

**Rich Tarro, Kenya - Lent 2022**

**Ethan's story**



*With Ethan at HOPE Project*

When I was a kid, I always wanted to be a teacher. However, eventually I chose the path of engineering and computers instead. Although being a teacher would have been great, working in high-tech gave me the opportunity to work with many leading edge technologies and to collaborate with a lot of very smart people. And during my many years at IBM, I did get to teach some classes and present in webinars and at seminars (some of them are still on YouTube, one of them actually with [over 15,000 views](#)).

My current role as director of the HOPE Project now allows me to live out my childhood dream of teaching. Although tutoring students is only a small piece of my responsibilities, it is by far my favorite part of the job. That moment when you see the light go on — when a student grasps a concept they have been struggling with — is one of the best feelings in the world for me. I also try my best to not only instruct our students in math, science and computers, but also to be a role model for them. I hope that I succeed, at least to some extent, on both counts.

In my three years running the HOPE Project, I have seen different senior students become leaders among our HOPE students and flourish in that role. The current leader is an 18-year-old who I will refer to as "Ethan" (not using real names). Ethan is finishing his fourth and final year of high school and preparing for Kenya's all-important national exams, which will determine what college, if any, he can attend. Physics is his favorite subject and the one he does best in.

Ethan is a very motivated and extremely hard-working young man. He likes music and plays keyboards. He also loves rollerblading. Ethan lives with his mother, Rose, and three siblings — Andrew, Margaret, and George — in Bangladesh, the largest and most congested slum in Mombasa. Their one-room house has no electricity or water and is close to a dumping site and so is surrounded by garbage. The family sleeps on the floor; they don't have beds or mattresses.

Ethan's father, Ian, passed away in 2013. He was a musician who sang songs in their local mother tongue. This is probably the reason Ethan and his brother Andrew, who posts music videos on YouTube, love music so much. After Ian's death, life became very difficult for the family. One of Ian's brothers wanted to "inherit" Rose. When Rose rejected the proposal,



*Ethan and Mildred during our Christmas food distribution*

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the family was forced out of their upcountry home and their property taken away from Rose by her late husband's family.

Rose traveled with her children to Mombasa to look for work and, with no other option, settled in the Bangladesh slum. With no money and no house, they were forced to sleep outside. One of her late husband's old friends gave Rose the equivalent of \$5, which she used to buy a small propane grill so that she could start cooking food to sell on the street.

While still struggling in Bangladesh, a relative invited the family to move in with them in a nearby town. Rose found a job at a place sewing buttons and button holes. She worked there for six months and then started experiencing chest pains. Rose was diagnosed with tuberculosis and had to stop working. She was eventually sent away by her relatives, and, with no other place to go, she returned again to the Bangladesh informal settlement. She had hit rock bottom once again. Thankfully Rose's health improved, and she eventually was able to start cooking and selling food on the street again.

It was at this point that Rose heard about the HOPE Project and sought out educational assistance for her children. This is when Ethan entered the project and began being supported by HOPE. Ethan is an above-average student and is thriving despite the harsh environment in which he has been living. The family, however, continues to experience setbacks. Rose continues to endure chest pains, and Ethan's sister, Margaret, got pregnant at the age of 17 and is now living on her own with her son.

Ethan hopes to go to college and become a software developer. We will do our best to help him reach that goal. I know he will. Ethan wants to get a good paying job so that he can help his mother and change the life of his family.

I suppose that all teachers encounter students who affect them in a special way. I so much admire Ethan as a person, his positive attitude despite all the challenges he has faced in his life, his work ethic and his determination to succeed. We couldn't be prouder, and given all that Ethan has accomplished and overcome, it's not surprising that he was elected school president this year.

I sometimes get discouraged when I think about the reality of what difference we are actually making in the lives of our students. I know that we are, but sometimes it is not so easy to see. With Ethan, it's very clear. Seeing students like him excel is what makes everything I do worth it. I can't wait for him to finish high school so that I can start teaching him computer programming.

Peace, Rich

[rtarro@mklm.org](mailto:rtarro@mklm.org) / [HOPEgivesHope.com](http://HOPEgivesHope.com) / [facebook.com/rich.tarro](https://facebook.com/rich.tarro)



Ethan in our computer lab

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