

Dear All

Time for another letter about life with our kids in Lusaka. I have been holding off writing this one in the hope that I would have some good news to share with you all, butŠ.

As I mentioned last time, we had been looking for larger premises in order to expand what we are doing with the kids, and had seen a very suitable place. The asking price was \$200,000 which was beyond our means, but we thought that we could afford \$150,000 (about £85,000) and offered this. Contrary to all our expectations the sellers accepted. We then left for holiday in Scotland in August, during which time we managed to raise the exact amount required by re-mortgaging our house in Edinburgh. So we came back to Lusaka full of anticipation that we would be able to go ahead with our plans, only to discover that in the meantime a better offer had been made and the sellers had decided to reject ours. It was very disappointing, especially as we are unable to bid up our offer beyond what we had raised on the house in Scotland. The sellers have not accepted the rival bid either so technically all is not lost, but if they want more money there is little chance of us being successful. However we do not feel too downhearted as we are sure that if we are supposed to expand what we are doing then the resources will be found, and if not, then we are content to continue with the 22 boys staying with us just now. The difficult part is having to turn the children away since we have no room, and this happens every Sunday when the Manda Hill lads come for lunch. I cannot explain how we feel when we see some little scrap of humanity begging to stay, and see some hope rising in his eyes only to have to crush it. Of course when there is no space, there is nothing we can do, but these children have been rejected over and over again and to suffer one more rejection must be very bitter, especially when they can see their ex street mates clean, well fed and going to school. And just because it's impossible to help does not mean it's easy to say ³No².

Our Sunday lunch club continues to grow, and we regularly feed 70 people each week. We always have a series of willing helpers and the whole experience is very enjoyable if exhausting. The Sunday before we left for Scotland, we had a completely new development with the arrival for lunch of our first 3 street girls. Honestly, I did not think it was possible to feel sorrier for anybody than I feel for the street boys, but I think the girls touched me even more. To be perfectly frank, they were not cute or attractive, like so many of the younger boys. They were hard, sullen, rude and aggressive, and talking to them at first was quite an unpleasant experience. Nora who looked about 14, angrily rejected my attempts befriend her and spat at me, a look of rage and bitterness on her marked and scarred face. Martin, one of our older boys, saw their reactions and helped me understand that their attitude was a defence mechanism - ³Bwana, it's the only protection they have² he said. Just a moment's reflection of what they must endure sleeping in the drains with all the street boys brings into focus a life that must be horrendous. I went back to Nora, and told her she should ³feel free² - Zambian English for making someone welcome. I told her she could stay for lunch and that

she was my visitor so nobody would trouble her while she was there. She hesitated for a moment, then the same bitter face broke into a beautiful smile, and when I held out my hand again, she gave me a quick hug. We didn't talk much more but she spent the entire afternoon walking around with me, trying to hold my hand. Every time I would drop her hand to do something else, she would come quietly alongside again and reach for my hand when it was free. What do you do? We don't have space for more boys - we certainly could not bring a group of girls into our present premises, but the need just grows and grows. Last night Phil and I went out to do a short night patrol around Manda Hill to see how the guys on the street were. We found a little boy called Emmanuel, whom I wrote about in my January letter. We had been unable to keep him at that time, and he comes along most Sundays now. Last night he showed us a horrible gaping wound on his elbow where ³fire dropped on² him, so we took him to the Coptic Mission Hospital nearby where the Egyptian doctors are very kind and treat our lads for free. We need to fetch him tomorrow when he is discharged, and then the question will be can we squeeze him in somewhere.

Another little face which comes readily to mind is that of Patrick - undoubtedly the smallest boy we have ever had visit. Six years old, he lives in a slum with an old grandmother who cannot feed him and does not want him. He is very noticeable amongst the other children because he is of mixed race and one of his parents was clearly a white person. We cannot know all the circumstances involved, but the possibility that one of the affluent white folk in Lusaka is responsible for Patrick and has abandoned him to a life of destitution just fills me with rage.

Amongst all the heartache and sadness, we have many laughs with the children, and any time spent with them is more than repaid in happiness and gratitude from the child. The first week we had the Sunday lunch club, the boys were all sitting on the grass eyeing the food on the table. We told them we were going to pray - i.e. say grace. Immediately there was uproar as they refused. Brian, a student from the Baptist Church we attend was speaking to them, and laughing, he explained to me that they did not mind praying, but they could not close their eyes because if they did the other boys might steal the food. In the end we compromised, and I had to stand between the food and the multitude, who closed their eyes only on the understanding that I kept mine wide open and stopped anyone who tried to filch anything. Thankfully nobody did. And going back to little Patrick, when he came in for the first time, he was almost rigid with fear. Any attempt to tickle him, hold him, or even touch him made him start trembling in the most distressing fashion. He would not make eye contact or shake hands and looked sick with apprehension. I called Memory and Rachel to meet him, and they took him to play with their toys. By the end of the afternoon, when we were all sitting talking after dinner, he crept through the group, sat down beside me, and still not looking at me, slid his hand out nervously in greeting. When I took it, he relaxed, and sat beside me for the rest of the time, clutching me till it was time to leave. All our own children begged us to keep him, but again we were not able to.

So for the sake of all the little ones who want to stay, the search for a home for us all must go on.

The other big event since last letter is of course our visit home to Scotland. It was very nice to be back again and to meet so many old friends and some new. It was great to introduce Mulenga to his new Scottish family, and he was wide eyed with wonder at all he saw on his first trip out of Zambia. Some of his observations on Scotland and Scottish life were very thought provoking, and we were able to ³see ourselves as others see us² through his eyes. I mean how do you explain why an otherwise polite, respectable lady blows her nose in a handkerchief then sticks the hanky up her cardigan sleeve?!. We visited Granny, Grandma, Grandpa and various aunts, uncles and cousins, and were able to travel around quite a bit. Mulenga even managed to find a Scottish girlfriend. While we were in Edinburgh we managed to buy kilt outfits for the four children, ladies outfits for Sarah and Rachel, and kilts and shirts for Nico and Mulenga. They looked fabulous in them, and the two boys attracted quite a lot of attention whenever they wore them, although since it was Festival time in Edinburgh, they did not stand out as much as they might have. We also managed to spend time at our old home church at New Restalrigg. It is always a happy experience to visit there and our friends made us feel back at home as always. I had the opportunity to speak to the children - and the whole congregation - about the street kids, and was able to share some of the stories. At one point I asked if anybody could tell me what the street children need most of all. One little girl immediately answered ³families². I was surprised, as most people think of material needs, but in my opinion she was right. What the children need is a family, where they receive love, instruction and care. This is much more pressing than food, clothing, shelter or education. These things are essential to life of course, but in order to have any semblance of security or normality in their lives, I believe the kids need to experience unconditional love, and a sense of belonging, and the quickest way to obtain this is in a loving family structure. And providing a family takes much more than just money - it requires time. It is our privilege to introduce these children, in our imperfect and stumbling manner, to the concept of unconditional love, and to open their eyes to the fact that they are worth something to someone, and to God.

Scotland was also memorable for the fact that we were the focus of some (little) media attention. The Herald contacted us and asked if they could run a Lifestyle profile on us for their Saturday magazine. We were taken aback at the request but it was quite good fun. We got lots of photos taken of us all in Princess Street Gardens - kids in kilts, me in Zambian chitenge shirt - and then were interviewed on life as a multi-racial family, life in Zambia and what it was like to have so many kids staying with us. Then we were asked to be the subjects for a Radio Scotland programme, so we spent a morning in the recording studio in Inverness. It left us all feeling quite the celebrities, and Christine and I are now the Posh and David Beckham of Lusaka - well perhaps not. We also spent quite a bit of time checking into ways of raising funding, and eventually, thanks to the help of some wizard financial advisers in Inverness we were able to get a mortgage deal which allowed us to

remortgage our house in Lasswade and use the money for buying property in Zambia.

Our journey back was difficult thanks to the increased security at Heathrow, but we got home safely, and holiday seems like a distant memory now. Still, it was great to get back, and as I drove home from the airport into the early morning sunrise, and looked at Africa waking to face a new day, I had a profound sense of coming back home where I belonged.

With all our love

Don, Christine, Sarah, Rachel, Nicholas and Mulenga