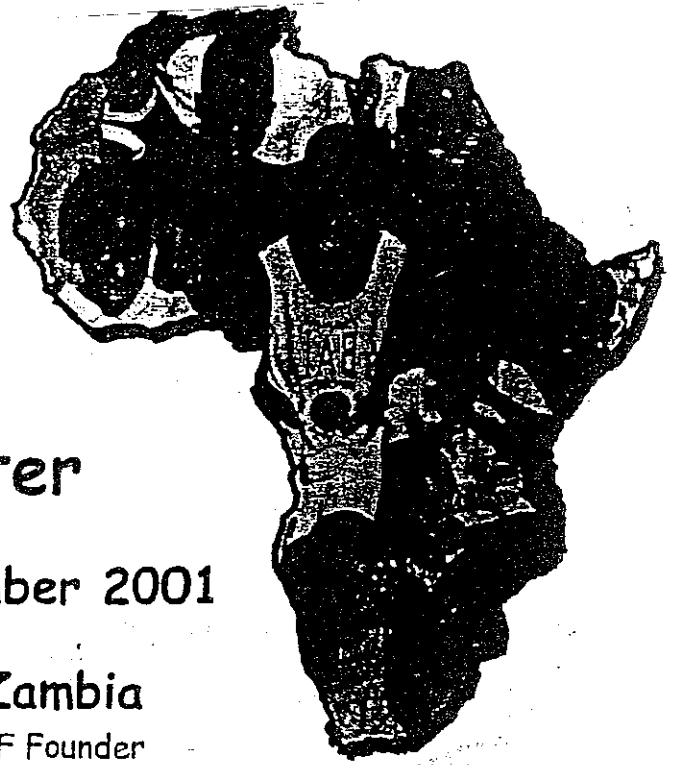


The ZAMBIAN CHILDREN'S FUND



Chishawasha Newsletter

September 2001

News from Zambia

By Kathe Padilla, ZCF Founder

An Update on My Life in Zambia—and the Children We're Helping

On May 1, I moved into a house in a nice middle-class neighborhood in Olympia Park, Lusaka. It is a large three-bedroom house with porches in both the front and the back. The yards are very large, with beautiful flowers and flowering trees everywhere. There are also mature guava, avocado, citrus, mango, and papaya trees. We have planted gardens in back and are now harvesting tomatoes, onions, Swiss chard, lettuce, sweet potatoes, rape, Chinese cabbage, and impwa (an indigenous small eggplant). A young Zambian woman named Gertrude moved in with me to help raise the children and help me keep up with the house and gardens.

By May 23 we took in our first two children. By the end of July we had 16 children living with us between the ages of two and 14, and we know of more who are hoping to join the family. Two of the bedrooms are large enough to fit four bunk beds that are now being built for us. The smaller, third bedroom is where I sleep, and it will also accommodate three or four infants. Once all the beds are made, we will be faced with the dilemma of where to put all the clothes, shoes, books, and school supplies that are currently stacked in boxes in the bedrooms. We hope to hire a carpenter to build shelves and cupboards in the living room, bedrooms, and hallway so that each child can have his or her own cupboard and we will have a place to keep clothes and shoes by age and size.

All of the children are very happy to be here and are very helpful around the house and in the gardens. When they first arrive they can't believe everyone actually has three meals every day. None of them has ever had running water or electricity in their homes. Even the little boys love taking a bath every day. But we have to teach all of them things that I have always taken for granted, such as the need to turn off

the water, that the oven and stovetop are hot, etc. But the education in our household goes both ways. I am constantly impressed by how ingenious the children can be in solving minor everyday problems and how automatically they translate things into three different languages for each other. So although life in Zambia continues to be difficult, having the children makes it a joy to be here.

The Story of Baby Daniel

On the evening of July 10 a big white truck with "Police Department, Special Victim's Unit" painted on it drove up into our yard. Two police officers stepped out, and I thought, "This is not a good sign." But then my friend Kavwumbu stepped out with a baby in her arms, and I knew she was bringing the baby to us. Kavwumbu is a very dedicated young woman who works with abused children at the YWCA Child in Crisis Center. The four of them came into the house and sat down. Kavwumbu initially just handed the baby to me, but I'm sure he had never seen a white person before, and I was obviously very scary for him to see, so I called Gertrude to take him. Gertrude is the young Zambian woman who lives with me at the house and helps care for the children. The baby was quite happy to be held by Gertrude, even though he had never seen her before. We commented on that and were told that he immediately called every adult woman or man Mommy or Daddy. He was extremely dirty and very small for the two years that the police were telling us was his age. However, he was able to speak some and could walk and make his needs known.

The police told us they had found him the previous evening abandoned near a community center in Matero compound. Matero is a very large, extremely poor compound a few miles from the neighborhood where we live. It consists of thousands of one- and two-room concrete block houses that usually have neither electricity nor water. Most of the floors are concrete, and the roofs are pieces of corrugated iron. The police also said they had spent the day trying to find someone who knew anything about this baby, but had not been very successful. The only information they had was that someone who recognized him knew his mother had left his father and the baby some months back and that his father had just put him in the area of the community center and walked away. No one had seen him since.

We assured the police that the baby would be well cared for and loved, and they said their goodbyes. As the huge truck pulled out of the yard, I thought, "This is not going to sit too well with the neighbors. First they think I am taking in a bunch of street children who are going to run wild and steal from them, and now the police are coming and going from our house."

We had been sorting clothing for some of the older children when we were interrupted, so we went back to finding clothes that fit everyone and putting the rest back into boxes. Within 10 minutes the baby was comfortable with my white skin and allowed me to hold him. So the first thing I did was find him some warm pajamas (it is winter here) and undress him for a bath. I was horrified to find him covered with large open, oozing sores on his neck, back, bottom, and arms. They were obviously painful, but he enjoyed the feel of clean water on his skin and never complained while I washed and dried him. Since we had no diapers, I used a soft

baby blanket as a diaper and put on a one-piece baby pajama. I couldn't help thinking as I was dressing him, "These pajamas are size 12 months. My children were all wearing this size when they were six months old." The baby was very small, except for his bulging tummy. With his tiny arms and legs, both his tummy and his head looked disproportionately large. But he was surprisingly happy. Gertrude made him some n'shima, a cornmeal dumpling that is the staple food here in Zambia. He obviously was used to eating it and ate every bite.

Although my bedroom was designated the "baby's room," he slept with Gertrude the first night so he wouldn't get scared by my white face in the middle of the night. I heard him cry around 2:00 a.m., but he stopped and all seemed well, so I went back to sleep. When I got up at 6:00 a.m., Gertrude told me neither of them had gotten back to sleep. Once she had changed him and started to drift off to sleep, he sat up beside her and patted her arm, saying, "Mommy, Mommy" until she looked up at him. Then he burst out laughing. After this had happened three times, she gave up trying to sleep. The baby was so excited to have a "mommy" that he couldn't sleep.

That day he ate well, but slept a lot, and even when he wasn't sleeping lay around quietly in either the living room or the bedroom. The second night he slept in my room. Again he woke up in the middle of the night, and I changed him, but luckily he went back to sleep. I got up at my usual 6:00 a.m., and started working on my computer. (I find I can get the most work done on my computer before everyone else in the house is awake.) By 8:00 I realized I had not heard a sound from the baby. As soon as I looked in on him, he raised his head from the bed and gave me a big smile. I was surprised to find him quietly lying there in wet and dirty diapers, not moving and not making a sound. This child was obviously used to being left alone for hours (or more) with no one to take care of his needs. It no longer even occurred to him to cry out to get someone to take care of him. I got him up, bathed him, put Neosporin on his sores, and gave him some breakfast.

The baby's second day here, he walked around a little more and was constantly asking for more food, even when he had just eaten a large amount. One of the things I have learned here in Zambia is that when children who haven't eaten well for months—or maybe even years—are allowed as much food as they want, they don't have any sense of when to stop eating. Their little bodies have so much need, they just can't seem to turn it off. So they have to be taught that they will have another meal in just a few hours. After a few days they stop asking for food constantly. The second day the baby was here, though, I really noticed how much he just lay around. The combination of malnutrition, not being used to being given anything to play with, and never getting attention made him extremely passive. I had never seen anything like a two-year-old just lying around all day and found it quite disturbing.

When the police first brought us the baby, they told us they would continue trying to find out more information about him and get back to us the next day or as soon as possible. We have yet to see them or hear a word from them. After the baby had been with us a week, we decided that we probably weren't going to hear much more

about his history and had better name him. We held a family meeting and voted on three choices. In the end, he was named Daniel.

After two weeks of living with us, Daniel is acting like a normal, active, intelligent two-year-old. He constantly gets into everything, talks almost nonstop in three different languages (Bemba, Nyanja, and English), and tells us when his diaper is wet or takes it off himself and gives it to someone. His favorite word is typical for any two-year-old, "n'cana," which means "I won't" or "I refuse." With a doctor's care his open sores are drying up and disappearing. They were caused by a fly that bites a baby and lays its eggs under the baby's skin. When the eggs hatch into larvae, they start eating their host and cause infections and open, running sores. Daniel has also been treated for intestinal parasites. He has grown a full inch in the two weeks he has been here, and his hair is growing so fast it's already starting to curl.

Daniel has yet to show any signs of missing either his mother or his father. He calls me either "Mommy" or "Ambuya" (Grandmother). I suspect he was handed off to so many different people in his short life that he learned to simply accept anyone who cared for him as his mother or father. In fact, even now whenever he sees a man he immediately starts saying, "Daddy, Daddy."

A funny thing happened with Daniel one day when I had to go to Western Union and then the grocery store. While I was gone, two women who have a preschool for orphans came by. They have referred a few children to us but have visited here only once before. One of the women is Zambian, but the other is an Irish nun (white). When Daniel saw Sister Marie, he immediately ran to her saying, "Ambuya, Ambuya" (Grandmother, Grandmother). She leaned over to pick him up, but he suddenly realized she wasn't his ambuya at all. He immediately yelled (in Bemba), "You're not my grandmother. Don't pick me up! You're not my grandmother!" The women stayed only a little while, but Daniel kept repeating the whole time they were here, "You're not my grandmother!" I was the first (and only) white person he had ever seen. Poor child had no idea there was anyone else in the world with the same-colored skin as his white ambuya.

Daniel is now a beautiful, happy toddler with lots of older brothers and sisters who all dote on him.

(Editor's note: Kathe wrote this story the end of July. On August 14 she added this update: "Yesterday was one of my favorite days of the month in that I weighed and measured everyone. I do that once a month. Please add to the story of Daniel that in the first month he was here he grew two inches. I can actually see a difference in him. All of the other children grew at least half an inch, and most of them grew one inch or more. Rank, a 14-year-old boy who has lived with us for two months now, has grown two inches and put on 18 pounds. He doesn't have a pound of extra weight. He was just starving before he came." We don't have a picture of Daniel yet. But Kathe will bring film to be developed when she returns to the Tucson next month for a while. See the last page for information on Kathe's return.)