

St. NICHOLAS Uganda CHILDREN'S FUND

Newsletter

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"Christmas is a necessity. There has to be at least one day of the year to remind us that we're here for something else besides ourselves."

—Eric Sevareid



This is the time of year when gift-giving becomes a challenge. We look at the names on our shopping list and we're overwhelmed trying to decide what each recipient may need or want. Popular magazines and the internet are ready to offer helpful advice: "Gift Ideas for the Person Who Has Everything." Here in Uganda, we sometimes face the opposite problem: "Gift Ideas for the Person Who Has Nothing."

In the slums where we work, the families of our children are undeniably below any internationally established "poverty level." Every day brings the challenge of "looking for what to eat" and any unexpected expense can send the household into an economic tailspin. Many times we've been called upon to help a family through a financial crisis. This assistance is usually in response to an immediate need: restocking a vegetable stand, providing medical treatment, supplying food for a week or two, or paying a few months rent to avoid eviction. Always the goal is to get the family back on its feet before the crisis turns into a disaster.

And then we met the family who had nothing but the clothes on their backs and a temporary roof over their heads. Nulu and her six children are staying in an unfinished flat at the sufferance of the owner. The man both pities them and also needs someone to watch over the property until the building is complete and he can rent it out. The mud brick structure has a dirt floor and the walls are unplastered both inside and out so that

water enters through open chinks whenever it rains. Nulu tries to earn a few shillings any way she can—washing clothes for neighbors or stacking bricks at a nearby construction site.



Just a year ago, this young woman of twenty-eight was a dutiful wife in a stable relationship. Her husband was providing for the family and paying school fees for the children. Nulu faithfully fulfilled her responsibilities as a wife and a mother. And then it all fell apart. He began consorting with an unsavory crowd, drinking too much, and using drugs. The family income dried up and the children had to drop out of school. As he became more desperate and delusional, he turned to a witchdoctor for help. The price of financial recovery and future wealth was the blood of their firstborn son. Eight-year-old Ibra was to be offered up as a ritual sacrifice.

As soon as she became aware of these nefarious plans, Nulu gathered up the children and escaped to the house of a friend from church. It was this friend who put her in touch with the man who owns the unfinished house. For now, her husband has no idea where she and the children are. How, in a teeming city of 2.5 million people, did this family in hiding come to our attention? Incredibly, our relationship with Nulu had begun eight years before we ever met.

In 2005, we rescued a family of five abandoned children from a condemned building in a nearby slum. The oldest was

in sixth grade. We moved them into a small apartment near our office and have been caring for them ever since. Abandoned by their dying mother after the death of their father years earlier, they remembered very little about the rest of the family. All they could tell us was that they had an older sister whom they knew as "Sarah." They didn't know that her real name was Nulu.

After their father's death, Nulu was taken by family friends to another town while the younger five were sent to a village. Neither situation turned out to be permanent. Nulu managed to complete seventh grade and then was sent back to Kampala—alone at the age of fifteen. She had lost all contact with her brothers and sisters. She entered into an informal marriage, and produced her first daughter at the age of sixteen.

Meanwhile, the younger kids had also been abandoned—to that very place where we originally found them eight years ago. They and Nulu were living only a few miles apart, but it was just last year when Nulu was finally able to locate them. The boys were happy that the family was reunited, and the girls were thrilled to have an older sister.

Their joy was short-lived, however, as Nulu's home situation deteriorated and she was forced to take refuge in the unfinished house. Providentially, it was located halfway between our home and our office, and when one of the boys appealed to us on behalf of Nulu and her children we were able to respond.

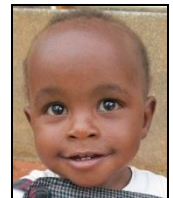
Christmas for Nulu came early this year. We found outfits for the kids from our supply of donated clothes. We gave the family two foam mattresses that had been returned by former boarding students, and we bought papyrus mats to cover the dirt floors. A dress made by a tailoring student fit Nulu perfectly.



Our shopping list is not yet complete. This is just the beginning of our intervention and we're trusting God to show us the best way to proceed. For now we're providing a weekly food allowance, and the children will be back in school next term.

In the parable of the good shepherd, we are not told that the one lost sheep was the most valuable. It was the one most helpless and in desperate need that had supreme value in the eyes of Divine Love.

May your Christmas be blessed with peace, love, and joy.



Peter & Sharon

"The poor are not annoyances; they are our neighbors, our own flesh, and we hide ourselves from them and their need at our own peril."

—Fr. Lawrence Farley

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

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