

St. Nicholas Uganda Children's Fund Newsletter

March 2010

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"We cannot do everything in Africa, but doing nothing is not an option." *—Lee H. Hamilton*



Circumstances beyond our control

When we returned to Uganda in September, we were greeted by riots in downtown Kampala. Six months later the streets once again have erupted in senseless violence. The news is being broadcast worldwide by CNN and the BBC. Video footage of crowds of Ugandans against a flaming background bolsters the stereotype of lawless masses running amok.

What you won't see on CNN is that for the vast majority of people in Kampala's slums, life goes on in the numbing sameness of a daily struggle for survival. Women and children rise before dawn to fetch water for cooking and cleaning. Kids set off for school, perhaps with empty stomachs, but still happy to have a place to go and something to do. Their mothers and stepmoms, aunts and grandmas, set about to find "what to eat"—scrubbing floors and washing clothes, trudging to the market to buy a few vegetables to sell for a miniscule profit, walking miles hawking second-hand clothes—all for the prospect of earning enough money to feed the children when they come home from school that evening.

Our small office is a second home for many of our kids, a place where they feel secure and welcome. If overt love is missing from their own homes, they know they can receive it from us and from "Uncle" Frank and "Aunt" Agnes. One ordinary day this past December during

the school break, Jackie and Justine showed up, scared and confused. Their uncle was kicking them out of the house and they didn't know what to do. They didn't even know what they wanted us to do, but they knew we would care.



Jackie

The girls are orphans and had not been attending school when their grandma brought them to us three years ago. When JjaJja became too old to work, she moved to the village and sent Aunt Betty to stay in the house and care for them. Betty

washed clothes for neighbors so she and the girls could eat, and only by staying rent-free in JjaJja's house could they manage to survive.

But real estate ownership in Uganda is tenuous and subject to tribal and cultural traditions as well as to modern land laws. One of JjaJja's sons claimed that it was his house, and gave them three days to vacate. There were no relatives in town willing to take the girls and the only apparent solution was for Betty to go to the family village and try to find a place for them.

After three years of relative stability and security, they did not want to leave their home, their school, and their friends. The family has the final say in matters regarding orphans, so we assured the girls that we would continue to support them in school whatever the outcome. Our unspoken concern was that the two sisters would disappear into the extended rural village network, perhaps even separated from each other.



Justine

When that happens, all attempts to locate the children fail and we never learn if they were able to continue school or if they were eventually forced into an early marriage.

The good news, at least for now, is that we didn't lose them. JjaJja and other relatives intervened and Jackie, Justine, and Auntie returned to the neighborhood before the beginning of the school term. Once again we see the radiant smiles of two girls who are glad to be back home and back in school.



Girl Electrician

Secondary School in Uganda is divided into four years of O Level and two years of A Level. Students who don't have A Level potential are encouraged to enroll in vocational training. Boys tend to gravitate to welding, mechanics, carpentry, etc. Girls usually choose hair styling, tailoring, or nursery school teaching.

Cissy completed O Level at nineteen, three years older than most of her classmates. An orphan at fifteen, she was working as a housegirl when she joined our program two years after her parents died. She performed well enough on her exams to qualify for A Level and we called her in to discuss subject combinations for the coming year.

But Cissy surprised us by saying, "I don't want A Level. I've always wanted to be an electrician."

Ugandan society is still largely male-dominated, and there is guy-work and there is girl-work. Electrical installation is definitely guy-work, but Cissy was serious about learning a useful trade and this was the one she desired.

We visited a respected training institute and asked the registrar if there were any other females in the electrician program. He answered, "Three out of about eighty." Good enough—she would not be the only girl! At the time of this mailing, Cissy will have begun her two-year course.

Thank you for your love, your prayers, and your financial support.

Peter & Sharon

"What does love look like? It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men."
—*St. Augustine*



Cissy with her O Level Certificate

We welcome your donations.
Checks may be sent to:

St. Nicholas Uganda Children's Fund
P.O. Box 285
Chardon, OH 44024-0285

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