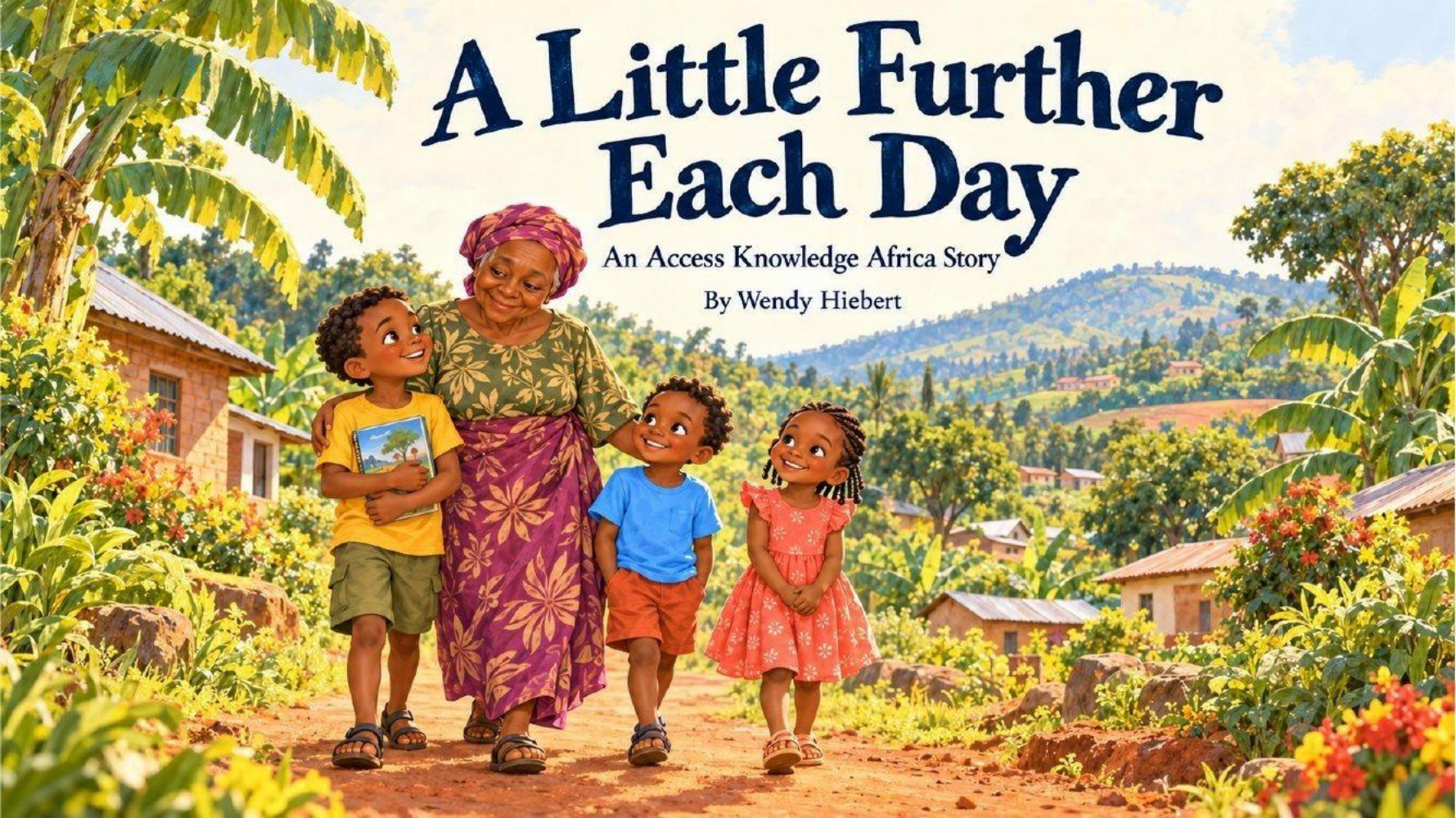


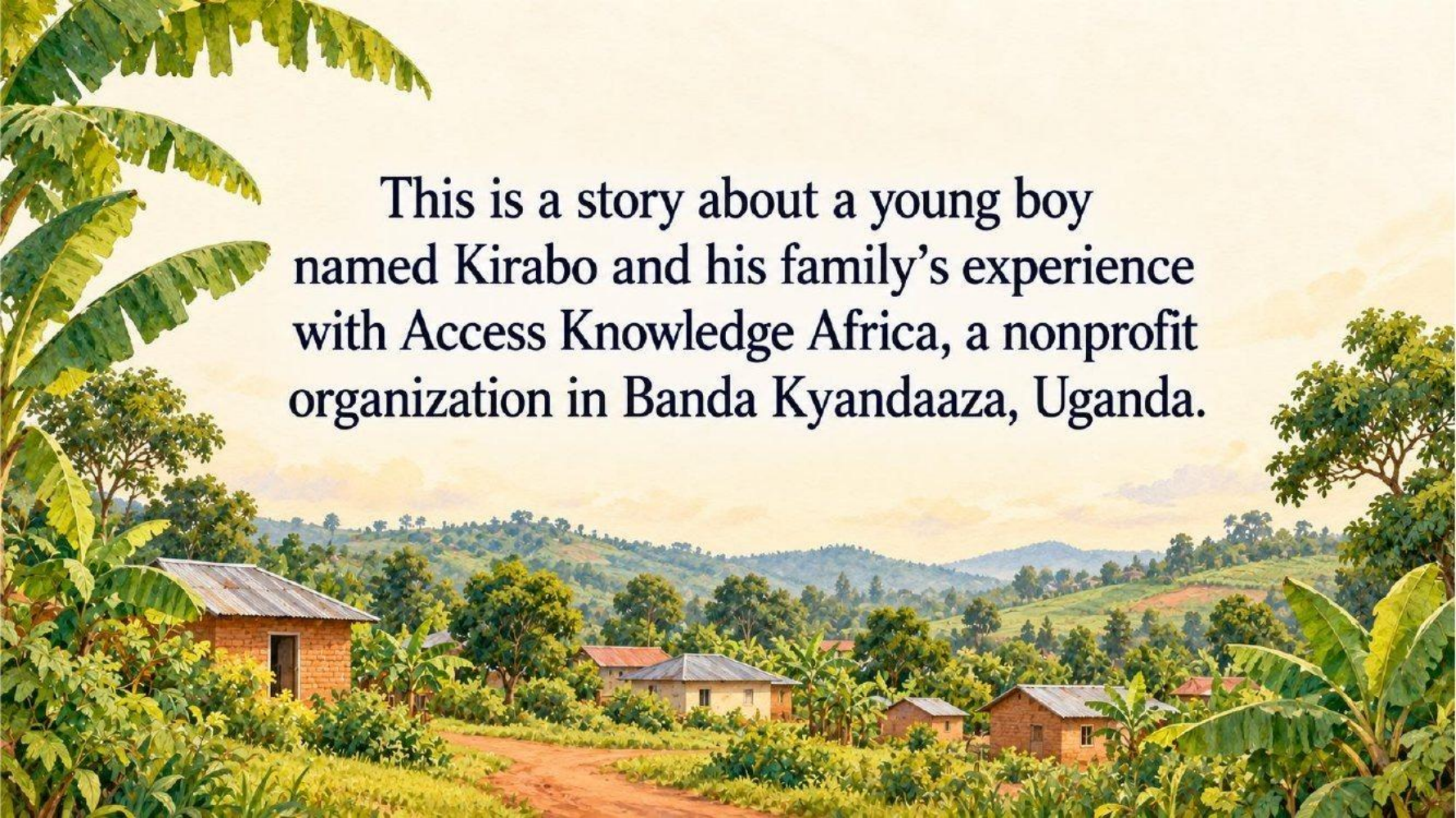
A Little Further Each Day

An Access Knowledge Africa Story

By Wendy Hiebert



This is a story about a young boy
named Kirabo and his family's experience
with Access Knowledge Africa, a nonprofit
organization in Banda Kyandaaza, Uganda.





My name is Kirabo.

I live with Grandma and my little brother and sister in a village about an hour east of Kampala, a big city in Uganda.

My brother and sister are twins.

That means they arrived together.

They usually arrive together when I am trying to do something, too.



Some of my older relatives struggled with drinking too much alcohol and gambling.

Sometimes money we needed was gone.

Sometimes there were arguments.

Mama found work in Kampala so she could help pay for our food, clothes and school.

She had to stay in the city for her job, so we went to live with Grandma.

Mama sends money and visits when she can.

When she calls, all three of us want to speak at once.

Grandma says the phone only has two ends.

I think our end needs to be bigger.



Grandma knows many things.

She knows how to grow beans, make chapati and find my school shirt when it has disappeared.

“It is on the chair,” she says.

And there it is.

I think she might have special powers.

She says I am growing, too.

I stand beside her to check.

So far, she is still winning.



No one in my family had been to school before me.

Grandma wanted us children to have that chance.

She took me to school and made sure I went back each morning.

“You can learn,” she told me. “Keep trying, and ask for help when you need it.”

Then she straightened my shirt.

My buttons were in the wrong holes again.



At school, I liked drawing.

Reading was harder.

Other children knew words I had never seen before.

When the teacher asked someone to read, I sometimes
looked down at my desk.

I hoped my desk would answer.

It never did.



After school, Grandma wanted to hear about my day.

“I knew three words.”

“Tell me which ones.”

“The next page has much longer words.”

“Then we will see what you learn tomorrow.”

Grandma could not read them with me. She had never had
the chance to learn.

But she always listened.



At school, I made a friend called Kafeero.

He could whistle through his teeth.

I could make a noise like a goat.

These are useful things to know about a friend.

During a school break, Kafeero told me where he was going.

“To the community library. Come with me.”



“What do you do there?” I asked.

“Look at books. Listen to stories. Play learning games.”

“But I’m not good at reading.”

“You can come anyway.”

Grandma said I could go.

“Tell me all about it when you get home.”



On the way, we passed a roadside vendor roasting maize
over charcoal.

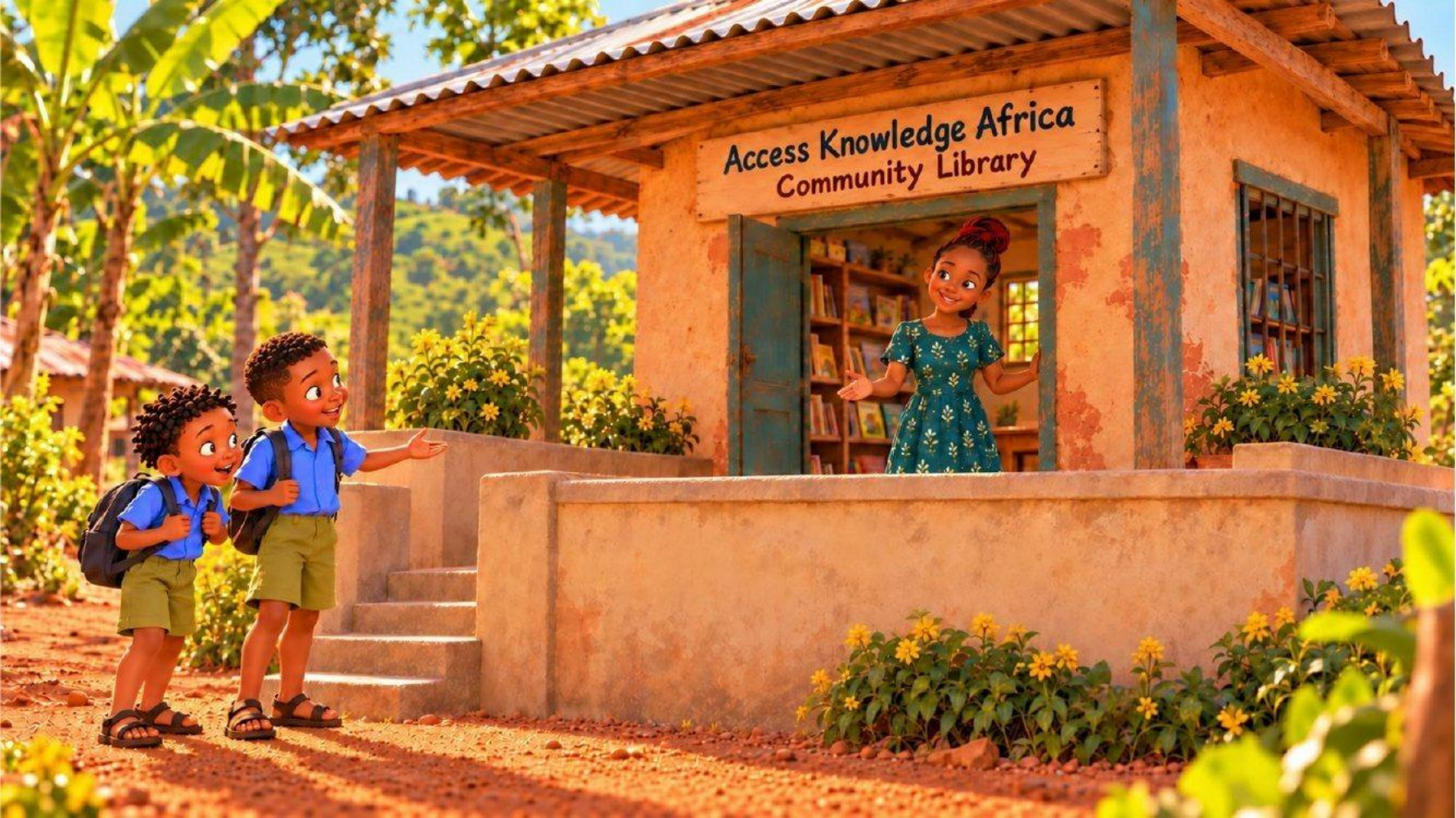
She turned the cobs slowly.

The smell followed us.

My feet kept going toward the library.

My nose wanted to stay behind.

Access Knowledge Africa
Community Library



The library was part of an organization called Access
Knowledge Africa.

A woman named Cathy welcomed us.

There were books to choose from, puzzles to try and
children playing games with letters and numbers.

“What do you like?” Cathy asked me.

“Football. Animals. Things with wheels.”

She found me a book.

I found a very difficult word.



It had so many letters that I thought it should have brought a friend to help carry them.

“We can try it in little pieces,” Cathy said.

She waited while I sounded it out.

Then I read the whole sentence.

I looked up.

Cathy was smiling.

I tried the next word.



After reading, Kafeero and I played a counting game with a man named Saul.

Then we drew pictures.

I drew a bicycle with enormous wheels and a seat for Grandma.

It would carry her all the way to Kisoga, our nearest trading centre.

Kafeero studied my picture.

“Where are the pedals?”

I had forgotten the pedals.

This was going to be a problem.



When I got home, Grandma was preparing matoke.
Matoke is made from green cooking bananas. Grandma
peels them and cooks them until they are soft.
I told her about the library and showed her my drawing.

“I will put the pedals in tomorrow.”

“Please do,” she said. “Kisoga is rather far to push.”

The twins wanted seats on the bike too.

I was going to need a bigger piece of paper.



I went back to the library.

And back again.

Some days, reading felt easier.

Other days, my brain wandered away halfway through a
sentence.

Usually to football.

But Cathy and Saul helped me find my place, and Kafeero
saved me a seat.

Soon, I could finish a story I had only been able to look at
before.



At home, I told the twins stories.

At first, I remembered the pictures and made up the parts I
could not remember.

Sometimes I added a goat.

My brother liked the goat.

My sister wanted to know its name.

Grandma listened from her chair.

She always knew when I had added something to a story.



Later, I brought home a book to read to them.

My sister wanted to see every picture.

My brother wanted to turn every page.

Usually before I had finished it.

“Wait,” I told him. “We haven’t found out what happens yet.”

When I finished, they said, “Again!”

Grandma smiled.

“You had better get comfortable, Kirabo.”



One day, Grandma came with me to the library.
Before that, we had to visit an office where Grandma had an appointment.

Someone pushed a big book across the desk.

“Sign your name here, please.”

Grandma looked down.

“I cannot write,” she said quietly.

I moved closer to her.

This had happened before.

Someone would ask Grandma to sign, and she would have to explain.

Sometimes people waited impatiently.

Sometimes she looked embarrassed and hurried to finish what she had come to do.

I wished they knew all the things Grandma could do.



At the library, Grandma spoke to Cathy.

“I would like to learn to write my name.”

Cathy pulled up a chair.

“We can practise together.”

She wrote Grandma’s name on a piece of paper.

Grandma held the pencil carefully.

Her first letters wobbled.

So did mine sometimes.



Grandma went back to practise.

Cathy gave her time to try each letter and begin again when
she needed to.

At home, we sat side by side.

I worked on my words.

Grandma worked on her name.

The twins wanted pencils, too.

Soon, there were marks all over their paper.

And one on the table.



Nambi

a a a
m m m
b b b
i i i



One afternoon, Grandma looked at my latest bicycle drawing.

“Still no pedals?”

“I am working on them.”

“I am working on this,” she said, pointing to a letter.

We kept going.

Then, one day, Grandma wrote her whole name without looking at Cathy’s example.

She held the paper out in front of her.

“This is mine,” she said.



The next time we visited an office, someone pushed the
book across the desk.

Grandma took the pen.

She wrote slowly.

I waited beside her.

When she finished, she looked at her name for a moment
before handing back the pen.

Outside, she squeezed my hand.

“I did it, Kirabo.”

“I saw.”



We stopped at a roadside stall for gonja. Gonja is a sweet
plantain that is roasted. It is delicious.

Grandma gave me the bigger one.

I gave a little bit back.

We both had something to celebrate.

At home, she put her practice paper away safely.

“I will still practise,” she said.

So would I.



When Mama came home for a visit, the twins ran to meet
her.

I ran, too.

I had a lot to tell her.

About the books.

About Grandma being able to write her name.

And about the bicycle drawing, which now had pedals.

The next day, I took Mama to the library.



There was another room at Access Knowledge Africa that
had computers in it.

Saul helped people learn how to use them.

Mama watched for a moment.

“Could I learn, too?”

She and Saul arranged lessons for the days she could come
while she was home.

Mama learned to move the mouse and type words.

The computer mouse did not have whiskers.

I checked.



Before she went back to Kampala, Mama showed us a page
she had typed.

“You made all of that?” I asked.

“I did.”

I read the first line aloud.

She smiled at my reading.

I smiled at what she had typed.

Grandma leaned closer to look.

The both wanted the page. Mama cut it in half.



I missed Mama after she went back to work.

But now, when we spoke on the phone, I had stories to tell
her and words to read.

She asked about school.

She asked about the library.

The twins kept asking when it would be their turn.

I still thought our end of the phone needed to be bigger



Kafeero and I still had time for adventures.

One day, we decided to walk up Banda Hill.

Near the beginning, I decided we were almost at the top.

We were not.

A little later, I decided it again.

Kafeero pointed uphill.

There was still quite a lot of hill.



We stopped for a rest.

“Do you think a bicycle could get up here?” I asked.

“Only if you pushed it.”

Below us were the places we knew, looking smaller than usual.

Lake Victoria was a short distance to the south, and a cool breeze blew from that direction.

I wondered what it would be like to sail across it.

Kafeero thought we should finish climbing the hill first.



At home, Grandma wanted to hear about our adventure.
The twins wanted to know whether we had touched the
clouds.

“No.”

“Could you see our house?”

“Yes.”

“Could you see us?”

“Not quite.”

“Next time, we’ll wave.”



Back at school, I wished my classmates could visit the library, too.

Then Cathy told me about Access Knowledge Africa's Mobile Literacy Program.

"We take books and reading activities to schools."

"Could you come to mine?"

"If your teacher likes the idea, we can talk with her."

The next morning, I asked.

My voice was small at first.

But my idea was quite big.



My teacher listened.

She spoke with the headteacher and Cathy.

They worked out a plan.

I asked for news so often that my teacher began smiling
before I even reached her desk.

At last, the day came.

The Mobile Literacy Program arrived at our school.



There were stories to listen to, books to explore and games
with words and numbers.

I helped a classmate find a book about animals.

Another child showed me one I had never seen.

Soon, we were sharing pictures and asking questions.

I wanted to read everything.

Unfortunately, the school day still ended at its usual time.



When the books were packed away, we wanted more.
“Could we have books here between visits?” I asked my
teacher.

She spoke with Cathy.

It took planning, time and help from people who supported
the work.

Then our school received a Mini Library, a shelf filled with
donated books.

It only needed a little room.

The line of children waiting to choose a book needed much
more.



Our teacher showed us how to care for the books.

We turned the pages gently and returned them so someone else could read them.

I helped arrange the collection.

At home, Grandma asked whether I had found a good story.

“I found three.”

The twins squeezed in beside me.

Grandma settled into her chair.



Through Access Knowledge Africa, I met older young people
called Literacy Champions.

They helped children with reading.

Some took books and learning games into the community
on literacy bikes.

Each bike had a box attached to the back, which the Literacy
Champions filled with books.

I watched them prepare to leave.

These bicycles had pedals.

And something wonderful to carry.



As I grew, I read longer books.

The twins grew, too.

They began choosing stories and pointing out words they
knew.

Sometimes my little sister corrected me.

Sometimes she was right.

Grandma still listened to us all.

There were quite a lot of voices in our house.



School was not always easy.

Sometimes I needed help with my work.

Sometimes our family worried about paying for the next part
of my education.

Mama and Grandma talked together.

Then Grandma spoke with Cathy about what help might be
possible.

Later, I received a scholarship that helped pay for my
studies.

I called Mama to tell her.

This time, the twins let me speak first.



I still had lessons to attend, homework to finish and exams to prepare for.

Grandma always reminded me that she believed in me.

Before an important day, she checked that I had what I needed.

After a difficult one, she sat beside me.

“You have learned hard things before,” she reminded me.

And I tried again.



When I was old enough, I became a Literacy Champion.

I learned to plan activities, share stories and listen to children.

One day, a little boy sat beside me with a book.

“I’m not good at reading,” he whispered.

I remembered saying those same words.

“We can try together,” I told him.



We worked through a difficult word, a little at a time.

Then he read a whole sentence.

He looked up.

I was smiling.

Later, I rode out with books and learning games on a literacy
bike.

Somewhere, more children were waiting for a story.



When I completed my studies, Mama and Grandma were
there to celebrate.

So were the twins.

They were much taller now.

And I was much taller than Grandma.

She reached up to straighten my collar.

She could still spot a crooked collar.



That evening, I sat beside Grandma.

I told her about the children I was helping and the books we
had shared.

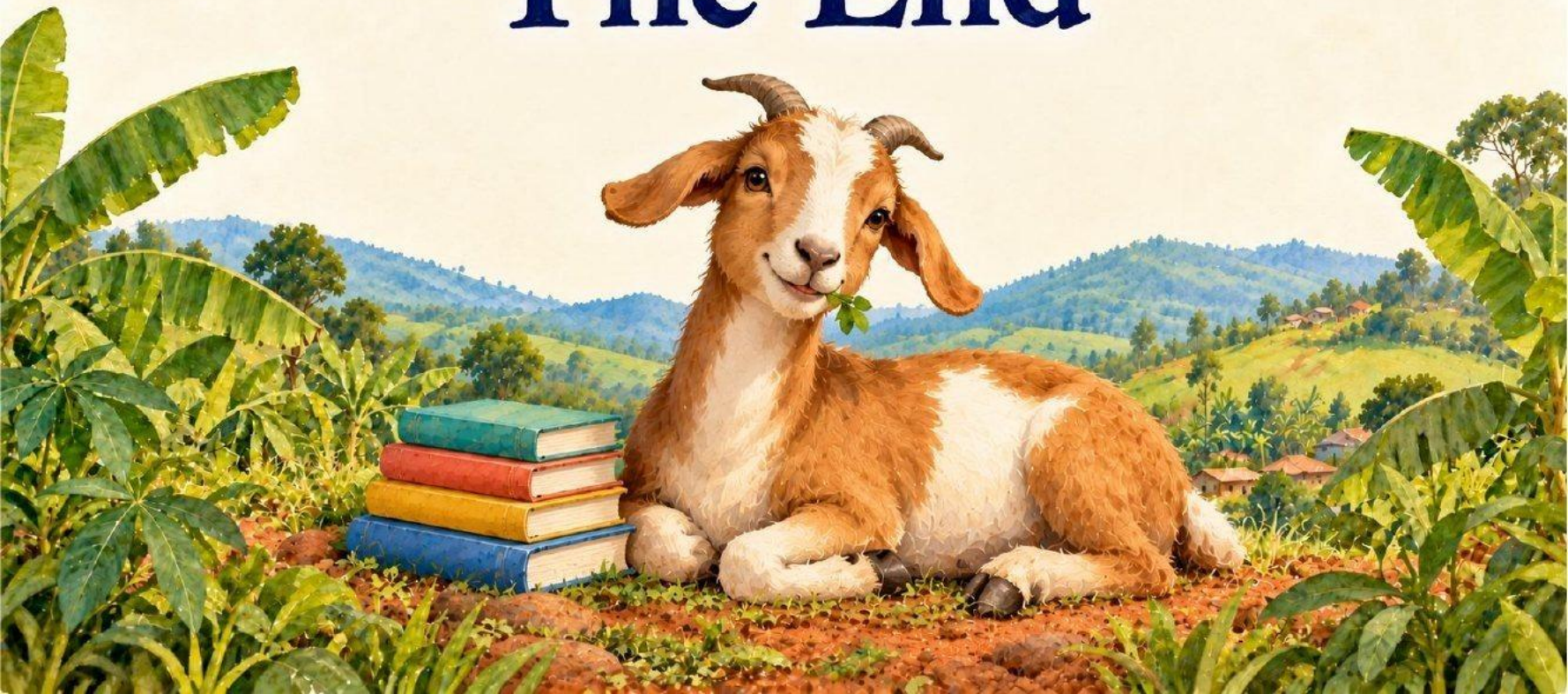
Then I opened a book.

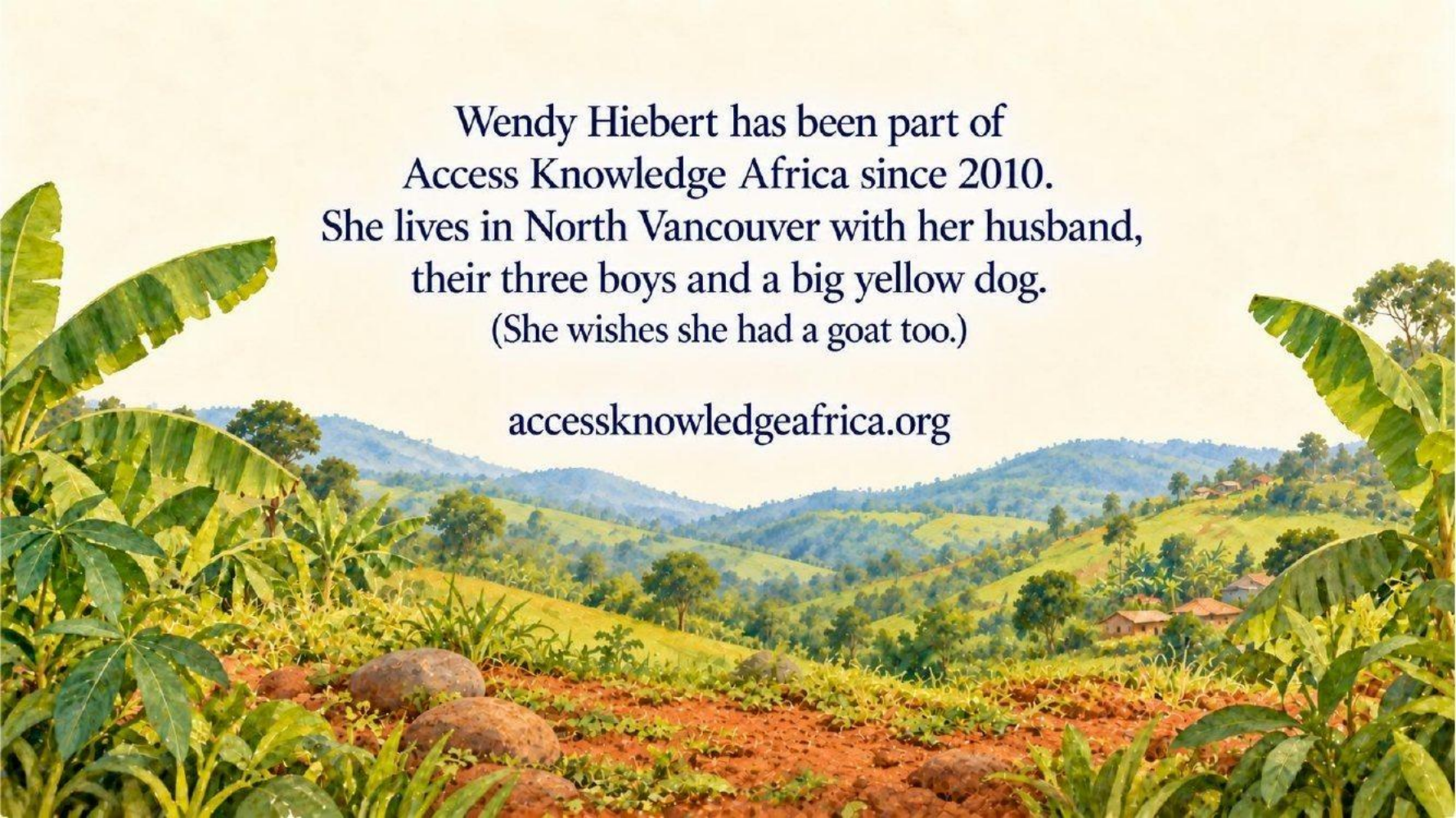
Years before, Kafeero had said, “Come with me.”

One visit to the library had given me a place to learn, people
who encouraged me and a reason to keep going back.

A little further each day, I had found my way.

The End





Wendy Hiebert has been part of
Access Knowledge Africa since 2010.
She lives in North Vancouver with her husband,
their three boys and a big yellow dog.
(She wishes she had a goat too.)

accessknowledgeafrica.org