

Hi everybody

Last time I said I would start another letter soon since I had so much to tell, so I better do so. Actually that is the way that the work seems to be with the boys. We will go for months without much happening then several things happen at once.

The first thing to tell you is that our numbers have gone up. We have taken on another big boy at the house, and a further 2 youngsters at day school. At the house we recently took in a boy called Lewis. We have known him for some time, and he used to come along to the house on Sundays for food, bath, laundry and swimming. He is a very quiet lad, about 19 years old, but did not want to come into the 'family'. While on the street, he became part of a gang, which attacked a passer by and stole some property, inflicting injury in the process. They were arrested and imprisoned for aggravated robbery. Lewis was released last week, and came to us for help. He is the second ex-convict we have taken in, and seems to be settling well. He is very lovable, but society has officially recognized him as otherwise as a result of his own actions. The really interesting thing about his case however is the fact that when he appeared, we decided we simply could not accommodate him as he brought our number of residents to 11. I called a meeting of our other boys and explained the situation. As many of them were his one time friends, they were campaigning on his behalf to have him admitted. However, when I explained the problem, they understood, and left somewhat subdued, only to return having unanimously decided that they would share bed, food and clothes with him so that he could be helped at no cost 'to the Boss and the Madam' (ie me and Christine). We were very touched and agreed to the plan 'how could we disagree given their willingness to share. As the lads said 'Bwana if he goes back on the street he will be completely lost'. That was on Sunday. On Monday Lewis was informed and moved in, and on Tuesday we received an email from a friend (who shall remain anonymous) saying the following:

'Please would you allow us to take responsibility for the most unloved and unlovable child you know. We would want to start with the limited objective of the basics of 'looking after' that boy's everyday needs. Primarily, we are looking to relieve you of the financial and emotional burden for this boy and to see whether we

can give him the knowledge that he and his future are precious to us and to the Lord.?

We find it amazing how these 'co-incidences' keep happening. The boys were so excited when we told them, and seem spurred on to be generous to those around them with less than them. It is actually very humbling to watch them do what they can with the little they have, when we have so much in comparison. Lewis has now settled in very well, and seems a quiet and stable influence in the compound. He is very conscious of the sacrifice the others offered to make and seems determined not to let them down. We wait and see how he will manage long term, but in the meantime we are all agreed that providence is wonderful.

On the day school side we have started helping another 2 lads whose fathers work as gardeners in houses nearby. They have little opportunity and no encouragement to make any headway in getting an education, but they are both bright and pleasant boys called Ackim (16) and Labby (14). It is hard to see them floundering and trying so hard to make their way with so little so we decided to assist although they are not orphans or street children. The father of one came to see Christine and said 'I just want to thank you. I never thought that this could happen that my son could go to a proper school?'. They will both finish their day school year in December, and we then plan to try and get them into boarding school.

Amongst the older boys, Charles has finished his welding course, and is waiting to graduate as one of the first students taught at the little trade school run by American missionary friends. He will leave with a welding machine and enough training to allow him to set a small workshop to earn a living. Iwell and Smart have gone off to Petauke in the east of Zambia with Phil Bailey our horticulturalist friend. He runs a mission farm there and provides very useful work experience for the boys. For most of them it is the first place they experience after being with us for many months, and it has been very successful as an introduction back to the real world after staying on our compound. So far, everyone has behaved in an exemplary manner, worked hard on the farm, and brought credit to themselves amongst the people they meet in Petauke, many of whom do not believe that they were street boys. Phil has also used several of the lads in setting up plastic tunnels he has sold to the local commercial farms around Lusaka. This is introducing new technology to Zambia, and has been enthusiastically received as it allows all year round growing. He has

taken 3 lads along to help installing the tunnels, and in the process they have learned a new skill.

The next thing I need to acknowledge is the remarkable number of people who have volunteered to help with our education programme. We started off by helping the kids we met where we could. Along the way so many folk have asked about what we are doing. We have tried to answer honestly, without sounding like we are appealing for funds (which we are not), but many people have come back to ask if they can assist, either by sponsoring a child through education, or helping in some other way. As a result of this generosity, we will be able to increase the number of children we are sending to boarding school from 4 to 8 in January. We feel a big responsibility when others put their faith in us like this. In many ways it is easier just to do what we can ourselves, and then if it goes wrong we have not involved anybody else. On the other hand, so much more can be done when other people want to get involved, so thank you all for your help.

Finally, I should mention that Rachel had her 5th birthday party on Saturday 15th October. We had all the family and all the boys and a very special guest came along ? Dr. Kenneth Kaunda. He was the first president of Zambia, and is now 81. He is very fit, and does a lot of charitable work, especially amongst HIV/Aids victims. He heard about our street boys and wanted to visit, so when his office phoned, we could hardly refuse. I explained about the birthday party, which posed no problem, as he agreed to be a guest. He is a lovely old man and he sang Happy Birthday to Rachel - not many 5 year olds can say they were serenaded by a President on their birthday. He also spent a long time talking to each of our boys in their own languages and hearing their stories in their own words. Many of them were completely star-struck to meeting the famous ?KK?. Their excitement just served to highlight the awful situations they found themselves on the streets, and it was rather harrowing to hear some as young as 12 year old talk in such a matter-of-fact tone about violence, abuse, drugs, rejection and even seeing their fellow street-kids dying in their arms or being shot in gang warfare. And there are another estimated 1.5 million abandoned children in Zambia, many of them on the streets and the in the drains and sewers. God help our society if we ignore their situation. Let me close with an extended quote from an article which appeared in one of the national papers here last week, which sums up the plight of these children. It's about a boy called Bupe (which ironically means ?Gift? in the local language).

?Growing up, Bupe didn't know his real name, his family or even his birthday. Left to fend for himself on the streets of Lusaka, his life was full of fear and sadness. His bed was a hard sidewalk and his meals were leftovers and scraps from Soweto market. He struggled to survive. ?For seven years I lived on the street. I didn't have anyone in the world? Bupe says. ?To live, first I would beg. Then I learnt to take things from other people. On a good day I would steal from nine people, mostly women. I had to steal to eat and get clothes. At first I felt bad about taking people's things. But then you just do it because you have to.?

?According to UNICEF there are about 1.5m street kids in Zambia. Bishop Joshua Banda, who runs an orphanage in Lusaka, said ?This is a tragedy beyond comprehension?never in the history of mankind have we had so many children running around unprotected. No one celebrates when these children are born. They have no happy childhood to remember. Their lives are bitter from the start?

?According to the World health Organisation, vulnerable children on the streets as young as eight years old live completely on their own in developing countries. Boys make up more than 70% of the total, and 50% of street children in Zambia are addicted to solvents, which they sniff as defence against cold, hunger and fear.?

Zambian Daily Mail 31 October 2005.

On behalf of all the other unwanted young Gifts, thank you for all you are doing to help and God bless.

All our love

Don, Christine, Sarah, Rachel and Nicholas