

Dear Everybody

A Happy New Year from us all in Lusaka. I hope you all have a blessed and prosperous 2006.

Right now we are enjoying respite from the heat of October and November, and the rains in December were very heavy. While the cooler weather is welcome, the rain does tend to generate problems of its own, with flooding in various parts of the city. However, everything is looking green and healthy, and we hope the rain leads to a good harvest, especially for those parts of the country that have suffered from drought and hunger in the last 2 years.

We have just come to the end of the holiday week ? today is the 2nd of January ? and everybody is gearing up for going back to work tomorrow. We had a very nice time staying at home with all our kids and various other assorted folk. On Sunday we had our regulars who come for lunch every week, but on Monday 26th we organised a party for many of the children who are still on the street and the relatives of some of our boys. In total that day, Christine and Yvonne managed to feed over 70 people. It really was a big undertaking and I am never quite sure how they manage to do it. Everybody had enough to eat, and even some second helpings, and everybody received a small gift. This sort of event was only possible through the many people who sent us something for the boys for Christmas, so we would like to thank you all. Our boys got small individual gifts and a television which is now shared between the two houses. I think it has been on the whole time since they got it, but at least it makes things a bit quieter in the evenings. At New Year we had a much smaller group ? about 22 of our own boys and other street children. We had a big bonfire outside and we all sat round it in the evening and talked about what we thought was the best and the worst thing about 2005 and what we hoped for in 2006. Some of the events described were moving and some were quite hair-raising, but for me the best came from little Isaac, who is 10. He is one of Mabvuto's brothers, and we have helped send him and his two sisters, Maggie and Sapphira, to school. The two girls are sponsored by friends in Scotland, but nobody has been won over by Isaac yet. He is a lovely little boy, but had been neglected quite badly and as a result contracted very bad scabies. We had him treated, but when it recurred we felt the best thing to do was to keep him on the premises for a while until he made a full recovery. He said with heartfelt conviction that the worst thing about 2005 was scratching (scabies is unbearably itchy) and the best thing was stopping scratching. For the occasion Christine made the usual feast, and this time introduced the Zambians to a good old-fashioned Scottish trifle. As they waded their way through jelly, sponge, fruit, custard and cream, the boys were unusually silent, and we were afraid they did not like it. We need not have worried ? one of the street kids turned to his friend and said in a stage whisper ? ?This is very nice porridge ? is there any more?. Finally when all was finished his friend looked at him, patted his bulging stomach, turned to me and said ?Ah bwana, he is pumped?! I nearly choked laughing, and have decided to use the phrase as an excellent description of being full.

One very interesting person we met this time was Memory and Lucky's Grandmother. Memo and Lucky are the 2 younger children of an orphaned family whom we have fostered, and send to school with Nicholas and some of the other boys. They have an older sister and 2 older brothers, none of whom seem interested or capable of looking after them. This means that Granny is the legal guardian of the children, but apart from a brief visit when we started sending them to school, we had not met her. She really is an amazing character. She had 5 children, of whom 4 have died, including Memo and Lucky's mother. They left 17 orphaned children between them, and Granny looks after 12 of them on her own, with no help or support from anybody. Memo and Lucky are with us, and their 3 siblings live in a rented house, rapidly squandering their way through the money their father left them, without a thought of helping anybody else. Granny has no education, no training, suffers from very bad arthritic hips, but somehow manages to keep 12 children fed and clothed by running a little business selling foodstuff. The children range in ages from a 10 month old baby called Moses to a 16 year old boy, old beyond his years, trying hard to help his grandmother. They are well behaved, polite and very nice children, but their grasp on existence is precarious. I looked at the old lady, and tried to imagine the sadness of losing your own children, the stress of having to care for their children, and the overwhelming odds against trying to feed everyone from a little roadside business. The sheer magnitude of the task left me feeling hopeless and depressed, but Granny is made of stronger stuff, and is determined to fight, against all odds, to do what she can. Her refusal to indulge in self-pity, or even a little understandable complaining, and her devotion to her grand children made us realise we were meeting a very special woman. I could not help but feel in awe of her and wonder how she manages to keep going, and we were honoured to be able to offer to pay school fees for her large brood. As a result of HIV/Aids, there are more and more elderly African people finding themselves in a similar position, as the disease wipes out the middle generation and leaves little children with only grandparents. I have attached a photograph of this great old lady with her grandchildren around her.

The other main event which has happened since my last letter is the contact we have made with an organisation called Grassroots Soccer. This is an American charity which has been set up to educate children in developing countries about HIV/Aids by using games and in particular football training to bring them together. The venture was set up by Tom Clark, who is a paediatrician in the US, and is the son of Bobby Clark who used to play in goals for Aberdeen and Scotland. He has been assisted by the winner of an American series of Survivor (of all things), who has used his prize money and fame to generate publicity about the needs of children especially in Africa. We made the initial contact through our Rotary club, and invited the local volunteers round to meet the boys. They were very keen to help, as most of their work so far has been in schools, and they had been looking for ways of breaking into the street kid community. So we were assigned a couple of young volunteers ? Jo and Jessica ? and they ran an intensive 2 week training programme for our guys. As a result, we now have 8 lads with certificates in Aids awareness, and 3 did so well that they have been chosen for further training as peer educators, after which they will be able to go as ambassadors to the wider street child group. It has been very good to see the way the boys have embraced

the opportunity and been able to build up a team spirit. As a follow up, Jo has entered our group into a soccer league of 36 teams and will train them regularly ? so the Manda Hill Rangers will be up and running in a few weeks. I will keep you posted on results, but they cannot do any worse than the other Rangers are doing at present. Jessica is very keen to reach the sisters of the boys who are stuck in the compounds and are extremely vulnerable to HIV infection, and has also stayed on to help some of the boys with literacy training a couple of evenings a week. It's amazing how people keep turning up to help in different ways.

Recently two of our lads, Smart and Richard, have moved out to start life on their own. Smart has gained a driving licence in the time he has been with us and Richard has completed a carpentry course, and has made some very nice furniture. They were beginning to find staying with 10 other boys a bit claustrophobic, so after some discussion with them we agreed they could set up house together and look for work. This is a new experiment for us, and to be honest it has been a bit of a wrench. Of course we cannot live other peoples' lives for them, but when you have known someone for 2 years, helped them come off glue addiction, seen them progress from illiterate and abused street children to competent craftsmen and young adults, been through the good times and the bad and shared the joys and the problems, it does affect you to bid them farewell. Thankfully they have promised to come back to visit regularly, and we will keep a watchful eye on their progress to try and make sure they successfully manage the transition into Zambian society. Dear knows how we will cope when it comes to Sarah or Nicholas moving out. We marked their departure with the inevitable party and had a small ? graduation? ceremony for them at which the guest of honour was Hon. Abel Chambeshi, Minister for Transport. I have attached some pictures of this also.

Richard's and Smart's departure ? from our house if not our hearts ? has meant that we have 2 spare places in the dormitories. We anticipated having a little rest before contemplating filling the spaces, but yesterday 2 desperate new cases turned up at the house during lunch. They have been hanging around the shopping centre nearby and have formed part of the new lot of little boys we have seen recently and have been so worried about ? honestly some of them are about 8 years old. Their names are Danny and Emmanuel. I have attached photos of Emmanuel (meaning God with us ? the significance was not lost on us), and I challenge anyone to look at them and not be moved. When Nicholas saw him, he said ?Dad I feel so sorry for that little boy, can we not keep him?? So we will take time to get to know them, but I think we may be committed to helping already.

The New Year brings new challenges for us all. For many of our kids a new term and new school year beckons. Thanks to the input of friends all around the world we have been able to increase our number of boarding school pupils from 5 to 10, and maintain our 6 day school pupils. For some of the older boys comes the prospect of starting out in life on their own and making a living. While for still others comes the prospect of moving into our compound and beginning to rehabilitate. For Christine and I come the trials, tribulations, and joys of loving, helping, counselling and organizing our extended family and for our own 3 children the challenge of continuing to share their home and parents unselfishly with others less

fortunate than themselves. Thankfully we know we do not have to face these challenges alone. We are very conscious of the prayers and support of so many friends everywhere, and we believe that all we do is in the hands of a God who came into our world and said "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them?".

With all our love for the coming year.

Don, Christine, Sarah, Rachel and Nicholas