

# St. NICHOLAS Uganda CHILDREN'S FUND

## Newsletter

December 2016

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"Christmas is most truly  
Christmas when we celebrate it  
by giving the light of love to  
those who need it most."

– Ruth Carter Stapleton



**Desperation and hope bring them to our door.** "Why have you come?" we ask. They reply, "They told us you help children."

A neighbor directed Mary to our office. We found her sitting outside trying to catch her breath after climbing the gentle slope from her home a half mile away. Only twenty-one and with a small baby, Mary suffers from severe pulmonary valve stenosis. Ordinary daily activities cause chest pain, chronic fatigue, and shortness of breath, but her condition is not why she came. She came with and on behalf of her late sister's child.

Alice<sup>1</sup> is thirteen years old and HIV positive. She is receiving antiretroviral therapy to suppress the virus and slow down the progression of the disease. Her mother died of AIDS when Alice was six and her father died the next year. Her young Aunt Mary had recently visited the family village

where she found Alice working as a housegirl for her relatives. Alice had completed seventh grade in a rural school and had performed poorly on the national exams. The family could not afford to send her to secondary school and had no inclination to do so. With an air of resignation, they told Mary, "Why send her to school when she's just going to die anyway."



Mary knew that she also couldn't afford to pay high school tuition, but seeing the hopelessness of Alice's situation, she invited her to come and live with her in the city. She brought Alice to us and after interviewing both of them and reviewing Alice's exam results, we determined that the village school had not prepared her properly for high school. We offered to accept her into our program on the condition that she repeat Primary 7. Alice readily agreed.

Our children attend Alund'Entono Primary School, just a stone's throw from our office. Loosely translated, "Alund'Entono" means "shepherd of the little ones." The Director of the school, Mabel, sets the example for her teaching staff by her love and care for each child. With an average class size of less than thirty, teachers are able to give personal attention that is not possible in the typical Ugandan classroom of one hundred or more, and the children thrive academically, spiritually, and emotionally. We met with Mabel and the head teacher and explained Alice's background and medical condition. We wanted them to understand that discretion was needed so that Alice would be given privacy to take her scheduled medications and avoid being stigmatized by unenlightened classmates.

Our spunky group of P.7 girls happily welcomed Alice into the "family" and she's made friendships which will extend into high school and beyond. These children have just completed their final exams and we all eagerly await the results and the transition to the next stage of their lives.



Alice and her P.7 classmates

<sup>1</sup> Not her real name.

### Things fall apart.

Rebecca and Bisenge are numbered among the millions of working poor in Uganda. Bisenge was employed as a mechanic for a major intercity bus company. Rebecca cared for their two daughters and baby boy and washed clothes for neighbors to make a little extra money. Together they earned enough to afford a one-room apartment, put food on the table, and pay school fees for the girls, Grace and Tereza.

There is no government safety net in Uganda—no welfare, no unemployment benefits, no disability payments. When the unexpected occurs it can be devastating. For families struggling to survive week to week, there is nothing left over to save.

Bisenge was working underneath a sixty-passenger bus when the jack failed. He survived, but the accident damaged his spine rendering him unable to work. Bisenge was more fortunate than if he had been self-employed because the bus company assumed responsibility for his medical expenses. Co-workers contributed food as they were able, and the landlord has been mercifully lenient about the rent. But without Bisenge's income, there was no money for the girls' schooling.



Tereza, Grace, Rebecca, Junior, Bisenge



At twelve years old, Grace was already three years behind other children her age when her father's accident forced her to drop out after fourth grade. The lost year did not diminish her enthusiasm for studies nor her academic potential. Finally completing fifth grade, she ranks near the top of her class and has impressed the teachers with her cheerful confidence. In the mid-year student elections, she was chosen as one of the school prefects.

Only four years old, Tereza was not to be denied. Though often sent home from her previous school for lack of payment, she would return undaunted the next day and sneak back into the classroom. Now in kindergarten at Alund'Entono, she gets excellent grades in all of her subjects with an overall average of 96%.



We and our children wish you all the joy and blessings of Christmas!

*Peter & Sharon*

"May you have the gladness of Christmas which is hope; the spirit of Christmas which is peace; the heart of Christmas which is love."

*— Ada V. Hendricks*

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](http://www.ugandachildrensfund.org)

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