

Dear Friends of Kids of Africa!



Our village is doing well. It's a bit dusty and our football field is feeling it. But life at the village is good. Education remains our greatest challenge and opportunity. We had an outbreak of chicken-pox among our children; luckily, it passed easily for most and gave way to good health for those few who suffered. Otherwise, there are minor challenges to report, such as the persistent problems with our water purification equipment and the daily breakdown of electricity. But that should not be a cause for complain.

The arrival of Teddy, aged about two years and Joseph and Lucy, both aged two weeks has lifted our spirits as well as the number of our children to a total of 78 children, by now.



Joseph, two weeks, the day he joined us

From the little biographical information we could obtain, Joseph and Lucy both lost their widowed, terminally-ill mother in labour. Teddy, aged about two, was abandoned by his parent. He was found weak, malnourished and dehydrated in a pit-latrine in Kampala, the capital of Uganda. When we received him on, we sensed that his rescue was tight: without it, he would not have seen another day's dawn.

Tragedies like this are among the most heartbreaking stories we experience. This is not only because of the near-death of an entirely innocent child. I am equally shaken by the desperation, which its parents must have felt. For sure, no parent leaves his or her two-year old child behind easily. Every time we encounter such situations, we sense the agony, which the parent must have felt before concluding, she/he has nothing better to bestow to her immaculate baby than abandonment and likely exhaustion.

In a way, Teddy's parents are just as needy of help. But unfortunately, we rarely get the opportunity to meet parents who abandon their children. If only we could help them back on their feet and restore their self-confidence. If only we had that opportunity more often, maybe we could prevent some of these agonizing tragedies for parents and their children.



Teddy, a week after he joined Kids of Africa

Thus, as we received Teddy, our thoughts and prayers are equally with his parents –even though unknown to us. We pray that they will get back on their feet. They are welcome to visit and maybe even rejoin their son. In the meantime we shall care for Teddy in the same way, in which we would hope to be helped if we had suffered Teddy's fate – left abandoned, unable to care for him. Who knows – maybe Teddy will be able to lend a hand to others, even to his parents when he matures? It's a dream which keeps us going. When I reflect on it, I often think of a poem authored by John Donne in 1642,

No man is an island

*No man is an island,
Entire of itself.
Each is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.
As well as if a promontory were.
As well as if a manner of thine own
Or of thine friend's were.
Each man's death diminishes me,
For I am involved in mankind.
Therefore, send not to know
For whom the bell tolls,
It tolls for thee.*

(John Donne, Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, 1642)

In our work at Kids of Africa, I am often reminded of the timeless wisdom which shines through these words. To use another metaphor, humanity is like an enormous spider web. If you touch it anywhere, you set the whole thing trembling. Sometime during the extraordinary week that followed the assassination of John F. Kennedy in Dallas, the newspapers carried the story that when that crusty old warhorse, Andrej Gromyko, signed the memorial volume at the US embassy in Moscow, there were tears in his eyes. I do not think that you have to be either naïve or sentimental to believe that they were real tears. Surely it was not that the Soviet Foreign Minister had any love for the young American President, but that he recognized that in some sense every man was diminished by that man's death. In some sense I believe that the death of Kennedy was a kind of death for his enemies no less than for his countrymen.

Just as John Donne believed that any man's death, when we are confronted with it, reminds us of our common destiny as human beings: to be born, to live, to struggle a while, and finally to die. We're all of us in it together.

Nor does it need anything as cataclysmic as the death of a President to remind us of this. As we move around this world and we act with kindness, perhaps, or with indifference, or with hostility, toward the people we meet, we too are setting the great spider web a-tremble. The life that I touch for good or ill will touch another life, and that in turn another, until who know where the trembling stops or in what far place and time my touch will be felt. Our lives are linked together. No man is an island.

This is more than a dream: it's a call to act and a cause to share our privileges and our burdens. Uganda is not a poor country. It is vastly wealthy because it is gifted by nature and by its friendly and creative people. That is what will create its own wealth and development. And with that wealth Uganda will be able to afford its own health and education and become an anchor of peace and stability in the centre of Africa. That is where a country as romantic and timeless and beautiful as Uganda deserves to be. And that is where we need it to be.

Because no man and no country is an island.

Yours truly,

