

# Peninsula Journal

## Making a difference by changing lives

by Eric Feldman

As our jeep lurched over one muddy pothole after another, the orphanage seemed very far away. Looking out the window, I saw immense poverty in the slums of Mukuru. We were on the outskirts of Nairobi, Kenya, and although our guide assured us that we were safe with him, I felt uneasy. Many of the older inhabitants glared at us as we watched the younger children run and play among heaps of garbage. The stench of sewage mixed with rotting vegetables permeated our space. Witnessing the utter destitution of thousands of people crammed into a few square miles left me feeling hopeless and depressed.

My initial aim was to meet the two children that Allison Eckert and I had sponsored. What transpired in the next 24 hours was beyond my imagination, as it would change six children's lives forever.

## In the Beginning

More than a year earlier, my parents were considering a family trip to South America to work in a medical clinic. Each had spent a part of their

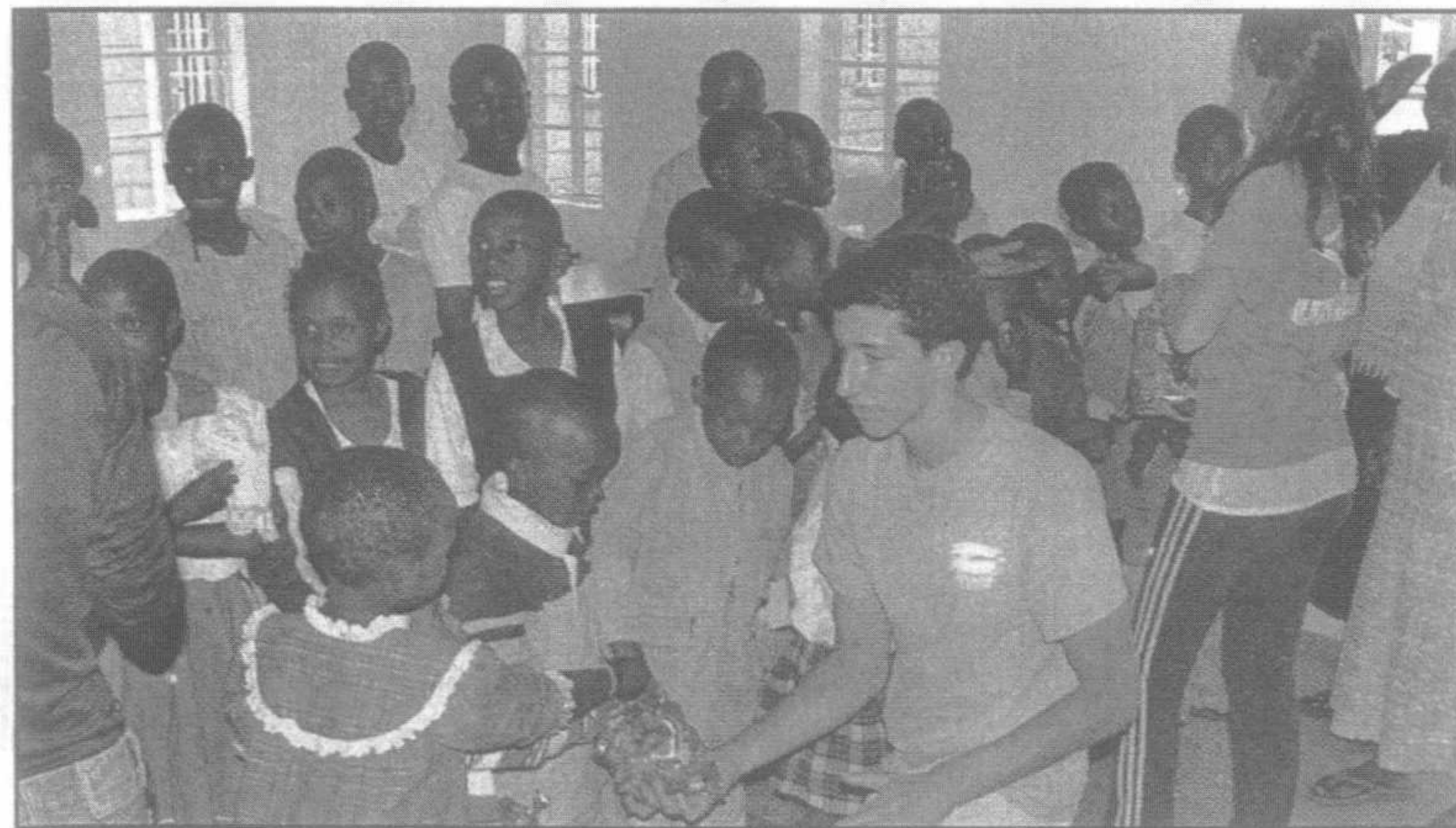


The slums of Mukuru, Africa

high school summers in medical clinics and orphanages outside the U.S. They hoped to show us kids another facet of life. Allison, a friend of mine, had traveled with her family to Africa a year before. She told me of her experiences on safari, and it sounded very exciting. One company in particular, *Micato Safaris*, offered a chance to spend extra days building a school or working in an orphanage as part of its "Lend-a-Helping-Hand-on-Safari" program. *Micato* also offers the opportunity to sponsor a needy child through its nonprofit arm, *AmericaShare*. Once I encouraged my parents to choose this destination, I asked Allison if she would help me raise funds so that one of the orphans could go to school. She found the idea appealing and was eager to help.

Calling upon the talents of our friends, Allison and I organized a musical fundraiser and called it "Just One Night." Michael Murata, a good friend of mine since Town and Country Preschool, immediately volunteered to play classical piano for our event. Sammy Miller and his sister Molly offered to bring their jazz quartet. With such a positive initial response, we felt confident that we could find more musically talented friends to help put together a special night. The invitation to the event stated our goal clearly...we wanted to raise enough money to support one child in Africa for four years of schooling, including room and board.

We were overwhelmed with the generosity of our guests, who gave over and above the suggested amount. Cordon Bleu-trained Chef Kathy Capellino decided to donate not only her services but also the food. In the end, we raised almost \$11,000! This was enough money to sponsor two children to attend boarding school, gaining an education right through high school. I was so excited about it that I shared the news with the Saldo family, who would be traveling with us to Kenya. Inspired by the fundraiser given by my friends and me, they enthusiastically decided to sponsor a child of their own.



Eric Feldman gets acquainted with some of the children at the orphanage.

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## At the orphanage

And so, it was with the hopes of meeting these (now three) children that I traveled through the Mukuru slums to get to the *AmericaShare* Orphanage. Children on both sides of our van lined up to chant "how-are-you!" in the hopes that perhaps one day they would be the recipients of someone's atten-

