

Dear All

A Happy New Year to all of you – 2010 has arrived safely and we wish you all a blessed and prosperous year. Here at OMF we can scarcely believe 2009 has finished, even the lads commenting on how quickly it seemed to pass. It was a difficult year for us in many respects and we hope that things will ease up in the coming year.

Let me update you on how things have gone here on the farm since I last wrote in July. One major event has been the finishing of the dormitory. When I last wrote we were struggling to get our money back from the contractor who had failed to complete the building. Finally we managed after getting the police involved, and we were then able to have the building completed in time for Social Welfare's deadline and then to move the boys in. They are very happy with their new surroundings and seem to enjoy the 4 to a room arrangement. There is also a kitchen and a shower block at the new dorm so we now have a much quieter and emptier house than at any time since we moved to the farm. Some days it seems almost deserted and we are still not sure we entirely approve of the new system, though we were forced into it by Social Welfare. We miss the boys under our feet (well, sometimes) and the closeness we shared with them was one of the reasons why so many of them felt they belonged here. So while the extra space and peace is nice, I hope the new building does not lead to a barrier between us and them. We are now working on getting furniture for the rooms such as cupboards and drawers and desks and bookshelves. We already have bunk beds for everyone and we and the boys are truly grateful to all of you who made the dorm possible. It's completion marks the beginning of a new phase in OMF. Inevitably the question gets asked "What will we do with the space now available in the house" and this is something we think about a lot. There are so many needy kids that we could fill it 10 times over without any effort, but we don't have the other resources we would need such as staff and funding, and we really cannot stretch ourselves much further. Yet it seems pointless (and wrong) to occupy a 7 bedroom house when so many youngsters still sleep on the street.

Another major event for us has been the arrival of Abigail Brown to work with us. Abi is 24 and a qualified primary teacher from England. She visited Zambia on several occasions and spend a lot of time with us on each visit. She decided to give up her job and come to stay with us for a

year, sponsored by her church. We are very aware of the sacrifice this meant on her part and the part of her church and her parents, but we must acknowledge that she has been a complete godsend to us here. She spends most of her day teaching boys not yet ready for school, helping with home work in the evenings, and assisting in running the house, as well as being a good friend to Sarah our older daughter. In a very short time she has become one of the family, and we find it difficult to imagine life without her. In particular she has demonstrated a real love and dedication to the boys that has left an impression on many of them and they have accepted her as the “big sister” in the house. God bless you Abi, you came at the right time and have helped more than you know.

From the boys point of view, the last six months have been busy with school. Four children wrote Grade 7 exams in November and the results were just announced this week. After all the anxiety of waiting, our four candidates did very well. Memory – the only girl we have staying with us – led the way with 89%, followed by Isaac with 83%, Sammy with 83% and Rommy with 79%. Remember that with the exception of Memory, all these kids lived on the street at some point and missed several years of education, and in Sammy’s case had done so well last year in Grade 5 that he was allowed to skip Grade 6 and go directly into Grade 7. We also had 4 lads write Grade 9 exams – results in February, and Edna, one of our boarding pupils wrote Grade 12 which is effectively the school leavers certificate. The other lads all did well on their coursework, several taking top spot in their classes, including little John, who is now not so little any more.

We also had some comings and goings amongst the lads. I mentioned Clifford in my last letter and he is still doing here and making good progress under Abi’s watchful eye. Our latest addition is a boy called Joseph who is also schooling at home but has become a great help to Phil on the farm, and takes the responsibility of feeding the pigs very seriously. Little Danny on the other hand has left us again. We discovered a series of thefts had taken place, mostly from Abi’s room. We decided to lay a trap which involved me hiding behind a bed in the room while everyone else was watching a movie. The first night nothing happened, but the second night I heard the scrabbling and emerged from my hiding place to stunned looking 10 year old who’s knees nearly gave way with the shock! His face was quite a picture, and it would have been funny if it hadn’t been so disappointing. He confessed the whole crime spree and we had no option

but to send him back to the orphanage where he came from. The other boys were so annoyed with him that they were ready to lynch him, and he had to leave for his own safety as well as our peace of mind. It really is very hard to understand why people will risk all that they have for petty theft. Apart from this incident, the boys really have been very well behaved for the last few months, and several of them attended church camp in December and were obviously challenged by the messages.

Our girls have worked hard at school also and Sarah is due to write her IGCSEs in May. She is specialising in Music and Drama and seems very gifted in both. Rachel just takes whatever comes her way at school and seems to enjoy everything EXCEPT English and Drama. Christine has had a busy festive season feeding us all and buying presents for countless other families and children we support in one way or another. I hope that she might manage a few days break away in January to rest and recharge her batteries. Her Obstetrics and Gynaecology practise continues to be in great demand but she is happy with part time work and being a “mother of thousands” as one of the boys called her recently. Just in case she doesn’t have enough to do she plans to start a small home bakery this year making Scottish cakes and other goodies, and will get some of the boys to help out in that. She already has several orders in the pipeline so that will probably be our next project.

From a work perspective, the last year has been very difficult especially in financial terms, as the recession continued to bite. Things are looking up a bit now and we hope the shop will return to profitability soon. I was approached to ask if I would become the Commercial Director of Zambezi Airlines, a small airline which was started after the demise of Zambian Airways. I agreed to do the job on a part time basis and to combine it with my work running the hardware store. It is hard work doing both, but it helps pay the bills and I enjoy the challenge of being back in the airline industry.

We continue to wait for registration of the farm as a childcare facility and are hopeful that this will happen early in the new year, but we have been helped a lot in this by our friends in the police force and some very kind social workers who seem to realise we are only trying to help. We continue facing challenges in our efforts as many people do not understand what we are trying to do and can be very unhelpful. In particular we have been very distressed this year by a couple of lads who left us and made

allegations of sexual and physical abuse against us. This has been behind a lot of the scrutiny from Social Welfare, but thankfully they have stated they have found no evidence backing the allegations. Nevertheless it is a very upsetting experience, especially when we realised that the boys in question were being manipulated by unscrupulous lawyers and police officers who were determined to extort money from us. We have defended ourselves as best we can but it is all unsettling and a big distraction from what needs to happen in order to help the many kids still on the street.

Finally I have managed at last to post some photos to a Facebook site. If you would like to see them please click on the links below – you do not have to be a member of Facebook to use it. I don't really make use of it to keep in touch but it does seem the easiest way to let you see the pictures. The names of all the boys can be seen by clicking on their picture.

[http://www.facebook.com/album.php?
aid=2159&id=100000286013171&l=e632a77f13](http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=2159&id=100000286013171&l=e632a77f13)
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So 2009 has finished with its problems and blessings. We look forward to your continued support and interest in 2010, and will keep you posted on any other developments. In the meantime, could I please appeal to those of you who help sponsor the boys education to send your contributions for this year as soon as possible to allow us to get everybody settled into school without delay this as we start the new session.

With all our love

Don, Christine and all the kids