

St. Nicholas Uganda Children's Fund

Newsletter

September 2009

Email: info@ugandachildrensfund.org

"The honest poor can sometimes forget poverty. The honest rich can never forget it."

—G.K. Chesterton



Dear friends,

We are sometimes asked if we operate an orphanage. This is understandable since we often talk about "our children" and the majority of them indeed are orphans. While we are very involved in each of their lives, most of our kids live in households managed by at least one adult. This adult may be a grandparent, an aunt or uncle, a stepmother, an older brother or sister, or a surviving parent, usually in poor health. Each household typically includes children from other relatives who have died of AIDS or other causes.

There is a strong sense of family responsibility in Uganda among all socio-economic classes. When parents die, relatives will step up and take care of the orphaned children, even if they are already struggling to feed their own. This support is sometimes provided lovingly and sometimes grudgingly. Food and shelter are prioritized, and paying for education becomes difficult and often impossible. It's not unusual for a struggling family to send one or more children to live with relatives in a rural village, where their prospects for a decent education are limited and escaping a lifetime of poverty becomes unattainable.

In spite of traditional pressure to care for one's own, some children are completely forsaken. Such was the case with a family of five children who were recommended to us in July of 2005. The Children's Fund

was in its infancy then, and we were paying school fees for around twenty kids. The deputy headmistress at Namungoona Orthodox Primary School approached Sharon to ask for help with food for a family of orphans.

She described them as bright, clean, and well-behaved. They were living on their own in a one-room flat about two kilometers from the school. They attended class without paying school fees, and some of the teachers gave them odd jobs from time to time. Neighbors and friends occasionally helped with food, but the children frequently had nothing to eat. Sharon agreed to buy them maize flour and other staples, and we began paying for school lunches.

Faruk, then 14, was the head of the household. Both parents were dead, and an older sister briefly looked after them until she had a child and ran off with its father. No other family member came forward and the five children were forced to fend for themselves. Their single-room unit was located in a congested, low-lying slum area, but the landlord allowed them to stay rent-free. It's very possible that not only was he moved by their plight, but that he also was impressed by their sense of responsibility in the way that they cared for themselves and for each other.



Zainabu, Aisha, Simon, and Faruk in 2005

At that time, Faruk was in Primary 6. His brother Simon, age 12, was in P5, Aisha, 10, in P4, and Zainabu, 8, in P2. We later met another sister, Sarah, who was 11 and had a school sponsor. In spite of their Muslim names, the children were all Christians and attended church faithfully. By third term 2005, we had assumed all their school expenses and gave them shoes and new uniforms.

The following year, Sarah's individual school sponsorship came to an end and she joined the others in our program. As we came to know them better, we were impressed by their good grades, their neat and clean appearance, and their respectful behavior. We sensed an inner strength in the face of overwhelming adversity. Then in June 2006, they received some devastating news. Their landlord told them that the city had condemned the building and they had one month to vacate the premises.

In order to assess the situation Peter went with Faruk after school to see their home. They left the main road and walked for a few hundred yards through a cramped, downhill maze of dwellings. The building was crumbling but the inside of their room was neat and orderly. A thin curtain divided the girls' sleeping quarters from the boys' area. They slept on mats on the floor.



Peter with Aisha and Zainabu

We decided it was time to take full responsibility for these children. We moved them into a two-room unit near us and near the school. We bought beds, sheets, blankets, and mosquito nets. We pay their rent and give them a food allowance. As with all of our children, we take care of their medical needs.

Faruk is now eighteen and in Senior 3. Simon and Sarah are in S2. Aisha is in Senior 1 at boarding school, and Zainabu is in Primary 6. We've been together for over four years and we are the closest thing to parents that they will ever have. We counsel and advise; we admonish and comfort. To all of you who share with us in this ministry, they are your children too. Thank you.

With sincere appreciation,

Peter & Sharon



Simon carries water to earn a little pocket money

We welcome your donations.
Checks may be sent to:

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

Or you can donate online at
www.ugandachildrensfund.org

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