

Dear All

It's a wet, thundery evening here in Lusaka and the cloud cover makes it seem darker than usual. I could be sitting in our house in Edinburgh on a dark, dreich December evening but the temperature outside, and the noise from the livingroom assures me I am not. I am sitting in the bedroom, and I can herefrom the living room the sound of at least 15 adolescent male voices as they chatter and bellow at each other. The sense of excitement can almost be touched even from here. In the living room there are two main groups of children. One is watching in mounting tension as Mulenga tries out a computer game installed on an I-Phone. The other, larger group is gathered around Christine, offering advice and assistance as she assembles and decorates a gingerbread house decorated with sweets. They think that this is an astonishing thing to do, even though most of them saw her make one last year, and there are mutters of approval and awe as they watch the house take shape. The oft repeated conclusion is that "Mum is really clever." Rachel, Memory and Sarah are in the mix somewhere, issuing instructions in assertive female tones (they might as well get started early) and I can also hear the sound of Kate and Jamie, who are over from Scotland visiting.

They (Kate and Jamie) are from a TV production company in Glasgow which is considering putting a TV documentary together on the plight of street kids in Zambia and attempts to deal with it such as OMF. As with most of our visitors, they have fitted in very well, and have become part of the family for the short time they are here. They have asked us to try and ignore the camera, and have filmed us at all times, so dear knows what they will come up with if they ever manage to produce a programme. As part of the project I took them on Saturday to visit City Market and an area called Soweto where many of the boys have taken shelter after being driven from the town centre. It was an eye opener for all of us as we met so many lads in dire straits including Clifford the retarded lad I mentioned before and others who spent time with us or came to our Sunday lunch outreach when we lived in the middle of Lusaka, including the infamous Jonathan. Today I managed to arrange an interview for them with the Deputy Commissioner of Police in charge of the Child Protection Unit.

At the start of December most of our boys went off to visit their relations and today was the day for them to return in time for the festive season here

at the farm, so that is adding to the general air of excitement and chaos. Also since writing last time, we have had 4 new additions to the family. Samuel (the fourth Sam we have) came to see me at the shop and asked for help. He is an orphan aged 15 who has no relatives except his grandmother. He was born a twin, but his brother died when they were 10. They never knew their father, and in order to support them, his mother worked as a prostitute in a nearby town. When she inevitably died, his grandmother said she could not support him and he left to stay on the street in Lusaka. He managed to survive about 2 weeks, but found it terrifying, so was sent to see me by some of the other kids. Sadly, since he left, his grandmother has moved back to the village she came from, and he has no idea where she is, so is left with no relatives. Then there is Gift, who is also 15. Also an orphan staying with a grandmother, he has struggled to get through school up to Grade 8 but as a result of the economic downturn, his grandmother cannot continue to send him there. He also came to the shop and asked for work so that he could pay his fees. So he is staying while he works on the farm and we hope we will be able to send him to school next January. Finally there is Danny and Patrick aged 11 and 10, and the smallest boys we have ever taken in. They walked here from City Market - a distance of about 13 miles – looking for help. They are not related, but each of them lost his mother earlier this year. Patrick was abandoned by everybody and ended up on the street immediately, while Danny stayed with an uncle who treated him badly then one day went out, locked the door, and said he was going away on a journey. He left Danny outside and one week later, Danny, realising he was not coming back, made his way to the City Market where he met Patrick. After a few weeks, they were advised to come to OMF by some of the other little boys in the market. They are utterly adorable little guys and everybody loves them, though whether we will be allowed to keep them, and for how long remains to be seen. We have had to bow to pressure and register as a child care institution, meaning we are now subject to irritating and pointless regulation in our own home – e.g. displaying a weekly menu on the wall, and according to the law we need approval from Social Welfare and the courts before we can keep each child. We had a visit from Social Welfare this afternoon as part of the process, and they paid particular attention to Danny and Patrick since they are so much younger than the other boys.

Many of the older boys sat national exams before school closed, and we now await the results. In the meantime, Joseph and Cleopas are busy with

their studies at University. Cleopas has done exceptionally well, finishing as the best student in his year in his Business and Management course.

The immediate family is doing well. As some of you will know, Christine and Rachel were in Scotland for the first two weeks of December. The day they left, I woke up with a very sore stomach ache which did not get any better, and after dropping them at the airport I thought I should go to see the doctor. The upshot if it was I was whisked into hospital, and had my appendix removed that afternoon. It was a short operation, and I felt much better when I came round. I was concerned about everybody at the farm with Christine away, and managed to persuade the surgeon to discharge me the following day.

I will close here as some of you have asked that I make the newsletters shorter.

With our thanks for your ongoing support, and our best wishes for 2009,

Don, Christine and all the children.