

SHOE4AFRICA

IT HAPPENED BY MISTAKE. YOU TAKE A JOURNEY TO A FOREIGN
PLACE WITH EYES WIDE OPEN. YOU WALK ABOUT EXPECTING ONE THING;
A HOLIDAY WITH NO RETURN.

TEXT *Toby Tanser* FOTOS *Mike Kobal*

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hen you see a picture, you witness a happening. It is a cliché that is as old as the bible; nothing new. A beginning starts something very small, insignificant and off the radar. You have no vision or dream beyond the moment of what you are doing, no plans for your life to alter. You keep on do-

ing because it is easy to do so, but you do not notice the momentum that is steadily growing about you, you do not notice that what you started with has now become something bigger, and is having an effect that you never even hoped for. Consuming projects are all around us, that is how it always happens. Every idea is a moment's thought that grows, and shoe4africa's thought was simply just to give out one pair of shoes.

One pair, nothing more. One pair of shoes that were not even new, or indeed had even been paid for by the giver. Hardly a charity, hardly a sacrifice. But that, I have found, is the story of how many projects begin. Where they take us we will never know, but it often is an interesting journey that is as rewarding for the giver as it is as beneficial to the recipient. So Shoes were the conduit to help, as I was an athlete who was sponsored I had an abundance of shoes, good quality expensive shoes. I also had a bunch of good friends, and quite a few had sponsorships too. Like me they received more shoes than they were able to use, like me they had apartments where giving away the excess shoes would actually be a blessing in disguise. And like they say you get the buzz of feeling good when you are giving... even when you are giving something that is not really a gift.



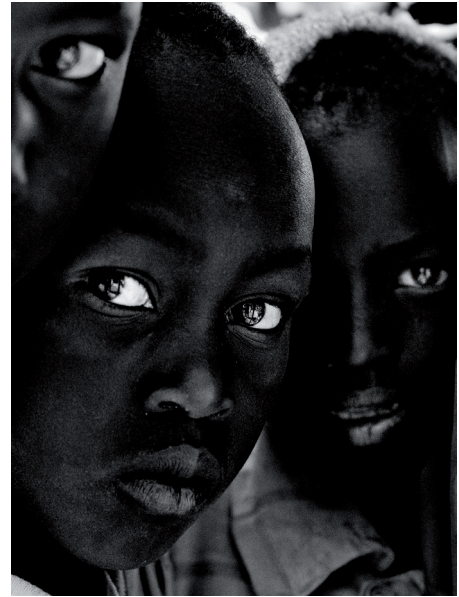


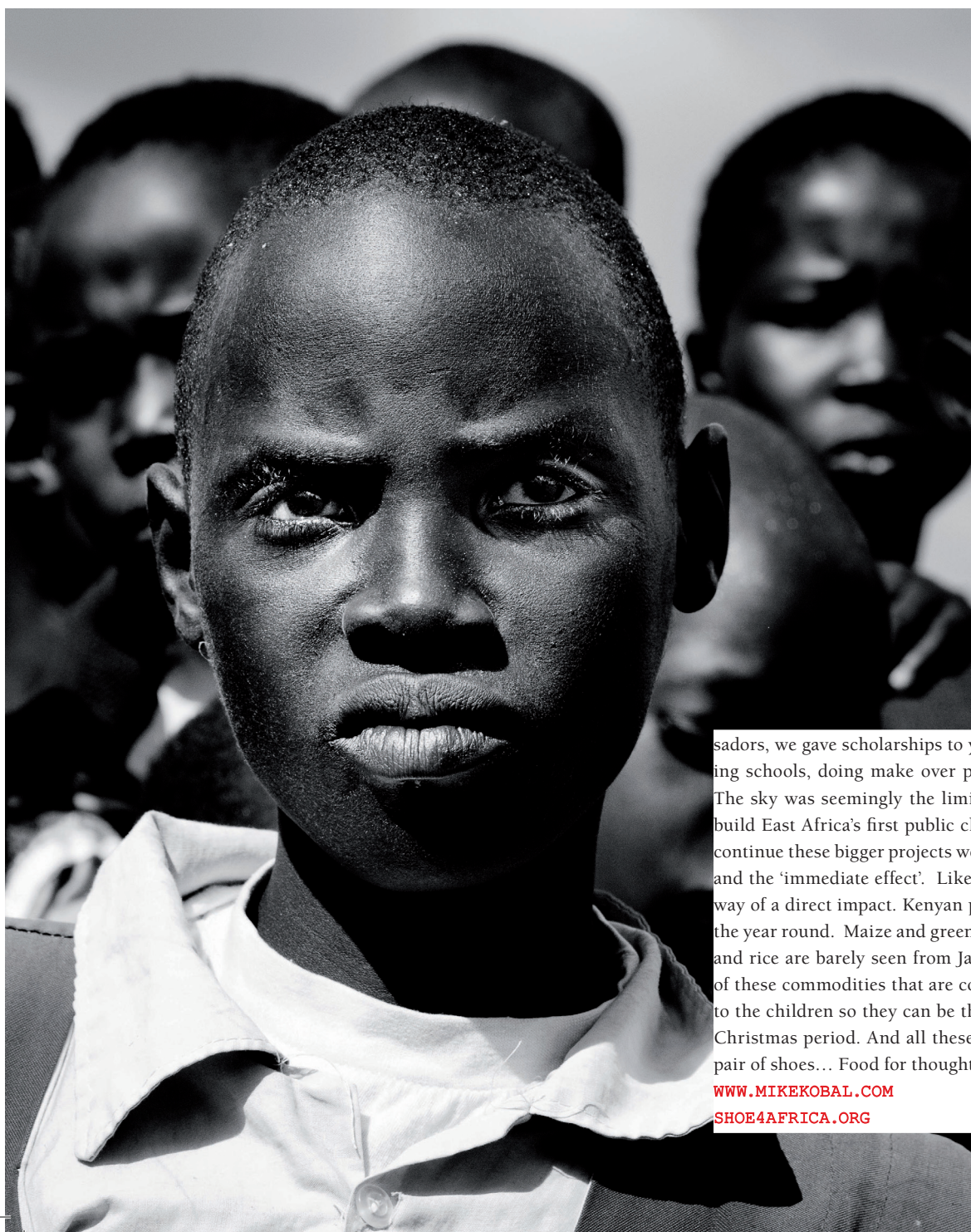
One pair led to a box, led to boxes, led to a container, on to containers. It grew in a fashion I would never guess but therein lies the conundrum; Africa is not a dumping ground for old shoes, or should it become one. Also if you just give shoes then the locals will take them and sell them. Luckily, inadvertently through nothing more than good luck, I had come across a method of earning shoes. I would put on small running events, specifically for ladies and children. Not more than a few kilometers, and then when the runners completed the course they would get a reward for their labor; a pair of shoes.

As I mentioned, small things grow. Before long our races began to be real events, we had Women's Empowerment races in three countries with as many as 5,000-ladies running. When political violence occurred we had peace events with the country's best athletes as ambas-

MIKE KOBAL

THESE PHOTOS WERE TAKEN DURING A FEEDING EVENT ORGANIZED BY SHOE4AFRICA. IT WAS PROBABLY THE MOST INTENSE PHOTOGRAPHIC EXPERIENCE DURING THIS TRIP, TO SEE THE DAILY STRUGGLES AND HARSH CONDITIONS REFLECTED IN THE EYES OF THESE VERY YOUNG CHILDREN, WAITING PATIENTLY IN LINE FOR SUGAR AND RICE.





sadors, we gave scholarships to young girls, and then we started building schools, doing make over projects for young ladies in the slums. The sky was seemingly the limit when I started the major project; to build East Africa's first public children's hospital. And all the time we continue these bigger projects we never forget the way we started, small and the 'immediate effect'. Like our feeding project; a simple effective way of a direct impact. Kenyan poor rural kids have a plain staple diet the year round. Maize and green kale, day in day out. Things like sugar and rice are barely seen from January to January. Why not take sacks of these commodities that are commonplace in the West and hand out to the children so they can be the gift bearers to the family... over the Christmas period. And all these ideas stemmed from giving away one pair of shoes... Food for thought or what?

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