



# 2008

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## Winter 2008 – Letter #1

Summer brings much-needed rains to Lesotho, with seasonal and sometimes terrifying thunderstorms. As the crops and flowers grace the countryside, I recall this time last year when it rained like this, only to be followed by ten months of a terrible drought, declared an emergency by the World Food Program. There are reports of flooding in the south, but up here it does not seem so severe.

We concluded our third annual HL Leadership Camp in the village of Pitseng, and all boast that this has been our best. With close to 200 orphans, vulnerable children, teachers and principals, the six-day camp provided morning sessions on HIV/AIDS, gender equity, problem solving, self-esteem, conflict resolution, and goal setting. It is a tremendous amount of work and preparation. Each child receives an invitation; each of our 15 twinned schools chooses two boys and two girls with leadership potential. The rest are HL sponsored children from 12–20 years of age. For some, this is an annual pleasure. For others, it is their first time.

Our trained youth leaders act as junior counsellors and are so proud to be part of the team. Donna Bawden organized it this year, spending countless hours arranging transportation, logistics and programs. HL volunteer Penney Place devoted hours to manage the food for such a huge group of people with her local women as cooks. The rest of the team consisted of our Basotho staff (Konesoang Mohatla, Palesa Selikane, Mapoloko Leteka, Mahlompho Motsoasele, Lillo Letsie), Carolyn Kennedy, myself, our intern Sonya Kalyniak and HL volunteers (Michele Pierce, Helen Douglas, Bruce Burbidge and Phil Clarke). Penney's daughter, Stacy Clark, and Dean Bareham from High Strung Circus donated their time to give the kids afternoon circus training. It was wonderful. The camp is such a challenge to put on that it takes this many people plus our youth leaders. We could not have done this without each one. We are grateful this year for the funds from the Kenoli Foundation.

At the opening ceremony, winners of the Kathleen Lauder Leadership Speech Award (Likeleli Chakela) and the Shelagh M’Gonigle Gender Speech Award (Mpolokeng Mochache) read their speeches to the assembly (see below). Each received a small prize, a certificate and M500 (about CAN\$80). Likeleli chose to give her money to her grandmother to help her, while Mpolokeng will buy school books. We are so proud of them, and their joy to win is beyond my ability to describe.

The leadership camp is my treat for the year and always graphically reminds me why we are here. When you see these dear children grow before your eyes, being taken care of for six days, relaxed and happy and safe—safe from criticism, from beatings, from hunger—and learning about psychological, medical and social life-saving measures, no one can doubt that it is well worth the trouble. The children look forward to it all year. Unfortunately, many more came who were turned away, uninvited and for whom we had no room. As news spreads of the camp and its wonders, of course everyone wants to come. We all struggle on a daily basis that we must turn away children and schools. Facing the reality that we cannot help everyone is, frankly, brutal and wears on the conscience. It makes us work harder to spread the news of the need. The balance is always the huge number of children who do benefit in so many ways. This duality is a constant and one we all live with.

We are so proud of our twinned schools. Of the top ten Grade 7 students in the national standardized test results, seven are from our twinned schools. Bokoro Primary, a small, poor school with falling down buildings, gained 4/10 of the top Grade 7 students in the country! The principal, ‘M’e Palesa (Anna), was positively bursting with pride. Sefapanong had two and Katlehong had one. All the teachers tested in our final testing day and were proud to tell me.

I am struggling with the processes and paperwork to start construction on our Youth Centre, Pitseng, funded by the Ontario English Catholic Teacher Association (OECTA) and the Leadership Centre in Hlotse with the hotel for 50 young girls. The Anglican Diocese of Lesotho has generously offered land for both sites. One essential adjacent piece belongs to the government. This larger site is lovely, just outside the small town of Hlotse, large enough for us to hold big grandmother or testing events and room for youth to play. The processes to secure legal entitlement are extremely challenging and time consuming. They involve far too many government departments, conversations and meetings. One goes to a department and finds the file missing or the person not available. I am confident we will make strides in the next two weeks. The contractor is ready to go for Pitseng, and the architect is working on the drawings for Hlotse. We also received anonymous funding to build our own office and upstairs apartment for our interns and staff. It is nigh on impossible to get accommodation here, and we are bursting at the seams in the small office we now have. This new office will be on the Hlotse site.

School starts this week. Our office is bursting with efforts to provide our sponsored children’s uniforms, socks, shoes. Helen and Michele are going up and down to shops and villages to secure the needed items and sizes for the children. It is a huge task, and we appreciate their kind and efficient help. The children’s faces are full of delight to receive the gifts from their sponsors. We are inundated with children and grandparents trying to secure sponsorship. We have had to cut off the list for now until we get new sponsors. It is heartbreaking to see these smart and motivated young ones turned away.

‘M’e Ratia, from Mahlekefane, has stopped by twice to thank us again and again for helping secure new classrooms from the government, for the desks, track suits and shoes for her children. She is a marvel, one of those incredible local leaders upholding her entire remote mountain community.

Two staff members, funded by the Stephen Lewis Foundation (SLF) through Thusa Lesotho, are working hard on their programs. 'M'e Mampaka (child sponsorship and orphan relief) is grateful for all the help as school starts for the year. On Monday there were dozens of grandmothers and children at our door before 7:00 a.m. They come all day, every day. News of our programs has spread far and wide, and her job is a huge one. 'M'e Mapoloko is developing our new grandmother programs in villages, meeting with the chiefs and local leaders who will select the participants. She is also responsible for our existing grandmother programs. It is so unusual for a staff to be devoted entirely to grandmothers that as the word spreads, I fear a floodgate will open. We have clear criteria and are aware of the huge number of elderly who will solicit help. It can be overwhelming, but 'M'e Mapoloko is so excited to have this challenge. The SLF is a pleasure to work with, and we are appreciative of their support.

Programs are in full swing, the need is present, and the conditions are constant. The number of deaths lately seems a lot, a constant I never get used to. One of our grannies lost her daughter to AIDS after a long and painful demise and is left with a severely handicapped child to raise. The child is completely paralyzed and spends much of the day lying on the ground. One blind granny was raped and is in hospital.

It is good to be back after only a four-week absence. We have much work to do.

My very best to you all.

### **Kathleen Lauder Leadership Speech Award 2008**

#### **Likeleli Chakela**

##### Qualities of a Good Leader

In any situation, there is a leader who paves way for his people otherwise things won't be right. In any community, society, politics or church organizations there is a leader.

A good leader is disciplined. He/she is a role-model in any place at any time. He/she sets good examples to his followers; just like a teacher to his students. This help to build culture that will stand the test of time.

A good leader is loyal to his/her people. He/she is trustworthy and reliable. This enables him/her to work harmoniously with his follower on any matter that require attention. Whether present or not, things move smoothly. Even fire, he/she is not to blame, but all share the blame.

He/she should be strict and firm. This helps to make his followers believe what he/she says because he/she is swayed about. But he/she knows what he/she is doing. Firmness means to stand by once decision, if need be. Though, advices are not thrown away for nothing.

A good leader plans his/her work in time because they should have a confidence of doing what is best and weighs the consequences or results. He is very careful of mistakes that might ruin his plans thereby make him a failure.

He/she is dedicated to the welfare of his/her nation progress. He/she wants to see success in any development, socially, economically, politically and otherwise.

A good leader has parental characteristics. He/she build the community like parent who build a family into a mighty web that due wonder.

Being a good leader means you must first have self respect so that people can respect him/her, also should believe in his/herself. Leaders should be able to manage time to avoid being a stumbling block.

Because life has its ups and downs, when you are a good leader, you must be patient and nice to people and try to make them like everything is possible and they worth something because you can come from nowhere but go anywhere.

When you are a good leader, before you do or say anything, you must think about it to avoid conflicts between you and your followers. A good leader must never take things for granted. He/she must take each and everyone close to his/her heart.

LEADERS NEVER GIVE UP!!!

### **Shelagh M'Gonigle Gender Speech Award 2008**

#### **Mpolokeng Mochache**

First of all, I would like to pass my sincere greetings to Help Lesotho and all the Canadian people who contributes to help the Basotho nation with scholarships.

Help Lesotho has done many things in our country, but among them all, I would like to talk about the young women's leadership workshop that was held at Hlotse in Leribe District. I have enjoyed being part of young women's leadership because I have learned a lot about gender.

I have grown up knowing that men are leaders of their families while women are to take care of the children, but help Lesotho improved my mind. I now know that there is something which is called gender equality.

Besides that, I would like to say to help Lesotho I really appreciate their presence in Lesotho because without them, we may not be aware that there are so many things which are done by men that women can still afford to do. I have got new information, and I also know that we as women, we are equal to men even though we are not equal in terms of sex.

I promise help Lesotho that their information has not fall in to deaf ears, so I am going to pass these to other people. Basotho people were living under pressure where by women were forced to stay at home doing nothing but with the help of help Lesotho our nation would know that women are equal to men in terms of gender

Help Lesotho has come to our rescue as Basotho. It has brought light to reveal and fight against being stereotyped. Help Lesotho is going to remove the fears that were on our faces because we are now getting developed in our lives.

To climb down the ladder, I would like say to Help Lesotho, please stay patient as you are and have more enthusiasm to fight against these traditional desire which is strongly on gender.

May God bless Help Lesotho

So I would strongly like to say thank you.

Mpolokeng Mochache  
Bokoro High school Form D  
Tsime, Botha- Bothe

## Winter 2008 – Letter #2

Saturday, another funeral! Each time I go to a memorial service, I discover a different cemetery I did not know existed. This week was the funeral of our Orphan Support Officer's father. By all accounts he was a lovely man. Last Saturday in this small village, five people were buried that we know of. My Sesotho is inadequate to understand the tributes and so I watch the faces and traces of grief as each attendee recalls a family member who has recently died. No one is spared. The women are dressed in traditional style (called *seshoeshoe*) with their colourful Basotho blankets—neighbours helping each other bury the dead. The effects, both financially and emotionally, are devastating for children, mothers, aunts, brothers and sisters.

I continue to hear about Dr. Bob Birnbaum's sessions at camp. Bob works at the Tsepong Clinic and volunteered each morning at the leadership camp to give sessions on HIV/AIDS, sexual health and general health issues. The children and youth queried myths and misconceptions; teachers, many of whom are either HIV/AIDS positive themselves or are looking after people who are, asked about ARV treatment and their own high blood pressure.

I have become like the children, reciting our camp theme daily: **Leaders Never Give Up!** as I struggle through the labyrinth of bureaucracy to secure the land for the centres. We are making real progress but getting this darn paperwork done is brutal here. Due to a housing boom in South Africa, the cost of construction material has risen about 25% in the past year—waking me up in the night to wonder how we can pay for this increase. The large pieces of land given to us will require expensive fencing. Lots of challenges! However, on the positive side, there is a great deal of local government support.



We recently hosted a highly successful two-day Grandparent Conference for 30 from all over the district to provide information on home-based care, local resources, HIV/AIDS, civic rights, etc. The event ended with HIV testing. Palesa Selikane did a great job of organizing local partners.

'M'e Mapoloko, our Grandmother Support Officer, is liaising with communities and local chiefs to roll out the monthly Grandmother Days. She interviews so many grandmothers, listening to their stories. I asked if I could share one:

*I am 77 years old. I am a widow and I stay and take care of 5 orphans they are 4 girls and 1 boy, all of them depend on me . I only remember properly the years of the three of them, 1 year, 5 year, 9 year, but for the rest I don't remember at all. The two girls attend school here as they are being helped by one of the nuns who used to know their mother. They are my sons' children both*

*their parents died. Their father died in 2002 and their mother in 2004, they both died because of HIV and AIDS.*

*After the death of their parents I thought life has come to an end mostly because I was worried about their future, how they will attend school, how I will get food to feed them. Food is the problem is the most problem in this family, we are many. Sometimes I cry with them when they cry, I sometimes think that would be the easiest way to show them that I also don't know what to do. Another problem is school uniforms for them and books. There are days where they go to school without food. I always pray God that I live for a long time for my grandchildren.*

'M'e Mampaka and Michele Pierce are almost through the start-of-school distribution of uniforms, shoes, shirts, etc. What a mammoth task for hundreds of sponsored children, although perhaps one of the most tangible rewards for all of us: seeing desperate people return to hope and children go to school. One man stopped me on the street almost in tears to express his gratitude for the sponsorship of his daughter. Both he and his wife are HIV positive and his level of concern was beyond his ability to control.



I have been up in Thaba Tseka this week, a desperately poor region with the most spectacular mountains. We work with five schools there and a youth corps. At Paray Primary, twinned with John McCrae Elementary in Guelph, Ontario, I met a 10-year-old boy, who looked about six, his shoes held together with staples, his clothes ripped and re-sewn. Never having had his own pair of shoes, he did not know his shoe size. I traced his feet on a piece of paper, went to the store and bought him one size too big for growth and two pairs of socks. Winter is coming. This is what our Orphan Relief Fund is for: children's needs, whether sponsored or not, for which we would have no funding. When I returned the next day with the new shoes, he tried them on so carefully, afraid to scuff or soil them. New socks! It does not take much!



Katlehong Primary, twinned with Corpus Christi in Ottawa, Ontario, is hosting our new volunteer, Marc Brown, who will teach in HL's three primary schools in Thaba Tseka.



Sefapanong Primary, twinned with Turnbull School in Ottawa, is progressing well with the building of its Turnbull Hall. Currently, there are 115 children in one Grade 2 class, for example. This hall will provide three classrooms, community meeting space and a rental facility for the school. Construction stopped for a few weeks because of rain, then a broken machine, then.... Nothing is easy here.

A young girl waited for me one day, calmly knitting with her needles made from a broken clothes hanger. She knit well. When I came in, she said in her broken English that she just wanted to know me. We chatted a while, then I returned to my work, she to knitting. After half an hour, she put her sweater on, smiled and left! She lives

in a nearby village with two older girls and a boy of no relation to her. Her mother had left her alone to work in South Africa. Just to be with someone!

Today is another Saturday, two weeks after I began this letter. I am back in Hlotse. Palesa and the youth are running a sports tournament and an HIV/AIDS testing day up in a village on the way to Pitseng. I will go for a few hours. It is so much work to organize things here—we celebrate each event. Many will know their status today.

My recent visit to the orphanage was fun. Helen Douglas is there now helping with literacy and animals. The difference since I first saw it in August 2004 is remarkable. HL has built a volunteer rondaval and rental units to provide some income generation. They have gotten funding from various places to fix up the grounds, buy tables for the children to eat, hire more staff. The most striking to me though is the difference in the children—now they are getting attention, help with school work, having some fun. It makes all the difference. Everyone falls in love with Sr. Margaret and admires her tenacity. One of the girls from there who has been a part of our Young Women’s Conference Series Step Up and Speak Out and who has attended the camps has completed her high school. She has a private sponsor who is paying for her to work in the HL office and get exposed to a bit more of the world. Puleng is smart and so delightful. She hopes to go to university in August to become an accountant. She is living at the hostel here with our sponsored girls and does light office work all week. We have her reading quality books and journaling on her time off. What an adventure. She writes her sponsor constantly to tell him how much she appreciates this opportunity. She is a wonderful young lady and will be an excellent leader in her community.

Carolyn left on Wednesday. I have less than two weeks left of this two-month stay. The amount of work to finish is always daunting but somehow always gets done. Our staff members are terrific—happy and productive. I feel a real sense of our future in them as they reach so many children, youth, grandmothers, schools and local partners. This has been an amazing journey and to see the results daily gives us all hope and renewed energy.

We are all clear that without the support of so many people, none of this could have been possible. I wish I could recount the times each day when people stop me to thank Canadians for caring about them. It would make you proud!

### Winter 2008 – Letter #3

4:15 a.m. The crickets are riotous this morning. The days are noticeably shorter. Leaves are beginning to fall. The days remain hot, but the nights are noticeably cooling. Fall is coming to Lesotho in its own way and time.



Two tall, handsome boys came to the office. Their sole purpose was to thank Help Lesotho for their **Achievers’ Fund** sponsorship to finish their final year of high school. They handed me their excellent results with delighted grins. They were able to finish their high school, and without this funding, it could never have happened. What fine young men. I often think how much we take education for granted in Canada and how desperate thousands of youth are to go to school here.

Palesa Selikane organized a multi-partner **soccer tournament** and event recently for over 600 youth from various schools. It was so much fun. The event began with foot races, and it is hard to describe how fast the Basotho children can run across an open field in bare feet. The spectators were enthusiastic as the schools battled for the soccer trophy. The youth were educated about HIV by our trained youth and partners, and then all were given the opportunity to test and know their status.



Last week, I had a lovely visit with Her Majesty, **Queen Masenate of the Kingdom of Lesotho**. She is a gracious young woman, who just had her third child—luckily a boy for succession. We talked at length about the Leadership Centre HL is building in Hlotse with its hostel for our girls’ leadership program. ‘M’e has two young daughters and is compassionate about the plight of young orphans from the area where she grew up. She graciously and enthusiastically agreed to be the patron of the two centres and promises active involvement. The palace in Matsieng is truly beautiful, surrounded by vaulting, sculptured rocks cascading on the side of a mountain. I enjoy our visits and very much appreciate the support she and the King have given to HL since the beginning. This photo is one I took of Her Majesty last year at the Bytown Orphanage wearing HL’s signature three-girl pin.

Last Thursday was the first **Grandmother Day** in Hlotse, funded by the Stephen Lewis Foundation. ‘M’e Mapoloko Leteka estimates that 90% of the grandmothers are not really sure what HIV/AIDS is, although they have heard about it. I asked Donna Bawden to describe the event:



Peg, I can’t tell you how wonderful today’s grandmother event was. After months of planning and fundraising, it was finally here and so truly worth it. ‘M’e Mapoloko did an absolutely fabulous job of planning and running the event—with a great deal of support from all HL staff who helped even with details like serving food! We all passed out cold drinks and a snack as they arrived and a wonderful and nutritious lunch. It was an honour to serve these women as they sat together on the lawn in the sun. You could see how much Mapoloko loves her job as she prepared welcome signs and readied the room. She greeted each granny as they arrived—many three hours early!

There were about 50 grandmothers in all (and two grandfathers). Each was so happy to be there! Some grannies could barely walk from various illnesses. Two of them came with the wee babies they are caring for—just a few months old and darling. Most of these dear grandmothers do not have the food they need to care for the orphans.

There was singing coming from the room throughout the day and even dancing. Mapoloko introduced the program, its purpose and how it will work. Local officials were invited for this first day and gave speeches in their honour. A local reporter covered the event for the state radio station—but the day was really for the grandmothers.



Mapoloko gave a talk on basic HIV/AIDS education as so many of them are affected and have lost children and spouses to the disease. It was a day when the grannies themselves could talk about what they wanted from the program, a time to come together and support each other, share their struggles and what they wanted to learn.

I had tears come to my eyes thinking of the magnitude of the problems this group faces, but also just feeling so happy that it was finally taking place and with gratitude that we get to be involved in this work and with these amazing people who are caring for the orphans of Lesotho.



I am putting out a call asking people to save old reading glasses and to buy simple magnifying glasses for these grandmothers. Virtually none have glasses, although many have cataracts and cannot see to read. They will be light and easy to take over.

On the opposite side of this story was a young sponsored orphan who came to me the day before with a great need to tell me that her grandmother had died the previous week—her only surviving relative and the foundation of her young life. She was devastated. We found her lodging as she now had no place to go in the world, nowhere to live and no one to care for her. Her sponsor is wonderful and will write words of encouragement to her. She only wanted this pain to be heard!



'Mampaka Kunene is struggling under the weight of the need of our sponsored children. She is and will be a huge blessing, both to HL and to these hundreds of children. I see that they already trust and love her. Her ready smile is that of a mother's.

She handles each child with humour, attention and patience. In themselves these are real and wonderful gifts to these children who are often lost and alone.

I have spent three and a half months of the last four and a half in Lesotho and leave feeling the centres are going to be finished on time. The foundation for the Pitseng Centre, funded by OECTA, is almost finished.

On Feb. 25, Chief Molapo of Raphoka, Pitseng called a community meeting (referred to as a *pitso*) of the two villages beside where the centre will be at Ha Raphoka. There was a huge turnout with two chiefs and over 100 people. Everyone is delighted about the centre. The leaders in the centre will be two local youth from our training program and two grandmother leads in that program. It fulfills the true notion of traditional elders mentoring youth and will be a wonderful intergenerational example for the community. We are planning the opening, programs, etc. In our meeting with the youth, one said, "This is wonderful. Most of the time the grandmothers are neglected when people think of participation!"

The Leadership Centre in Hlotse is scheduled to open in January 2009. We are thrilled to know that soon we can help hundreds more orphans, vulnerable children and grandmothers. The government and the Anglican Diocese of Lesotho are donating large and beautiful pieces of land. Getting all this accomplished is the most challenging thing I have done in Lesotho, and I feel a huge sense of relief that it is going so well—against what seemed insurmountable odds. I will return in five or six months to oversee both centres and their interior furnishings. I have a huge amount of money to raise for the Hlotse Centre before that and am just trusting that the funds will come for such a special and essential project. One day at a time!

I leave Lesotho feeling that we have an outstanding team on the ground who will efficiently and effectively execute their responsibilities with love and kindness for all those we serve.

I return to Canada to our annual audit and a move in early April to our new office. Keller Williams Ottawa Realty (KWO), at [www.kwottawa.ca](http://www.kwottawa.ca), has **donated free office space** and support to HL. I confess that it will be a good thing to move the office from its three-and-a-half-year home in my basement. We have outgrown the space, and it will be good to have some separation between home and work. Both KWO and HL are excited about this partnership. We are appreciative of their support.

I look forward to seeing many of you as I go around to speaking engagements and meetings. One of the best parts of what I do is meeting incredible people who care about orphans and grandmothers so very far away. What a privilege!

Thank you.

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## **Fall 2008 – Letter #1**

As I flew into Maseru this time, my mind was congested with competing concerns. The stock market is dismal and may not have bottomed out yet. Canada will elect its Parliament while I am gone and the Conservatives have not yet released a serious plan to address these economic woes. The Americans have yet to go to the polls. Will people still give to this tiny mountain kingdom? With the world food crisis hiking the cost of maize meal 55% this year, paraffin (used for cooking and heating) up 80% and cooking oil up 50%, how will this global financial crisis affect those who are poverty stricken already, and how will it affect Help Lesotho's donations?

I wonder how the keyhole gardens the grandmothers are learning to build are doing now that spring is in session. Will they yield the promised increase to feed these orphans and grandmothers? How are our two young women leadership trainees doing in their first month of university? How is our new staff, Anna, funded by the National AIDS Commission of Lesotho, blending into our team?

I carry letters from sponsors to their orphans — my favourite cargo! I was so touched that with all Elizabeth May has to do to lead the Green Party in this campaign; she took time to give me a letter for her dear Nkeboleng on the day of the big debate. The effort and care our sponsors have for these dear children, the ones we all work so hard for, keep me going many a day. Just before leaving, I spoke at the Kingston Grandmother Connection evening and was moved by how close these incredible women feel and how hard they work for our grandmothers. I look forward to telling the grandmothers in our villages how much they are loved. Aren't people amazing!

As the plane approaches the mountains of Lesotho, I could clearly see that there has been no rain. It is spring now and there should be new growth and vivid greens everywhere. I felt nauseous as the consequences of this parched landscape dawned on my jet-lagged brain. No rain, no crops. Seeds planted would not grow. After the long, cold winter, this is heartbreaking. The past few years, there has been persistent drought broken by flash floods that wash away the vegetation and the soil without replenishing the ground. It was the same last year. From this seat far above, it looks worse.

All these thoughts flash through my mind as the tiny plane drops into the Moshoeshe Airport. I anticipate the familiar smell, the clean, thin air, seeing my friends and especially and always the children. It is so good to be back!

On my way from the airport, Donna and I had three meetings to maximize the time. The discussion with Prince Harry's Trust (Sentebale) that is making a generous donation toward the Hlotse Leadership Centre was helpful. We met with the architect to get this moving. The land survey office in Maseru lost our application and survey and we had to start again. Nothing is easy.

When I arrived in Hlotse, 'M'e Mapoloko, our Grandmother Support Officer, was brimming with stories — of the 140 out of the 200 grandmothers she has visited who sleep on the ground, even in the cold and wet and with no mattresses; of the grandmothers now willing to test for HIV/AIDS; of the change in their attitudes because they are now recognized for what they are doing; of their appreciation for the education they are receiving on AIDS, child support, health, grief and loss. She talks of the death of several lately, leaving child-headed households. She talks of grandmothers and the children crouched together in a corner of their huts during the rain storms because of the holes in the roof thatch and how thankful they are to have had their roofs fixed. Her work is painful and yet she loves these old grannies. Bless her heart.

I also heard of the arrival of one tonne of green lentils. A very generous commodities broker, Dave Newman from BC, arranged for a trial shipment of lentils from Saskatchewan. Although it took more than three months for them to arrive by ship to Durban, overland and through Lesotho customs, they will supply three tons of food to these grannies. What a blessing. They do not require soaking so will need less water to cook. Some can be planted. They are high in protein and will help to fill these empty bellies of the orphans and grannies. Some have absolutely no food. The lack of food is becoming ever more a crisis here. With the drought and increase in food costs, many more are literally starving. The hospital sends us children and grandmothers who have AIDS and do not have the nutrition for the drugs to work.

There is much work to do.

My first visit to the office was touching and makes me smile as I write. 'M'e Mahlompho had polished everything in sight, Konesoang had a lovely card and they had decorated my desk. Our two new interns, Gillian Walker and Salil Shah, have been on the ground for two weeks and are adjusting to their new jobs and living conditions. Donna and Palesa have been rolling out the programming in our new Pitseng Centre. Mampaka, Lillo, Anna and Mampoi all have stories and challenges to share. Friday I meet with each one individually. We are blessed with a talented team. Each has too much to do but loves the work and the good we are accomplishing.

I look forward to hearing of each child and grandmother, each youth and school. Who would ever have imagined that we would now have 9,000 people benefitting from our programs in four years!!

My personal thanks to each person who has contributed — in time, money, prayer or promotion. I see the results and we are grateful.

## **Fall 2008 – Letter #2**

Tonight, after the sun dipped below the mountain, two young girls came to see me. They spoke of a family far from the village. The grandmother had AIDS. Her son had died of AIDS. Her daughter-in-law gave birth to a baby girl. She is now just over one, they reckon, and has AIDS. She had to have gotten it from her mother at birth. The baby is on ARVs (antiretroviral drugs). The mother went to test and was diagnosed with AIDS. She never went back for treatment. She won't talk about it. She avoids these girls who are trying to help. So much pain! The girls wanted to know how to help.

They reminded me of a blind grandmother who was brutally beaten and raped last December. Her battered body took weeks to recover in the hospital. I remembered her well and had written about her in a letter home. She did not recover fully and no longer walks. She lives alone with no food or fuel to cook

and there is no one to look after her. Her son lives in Maseru and she weeps to be forgotten so. She asks God to take her. It is just too much. The girls wanted to know how to help.

As I tucked myself into bed on that cold evening under the clear, star-studded sky, in my flannel pyjamas and fleece socks under two warm blankets, I could not sleep for the images of the grandmothers and little ones lying on the cold ground shivering. When we gave out 150 blankets to grandmothers at the beginning of winter, most said they had none. The threadbare ones they did possess were given to the orphans. Some nights, it's just hard to sleep trying to figure out how we, who have so much, allow so many to exist without anything.

Many sponsors ask about sending letters and can do so by mailing them to the Help Lesotho office (Keller Williams Ottawa Building, 610 Bronson Avenue, Ottawa, ON CANADA K1S 4E6) by early November; they can be taken over when Kelly goes. Please mark clearly (child's full name and school).

With now 200 grandmothers in our Grandmother Days, they do not feel alone anymore. Fifty poverty stricken and often ill grandmothers were chosen by the local chiefs and councils in each of four villages, meeting monthly, guided by two local Grandmother Leads. They sing, dance and laugh, share a great snack and nutritious lunch and precious education followed by several hours of discussion. They are learning so much and feel liberated to have someone take the time to help them. They tell me they can't wait for the next meeting. In each village they have started to meet on their own between times. Over 90% did not know what HIV/AIDS was. They had heard about it but did not know what it was. They did not know their vulnerability to the virus when nursing dying people. They learn how to help the orphans under their care, share their grief and loss, receive HIV/AIDS information, homecare support and materials, and learn about available local resources, etc. 'M'e Mapoloko is doing a wonderful job.

'M'e Mampaka and Aus Palesa have gone up to Thaba Tseka to see to the orphans and youth there. It is such a poor area with incredibly high incidence of AIDS. We have many sponsored children there plus Katlehong, Paray and Sefapanong Primary schools, Paray and Thaba Tseka high schools.

Sunday: The service today was special in the 120-year-old church. It was both confirmation and the last time the current Anglican Bishop was preaching before the election of the new Bishop this week. It was standing room only in the Sesotho service. Grandmothers danced in the aisle, leading the singing. How the Basotho love to sing! Despite my traditional dress and head cover (seshoeshoe), the baby beside me on his mother's lap was somewhat alarmed at the only white face in the congregation! I had a special visit with my friend Bishop Mokuku as he stayed at the same cottage for two nights. He has always been so supportive and was a key advocate for the donation of the Anglican land for the Pitseng Centre. He is a charming, smart, kind man and has been a wonderful shepherd to his people. He is loved and we will miss him dearly.

Last night, the Canadians held a Thanksgiving dinner — a real feast. There were seven Canadians, a Nigerian doctor, a Zimbabwean hospital administrator and more than 20 Basotho friends and children. Taking time to visit and have a social exchange is rare and welcome. We all think of our families at home gathering in a similar way.

After dinner I visited with the St. Mary's girls, sponsored by St. Bartholomew's Church, Ottawa. As they crowded around me for a hug, I thought of them four years ago when they came into the program. Carolyn worked so hard to make them into a family. They were so young and yet most had had unbelievable hardships. I often think of one who nursed both her parents in a hut up in the mountains,

alone, not knowing what to do. She is now like the shepherdess of the group, sensitive and kind. We have been through many up and downs together. I have loved them, scolded them, prayed and sung with them, celebrated their victories and tried to find help for their families. It is a strong bond we hold. As I left, we sang “our” song — one I use to sing to them at night years ago and we continue it. Their sweet voices raised under the starlit southern sky in harmony were both ethereal and fortifying.

Oct 14: I visited Sr. Margaret at the Bytown Orphanage. I marvel at the changes since I first met her four years ago. She has 60 children, a full-time social worker (who lives on the property and is there from the time the children come home from school until bedtime), two and soon to be four rental units on the property, furniture for the children to eat together, a full-time officer woman and even a TV! We hope to raise enough to hire a live-in young teacher for study help from 3–9PM after school and on weekends and holidays. There have been many improvements in the property of late. It seems a new place from that time long ago when she and I sat to discuss the desperate situation she was in. She has built relationships with funders and many have been generous. She is a kind and good woman. I missed seeing the children, as they were all off at school, but it gave us a precious and quiet visit.

I spent most of the day Thursday at the new Help Lesotho Pitseng Centre funded by the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association (OECTA). From the time two and a half years ago when it was only an embryonic idea, it is now a reality — and such a beautiful one. I could hardly contain my happiness at seeing it finished and up and running. There are new programs starting: after-school peer tutoring for the orphans, grandmother days, youth programming and our small but wonderful library. We have purchased books from all over Africa with shining black faces and relevant material to educate and inspire. When the rest of the bookshelves arrive, the selection will be coded and organized by the youth leaders who are being helped by a group in Ottawa of retired librarians headed by Karen MacLaurin.



We are starting a log of the use of the centre and in the first three days, 150 grandmothers, orphans and youth came for programs. Imagine how many will use it in the future!! I went to the centre to be a part of the monthly Pitseng Grandmother Day. What a joy. The grandmothers came from all over, some on crutches, some with babies. They sang for me and had made wonderful hats, straw mats and gifts to show their appreciation. I almost cried to see this beautiful place and their delight in being attended to. It is a dream come true, thanks to OECTA. Unfortunately there was no water. The village is suffering from the drought. I drove some youth with the truck to get water from the school tap to cook their lunch.

Drought and inflation have increased the poverty significantly. In early October, we used our youth corps to roll out small packages to 1924 children in some of our twinned schools. We were able to deliver candles for doing homework, personal soap, soap for washing clothes, Vaseline for hair and skin,

toothbrush and toothpaste at a cost of \$5.50 per child. Our youth were careful to give the packages to the little ones first so that the older children did not take them. This was a pilot to see how we can quickly and efficiently get simple supplies directly to children. Suppliers delivered the goods and plastic bags for each to carry the items home.

The Kenoli Foundation has been a huge help this year, helping to fund the camp last January, providing funds for a wonderful new photocopier for resources, materials on HIV/AIDS, gender, literacy and coping. We are rolling out these materials to children and youth in the HIV/AIDS clubs in our schools and library.

I have stayed at a small guest house run by Anglican nuns for years, and especially Sr. Maria — a dear soul. She has been the epitome of kindness and generosity. She has aged quickly of late and since my last visit, she has grown old. Her spirit has grown thin. She is in her early 80s and ridden with arthritis. She has given up the guest house and tends only to her flowers. Without her, the light has gone from the place. I notice such a change since my last trip.

At night, I find myself sitting in the dark praying for gentle rains. The gardens that have been planted are quickly drying up. Most have not planted yet as they have neither the seeds nor water. Such simple, yet elusive essentials.

### Fall 2008 – Letter #3

During my travels to see the projects this week, I felt a different sense of being overwhelmed — this time at the progress made and the hundreds of people benefitting. 'M'e Konesoang has worked hard to complete these large projects. It is difficult to manage with the enormous distances involved. The **Turnbull Hall** in Sefapanong is now fully complete but I did not have a chance this time to go up so far into the mountains to see it. The opening will be in a week with the entire community participating.



During my first visit to **Bokoro Primary School**, the walls of the school were crumbling — large holes in the walls and cracks in the floors and broken windows. Roof beams were rotten and the children had to leave the classrooms during high winds or vigorous rains. Now the repairs are complete. HL has build concrete walls on either side of the existing walls, repaired the floors, added a new roof and windows. Such pride! The principal, 'M'e Palesa, is such a good soul and is so appreciative of the help (see below before and after shots). Parents and guardians, the chief and school council are deeply grateful.

People who walk by stare at such transformation. The children sang a song for me they made up about their joy in this “new” school. Bokoro Primary is twinned with Riverview School in Ottawa and the tiny school office room has a surround banner made by the children in Canada — the children of Bokoro y feel loved and befriended.



During my visit to **Bokoro High School**, twinned with Ridgemont High School in Ottawa, it was exciting to see the students and the new dorm funded by *positively Africa*, the Ha! Man! Concert and Kathleen Lauder. The school is so remote that girls are in mortal danger of walking more than two hours to and from school, often in the dark. More than 100 girls will be housed in this wonderful building. The principal, 'M'e Mapalesa, is delighted and the girls can hardly wait to move in.



**Mokoena**, HL's newest twinned school, is a tiny primary school behind a looming mountain accessible only by one very long and terrible road, parts of which are mere paths winding around the boulders. Twinned with Rockcliffe Park Public School in Ottawa, Mokoena is thrilled to have this recognition. Children received shoes and uniforms to replace the tattered cloth and bare feet. The photo shows the children waving to their Canadian peers.



I had such fun at two more Grandmother Days in Buthe-Buthe and Hlotse. What dear ladies, many so frail. They made gifts for the grandmothers in Canada who support them, so wanting me to know that before this, they were destitute and depressed. Now they are filled with hope, their huts no long leak and they are not alone. In Butha Buthe, they meet in a small stone one-room church. We had to buy plastic chairs for the church as there was nowhere to sit. In Hlotse, we must rent chairs each time as we do not have a facility to host so many indoors. In poor or cold weather, it is a huge problem. Grannies arrive early, eager for the education, singing and support. Once the Hlotse Centre is complete, it will be significantly easier. The cooks will not have to manage outside and the weather will not be such a determinant. We will have chairs!

A group of volunteers from the Bracelets of Hope Church Engagement Committee (Andy McDougall, Shelley Donelle, Wes Burrows, Gary Cymbaluk and Jeff Lambkin) who are raising the final amount for the Hlotse Centre joined us for the Grandmother Day and were delighted to serve food and drinks to these dear grannies.



This month, the grannies each received their food packages — maize meal, oil, soap, candles, dried beans and cabbages or potatoes, whichever is available. I tell them of how the grandmothers in Canada in the HL group care for them and how they raise the funds — through hard work and dedication. They long to speak of their appreciation. Some give presentations on what they learn and talk to me at great length to describe the difference (despite the fact I do not understand a word). We dance together and I feel such joy that they are no longer alone or forgotten.

Even as I write this, I think of two fundraisers this week, one in London (Masonville Manor) put on by our group of octogenarians and one in Toronto (Go-Go Grannies). I hope these photos do justice to their efforts to provide life-giving food and support. You can see the effects of the drought and unplanted fields at the end of spring.



I was keen to see one of our latest initiatives, keyhole gardens made from stone, tin cans, grass, ash and cow dung. They require less water, are self-fertilizing and do not require painful bending. Soon we will train youth teams to construct them. There is no cost for the gardens themselves, just the outrageous cost of seeds — more than \$100 CAD for two plantings. The yield is many times that of a traditional garden. The gardens are drying up with the lack of rain. These grannies were delighted I came so far to see their gardens. One granny had left. She had five orphans to care for and no food. A rumour that there was someone with maize meal to share on the other side of the mountain sent her on the several hour walk to see if that was so. It is so hard.

As I wash my clothes with a bar of sunlight soap and a stone, I remember the women in the villages washing in virtual mud puddles – the lack of rain is wreaking suffering upon the already challenged.

This photo shows one village high up with no water in the village tap. Jugs wait in the hope that it will start to flow soon.



Our lawn mowers, a cow and a horse, are emaciated and it is painful to watch them try to find greens to eat. Yesterday the horse was foraging in the garbage burning place, filled with broken glass. Everyone suffers.



This last weekend was our annual “Step Up and Speak Out” Young Women’s Conference with 30 girls from our villages for three days of fun and education on grief and loss, sexual health, abuse and self-esteem building. Most of them were new this year to our programs. Several times a day, we join hands and scream “WE ARE WONDERFUL!!!!” It is a joy to behold. This is my favourite part of my work, talking to the girls, holding them when they cry, helping them to know that they are cared for and watching them grow before our eyes. The conference organizer this year, our new intern Gillian Walker, did a fabulous job with the complications of getting these dear girls excused from school, transported to and fro, arranging programming and meals. Even the cooks love to be in such a positive environment and both tested for HIV/AIDS on the last afternoon with the girls. Their singing was so lovely — as are they. Almost all were in tears as they talked about what they have learned and the sadness they carry at being orphaned and often abused. It would break your heart. Lots of hugs for each one!

This coming week Patty Freeman and her husband Stuart Culbertson, from Victoria, arrive for three months. They are the first volunteers to live at the Pitseng Centre and will be a huge help in the programming, setting up the library, literacy groups, peer tutoring, grandmother groups and youth initiatives. They have been dear friends of mine for 25 years and have been preparing for a year — reading, fundraising, resourcing their workplans and taking leave from work. They will meet their sponsored child, a fine young woman whom they have loved and supported for almost four years now — what a reunion it will be!

As October closes, our office is again inundated with guardians and orphans hoping for sponsorship. Throughout November the numbers will swell as people struggle to imagine how they will fund the school fees when school opens at the end of January. Our sponsorships have been down significantly this year for some reason and the waiting list is long.

We hope to have the final documentation on the land donation for the Hlotse Centre this coming week and are ready to proceed. We have been saving for over two years for this and the entire community is excited to see the two buildings go up so that we can reach hundreds more.

Almost as soon as I get home, I will speak to over 500 real estate agents in the Keller Williams Realty group at their annual inspirational breakfast. The Keller William Ottawa donates our office space and

sponsors three orphaned girls. I hope I am able to convey the need here and our appreciation for their support.

As I conclude this letter before I leave Lesotho, it is 3 AM and it is raining! Oh that it is gentle and enough to allow planting. Last month, King Letsie III called for national prayer for rain. The UN's recent list of poverty indicators for developing countries puts Lesotho 7<sup>th</sup> from the bottom — that's a distinction!

Our sincere thank you to those who read these letters and for your interest and support for our programs. Your encouragement means so much to me and to all the staff in both countries. Next week, when I get home to high speed, I will send out some suggestions and prices for Christmas gifts you may want to purchase. These have been defined by our staff and project leaders as key items.

We all thank each one of you and wish you well in your own lives.

Sala hantle (stay well)