

# LUTHER Alumni Magazine

## Building hope through books: Kutschats found Bookfriends International

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Paulette (Lutz) '67 and Steve Kutschat vividly remember the day they saw firsthand just how dire the need for educational resources in many parts of Africa really is.

Paulie had just wrapped up a week volunteering at a girls school in Monduli, Tanzania – and Steve had recently returned from summiting Mt. Kilimanjaro, also in Tanzania – when they were invited to tour a new secondary school near the Maasai village in which they were staying.

There they saw students eager to learn. They saw educators eager to teach. What they didn't see were books – the shelves in the library were virtually bare.

Both moved and a little shocked, they made a pledge to the school's teachers – they would stock those shelves with books. “We didn't know how that would happen, but we had faith that we would be led in the right direction,” recalls Paulie.

Thus was the seed planted for Bookfriends International NFP, a charitable public foundation founded by the Kutschats in 2004 to gather unwanted books in America and place them in schools in other lands.

“The only difference between students in Africa and students in America is the lack of opportunity,” says Steve. “We are small but think and dream big enough to make a difference in the educational opportunities for African youth.”

In just two years, Bookfriends International has shipped enough textbooks to provide curriculum materials for eight Tanzanian secondary schools with 3,600 students. (Each of those schools has also received several hundred library books.)

Many of the books were donated by libraries and schools – including Paulie's alma mater, Luther. Last October she and Steve traveled to campus from their Lake Zurich, Ill., home to pick up textbooks and lab manuals that had been collected by Preus Library staff with the assistance of Luther faculty members.

“We know for sure that those who received them are smiling over these resources, and we are grateful that Luther has taken this project to heart,” says Paulie.

While the Kutschats admit it's been an intense two years establishing Bookfriends – Paulie continues to work as a private piano teacher and professional accompanist, Steve as a financial consultant – they also say they have been greatly helped by a growing network of donors and volunteers.

“Nearly every organization and individual who heard our story became very excited to see African students benefit from what would have been America's waste,” says Steve, who plans to return with Paulie to Tanzania in 2007 to visit schools they have assisted and further develop contacts in the country.

Recently Bookfriends International purchased a larger warehouse in Wauconda, a Chicago suburb, that will triple inventory capacity to 30,000 books and provide space to

more efficiently process and ship those books. As the operation grows, fund raising remains a challenge, especially given the high cost of shipping books overseas.

It's a challenge the Kutschats are determined to meet. "The need in Africa is so great and so urgent that we feel we must do what we can," says Paulie. "Surely this is a way to create good and lasting relationships between our countries as we help them to find real hope for the long-term through books and education of their youth."

*For more information on Bookfriends International, visit [www.bookfriends.org](http://www.bookfriends.org)*

Caption with PHOTO of Steve and Paulie at Luther College Preus Library:

*Bookfriends International founders Paulie (Lutz) '67 and Steve Kutschat visited the Luther campus in October to pick up textbooks and manuals donated by Preus Library and college faculty members.*