

Hi again everybody

Hope you are all well. Here in Lusaka we are coming into the hot season, and it promises to be a really hot one. October is referred to as 'suicide month' locally because of the heat and humidity. The chilly nights of July are now a fond memory. We are all doing well here, and Nico, Sarah and Rachel have gone back to school for another term. It was nice having Nico and his schoolmates at home for the holidays, and we also have Christine's niece Isla over from Scotland for a holiday. She is on sixth year in school and has taken a few weeks off for 'work experience'. She has fitted in very well and seems to have great fun helping the boys with school work, reading stories to Rachel, and being the centre of attention amongst the older boys. Not sure if this is the sort of 'work' her school had in mind, but who's counting?

Last letter I promised I would tell you a little bit more about the little children we help. I will get to that, but before I do, just a couple of news items on the 'big boys'. Iwell is still with us, and has really worked hard on a little project we have going to build a new paved and thatched area in the garden. He has shown real ability in bricklaying and stonework, much the same as he did with his welding classes. We have an architect friend who is supervising the work, and she has been so impressed with him she has made him her right hand man. Even better, she has said she is prepared to take him on to work with her on her various jobs. This is a great boost for him - and us - since it is only a short time since he was sent from school for stealing. We pray that he would be able to take this opportunity and remain consistent and honest - it really is a temptation to these lads to go 'off the rails' as soon as they get some money. Last week, I was commenting on his good work, and telling him how glad I was that he came back, and he looked at me quickly then looked away and said 'Ah bwana, please forgive me for all my mistakes'. Then just today, Richard and David got their test results back from the carpentry course they have been studying for the past 6 months. They both passed, David with very high marks, and are now officially qualified by the Examinations Council as Carpenters and Joiners. They are both fairly quiet boys, so there was no running around shouting, but the look of quiet triumph on their faces showed their satisfaction. We have seen examples of the work they have done, and have been very impressed by the standard they have achieved - they have made tables and chairs for their house, and ours, and dolls furniture for Rachel. It really is worth all the effort when we have days like this. Now we want to set up a little work shop for them to start earning some money and move onto the next stage of their life. We have managed to get 2 tool kits from Tools with a Mission which should arrive here in December, and in the meantime we will try and get some premises for them.

Well, now to the 'little ones'. As you know, we have 10 big lads staying with us ranging in age from 15 to 23. We started off looking after them because nobody else wants anything to do with them. But we quickly found help was needed for younger children who are not necessarily orphans but have either been abandoned

by their family or are in such poverty that they have become extremely vulnerable. In this group we now have 10 youngsters ranging from 7 to 14. They include both boys and girls, and they are all adorable. The first I must mention is Mulenga. He was a sad little 12 year old when we found him sleeping in the sewers near to the shopping centre. He had made a little fire at the mouth of the sewer to keep himself warm, and we noticed the smoke and went to investigate. We took him home with us. For 2 weeks he did not smile or laugh. He had been on the street with Nicholas and they had been friends against a cruel world, but had lost touch, so Nico was overjoyed to see him, and begged for him to stay, offering to share his bed with him. So he stayed, and goes to boarding school with Nico, where he is doing well and catching up quickly with the education he missed. He is a real charmer and now grins happily most of the time, and has become a firm favourite with every lady ? young and old ? he meets. Christine?s Mum was smitten and would have taken him home with her if she could have, and I think Isla is planning on abducting him when she leaves for Scotland. He has been joined in school by another 12 year old called Matthias. Matty has no parents, but lived with his grandmother, who is too old and frail to support herself, so Matty begged on the street as the bread-winner. He did not want to go to school because he was worried about who would care for his grandmother. Thankfully, his grandmother insisted he take the chance, and we have been able to help her out as well so she is better off than before. He is a very quiet boy, and has little English, but in the general rough and tumble of our household, he is coming out of his shell and is getting much more confident. Like so many of the kids, he has been helped to overcome his shyness and fear by Rachel, who insists he plays with her when he is home, and speaks to him in a mixture of English, Nyanja and sign language.

Then we have Lucky (12) and Memory (8), who are brother and sister, and were orphaned 2 years ago when their father died ? their mother died 2 years before that. They have 3 older siblings, none of whom seem willing to be helped or to make much effort to manage the family, so the little ones were faced with a hungry, bleak future, with the street beckoning for Lucky, and early pregnancy or worse for Memory. We just couldn?t let it happen, so we took them in and sent them to boarding school as well. Memo, as she is called, is a great friend to Rachel and they share a bed during the holidays and play all day every day, with rarely a cross word. She is particularly good for Rachel as she stands up to her and will not tolerate any bossiness, something none of the boys will do ? they all seem happy to let Rachel march right over them. This brings our ?boarding school kids? to 4, and they all come home for the holidays, which makes life quite chaotic, but fun. We send these children to boarding school as the standard of education is so much better than in day school, and we are sure they have a safe and secure environment every day. And during holiday times we get to catch up on some of the parenting and nurturing they need, and have all missed out on.

We also have some ?day schoolers?, at last count 6 of them. These are children who have parents and family who are too poor to send them to school. The first group are Isaac, Maggie and Sapphira, who are siblings. Some of you may remember them from previous letters. Their older brother is Mabvuto, the very troubled lad who stayed with us for a few weeks then ran away. He could not adapt

to an ordered life and went back to the street where he still struggles to survive, but comes to see us most Sundays for food, shower and check-up. He must have retained some affection for us, because he brought the 3 younger ones along for help when Sapphira was sick. We realised we could not keep another 3 young children on the premises, so we went to visit their mother. She seemed very depressed and indifferent to life, but we agreed with her that if she made sure the children went to school and cooked for them, we would provide food for the whole family. This arrangement has worked well, and the little girls are getting plump and happy to be at school. Poor little Isaac, who is about 10, has been quite unwell with kidney problems, and we thought we might lose him altogether, but we managed to get him into a very good clinic run by the Coptic Church mission, which is near at hand, and he has made a full recovery. The Clinic has very kindly agreed to provide medical treatment for all our kids free of charge, so that has been tremendous help. Another side benefit has been the fact that their mother seems to have regained some will to live and is taking an interest in her children again. We can only imagine how awful incessant, hopeless, grinding poverty must be for women in her position.

The other 3 day school pupils are Eva and Jacqueline who are cousins of Memory, and Sammy a loveable rogue aged 10, who lived with his parents some distance away but travels to school every day. He is a hilarious little fellow, absolutely bursting with personality. He used to beg on the street and came to visit us each Sunday. When he realised we were sending Isaac to school, he announced he wanted to go to school since he was much cleverer than Isaac. Christine fobbed him off with a challenge to learn his multiplication tables. 2 weeks later, he recited them without a single mistake, and when he finished, looked her in the eye and said triumphantly 'Now can I go to school?'. So off he went. He is actually a very bright little boy, and would really benefit from going to boarding school next January, so we are trying to make plans for that.

Each of these children has their own heartbreaking story. If I was to include them this letter would run to several pages. If anyone is interested in knowing about any of them in more detail, I would be happy to reply with a fuller history. Most of them have been through rejection or neglect, and some of the stories are so harrowing they are not suitable for telling here. The wonderful thing is the difference a little love, security and feeding makes to almost all of them, and we count ourselves privileged to know them as individuals.

Let me finish up by answering the two questions we are asked more than any others by friends who take an interest in our life with the children.

First we are asked 'Is all this not very expensive? How do you fund it??' The answer to that is that feeding and clothing the children costs almost nothing in relation to what we earn. Let me put this in perspective. We can buy food for a month for the young folk mentioned above for the same amount as it would cost Christine and me to go out for dinner twice in the month. The main expense we face is the cost of education, whether in boarding school, trade school or day school. This is costly, but so far we have been able to meet all the requirements,

and we will not take any child to school unless we can afford the fees. In this we have been tremendously encouraged and supported by the number of people who have been willing to become sponsors to individual children. Without this, we could feed the youngsters, but some of them simply would not be educated. And since they cannot speak for themselves just now, let me say "Thank you and God Bless" on their behalf.

The second question we are asked is why there is such a large proportion of boys amongst the children we help. This is much more complex to answer. There are a number of reasons. Firstly, boys are much more likely to be abandoned by relatives. This is because they are regarded as more able to care for themselves on the street, and also because they have no "economic value". Girls can be kept for house work, early marriage (with dowry) or even prostitution. Boys are simply worthless to already overstretched extended families. Nicholas was rejected by his aunt while his sisters were kept. Secondly it is fashionable in Zambia just now for Western agencies who deal with children and poverty to focus on the "girl child" (a really irritating piece of consultant-speak "surely all girls already are children"). And thirdly, it is much easier to get sponsorship and help for girls. As an example of what I mean, we had no difficulty whatsoever obtaining a sponsor for Memory - in fact there were several willing people volunteered - while her brother Lucky took much longer to place, and Matty still has no-one willing to help him. Maggie and Sapphira are supported by Scottish friends but nobody seems to want to help Isaac their brother. All this means that there are simply many more boys destitute and visible on the street, which is where we find most of our kids. So we try to help them in the hope that if we can cultivate young men who will be kind, responsible, loving husbands and fathers we will also help towards the security and happiness of their wives and future generations of Zambian children.

I hope that clarifies these issues, and helps you understand why we do what we do. I seemed to have reached the end of my space, and I still have lots to tell you, so maybe I will send this and start on another letter "you have been warned."

All our love

Don, Christine, Sarah, Rachel, Nico and ALL the kids