

St. Nicholas Uganda Children's Fund Newsletter

June 2010

Email: info@ugandachildrensfund.org

"My job is to take care of the possible and trust God with the impossible."

—Ruth Bell Graham



"A Tale of Two Siblings"

It was the middle of the school break and Robert was trying to do his job, taking care of the possible. He was moving about the neighborhood, offering to carry water for the elderly, the busy, the lazy, and anyone else with 100 shillings (5 cents) who was unwilling or unable to walk down to the local spring and haul two forty-pound jerrycans of water back up the hill. He also was happy to carry their garbage to the burning pit for a few more shillings.

Through hard work and a little help from relatives, Bob had managed to complete the first four years of secondary school and receive his O Level Certificate. Eighteen years old, he was only two years behind his age-mates. His mother, Edith, had been an ethnic Tutsi from Rwanda and had died five years earlier. His father, John, was a village peasant. He was now lame and could no longer work. Bob wanted to complete the final two years of advanced secondary school, but his hopes seemed unlikely to be realized.

On that particular day, Bob looked up and saw an unusual sight. Walking down from the main road was a *muzungu*. It was rare to see a white man in this overcrowded slum neighborhood, but there I was, picking my way down the rutted path. I was searching for a certain small primary school in order to collect a document necessary to enroll one of our girls in high school.

"Good morning, sir. I'd like to tell you my story."

Now this was in early 2007 and we had neither an office nor an established application process. So I listened, sitting with Bob on a rough wooden bench in front of the school.

"Bleak House"

Bob stayed with an uncle, not an actual relative, but the husband of Bob's aunt. Uncle Henry lived in a three-room house with his five children, his mother, and his mother's sister. Henry's wife, Bob's actual aunt, had run off and left him with the kids. In spite of that, Henry allowed Bob to sleep in a tiny storage room near the house.

Bob spoke quietly, sharing the details of his life without self-pity. He had a burning desire to continue his education and asked if we could help, even in a small way. There was something compelling about his earnest but gentle approach. We agreed to enroll him in Senior 5.

He successfully finished high school in November 2008, and sat for the A Level national exam. He passed the exam, but did not perform well enough to qualify for university. He wanted to repeat Senior 6, but based on his results we were considering vocational training. It was at this point when Bob appeared at our office with a lovely young woman—his sister Margaret.



Margaret

Margaret was seventeen and had just completed O Level. She and Bob were now staying in their own place—a single room that was built to be a shop, not a home.

Margaret had worked her way through high school by scrubbing classroom floors and cleaning the school compound in exchange for school fees. While her classmates were studying or socializing, Margaret was on her hands and knees, toiling until the school closed at dusk. Her opportunity to continue in A Level evaporated when the headmaster fired her to hire one of his own relatives.

Now she was washing clothes, dishes, and kitchen utensils for neighbors. From their combined odd jobs, she and Bob were paying the rent, providing a little food, and buying some of Margaret's school supplies.

We readily accepted Margaret into the program and she did not disappoint. No longer worried about finding school fees, and with all her academic needs met and time to study, Margaret blossomed as a student, achieving outstanding results. She is currently in her second and final year.

"Great Expectations"

Continuing his pursuit of the possible, Bob found a steady job, making fresh chapattis, a local treat, and selling them on the main road near their home. The income was irregular; his take-home depended on how much he sold in a day. Working from dawn until after dark, he was able to earn enough for the two of them to move into a regular room, one with a door and a window.



Deacon John Cox with Robert at his home

When Bob first brought Margaret to us, we told him that he had to put his post-graduate education on hold. He needed to work full time, at least until Margaret completed Senior 6. A year later, we were

quite surprised when Bob brought us his results from retaking the national exam.

It seems that Bob convinced the head teacher at Namungoona High School to allow him to clean classrooms in the evenings in exchange for the fees required to sit for the exam a second time. Bob did not attend a single class, but somehow managed to improve his score by 50%, qualifying him for acceptance into university.

Bob knew I would challenge him about their survival if he went back to school and he was prepared for my questions. He told me that his older sister Teddy separated from her husband and moved in with Bob and Margaret. Teddy is a small-scale vendor at Owino Market and is now contributing to their rent and upkeep. Bob is investigating universities on our side of town with day programs. He knows that with his family obligations, boarding is out of the question.

Bob trusted God with the impossible and never stopped working on the possible. He and Margaret have a bright future that seemed unattainable three years ago. We are blessed to have been an instrument of this transformation. And without your faithful support and prayers, these two lives and many others would have taken a very different course.

We recently asked Margaret how things were going at home. She broke into a huge smile and said, "We are very fine. These days we almost never go to bed hungry!"

"Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.' "

—Matthew 19:26

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