

Dear All

Today is a sweltering hot Zambian summer's day with the temperature in the high 30s, the humidity up and the air conditioning and fans churning sluggish heavy air. We all sit around complaining about the heat and longing for the rains to arrive – when of course the humidity will become unbearable, so we will have something else to complain about. It is 24th October – the day when Zambians celebrate gaining independence from Britain way back in 1964. The other really important thing that happened that year was that I was born.

We have just had an election which saw the incumbent president lose to Michael Sata the then leader of the opposition. The election process and handover of power went very smoothly and gained Zambia a great deal of respect internationally as a result. Many of you may have heard about the elections which were notable internationally in that Zambia now has the first ever white Vice President in Africa – a Zambian of Scottish extraction called Dr Guy Scott whose forebears were missionaries here. The new government has made a promising start and has vowed to clean up the corruption which has affected much of national life in the country. We hope and pray that the country will continue to enjoy the peace, stability and tolerance which has marked its history and that poverty and corruption will be tackled effectively leading to an increase in prosperity for the ordinary citizen.

Last time I wrote I told you about the sad news of Kondwani's death. A lot of time has passed since then and we have been able to come to terms with his absence in a way although of course we still miss him, and think about what could have been. His older brother Gershom has now started working with us at the Farm. He is a larger than life character, very cheerful and noisy, much like Kondwani, and has been working hard to finish the college course he had to abandon when his father dies some few years ago. In return for his board and lodgings and the payment of his college fees, he stays at the dormitory with the boys and acts as a boarding supervisor, meaning that he is able to deal with many issues and save Christine and I from having to do everything. This has been a great help to us. He is well liked and respected by the boys, and as a young Christian man he has been a very good influence on life in the dorm.

Abigail has been at home for a visit to her family, and on her return was granted a further 2 year work permit by the government, meaning she is able to continue her work in developing her little school. She will go home again in November, spend the festive season with her folks and see her little brother safely married off (we hope) to a young lady called – of all things – Abigail! After that she is going to be chained to her desk for the rest of her work permit duration. Abigail of course helps Christine and great deal on the domestic side and also works on our website which is at www.omfzambia.com. If you just click on the highlighted link it will take you direct to the website where you will find lots more information on all our activities and of course lots of photographs.

I have tried several ways of sending pictures in the newsletters but there are so many of you who either cannot see them, or cannot open them, that I end up sending out 4 or 5 different versions to different people. If anybody would like to see pictures but cannot access the website, please let me know and I will consult our IT specialist (i.e. Abi) and see what we can do.

For two weeks in August our friends from the Heskethbank Christian Centre in Southport, England, came out again to run a Summer Camp of activities for our children, including fitness, music, drama and IT training. The camp was a great success and both the visitors

and our children made friendships that we hope will last. The team also provided us with a gift of 10 laptops, which we intend to use to create an IT lab for our children and the small Community School Abi is working on.

Most of our lads are continuing well in school. Lucky is in his last year and is writing his final exams just now. He was Head Boy at his school in his final year and we were very proud of him. So imagine how we felt this year when it was announced that his successor would be another of our lads – Lingson – who is also Lucky's cousin, and that the Deputy Head Boy would be Owen who is also one of "the MacDonalds". Not only that, but we now have a further 6 youngsters as prefects, and a Head Boy in another school. And if that sounds like a proud Dad boasting – that's exactly what it is. We attended the annual graduation at Lucky's school where most of the kids go, and as were so pleased to see a number of prize winners, including Lucky as best athlete, Memory (Lucky's sister) as Spelling champion AND Mental maths competition, and Humphrey for coming third in the senior spelling competition where he competed against pupils 2 and 3 years older than him.

Of course it is not all plain sailing. Many of our lads are getting particularly stressed as the combination of heat and exams leads to short tempers and irritability, and we have had the usual quarrels, and with such a large group there are always those who are going through the delightful teenage phase of being bored with school, studying, chores, parents and in fact anything they should be doing, but by and large they are a well behaved bunch.

We have also taken in two new lads, Christopher Mbolela who is 17 years old; and Nickson Powanga who is 14 years old, both of whom Social Welfare sent to us.

Christopher is a stable and pleasant young man with difficult family circumstances and as a result of poverty was unable to continue living with his mother. He has successfully adapted to life at the Farm and we anticipate he will resume school in January next year. In the meantime, he is revising at home under Abigail's supervision, and getting invaluable help in the basics of education which so many children seem to miss in Zambia.

Nickson comes to us with a very troubled background. He has been HIV+ from birth and has a history of being in various centres but absconding from these to live on the street. He has a regular supply of ARVs but because of his erratic behaviour, he did not take these regularly and his health suffered as a result. He was also extremely malnourished and growth retarded. Since his arrival at the Farm he has detoxed from glue, which was a difficult process for him, and has stabilised remarkably, having now completed four months with us with only one attempt to run away. His behaviour is still poor, with outbursts of temper, and chronic sulking if he feels slighted or crossed in any way, but he is gradually learning to socialise, and is making great efforts to fit in and settle down. He has been "adopted" by Rommy Phiri one of our older lads and seems to enjoy having a big "brother". He enjoyed the Camp run by our friends from Heskethbank, and showed great interest in the IT training. He will go to school depending on his progress in the next few months.

Unfortunately we have also had to suspend two of our residents, Owen and Davies Lusenga who are brothers. As I mentioned in a previous letter Owen has made one attempt to commit suicide while staying with us and has on several occasions threatened to try again. Following medical evaluation we were advised that his behaviour was manipulative and aimed at allowing him to dictate how he behaved, and as a result he was sent to boarding school during term, and asked to return to his uncle's house in Ng'ombe compound during holidays. He has stopped all threats to kill himself, and was behaving in

a stable manner until we allowed him to attend the Camp, when he assaulted another boy for talking to a girl Owen believed was “his”. As a result we had to suspend him although we are still paying for him to be educated as a boarding pupil. The fact that he has since been appointed Deputy Head Boy at school suggests that he is able to behave himself when he sees it in his own interests and this makes us particularly annoyed as it seems that the psychiatrist was correct in his assessment that his behaviour was manipulative.

Davies is an extrovert character who seems unaware that his behaviour is inappropriate in some situations. In particular he has displayed defiance and disobedience to Christine when she has asked him to behave himself, and after a series of such incidents and several warnings, he was also sent to boarding school, where he has excelled in the end of term tests! He returned for the Camp without any problems, and we are not sure how we should proceed with him.

Another young man, Emmanuel Chola, who has been at the Home since the start of this year, has been doing very well, and took position 3 in his Grade 8 class at Tina Trust School. Unfortunately, following the end of his exams, he drank several sachets of alcohol and became very drunk while attending the school end of term party. He was hospitalised at Coptic Hospital as a precaution but suffered no ill effects apart from severe embarrassment. This episode was out of character for him, and he has sworn never to drink alcohol again! He was suspended for a week by the school at the start of the following term but has managed to stay out of trouble since then.

Christine, the girls and I were able to have a lovely family holiday in Cape Town – our favourite destination – in July. We are so thankful to Bruce and Heather Barrow for the use of their house by the sea in Betty's Bay and to Ann Mayo from Edinburgh who braved the ordeal of running the house while we were away. Sarah is now in her last year in school and is working harder than seems fair. She is also looking at possible colleges and universities where she can study Music and Theatre. Rachel is in her last year at Primary school, and will go to secondary next August all being well. Christine's little bakery enterprise is taking off and she gets several orders for cakes and bread most weeks.

Well, that's it for another letter. Our love to you all and thanks for all your support.

Don, Christine and all the kids