

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Two teachers, two worlds; one hope

By [RACHANEE SRISAVASDI](#)

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LAGUNA BEACH When Judy Jameson-Trulock was still working as a teacher, she opened her heart to gang members, drug addicts and teenage mothers.

About two years ago, in retirement, she was introduced to a partially-blind teacher determined to impart the same hope upon youths with an uncertain future – but on the other side of the world.

Each month, Jameson sends Eskie Maliwanda a box filled with supplies for his students, including pencils, notebooks, text books and classroom visual aids, such as maps. Maliwanda – who Jameson has never met face-to-face – uses those simple gifts to teach more than 100 children in

Malawi, Africa.

[SEE PHOTOS OF JAMESON, AND THE AFRICAN STUDENTS](#)

The two teachers – one retired in Laguna Beach, another responsible for educating kids in one of the poorest countries in the world – have become close friends. Maliwanda calls Jameson a sister, while Jameson, 67, thinks of Maliwanda as her son.

Their friendship blossomed as a result of [Direct Connections to Africa](#), a nonprofit organization set up to help villagers in the Mangochi District, an impoverished area in southern Malawi. Individuals here either sponsor a student or are paired up with someone in need in Africa.

Sometimes, Jameson's efforts aren't understood. People will politely ask her why she helping kids in Africa.

"They say, 'Why don't you help American students?'" she said. "I tell them what Mother Teresa said, 'We have forgotten we belong to each other.'"

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It all started after a Sunday service at Laguna Beach Presbyterian Church. Jameson and her longtime friend, Mary Ellen Carter, were chatting about what they'd been up to.

Carter, the wife of U.S. District Judge David O. Carter, explained how she founded Direct Connections, and was looking to pair up Orange County residents with residents in Malawi.

Jameson agreed to help. Carter paired her with Maliwanda.

"They have a lot in common. They are both teachers who don't give up and don't get discouraged," Carter said. "They keep going on."

Jameson started teaching in 1969. She took about a ten-year break to raise her three sons, and then returned to teaching.

"It was like being thrown in the deep end of the swimming pool," she says.

She worked at the Orange Unified School District's Access Now program, which taught at-risk youth who had been kicked out of traditional schools.

She was assigned to teaching students in gang neighborhoods in Santa Ana. On her first day, the hubcaps of her vintage '59 Volkswagen bug were stolen. Jameson then approached one of the students.

"I told him, 'I want my hubcaps back. I know you didn't do it, but you know who did.'"

The next day, she had four hubcaps on her car.

"They were different ones than mine, but at least I had hubcaps.' "

These were students other teachers had given up on; teens with criminal records, including gang members.

Their problems made Jameson try even harder. She became both parent and teacher, and treated them as she treated her children: Be loving but firm.

She'd go over a student's house in the early mornings, dragging them out of bed to attend class. She accompanied youths to court and talked to judges on their behalf about their progress at school.

She couldn't, though, protect her students from the horrors of life. One of her students, a preteen who played with Barbie Dolls, was sexually assaulted by a relative. Other female students would have sex with several gang members, or get pregnant by a gang member, in order to show loyalty to the gang.

Such moments would be heartbreaking. "I would go home, tuck my kids in, and thank God."

There were other moments, too; times of celebration, like when she taught a high school senior how to read his first book. Or when she would see students graduate high school, and contemplate college.

"I would keep telling them, 'You can do this, you can do this,' until they believed in themselves," she says.

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Maliwanda is poor and was raised in the village that his students now call home.

The 36-year-old doesn't have a college degree, though he would like to get one. His wife works as a preschool teacher, and they have two sons. They recently lost their third child – a daughter – to malaria. She was four months old.

He says teaching in Malawi is difficult. Classes average one teacher to 100 students. There aren't enough classrooms for students – who sometimes have to be instructed outdoors. During rainy season, students either have to be sent home or are combined together with students of different grades.

Despite such hardships, Maliwanda loves teaching.

"I love to play with children, listen and solve their problems, share with them modern experiences and help them to acquire basic knowledge which will help them to excel with their education so that they can become self reliant," he wrote in an e-mail.

"That is my dream."

Maliwanda says his students are attending class more because of Jameson's donations of paper and writing utensils. Before Jameson's donations, students would go to class and not have a pencil or piece of paper to write on.

Jameson also has helped Maliwanda personally. As a child, he lost sight in one eye, and later was diagnosed with glaucoma in the other eye. He was unable to get consistent medication, until Jameson connected him with Dr. Diane Kersten, a San Clemente ophthalmologist.

Kersten regularly sends medication, and corresponds with Maliwanda about the condition of his eye. He thanks

Kersten, and also mentions Jameson's help.

"He just adores her," says Kersten, who also sponsors a student through Direct Connections.

"What brings me the most happiness is when my sister Judy does not hesitate and manages to render the support in time with the little benefits she has," Maliwanda wrote in an e-mail.

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Jameson shows a reporter a few photos of her friend – showing him teaching, or receiving her packages.

"I wish he smiled more," she says. "It worries me."

She has reason to worry. Malawi is one of the world's most densely populated and least developed countries, carrying a high adult HIV/AIDS and a high infant mortality rate. Infectious diseases abound, such as malaria.

When it comes to teaching, she considers Maliwanda a step above herself.

"He's coming from what they were," she said. "And he's trying to get them out."

Jameson is learning about grant writing to help Carter expand the organization. She also is considering traveling to Africa next year with her son, who may shoot a video about Maliwanda.

She believes in Direct Connections, which she likes because it is simply about people helping people – and that recipients, like Maliwanda, report back on their progress. Dozens of others in Orange County have sponsored students and donated money to help set up an Internet cafe and give villagers medical help.

Part of Jameson wishes she can take Maliwanda out of Africa.

"I'd like to save him, bring him here where I can take care of him," she says.

"But we can't ... so maybe we can change the system."

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