

KING GEORGE VI CENTRE

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Well, we made it through another difficult term! There were some times during this year that we asked ourselves if it was all worth it, as we fought to find yet another unavailable basic or despaired of ever getting just one tank of petrol. Then sitting the other night at our end of year party listening to the band thundering out another jubilant 're-mix', watching the children dancing enthusiastically and seeing some of the wheelchair bound youngsters whirling round the floor in the arms of our volunteers, I knew it was!

Surprisingly despite our predictions we only had two children who did not return. Every other family somehow, somewhere managed to find the boarding fees! With so many Zimbabweans fleeing the country we can only assume that nearly every child has some relative working outside sending home just enough money. Which was of course good news but did mean that we had to continue to find food for over 90 children, no easy feat in the Zimbabwe of today.

So Precious took up the challenge and the children at KGVI were probably some of the best fed children in the country, but at what cost. The daily increase in everything is frightening, then add to this the problems of having to pay for everything in cash (in \$20,000 notes this adds up to hauling big bundles of notes everywhere) and the difficulty of obtaining fuel to go and collect whatever you have been lucky enough to find. No fuel is sold at garages any more so one is at the mercy of the blackmarket and the blackmarketeers who can charge whatever they like for the precious commodity. We even resorted to a trip to Botswana to buy a drum of petrol but the nightmare of the border post and the customs duties were very discouraging. Our cleaning chemical bill which is always a big expense for each term looked like breaking the bank. Last term we were shattered to have a total chemical bill for over \$50 million but for next term we were quoted \$68 million for the laundry powder alone! Luckily we were put in touch with a company which makes its own cleaning materials and by some miracle the total for all the chemicals will be less than 20 million – whew! I could go on and on about the horrors of living with hyperinflation but it would not make for a very interesting newsletter! It is enough to say that in November our monthly expenses totalled over Z\$400 million which even in real money at £3 470 is an awful lot! Our costs have virtually doubled since last term with nothing to show that they will not do so again next term.

The past term has been extremely busy, not helped by the fact that the government lopped 2 weeks off the end because of the senseless senate elections. Fitting in public examinations along with all the end of year activities proved challenging to us all. Teachers all over the country are so demoralised that they have virtually given up. It is said they now do a month's work to earn enough for little more than 3 bottles of cooking oil! Even the KGVI teachers have lost their enthusiasm and had to be persuaded not to cancel the annual prize-giving concert. How could we let the children leave with no reward for their year of hard work. Centre staff kept their momentum and effort going until the last week and then they too sank into depression. It is very difficult for anyone be it company or organisation to pay staff enough to keep up with inflation. The stated living wage for a family of 6 is \$11.6 million and it is unlikely that more than 5% of the country actually earns this amount! Oh dear, I have slipped back to talking about inflation!

The term started with a trip to Harare for the annual Danhiko disabled sports competition. KGVI sent a team of some 20 children to take part in netball, football, wheelchair basketball and various wheelchair races. The students had a wonderful time and came away with several exciting victories. One of the best aspects of this sort of event is the travelling and the participating in national events.

Many of the athletes were also band players who had taken part in the Intwasa arts festival held in Bulawayo. This term we reduced the band to musicians only with Prudence as the lead singer. She has done an impressive job of leading the band ably assisted by two of the boys who have started to come to the fore as the flamboyant Pharis left a space that had to be filled. Tapiwa joins Prudence with the singing and has helped with the organisation, while Goodwell uses his bass voice and multi instrument skills to good effect. There is so much to be said about every member of the band for instance there is Vusani who is deaf but who does an amazing job playing the bass marimba with such enthusiasm. For the Intwasa festival they were classified under the gospel music section which meant they had two days to learn 2 gospel songs. Nothing daunted they did just that and had the audience at the city hall on their feet dancing in no time. Sadly our volunteer piano teacher left and we couldn't find anyone to replace her which left Farai and Tapiwa teaching themselves some new tunes. I even heard Farai picking out *Jingle Bells* the other day. The grand finale for Prudence was an invitation to join a world famous Mexican opera singer who was flown up to Bulawayo by the Mexican Embassy following some concerts in South Africa. We none of us knew Prudence could sing that high, not even Prudence herself and now she has added Spanish to her growing list of singing languages.

It wasn't all fun as this is the big exam term. Because of the foreshortened term the poor O level students ended up writing most of their exams in the final week when everyone else was partying. There was a new determination to work hard for the exams and every evening saw all the boarders hard at work studying. Sadly one of the staff who helped most with the studying could not resist the temptation to steal some petrol from us and had to be dismissed. He was a firm favourite of the children and it hurt us all that he had to leave under such a cloud. A real sign of the times when everyone is tempted to be dishonest. We even had someone stealing vegetables from the garden until we set a trap and frightened them off. Although knowing that the vegetables are there will surely bring desperate people back again.

We were also sad that one of our earliest symbols of independent living burned down. The rondavel which was a feature of the senior boys Green Future House, caught fire one night and was totally destroyed, thank goodness the three boys sleeping there woke up and got out safely. They have been sleeping on the floor in the sitting room of the house ever since and this holiday we will brick in the verandah to make an additional room as we now think the risk of thatch is too much. It is a favourite trick of thieves to set a diversion and then move into the house while everyone is outside attending to the fire. Another disaster and another expense but we are just grateful that no one came to harm.

As every year we have to say goodbye to our school leavers who face a very uncertain future. With an unemployment rate of over 75% and growing they have little chance of getting employment. One of them will try to do an art course but accommodation will be a problem and another will try and buy a second hand computer and offer a typing service. Luckmore will do a one year garden apprenticeship at KGVI. It is not easy out there and we can only equip them so far and hope that the independence and

confidence they have learnt at KGVI will help them with whatever they find to do. Our two A level scholars, Sonia and Bekezela, have also come to the end of their schooling. Bekezela achieved top marks for technical drawing in his school, Milton while Sonia left Girls College with two A levels and a selection of Pitmans commercial subjects. Even for them the prospects of employment or even further education are not good. Sonia will possibly spend the next term teaching at KGVI as the ministry has granted too many teachers leave at the same time and we face a real shortage of staff for the new term. And then there is Prudence? What can we do to make sure that the message carried in her voice reaches more people? So far all attempts to get her to work with a South African have failed. At least for next term she can help with our music programme here at KGVI, but that can only be temporary. It is very sad that both Sonia and Prudence have asked to stay at KGVI over the holidays rather than go home. It will be a quiet and boring Christmas for them but both say it will still be better than being an unwelcome guest in your own home!

We ended the term with a cookery competition where we tested Kess's bulgar wheat recipes. Each house produced a bulgar wheat dish which was then judged by a representative from World Vision. We even have a KGVI bulgar wheat cookbook. We were very fortunate this term to have four other volunteers joining Kess at KGVI. Three young therapists sent to us from Jabulani Kids Zimbabwe and a young German girl studying social work. How the kids enjoy the love and attention they get from our volunteers and how we enjoy their enthusiasm and energy. I think they had a wonderful time too!

We look to next year with trepidation but a feeling that we will survive for yet another year. Already we have to try and find enough millions to buy all that will be needed for the new term before the huge price hike which always comes in January. We have had to set our fees at 4 million dollars which is still 6 million below the true costs of keeping a child at KGVI, but is nevertheless an awful lot of money for our parents to find. We will try to continue to support our orphans as life without KGVI would be pretty bleak for them.

We would all like to thank you again for helping us to keep going. I am sending a photo with this letter which I hope will show you how much we value your support. Without you those faces would not be smiling. Thank you so very much!

Best wishes to you all for Christmas and for the new year.

Also attached are some articles written by the children with the title – *my best day this year*. They are set out in alphabetical order so you can quickly find the one written by 'your' child.



Preferment & Amanda at the park

BRENDA

I enjoyed three things and these three things were educative and interesting. First it was the parties we had at the hostel. They were very nice indeed and I also learnt many things from the speeches. Especially I liked the speech which Pharis gave us on his last day. I learnt that you should use your gifts to do something in life.

Second the studies which took place. For the boarders it was nice that we had studies every day. They really encouraged us to work hard at school. This term was a busy term and everyone was focused on the books.

Third was the cooking classes which took place. I enjoyed cooking the bulgar wheat recipes with the OT dept. They were very nice also they will continue to be useful not only here at KGVI but also in future.

BRILLIANT

I know that the hostel is ok. The people help each other but sometimes not. The PH and deaf people are happy because of the help they are getting from each other. All of us children must not be angry and rude to each other but to be happy and communicating with each other.

ENERGY

It was a good time learning at KGVI. The way the staff in hostel and at school treat us is enjoyable, I really like that and wish everything to continue. I really enjoyed the trip last year to Victoria Falls.

As a marimba player I enjoyed the band and I had a good time with my friends in the band. I really wish to continue with the band trips when we played for other schools.

GOODWELL

It was wonderful living such an independent life at King George and I hope this will never end. Although when I first came it seemed hard to cope with other languages it was very interesting to share stories and jokes. Socialisation is very good.

Entertainment is something which changed my life. I always enjoyed myself watching interesting channels on the television. Since I came here I am now a musician so I was happy to be a member of the band – Induna Six. I love the songs and will never forget them until the sound of drums disappears from my mind.

HLENGIWE

In 2005 it was very good at school. I like home and I like school too. At home I like my mother, at school I like my teacher too and I like my Ma Ncube (Housemother).

INNOCENT

This year what I really enjoyed is when I visited my grandparents in the rural areas. When I reached home they all welcomed me well and they cooked sadza and okra and it was a delicious meal. Days went on then one day I decided to be naughty because I had to stay at home while my young brothers went to herd cattle. I took one piece of meat which was hidden in a big bowl then I started to roast it. Suddenly when I was about to eat the meat my grandfather came into the kitchen. I was given a hard punishment which taught me not to steal again.

LAIZA

What I enjoyed through the year was that I was going out to different places with the band. I also enjoyed writing exams because I knew that I could do my best at school. Sometimes I would play games like races, playing with a ball and snakes and ladders.

LEARNMORE

At home it was very good and at school. I love my teacher and my friends and my small sisters too and I like television.

MELI

It was my first time to learn at such a wonderful school like this. It was very joyful to be at KGVI. At my first time I thought this school is tough when I heard Mrs Hussey shouting to her children but as time went on I was in the mood of it.

Marimba made my year to be fine because music cheers you up even when you are angry and also basketball. Also my friends who are organising some new legs for me so that I will be able to run around.

OCEAN

My school KG6. I love my school.

PRIMROSE

What I enjoyed was the day they told me that we were going to write examinations. I was so happy that I jumped up and down. That night I couldn't sleep thinking about the exams. The next morning I woke up and prayed asking for help to God so that I can pass. In the classroom Darlington boasted saying that he will pass the exams but I kept quiet and listened to what he said. I did not talk or laugh, I was serious. Our teacher Mrs Ndlovu came and said good luck in your exams.

Now I had strength to write my exams. I told myself that I can do, it no matter what task is upon me I can do it. I always tell myself that being number one does not mean that you passed. Your marks are the most important.

TAPIWA

The year 2005 was full of nice things that happened and those things were fun, motivational but all educational.

The thing that I really enjoyed was the formation of the band. It was the greatest improvement that I saw. The formation of the band made a great impact on me because through the band I have managed to uplift my music career. I have learned to play new different songs that are nice and I have also learned how to handle a show.

It has been a wonderful experience for me and it has kept me happy and out of trouble. I am happy that such an idea was put into being. Being one of the band members has given me a task to work towards the music and entertainment at KGVI and I will try my level best to do good for the improvement of the entertainment. This has been and still is the best thing that happened to me this year.

THANDO

Over the past years I have been having memorable and exciting days. This has been a wonderful year for me, even though it has been having ups and downs and that the economy has gone high so fast.

The day I will never forget this year was when I went to lunch at a certain hotel school in Bulawayo with the school band. We found many people there roaming around to see the student's work. Anyway, let me get straight to the point, what I really enjoyed is the meat that they had cooked for the visitors.

The other thing that I enjoyed is when we went for a long night show at the football stadium. There I really enjoyed seeing so many people dancing. The groups that were there sang songs that took my heart far from this world of poverty.

URMILLA

What I enjoyed during the year was when my young sister had a birthday. My young sister was happy because it was her first time celebrating. On that day there came many people and there was a lot of food and drinks. There was a disco and people dancing and enjoying themselves. I wore the beautiful dress which was given to me by my friend in Germany.

VALERIA

At King George I enjoy staying in the hostel. In the morning I always wake up early and go for a bath. Then I have my breakfast and go to school. At school I do a lot of things like writing, reading and doing art with Miss Kess. I also enjoy staying with my friends in our house in the hostel. I would like to say thank you to the visitors from Holland, all of them with the things that they have done for us, we say thank you very much. I want to tell everyone that we the children at KGVI, we love KGVI. That's my story for this year.