



You ever forget to grab the brown paper sack with your name on it from the kitchen table on your way out the door? Or lose your lunch money to the class bully? A long, wasted afternoon pretending to listen and study, your mind fixated on the fridge at home, your stomach rumbling, a one person earthquake.

This 8'x8' corrugated metal shack where all the food was prepared from 2017 to 2024, when Polly's Kitchen was completed.

Porridge for all 600+ students every morning. Not to mention lunch at 1pm sharp.

At the Mulandi School, a couple hundred meters from Red Rhino, there were no forgotten sack lunches or lost lunch money, but every afternoon it was a chorus of empty stomach chamber music. Not all the students were in the intestinal orchestra. A lot of kids ate lunch every day. Some ate some days. And some ate no days.

In 2014 Red Rhino started a school fees assistance program to help the very poorest kids in our very poor rural neighborhood make it through primary school. It was and is a good idea, but it doesn't take a genius to connect the dots between adequate nutrition and academic performance. The school had 150 students in 2015 and we had 39 in the tuition assistance program. So we dipped our toes into the shallow end and started a daily school lunch program for the kids we were helping.

We went through a number of iterations of this feeding program, but every one had gaps in it filled with under-nourished kids. So we tossed in the apron and decided just to feed all the students at the Mulandi School breakfast and lunch every school day of the year.

It's now 10 years later and our modest plan has grown. The school has 610 students (and counting) and all of them line up for "uji" a sorghum porridge, at

10am and lunch at 1pm. You math intuitives know that's over 200,000 meals a year.

Until late this spring, every one of the 1.4 million meals from 2015–2024 had been cooked and served from this kitchen. A few years ago a good start was made on a new kitchen/dining/multi-purpose building. But the funding faltered and it remained incomplete for several years.

I met with the Fishers at Peets in Stockton a couple of years ago, and in short order the funds were available to complete the building and to add a 50,000 liter water collection system, a big plus in this dry climate.

Now, the 1,200+ daily meals are prepared and served from here: Polly's Kitchen. Polly Fisher said "yes," before any questions were asked. Her vision carried us. Though she passed away before the kitchen was completed, her spirit still carries us. And 610 (and counting) full bellies are her daily legacy.

