

Dear All

Hello again from Zambia. It's the 2nd July today, and Monday and Tuesday next week are public holidays here so we are looking forward to a nice long weekend. July is the middle of winter in this part of the world, and the evenings and early mornings are quite chilly. Rachel announced recently that this is the time to have Santa come to Zambia. The immediate family are all well, though we are recovering from a nasty bout of flu which hit us recently. Sarah and Rachel have finished school. For Sarah it is the end of primary school, and for Rachel, the end of nursery, so they will both start new experiences in September. I cannot believe my little girl is going to secondary school. She has grown up so much over the past 12 months, but to be honest she is coping with it better than I am. Rachel is very put out at having to be on holiday for 2 months, and even more indignant at having to change classes next term. She has learned to write her name and is desperate to learn to read.

Nicholas is in the middle of his school year ? the Zambian schools run from January to December. He is doing very well, still in position one in his class, and his little friend Lucky, whom we are also sponsoring, is now in position 2 and closing fast on Nico, so there is a lot of healthy competition going on. Christine keeps very busy at work and comes face to face with the realities of HIV/Aids in her patients on a daily basis which is emotionally very draining.

My own work is pretty difficult just now. The cost of fuel keeps rising, and it is very hard to cover the costs and make any money. I don't see things getting much better for the foreseeable future. I have been on national TV and in the papers quite a lot recently commenting on business in Zambia. I have also been asked to come on TV and talk about the work we are doing with the street boys. Haven't decided yet, as I don't want personal publicity, but would do it if it would help others to do something for these children. On Friday I was summoned to appear before the Parliamentary committee on Transport to advise them on air travel in Zambia. They rather unnerved me by telling me I could speak freely as I was covered by Parliamentary privilege, and could not be sued or prosecuted for anything I said to them.

I feel I should call this letter something like ?Comings and Goings? or ?Lost and Found? as we have seen quite a few changes in our extended family since we last wrote.

Some of you will remember Felix, the disabled boy we had looked after. He had been badly burnt as a child, and had only one arm and was very badly scarred over his whole body. He survived by begging on the streets. We took him in and eventually managed to get him a place in a local school for disabled children where he learned to use a knitting machine and produced some lovely knitwear. The programme included a course on running his own business, and Felix's whole outlook on life changed as he saw the prospect of being ?a boy who can do something?. We were delighted and for over a year he worked at school Monday

to Friday and came home for the weekends. However, recently things began to change for the worse. First, Felix was suspended from school for stealing. We managed to prevail upon the headmistress to let him come back, and for a while things settled down. Then he was expelled for going out of school during class time. We were very disappointed, but we sent Mr. Banda to the school to plead for another chance. The school agreed to take him back the following Monday and he was warned that this was his last chance. He set off on Monday morning but by lunchtime Christine got a call telling her to come to collect him as he had been caught sneaking out of school again, less than 4 hours after arriving back. This time, no amount of interceding would help, and we were told he could not come back to finish his course. We were really disappointed, and very annoyed with his foolishness. However, we did not want to send him away as there seemed no hope of his straightening out his life if we abandoned him. So he stayed with us, but after about 2 weeks, he said he needed to go and visit his family. He took off, and just did not come back. We saw no sign of him for about 3 months, then we heard that he had been spotted begging on the street in town. We sent Mr. Banda to look for him, and he spoke to him, and told him to come back, but still he stayed away. At the end of May, as the weather began to get colder, he turned up at the house, saying he needed to come back. We were delighted and welcomed him in, though we wondered what we would do with him long term. However, we need not have worried. The following day he left again saying he was going back to his home town about 2 hours away to start a business and get married, neither of which is very likely. Since then there has been no contact with him.

We have been hurt and disappointed by the whole episode, but most of all we cannot understand what he has been thinking. However it has taught us again that what we cannot change anybody? the most we can do is give people a chance to change themselves. Thinking back over our time with Felix, we can certainly admit we could have done some things differently, but in the end, his life is his, and he must make his choices according to what he sees as the right path. It is hard for us to stand and watch someone we care about ruining what we see as his only hope, and destroying his opportunity for a better life, but unless he embraces the chance with all his heart, and truly wants to change, then all the help he may get will not make any difference. He will still destroy himself, not from lack of opportunity, but because he has chosen the dark side. As so often in my dealings with the boys, I am struck by the insight they provide us with into our relationship with God. Certainly I can remember a time when I was a Felix, in spite of all I was offered in the Father's house. So before we judge him, let's ask if we are really any different from Felix underneath the surface layer of respectability and privilege. People ask me if I would still take him back. The rational part of me says no, as there are so many others who need help and would appreciate it. After all he has had his chance, and blew it several times. And then I remember how much God (and other people) have to put up with from me, and I know that I would have to welcome him back with open arms, if only he would come.

Then we have the case of Iwell. This is the young man who has already spent time in prison for stealing and assault. You may remember we were worried about taking him in, but that the other boys agreed he should be given a chance. He

seemed to have settled in very well, but we noticed the old aggressive nature beginning to surface again from time to time. He started training with an American missionary couple who had set up a small vocational school teaching local boys welding. He went there with Charles another of our boys, and according to Danny (their instructor) Iwell was the best in the class, and seemed to have a real talent for the work. I think I mentioned in my last letter how touched we were when he came to show us his first certificate:

Iwell came to see me that same night after I came from work and shyly said he wanted to show me his certificate. He said "Bwana, this is the first thing I've ever had". He was so proud of himself, and so keen for me to approve, I found it really moving.

We were proud of his progress, and looked forward to him settling into his life. Then one day we received a call from the school saying a watch had been stolen. And we remembered we had seen Iwell with a ladies watch. With sinking hearts we brought it to the school where it was confirmed that it was the missing item. We felt devastated, as it seemed such a pointless thing to do, and we also felt we had let the missionaries down. They were very kind about it all, but as they had made it clear to all the students that they would not tolerate dishonesty, they had little choice but to expel him. In fact Iwell was so shamefaced that he did not go back to the school. The evening we found the watch, Danny said he would speak to him the next day at school. But that evening, without a word to anybody, Iwell took off into the darkness, and went back on the street. We know he was afraid of being taken to the police as he would probably have been locked up for a long time as a second offender. Thankfully nobody wanted to report him so we let the matter drop. He came back one evening to collect his clothes, and we were shocked at the deterioration in him. He looked wild and unkempt, and was obviously very cold and hungry. He had been sniffing glue, and had a lost, desolate look about him. But his pride would not let him come back and he told me there was no problem, he was fine. Two weeks later, we heard he had run out of money, been evicted from his rented house, and was sleeping in the drains at a shopping centre. We held another meeting with all the boys, and they again agreed he be given another chance, so we asked them to look out for him, and to tell him he was still loved, and welcome to come home any time. A further week passed without any contact, then one night Christine was out late attending to a patient, and decided to pass the area where he slept. She found him, and when she called him, he came into the car without a word. He is back with us now, and seems genuinely glad to have come home. He has been very subdued, but I spoke to him and told him the whole episode was over and forgotten so he should not worry. He was welcomed by everybody, and the warmth of the reception seems to have touched his heart.

Finally we have had our first "graduation". Ephraim, who has been with us for 2 years, has completed his course in mechanics. He is Mr. Banda's oldest son, and has never lived on the street, but he and Joseph, our night watchman, have been with us the longest and have been a tremendous help in dealing with the street kids especially when they come in first. Ephraim has now found a job, albeit a temporary one, and has decided it is time to move back home to help his father

support the rest of the family. So today we had a big party, and speeches, and he formally "passed out" from our "academy". It was quite an emotional moment but he spoke very nicely about everybody and told the other boys he would come back for their graduations.

I think that is enough for one letter, so next time I will tell you some more about the little children we have been sending to school. Our extended family continues to grow and we don't really know what we would do now without them all.

In the meantime, thank you for all your prayers and support. Without it we couldn't continue.

All our love

Don