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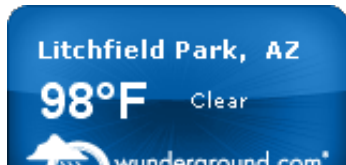
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# EMCC professors Make A Difference

Submitted by Charity Yodis on Tue, 09/03/2013 - 12:00am



*OLGA TSoudis instructs children on digital photography during her camera workshop this summer in Tanzania. The Estrella Mountain Community College professor traveled to the African country through the nonprofit organization Make A Difference to help provide orphans with a quality education. Submitted photos*

## *Teachers travel to Tanzania to teach orphans*

One evening, as he was browsing the Internet to find a way to fulfill his life-long dream of climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro, Stephanos Antoniadis stumbled upon something much more.

He and his wife, Olga Tsoudis, sociology professor at Estrella Mountain Community College in Avondale, came across a charity hike on the African mountain through a nonprofit organization called *Make A Difference*.

The organization works with a select group of orphans in Tanzania to provide for their needs and help them get a quality education.

The couple contacted Bertha Medina, an EMCC counselor who previously took a trip with them to Tibet, to join them on the excursion, which began June 19 and ended July 4.

It didn't take much for her to agree.

Medina had wanted to travel to Africa for nearly 40 years.

It wasn't until they started their journey that they met Theresa Grant, Make A Difference founder and executive director, and 22 faces that would be difficult to leave behind.

## **Pole, pole**

While Stephanos went on the hike, Tsoudis and Medina stayed behind to spend more time with the children at the orphanage.

"I could not imagine, at that time in my life, losing eight days from the orphanage [to go on the hike]," Medina said.

Both women spent time helping the children with their journal entries, tutored math and reading, played games, held a movie night and camera workshop, and even braved the markets to go shopping for them.

Medina said the children were "kind" and "lived out their gratitude."

She recalled the first moment they arrived: The children rushed out to greet them with hugs, and immediately carried their bags in for them.

"They could foresee our needs ... and that really impressed my heart," she said. "Although they didn't have much, they had a lot of joy."

Medina said she loved the experience she had in Tanzania.

What impacted her the most, she said, was when the children would sing their prayers before eating a meal.

Tsoudis also noted the children's joy and the lack of materialism she saw there compared to the United States.

"The biggest difference is that kids appreciate the little amount that they have," she said.

The best way to describe the Tanzanian way of life, according to Tsoudis, is the Swahili term "pole, pole" meaning, "slowly, slowly."

## **Sold**

She had it all.

Grant was living comfortably as a marketing executive in Silicon Valley, Calif., when she started having dreams about helping orphans in Africa.

So, in 2005, she left her job, sold all her belongings and moved to Zambia.

At the time, she was working with another organization, but decided to branch out and start her own nonprofit that launched in India in 2008, then Tanzania by the end of the year.

“It truly wasn’t something premeditated, and I truly don’t believe it was from me. I felt like I was following something much higher than myself,” she said.

“I feel like if there is something calling you, you feel there is an urgency, then somehow it all comes together,” she added.

During a presentation at EMCC, Grant talked about how one of the largest areas of need where she lives in Africa is a lack of quality education.

She said the children in primary school (kindergarten through seventh grade) grow up speaking Swahili, but in order to pass a test to continue their education, they must know English.

According to Grant, many of the teachers in primary school are not equipped to teach the children enough English to pass their exams.

Through MAD, Grant and the many volunteers both local and those who go for short-term visits, have provided shelter, clothes, supplies, additional school tutoring and much more.

Grant said she believes that quality education and training those children to be “leaders” is key to making a difference in the country.

“I think the most rewarding part [of the job] is seeing kids go to school,” she said. “They cheer each time they know they can go for another year.”

## **Returning**

Tsoudis and Medina both hope to return to Tanzania, they said.

Tsoudis said she hopes to make an extended visit for several months at some point.

Medina is currently sponsoring one of the girls she met at the orphanage, and said she would like to go back for at least a month.

“They left such a big print in my heart, you know, and I just don’t think that’s going to fade,” she said.

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