

Dear All

Hello again from Lusaka. July was a busy month for us as Christine and I reached our 20<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on 9<sup>th</sup> and I made it to 43 on 17<sup>th</sup>. We have also had a visit from Christine's sister Jo, her husband Peter, their daughter Erin and grand-daughter Zoë. It has been really nice having them around and they have been a tremendous help in many ways. Peter is an electrician and after recovering from the horror of the poor state of the wiring, has set about improving it with a vengeance. We also managed to spend 5 days in Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar with them and enjoyed the peace and quiet of there only being 8 of us to look after instead of 40. In August all our children were off school together, something which happens only in August and December each year. However for the boys, lessons continued with tuitions every morning to help them catch up in weak subjects. In the last week they had a proper holiday and many went to visit family or friends for a few days, meaning the place seemed very quiet. We had hoped to have a family break in Cape Town, but were not able to do so; however it has been nice to have the children at home and to spend time with them. Sarah and Rachel will start another academic year in September, while the boys and Memo will be into the last term of their years and will have exams in November. The last few days have been the usual chaos trying to get everyone kitted out in uniforms, shoes, books and stationery, but Christine has supervised 26 demanding pupils with her usual efficiency. On the work front, my efforts to set up my own business seem to be coming together nicely but I will need a new permit which would allow me to be self-employed, so I have made application for that.

Following my last letter, I received a remarkable number of replies all dealing with one thing. It seems the story of Shadrack and his lack of school fees touched the hearts of many people, and we have received several offers to pay for his schooling. This would be very good news indeed if it were not for the fact that I cannot find him. Just a few weeks after restarting the night patrols, we woke up one morning and discovered that all the street boys had disappeared. It was so strange driving through town and seeing where they used to hang out empty of life, with no little faces at the car windows looking for money. The strangest thing of all was that nobody seemed to know where they had gone, but gradually the story

has emerged. The government has launched a Clean Up Zambia campaign, part of which involved removing the children from the street and keeping them in holding centres so that they will not be a nuisance on the street. We have mixed feelings about this. Personally I have a great deal of sympathy with the government as it is always accused of not doing enough/anything for street children, yet when it tries something people start screaming about “human rights” – don’t you wish that all these rights activists would just shut up and actually do something helpful? On the other hand, it is rather alarming that police can descend on a bunch of kids in the middle of the night and take them off to holding centres where they are basically held in school classrooms converted to makeshift dormitories against their will with no idea of what will happen to them. And the fact that the media have failed to follow up suggests that they and many people in the public are just happy that the boys are no longer visible, and are very content to let them disappear out of sight and out of mind. As I said, it is so easy to hit out and blame government, but at least they are trying to do something. The problem in my view is that those of us who hold the solution in our hands are not prepared to make the effort to do what is needed. Locking street children up all day in classrooms will never address the issue. What these children need more than anything else is a stable and loving family environment. Governments cannot provide this anywhere in the world - but that is what so many “ordinary” folk have and have provided for their own children. So if we were all prepared to take on responsibility for one of these lost boys, we could rescue them from the street, give them roots by providing stability and love, and provide wings for their future by education and training them. It is not rocket science, but it does need time, dedication and perseverance in a task that is not easy but very rewarding. And in our present “throwaway” societies, anything that asks for our time is unlikely to be successful – basically we are all too “busy” being busy to reach out and rescue the perishing. Sadly this also seems true of most of the Christians around Lusaka. While a few are making brave efforts to help, most are content to sit back and discuss the issue on an intellectual level. I wonder what Jesus would say if he visited Lusaka in 2007.

We are trying to discover a bit more about the boys’ situation without appearing like we are accusing anybody of harming the children, and without belittling the efforts that have been made to address the problem.

It is always easier to criticise from the sidelines. Hopefully we will be able to visit some of the lads soon, and take some of them into our care, including Shadrack. With that in mind we are pressing ahead with a big new project – the largest we have ever undertaken. We are hoping to build a 32 bed dormitory at the top of our garden, where we can house our existing lads in 8 study bedrooms with 4 boys in each. This will improve the space the boys live in and give them a sense of a place of their own as each will have his own bed, desk, wardrobe, and locker space. It would also give us a dedicated kitchen, shower block and dining/common room and this will be a relief on our over-stretched showers and kitchen in the house. It will also provide a focal point for the boys to socialize together in the common room and stop them having to eat outside under the trees. It seemed like a great idea when we discussed with some of our friends in Lusaka, so we decided to go ahead with it. Some friends seem to have taken this project to their hearts, and have provided some initial funding for the building, so we have actually been able to start construction. Our contractor – a cheerful retired Texan called Jim Burnett – has given us a quotation at cost price and has agreed we can build in phases as we can manage the cash flow implications.

This project is different from anything we tackled before in many ways. Not only is it much bigger and more costly than anything else we have tried, but it is the first time we have actually had any funding before we started although the size of the project is so big that we are not sure when we will get it finished, but will take it as it comes. We especially want to thank the following givers – the Diplomatic Spouse Association of Lusaka, Ray Brennan from Ireland, Taunton Baptist Church youth group, the Berry family in Herefordshire, Raja at MIT (who gave up his birthday celebration and sent the money to us instead), the APC congregation in Toronto, the D’Silva family and of course all the regular sponsor of individual children. I realise I am starting a dangerous path acknowledging donations – I will inevitably miss out someone, or include somebody who would rather be anonymous. If either event happens, please believe me it is not intentional, and I am simply trying to put on record our heartfelt gratitude to you all for caring and sharing with our boys.

The dorm will give us good facilities for our existing boys and will free up space in the house for visitors and new lads or younger children who need special attention. We would also be able to house some of the little street

girls in the house with us for their protection. The possibilities go on and on, and now we are finding that our own time and capacity to manage is becoming the main limiting factor. The scale of need is not any smaller, as many of the destitute children have been forced into hiding by the clean up, or have resorted to poorer parts of town where their presence causes less offence. Christine and I often feel stretched to breaking point and beyond, but we have always felt the power of God helping us to keep going. We have been blessed with a series of volunteers – mostly young folk but a few oldies as well – who have done a tremendous amount to help with the boys – in particular by helping them with school work and remedial lessons in English reading and writing. Every one of these volunteers has added their own special something to the farm and have illustrated to the boys the size, reality and scope of the extended Christian family. Special mention needs to be made of Abigail, Becky and Andrew – all from Baptist congregations in different parts of England, Ruth Tricker from Phil's church who came out for a second visit – the first couldn't have been too bad – and Peter and Margaret Seccombe who spent a night with us on the way through to Petauke where Peter is speaking at a conference for pastors. We have also been able to bring in another staff member to help look after some of the littler boys. Her name is Pamela and she is a lady in her twenties who was training to be a nun in a closed order called the "Poor Claires". Her fellow nuns did not feel she was suited to life in a closed environment so she had to leave and as she had nowhere to go we offered her a place to stay. She is a very pleasant, quiet person and although she must feel the rejection of her colleagues she has adapted to her change of circumstances and seems to enjoy spending time helping the little boys, Rachel and Memo with their work and being part of their games.

The farm is now well established and Phil continues to supervise it and work very hard to bring it all together as well as doing his "main" job at Covenant College in Petauke. He recently employed a man from Petauke as a farm manager. He was a deacon in the Baptist church there and had come to Lusaka looking for work, leaving his family behind. We were happy to have him, and he has now been able to bring his wife and children to stay with him. His name is Tuesday Banda – or "Mr Tuesday" so that he is not confused with the other Mr Banda here. He is doing good job and this relieves a lot of pressure from us when Phil is in Petauke. In

time we hope to be able to build him a little house and bring the whole family to live on the farm as part of the extended family. Our livestock now include 7 goats – we had twin kids born 2 weeks ago who have been named John and Jeremiah after our two littlest boys – 5 pigs who get fatter by the day, and 50 chickens, who will be joined by another 50 every 3 months till we have 200 in all. Plans are still going on to add quails, rabbits, ducks, geese, sheep and possibly fish, and in the next few weeks Phil and his team will have to start planting crops again before the rains due in November or December, so there will be no shortage of work for everybody. Meanwhile all our schoolchildren are back in harness and working extremely hard for their last term. Tests in November will determine if they have passed their current class and can move up a grade next year and nobody wants to be left behind. Some of them have national exams in November, including our Grade 7s – Mulenga and Danny - Samson on Grade 9 and Cleopas on Grade 12. If Cleopas does well enough he will be called to university and he hopes to study law if successful.

As far as our older lads are concerned, sadly Patrick has run away again, and John and Isaiah have also left and gone back to addiction on the streets, while Jonathan continues to be a major headache. He repeatedly leaves and then asks to come back again, and our patience has been stretched to the limit by him. Recently we worked out that he is very heavily addicted to dhagga – the local brand of cannabis, and this has helped us understand and tolerate his behaviour. We did not know what to do with him as we did not know of any rehabilitation services for drug addicts in Zambia, and we have neither the skill nor the capacity to run a rehab centre. Thankfully we have just found out about one such service run by an American lady with local volunteers. So far we have been able to have a counsellor visit Jonathan and he has admitted his addiction and agreed to go into the rehab programme, so we hope and pray that this will provide the deliverance he needs. I guess the process must be very hard as many of the boys have severe withdrawal symptoms including sudden nose bleeds, vomiting, aches, cramps and shivering, and they need 24 hour supervision in a locked room for at least a month. Please remember Jonathan as he goes through all this and pray that he will be cured and keep away from the temptation to relapse when he is finally clean. He is such a sad big lad – very nice in many ways, and very intelligent, but

utterly helpless to resist his addiction, and he swings between drug induced euphoria, withdrawal symptoms, and utter self-loathing which has got so bad that he has planned to kill himself recently. Let's hope he gets through it and then can come back to stay with us and do some training or school. I would also like to mention that the counsellors who work with the boys in the rehab centre are all part time volunteers as there is no funding to give them full time jobs. Jonathan's counsellor is called Prosper and seems a very nice young man, and if anybody out there feels they could pay his salary or part of it I believe by doing so you could do more to help a lot of street kids than almost any other action you could take. I would be happy to arrange for the connection between the centre and any donor who feels they would like to help.

Charles has recovered from his broken jaw and is back working although his teeth were rattled so badly he has difficulty chewing meat. He comes to our church services every Sunday and usually visits at least once during the week, and we continue to admire his courage and resolve in making his way in the world. Poor David is still in prison and I have been visiting him in an attempt to keep his spirits up. His case has been postponed 4 times now for the least excuse, but yesterday the court met again and there is now only one witness to be heard before the magistrate decides if David has to defend himself against the charges. The lawyer who I found for him is hopeful that the case will be dismissed without a defence being required. If he is released he will have to start again and we will offer him the chance to come back with us for a time to allow him to regroup. We have also taken in three more older boys who had been on the street then taken by the government to a National Service training centre where 2 of them - Evans and Godwin - were taught Agriculture and Jackson was taught Motor Mechanics. Jackson has been able to work with our Scottish friends Adrian and Lynne who are setting up a workshop, while we have employed Godwin and Evans as farm workers to help Tuesday. So the family grows and shrinks, with every day bringing its own demands and pressures as well as its joys and laughter. It is very hard work but very rewarding and when we look around at the happy faces when the boys are having fun, the intense concentration as they study, the surprised joy when they realise someone thinks they are worth something or the vigour with which they sing at evening prayers we know we really would not be without any of them.

Till next time, all our love and gratitude for all the support,

Don, Christine, Sarah, Rachel, Nicholas, Mulenga and all “the boys”