

FRIENDS of M.R.C.H.

NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2001



Mr Mangobe

News from the Chairman

This is the last newsletter while Mr. Munamoto Mangobe is Superintendent. Many of the Friends know him personally. Indeed it was his generous welcome of all visitors to the Home, which made so many of us keen to help. He always spoke well to any group, describing the ways in which the Reverend Matthew Rusike founded the home, and the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, through the Home, continues to welcome children from all corners of Zimbabwe. He remained optimistic through many difficult times, whether these arose from the lack of finance, or staff or the many other aspects which all come to rest on a Superintendent's desk. We thank him and his wife Catherine for their friendship and care and wish him and his family a happy retirement.

The children have health and education problems that cannot be helped adequately through lack of funds. Sponsorship of children is welcome at any time.

We are pleased that we have raised considerably more money this year. Some donations come from regular givers, but several have come from people or churches we do not know. We are keen to publicize the needs of the Home, and the work of the Friends through our newsletter. We hope the Home will display our poster so that any visitors can contact us, and we ask the Home to tell us the names of anyone we may be able to recruit to our mailing list. We have heard that the postage from Zimbabwe is becoming hard to afford, so we hope they recognize how much they can save by sending their appeals through us.

Although we have not qualified to be a charity (largely because we do not control the money we donate to the Home), we can assure our supporters that we take good care of the donations. Our expenses are small, and we even save the Home money by transferring money in sums of about £1000 a time, reducing the bank charges that would be made if donors sent out their donations separately. We are discussing with the Home how we can get a clearer picture of what their financial needs are, and how they spend their money; this helps to ensure that we are not sending money out to be wasted. We also ask for assurances that if money is sent for a specific purpose, they will guarantee to do so; if they find the money is not all needed for the specific purpose we expect them to ask the donor what to do with it. However, for most donations we do not wish to interfere with the decision-making prerogative of the Home.

We rarely have any direct news from visitors to the Home. We are very glad to include Amanda's moving account of her work – please send us any news you have, which helps us to pass it on.

Notes from the Home

The Home is faced with a serious challenge of children who are HIV positive especially the under fives. In July a team of medical Doctors led by Professor Fortune of Leeds Medical Centre in the U.K made a thorough medical check up of all the children and a number of them were found to be HIV positive.

During August 2000 a team, sponsored by Qantas Airways, which included an optician, an Optometrist, a General Practitioner, a Nurse, a Dentist, and an audiovisual specialist, arrived for 10 days Voluntary work. It was important that this team gave of their expertise in order for the not so fortunate to benefit. It was hoped that they in turn would encourage teams of similar nature to continue their services in Zimbabwe. All the children were examined. The Ministry of Health and Child Welfare attached a local doctor to the team for service continuity after the visitors returned home.

Education. MRCH encourages all the children to go to school. They have got a strong educational child sponsorship programme, which is sponsored by various groups.

Creche. 13 between the ages of 3 - 6 years

Children in Primary Education total - 67 Secondary Education - 38 University - 2

Total No of Children 120

Projects.

a) **Piggery** Three rows of pigsties were refurbished at a cost of 19 Zim dollars each and can now accommodate 100 pigs

b) **Poultry** Currently the Home has 432 birds.

c) **Gardening.** Enough vegetables are produced by the children. Plans are underway to grow more varieties in order to improve the children's diet.

Reflections on Placement at Matthew Rusike Children's Home Sept 99 - July 00

By Amanda Spalding

Sept - Oct 1999

Well, here I am in Zimbabwe at last. The months of preparation and panic are over and I'm actually HERE! Driving from the Airport everything looks so strange, There are people everywhere, women with babies on their backs and large loads on their heads. Hope the loads don't fall off and hit the babies! I am horrified at the squalor and poverty all around me as we approach Epworth, Can people really thrive in such an environment, I wonder? It's very hot and everywhere is parched and dried up and covered in red dust. We arrive at MRCH and I'm sort of scared and excited all at once. What will the next 10 months be like? Will I be happy? Everyone seems very friendly here and the children are gorgeous, especially the little ones. I just want to hug them all. They all make me feel so welcome. I think I'm going to like it here.

I'm spending the first couple of months trying all sorts of jobs at MRCH. They need so much help here. I usually work in the crèche in the morning, I love that. I think I am at my best with the little ones. After a few weeks they are beginning to know me and trust me and very slowly I'm learning all their names. Other jobs I'm doing include driving the truck, ironing in the laundry, putting buttons on school shirts, helping out in the office and going into town to do the Banking.

I'm spending the first 2 months staying in the Theological College, which is nice and the students are very friendly, but I shall be glad to move into the Home, as I shall feel more a part of things then. It's a bit disjointed at the moment. After about 10 days I suddenly have a real burst of homesickness. It hits me quite unexpectedly one morning as I look at the photos on my wall of friend's back home. I can't stop crying and feel so stupid. The novelty has suddenly worn off and it seems an awful long time till I go home. Anyway I walk over to the home, have a cuppa with the Australian volunteers, who are so sweet and understanding, then get stuck into the crèche and soon feel fine again.

The weather is so hot now. They call October suicide month here in Zimbabwe, but I love it!

Nov - Dec 1999

I'm really beginning to feel settled now. I'm getting so much support from my Church back home, which is great. The children in my Youth Club have sent me £50, which they raised at a cake stall. I'm going to buy a pig with it, which will hopefully have lots of babies and be a good investment for the home. I move out of the College at the beginning of December, which is really good, It's nice to be with the children in the evenings and help out at bedtime. The rainy season is here now - my goodness can it pour! And my room leaks - I shall have to invent some sort of flood barrier. It will

soon be Christmas. I wonder what that will be like. The other volunteers have all gone away, so I'm the only "murungu"(White person) left in Epworth. Christmas Day dawns really hot and sunny. It seems strange having summer in December. We're all off on a bus trip - 117 of us on a 76 seater bus. You should just hear us belting out carols at the tops of our voices. Next Christmas when I sing carols, I think my heart will be back on that bus. New Years Eve is very special. We have a big party and everyone lets their hair down and dances - even Matron. At midnight we all hug each other and say Gore Idzua(Happy New Year) then Matron calls for silence whilst we pray. Finally everyone rushes outside for a firework display - well, actually just one firework that goes "phut-phut" for about 10 minutes, but the children love it. The celebrations continue on New Years Day with a great big birthday party with lots of cake and fizzy drink. The children all celebrate, as many of them don't know when their birthdays are. What a fantastic Christmas and New Year it's been - I shall never forget it.

Jan - Feb.2000

Well, the celebrations are over, the children go back to school and life gets back to normal again. Over the last few weeks I have gradually been befriending the families down the street in Epworth. At first some were quite hostile, but I started to play with the children, then the mothers became friendlier and now some of the fathers even greet me. The children rush out for hugs now when they see me coming and walk down the road with me holding my hands. I feel like a cross between the Pied Piper and Mary Poppins. It now takes 20 minutes to do the 10-minute walk to the bus stop. Meanwhile, the rain continues to pour. We experience the tail end of Cyclone Elene and we have an outbreak of frogs! I even found one in my handbag. I think its time for a holiday. We go to Bulawayo first and watch England beat Zimbabwe at cricket. Then after a visit to the Matopos Hills, where our jeep gets stuck in mud (a typical African experience) we move on to Victoria Falls, Zambia and Botswana where among other things we see lots of water and lots of elephants. Fantastic. What an experience

March 2000

Definitely the worst month of my stay! I get ill after the Vic Falls trip. The doctor suspects malaria, I have my doubts, but whatever it is I feel lousy for a week or so. Just get back on my feet again and go out with some friends when a car pulls up just near MRCH gate (in broad daylight) 3 men jump out, one points a gun at us and makes us lie down in the road and robs us of everything we have. It must be the scariest moment of my life, but thank God we are not hurt. The subsequent trip to the police station is almost as much as ordeal as the actual attack. It's like something out of the last century.

April 2000

It's taken me a while to get over the events of March. Things are getting "interesting" politically with the elections looming and I get caught up in riots in town. Very scary. How do I always manage to be in the wrong place at the wrong time? Think I need another holiday - South Africa this time and Swaziland. It's all so beautiful, but too much to see in not enough time.

May 2000

It's all brewing up now on the political front. Elections next month. Great long petrol queues are a familiar sight now. A friend of mine queued 9 hours one day. One chilly evening (yes its winter now) Pauline arrives at MRCH. She's brought in by social workers but no one is sure of her history yet. She's five and is just wearing a ragged cotton dress and purple plastic sandals. She's cold and looks so lost and frightened. I give her a bath, she's filthy. I find her some clean, warm clothing and go to dispose of the old ones. She fiercely hangs on to the purple sandals. I give her some tea. She's so hungry. After tea I just give her lots of hugs till bedtime. Pauline and I become very close after that first day, she gets used to her new surroundings amazingly quickly. She has a lovely smile, which is all the more endearing as she has no front teeth. I have decided to become her sponsor, which means I shall pay all her school fees until she is 18. Quite a commitment, but I feel it is a privilege that I have the opportunity to give her the best possible start in life.

June 2000

Dadirai, aged 12 is dying of AIDS. She picked up the disease whilst in a foster home, she was abused by the son of the foster father. Such a lovely girl. It is so sad. Yet she still manages to smile

despite being so ill. She's now at Mashambanzou, an Aids Care centre. Where I am spending some time. I love being there and playing with the children. They're amazing. Remember that pig I bought? Well she's had 9 babies and I'm so excited. A big litter for her first, which bodes well for the future. I think she'll prove to be a good investment, Atmosphere very tense as elections loom. I have to go into hiding. It's not safe for a "murungue" to be seen in Epworth, I go and stay with a friend from Church on the "safe" side of town. It's so frustrating as I only have a few weeks left

(Sadly Dadirai died in November 2000)

July 2000

The elections have passed peacefully and my time is nearly over. Where has the time gone? Have I really been here nearly 10 months? The thought of going home is a bit scary, will I cope? Have I changed? I think so - what about my friends? It's all going to be so different.

July 8th

Time to say farewell. Driving away in the truck to the Airport - everyone's shouting and waving goodbye - I'm crying. I promise then I will be back. I'm clutching little Pauline on my lap. I say goodbye to her at the Airport. It's so hard. Does she understand? I wonder. How can I desert her? Before I know what's happening I'm airborne, leaving behind a beautiful country, lots of friends and so many unforgettable memories.

August 2000

Well, here I am back home in grey, wet chilly England. Or is it home? Zimbabwe still feels like home to me. I miss it like mad - all the big open spaces and that beautiful African sky and golden sunsets. It feels so claustrophobic here. Most of all I miss the Staff and the children at MRCH especially my beloved Pauline. What an amazing year it has been and what a privilege it was to have had the chance to live and work at Matthew Rusike. I can see just how much I have changed. Above all the experience has made me a lot more spiritual. My faith has grown in leaps and bounds. God was there with me the whole time, helping me along and answering my prayers, especially when things were tough. I know I couldn't have made it without Him. I'm now praying and asking God to guide me in the right direction for this next phase of my life. I wonder what the future holds? What I do know for sure is that one day I will return to Zimbabwe.

Unabridged version - typed from a copy written by Amanda Spalding. August 2000.

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Shirley Richer

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