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Bob Kerr: Kids learn from the run to Horseneck

01:00 AM EDT on Friday, May 20, 2011

It was in Brewster, Mass., that young Luke Parker turned to Bill Molloy, who was at the wheel of the support van and told him there was a police car behind them.



"And Mom and Dad are in it," said Luke.

Yup, Chris and Lauri Parker were in the cruiser. That they would spend part of Mother's Day in the company of the law is just one of those unexpected things that can happen when a guy runs from Provincetown to Horseneck Beach in Westport, Mass. It's not something people regularly do.

A driver took issue with the Parkers running on Route 6. Chris Parker took issue with the driver. Then the police showed up. The Parkers were told Route 6 is too dangerous for running, and they were taken to Route 6A. And the run, with its flexible rules and solid purpose, moved west.

The run is something Parker had thought about for a while. He wanted to use running, which has been a part of his life for a long time, to benefit this wonderful project that he and Molloy and a small group of other educators have taken on.

"It comes down to raising money," said Molloy, a longtime teacher and administrator in Fall River schools who now teaches at the University of Rhode Island. "He wanted to combine the two things."

So the run was combined with the Africa Teacher Foundation, a very direct and personal way for teachers who have what they need to help those who don't. It began with a trip to Kenya with friends in 2007. Molloy was invited to help with a "feeding" at a school in a Nairobi slum. He saw a classroom with one book and one chair and a large number of students who were HIV-positive. They lived in the room, and some of them died there.

He came back home with the idea of going back to Kenya with teachers and supplies and a better way to teach. This year will be the fourth trip. And Chris Parker is a natural to be a part of it. He and Molloy met when he was a student of Molloy at Durfee High School in 1984. From Durfee, Parker moved on to Tufts, Northeastern and the University of Oregon, where he earned his Ph.D. in school psychology. He now runs his own company, IDEAL Consulting Services, which promotes research-based educational practices centered on teaching literacy. When he goes to Kenya, he conducts intense four-day workshops on teaching strategies.

"I work with teachers regularly here in the states, and I hear a lot of complaining," said Parker. "But I go over there — where people have every reason in the world to complain — and I never hear one complaint."

He called his 10-day, 116-mile run to Horseneck "Shillings For Shule." Shule is Swahili for school. He came home to Westport every night, visited a chiropractor every morning. Lauri Parker, a teacher in Fall River, covered one stretch when her husband's legs needed a day off.



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Before the run, Molloy and Parker contacted a bunch of schools and asked that students pledge a penny a mile. The returns are still coming in. The money will help feed kids and create better teachers in a place where the need is clear and immediate, and where some good people are providing the best kind of American investment.

For more information, go to africateacherfoundation.org.

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