



UGANDA: May 9 - 26, 2003: 5,000 Bedkits

BY GRANT CLARK
MISSISSAUGA, ONTARIO

Uganda is a country of startling contrasts. This beautiful 'pearl of Africa', located on the Equator, can have daytime temperatures that exceed 45°C, while the evening temperatures force you to wear a sweater. This is also a country that has experienced much sadness with the epidemics of AIDS and malaria, plus the loss of life from political strife; yet you continue to hear the reverberating sounds of laughter.

As we would drive through very remote parts of the country to reach our distribution sites, children and young people would approach our vehicle with friendly waves and shouts of welcome. This is a land that is lush with vegetation. The two rainy seasons play havoc with the poorly constructed roads and make them almost impossible to travel, but this weather produces some of the most delicious fruits and vegetables you will find anywhere. The watermelon, mango and pineapple have a sweetness that I never experienced in Canada. The vegetables, including peas, beans and corn, are superb. There are also twenty-three varieties of potatoes grown here. Why then are there so many malnourished children? If you drive into the remote villages, it is commonplace to see young children with distended stomachs suffering from parasites or imbalanced diets. A lack of knowledge of proper diet has placed the youth at risk. A main staple eaten every day is a food called *matooki*, made from the green plantain banana, which is peeled, placed in banana leaves and cooked over an open fire. This food is consumed in large quantities, but unfortunately, it has very little nutritional value. This diet has little balance with milk and protein products. Although most rural families may have a goat and some chickens, the milk and eggs are often transported by foot or bicycle for many miles to a local

village market where they are sold to provide a meager income that the family requires to purchase the other necessities of life. This is a cycle of poverty that is difficult to break. It provides only poverty in the midst of plenty.

2003 Uganda Bedkit

- 1 ground mattress
- 1 uniform
- 1 T-shirt
- 1 towel
- 1 blanket
- 1 set of bed sheets
- 1 water bottle
- 1 pair of flip-flops

Our travelling team of volunteers from Canada often remarked on the enormous contrasts in Uganda. There were real contradictions that we had difficulty understanding. We also talked about the 5,000 bedkits that we were distributing when many of the 14-million children in the country needed this gift. We asked ourselves whether this was an effort of hopelessness or hopefulness.

This question was answered immediately when we witnessed the joy of a child as a gift was received. Words cannot express their gratitude for the bedkits. Mothers sang and danced, and even kneeled before us to say "Thank you!" The hope that was brought to remote villages was mirrored on their faces. Families that did not receive a gift of a bedkit came to say "Thank you!" for those families who did take away a bedkit. As a team, we were left with the feeling that it is possible to make a difference—one child at a time.

Our bedkit was similar to the one distributed in Uganda last year. The wonderful women from the Inner Wheel of Kampala had again worked diligently to obtain good quality and value from the Ugandan manufacturers. Each

bedkit included the items shown in the box to the left.

I anticipate returning to this magnificent African country with its friendly smiles and warm welcomes, where we have made many friendships. I will remember the soft voices of the children, in their village dialect, saying "Sank yoos!"

BY LESLIE LEE BANNER
MISSISSAUGA, ONTARIO

The anticipation and emotional involvement I felt as our plane landed in Entebbe, on my second distribution in Uganda, had kept me awake for most of our long flight from Toronto. This year, unlike last, I knew what to expect on a distribution of bedkits in Uganda, or so I thought.

We believed that the rainy season would be over. However, Uganda was experiencing a prolonged wet season, just like we had experienced a lengthened winter back home. Perhaps global weather is changing world weather norms.

The reality of heavy rains occurring during the night, and sometimes lasting until shortly before a distribution was planned to begin, led to some interesting trips to distribution sites. Roads became lanes, which narrowed to slippery paths necessitating our bus driver to carefully walk over the road ahead before attempting to drive our bus through a narrow, swampy section. As always, following a long, slow drive through small villages, past numerous goats, we would see a gathering of brightly coloured clothes on smiling children, plus their happy mothers, parents or neighbours patiently waiting for us.

One distribution site was changed due to
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(Uganda by Leslie Lee Banner, Mississauga, Ontario, continued from page 1)

A VILLAGE OF 100

an unforeseen landslide from days of rain, which caused a road to become impassable, and some village homes to be lost. This distribution site was moved to another location, which required many of the children and their families to walk up to 20 miles over hilly terrain to receive their bedkits. Yet, on the day of the distribution, children and families began arriving at daybreak to ensure that they would receive their bedkits.

We were greeted by the happy faces of the children when they realized that the mattress would indeed be theirs; then the joyous singing of the mothers when they understood that this bedkit was a gift from someone who cared enough to give \$30 Canadian.

At this hilly, windy distribution, I met a child who stole my heart. He and his father had walked miles over the hills to receive his bedkit. It was an extremely hot day, and an Albino child had extensive sunburn to his face, arms and legs. He had his arm over his eyes to shield them from the sun. Like most of the children, he was without shoes. Watching the happy children united with their bedkits, fathers, and in some cases grandparents, who were looking after orphaned grandchildren, made our day.

We walked with the young Albino boy to his father who expressed his thanks. With one of the Inner Wheel members translating, I put my sunglasses on the boy, and he was able to take his hands down from shielding his eyes. It was such a small thing to help one child. We were told that Albinism occurs once in every 10,000 births in Uganda, causing serious potential health issues for these children.

I will always remember the 17 distributions, the children, the families, the community members, the Inner Wheel of Kampala who opened their hearts and resources to the children, the team from SCAW, and the donors of the 5,000 bedkits who made it all possible.

Our responsibility for each other, regardless of where we live, is brought to life in the following:

If we could shrink the earth's population to a village of precisely 100 people, with all the existing human ratios remaining the same, it would look something like the following. There would be:

- 57 Asians
- 21 Europeans
- 14 from the Western Hemisphere
- 8 from Africa
- 52 would be female
- 48 would be male
- 70 would be non-white
- 30 would be white
- 70 would be non-Christian
- 30 would be Christian
- 97 would be heterosexual
- 3 would be homosexual
- 6 people would possess 59% of the entire world's wealth (and all from the United States)
- 80 would live in substandard housing
- 70 would be unable to read
- 50 would suffer from malnutrition
- 1 would be near death
- 1 would be near birth
- 1 would have a college education
- 1 would own a computer



When one considers our world from such a compressed perspective, the need for both acceptance, understanding and education becomes glaringly apparent.

BY KATHY DEVINE SCARBOROUGH, ONTARIO

In 1907, Winston Churchill visited Uganda and wrote that "Uganda is truly the pearl of Africa" in his book 'My African Journey'. He felt that Uganda deserved to be called a pearl due to its magnificence in landscape, wildlife and culture. Anyone who is familiar with pearls knows that they are distinctive because of their luster, or the way they seem to glow from within. Therefore, the term 'the pearl of Africa' has stuck over the years. A person coming as a tourist to Uganda would quickly understand why the name has remained. An aerial view provides one with a glimpse of red earth, lakes, dense forests, mountains, rich savanna grasslands, woodlands, rolling plains and waterfalls. Look a bit closer and one can see elephants, zebras, hippos, baboons, water buffalo and even mountain

gorillas. But take the time to look even closer and you may feel that this pearl has lost a bit of its luster.

Kampala, the capital city, where our SCAW team was stationed for most of our 17-day stay, is spread over seven hills and known as the greenest city in Africa. Inside this city, adorned with beautiful gardens, parks and first class hotels, are a great many children: children who have no shoes, many of whom may go to bed hungry, and who wear torn, dirty clothing, and who have been orphaned. These children are not only in Kampala, but are spread throughout the country.

This was my second year in a row coming to Uganda as a travelling volunteer with SCAW. I was thrilled to be able to return. Despite the poverty rife among the people, the beauty of these people had touched my soul last year, making it easy for me to want to return.

Our first of 17 distributions was in the city of Kampala for 424 children on Sunday afternoon, May 11th. Over the next ten days, we would travel to the districts of Wakiso, Iganga, Tororo and west to Raka, Mbarara and Rukungiri to distribute 5,000 bedkits. 5,000 bedkits may sound like a lot, but it is not enough. One child in a family receives a bedkit, and everyone in that home shares what has been received. The joy that lights up a child's face when he/she receives their mattress is like Christmas morning in Canada when our children see what Santa has left for them under the tree. It is not until the mattress has been put into their hands that most of the children truly comprehend that this is really theirs to keep. No one has ever given them anything for free before. In Mbarara, one mother was so excited that her child had received a bedkit, she was screaming for joy – it would be the first time there would ever have been a mattress in her home.

There are always extra children at every site patiently standing by, just watching, as they are not receiving a bedkit. Last year, I could not get these children out of my mind. This year, I managed to bring with me some extra T-shirts, baseball caps and a few plastic toys to give to these poor little ones. Their faces were also able to light up after receiving a small token.

Over the past year, people I know who have looked at my photographs and video from last year, have commented that perhaps

it is a never-ending battle to help these people. One Ugandan gentleman I met this year, who is educated and works, made the comment that he looks at the bedkits being given out as an incentive to the people – an incentive to learn to provide for their families better than they have done so far.

Perhaps, with the help that SCAW donors are able to provide, the help given year round by the wonderful women of the Inner Wheel Group that SCAW works with in Uganda, and the progress the government has been making in educating people about AIDS, and the importance of educating children in general, Uganda will retain its luster in all areas. The future of this country lies in its people. Kindness, friendliness and warmth emanate from these peoples' hearts. I hope it will be my privilege to return to this country with SCAW in the future, to again work with the real pearls of Africa, Uganda's people.

BY LAURIE DAVEY-QUANTICK SYDENHAM, ONTARIO

SCAW distributions are about bringing bedkits to children who otherwise would not have a bed to sleep on. In Uganda, this need for bedkits is very great. Our distributions took us to areas of the country where a child may have only the shirt and pants they are wearing. For some, a mattress to put down on the dirt floor of their house is just a dream.

This was my third distribution trip with SCAW, but my first to Uganda. I am always struck by the happiness of the children we see and have the pleasure to meet. As our bus moved down the winding and bumpy roads, the children ran from their homes and yards to the road to wave as we passed. Many were wide eyed because this may be the first vehicle of this size they have ever seen.

When we arrived in the village where the distribution was to take place, we were always greeted with a sense of joy and great excitement. As we began the process of taking the photographs, the children approached us with a cautious curiosity. If only we could know what was going through their minds at that moment. This gift of a bedkit was often the first

gift these children had ever received in their lives. The mattress, sheets, blanket, pyjamas, T-shirt, sandals and water bottle will make an enormous difference to their lives.

As you read this newsletter in the comfort of your home, it's difficult to imagine the lives these children live. Their homes have dirt floors, and the yards where the children play is also dirt. When it rains, the dirt turns to slippery mud. There are very few families in Uganda who have not had a family member affected by HIV/AIDS. Tuberculosis and malaria are also wide spread. Many of the children we met were suffering from colds and other respiratory problems. Most will not be treated with any antibiotics because their families cannot afford them. Few children in the villages we went to wore any type of footwear. As a consequence, their feet had cuts and sores that would not heal.

Often, children, having lost their parents to AIDS or some other disease, were now caring for their smaller brothers and sisters. Perhaps a family member or another family in the village will take them in. Or, they are placed in one of the many orphanages in the country. Many children will fall victim to diseases and illnesses themselves. The small coffins being built in the furniture shops, along the roadsides, provide a startling reminder of this fact.

Yet, despite all of these hardships, the children arrived at the distributions sites, sometimes after walking for miles, with huge smiles on their faces. They do not complain about waiting in the lines before getting their picture taken. They do not complain about being tired or hot. When the bedkits are handed to them, there is absolute delight on their faces.

This is why I chose to come on distribution trips. In the midst of such despair, the children can find hope and the courage to be excited and happy in the moment.



BY CRAIG BOLTON CAMBRIDGE, ONTARIO

This distribution in Uganda was my first ever distribution, and I couldn't have asked for anything more. I was treated to the company of four incredibly talented SCAW members, plus an absolutely magnificent group of Ugandan women known as the Inner Wheel of Kampala. These women are not only role models for Ugandans, but for all of us around the world.

We spent just over two weeks in beautiful Uganda, surrounded by fields of pineapple, maize, tea, sugar cane and banana trees.

The best way for me to explain my experiences in the country is with one simple word: WOW! Wow for the beautiful children, for the lush green fields and mountains, for the ever bright smiling faces of an incredible people, but wow also for the incredible poverty everywhere.

After landing at Entebbe International Airport on May 9th, I was struck very suddenly by scenes of mud huts with thatched roofs along the side of the roads, with young children in tattered clothing playing amongst rocky fields with a soccer ball made only of banana leaves.

Travelling in Kampala and throughout both the east and west parts of the country, the scene was the same: incredible poverty everywhere, whether it be tin roofs, straw roofs or no roof at all, there were always very poor children with smiles beaming with excitement about their gifts.

I would like to thank every donor for the gifts that have been distributed to the very needy children of this country. Without your generous support, none of this would be possible. I only hope that, through your pictures, you can see the sincere appreciation that the children have for your gifts. If it were only possible for each donor to personally hand a bedkit to a child—but unfortunately, that is not possible. Please try to imagine the most excited child in the whole world, receiving not only the biggest, but also the most sought after present on Christmas morning; and only then do you begin to approach the degree of excitement that both these children and their families experience.

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(Craig Bolton, Cambridge, Ontario, continued from page 3)

Even with all the poverty, plus the many hardships and tragedies endured in their past, Ugandans are the kindest, most friendly people in the world.

After distributing bedkits to the children behind 5,000 smiling faces, it is clear that the bedkit is not the only gift received—quite often we have delivered the gift of hope to many discouraged families.

I would like to thank once again the donors for their selfless gifts, and also the beautiful people of Uganda who made our visit possible. Their country is beautiful, and the people are warm and welcoming.

I only hope some of you may someday have the opportunity to experience Uganda for yourselves.

PART OF SCAW'S WISH LIST

Every so often we advise you of a need that SCAW has outside of our bedkit distributions. Be assured that no bedkit donations ever have, nor ever will be used to augment the running of SCAW's program, i.e. all bedkit donations go 100% to the purchase of bedkits in developing countries.

However, as you know, to run any organization, there are things that must be done. Upkeep of property is one very strong element.

At this time, the upkeep at 28 Pinehurst Crescent (our SCAW head office), is in need of some specific repairs and window dressing in keeping with the neighbourhood. Specifically, we need to replace a backyard retaining wall (that collapsed a few years ago), and we'd like

to plant some shrubs/flowers (an annual dilemma).

If you would be interested in making a contribution to help with these projects, or to any other part of the running of SCAW's organization, we would be most pleased. Unfortunately, no tax receipts can be issued for these purposes. If you wish to help, please contact Linda Webb at the office. Thanks!

A DONOR'S LETTER

Hello SCAW:

My name is Mrs. Yates and I am a teacher at Adelaide McLaughlin Public School in Oshawa, Ontario. In March 2002, Arun Vallippan, a student in my class, lost his sister to a streptococcus virus. He is a wonderful boy and this definitely damaged his spirits, but our class helped him the best we could through this difficult time in his life.

Luckily, I was fortunate to have him return to my class this year for grade 5. He is a young boy who likes to keep busy, and he helps many students in our class with their math because he is quite a little mathematician. However, being surrounded by his friends did not seem to fill a void I could see.

He brought in a picture one day of a gift that had been given to his family in memory of his sister Meena. It was a picture of three children in India who had been given bedkits from Sleeping Children Around the World. I read more about your program and I was intrigued. I asked Arun if he would like to raise money in our class to buy another bedkit for another child in memory of Meena. He just glowed. Finally, a way he could help!

Arun joined with his good friend Ryan Collins to get the fundraising going. Many students in our class had known Meena and were more than willing to help out. Arun and Ryan told the class that the goal would be to raise \$30.00 to buy one bedkit in memory of Meena. Arun said that his parents would also donate a bedkit if we raised enough money to buy one. The boys made a thermometer to record the amount of money we collected.

Our first fund-raiser was a penny drive. Students were asked to bring in extra pennies they had at home. Amazingly we were very close to reaching our goal. Next the boys planned a bake sale for one week. Students in our class brought in goodies to be sold to

other students in our school. In January we had a Beanie Baby Day. If students brought in a quarter they could have the Beanie sit on their desk all day. Our class also had a day of games where students could do a bean bag toss and mini putt. Everyone looked forward to each fund-raiser that was planned by the boys. The boys had to add extensions to the thermometers as our efforts continued to raise more money.

On March 1st we finished our fund-raising as this was the first anniversary of Arun's sister's death. Money was counted and our class of 26 students had not only bought one bedkit, but we had raised enough money to buy five (plus one donated by Arun's parents)

...this year they have become great philanthropists. To instill the message in their minds that even 10 year olds can make a difference in this world is wonderful.

... SCAW is a great cause...

(signed) Mrs. Kerry Yates

THANK YOU for your contribution to this Uganda trip

Black's Photography for
photofinishing

Champion Photochemistry Limited for continuously
funding film and photofinishing
costs since 1986.

Konica Canada Inc. for
donating film

The Printing House (Russ Cosman)
5120 Dundas Street West
Etobicoke, Ontario for the
printing of this newsletter

Kay Kelly,
Harry Keating and
Maurice Kowanetz
for publishing this newsletter

Donors and Volunteers!

NEXT SCHEDULED **DISTRIBUTION TRIPS**

JULY, 2003 -
HONDURAS - 4,000 BEDKITS
SEPTEMBER, 2003 -
TANZANIA - 4,000 BEDKITS