

Dear All

Here we are in September, and in Zambia anyway, the temperature and the humidity is soaring from the calm and comfort of July and August, towards 'suicide month' as the locals call October, when the weather becomes unbearable. It's Saturday evening and some of the kids are watching the Puss in Boots movie, while others are busy studying for end of year exams which will come in October and November. It is an important year for the kids on Grades 7,9 and 12 who write national tests which will determine entry into junior secondary, senior secondary and college.

Looking back over the past few months, we have experienced many blessings and we are aware of the support we receive from many of you. In April, we were still struggling coming to terms with Sarah being unwell. She was diagnosed with Non-Epileptic Attack Disorder, and was having seizures which were very distressing to watch as well as deeply disruptive to her own life. Thankfully, she has been receiving treatment which has helped a lot, and the seizures have become much less frequent and much less severe. During this time, she has done incredibly well to finish her International Baccalaureate course and achieve very credible results, meaning she reached the required standard to be accepted to study Musical Theatre at the Royal Scottish Conservatoire – formerly known as the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama – in Glasgow. She and Christine have travelled to Scotland to get her settled in there and ready to start her course at the end of September. It is so strange to me to think of my little girl now a student, but I guess that is life. There is a certain romance – in my mind at least – about the fact that Sarah is studying in the city where Christine and I studied, and where we first met, where we lived when we were married and where Sarah herself was born. I certainly hope she has as good a time in Glasgow as her Mum and I had.

Rachel has started secondary school and seems to be enjoying it quietly. It is strange seeing her set off every morning with her school tie and uniform, but again that is part of the progression of life. Lucky continues to do well at college where he is studying Business Administration, and has been able to get holiday work at a firm of accountants I know, while Memory is busy with her school work on Grade 10 and has aspirations to be a doctor. Nicholas continues to struggle with his addiction to alcohol. Although he had come back home last time I wrote, it wasn't long before he was drunk

at home again and causing more problems, and he decided to leave again. He continues to work with a local mechanic and comes to visit most weekends and attend church.

We have a number of different people and groups visit, including several teams from Mission Direct, and it has been good to share the story of what God has done with all of them. We have had some individual volunteers as well, who have helped out on the farm and with the guys and been a great benefit to Abigail in her little school. Looking forward it seems that the idea of the community school is the one which will reach the largest number of children, and give them a bright spot of hope in lives which often otherwise are miserable and full of sadness. Abigail currently teaches and feeds about 50 kids and could easily take 4 or 5 times that number if she had the resources. The level of neglect some of the children suffer is truly appalling. One little girl who cried constantly and seemed miserable and sad all the time recently fell and bumped her head. Abigail picked her up and soothed her, and in the course of doing so, patted the little girl's head. She felt her hand sticky, when she looked at it found it covered with pus which had come from sores hidden under the girls scalp. She took the girl to hospital, where thankfully we discovered she was not HIV+, her condition was simply due to neglect. So we had to start to sort the whole problem out, including getting medicine, making sure she took it, shaving the little girls head and so on. She is now so much better and smiles as she is out of pain, at least for now. The most depressing part of the whole story is that while Abigail is teaching her every morning, they can look out the school window and see her father drinking in the tavern next door.

Amongst the other visitors who have been here since last April, we have had one rather famous one – in Scotland at least. Sally Magnusson, who reads the news on BBC Scotland, was here for a few days with her son Jamie Stone who is a film-maker. They were here to do a documentary on Christine and I and the work we do with the street kids. Jamie did a lot of filming and Sally spent time interviewing us and the various folk who make up the big family here and help out in the work. We were a bit nervous being followed by a camera and being interviewed by "someone off the telly", but Sally and Jamie were so nice and fitted in really well. They seemed to enjoy their time with us and felt like part of the family very quickly. Jamie had been here before a few years ago with Kate West, who works for Sally's husband as a production assistant. Kate is now

married to Consol, a man from the Congo, which is just north of Zambia. Consol has two little daughters and they now live in Glasgow – near to the Royal Conservatoire – and they have kindly asked Sarah to stay with them for her first term while she gets settled in Glasgow!

The documentary has been commissioned by BBC Scotland and we are waiting to hear when it will be broadcast. It is unlikely it will ever reach Zambia, but we will let you all know when it is due to go out so you can watch it if you are interested. Not sure I would like to see myself on TV, especially talking about very personal stuff, so I think I will stay safe here!

Just before Sally and Jamie were here, Christine and I celebrated our silver wedding anniversary. We had hoped we would get away for something like a special train journey from Victoria Falls to Cape Town – 2 weeks on a luxury train – but Sarah's illness and then planning for her to leave to study meant we have had to put that on hold – who knows maybe next year. However we hope to have 2 weeks away at the beginning of October. I am due to travel to Los Angeles for an important conference and Christine has managed to get the time off to come with me. Not as romantic as a train journey or a cruise, but it will be lovely to have a break. We are so grateful to Joy MacKenzie who has agreed to come out to visit and hold the fort with Abi and Mr. Banda while we are away. This will be her third trip here and the boys remember her fondly from previous visits.

The boys are doing well by and large, though of course with so many of them, there are always those who are having problems. Just 3 weeks ago we were so happy to have 3 lads – Samson, Lingson and Kenny baptised at the local Reformed Baptist church – along with Kenny's sister Sibeso who stayed with us for a while. She is now working as an accounts assistant at ZEGA Limited the company where I am the Managing Director. As they get older, many of the lads start to feel the pressure of working out what they hope to do in life. There are very few jobs available in Zambia and you have little chance of getting a start on the ladder if you do not know someone who can help you. That has led Christine and me to think about what we can do next to address this problem for our lads. Ideally we need to see industry starting up to employ people, but it is hard to see how one couple can do much in this regard especially as we have to work each day to pay the bills. We have thought about ideas like setting up an industrial scale bakery or creating a small shopping centre both of which would create employment, but the investment required is really beyond us both in

financial and time terms. However we can see God has taken us and the boys through to this point, and we believe he has a plan for each of them. There are those who look forward to the challenge and those who find it all a bit too difficult, and begin to lose hope, but we pray each one of them will find the path through life that will make them and their families happy and truly blessed. We have faced a number of challenges with a few of the boys who have found it difficult to cope with the pressures of 'grown-up' life and some have decided to drop out of school and drift rather than put in the hard work required. We have seen this since we started helping young men 10 years ago, and to be honest it seems to be a fairly world-wide phenomenon, but we are encouraged that some of the lads who drifted away 8 or 9 years ago, and even 'crashed and burned' - have turned into responsible young men who remember what we tried to do for them and keep in touch regularly. Perhaps it is part of the growing up process for some people – especially young men.

At the other end of the process, we continue to see young lads in desperate circumstances, some of whom have suffered almost unimaginable neglect or abuse, but have struggled through to their teens. Others have pretty much raised themselves and are struggling to try and get an education by working to put themselves through school. Their efforts are quite heartbreaking to watch, but we can only help a small number. Our latest addition is a pathetically thin young lad called Francis. He is about 1m70 tall (about 5ft 10) and weighed just 49 kg when he came to us. He is HIV +, and struggles to see the point of living, especially when he is hit with an opportunistic infection, which happens often. As I write he is just back from hospital after a severe attack of pneumonia, and he is also suffering from the effects of TB. He has never learned anything about living in a family, or been shown affection, and is a cowed, worried little soul. The help available to such lads is just a fraction of what is needed. Of course girls also suffer from the same problems, and have their own special difficulties to overcome, but the pro-female Western aid organisations make sure that there is far more provision available for girls than boys. I drove behind a garish pink car the other day which proclaimed that it fought for the educational rights of the "girl-child". It belonged to a charity called 'Because I'm A Girl'. I am very much in favour of helping children in need of both genders, but just a thought... imagine the screeches of outrage, the cancellation of donor funds, and the general condemnation an organisation would face if it was called 'Because I'm A Boy' and refused to help girls.

In spite of all the unfairness, injustice, neglect and downright cruelty we see, and amidst the daily grind of working just like everybody else to keep our family together, we are conscious of being supported by many people. We can never really know the full extent of that support, nor how much it has helped when things have seemed impossible, but we know it is there and we are deeply thankful for it. May God bless you all for standing with us and the street kids of Lusaka.

All our love

Don, Christine and the kids