

WHEN MARY COMES CALLING

Beyond the shadow of a drought



By Marc Massery

Marian Helper Nermine Rubin, a native of Egypt now living in Clearwater, Florida, did not feel comfortable sending her teen daughter, Samantha, to a faraway, underdeveloped country. So, every time Samantha would ask if she could visit Tanzania, Africa, Nermine said “no.”

But in 2014, early into reading the do-it-yourself retreat *33 Days to Morning Glory*, by Fr. Michael Gaitley, MIC, Nermine’s “no” became a “yes.”

“I had an issue with day four of the retreat because that’s when you give it all up to Mary,” Nermine said. “That was a very hard thing for me as a ‘type A’ personality.”

As she was thinking about this, Samantha came into her room and, as usual, asked her mother if she could go to Africa.

Nermine, as usual, intended to reply “no.”
But the word that came out was “yes.”

She tried to correct herself, but yet another “yes” fell from her mouth.

So she and Samantha soon headed to the village of Moshi, Tanzania, to volunteer at the Upendo Orphanage.

Though they spent much of their time ministering to orphans lacking the most basic necessities, Nermine and Samantha experienced Tanzania much like tourists. They stayed in a town that Nermine said “caters to Kilimanjaro climbers and safari goers.”

“Mary was being gentle with me because she gave me enough to see what I needed to see at that time,” Nermine said.

Ever since that trip — and ever since her consecration — her faith has intensified. She started sponsoring several girls at the orphanage. Then she took her newfound fervor back to the United States, where she volunteered for *Divine Mercy Sunday* at the National Shrine of The Divine Mercy.

She also arranged for Fr. Michael and the Marian Missionaries of Divine Mercy to host a retreat at her parish in Florida.

“I noticed that the more I sacrificed, the more graces abounded,” she said.

In the summer of 2016, she went on a pilgrimage to Poland, led by Fr. Michael.

“I went alone, and I felt so small,” she said. “I remember talking to Fr. Mike, saying ‘I’m here with all these well-known Catholics, and I’m feeling so little.’ Father Mike looked at me and said, ‘That’s OK. Remember St. Faustina. The smaller you are, the more graces will follow.’”

“That pilgrimage,” she continued, “is what really changed my heart.”

She believed Mary and the Holy Spirit had been preparing her to return to Africa.

For her second trip to Tanzania, she traveled to Dodoma, a more remote area than Moshi. She went hoping to encourage the archbishop to have a diocese-wide Marian consecration. She was also helping the Marians facilitate a translation of *33 Days to Morning Glory* into Swahili.

During this visit, though, she witnessed a side of Tanzania she hadn’t seen before.

“What I saw broke my heart,” she said. “A lot of men sitting around doing nothing and many people with no sense of responsibility. I kept asking myself, ‘Why?’”

Instead of seeing the fruits of her financial support, she felt that she might be enabling the impoverished rather than empowering them. Bothered, she went back home and prayed every day in front of the Blessed Sacrament, asking God for answers. One morning in prayer, she remembered a book she had heard about at least twice before but had never read: *Let There be Water* by Seth M. Seigel.

She had randomly met the author of this New York Times best-selling book a year earlier and had even received the book as a gift at a function she attended.

“But I had no desire to learn anything about water,” she said. She admits to having given the book away without reading a word.

At the prompting of grace, she found a copy and finally read it. In it, she discovered the answers for which she was looking. She read about “innovation: Africa” (iA), an Israeli Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that builds advanced, solar-power water wells to solve drought, which so often lies at the root of poverty in underdeveloped countries.

“There is water in Africa,” she said. “We just have to drill to it.”

She realized that, though she had had good intentions, her financial support for the orphanage had made no lasting change. “Ultimately, they’re in the same situation year after year, always having to ask for more money,” she said.

But she found in iA a permanent, sustainable solution to poverty that empowers poor countries to overcome their difficult circumstances. With access to clean water, farmers can sustain their crops and feed their livestock. With these resources, villagers can start to take advantage of a local economy.



Die-hard Marian Helpers, Nermine and Samantha Rubin hold a copy of *Marian Helper* atop Mount Kilimanjaro.

Nermine has since worked tirelessly to start her own non-profit “Water4Mercy” and has partnered with iA in the hopes of bringing water — and jobs — to Dodoma.

Currently, iA has more than 200 projects in eight African countries, helping to provide 20,000 liters of clean water per day to each village.

“What I love about this technology is everything is monitored remotely,” she said. “iA has an application that can monitor their water levels anywhere in the world so that they make sure everything’s in working order.”

Nermine spent \$50,000 she had initially saved for a new vehicle to help fund the project in Tanzania instead, and she continues to raise money for this cause.

“I’m doing this because I feel I *need* to do this, and now I *want* to do this,” she said. “At my age, I thought I would be relaxing on the beach eating bon-bons. ... This was not me.”

It was the Blessed Virgin Mary. She transformed Nermine’s “no” into a “yes.”

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Visit Water4Mercy.org for more information.