

Dear Friends

A Happy New Year to you all from Zambia. We hope and pray that 2005 will be a year of blessing and prosperity for all of you.

We are getting back into normal routine now after a very pleasant but busy Festive season. This year we decided to stay at home in Lusaka, and we all rather enjoyed having time together at home. Nicholas, Sarah and Rachel all had time off school, and Christine and I managed a few days off so we had time to things like play board games together, courtesy of Santa who brought Monopoly and Risk for Nico and Sarah, and watch the Wizard of Oz, again courtesy of Santa who brought a DVD player for everybody to share (clever guy really Santa).

We also had our extended family around us, and it was so nice to see their delight and excitement at getting presents. An American missionary family who stay nearby bought each boy a sports holdall and filled it with so many useful things like re-chargeable batteries, pens and pencils, towels, soap, deodorant, and best of all, a radio controlled car. Some of the younger lads nearly passed out with excitement when they saw they had one each. We constantly have to remind ourselves that these children have never had anything, which is hard for us to grasp since we have so much. The Wells (that's the American family) are here hoping to work with street kids. They had a difficult first year with church issues, but seem to be settled in now, and want to start up a project similar to ours. In the meantime, they have been very generous to our boys, and will feature later on in this letter on the issue of training the guys. They distributed the bags on 20th December, and 5 days later the boys woke up to find they had been given a watch each, so I think they are very much in favour of Scottish Christmas in Lusaka. Needless to say, Christine cooked a mountain of food on Christmas Day and again on New Years Day so we all overdid the eating, and had a jolly time. As well as the 5 of ourselves and the 10 resident boys, we had various waifs and strays from the street and the surrounding houses, so we were knee deep in children of all ages, but Christine remained calm throughout, and somehow everyone got fed.

Our little school for street boys also broke up for the holidays. As this is the hot and wet time of year, Zambian schools have their long holiday over December and January. All the boys did very well under Mr. Simbeye's tuition, and everybody passed into the next grade. Something which seems to mundane to us was a major life achievement for some of the boys, who less than a year ago were surviving on the streets and blanking out their miseries by doping themselves with glue. One lad, who rejoices in the unlikely name of Romeo (which Zambians pronounce Rommy as in Tommy) is 15 years old, and when he saw he had passed Grade 3 (Scottish Primary 4 level), he ran round the garden yelling at the top of his voice 'I've passed a grade, I've passed ? for the first time in my life, I've passed!?' It really was very moving to watch his delight.

Other achievements include Charles, one of our older boys, becoming the first to pass his driving test. He is very proud of himself as he gets to drive us around at the weekends, and is regarded with a mixture of jealousy and awe by the others,

who all now want to drive too. We have also taken in one more boy called Iwell (as in a Glaswegian saying 'Aye?.well?'). This is a bit of new territory for us as he has just been released from prison after serving 18 months for robbery and assault. We knew him before he went to jail, and he was a bad, arrogant, bullying individual. I often warned him he would end up in prison if he didn't change, but it made no difference. Then one day the law caught up with him, and he was punished. I wish I could say I went to visit him while he was locked up, but I didn't. The day he was released, he came and sat outside our gate till I came home and asked for help. It was pretty worrying thinking about having him around, but the difference in his demeanour was so marked, that had I not recognised his face, I would not have believed it was the same young man. He is now a much more humble, gentle character, and has proved to be very trustworthy and dependable. Christine and I agreed that we were probably his best chance for going straight, so we felt we should take him in. Mr. Banda agreed too, but I felt I needed to consult the other boys as they had known Iwell on the street as a bad character, and he had even beaten some of them severely. We were touched when they voted unanimously to give their one time persecutor a chance, and so far, none of us have had reason to regret the decision.

We have also branched out in another direction. A family of 5 children just along the road from us were left orphaned in 2004. They range in ages from 7 to 18, and one of the neighbours came to speak to us to ask if we could help. We reckoned that there was little point in ignoring their needs, letting them end up on the street, and then picking up the pieces, so we agreed to take the 2 youngest children into our school, and to providing some kind of Income Support to allow them to survive as a family unit. So far, they have succeeded in staying together, but their survival is precarious from day to day, and we want to find sponsors for the 3 older children to get them through secondary school.

We are now at a stage where we are getting more cases referred to us, and we really cannot fit any more children into the space we have available. So we are praying about the way forward. Should we look for bigger premises, and build a formal orphanage? There is so much to be done, but the level of cost involved is huge, and the commitment required from us frightens us. It is hard to turn away so many, but should we concentrate on providing a family for 10 children rather than an institution for 50? I really believe the family environment is what these children need, but could that be done on a bigger scale? And are we the right people to do it? We are not missionaries after all, and have not been commissioned to treat kids work by any church group. So the questions run back and fore, but we have decided that if God wants us to expand the work, he will make the way clear for us. Recently, the house next door became available for rent, and we felt mounting excitement at the thought of having the 2 properties, and knocking down the garden wall in between to give us double the space to take in some more children. The landlady however wanted \$1,500 per month (double what we are paying for our house) and really did not warm to the idea of 'street boys in her house?', so we let the matter drop. But nobody has rented the place, and the heart of man is in the hand of God, so her mind could be changed very easily.

The big exciting prospect for the start of 2005 is the opportunity to give all our lads some vocational training. Most of them have lost out on formal education completely, Iwell who is 20 cannot read or write for example, so sending them to school just would not work. However, we have now found places in carpentry training for 2 of them, and the Wells family have set up a training facility to teach welding, and have agreed to take 2 of our boys. This is wonderful news, as the boys will now be able to learn a skill, and get the chance to earn a living. Both courses are very practical but also include training on how to run your own business, and invest for the future. Two more boys are already learning car mechanics, at a local college. The remaining 4 boys are younger and attend school. We have also agreed the 6 bigger boys can learn to drive, and a teacher at our local church has agreed to come 2 afternoons a week and do adult literacy training with them. Finally, thanks to Phil Bailey, a local agricultural college has agreed to take 2 boys at a time on work experience for a day a week. So with all this activity, we will hopefully finish up with some capable young men to be hard-working and responsible citizens, husbands and fathers in the future. At the moment they are all so excited that they have great plans for setting up their own co-operative company to make money by selling what they make. I would like to acknowledge that all this opportunity has been made possible by generous donations from many of you, for which we can only say ?God bless you?.

I don't want to include a profile on any particular boy in this letter, but I have attached below a story written by Nicholas about how he came to stay with us. I have typed it just as he wrote it, and should mention that it is dedicated by him to Sarah our elder daughter.

May God be near you all in the coming year.

All our love

Don, Christine, Sarah, Rachel and Nicholas

?Tital ? Nicholas

In the street lived a young boy called Nicholas. His mother went away and left her children suffering and this boy his aunt didn't like him so he went in the street begging money from people at Manda Hill.

He used to sores all over his body then came a white man called Mr. MacDonald and then one day I went to his house and he welcomed and bathed me and put medicine on my sores and said you will stay here for three days but his daughter Sarah wanted me to stay forever. Then December came and they adopted me and make me his own son. And then they wanted me to come with them for Christmas and we went to a country called Scotland and stayed there for three weeks and came back to Zambia?