

Dear Everyone

It's hard to believe it is the 25th of November and we are heading fast towards the end of another year. The rains have arrived, and the locals are all busy ploughing and planting, hoping for a good harvest. Everyone is thankful for the relief from the heat, but when the rain stops, the heat comes back and everything is very humid and uncomfortable. I was planning to wait till the first week in December before getting down to another letter but I realised that in fact we will be rather busy that week as we hope to move to Old MacDonald's Farm on the 9th. I cannot quite grasp the enormity of it all - we will be living on a little farm dedicated to housing and teaching young children, most of whom have been traumatized by violence, substance abuse and rejection - doesn't sound like a bundle of fun does it - and yet it really is - or at least it has been so far. Since I am in contemplative mode, I also have to remember the large number of friends who have showed so much trust in us and supported what we are trying to do. It is pretty sobering to think of the responsibility we owe to all of you as well as to the children who will come through OMF (Old MacDonald's Farm - not the REAL OMF). It really is amazing how different people have risen to the challenge of helping the kids - let me just mention a few. One couple in Scotland have donated money for a swimming pool at the new house so the boys can have fun, and to help with bathing!² - the latter point is NOT one we want to encourage amongst the boys. An older gentleman, in his 90s I believe, who used to be a tailor, is now charging his friends for altering clothes and is donating the proceeds to us, a church in Inverness held a curry night and raised over £2000 in one evening. A church in Canada, donated £450. Following the broadcast of the Action Scotland programme on Radio Scotland on 25th October, more people we did not know contacted us out of the blue. It is really encouraging to see the basic desire to help coming through from so many quarters. It helps a lot to realise that although the scale of the problem is huge, so are the resources available, and that if we can bring the needs and the resources together, and act faithfully to both, there is limitless opportunity to do good together.

We have been contacted by the Herald (Glasgow newspaper) to tell us that they will be running the lifestyle profile they did on us on Saturday 9th December - by a strange co-incidence, the very day we will be moving into OMF. So if you want to see some frankly rather embarrassing pictures of us in Edinburgh, then buy a copy! I also had a bit of a rant in the article against how the West treats Africa and how the whole Aid Industry rips off everybody - those who give and those who are supposed to receive - no doubt I will be mortified to read what I said, and be banned by all aid agencies forthwith, but quite honestly somebody has to point out how many street kids or malnourished people you could help if you spent the money on them rather than flying aid workers business class or giving them Landcruiser 4x4s to drive. What a con!

Coming back to the real issues, the boys are all doing rather well just now. Most of them seem to have settled in, and as they get better fed,

and realise we are not about to beat them, sell them or otherwise abuse them, they relax more and become more friendly and forthcoming. It is a great privilege to share their lives and see them begin to respect themselves and others. David, whom I wrote about in my last letter, has made great progress. He has recovered remarkably well from the trauma of his attack - it is always a great breakthrough when you can raise a feeble smile from them by teasing or tickling - and is now an energetic and vivacious addition to the fold. His natural leadership qualities are showing, and he is very helpful in assisting the younger lads with their 'homework' in the evenings. I expect he will be ready to go to school fairly soon, hopefully we will get a place for him in January at the start of the new school year. Emmanuel (not the one I wrote about previously who is still lost) is a bright little fellow of 11, and is loved by everybody - he is the only boy whom all the others like all of the time, and when he is not helping somebody with something, he sits and looks at books and sings to himself in a flat monotone. He is also ready for school in January. At the other end of the spectrum is poor little Steve, also 11 but small, skinny and educationally very backward, with behavioural problems. He wants to be cuddled more than any of the boys, in fact he is sitting beside me as I type just now, and has placed my arm around him so I have to type with one hand! He is very loveable but in moment he transforms into a little demon, lashing out, cursing, yelling and generally provoking violence and anger in all around him. We really did not know what to do with him, as he seems constantly to be in the centre of trouble, but an acquaintance who works with street kids pointed out that his behaviour was typical of those small boys who have been violently abused or raped. I was rather sceptical until they told me of the paedophile rings operating in the compounds in Lusaka. What a lost, desperate world, when this can happen to such defenceless little kids. I am afraid to ask Steve what happened to him - I am not sure I could handle the truth he has to live with every day - but I just hope he can find love and peace somewhere. If we can give it to him, we will.

The stories go from the heartbreaking to the mundane to the heart-warming. Joseph, shy and backward, came in one day with a gift of 2 guinea pigs for Sarah, to say thank you for her helping him. Handing them over he was as awkward as if proposing marriage, but he was determined to get his point across. The Pinny Giggs as they have been named, are also now part of the family. Squeals of laughter as the young boys watch their puppy trying to catch his own tail. General contented chatter as they settle down to their chores of washing clothes and cleaning bedrooms on a Saturday, and the excitement of a video on Friday evening.

Amongst it all, life goes on, and we continue working in clinic, at the airline and at school. It makes for a very odd existence really as the two worlds seem very far apart, and yet recently we have seen more and more local people coming to us with the mantra 'We have to do something about these street kids at Manda Hill'. Most recently, a friend who runs a very nice popular restaurant called me and said she would like to donate food on a regular basis. We got talking, and we felt we should have a fundraising/awareness evening for the business community to

challenge them to do something about their city and their children on its streets. So we are planning something for January, in the hope that it will provoke some action and response from the ³haves² in Lusaka to helping the ³have-nots². We continue seeing more and more little boys - and older ones - trailing around the streets out of their heads on glue or other solvents. They look so hopeless and lost, and there seems so little we can do. UNICEF estimate there are 100,000 of them in Lusaka alone, and up to 1.1 million orphans in Zambia, most caused by HIV/AIDS. God help us if we don't do what we can to rescue them.

We are all looking forward to the festive season coming up. Most of the boys have never even had a present in their lives, and are giddy with excitement at the prospect of turkey dinner, gifts and holidays all rolled in one. It will certainly be great fun, but I am not sure it will be very restful, so I hope I manage to take Christine and our own 4 children away for a short break in January to give us time to regroup. Still, there is a lot to get through before that - such as moving house, and 25 boys, to the farm, so I hope you will understand if we don't respond quickly over the next few weeks.

Until next time, all our love, and God Bless

Don, Christine, Sarah, Rachel, Nicholas and Mulenga