

Dear All

It really is a long time since I last sent out a message to everybody, and I can only apologise and say by way of explanation that things have been very difficult for us since the last time I wrote. Thankfully the pressure has eased a bit now but for most of the time since last January when I sent out our last mail, we have been too despondent to make any effort to write or I was afraid I would sound so gloomy I would end up depressing everybody.

Before continuing, let me also explain that I have changed my computer, and inevitably my address book got messed up. This seems to be the only thing that I can rely on to happen without fail every time I make any changes in IT. I have tried to reconstruct my newsletter list but I am sure I have made mistakes. Could I therefore ask if you have received this and do not want to receive any others please would you drop me a reply email to that effect. If on the other hand you know of people who would like to get a copy but have not, please feel free to send it to them.

When I last wrote, we had been through a very upsetting experience where one of the boys we had tried to help – Jonathan – claimed I had sexually abused him. The police refused to take any action on a criminal charge as they said there was no evidence against me, and Social Welfare investigated us and also stated there was no evidence of abuse, but a local lawyer claimed he was convinced and filed a civil case in Jonathan's name suing me. We had no idea what was going to happen. We felt that Jonathan actually knew very little about it all as he has gone to live in another part of the country and phones us regularly to keep in touch with us, but we could see that the lawyer who had taken up the case felt that he had an opportunity to make some money from us. The fear of facing a long and embarrassing trial with the resultant publicity was dreadful, and I often felt paralysed with no idea what to do. In the end I engaged a lawyer of my own who told me that I had to fight the case in order to clear my name. While this was clearly the correct advice, I dreaded the thought and could not see any way out of the situation. But some months later, completely out of the blue, we heard that the lawyer bringing the case to court had been struck off by the Law Association of Zambia for stealing a large sum of money from a client. This seemed miraculous at the time, and still does, though I believe that the prayers from so many of you on our behalf were a decisive factor in

the outcome. Although the lawyer has been struck off, the case can still continue with another lawyer and the original lawyer has tried to get this to happen, but the new lawyer seems to realise what is happening and has made no effort to pursue the matter, so my lawyer has asked the court to dismiss the matter, and we await the decision.

While we were going through this process, a further problem arose in connection with the hardware store I set up about 3 years ago in conjunction with a South African business group. My partners in South Africa decided they wanted to sell up, and offered the store to me. I was eager to purchase it, but in the meantime they agreed a deal with a local businessman, and in an effort to side-line me, they carried out a stock take after which they claimed that \$200,000 worth of stock was “missing”. They refused to show me the results of the stock take but simply closed the shop, fired the workers and suspended me. I knew that there was no stock missing because 2 weeks earlier I had done our regular count and the figures were spot on. It appears as if the whole thing was done in an effort to intimidate me, and the executives involved told me they were going to take the matter further to recover the money from me. So I had to go back to my lawyer again! I told the South Africans that I intended to take a case against them for their behaviour, and overnight they changed their tune from “intending to recover money” from me to offering me a payment to drop the whole matter. Christine and I decided that we should settle for this because although we believe we could have got far more if we had pursued the case, we did not want legal proceedings hanging over us for months or even years, and also we feel that God makes it clear that vengeance belongs to him.

We managed to reach this point in both the cases towards the end of July, just in time for us to set off on a family holiday in Cape Town for 2 weeks. We had a wonderful relaxing break, and stayed with our old friends Heather and Bruce Barrow, and Neville and Margaret Rasmussen. We love Cape Town and the Western Cape area, so the holiday was just what we needed. We were very touched to meet a group of people in Cape Town who have been praying for us for some years now, and we were able to tell them all about the latest developments.

On our return, I took up a different position running the company which handles passengers, planes and cargo at the airport in Lusaka. So far it

has proved a much less stressful job than running the airline, and I hope for a bit more calm in life over the next few months both at work and in the stuff we do with the boys. In order to stop the confusion which is growing about what email address to use for me, could I ask that you delete all old email addresses and use [don@iconnect.zm](mailto:don@iconnect.zm) which is a personal address and which should not change with any further job changes.

We have also been very encouraged by Abigail Brown's decision to stay with us for another year and continue helping with the boys education and managing the house. Last time I wrote Abigail had been with us a few months and since then she has really become part of the work and part of the family. She has been a real blessing to us and we are so delighted that she was willing to stay on. We are also very grateful to her family, friends and church for continuing to support her in her work here. Amongst other things, Abi spends time teaching the younger children and those who need tuition at home before going to school. During that time she has helped a number of the guys who have had learning difficulties and have been dismissed by mainstream education as being "dull". In particular, one boy who suffered from undiagnosed dyslexia has been able to catch up after dropping out of school, and thanks to her encouragement has decided to go back in January and take up the challenge again. It is sad to see kids with problems such as dyslexia written off by uncaring systems, and we can only guess how many more children are affected by such issues.

The dormitory which had just been finished at the time of my last letter is now fully occupied except for one bedroom which needs internal repairs. Unfortunately the structure needed some repairs after the rain damage which occurred last rainy season when the building was incomplete. We were blessed to have a visit from David Daschovsky from Inverness and his daughter Fiona. David is a joiner and was able to do a huge amount of work to correct the damage and we hope that we will be watertight now for some years. We have now almost completed the care givers house which will lodge Mr Banda and his family and thereafter we should have finished the requirements of Social Welfare, who have agreed to register us as a child care facility. We hope we will then be able to take a break from building activity as it feels we have lived in a building site for most of the last 3 years.

Most of the boys continue to do well and work hard in their studies. Two left us during the last 6 months, Joseph for persistent theft, and David Phiri for indiscipline and trouble making. We feel sorry about such cases but the advice from Social Welfare in both cases was that the boys were not ready to behave themselves and were causing disruption to others. Another older lad called Lazarus came looking for help and we have taken him in. He seems very well behaved and is working hard on the farm while waiting to start studying IT at college. He did well in school but sat idle for 3 years as he had no sponsor to send him to study further so thankfully we have managed to find someone to help him. We are also considering taking in a severely disabled boy called Pass. Those of you who remember when we started out looking after kids from the street may recall that Pass came to us as the second boy we took in. He has Muscular Dystrophy, is now confined to wheelchair, and is neglected by his family, relying on other boys in the neighbourhood to wheel him around. He is malnourished and unable to do anything for himself. We did not think Social Welfare would agree to us looking after him as we have no special facilities for disabled folk, and to be honest we were (and are) afraid of the trauma of watching him suffer. However we probably represent the best chance of improving his quality of life, and SW agreed that we should help as places with facilities for him are rare in Zambia. We have had him visit a few times and after he left, some of the boys about his age (he is 17) were so affected by his condition that they said to me that if we agreed to take him in they would look after him physically and make sure he was cared for – we were very touched by such kindness and thoughtfulness from teenage lads. We have not made a final decision yet, so please pray for wisdom to make the correct choice.

We had a team of 14 volunteers from Heskethbank Christian Centre in England. We have had some contacts with members of this church in the past, in particular our good friend Duncan Taylor, and the team of 6 adults and 8 young folk arranged to come out and run a 2 week activities camp for our lads. It worked out very well indeed and everybody has had a great time. The team were very friendly and helpful and had put an enormous amount of time and effort into preparing for the activities. The young lads all got on well together and our visitors left a large number of resources behind for our boys to continue fitness, music and arts and crafts on their own. We have also had a visit from Anne Mayo whose son Cammy was here with us last

year and her friend Lesley who courageously looked after the house with Abi while we were in Cape Town, and coped with a minimum of fuss and a good Scottish no-nonsense approach to life, and a return visit from Anna and Robin Watt. We have had various groups from Mission Direct spend an afternoon with us and this has always been a good time for us. I hope I haven't missed out anyone but if I have please forgive me.

So life continues with its ups and downs. Most of the time things are just normal family life but some of these problems can really hurt and destroy our confidence, though when they are solved – as they always have been – it does give us a sense of being taken care of by a higher power than this earth knows. Looking over the past year or so and remembering the very difficult moments makes us realise how blessed we have been also in terms of the hands on help from so many volunteers and friends and the care from so many of you who have been interceding on our behalf and supporting us in every way possible. May God bless you for your care for us all.

With all our love

Don, Christine and all the children