

Interviewee	Interviewer	Monastery	Date of interview	Keywords
Harm <sup>1</sup>	Anique Schüller	-	July 9, 2020	Nyang'oma; Technical School

Harm went to Nyang'oma (Kenya) to be involved in the starting phase of the technical school for the deaf. Because of his technical background and his qualification, it became able to receive financial support from a German development foundation. His wife also travelled to Nyang'oma for duties in the primary school. Harm stayed in Kenya for a year, Brechtje stayed there for 9 months because of illness.

*Q: How did you end up in Kenya?*

A: Brechtje [his wife] worked at the Institute for the Deaf, in St. Michielsgestel. A visiting Sister who came to see her and the speaking lessons turned out to be a sister who worked at a deaf school in Nyang'oma in Kenya. They got into a conversation and it became clear that they could use "laymen" there. We [Harm and Brechtje] didn't know each other very long but we felt like doing development aid. And that was actually a bull's eye, because they could go there...

A: Brechtje was a teacher and I had a power. I have no background in deaf education, but I had a technical education qualification. And in Nyang'oma they were dying to find a qualified teacher in technical education. Because if there was a qualified teacher, they would receive money from a German development aid organization to build a technical school. So that's why I was very welcome.

*Q: So, your qualification certificate was a requirement for receiving money?*

A: Yes, it was required to have a qualified teacher.

*Q: Was it a big step of moving to Kenya and leaving behind everything? I mean: you were motivated to go to Kenya, I know, but you also like to travel, right?*

A: Yes, and we wanted to... It is also a social event of course. You want to help other people. And of course, we could have both stay here [NL] in education. But this seemed to us as a wonderful adventure to get those people, the children, to work there to help those children to move forward. And it was also a wonderful experience.

A: We got our own house on the compound. That was quite luxurious. At least for African standards, it was quite luxurious. That the two of us could live in a house.

*Q: That sounds good, isn't it?*

A: Yes, it sounds really good. However, we also had a little trouble with it, because there were also African teachers involved in the school. And they lived in a much smaller house. And I was actually sorry that it was not the same.

*Q: How was the contact with the Sisters when you lived there?*

A: That was fine

*Q: Did they provide any service? Having dinner together, or?*

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<sup>1</sup> The name of the interviewee is anonymized, just as the name of his partner Brechtje. Both their first names and surnames are known by the researchers. For contact details:

[www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/staffmembers/victoria-nyst#tab-1](http://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/staffmembers/victoria-nyst#tab-1)

A: Yes. The Sisters also worked at the school for the deaf and they provided food. So, we did get food from the Sisters every day. But we did live separately in a house, and those sisters lived in a small monastery.

Q: *Could you tell me how the compound looked like? I try to imagine it. A school, a monastery, your house, another school...*

A: It was a "carré-shaped" [square-shaped] school, which you often see. It contained everything. In that compound was also the orphanage, the dispensary and the technical school... All of this was in a large building. And then those houses, they were around it. And the monastery was around it. And of course, there was also a church, because it was a mission post. And the missionary also had a house.

Q: *You were the head of the project of the technical school?*

A: Yes. And that technical 'school' consisted of two departments. Yes, a school in quotes, because we only had 25 students in total. And half of them had sewing training while the other half had carpentry training.

A: I had a metalworking license. But rolling out metalworking didn't happen in that short period of time to start that up. So, I taught theoretical lessons with the students: math and the like. And then they had the practice classes where they were trained...for example, the tailor-made clothes, or uniforms. And the carpenter made tables and chairs for the population there. What was needed. Because we received no subsidy.

A: We had to provide for our own maintenance. So, we bought stuff in Nairobi, we made products from that and they were sold and that way we could run the school. So, it was more like a workshop where those deaf boys learned a trade rather than a real school... Because the stuff that was made had to be sold. It was actually already a workplace where learning could really be done in practice.

Q: *So basically self-sufficient. Make something, then sell it and buy something with that money to make something of it.*

A: Yes, exactly. And that worked fine. Those students were very eager [...] The children wanted to learn. That was the big advantage of that school there, or that workshop there. Because later, when they left that school, they wanted to start for themselves. To earn their own living. So, they were very motivated. And that was very nice.

Q: *Do you think technical schools are important for deaf boys?*

A: Very important!

Q: *Do you think they can improve their position in society there?*

A: Yes. Especially for disabled children, that they know a trade and can provide for themselves. It was very important there.

Q: *Could you describe how the building of the technical school was compiled? Big or small?*

A: It was 24 or 25 students altogether. 12 for the carpentry workshop and 12 for the tailoring. There, they had a limited space where the students could work and where they could see, like they have a workshop here you can work. So, there was no luxury, only the necessary materials to learn the trade.

Q: *The tables in classrooms were arranged for deaf students? So that everyone could see everything and everyone?*

A: Yes.

Q: *Could you tell something about the students you had there? How did those students get there? Where did they come from?*

A: The students came from all over Kenya. But I think ... That missionary had already ensured that the students were there. But I think that happens because the missions are all in contact with each other, so they know ... I think it was the case that in Kenya it was known that a technical school for the deaf was in Nyang'oma. So, if a deaf child was found somewhere, if they knew "hey, there is a deaf person," it was made clear to them that there was a primary and technical school in Nyang'oma especially for deaf students.

Q: *Okay, a little word of mouth...*

A: Yes. And I also think through the mission posts. Because those other missions, those missionaries had the same idea. So, they knew about "hey, I have in my area, in my mission post ..."

Q: *Do you have an idea about the attitude of the parents against deaf children or deaf people in general?*

A: Against disabled people in general...There was simply nothing for the disabled. Handicapped people were not included, they had to take care of the cows or something else, but did not go to school. Hence, those missionaries at those mission posts tried to cover the needs. One started a school for the deaf to educate the children living in the country. Another founded an institute for blind or disabled children. Because there was nothing for those children. So those missionaries, they set up disabled education. They were going to do something with those children. And there will probably also be children who fell completely out of range. These children were not reported and therefore did not receive any education. Especially in the countryside. There were several schools for the deaf across the country. Nyang'oma was one, but there were several. There was one in Mumias, one in Kakamega...

Q: *In your school there were deaf children and hard of hearing children. Did you divide them in groups?*

A: The school was too small to divide

Q: *Because you said that there was a tailor-group and a carpenter group...*

A: No, it was their own, free choice. Whatever they wanted

Q: *Okay. You also mentioned that the children came from over the whole country. When they arrived at school, was there a high variability in previous educational level?*

A: It was blended, very blended

Q: *Also, in communication? In which language...*

A: The language of instruction was English. So only English was spoken at school. But they also came from different tribes. We were in the Luo area. Kenya is made up of tribes and we were in Luo area. I don't speak Luo. Missionary who spoke Luo, for example, knew the language of the Luos. But there were also students from, for example, the Kikuyu, which was another large group and that was also possible. But we spoke English with the students. The language of instruction in Kenya is English.

Q: *Did you have to teach them English when they only spoke Luo?*

A: They already know (some) English

Q: *Were there also differences between the children themselves, in terms of their background? You mentioned various tribes, of course, but also in terms of education, how much education they had at all.*

A: I do not know. I don't know if there was a selection procedure. I do not know. I think if a child was reported somewhere, it could come to school. And the level that ... Because they worked there through lip reading. The children, of course, used signs and gestures to communicate

with each other. But our vision was through lip reading, so that was taught through lip reading. Yes. But of course, there are many natural gestures that are used.

Q: *You are mainly talking about practical lessons, right? Lessons were also given in language and...So, if a child goes to school, he had language and practical lessons. Anything else? Gym class or something?*

A: No, not gym class, no. [Laughs]. No, in the workshop or theory, that's all it was. It was still quite simple in design, it didn't exist that long either. You cannot compare it to a school for the deaf that is a hundred years old and large. It was of course much more primitive there. It was the beginning.

Q: *So, those theory lessons were, for example, language and arithmetic?*

A: Yes, language and math. To support the carpenter and the tailoring, you must be able to calculate and measure.

Q: *Aah exactly. Sounds interesting. Were there also speech lessons?*

A: No, not in our school. However, in primary school. Brechtje taught in primary school. Speaking lessons, yes. But no more at the technical school.

Q: *That means it should be good enough there to communicate with speech at that tech school?*

A: Yes. And again, the category was: More towards hearing impaired towards deaf. For example, there were no audiograms either. I have never seen audiograms from deaf students. However, they did have a hearing aid.

Q: *So, classes were in spoken English, the oral method?*

A: Yes

Q: *The children, did they sign together outside the lessons?*

A: Yes, yes, they do. Again, there are a lot of natural gestures out there and they were just used. And which, moreover, were from another tribe. Yes, somehow, they talked to each other.

Q: *If you encountered a child outside school, did you also use signs to communicate?*

A: No. I don't know any signs so I didn't use them either. Of course, I used natural gestures. I used gestures, no signs.

Q: *That's what I meant [gestures]*

A: Yes, gestures to support what has been said

Q: *When children were signing, did one accept this or were people against it?*

A: It was not prevented, no

Q: *Those boys who learned to make things, who improved their position in society?! How do you see the future prospects for those boys? When they graduate, when the school is finished?*

A: Unfortunately, I did not meet any children after graduation. So, I can't say anything about that. Because I do not know. I still have... We are still... Ten years ago Brechtje also had to go to Kenya for a project and we went there. I would have liked to meet former students, but that has not happened. So, how they did it in the end, I don't know. But the intention was that they or, for example, a tailor, that they somehow got a sewing machine and thus could make things for the people herself. Which was actually very common for those countries. You actually have a lot of one-man businesses; one makes something for the other. A tailor or carpenter fits in perfectly with that society. Yes, here we would now call it self-employed, yes. Someone who works for someone else. I assume that it worked well, but I don't have the experience. So, I can't say anything about that. Yeah, too bad.

Q: *Yes, too bad! Do you expect that they have gained status in society because they have now learned a trade ...?*

A: Yes, I assume, knowing a little bit about the culture, that it worked. Because at first, they weren't looked after and now they could add something. Because they could do something. They were carpenters or tailors, yes, they could do something. So, they had acquired some status. But how it eventually went into practice? When they came home to their own village or settlement... I don't know.

Q: *Do you know anything about deaf culture in Kenya?*

A: No

Q: *That was not taken by the sisters or something?*

A: I don't even know if there is a real deaf culture. There may not be a deaf culture. When I look at the kids who went to school with us, they went home after that, they were all over Kenya. I don't know if they still had contact with other deaf children or if they could just make themselves understood and communicate at home. So, I wonder if, at least then, if there is a deaf culture there. But I can't really answer that.

Q: *No, I understand that. Another question, more about the organization of the compound in general, and also about the technical school... It was all founded by the Catholic Church, right? How big was the religious influence? Was religion taught or something? Religion lesson?*

A: That was strong. Look, it was still a mission. There was a missionary sitting there preaching the faith. That was the basis of why you sat there. So, he did that too. And when he was there, I don't know how long he was there that missionary, then he started that school for the deaf. Then he made contact with Oudenbosch, because that was where the sisters of Oudenbosch were and who asked him to start a school for the deaf there. Yes? And that's how it worked. The missionary had a big finger in the pie, let me put it this way. Because it was his mission.

Q: *And how did you see that in education?*

A: He didn't come to the schools. But everyone went to the church on Sundays. Wait...I think they went to church every day. There was a church service. So, there he also preached to the deaf students. But he never came to school. That was the duty of the Sisters. The Sisters of Oudenbosch were in charge of the school.

Q: *Do you perhaps know whether the school received financial support from the government or its own congregation?*

A: Yes, the own congregation supported the school. And I think, but I'm not sure, I think the school also received a certain subsidy from the government to run it. But that goes for the primary school for the deaf. But I don't know how that worked financially. But there was a lot money collected through projects for such a mission. And that was what the missionary, who was active in collecting money, in fact, if he had a project again. Because yes, there was no income. He had no income himself, he also had to exist from what he received/collected.

Q: *Thank you. I have no more questions but I want to clarify one point: You said that when the boys where finished...How many years did the study take?*

A: I thought 3 years. And then they had to fill out a test. If they passed, they were graduated and went home.

Q: *When the children started in the technical school, what was their age?*

A: They finished primary school. So, I would say approximately between 14-15-16 years old. I have to say that those kids were very nice. Very nice.