

# St. Nicholas Uganda Children's Fund Newsletter

March 2011

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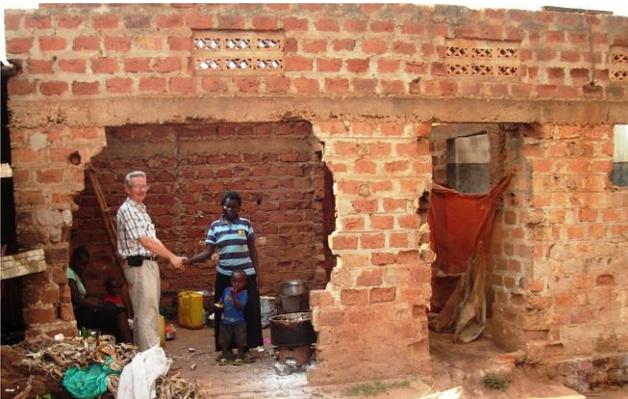
"Life becomes harder for us when we live for others, but it also becomes richer and happier."

—Albert Schweitzer



## Cooking Cow Heads

"She's a hardworking lady." Frank and I were walking down to the main road to buy bunk beds for one of our child-headed households. Frank indicated a middle-aged woman in a striped shirt, cooking in big pots inside the shell of a building that looked like it had survived a wartime bombing. "She cooks the heads and feet of cows and sells to these local people. The family also sleeps there." Although I'd seen my share of miserable hovels during our time in Uganda, this was extreme. "How many children does she have?" "Four or five, including a girl who just completed P7."



*The Restaurant*

In Uganda, many working parents can scrape together enough money for primary school, but the significantly higher cost of secondary school is impossible for a family income at subsistence level. We are especially sympathetic to girls since their prospects are limited. In this particular case the

daughter, Margaret, was sixteen—three years older than her classmates and physically mature. She performed well on the Primary Leaving Exams, and we felt that she deserved a chance at high school.

We visited the place and inquired about the menu. One piece of head: 13¢. The foot: 43¢. Vegetables are extra. We entered their home—a single bedroom located behind the "restaurant." The roof was made of papyrus reeds covered by a sheet of plastic. We proposed boarding school for Margaret but to our surprise she declined.



*The Bedroom*

"I will be a day scholar," she said. "I must be here in the evening to take care of the small children while mother works."

Cow heads got Margaret through primary school; now it's our turn to help!

## The Boy Nobody Wanted

It was October and the final term of the school year was well under way. He was waiting on the bench outside our office when we arrived in the afternoon, looking small and forlorn. He was not wearing a school uniform so it was unlikely that he was sent away from class for lack of school fees. No, this boy was not attending school at all.

We usually don't interview children unless a parent or guardian is present, but as he was there we decided to get some basic information to determine if he qualified for a second interview with an adult.

Joshua was eleven years old and hadn't been in school since 2009 when he was in third grade (P3). A neighbor had spotted him outside the house during a school day and told him to "go ask those *bazungu* for help with school fees." We began with the usual preliminary questions and his answers were sparse and disconcerting.

"Where is your mother?"

"She died."

"Where is your father?"

"I don't know."

"Who do you stay with?"

"Auntie."

"Is she a relative?"

"No."

"What is her name?"

"I don't know."

"How did you come to stay with Auntie?"

"Aunt Anna brought me."

"Is Aunt Anna a sister to your mother or to your father?"

"I don't know."

He did know that he was a twin and that his brother died when they were born. He also knew that his mother had supported the family by selling fish. We explained to him that he must come back with Auntie. When he didn't return, we thought we might not see him again, but a few weeks later he appeared with a young woman named Christine and her nursing baby. Christine could tell us about herself and her baby but she didn't know much about Joshua. It seems her friend Anna had brought him to her to work as a houseboy. She told us that she had no objection to Joshua attending school, but she didn't have money for school fees.

In order to complete the story, we had to meet Aunt Anna. Christine said that Anna came to town about once a month and that she would send her to our office the next time she saw her. We were becoming fond of the boy and were touched by his quiet persistence, so when two months passed without seeing him, we were concerned. We were about to try to find his home when he showed up,

serious as always, with Anna. Now we could fill in the missing pieces. Anna had been a neighbor of Joshua's mother in a village north of Kampala. The father had run away long ago and yes, the mother was a fishmonger. On a particular day in 2009, she left Joshua in Anna's care while she traveled to Lake Victoria to buy fish. She never returned. A few days later, some fishermen came and told Anna that she died at the lake. There were no details. No family stepped up to care for the boy and Anna didn't want the responsibility, so she "gave" him to Christine to help out around the house.

Joshua sat quietly during the interview, his face expressing neither hope nor despair. But when we told him he could begin school tomorrow, he smiled for the first time since we met him three months earlier.



Once orphaned and alone, he is now a part of our St. Nicholas family.

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)**

**The St. Nicholas Uganda Children's Fund is a registered non-profit 501(c)(3) organization eligible to receive tax-deductible contributions.**



*Sharon and teens*