

WHY AFRICA?

September 2008

My, what a year this has been! When I left Uganda in Spring 2007, I had no idea what was ahead of me – and I am thankful for that! I had some thoughts of what might happen as Rita and I planned for deputation in May/June but we had no idea she would need major surgery just as we were about to begin. After a busy summer, I was preparing to start Bible Studies at International Christian College in Glasgow – however, we were shocked and devastated to lose my Dad so suddenly and unexpectedly. But God knows our appointed times of birth and death and what a blessing to know that my Dad is in heaven eternally. I was told a wonderful testimony by one of my Dad's close friends who had a dream the night before my Dad died. He saw Dad with many friends who are already in glory. He woke from the dream wondering why my Dad was there and the next day he heard the news of his death. His words to me were: "Heaven knew he was coming and they were expecting him".

Still reeling from shock and grief, I started my studies in September and was astounded to realise how much I enjoyed them! I valued both the lecturers and students who made the subjects so interesting. Most classes were very interactive and with such an international student body, the discussions were so valuable. I appreciate the work of ICC immensely, both for their academic ability and also the 'down-to-earth-ness'! I also valued having my own single accommodation room that afforded me the space to rest and grieve in private, I also really enjoyed being back in Glasgow, church-life, music, friends, etc.

I have had a truly wonderful summer. I was very tired when I completed the studies in June, as I had tried to balance studies with deputation and family and friends. I had a spectacular trip to Israel which I thoroughly enjoyed and then came back to Scotland and just had lots of time with my family. After six years in Africa it was

wonderful to have such an open time to relax and have fun (and put on weight!). I was especially thankful for time with my three nieces – Shannon, Rachael and Corrina. I really feel they have got to know the 'ordinary' Marsali, not the weird Aunty that comes and goes from Africa.



My sister and my three nieces

It would take too long to speak about the many ups and downs of the year but I would like to concentrate now on answering the title of this newsletter – Why Africa?

Many of you know that my calling to the work in Africa was gradual but strong. I was happy in my life and work in Scotland when I starting feeling a great desire to work in Africa. I was sure I was to go with AIM, but I then had no idea to which country or to what kind of work. After initially thinking I was to work in rural community health, all changed and I was asked to consider working with a Ugandan Christian team working with street kids. I said yes, that yes has stayed yes, and it has grown into a stronger yes as the years pass by. My involvement with Dwelling Places has been a roller coaster of highs and lows; I often describe it as the best job in the world but also the most difficult at times. Our ministry to reach and rescue children living on the streets is a privilege to be a part of. It has grown into a multi-disciplinary team including a director, administrator and accountant, social workers, teachers and

nurses, as well as a cook and residential care workers. Our work has endeavoured to develop in 4 main areas: rescue of the street kids, rehabilitation in a 2-year residential programme, reconciliation with any family members, and resettlement back into homes and communities. For those for whom we find no family members or for whom the situation is not safe or suitable for resettlement, we endeavour to find foster or adoptive families. We are also trying to develop an independent programme for our older teenagers.

The health work has developed alongside these, sometimes pioneering into new areas such as the remand centre where many street kids are held, and into the slum areas. The main priority for the health work is our residential kids, although we do try to help as many kids as possible. But with thousands on the streets and many still migrating due to famine, HIV/AIDS, rebel activity and insecurity, poverty and abuse within the home, it's impossible to help every child. Our great desire is to see a world with no children living in the squalor and despair and abuse of the streets. We want children to know God, to know they are loved and cared for, and respected. Our health work endeavours to be holistic, caring for them physically, emotionally, spiritually and psychologically.

All this may still not be answering the 'Why Africa?' question. Because the real answer is in the calling. I need to know that this is the place where God wants me to be. It is indeed true that there is desperate need all over the world, especially in health work, and especially with children. If I was staying in Africa based on whether I liked it, or whether the work was going 'well', I would have been long gone! I am returning to Africa because I believe with my whole heart that is where God wants me to be for this time.

So, I hope to fly to Uganda on 28 September. My heart is so excited to be returning home there, and yet the reality is that I will miss my family and friends here. Herein lies the real sacrifice of mission work for me: I leave them and miss them and they miss me too. There is little I can do to change that, so I try to turn my thoughts to being so very thankful for them and their great love for me. I also really believe that I

am able to love and care for the street kids in a more powerful way by being so loved myself. Once you know that love of a family and of a great God, you want to share it, especially with such hurting and confused children.



My Mum

I need to find a new place to stay, which I am really praying about, as I would love to settle as soon as possible and feel 'at home'. I am also needing much prayer for doing some more language studies in Luganda. I have spoken to the DP team about trying to balance my time for that in the first few months, though I can never know how that will work itself out in reality – health work is notoriously unpredictable!

Dwelling Places is now a registered UK charity which is fantastic news and a testimony to the hard work of our newly founded DP International UK Board of Trustees – Rev John Macgregor, Jan Blackie, Valerie Macluskie and Torquil Macleod. If you are interested in finding out more about the work of Dwelling Places please check out www.dwellingplaces.org Also, my own website is being revamped and should be up and running soon – www.marsali.co.uk

Thank you, thank you, thank you for all the love and support and encouragements. May God bless you as we partner together.

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