

St Nicholas Uganda Children's Fund

Newsletter

December 2008

Email: info@ugandachildrensfund.org

"We must not seek the child Jesus in the pretty figures of our Christmas cribs. We must seek Him among the undernourished children who have gone to bed tonight with nothing to eat . . ." –Oscar Romero



How many times can a child be orphaned?

This is the question we asked ourselves when we heard the latest report concerning two of our children. Florence, 11, and Caroline, 8, joined our program three years ago. Their parents had died a few years earlier and they were staying with an elderly grandmother. Within a year, we were told she was unable to earn enough money to pay the rent and the three of them moved across town to stay with the grandmother's sister. Although we usually require that our supported students live and attend school in our local area, we made an exception due to the girls' difficult circumstances.

A year later, Florence and Caroline came to tell us that their grandmother had died. Her sister, the girls' great-aunt, agreed to continue to care for them. This past summer, we were informed that the great-aunt had also passed away. The girls were now staying with an older half-brother who was lame and confined to a wheelchair. This was a short-term solution as the brother was unable to work and was himself dependent on the charity of relatives. A family meeting was scheduled and we asked them to keep us informed as to the decision regarding the girls. If no one was willing to accept responsibility for them, we were faced with the prospect of putting them in a boarding school, something we prefer not to do for primary school children.

In September, the girls came to see us along with a cousin-aunt, the daughter of the lady who had recently died. Aunt Justine lives about an hour away from us, together with her two grown daughters. Florence and Caroline were spending the school holiday with them and would move in full-time at the end of the 3rd school term. There is a good primary school nearby and of course we committed to continue sponsoring the girls' education. We rejoiced at this positive turn of events and pray that these children have finally found a secure home they can call their own.



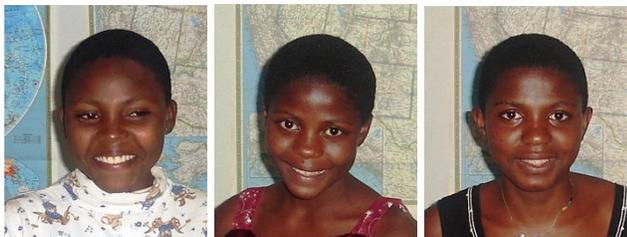
Florence and Caroline

Suddenly forsaken. For most children who have lost both parents, there is a time lag between their deaths. A child may not have known a father who died years ago but knew well the mother who cared for him until she herself passed away, often after a lengthy illness. Orphanhood becomes a gradual process. Such was not the case for Rebecca, 16, Gladys, 14, and Hilda, 12. They went from a position of relative security to complete abandonment in one month.

Their father had a steady job driving a *matatu*, a mini-bus taxi. He paid the rent for their one-room apartment, put food on the table, and enabled Gladys and Hilda to attend seventh grade in a decent but inexpensive primary school. Rebecca was a day scholar at a local secondary school.

The father had no other wives; there were no stepchildren from another husband. It was a rare example in Uganda of an intact nuclear family. Then, earlier this year, the father became too ill to work. He died in June. His wife died in July.

Somehow, the parents had managed to pay school fees for second term. But now the girls were on their own, bereft, with a frighteningly uncertain future. Relatives of the father came and took his clothes but mercifully left the furniture with the girls. No relative from either side came forward for their upkeep. Thank God for kindly neighbors! The landlord generously agreed to allow the girls to stay rent-free until they finished their education. Another neighbor helps with food when she has any to spare, but the girls often go to bed hungry. We told the neighbor that the girls would be enrolled in boarding school next year and she graciously offered to look after them during the school holidays.



Gladys

Hilda

Rebecca

In spite of their personal tragedy, Hilda, Gladys, and Rebecca maintain an attitude of quiet optimism and grace. They are thrilled that they will be attending boarding school. They know that their education is secure and that they will be enjoying three meals a day.

The Cow House. Last year, a friend from Gulu in northern Uganda asked us to help him purchase materials to build a "cow house." He and his wife, both HIV positive, had been selected to receive a milk cow from a local charity and were required to provide proper shelter for the animal before they could take possession. Our friend died this past summer after completing the construction. Milk from

the cow continues to provide a small income for his widow and their small boy.

Jesus began His earthly life in a "cow house." His mother gave birth amidst the sounds and smells of stable animals: sublime identification with those who live in poverty and humility. As we prepare to celebrate the solemn and festive event of His birth, may we remember the Child who was born "to proclaim good news to the poor."

Your prayers and your financial support are making a real difference in these young lives. We thank you with all the joy of the season.

Sincerely,

Peter & Sharon

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

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



Secondary students with Frank, Sharon, & Agnes