

Dear Friends,

I am very sorry that I have taken so long since the last time I wrote. The usual excuses apply of course, so perhaps let's just skip them.

We are all well right now. We had a very busy and trying time at my own and Christine's work over the months of June and July, and by August we were feeling rather worn out, but we were able to take a family holiday in Cape Town in South Africa for 2 weeks. It was wonderful and relaxing, and we stayed with some of the missionary families who have stopped off in Lusaka with us from time to time. I had warned them we would get our own back sometime - so we did - with a vengeance! They were very gracious about it, and we had a super time, and came back very much refreshed. Cape Town is very beautiful, a kind of Scottish scenery in the African climate, by the sea if you can imagine. It has lots of quaint old towns dating from 1650s when the French Huguenots and the Dutch traders arrived and settled. It is without doubt one of the loveliest places I have ever seen, but it was good to come home to Lusaka and see our extended family again - of which more later.

Things went through a rocky patch at my work, but thankfully business seems to have stabilised now. Christine still finds more work than there are hours in the day between being a Mum, wife, O&G specialist and hostess to whoever needs a bed for the night, but never seems unduly stressed by it all. Sarah and Rachel are now back in school after their long holidays. Their school follows the Scottish holiday dates, so they have had the summer hols¹, even though it was actually winter¹ here. Nicholas, whose school follows the Zambian system, only had 4 weeks off, and goes back to school this coming week. At present he is in the far north of Zambia visiting his 86 year old Grandmother, whom he remembers with great affection from the happier days of his childhood. He lost touch with her when his father died, but was anxious to see her again. We are waiting to hear how he got on. He is doing well at school, without exerting any effort, which is extremely irritating, as he would do so much better if he studied. But achieving a top 15 position in his year without working, he cannot see the point of studying when he could be playing football. I guess boys are much the same all over the world.

Our street boys are doing very well now. We have managed to complete and furnish our little dormitory at the bottom of the garden. It looks really nice, and 4 boys have moved in, bringing our total to 6. We also have 2 young men who are workers staying on the premises - Joseph and Ephraim. They are night watchman and gardener respectively, and are both attending college. They are a great help with the other boys. That is pretty much the maximum we can manage in the space we have so we will not be able to do much more for the time being. It is very hard to turn them away. There was a story in the papers recently that Zambia has 1.1 million orphans of which 750,000 are as a result of HIV. When you consider the population is about 10 million, it means one in ten people here is an orphan under the age of 14. What poverty, desolation and loss - God help us to do what we can in the face of such a disaster. And God forgive us if we don't do something when we can. Sometimes I can hardly

bear it - the scale of the need is so overwhelming.

The boys staying with us now are called: Felix, Smart, Charles, Peter, David and Richard. Before I tell you more about them I just want to tell about poor Mabvuto. As I told you in previous letters, he is a deeply disturbed lad, and it is hard to get through to him in any sense. I also suspect that the call of the wild is very strong as far as he is concerned, and that while he may know he is better off coming off the street, the ¹freedom of street life, with its chaotic mix of substance abuse, violence, sex and absence of rules, is simply too attractive most of the time. In any case, whatever the reason, he left one Sunday while we were in church. Some of the other boys tried to stop him, and he became very abusive, accusing us all of all kinds of evil behaviour towards him. For quite a while after this he was nowhere to be seen, but about 4 weeks after he left he turned up one Sunday very drunk. He had been at a funeral, which turned into a drunken brawl, during the course of which Mabvuto got drunk, started a fight and got beaten up. He arrived at the house crying, but was too shamefaced to come in after his accusations. Thankfully one of the other boys told me he was there, so I went out to bring him in. He was so distraught, I just hugged him and told him it was OK. He could not look me in the face, and was practically incoherent, so after getting him fed we just let him sleep. When he sobered up a bit, I realised that he probably would not have had the courage to come back had he been sober, so we skipped any lectures about the harm he was doing himself, and just told him he was welcome to come back at any time. The following Sunday he returned, and began to talk about coming back to stay with us. I was a bit worried about this as his erratic behaviour poses a threat to the rest of us on the premises. However, Christine and I discussed it with Mr. Banda, our gardener and the ²boss for the boys, and we decided he could come back. After all, think about how often God accepts us back when we go far away from him. We did make it a condition that he apologise for all he said. He was willing to do so to Christine and me, but would not agree to do so to his fellow Zambians. So for the time being, we welcome him back for food every Sunday, and try to show him we care, and are willing to help him if he wants to try and change. After he left I was very worried that we had lost him completely so I am thankful we have re-established contact. I cannot help noticing that the boy we have had the most trouble with is the one we asked you all to pray for. Am I imagining it, or are we in a battle here?

Of the other boys, I will focus this time on Felix. He is 18 years old, and was badly burnt as a child and now has only one arm and a disabled leg. I have attached a picture of him. When I met him he was begging on the street, and looked hideous. I asked him to come and stay with us, and we managed to get an operation arranged for him at a private hospital to ease the contraction on his remaining arm. For a long time he was a problem case and seemed very reckless about his behaviour. He had been rejected by his village as ³useless² and his widowed mother was told by neighbours that she should abandon him as he would ³never be any use² to her. Needless to say this had a profound effect on him as a youngster, especially as the duty of providing for the other children when his

father died fell to him as the first born. So when he was older he left home and came to Lusaka where all he could do was use his terrible injuries to elicit sympathy while begging. Can you imagine for a moment what life must have been like for him - deformed, despised, rejected, and sleeping rough. No wonder he had behavioural problems. Shortly after he came to stay with us, we realised that formal education was unlikely to help him. We then discovered a training school for disabled people. They provide basic education in the mornings and practical skills in the afternoons, and the pupils board there during the week and return home at weekends. We told Felix about it and were very surprised at his complete lack of enthusiasm for the idea. On the day when we arranged to take to have a look at the place, he ran off to hide when it was time to set off. We realised that he was afraid we were going to dump him in an institution, and having been rejected so often, he did not want to take the risk again. We assured him he did not have to go if he did not want to, and still deeply suspicious, he set off with Christine. He remained sullen and defiant until he met a boy of his own age, equally deformed, but also in a wheelchair. This boy showed him the sweaters he had knitted using his knitting machine which he operated one handed. Felix's life changed in that instant as he saw hope for his future. He enthusiastically agreed to attend school for training and one the way home in the car he said to Christine ³Now I can go home to my mother as a son who can do something². I am afraid there wasn't a dry eye in the house when we heard that. Even now it brings tears to my eyes.

He has been training now for almost 1 year, and is doing very well with. He has made some excellent knitwear, including hats for all the other boys and Sarah (they look like tea-cosies and have the brilliant name of ³headssocks²), and a beautiful cardigan which we bought from him as a birthday present for Christine's Mum. He has a few more months to go before he is ready to operate on his own and then we plan to buy him a knitting machine and teach him the basics of business. He will then indeed be ready to go back home as a son who can do something. It has not all been plain sailing of course. Every now and then he slips back to bad habits, but by and large he is a very well behaved lad, and has seized his chance to support himself.

The rest of the boys work in the garden here and at the local Government hospital. Christine has set up a burns Unit for children and with the help of Rotary we have been able to refurbish some side wards and set up a, 18 bed unit. One of the key requirements for burns patients is nutrition, and this is always a problem in government hospitals, so the board gave us a piece of derelict land which we use as a garden to grow vegetables for the burnt kids. The labour is provided by our street boys, who are very excited at being able to help somebody else, and one of our missionary friends who passes through frequently is a trained horticulturalist, and he has provided a lot of planning and training to the boys, so our garden looks very promising. Isn't incredible how God brings all these people together when needed? Phil Bailey (our horticulturalist) works in the east of Zambia, but we have discussed the possibility of setting up a much larger farm-based street kids project on the outskirts of Lusaka. That is obviously in the future, but we share

the vision, and it would be a good way of helping a lot more children.

When our boys are not working, they are busy keeping their dorm tidy and washing their clothes in order to look smart enough to impress any passing young ladies. We have a football team established now - I have been appointed coach - and we are busy training to get in shape to play other teams. We need to organise some strips and training shoes for them as now they play topless and in bare feet. They are pretty skilful but have very little idea of team work or discipline. In the evenings after supper we chat and play some card games, and on Friday we watch a video which is a great treat for everybody. Saturday we often have a barbeque or a party especially if it is near to somebody's birthday, and on Sunday we all go to church where the boys can attend a service in their own language, and the rest of us go to the main service which is in English. That is pretty much how the week shapes up, and while it may not sound very glamorous, I think we all find it very satisfying.

For now let me finish up, and send this off. We would be delighted to hear from any of you sometime.

All our love

Don, Christine, Sarah, Rachel and Nicholas