

# the OUTCRY!

(Newsletter from Alan and Sheena Gaston working with children in South Africa. Sept 2013)

***“My presence will go with you and I will give you rest. “ (Exodus 33 verse 14)***

**Zanini Bantwana – looking back with thanks; looking forward with hope**

It has been a sad time for the ZB team. In the past month we have mourned the passing of Maureen Blake. She was a great personal friend for many years and one of the most practical and enthusiastic supporters of our work right from the beginning. Mo visited us twice in South Africa and made a tremendous impact on the team. As the ZB team met to remember her there were many tears. We sang “Thula Sizwe” (*Be still, nation, don't cry. Your Jehovah will conquer for you*), which was a favourite song when Mo visited. We heard later that it was played at her funeral. As we give thanks for Mo's life and the input she had into so many lives, we pray especially for her husband, Chris, and children, Richard and Joanna.

## **Bigger team**

Recently there have been some very significant developments. We have added two full-time volunteers, taking the team to six. We now have two people working in each hospital each day. It is better to have the staff working in pairs and the larger team means we can reach many more children. Praise God for these volunteers who have such a heart for the children. In due course, and if we have the resources, we may look to employ them.

## **New work**

In another exciting opportunity, we have started to work in a second outpatient clinic in Northdale hospital. This clinic deals with children who need chronic medication. They come regularly and can have a long wait. The medical staff were very keen that ZB should start to work there and have arranged space in the clinic for us.

## **Ongoing training**

Ongoing training is a priority as we seek to do our best for the children. At our weekly Monday morning meetings, members of the team present a part of the week's activities – introduction, story or craft – and the others give constructive criticism. The team is very keen to learn and appreciates the input from their colleagues. We have also arranged for Sihle Duma to come and oversee this. Sihle's experience and talent for working with children make this a very worthwhile time.

## **Taking the strain**

We would especially ask you to pray for the ZB team. Daily they are involved in the most harrowing and emotionally demanding situations. It is very draining work as they support children who have life-threatening illnesses, who suffer abuse or abandonment and come from very disadvantaged backgrounds. The team needs tremendous strength and courage to cope with all of this.

## **The end is in sight**

We hope we have had the last meeting with regards to Nzuzo's adoption and we have been promised that this will go to court in October. We are excited about this and it will be a wonderful feeling to have completed this difficult process and give **Nzuzo** permanence in our family.

In order to have the adoption agreed we now have to introduce Nzuzo to some of his biological relations. This is something we would have preferred to do later when Nzuzo was older and when we felt the time was right, but we have no choice in this. We would value prayers for protection for this dear little boy who is so happy.

## **Never say never**

We used to think that anyone who homeschooled their children – and it is very popular here in South Africa – was entirely cuckoo. We never, ever thought we would end up doing it ourselves. However, this year **Sihle** had 2 difficult terms at school where his grades and his behavior deteriorated, resulting in him being in quite a lot of trouble. His teacher wanted him put on Ritalin, a powerful behaviour altering drug that is very widely used here. We did not believe he needed to be medicated and all the experts we consulted confirmed our opinion. We had him assessed by a psychologist who confirmed that he is a bright boy and identified an auditory processing problem which made school difficult for him. He has just been assessed by a speech therapist who will help us work with him.

Through this difficult time at school Sihle lost a great deal of confidence in his abilities, but he is gradually regaining confidence as we teach him at home. We are happy that in the last week or so he seems to be realizing he does have the ability to learn and he is starting to do very well. Homeschooling is obviously a big change to our schedule, but we are happy to do it in the interim.

We have decided to send Sihle to a boys' school with smaller classes which we think will suit him better. He will start next term at the start of October. Please pray for Sihle as he begins in a new school and for us as we seek to identify any learning difficulties he might have and get the best help for him that we can.

## **Family matters**

Henry's life went into a bit of a spin recently when he discovered that his father has a sister **Henry** had never been told about. There are also cousins he had never heard of. This has been huge for him as it has raised all sorts of questions of secrecy in the family. Why was he never told about these relations and who else may be out there he doesn't know about? We are also concerned about the cousins and wonder why they have suddenly popped up. We do not know what influence they might exert on Henry.

He is also very angry with his father who left the family when Henhry was in hospital. When he visits his father, Henhry feels his father is not interested in him.

When Henhry goes to visit his mother, he sees his half-sisters raising their children with no men on the scene. One of these young women has abandoned her three children there and has disappeared without trace. Henhry's mum is the only one with a job so it is a struggle to provide food for the family of 4 adults and 6 children.

At school Henhry has chosen his subjects for Matric which is the school leaving certificate pupils sit here at 18. He is happy to drop the subjects he hasn't enjoyed and concentrate on those that he likes. Henhry is in a unique position of being bilingual in English and Zulu and also in understanding both the Zulu and the white world. He is a lovely young man and it will be interesting to see where God will lead him. Please pray for Henhry and his future.

### **Getting the balance right**

**Sipho** is a lovely girl and we are delighted to see her grow up with a strong sense of self. However, although she loves her friends at school, she finds the work hard. She is in Grade 3 and last night when Sheena was tucking her in Sipho said she didn't want to go to Grade 4 because the work would be too hard. She finds Maths especially difficult. She does have extra help at school and we now have someone who comes twice a week in the afternoons to help her.

With Sihle being more content now, our whole family dynamic is much more settled. We find we are less stressed and have more energy for the other children. This has been good for Sipho as she now enjoys more attention and quality time.

Please pray for us as we balance all the needs of the children. We know this is our calling and feel that it is a great privilege. We do, however, get tired but we thank God that when one of us is down, the other is usually up!

**Our greatest desire** is to see the children grow up knowing and loving God, and although education is important and success in this area would be great, it really is of secondary importance. Please pray for them in this.

In all our work, we try to do the best we can. However, we are also very aware that in our own strength we can do nothing. Our desire is that by the Holy Spirit, Jesus himself would call these children to follow him.

**Much love from us and thanks for all your support and prayers,  
Alan and Sheena, Henhry, Sipho, Sihle and Nzuzo.**

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