

## A Note from Kimeli Naiyomah

I am the Kimeli in this story. I grew up in a small village in Kenya.

When I was a little boy my mama said I was too gentle to be a fierce Maasai warrior. I fed little nestlings in the bush and rescued drowning ants from water puddles.

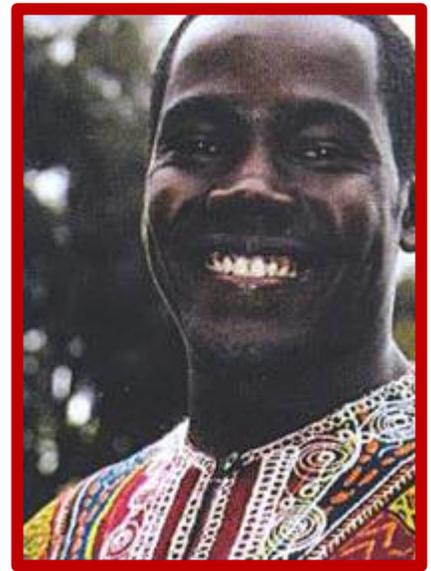
I loved taking care of the cows that belonged to the elders. I felt a close bond with them. A Maasai boy is like one of the calves in the herd. He drinks milk from the cows and feels protected by the bull. My mama was too poor to own a cow. I dreamt of having one someday for my mama and me. It was my biggest dream.

As a young boy, I spent much of my time with the grandpas and grandmas of my tribe. It was through them that I learned my tender warrior heart was not a bad thing. They taught me that the Maasai valued more than strength and boldness. Our ancestors also valued compassion and kindness toward anyone in need: the orphan, the widow, the stranger. To heal the pain in someone's heart, they told me, you give them something that is close to your own heart.

When I was older, I won a scholarship to study in the United States. Many American moms and dads welcomed me to their homes as they would their own child. Like the Maasai elders in my village, these people showed me kindness by taking me in and helping me get an education. America became my second home.

I was in New York City on September 11, 2001. What happened that day was devastating. Many people were left without their mothers and fathers, brothers, and sisters. Like countless others, I watched brave firefighters and police officers risk their own lives to save people. My warrior heart could not sit still in me. I wanted to do something to help.

My childhood heart told me what to do: Offer a sacrifice in the way of my people. *To heal a sorrowing heart, give something that is dear to your own.* I have saved enough to fulfill my dream and buy a cow. I decided that the cow, a symbol of life to our people, would be my offering to the grieving Americans. But some pains are too big for one chest to carry. I would ask the elders in my village to bless the cow, to make it special so the gift might take away some of the sadness from American hearts.



I returned to Kenya the following spring and told the story of that tragic day in New York City. Hearing my story, seeing my tears, the ancient spirit of my people was stirred up. When I presented my gift for blessing, others offered up their own precious cows. Fourteen cows were blessed that day. It was a great moment in my village. We were helping to heal a people far away.



Kameli (in the center) with Maasai elders.  
Senior chief Ole-Ng'ong'ote (right) and elder in charge of the warrior camps Ole-Meleii (left).-

When the American ambassador and his wife came to our village to accept the cows, “The Star-Spangled Banner” played over a loudspeaker during the ceremony. Although my people did not understand the song, they stood along with the Americans and placed their hands across their chests. Seeing hundreds of Maasai standing with him in respectful silence made the American diplomat cry. His tears caught the Maasai by surprise, and we were all swept up in the deep

emotion of the moment. A connection between the two cultures has been made. We felt we had taken some of America’s pain into our Maasai hearts.

These sacred, healing cows can never be slaughtered. They remain in our care in Kenya under the guidance of the revered elder Mzee Ole-Yiampoi. The original fourteen have calved and the herd now numbers over thirty-five. They continue to be a symbol of hope from the Maasai to their brothers and sisters in America. The Maasai wish is that every time Americans hear this simple story of fourteen cows, they will find a measure of comfort and peace.