

Dear All

16 June 2007

Well I have put it off long enough so time to get started on another newsletter. 16<sup>th</sup> March seems a long time ago, and a lot has happened since then. It is very hard to put it all in order so that it makes some sense, but I will try.

First of all, as I said in my short note on 11 April 2007, I now work from home on a number of projects including business development for Zambian Airways. It is actually very nice to be able to spend more time at home supervising the farm and watching all the children learn and grow. It is also wonderful not to have to wear a suit and tie every day. And just 2 weeks ago, my work permit was renewed for a further 2 years, so we are very relieved as it gives us the peace of mind to continue working trying to help the boys. Now that the uncertainty of our stay in the country is removed, we feel able to look at long term plans again, but we feel unsure over which way to go, especially with our work with the boys. The need is greater than ever, and on every side we are begged for help from lads who have no other hope. Without any difficulty we could find at least 100 boys to come and stay with us, but right now we have no way of accommodating them, or giving them the care, attention and support they require.

Just recently I started the “night patrols” again. This was how we began the work about 5 years ago, and involves driving around in the evening when the lads have all gathered at the places they are going to sleep, but have not yet settled for the night. It is a good time to make as many contacts as possible, and after a day exposed to the heat, noise and dirt of the streets, the lads can be in a more subdued or reflective mood. Often they will have scraped some money together from begging and will have spent it on glue or food according to their individual priorities. So we walk amongst them, distributing bread, milk and fruit, or other food, talking to them as a group or on a one to one basis. It is often noisy, with lots of jostling and shoving. Sometimes passers-by think I am being attacked and will stop their car asking if I need help but I have never been attacked or felt afraid of the boys. Perhaps that is a mark of how clueless I really am about their way of life, but it is a blessing. If I was afraid, I could not get to know them so easily, and if they sensed fear, they would

most likely try and take advantage in some way which would make things much more dangerous. But when we moved out of town to the farm it became more difficult to spend time on the street in the evenings. However, we felt we should start again even if we could not do it as frequently as before as it gives us the contact with the boys and we can get to know the new faces which constantly appear. One of the best things that has happened since re-starting the patrols is that some of the men from Kabwata Baptist Church have started to join in and spend time with the boys on the street. As I recall Pastor Mbewe and some of the others sitting on the pavement at Manda Hill, surrounded by dirty, drugged, lost boys, talking to them in and showing care and compassion for them, I cannot help thinking that this is how the church should act in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Perhaps if we did our actions would speak louder than our words. The involvement of Kabwata also means I do not feel there is so much pressure on me to be there all the time, and I hope and pray that the church will decide that they should become fully involved in reaching out to the lads.

Getting back into street work is hugely satisfying for me personally, and I treasure the time I can spend with the boys, but I always come away with a sense of frustration as there are so many individuals who need help there and then, and there is little I can do. The stories are so familiar, yet each has its own individual twist. One boy I met recently is called Shadrack. He is about 17 years old, and unusually for a street kid has managed to complete Grade 7 at school. At the end of Grade 7 Zambian pupils sit a national exam which determines if they are qualified to go on to secondary school. Shadrack lived with his widowed father until about a year ago. His father paid his school fees, and with remarkable foresight, also paid the fee for sitting the Grade 7 exam, months before it was due. Then about a year ago, he died suddenly, leaving Shadrack an orphan. His relatives took all the property – what little there was – and were supposed to look after Shadrack also. However they did not see any need to do so, and certainly did not intend to spend anything on school for him. Thanks to his father's foresight, he was able to continue in school for the remainder of his Grade 7 year and sat the exam. The cut off for entry into secondary is 620 points, and he scored 680 – a remarkable achievement given the upheaval in his life and the fact that he went to a poor school in the compound where he lived. However, his relatives absolutely refuse to support him or pay for secondary school, and so he is on the street begging trying to get enough money to survive. All his life he has been told that education is the key for his future, and that if he worked hard everything

would somehow work out for him. Well, he kept his side of the bargain, yet now he finds himself out on the street begging. His sense of frustration and bitterness is obvious, and I felt so sorry for him— some things are just not right. The same night I met another two lads who had completed the studies for Grade 7 but had not sat the exam as nobody would pay the fee for them. And this problem, with all its attendant bitterness, frustration, despair and resultant anger and crime is multiplied over and over again, on every street corner, in towns and cities, all over the world. Meanwhile the “haves” of this world (including me) consume more every day. I wonder sometimes where it will end, and how long the “have nots” will put up with the situation. We really need to take to heart the words of Isaiah the Old Testament prophet when he reports God as saying:

“This is the worship I have chosen: loose the chains of injustice... set the oppressed free... share your food with the hungry, provide the poor with shelter – when you see the naked, clothe him” (Isaiah 58:1-10)

Back at home, the boys continue to make progress, some in leaps and bounds and some more slowly. It is amazing watching them change and to see how much effort they put into learning. The start of May saw a new school term for them, and 5 of them did so well in class tests that they were promoted to a higher grade. We really felt proud parents! We also have another 2 additions to the fold. One of them is a bigger boy called Patrick whom we have known for a long time. He did not seem able to make up his mind about leaving the street, but 2 weeks ago he arrived unannounced and said he wanted to “change”. The other is little John Tembo, who “wants to be called John MacDonald”. He stayed with us before as those of you who read earlier letters will know. He is a very amusing little fellow, and we are glad to see him back. He seems to be serious this time and both he and Patrick have been working hard at their chores and home schooling. Right now we have 3 young volunteers with us. Claire is from our home church in New Restalrigg in Edinburgh and is a student at St Andrews, while Hugo and Fiona are cousins from Ireland who are on a gap year between school and college. As well as being good fun, they have been extremely helpful in spending time teaching the two new boys, and some of the others who need extra help with school work. This in turn relieves the pressure on Christine and myself and makes life easier all round. When they leave, we have a series of volunteers coming to help until 5 September when my cousin Christina Macritchie hopes to

join us for about 9 months. Having such assistance makes a great deal of difference, especially as the boys really appreciate feeling that somebody cares enough to give them time and help them on a one to one basis.

During the Easter break, some of our older lads went to a Youth Camp organised by the Reformed Baptist churches in Zambia. Brian our youth worker told them about it, and accompanied 14 of them to Ndola on the Copperbelt. They all had a great time there mixing with other young folk from around the country, and made a number of friends. They seemed to enjoy the teaching and the activities, but the most remarkable thing was how enthusiastically they joined in learning the songs and hymns that were being taught. Before their trip we had got used to hear all sorts of music coming from the dormitories. I use the term "music" in its widest sense – most of it sounds like unpleasant noise to me (I have just realised how that remark makes me sound very old!), but they seemed to enjoy it. We always felt it best not to enquire too closely into the lyrics. However, for the past month since the camp, we have had to adjust to hearing things like "We have an anchor", "Burdens are lifted at Calvary" and "All to Jesus I surrender" being sung with volume and vigour (though not necessarily very musically). A particular favourite is rendered "There is pow-a, pow-a, wonda wuking pow-a" and is sung at top volume at the slightest excuse. We are happy to endorse these lyrics and it makes a nice change from Eminem. If you don't know who, or what, Eminem is don't worry, neither did we, and you are not missing anything.

The older lads who finished their training and left us recently are having mixed experiences of life on the outside. Most of them find it hard to settle to a new routine, and cope with the new pressures. We have also noticed that there is a great deal of jealousy directed against them by their own communities as they are regarded as having been favoured in some way. This leads to conflict, and in one case has resulted in one of the lads, David, being accused of committing a crime he maintains he did not do. Unfortunately he has been kept in custody until the case comes up in court. Charles has also run into problems. He has managed to get himself a job as a taxi driver and works on his welding the rest of the time. In many ways he has succeeded in doing what we hoped, but because he has been so successful, he has been targeted by jealous individuals, and last week was attacked after finishing driving the taxi, and robbed. In the course of the attack he was hit by a bottle, and his jaw was broken, so we are keeping him here until it heals up. It all makes us feel very angry. Surely

these young men have suffered enough without being turned on by a society which threw them on the scrap heap and did not wish to know them when they were on the street.

On a happier note, we have harvested our first crops from the land we farmed. We have produced sunflower seeds for cooking oil, and maize and ground nuts for eating, though our beans seem to have failed. As it was an experimental crop we feel Phil and his team have done very well. Thanks to a large donation which came via acquaintances in Ireland, it looks as if we have solved the problems with water and will be able to install irrigation throughout the farm, and will therefore be able to grow crops all the year round. This will be a useful addition to the weekly budget, and will mean we can continue teaching farming methods all year. We have also bought 5 goats, and have been given donations of 5 pigs, with promises of chickens and quails when we are ready for them. On the infrastructure side we have at long last started building the work shop and will then build a chicken shed, farm storage and a small office as we now need space to administer all that is going on. This will bring us to the end of the stage of developing the farm, and will mean we can then turn to think about expanding and bringing in more children. Before we do so, we will need to build more dormitories and washing facilities, and we have already been offered financial and practical assistance to do so. This is a new experience for us, as up until now, the finance has only come when we needed it, not at the planning stage. We must acknowledge the ongoing support from so many sources. As well as the people who are sponsoring individual children through school, we have had numerous donations. Tools With A Mission have sent us many tool kits for the lads as they learn trades, as well as educational books to help the boys at school. One church in Stornoway raised over £1300 at their mission evening, while the Inverness Male Voice Gospel Choir held a Festival of Praise concert and raised over £1100. The Diplomatic Spouses Association in Lusaka has been a great support both in donations and in some ladies giving up their time to come and do arts and crafts with the boys. They held a fundraising event last week, and listed us as one of the beneficiary groups. Another lady who had spent time in Lusaka and was leaving, sold her car and donated half of the proceeds to help pay school fees, and another decided to forgo a foreign holiday to sponsor a child. In the light of such commitment, we feel very humbled to be trusted by so many people we have never met. The list goes on and on, and I have mentioned only a few of the gifts we have received. Many people ask to be anonymous, so we

respect that, but please know you have heartfelt thanks from us and our boys. If I have omitted anyone who wishes to be acknowledged, I hope you will forgive me, it was not intentional. And please rest assured that we will do all we can to make sure that your gifts benefit the boys as directly as possible.

Our immediate family life goes on as normal. Sarah is sitting end of year exams this coming week, and she and Rachel will then have finished another year at school. They have a long break until the end of August and then Sarah will start Grade 9 – equivalent of Secondary 3 in Scotland, while Rachel will go into Grade 2 – Primary 3 in Scotland. Nicholas is working hard on Grade 8 and Mulenga on Grade 7, and we have started the formal proceedings to adopt Mulenga. Christine continues to be super-Mum to everybody and on top of everything else is trying to set up a screening programme for cervical cancer in Lusaka. Recently she and I were able to spend a couple of nights away from everyone at Victoria Falls thanks to Christine's brother and sister in law, Roddy and Maureen, who came out for a visit with their son Calum. Their daughter Isla has been out twice before now, but was caught up in University studies this time. Roddy and Mo bravely agreed to baby-sit everyone for a couple of nights, and seemed none the worse for it. We had a very lovely time relaxing by the Falls and our folks enjoyed their experience of Zambia, spending time helping the boys (Mo), fixing things that were not working (Roddy) and hanging out with cousins (Calum, with Nico and Mulenga). Mo fell in love with some of the “little ains” and we had to do a quick headcount when she left to make sure she did not have Jeremiah tucked in a suitcase somewhere. We did offer her Steve, but that’s a different story... In August we will have 3 weeks when all the children will be off school together – because of the different school calendars this only happens in August and December – so we hope we have time to have a family holiday then, work permitting as the schools will be on break and many of the boys will go to visit family.

Just one last item, we have now obtained a personal mail box so in future if anybody is posting anything please use the following address:

Post Net Box 187  
P/Bag E835  
Kabulonga  
Lusaka

## Zambia

For now, let me finish up with our love and thanks to you all for your continuing support.

Don, Christine, Sarah, Rachel, Nicholas, Mulenga and all “the boys”