

# Tshepo Ya Bana

Hope for Children

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Dear Friends and Family,

This was not supposed to arrive together with all the rest of your annual Christmas/New Year updates from one and all! As usual it has taken me far too long to put everything together and the longer it takes the more computer issues I have, and the more news there is to tell..... but I hope you will find a few minutes to read what has been happening in the bush!

It's been quite a year, one way and another. Five houses on the farm means a lot of care and maintenance, and I really feel the lack of a permanent handyman on the farm. Dear Papa Lucky does what he can, but just keeping the garden neat and the grass short in summer is more than enough for him. Of course he also has to clear out blocked drains (although they often get blocked at weekends when my teenagers have to get involved!!) and fix fences damaged by elephants. Many of our problems this year have been water related: problems with heating water in three of the houses; a poor supply of water to a couple of them....and this past weekend we had a problem with our borehole pump so it meant no showers, no laundry, and heating pots of rainwater for washing etc.

We had a few occasions during the year with no volunteers at all, which put a lot of strain on the mamas. Fortunately it doesn't happen too often. We are not letting the number of babies go too high, but even so if we are shorthanded it gets quite difficult, particularly at weekends.

Financially, too, it has been a difficult year. Over time we do lose some of our regular supporters, and, of course, our strained South African economy makes life more and more expensive. I am probably one of the few people with a smile on my face when the rand drops against the pound or euro....it means we get more rands when donations come from overseas! But, in spite of some nail-biting around month end, we still keep going, and are very grateful to the Lord for supplying our every need as he promised back in 2003 ("and my God shall meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus" Phil.4, 19). I have to constantly remind myself not to worry, but to pray and to trust him. We are also very grateful to the many of you who give sacrificially to help us and also to those who spend time here lending a hand. Our volunteers are such an important part of our set up, both those who come for a few months to care for the children and those who come from near and far for a day or two or a couple of weeks to help with repairs and maintenance.

I am very grateful to the Lord for blessing me with good health and the strength to continue managing the project singlehanded. One of the biggest strains is the fact that I am now the only driver here. Some days I hardly seem to get out of my car. Apart from school/staff runs I have to take little ones to the clinic or for therapy; attend children's court; do the shopping for everyone; visit various offices of the Department of Social Development; and all the usual

running around which goes with having teenagers, not to mention church on Sundays and the occasional social outing or family gathering. When I manage to have a day at home I try to encourage Nhlanhla with his online studies, supervise the care of the little ones and catch up with emails (and newsletters!!!!). I hope that a couple of the boys will have their driving licences soon, but they won't be available to help when I need them most!

Enough of that! There are far bigger issues in life than a busy schedule and maintenance problems. We continue to welcome abandoned babies into our midst, always wondering what drives a mother to leave her little one to such an uncertain future. I often wish such moms could later see the amazing parents who adopt their babies, giving them the future they would have dreamt of for them. Two of our babies went to their new families recently - always such a heartwarming event!



We had a special visitor from Luxembourg in April. This time it was "Stompie" - so nicknamed by one of our staff because he was so tiny when he arrived. He is now called Noé and we were delighted to welcome him and his parents for a few days. Now twelve years old, and competent in several languages, it was so exciting to see him again, still a very active young man, and still with that delightful smile. He had some very clear memories of some of his past here at TYB, and was very excited to

meet up with one of his special friends!

I managed to "escape" for three weeks in March. Dennis and his wife, Lynda, came to man the fort while I travelled to Brisbane, Australia, to visit my son Matthew and his family. His wife Helen grew up there and they left South Africa early in 2013 to settle there with their son Jack. Last year they had another son, James, so it was just wonderful to spend time with them, and especially to have some bonding time with my two youngest grandsons. Brisbane is a beautiful coastal city, with a river running through it, and the climate is warm and humid. I was blessed by cloudy cooler weather for most of my stay, after they had experienced a very hot summer before my arrival. I was able to meet up briefly with a couple of ex volunteers and old South African friends during my stay, which was very special, and also had lunch with an old college friend, who I hadn't seen for around forty years. One highlight was spending three magical days on Stradbroke Island, which is a short ferry ride away – a beautiful, mostly unspoilt island with a turquoise sea and abundant wildlife.

It was good to come home again, to the daily rush and drama, but a little part of me would like to be back in Oz, being just "grandma" again. I sometimes seem to wear too many hats here!

A new baby arrived while I was away – a gorgeous smiley little girl who had been abandoned under a bridge. A couple more new children have arrived since.

At the other end of the scale, our eldest teenager, Kagiso, has left school and is working at a nearby lodge. He is gaining lots of skills and knowledge of how such an establishment runs, and it is a good start to his adult life. Over the past few years I have been busy with the adoptions of my four young men. It is a painfully slow process, but well worthwhile in the end. It took one week short of a year from the date of the adoption for Kagiso to finally obtain an ID card in his new name! Tom's adoption was finalized in February and hopefully the last two will go through in the next couple of months. Tom and Tshepo have finished school for the year,

and Nhlanhla has been busy with on-line photography courses together with some informal school work.

During the July holiday a group of 10 students from the Engineering Department of the University of Pretoria came for four days to fix up our jungle gym and trampoline. The trampoline has been moved to the lawn in front of the playroom, which means the kids can no longer hide away behind the wall to get up to mischief while pretending to be jumping. In addition the students were able to move a number of trees which had been knocked down by elephants and were taking up rather too much space on the paving in front of the playroom.

As we were short of help with the children at the time, some of the girls in the group focused on child care, which was also much appreciated. Our volunteer situation is



looking better for the next few months, which makes life easier for everyone. We never know when to expect new children, or even when the existing ones will be moved on. Often changes happen with just a few hours' notice. We have been expecting to "lose" a couple of children for some months now, but ...we try not to make promises to our little ones, knowing we might have to break them. Many of the most traumatic experiences of children in care revolve around broken promises.

We do know, however, that although these little ones may have been abandoned or let down in one way or another, our God will never abandon us or them. Let me share with you a couple of verses which have been an encouragement to me:

Lamentations 3:22, 23 *"Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."*

Psalms 13: 5, 6 *"But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the Lord's praise, for he has been good to me."*

Just on a practical note – I decided to make the effort to go through my mailing lists in detail before sending this. In the process of transferring names from one computer to another it seems that I always manage to lose some of my addresses, so I have added a few extra people who may or may not have been on the earlier lists. Let me know if you'd like to be removed!

May you all be blessed during this time of celebrating the birth of our saviour.

Love from us all,

Chris