

Dear All

Lusaka is in the grip of winter right now and we are all shivering in the mornings and evenings as the temperature drops to levels normally only felt at the end of June. It is still not cold by Scottish standards but when our houses are not heated it can feel quite chilly.

As some of you know I managed a quick visit back to Scotland at the end of April/start of May. I wanted very much to see my parents and spent a very nice time with them in Inverness and Dornoch while also managing to catch up on quite a few visits including speaking to groups at New Restalrigg church in Edinburgh and East Church in Inverness. My visit home reminded me as always of the generous support we have for what we are doing amongst family and friends, and even those we have never met, and it was good to realise that we were not alone even in the middle of difficulties. Special thanks to Martin and Trish Sinclair and Joy Mackenzie for putting me up (and putting up with me) while I was in Edinburgh.

Time flies and reading my last letter I can see we were then in the centre of a storm, which thankfully has abated somewhat. The biggest issue we faced at the time was the problem with David and his attempts to kill himself. Thankfully since then he stabilised, and had been receiving some counselling help from Prosper – a social worker I mentioned to you some time back. Prosper is working as a hotel worker until he can find full time work as a social worker. Some of you have helped to pay about half his salary so he is now able to help us and other centres part time. He is very good with the boys and we wish we could have him around the place all the time. Following their discussions, Prosper told us he thought David didn't really want to change, and that until he did there was little we could do to help him. He had actually moved out for a couple of weeks before this but was coming to work at the farm. However the "work" consisted of watching TV in the servants' quarters and quarrelling with people. Then he began to give us another set of problems, this time by being aggressive and in some cases violent towards the other boys in order to get what he wanted. This reached a peak in April while I was away in Scotland when he threatened to kill one of the boys – Rommy – and then

later on threatened Phil with a hammer. I returned home on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> May and said I would speak to him on Friday but he got into another fight and beat up one of the younger boys quite badly, leaving him with a swollen face, and then walked out. When I eventually saw him on Saturday I had to tell him that we could not allow him to stay or work with us as his violent behaviour was a threat to the rest of us. He said he didn't want to stay anyway but just needed money to set up his own business. I would have helped him again but Christine and Phil were of the view that he was just trying to take advantage and that he should not get any money unless he works for it. Mr. Banda also agreed with them, and on balance I think they were right – I just find it very hard to say no to the boys when they need help. So anyway, out he went and we did not hear from him for a few days, then he turned up for work saying he would behave, but of course it didn't last and we had to tell him there was nothing more we could do for him. Mr. Banda assures us that what he needed was a shock and to realise that we were not going to give in to his threats by giving him money. Needless to say I feel rather foolish as I had always hoped love and understanding would have had the desired effect, but I am glad things have settled down and now I know that we did all we could to help him. One of the hardest things I find about working with the lads is the fact that so many people here seem to regard attempts at kindness as a form of weakness which can be abused and taken advantage of.

We also said goodbye to my cousin Christina Macritchie who spent about 9 months with us in total. Christina blew in on a flight one day, settled into life in Africa, and quickly became part of the family, sharing our trials and tribulations and the good times, and becoming a friend to all the boys. She was particularly good to Sarah, who enjoyed having an older sister for a change and who misses her terribly, as we all do. Meal times are slightly more peaceful now, as I have nobody sitting beside me who can without any warning, drop a plate or knock a glass of water over me, but on the other hand there is nobody to jump up and make the coffee after dinner so I reckon we are quits. God bless you Christina, you are in our hearts and I hope we see you again soon. We now have some other visitors, including two young ladies who have been out before. Isla is Christine's niece and Katie is an SIM volunteer who is studying to be a mission worker in the US. Both of them have fitted in well and spend all day and most of the evening helping the boys with school work and supervising the running of

the house with Christine. We also expect Fiona Nea soon. She visited last year with her cousin Hugo. Since they first came out to visit all of them have been active in raising funds for the boys. One of the things I was asked in the various talks I did while in Scotland was how best people could help, and I was able to point out that even a brief visit can be very helpful as you can spend time with the boys, helping some of them to read and do their homework. Doing so makes them feel very special as this will often be the first time anyone has shown enough care for them to spend time with them. Giving them a sense of worth in this way is a great gift that cannot be over valued. We also have Bernard Blendell staying with us again. He is a mission worker in NorthWestern Province in a very remote part of Zambia. He is a plumber by trade and when he retired in London, he came out to Zambia to set up work amongst rural orphans. He is in Lusaka for a few weeks and has been a terrific help in sorting out plumbing and other jobs needing done around the farm.

The boys seem to be in good heart most of the time. They are busy working at school as usual, and apart from complaining about the cold, are occupied all of the time with lessons, homework and games. A couple of lads who have been working on apprenticeship schemes have now decided to move out and live on their own so we will see how that will work out for them. There is no shortage of children to replace them or indeed to add to our number. Although we do not go out looking for abandoned youngsters, there seems no end to those who either pitch up at our door or are referred to us by other people. While I was visiting Scotland, Christine met a poor woman in a desperate position. She is HIV positive, widowed, and has 4 children aged 8, 12, 14 and 17. She was walking round Ibex Hill looking for piece work at the farms in order to get some food. She had her two youngest boys with her, and was sent to see us by one of our neighbours who could not help her. When she arrived, she poured out her story to Christine and Yvonne, and finished by saying if we had no work she would go, but could she please give us her boys as she could not bear to see them suffer any more. I cannot imagine how desperate she must have been to offer to hand over her kids. Yvonne went to see where she lived and came back in tears. She said they would have been better off living in our pig shed. The house is a derelict old one room building belonging to a neighbour who cannot afford to pull it down. It is down hill from the river and the earth floor is constantly wet. They have absolutely

no furniture or cooking utensils; in fact the only things in the house were a straw mat which the mother and 2 children slept on plus a blanket they shared. They have literally only the clothes they wear, and when they wash the clothes they wrap themselves in the blanket until their clothes are dry. There was no food in the house, and they have survived on food given by neighbours who are poor themselves for the 2 years since the husband died. Yvonne was soupset she bought them some mealie meal and meat. When the boys saw the meat they did not know what it was, and tried to eat it raw. The poormother just sniffed it in disbelief and said she had not seen meat since her husband died. The 14 year old child is a girl who has been selling herself on the streets in an effort to get enough to eat, and the 17 year old boy had disappeared. Faced with somebody in such a situation, what can you do but agree to help? We gave the poor woman some work to do on the farm. She walks here every morning with all her children. Beatrice and David – the two oldest – heard that someone was helping and came back home, hopefully before either have contracted HIV, while Obadiah and Joshua are very cute though malnourished little guys. They come every day and play while Mum and David work on the farm, and Beatrice helps in the house. The joy on all their faces at having full stomachs and the prospect of hope is heart breaking to see, and I feel tears of compassion and frustration when I think about it all. How can we allow our fellow human beings to suffer like this? What is wrong with us? Where has basic humanity gone? And why is it that this woman's neighbours – below poverty level themselves – helped to feed her, while the “developed” world and its counterparts here in Zambia have shut our hearts to these people and their cries for help? It is not a question of Right or Left but a question of right or wrong, and this is just plain wrong. God save us all from our evil actions and their just consequences.

We will keep the family together, provide work for the mother whose name is Eunice, try to teach the children at home, and then enter them into our program. David the oldest boy will probably study a trade, and the others will go to school. It looks as if they will be joined by another family of three children brought to us by the lady who brought Mulenga and Lucky and Memory to us. She is a teacher in a Catholic school in Ngombe – one of the poor compounds in Lusaka – and she arrived in my office yesterday with another very sad story. She has been teaching the children in this family, and their mother – who had been a teacher in one of

the international schools in Lusaka - died 2 months ago, leaving them orphaned. Nobody is interested in helping the children, and they have been living together in the rented house since she died. The oldest is a girl on Grade 12 (about 17 years old), and the 2 boys are on Grade 9 and Grade 7 though I do not know their ages yet. They are all in exam years at school, and after their mother dies the nuns agreed to teach them for free and have been trying to feed them. Now the money has run out, and the rent is due and they are about to be evicted from their home. Mrs Mutinta – their Good Samaritan teacher – felt she couldn't leave it to happen so came to us to ask if we could take them. Squeezing the boys in somewhere will not be a problem. I have told our own boys about it and they are willing to make room and welcome them. The difficulty will be finding somewhere for their big sister as we really do not have facilities to keep both sexes. Still I am sure we can find some space somewhere. So it looks as if our family is about to grow again after being stable at 30 for many months. Oh well – nothing else for it but to get on with it and go forward, even though we often feel paralysed in the face of so much need.

Christine also came across a good work being done in Lusaka by the YWCA. They run a small refuge for little girls who have been sexually abused and are awaiting the trial of the case against their abuser. The little ones are lovely, but sadly many are HIV positive. Christine has been consulted on a number of cases as a doctor, and felt she wanted to do something for the refuge. Again it is shocking to see how little they have to help the girls with, and we would like to appeal to anybody who feels moved to help with paying school fees for some of the little ones. Since the cases are still to come to court, the girls live in danger of being abducted to silence them, and the centre has to operate very quietly and anonymously. The centre is called \_\_\_\_\_ and we would be grateful if you would pray for the little ones who are there. Christine managed to send one little girl to school, and she was so delighted to go. Her little friend said “Ah thank you auntie I being so happy. We being so boring colouring all the time”. What a sad world we live in when such wee souls suffer at the hands of those meant to protect and nurture them. And spare a thought for the bravery and compassion of the ladies in the YMCA who run such a worthwhile enterprise in spite of threats and physical danger.

On the farm, the crops have been good this year and the animal contingent has grown again with baby goats and pigs, more hens – now 200 – and geese, sheep ducks and turkeys. That part of the work gives very few problems thanks to Phil's expert management and dedicated work. I don't know what we would do without him as a colleague, friend and counsellor. We have finished construction of a farm managers cottage and Tuesday Banda – or Mr Tuesday to distinguish him from the original Mr Banda – has moved in with his family, so that is also a great help. We continue construction of the new dormitory for the boys, and when that is finished we will have a much quieter house. Maybe that is where we can fit in some girls.