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Adventist Journey

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My Journey

God wants us to get out of our comfort zones, and He equips us, not for something that's going to be easy, but something that is going to be uncomfortable at times, things that we think we can't do. But if we just say yes to Him, He will equip us with whatever we need.

Visit vimeo.com/nadadventist/ajjanlatsha for more of Latsha's story.

JAN LATSHA,
founder of the Maasai
Development Project in Kenya

Jan Latsha



Cover photo by Dan Weber

Dear Reader: The publication in your hands represents the collaborative efforts of the North American Division and *Adventist World* magazine, which follows *Adventist Journey* (after page 16). Please enjoy both magazines!

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ADVENTIST JOURNEY

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Changing Girls' Lives in Kenya

A rescue home provides safety and shelter for girls in need.

BY KIRSTEN ROGGENKAMP

In the years that we were full-time missionaries in Kenya, I fell in love with the Maasai people," says Jan Latsha, founder and director of the Maasai Development Project in Kenya, near the border of Tanzania and the Maasai Mara, a wild-animal reserve. "Their colorful dress and lifestyle fascinated me. Some of the women and I became good friends. We spent time together under the trees near Maxwell Academy, where my boys attended. I taught the women to read using the Maa Bible when I didn't really understand their language. I began to learn Kimaasai as I taught them the sounds and words. Writing for their language was developed in only the past 30 years."

In 2010, about two decades after beginning her work with the Maasai in Kenya, Latsha started a refuge, or home, for girls escaping female genital mutilation (FGM) and early marriage. She also organized a corps of lay pastors who have led many Maasai to come to know Jesus and join the Adventist Church. Jan lives in Spokane, Washington, United States, most of the



Jan Latsha (right, in pink), staff, students, and friends of the Maasai Development Project Education Centre pose for a photo.

All photos courtesy of Maasai Development Project

year, raising funds for “the Project,” as the locals call it, and organizing mission trips to Kenya. She visits the Project in Kenya at least twice a year and keeps close tabs on what’s happening the rest of the time via telephone and e-mail. Lay pastor James Nanka manages the home and the work of the lay pastors in her absence, together with the administrator of the Project, Ogoti Kenani, who lives in Nairobi.

A Providential Visit

When at the Maasai Development Project Education Centre (MDPEC) in November 2018, Latsha, Nanka, and lay pastor Korio Samson set out to visit a Maasai elder who was attending Samson’s branch Sabbath School. When the group arrived at the elder’s house, he wasn’t home. “Why don’t we visit his neighbor?” Latsha suggested. While they were greeting the neighbor, two men drove up on motorcycles. While the group was visiting and praying with the neighbor, the two men walked into the house and listened to the conversation and prayers. Then one of the men said, “We need a church in our village. Please come to our village.”

“I will contact our lay pastors and arrange for a visit tomorrow,” Latsha answered.

Latsha, Nanka, Samson, and two other lay pastors went to the men’s village the next day. They visited with the two men’s families, who expressed interest in learning more, especially about the Sabbath. The Adventist group then surrounded the men and their families and prayed for them.

Changed Lives

On Nanka and Stephen’s second visit to the men’s village, they found 28 people waiting to learn more about the Bible and Jesus. At the end of the meeting the people pleaded, “Please stay! We have so much more to learn.”

One of the men, who was a sorcerer, asked Jesus to take over his life. He destroyed all his implements of sorcery and was soon baptized.

When Latsha returned to Kenya in March 2019, they found 22 villagers who had been studying the Bible asking to be baptized, including another man who was a sorcerer. There is now a branch Sabbath School in that village, and the people are continuing to share their faith with others.

Nanyokie’s Story

In Kenya the practice of FGM was routinely performed at puberty, but FGM and marriage before 18



Maasai Development Project founder and director Jan Latsha (middle woman wearing brown hat), Adventist lay pastors, and others pray for villagers who have given their lives to Jesus.

are now illegal. Many families, however, continue to marry off their daughters at ages as young as 7 to men who are often as old as 40 or 50 and sometimes already have several wives. The girls’ fathers receive a dowry, usually of cows and goats. Those who stay at the rescue home, which can house up to 70, are kept safe from this practice. Younger girls attend the nearby public primary school. After graduating from eighth grade, they go to an Adventist boarding school in another region of Kenya. On school vacations they return to the Project. Some of the girls have finished higher education. One is a teacher; another is a baker; and a few have returned to help at the MDPEC.

Nanyokie is one of the girls who was rescued and lives at the home. Her father died when she was 6. She was one of seven children, and her mother was the younger of two wives. After the death of the father, Nanyokie’s oldest half brother, Michael, became head of the family.

“Education is so important. . . . Girls must go to school as well as boys.”

Michael arranged for Nanyokie and her sister to be circumcised and married.

“The cutting was very painful, and we could not show any pain, or our family would be disgraced,” Nanyokie says. Six months later her sister was married.

Michael then arranged for Nanyokie, not even 10 years old at the time, to marry one of his friends. “He was a very old man,” says Nanyokie.

About three months after she was married, Nanyokie was carrying water home to wash clothes when a young woman, who was a teacher, saw her.

“Little girl, you should be in school,” she said.

“No, I am married,” Nanyokie answered.

“I can’t believe a child as young as you is married,” the teacher said. “Come with me.”

The woman took Nanyokie to the police station, where the tribal chief was called.

“We must arrest this girl’s parents, her husband, and his family,” the police said.

The woman asked instead if Nanyokie could go to the Project’s rescue home, and explained to them the school’s mission. The police chief called the Project manager, James Nanka, and told him about Nanyokie.

Because Nanyokie was so young, the county agency for the welfare of children granted guardianship of Nanyokie to the Maasai Development Project. She went to live there.



Many baptisms resulted from Maasai Development Project lay pastors giving Bible studies in a local Kenyan village.

“I was given a bunk in a room with about 10 other girls,” says Nanyokie. The beds looked really comfortable and had clean sheets and soft blankets. At supper we all sat together, enjoying our maize [a type of corn] and beans.”

Nanyokie attends the nearby primary school and after graduation will enroll in an Adventist boarding school. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused some delays, but Nanyokie maintains a positive outlook. “I want to be a lawyer, for the sake of female African children,” she says. “I wish to tell them about the beauty of being educated. Education, not culture, is the key to life.”

“Education is so important for my people,” Nanyokie continues. “Girls must go to school as well as boys. The Maasai people need to work together to protect the girls and women so all of us can have a better future.

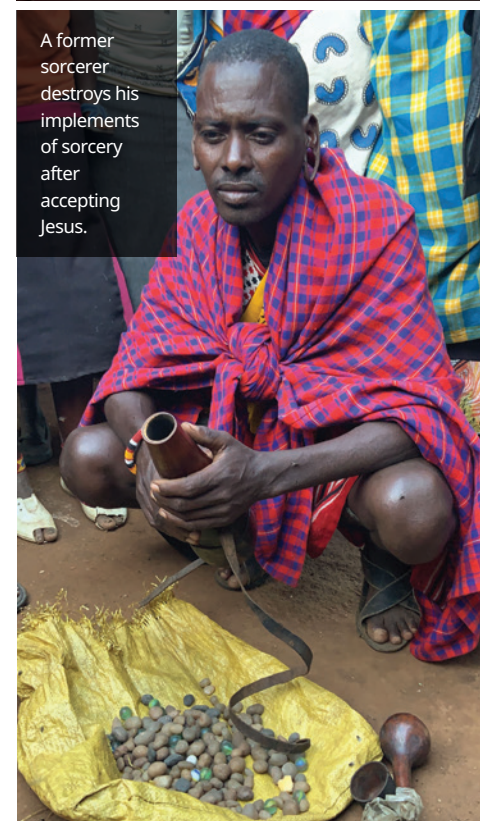
“I thank God for leading me to a better life!”

Visit www.4mdp.org for more information about the Maasai Development Project.

Kirsten Roggenkamp, who lives in California, is a retired academy teacher and a coauthor of several books.



Nanyokie poses with the Narok County commissioner after speaking to the magistrate and other Narok County government officials on African Child Day about challenges experienced by Maasai girls.



A former sorcerer destroys his implements of sorcery after accepting Jesus.

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Gina Lockhart and her son, Daniel, who is training to be an EMT. As a young boy Daniel helped his mother with her dialysis treatments.

The Most Precious Gift

A life with kidney issues brought Gina Lockhart closer to God. After a lifesaving transplant, she lives out her faith by sharing her miraculous testimony and giving back to her community.

BY DEE WOOLFORD

As the only surviving baby of a multiple birth, Gina Lockhart dealt with kidney issues most of her life. When she was 14, doctors discovered one of her kidneys was not functioning properly. Her right kidney was removed to keep her healthy, and she was told that she would someday need a transplant.

Lockhart lived an active life with her one kidney, participating in such sports as gymnastics and cheerleading before attending college. She married in 1995, and the following year she started a family. During her pregnancy the doctors watched her health closely. The baby was her little miracle, as she was previously told she could not have children.

Unfortunately, Lockhart's kidney function began to decline as soon as she reached her third trimester. At just 31 weeks' gestation, the clinical team had to induce labor to save both her life and that of her unborn son, Daniel. He was delivered at four pounds nine ounces, but was a healthy boy. Lockhart and her little miracle were discharged from the hospital three days later on Mother's Day.

Navigating motherhood and trying to stay healthy, Lockhart continued to monitor her kidney health, but her doctor saw her kidney function decline. In 2006 she was placed on home-administered peritoneal dialysis. Her 10-year-old son took great interest in helping care for his mother. While Daniel walked through the steps of care with his mom, his comfort and competence with the process increased, and he began to administer her treatments. Lockhart was grateful for her little helper and amazed at how well he was able to care for her at such a young age.

Lockhart then began to experience serious complications, and her dialysis catheter malfunctioned. The only resolution to this critical

issue was invasive surgery. Even with the suggested surgery, the problem could persist, so doctors told Lockhart she would have to go on hemodialysis, a treatment that was not a good option for an attentive mother with a full-time job.

The First Miracle

One evening Lockhart prayed and asked God to perform a miracle by allowing her new kidney to arrive that night. To the amazement of the doctors, God answered her prayer, not by giving her a new kidney, but by miraculously straightening the kinked catheter overnight.

"God wanted me to surrender everything to Him," Lockhart said. "As difficult as it was for me, I relinquished my authority and gave it to God, and God healed me! This was the turning point in my faith. He had given me the desires of my heart. God did what man could not do!"

After that defining moment, Lockhart started living out her faith in amazing ways. As a member of the Orlando Central Seventh-day Adventist Church, she took on volunteer roles, such as church treasurer and adult Sabbath School teacher. Outside church, she continued her job at AdventHealth as a financial analyst and shared her testimony with those around her.



Gina Lockhart with her son, Daniel, in his Adventurers uniform at church.

Lockhart prayed and asked God to perform a miracle by allowing her new kidney to arrive that night.

Prayer and Giving Back

Knowing that she would need a lifesaving kidney transplant someday, she asked her fellow church members, friends, and family to pray for comfort and peace for the future donor family that would lose their loved one. Their loved one would then become her kidney donor and give her the precious gift of life.

After 10 months on dialysis Lockhart received the call that a kidney was available. It was a perfect match.

"I was at work when I received the call. Within hours I exchanged my business suit for a hospital gown," she said.

Lockhart received her kidney transplant under the skilled and compassionate care of both Thomas

Chin, M.D., medical director of liver transplant, and Bobby Nibhanupudy, M.D., medical director of abdominal transplant, at the AdventHealth Transplant Institute. Her life was changed forever, and she was freed of the time-consuming dialysis.

"The thoughtfulness and generosity of people in the community who become living or deceased organ and tissue donors enable us to save the lives of people like Gina, who have no other option than a lifesaving transplant," said Nibhanupudy. "It is easy to sign up to be an organ donor and to talk to your family about your wishes. Those simple steps can literally save lives."

Today Lockhart continues to give of her time and talent as a wellness champion for AdventHealth and by serving as a volunteer for

central Florida's organ procurement organization, OurLegacy. She loves to share her testimony in churches and community events where she can educate on the importance of designating your wishes as a registered organ, eye, and tissue donor.

Lockhart's journey has come full circle. Her now adult son Daniel is completing emergency medical technician (EMT) training, fulfilling his childhood dream to help others through a career in health care. An organ donor saved his mom's life and now Daniel is inspired to save lives as a skilled first responder.

"God is so real in my life," Lockhart said. "It takes real faith to go to the next level with God."

Dee Woolford writes for AdventHealth.



The lives of both mom and baby were saved when Daniel was delivered prematurely at 31 weeks. He was born a healthy boy.

DONATE LIFE MONTH

National Donate Life Month is observed each year in April to encourage individuals to register as organ, eye, and tissue donors; and to honor those who have saved lives through the gift of donation.

Donation Facts

- One donor can save up to eight lives through vital organs and provide healing and mobility to 75 more through tissue donation.
- More than 100,000 children and adults are currently awaiting a lifesaving transplant in the U.S.
- Twenty people die every day waiting for an organ transplant.

AdventHealth invites you to honor the gift of donation this month. To learn more about organ, eye, and tissue donation or designate your wishes as a registered donor, visit **RegisterMe.org**.

PUTTING ON MY GAME FACE

Name: **Amy Miller** Location: **Hagerstown, Maryland** Profession: **ICU Nurse**

Many Adventists in North America have worked and are working in essential roles during the COVID-19 pandemic. For the next few magazine editions, we will share, in their own words, glimpses into some of their lives. We thank them and many others for their service, and encourage our readers to pray for them.—Editors.

What has been the toughest part of the past year?

I work in the ICU (intensive-care unit) caring for positive COVID-19 patients. I am proud to say I am an essential worker, even though some days it seems overwhelming and scary! Things did slow down for a little bit, but by November my hospital, and particularly the ICU, was so extremely busy as a new surge of COVID-19 patients were hospitalized! Once again the number of patients being admitted is declining, I am hoping there aren't as many people getting sick!

It is difficult for me to put into words what has been the toughest part. I would say one of the hardest things has been telling family members of very sick patients, "I can't let you visit your loved one." We do make special arrangements for those who are dying, but then the family has to stay on the outside of the room and look in through the glass door. I can't imagine the anguish, not being able to be there when a loved one is sick. This is one of the reasons my job is so important. Providing the comfort and support because family can't be present at this time.

I also miss hugging my parents!

Where do you get your strength?

For sure from Jesus! "I can do *all* things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). This is my motto before going to work. It really does help me put on my "game face" and get ready for whatever is being thrown at me. Psalm 91 has also been very comforting to me.

Specifically during these days, how does your faith play a part?

Some days my faith is strong, and other days not so much! I believe, and know God is in control; He doesn't want any of His chil-



↑ Amy Miller is an ICU nurse working in Hagerstown, Maryland.

Because I know God is in control, I try not to be anxious.

dren to suffer. Because I know God is in control, I try not to be anxious.

Now that COVID-19 vaccines are out, what is your hope for the future?

As far as the vaccine goes, I am hopeful it will bring this pandemic to its end! The vaccine is still in short supply. I am grateful to have received both of the recommended doses, but it is still not available to everyone who would like to receive it.

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BY ADAM FENNER

Every Encounter Matters—Digital Encounters Included

You've read the social media posts before; maybe you've made a few yourself. The ones that make you cringe, angry, hurt, sad, depressed, or simply numb. By the way some "Christians" post online, you might think they don't realize there is a real person(s) somewhere in the world reading and contemplating their potentially destructive words. God asks us to be "ambassadors for Christ," He makes His appeal "through us" (2 Cor. 5:20). Everything we do is supposed to be for "the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31), yet it seems many forget God's commands when they post in reaction to what they see and read on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and other media platforms.

Every encounter that we have matters. We humans put an incredibly high value on words and experiences. A single word misused or misplaced can end a relationship. One shared experience can make us lifelong friends. Relationship experts have found that happily married couples and high-performing business teams often make "five positive comments for every negative one."¹ In other words, the messages we provide to one another accumulate quickly. When we apply this principle to evangelism and our faith journeys, it indicates that every interaction we have comes with the potential to bring someone closer to Christ or push them further away.²

Recently a Christian organization posted a short news story that included a transcript of U.S. Senate chaplain Barry Black's prayer on January 7, 2021, the day after a U.S. Capitol protest. The rancor-filled comments from those claiming to be Christians in the comments' section had one observer remark, "Christians scare the [expletive] out of me!" while another commented, "I am certain Jesus weeps today seeing the vile hatred directed at each other in many of the comments on this post, by His 'followers.' . . . I am distraught at seeing 'believers' (clearly in name only) tear each other down . . . rather than focusing on ministering through the Word."

As Christians, through each and every encounter, we can use our time in the digital world to model Christ to others. The idea of a Christian digital evangelist should not be underestimated.

Nearly 4 billion people use social media every day, and in the U.S. the average person spends a little more than two hours of every 24 on social media.³ There's no reason to complain about not having opportunities to share your faith when you can access someone's attention so readily and predictably.

How you share that faith responsibly in the digital world is of importance. As digital strategist Jamie Domm writes: "Social media can be a powerful witnessing tool; remember that your posts can have a greater impact and reach than you realize."⁴ Domm encourages us to remember Christ's "golden rule" (see Luke 6:31) by avoiding gossip, conflict, mean-spirited, mocking or shaming comments, and bullying.

When asked which was the greatest commandment, Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. . . . The second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matt. 22:36-39). It seems so simple. Yet, on social media at least, it appears to be one of the hardest commandments to keep.

What's the answer to our own shortcomings and to the negativity, hate speech, and divisiveness so commonly found on social media?

Seeking and allowing the Holy Spirit to fill us with His fruit on daily basis. By personifying "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control" (Gal. 5:22, 23), we can all be digital disciples.

The idea of a Christian digital evangelist should not be underestimated.

¹ Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman, "The Ideal Praise-to-Criticism Ratio," *Harvard Business Review*, Mar. 15, 2013.

² Lorna Brown, "Loving God's Kids," *Canadian Adventist Messenger*, August 1998.

³ Gary Henderson, "How Much Time Does the Average Person Spend on Social Media?" *Digital Marketing Blog*, Aug. 14, 2020, accessed at: www.digitalmarketing.org.

⁴ Jamie Domm, "Personal Social Media Audit: Questions to Ask Yourself," *Social Media + Big Data Services*, https://www.sdadata.org/uploads/8/1/9/8/81986746/socialmediaaudit_booklet.pdf.

Adam Fenner is director of the Adventist Learning Community.

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—*In Heavenly Places*, p. 327

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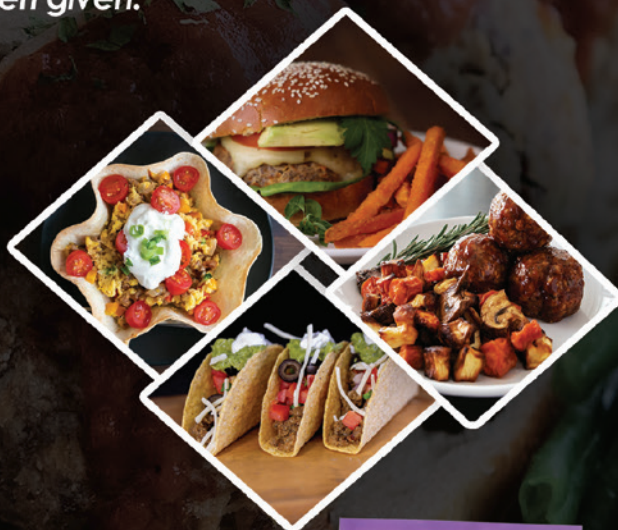


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