

Dear All

Last time I wrote in June, I mentioned the cold weather. Now in October we are experiencing the hottest weather since last year in November, and are sitting sweltering during the day. For a Northerner used to the gradual changes of season in Europe, it is still strange to experience how Zambia can move from cold to hot season with almost no transition period. Last month we were still experiencing temperatures of 10 degrees Centigrade at night, while just now as I type, it is 35 degrees outside.

I meant to send this letter a few weeks ago, but I lost my list of people who wanted to get the newsletters, so I had to try to recreate it from the Address Book on the computer. So if you receive this, and do not want it, please let me know so I can delete you from the new list. Also if anybody knows of other people who should be on the list, or would like to be, please inform me so I can add them.

On the family front we have enjoyed a more peaceful 3 months than previously, and we were also able to take a family holiday in August and have a trip to Cape Town – my favourite holiday destination. This was made possible by the kindness of Joy Mackenzie and two of our “experienced” volunteers Abby and Becky. Between them they formed a formidable team and planned to let us escape for 10 days. We had a wonderful break and rest, and were able to catch up with our good friends the Barrows and the Rasmussens as well as spend time with each other as a family. When we came back we were delighted to hear that the boys had behaved in exemplary fashion and had treated the “ladies” like gentlemen. I was teasing them about it afterwards and they said “It didn’t seem fair to misbehave to Auntie Joy.” So Joy, Abby, Becky, thank you so much and maybe you should teach us whatever you did to produce such a considerate attitude in a bunch of teenage boys.

Shortly after returning to Zambia, I made a trip to Nairobi and was able to take Nicholas and Mulenga. It was their first time to visit, but many of you will know that Christine and I spent 3 years there between 1992 and 1995 in our first visit to Africa. As well as doing business I was able to fit in a visit to the two Kenyan boys we supported to school many years ago. They are both grown up now, and it was very wonderful to see them again.

I also made a business trip to Rwanda and spent 3 days in the capital Kigali. While I was there I visited the memorial to the genocide which

occurred in 1994. It is a museum type with pictures stories and videos, and is built by the site of a mass grave where 258,000 bodies were buried. It was almost unbelievable to see the stories and hear the survivors' testimonies. 1 million people killed in 100 days for being from the wrong tribe – that works out at 7 per second, every second for 100 days. And there is no doubt from the evidence shown that the roots of the problem lay in the behaviour of the colonial powers and the church. They taught that the Hutus were an inferior race to the Tutsis and were descended from Ham and therefore additionally cursed by God. The Tutsis, who are lighter skinned and have more European style features were promoted as “superior blacks”. Before the white man arrived, both tribes lived peacefully together side by side. When I see, as I often do in Africa, the lasting harm and cruelty done by the white man to his brothers and sisters of different colours, I wonder if it is we, and not Africans, who are additionally cursed. One of the sections of the building is given over to other genocide events, including the Nazi holocaust, ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia and the slaughter of the Armenians by the Turks (this latter killed over 8 million people in early 1900s and is still officially denied today by the British and US governments.) It seems we never learn. I just cannot reconcile the hatred manifested towards others by so many Christians with what we profess to believe, or even the simple injunction to love our neighbour as ourselves.

On a happier note, Sarah has started Senior Secondary, and she is able to be home every night as it is just across from the Italian school where she went before and where Rachel is. She seems to have enjoyed her first weeks, and is already involved in the Music and Drama activities.

The school puts on a production every year in November, and she has already been picked out to perform either on the music side or as an actor. She is talented in these areas, and is blessed to be at a school where they do so much to encourage the children to make the most of their abilities.

Rachel is enjoying being back home with her friends and has started year 4. She has developed a mischievous sense of humour and really likes to tease people – as one of the volunteers said “well she IS your daughter Don”. It is so funny seeing yourself in your children – and rather sobering sometimes.

As far as the boys are concerned, Nicholas, Lucky and a number of others have big exams in November; some to get into Junior High School and the older boys to get to Senior High so there is some hard work and desperate studying being done. The stress of this along with the hot weather is

fraying tempers, and I feel very sorry for them all. I remember how bad exams used to be even in the temperate climes in Scotland. What it must be like when the thermometer is reading 35 in the shade, I can only imagine. One of our oldest boys, Cleopas, got word today that he passed all his exams for his second semester, meaning that he has successfully negotiated his first year in University. His lowest mark was 78% so I reckon he deserves credit for a very good effort.

Little John and Jeremiah came back after being away for 6 months. They tried to come back much earlier but we did not allow them to as we wanted them to learn a lesson. It seemed to be working and they were behaving much better than they did before they went. However a couple of weeks ago, they set off to school, and only John came back. He had some strange story about walking along the road when a car stopped and it just happened to be Jeremiah's mother, who decided to take him with her. It seems similar to saying "Jeremiah was abducted by aliens", but at least John came back. He is determined to stick to his story and in fact we knew that Jeremiah's mother had married someone who did have a car, but did not want Jeremiah, so I guess it is possible. Humphrey and Kenny, the two orphaned lads who joined us just as I wrote my June letter have now settled in and become part of the family, while their sister Sibeso is working hard at boarding school and sits her leaving exams in November in order to join University. Eunice, the desperately poor woman we met recently has been able to go back to her village with her children and we have given her a grant to begin a small business selling fish, so we hope that her problems are being dealt with. On the farm, the crops are growing well under irrigation, and we have a glut of tomatoes so Christine and her kitchen crew are busy cooking and preserving as many as possible and we sell or give the rest away. The rest of the ground is baked dry and hard and the grass burnt to yellow. We had a scare a couple of days ago when we run out of water and thought that the bore hole had run dry but mercifully it turned out that the pump had been lowered too far and had stuck in the mud at the bottom, so once that was fixed we had plenty of water. The new dormitory we are building for the boys is making steady progress but seems to be taking forever to complete. The boys are very excited about their new house and cannot wait to move in, though once we finish the building we will need to furnish it. Bernard is with us again and is getting the house painted and the roof fixed in preparation for the coming rainy season. In fact it seems like we live in a permanent building site as there is always some repair or construction going on. The one thing we never seem

to get started on is the much longed for swimming pool. Especially in the hot season we all long for the chance to cool off, but there are always other priorities much to the boys' disgust. They would much rather have a pool than worry about things like school fees.

On the farm, Phil's experiment of planting crops under irrigation during the cold and dry seasons has worked very well, and we have a good supply of vegetables and salads to supplement our food budget. We have also had a good harvest of maize which can be eaten as sweet corn rather than ground for mealie meal, though the cost of meal has gone up sharply, making it difficult for many poor folk to make ends meet. Doctors and missionaries in the rural areas tell us that between now and December they will see many people at starvation levels as they wait for the next crop to be harvested, and many people will survive on eating mangoes and wild fruit. Phil has also been able to erect 2 large polythene tunnels thanks to the generosity of a church in England. These are used during the rains to grow vegetables such as tomatoes which would otherwise be destroyed by the heavy downpours.

We also had a number of interesting visits over the past few months. First, we met two teams from a group called Mission Direct, who came from UK to help in construction of a primary school nearby. We think this is a very good idea as it allows church folk at home to visit the areas where their money goes and see for themselves the progress being made in the project. This means they can be sure that the work is actually being done and that the money is going to help rather than disappearing into "overheads". There is so much corruption in the mission and aid businesses that this sort of involvement has now become essential in my view. Unfortunately, the Mission Direct Teams brought us a donation of football shirts for the boys – English football shirts!

Then we had a visit from a group called Toccata. They are a group of musicians and singers who bring stage performances to developing countries. They organised a tour in Zambia, giving concerts to raise funds for orphans and vulnerable children. The artists all give their time for free, and spend time rehearsing with local school children who then take part in the show. The singing was amazing, and one of the performances was put on entirely for the orphanages at no charge so over 1000 street kids and others got a chance to see it, including our boys. They enjoyed it immensely and recognised some of the songs from Oliver, Phantom of the

Opera and other musicals. We spent the following week listening to adolescent male voices giving uncertain renderings of numbers such as “Who will buy my sweet red roses” and “Any dream will do”.

On a national level, Zambia’s President Levy Mwanawasa died in August. He had suffered a stroke a number of years ago, but seemed to have made a good recovery. The nation was shocked, and in my view and that of many others, he had done a very good job in difficult circumstances, and the economy had improved remarkably while he had cracked down on corruption. His death left a vacuum and now we are the grip of another election, which has meant people are holding onto their cash and waiting to see what happens. This has made life in the hardware business very difficult, and now we are being buffeted by the financial chaos in the banking systems in the West, which has resulted in the cost of our essentials such as food and fuel rising steeply. It seems incredible to me that people get off with all these kinds of activity in the name of high finance when the rest of us would be jailed for a fraction of it. And it enrages me that Africans who have no control over any of it suffer because of the greed and mismanagement of the “developed” world. Just consider one statistic. 70% of Africans live on less than 1 US Dollar a day, while the average cow in the EU receives \$7 subsidy every day. So we value our cows at 7 times the worth of an African child. Something wrong somewhere surely?

In the middle of it all, we get strength from the fact that we continue to have the care and support from so many good people all over the world, and that God has never failed us in anything we have tried to do here. We also get encouragement watching the progress made by the young men who have trusted us to care for them. It is by no means a straight line of progress but mostly the movement is in the right direction as they struggle, sometimes against terrible difficulties, to change their behaviour and habits and do something worthwhile with their lives. We continue having to turn boys away – most recently a poor retarded lad called Clifford who seems to have no-one asked to come and stay but we have no space nor the resources to deal with his special needs, and so he is left to fend for himself in a world that doesn’t care.

As an illustration of the difference a caring family environment can make to these boys as individuals, I attach a copy of two photos of one of our younger boys, Simba. The photo on the left shows him on the street aged

10/11, while the one on the right shows him now aged 13. If you look at the strain and the evidence of his grim reality on his face before, and the relaxed pose now, you will see why it is worth it to try to help.

For now, all the best from us all

Love

Don, Christine and all the kids