

Dear Everybody

We are slowly melting away in the sweltering heat of another hot October, and we are all longing for the rains which will bring relief and more importantly give the farmers a chance to plant their crops for the coming year. Just looking back at my last letter I cannot believe how much has happened in the intervening 6 weeks. The first, and most awesome thing is that just when we thought all was lost in terms of buying the farm we had seen, events took another turn. When we got back from Scotland we were told that another offer had been received for the farm we looked at, and as result we began to look for other suitable places. We looked at a couple neither of which seemed to meet our needs, although we would have been prepared to take one of them and carry out extensive repair work on it. Then one afternoon, without warning, we got a phone call from a business man in England. He said he had spent a very disturbed night after reading our last letter, and asked if a donation of £15,000 would assist in helping us increase our offer. This, together with the £85,000 we raised on our house in Edinburgh brought us to exactly the amount of the asking price. Isn't providence amazing? And aren't so many people kind hearted and generous? We contacted the sellers who told us that they would be happy to accept. They also told us that the previous evening they had decided to call the other prospective purchasers and accept their offer, but that the phones had been down and they had been unable to reach them. So it seems it was meant to be. And we now have a moving in date of 9 December. In order to purchase the farm we have had to set up a small company since we have not lived personally in Zambia for 10 years. This has been done, and Christine and I are now the proud directors of "Old MacDonald's Farm Limited". Everybody laughs when I tell them, but I just couldn't resist it – sorry.

The boys are all in a ferment of excitement at the thought of going to a farm, and have already formed all kinds of grandiose schemes, but we will just watch and pray, and carry out the work required as we are able. We have already had (last year) 2 donations which will allow us to build a workshop for the carpenters and welders. I am sure the donors have been wondering if we were serious about it since we have taken so long to do it, but we can see now that if we had built it in either our previous residence or here, we and the boys would have lost the benefit of it. Now we can make it the first alteration we make, and I can promise the donors – you know who you are! – that you will get a photo diary of the building.

We would like to build up the premises so that we can cater for 50 children, including girls, so we will plan it all out over the coming months. Phil has already done a fantastic job on devising a mini-farm, which will include crops, both rain fed and irrigated, a kitchen garden, greenhouses, fruit trees, chicken sheds, a piggery, a goat pen, and a fish pond. We will try and work the welding, mechanics and carpentry into the farm as well, each as little business units, and who knows, we may become self-sufficient in terms of food. Certainly we should be able to teach the children very good farming methods which will stand them in good stead in years to come. If we have 50 children, we will have the basis for a small school, and

we would perhaps look at that as a longer term project, which we could open to local children as well, so that the entire community benefits.

The children continue to pour through our garden like little bits of jetsam washed up by the tide. Feeding them and speaking to them once a week seems like sticking a band-aid on a severed limb, but it is all we can do. It is tempting to be overwhelmed by the scale of the problem, but still we must make every effort to be part of the solution. Looking over the letter in September I can see that I mentioned Emmanuel who went back on the street from the clinic where they treated his burnt arm. And nobody has seen or heard of little Patrick since the day he came to lunch. We are beginning to wonder if he was an angel since he seems to have disappeared! More likely he has been swallowed up in the maelstrom of life around him. Poor little trembling Patrick. Where is he, what is he enduring, and what hope does he have?

We have another few lads to tell you about as well. One unbelievably cute 10 year old called John came to stay about 2 months ago. He has a stiff glue addiction problem, but seemed quite settled for a while. One day Yvonne, the lady who helps in the house and is effectively a motherfigure for the youngsters found him crying. When she asked why, he said the other boys were calling him names. So she asked what names, and he said "they are calling me John Tembo". "So what is your name" asked Yvonne – "its John Tembo" he sobbed. "Well why are you crying if that's your name?" she continued. "Because I don't want to be John Tembo, I want to be John MacDonald". Poor little John Tembo MacDonald as he became known, ran off one day but came back a week later with a small friend and an even smaller puppy. We love them all, and Rachel is already planning to marry John, though she is torn between him and the puppy. I rather suspect John and Cosmos may have stolen the pup as an excuse for coming back – they announced very importantly that they had brought it because it was lost and needed looking after. Their own staying was purely co-incidental – of course. The puppy is still here, but John and friend disappeared again, and are nowhere to be seen. We hope they have got into another refuge somewhere and that we will meet them again soon, in the meantime, Rachel always wants to ask God to bless John in her prayers.

Our latest addition is a poor skinny 12 year old called David. He had been coming for lunch most Sundays and was a quiet youngster with no parents, but living with an old grandmother who couldn't keep him, so out he went on the street. His English is excellent, and he seems highly intelligent even though he only reached grade 4 before falling out of school since no-one could pay his fees. He survived by begging on the street, and since he is such a polite youngster he managed to get by. Last Friday night, one of the other boys, motivated by hatred and jealousy, and fuelled by drugs, decided to kill him. He took a large stone and intended to pound it onto David's face while he was asleep. Mercifully the angle of the blow, and his befuddled brain, meant that the stone glanced off David's cheekbone just below the eye, and he woke up and was able to escape. I have attached a couple of pictures of him after we took him to the clinic. You can see the injury is not too serious but I also believe you can see something of the trauma of the event in his

eyes. He is safe with us now and making a good recovery, but has not smiled or relaxed since he arrived.

We have also had a birthday party for Rachel since I last wrote – “now that she’s 6 she’s as clever as clever, I hope she stays 6 for ever and ever”. She asked for a bouncy castle for the day so all the boys could play on it too, and I have attached a couple more pictures of that event, thoroughly enjoyed by all. Rachel and Christine are home in Scotland for a short visit, leaving Nicholas, Mulenga and Sarah to look after Dad. They are doing a grand job so far. Today is Independence Day and we all have a public holiday, so Sarah has 3 friends and Nico and Mulenga one each for sleepover. With 8 in the house, not much chance of being lonely. The various school children are doing well at school, and will finish soon for the longholidays through to beginning of January. I will have to spend some time soon giving all their sponsors reports on how they have done.

We have just been told that the Action Scotland radio programme recorded when we were home in August will be aired on Wednesday 25th October (i.e. tomorrow) at 1105, so if anyone wants to listen, tune in. The production team have already asked if they can do a follow up programme so we will see how that goes.

Well that’s about it for now.

Thank you all for all your love, friendship and support.

God Bless

Don, Christine, Sarah, Rachel, Nicholas and Mulenga