

UGANDAN TRIP

For all those parents who have not yet caught up with me, I'd like to take this opportunity to let you know that I will be travelling to Uganda on the night of the Fair (we fly out at 8.10pm) until 22nd June on a project that has become very significant in both my personal and professional life – Mission Watoto. I have been a member of this team since last year which has raised \$38 000 to build a house for eight parentless children and a house mother. We will be laying 2,500 bricks along side a Ugandan building team of 10 men. The slab will already have been laid prior to our arrival and the handmade bricks ready for us to use.

Watoto is caring for 1,510 children. 1,058 live in the homes currently completed. 20 young adults attend tertiary education, including University. We will be building at Bbira Village where future plans for the expansion include 99 more homes, 27 teacher's apartment, a new water hole, a high school, a sport's field, a store, a medical support staff block and a nursery school.

The College Board has financially supported me in this leadership role, however the Abbey members in the Confraternity have committed to the lion share of the cost.

I have also received a grant through the Junior Heads Association from their Grants-in-aid project for this trip and will be presenting a report to the Association on my return.

Here's my story. You might need to sit down with a 'cuppa'!

In December, 2006 I witnessed an amazing reflection of faith when I went to hear the Watoto Choir sing at Glasshouse. I was overcome with the strong message of hope and joy that these children portrayed from deep within themselves – especially as these children were from deep within a country torn by war, disease and corruption.

I knew then that these Watoto choirs travelled to raise money for children in Uganda. I did not know that there are always choirs 'in training' and many other Watoto Choirs on tour all round the world, and that in time one of these Watoto Choirs would be singing in our very own Performing Art Complex this year on 24th June at 7pm and that 9 of our families would have the amazing opportunity of billeting these children for the night of the Concert.

During and after that evening, I wondered what I could do about helping these people, and why I had actually "had" the experience of not only hearing them sing but 'feeling' their joy and happiness. I was perplexed – many of these children had suffered so much, they were parentless, they had seen their parents slaughtered or dying of AIDS. After having the pamphlet sitting on my desk for a while, I eventually filed it in my "Things to do" folder, unsure of what I needed to do.

At that time I was unaware that Watoto actually means CHILDREN in Swahili and that there were teams around the world - 77 last year that would visit the Watoto Child Care Ministries, to help build houses for 8 parentless children and a house mother in Kampala where there are 3 villages. I was also unaware that there are over 1.7 million parentless children in Uganda where 50% of the population is under 15.

It was only after a phone call from one of our College parents, Andrew Burger, that I became aware of a group in Morayfield called Mission Watoto led by a remarkable man called Peter Mack.....

The moment I meet Peter I had a feeling that something special was about to happen. Special not only on a personal and spiritual level for me, but for the whole College community.

During our conversation I became aware of a great cause with long term goals and a wonderful vision to provide family life and shelter, education, medical care and most importantly spiritual guidance to thousands of Ugandan children, left parentless as a result of war and disease.

I immediately became enthused.

Yes the College would help raise the \$38 000 needed to build a home in Uganda.

Yes the College students needed to become more aware of other children in our world wide "global village" who have very little, almost nothing in many cases.

Yes this was a wonderful opportunity for our students to learn to " have hearts as big as the world." to quote Fr Theodore Ratisbonne.

Hearts that encompass all, radiating and extending to the outermost limits of the world, particularly in Uganda, where so much help is still needed to build a Children's Hospital and University, promote self sustainability by providing large scale farming projects, and by 2023 create care for 10,000 children - to name just a few projects – the list of building projects there is actually endless.

Initially I had no intention of travelling to Uganda with the Mission Watoto team in May this year. I felt fulfilled and was content to 'spread' the message, support the fundraising in whatever way we could by encouraging our children to participate and thereby heighten their awareness. I had set a goal of donating \$5000 by June, 2008. which we have reached – thank you to all those here at St Michael's College who helped raise that money in one form or another. I even had an aspiration of taking our present Year 2's over to Uganda as High School students as a working team ourselves in 2015. I wanted our students to be so aware of others that it would have an effect on their own lives – a greater sense of appreciation for all they have and to thank God for the blessings and life style that they enjoy in Australia .

The invitation to join the Mission Watoto team came as a complete surprise.

We will arrive at the Entebbe International Airport, Uganda, and be escorted to Kampala. In the village we will be helping a Ugandan team of 10 men to build the house. The slab will already be prepared, and 2500 bricks for the home already prepared and on site. Window frames, door, door jams, timber for roofing, roofing nails and iron sheets will also be on site ready for installation. The house will take about 2 weeks to build.

I believe that apart from working on the house - attending a service at the Pentecostal Church in Kampala (apparently they have a congregation of 17,500), visiting the other tow Watoto villages, meeting other workers and all those involved in the villages, working, praying, singing, eating traditional meals **and spending time with the children (and hugging them)** would all provide an amazing set of opportunities for me. It will indeed be a life changing experience. On my return I will be able to share the richness and diversity of the visit with all of you here.

I'm sure that even now I cannot grasp the contrast to our life here and do not truly understand how richly blessed we all are here in Australia. What a powerful message to experience and bring back.

Jesus did say "To whom much is given, much will be required". I can't help thinking and believing that this is part of the deeper purpose of the College.

The College has always been more than just an 'educational institution'. Just in the same way as our Church at St Michael's is more than just a Church, or our farm, more than just a farm – visitors to St Michael's, the Abbey Church and Museum or to our College have sensed a caring , compassion and peace that is not always so tangible in other schools or similar environments. I expect it is that we are doing God's work here, building His Kingdom in the lives of all who come across our path.

I have a vision that Watoto will not “go away” from our lives at St Michael’s College. I have a vision that the College will provide many opportunities for its children to find God within, without and around themselves – be it in their morning Tai Chi or prayers, RE lessons or their sense of belonging through their involvement with others not only in a classroom with their peers, or through sport’s teams, choirs, drama or dance lessons, musicals or bands or their involvement with Watoto. The die is cast as it were – their time at St Michael’s College will help them to become the people that God intended them to be – being involved in Mission Watoto will reiterate Christ’s message “Whatever you do for the least of my brothers you do also unto Me.”

Whilst I am away, I ask that you will all pray for my safety. The cloak of responsibility will fall onto Jenny Hubble as she accepts the position of Acting Principal. I know you are all in good hands as you were when I took LSL in 2003.

I have faith to know that all will be well during my trip away and I look forward to sharing the experience with you on my return. I have packed plenty of tissues!
God bless you all and thank you for your support for this ‘vision’

Together for the Children of Africa

Sr Veronica
PRINICPAL



Bbira is our second largest village and is located a 30 minute drive from downtown Kampala. With a beautiful Eucalyptus tree forest on the grounds, the serene and calm atmosphere is inspiring. With over 30 occupied homes, a nursery school, primary school and a soon to be completed high school, a clinic and a Church, Bbira provides a wonderful community for Watoto.

Currently construction for the extension of Bbira is taking place within the same grounds. This will enable the Watoto families to relocate from Buloba Children’s Village and make use of the schools and clinic and other such facilities, that are in close proximity.