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2009 was a year of growth and challenge for Help Lesotho. From getting the new centre in Hlotse close to completion to hosting the King of Lesotho in Canada for five days, there was never a dull moment!

Winter 2009 – Letter #1
The rains did come. This beautiful country has returned to its summer green and there is hope for the crops. Summer bathes the land in a light that is clear and comforting, hot and sunny. In the few short weeks I was away, the earth has recovered. I read last week that most poor Basotho spend 75–80% of their income on food. Feeding oneself has become a subsistence existence and threatens so many children who are orphaned, abandoned by parents working in South Africa or just too poor to for seeds or garden tools. You notice in the photos that the people look robust, not gaunt as one would expect. The diet here is almost entirely starch — papa (maize meal) and bread, with bread and tea for meals.

This past week we held the fourth annual Help Lesotho Leadership Camp. As I write this, it is hard to believe that so many years have gone by. More than 850 children and teachers have attended, and hopefully have had some transformative moments. This year we changed locations for the first time and tried St. Paul’s School for the Deaf. It is very hard to find a place to accommodate such a crowd. It was
more expensive but also more manageable. The camp has always been held under such challenging circumstances. This year it was organized by Gillian Walker, our intern, paid for by the Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development (funded by CIDA). Gillian, who is with us for a year and is fabulous, worked so hard and did a spectacular job. It takes months and infinite patience and forethought. We work on the child sponsorship portfolio and will soon also help with the new Basotho Girls’ Leader Corps project.

The kids look forward to this all year — it is a highlight and a yearning. They come from all over the mountains, streaming in with anticipation. The Thaba Tseka group even come one day early to ensure they don’t miss anything. The six-day camp provides a safe and supportive environment. Participants know that for this time no one will criticize or beat them. For six days they will have nutritious meals, fun, hugs and knowledge to guide them. This year, we hosted 230 orphans, vulnerable children, teachers, principals, eight granny leads and four young nuns. Many HL child sponsors treat their dear Basotho sons and daughters to this time. Each of the 17 HL participating schools is allowed to send its principal, orphan lead teacher and HIV/AIDS Club teacher lead plus two boys and two girls with leadership potential to influence others. Each wears his or her Help Lesotho red wristband; each is part of something bigger. By the end, most have tested for HIV/AIDS and also wear a blue wristband to indicate that they know their status. These are outward signs of belonging and leadership.

The camp always begins with the reading of the winning speeches for the Kathleen Lauder Leadership Award and the Shelagh M’Gonigle Gender Speech Award. It is a proud moment. When the winners realize that their words and opinions will be posted on the website for all to read, they are amazed. Sessions were held all morning on HIV/AIDS, Gender, Healthy Relationships, Alcohol and Drug Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Self-Esteem, Leadership and discussions with people living with HIV and AIDS, etc. I did one for each of the eight groups on Death and Grieving. This is the first time for many that the issue is safe to discuss. Although the discussion is painful, many show a noticeable sense of relief and gratitude that they are being encouraged to openly discuss these previously forbidden topics.

It is unfortunate that these issues are so common that we have to hold 1.5-hour sessions to give the children enough information and discussion to protect themselves and make decisions. Orphans, with no one to protect them, are so vulnerable — it is painful to hear their stories. These sessions are healing and liberating. In Lesotho, adults do not talk to children about issues or decisions. Most are not told what happens to their parents when they disappear. Imagine never knowing where your parents are, or if they are dead, what they died of! At least the custom to bury the dead parent at night and tell the children they have “gone away” is diminishing!

Afternoons were ones of drama and sports, both centred on communication and HIV/AIDS awareness. We have little time to be frivolous. Local partners are invited to join us for a day to see what we do and to model positive and caring relationships with the children. The evenings are delightful watching these incredibly talented children perform skits, recite poetry (some rap), sing spectacularly etc. One night the group singing reached such a pitch that it brought everyone to their feet to dance and sing for a couple of hours, hands raised, feet prancing. I love to dance with the children. Teachers participate fully, equally enraptured. This is the bond — Africa
It makes my own heart sing to see the children I know to have HIV or AIDS so healthy and participating — even in skits about AIDS discrimination. Sponsorship has changed and enhanced the lives of these children in remarkable ways. The sponsored kids love ‘M’e Mampaka (HL’s Orphan and Vulnerable Children Support Officer). She is wonderful with them. She provides continuity and kindness that transcends the financial benefits to provide psychosocial support they so desperately need. She is a mother to them all. I long to tell each sponsor of the incredible influence this is to a child — to know someone cares. This is the reason I am in Lesotho, so that these children know they are not alone! On the last day, almost everyone tested. The really encouraging fact is how many now test negative. When I first came to Lesotho, there was no testing or treatment outside the capital city. The progress, although slower than anyone would like, has been significant. In this area, the Ontario Hospital Association-funded Ts’epong Clinic has done a superb job. Many know their status now. Help Lesotho alone has been responsible for close to 6,000 people testing for HIV/AIDS in the past three years. Those who know they are positive do not re-test so the stats are exclusive of them. HL tries to get young people before they contract the virus and keep them negative, or if they are positive to keep them healthy. There are many indications that the rate of infection is slowing. I keep thinking the rate of death must be too but almost every person we meet (all the principals) were either preparing for or had just come from a funeral of a close relative!

I love to chat with the children and the teachers — I am deeply fond of them and have a history with so many. Travel to all the locations is difficult. Bringing them all to one place makes it a pleasure to visit. The final night includes a Canadian-style bonfire and singsong. It provides closure and some calm before we disperse. The children clean up the surroundings and are wonderful. To have that many children in one place and to have almost no disciplinary issues is a pleasure.

This year Helen Douglas came to help with the camp. She loved returning to Lesotho and is always such a hard worker and a pleasure to have. Doug Thicke arrived in time for the camp and held sessions on drama. Both Helen and Doug work so hard on the Canadian side to help raise funds and engage new sponsors. Doug will be here for three months working in the schools and orphanage. Patty Freeman and Stuart Culbertson, who have been living at the Pitseng Centre since their arrival at the beginning of November, loved the camp and helped in so many ways. They leave Lesotho in two weeks to travel and join their grown children in India. They are already missing Lesotho.

Upon arriving in Lesotho, I interviewed an outstanding young woman who is now engaged as a full-time teacher at the Bytown Orphanage. The orphanage now has a full-time social worker and a full-time teacher. Ausi Molumo will work with the 60 children after school until bedtime, on Saturdays and holidays. This is paid by one donor for two years and will make a real difference to the future of all the kids at the orphanage. We are most appreciative. I think she will be fabulous. Her specialties are math and science — the two most difficult subjects in Lesotho and the reason so many students fail. Few teachers understand the subjects. The students are expected to learn from books and memorization. They often do not even understand the questions on the standardized exams.

School is starting. Grandmothers, orphans, guardians are streaming into our office to plea for sponsorships. It would melt your heart to see the pain in their eyes. We have decided to only accept a short waiting list until we secure new sponsors. It is not fair to raise expectations, to lead a child to think she will be able to attend school this year and then not be able to find a sponsor.
Our office is teaming with people. We are so crowded that there is no place for me to work. I work on my bed in the place where I stay. I use the Internet in the vehicle outside the hospital to save money and benefit from a wireless connection. Nothing is easy!

The ex-pats in Leribe gathered at the local bar to watch Obama’s inauguration on TV with as much hope and admiration as the rest of the planet. Africa longs for recognition and support. He is a talisman for so many.

For those of you who have not yet heard, Carolyn Kennedy Van der Heide had a healthy, wonderful baby girl on January 3 — wee baby Hannah. Our sincere congratulations to Carolyn and Ben. Not a day goes by here when I do not think of Carolyn and miss her. She and I have always been here for January and February to help the children and move things forward. She has done such a great job and is so loved here. Everywhere I go people ask for her. They all rejoice in her new daughter. Help Lesotho will miss her. Her temporary replacement Stephen Kendall is doing a wonderful job and I am so grateful he is in Canada helping while I am here. He comes to Lesotho mid-February so we can overlap for a couple of week. He has been a blessing already.

A short note to say that my dear friend Sr. Maria had a stroke on Christmas day and is slowly recovering. It was on the right side of the brain and leaves left-side deficits. Her language is OK, memory not fully returned. It broke my heart to see her thus. She has been like a mother to me for four-and-a-half years and we all love her. She is goodness itself.

I hear it is painfully cold at home. We are all working so hard here to honour your trust and support. Although we cannot communicate with each one as we would like, know that you are in our thoughts.

**Winter 2009 – Letter #2**

So much effort in the past two years to raise funds and to build the two centres has been fraught with challenges. Yesterday, I spent the day at our Pitseng Centre, called Seotlong Centre which means “a place to share ideas,” built by the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association (OECTA). The sign on the building notes that the Anglican Diocese of Lesotho has donated the land and OECTA has donated the buildings. Three wonderful coloured signs now stand at strategic locations to announce the place and location.

We continue having huge problems with the Hlotse Centre. The final stage of land registration depends on one person who is never there and one piece of paper; the fine man who was to build the Centre was shot to death this week in a robbery. When I go to the Seotlong Centre, I am reminded that we will get this done, despite the obstacles. When I see the children in the library and the grandmothers learning so
much, I think of this time next year and how I will feel when the Hlotse Centre is complete. The challenges here are in every way formidable, slow to resolve and multi-facetted. Donna and I trudge on — in faith that it will happen and with determination that each effort will somehow bear fruit. I think of the hundreds and then thousands of people who will benefit over the years and am fortified. At Seotlong Centre, the youth leaders develop their skills to lead programs under the direction of Palesa Selikane, HL’s Youth and Leadership Officer, whose salary is funded by the Prince Harry’s Trust (Sentebale). These young leaders conduct programs, learn how to schedule and organize our many visitors and gain confidence each month. Perhaps the most difficult challenge is to develop a literacy culture — to help those who have never owned a book realize the magical experience and power in each page. It will take time. School has just started for the new year. Our study groups will help so many students process what they are supposed to memorize for their exams. The community is learning that they are important enough to have such a wonderful place and must strive to look after it. We had a hilarious incident when certain cows were invited into the centre property to “mow” the grass. A leader from the wee Raphoka Anglican Church came to complain that we only invited “Catholic” cows and why not “Anglican” cows!!!!

Below is a report written by Patty Freeman. She and her husband, Stuart Culbertson, have been wonderful volunteers — kind, persistent and helpful. This is their last week of their three-month stay and they are pained to say goodbye to the many people whom they have grown to love — the children they have read to, the youth they have encouraged, the grandmothers they have danced with. They will be truly missed.

People lined up around the office all day every day — we cannot help them. Each year our list of sponsored children grows but this year we cannot take as many new ones into school. ‘Me’ Mampaka has posted a huge sign on our water tank — in Sesotho of course — saying that we can no longer accept applications for sponsorship and the waiting list is full. It breaks your heart. I watch the hopeful people come and see the feeling of desperation on their faces as they are turned away.

A lovely young woman came to me to confess that she is HIV positive and cannot trust one person to tell. She worries she will be fired from her position, although this is now illegal, and ostracized from her peers.

A recent report from the World Trade Organization quantifies the effect of the economic downturn on developing countries, especially given their high dependence upon external factors. When one considers that there will be significantly less money sent back to Lesotho from those living elsewhere, fewer orders for the garments they produce (in southern African orders are down 30% and
falling rapidly as the developed world refrains from buying), and less tourism, international investment, and follow-through on aid promises, recent improvements in various economic indicators are likely to reverse.

As I close, I hear my resident rat that comes out to crawl around at dusk every night in the ceiling. He is a faithful visitor.

Each day brings new promise, new challenges and new tragedies of human life it unfolds. Such is Lesotho. My best to each one and thanks for reading this and for caring.

Letter From Patty Freeman, January 2009
Since its launch on June 17, 2008, Pitseng Seotlong Centre has become a landmark in the community. As the local population becomes increasingly aware of the centre and its services, more and more people have begun to come. Now open six days a week, total attendance between October 1 and November 30 exceeded 1,000, with visitors ranging in age from two years old to grandmothers in their seventies.

Five programs are now being delivered at the Centre, most of which are run by the four members of Help Lesotho’s Youth Corps (HLYC). Sessions focus on HL’s key objectives: HIV/AIDS awareness, gender equity, leadership and literacy.

Story time on Monday and Wednesday afternoons, averaging 20–30 children at a time between the ages of six and eleven, is the most popular. Children have the opportunity to practise their oral reading skills with the wonderful books donors have purchased.

On November 25 a weekly book club was introduced. A Canadian volunteer led the discussion and explained the concept of book clubs, which are unknown to Basotho, but there was some interest and hopefully it will grow over time. Eventually a Youth Corps member will assume the lead. In this non-literacy culture, the delight of books is yet to be discovered. In addition to the programs, many youngsters come daily to the Centre to play. Saturdays are for the students to come for study groups and library work.

Discussion groups on topics of interest such as drug and alcohol abuse, grief over the loss of loved ones and elder mentoring are just beginning, facilitated by the HLYC. Two other programs, English classes and French conversation (requested by villagers oddly enough), are offered weekly by Canadian volunteers and will continue until the end of January.

Large, monthly, community-wide events include the centre’s first, an HIV/AIDS awareness day. On Saturday, December 6, hundreds of youth and young adults learned about the disease from two HIV/AIDS organizations and enjoyed singing, dancing and listening to music provided by a DJ.

As soon as the long awaited Lesotho electrical company hooks up of electricity, the library will be better lit and open longer.
Winter 2009 – Letter #3

We have had many days of torrential rain — so good for the gardens and for the hungry. When the when the clouds lift, the mountains are again surprisingly and breathtakingly beautiful. There is something primordial, curvaceous and sculptural about the Maluti Mountains — each one different and imaginative. The clear, thin air is refreshing and hopeful. The ground absorbs the moisture like a starving child with a glass of milk. Renewal is somehow always surprising and wonderful.

Despite that fact that at my cottage it means the laundry does not dry and the water has so much mud that one cannot wash, it is a good thing. When the rain pelts down on my roof, I think of the thatched roofs of so many grandmothers we patched and replaced last year and how they no longer leak. I think of the grandmother and orphans inside and know that they can sleep through the night and are dry.

You would be amazed at how foreign the notion of book clubs and reading for pleasure are here. People view reading as the chore it is in school, and very few have a book of their own.

Demonstrating to people that reading is worth the time will be one of our greatest challenges in the few years. Individuals are so busy fetching water, cleaning, looking after the sick and working in the fields that taking time to read or discuss a book does not have intuitive appeal. For guardians to give children leave from their chores to read is a rare permission. The notion that it is worth time to stimulate young minds is unheard of. Deb Cowley and Joan Gregorich have spent hours helping us choosing books with thematic relevance and cultural significance. The Kenoli Foundation has provided funds to buy simple, Afro-centred books, many from the OSU Children`s Library Fund and various places in Africa. When I look at the modest selection we now have, I am so happy. This is a great joy and we are appreciative to each person who has helped. A group of librarians in Ottawa, headed by Karen MacLauren and Ann Baden, is raising funds to help hire a librarian. Members of the group have sewn beautiful cushion covers for a reading corner for the little ones. These orphans and vulnerable children are desperate for any attention at all and love to be read to. Our trained youth are learning the joy of reading to children. It is a work in progress, supported by many people.

This is the fifth and final year of the St. Mary`s Hostel project, funded by St. Bartholomew`s Anglican Church in Ottawa. Because of their generosity, sixteen girls have been fed, housed, educated and loved. I feel as if I am their mother. The longer I know them, the more acquainted I become with their family struggles, their isolation, their poverty and their need for us. Some are happy attending the sewing school and will graduate this year. Some are in grade 11 or 12. They have been to four leadership camps and know that there are choices, testing, treatment and hope. As they start this final year, the prospect of their futures alone looms large. One can see it in their eyes — soon they will have to survive on their own and the prospects are few. Whatever happens, they have been written to for five years, loved and
listened to. It has been a real blessing. Rob Nelson, his wife Joanne and their friend Mary Mahoney are coming tomorrow. Rob is a founding board member of Help Lesotho and has been such a support. Their girl, Sebolelo, is so looking forward to meeting them in person that she hugs me until I cannot breathe and jumps up and down. A girl’s dream comes true!

My visit last week to the Bytown Orphanage was a delight. I had my usual business meeting with Sr. Margaret, at which we struggle with her issues and plan for the future. The full-time teacher is a wonder — young, smart, kind and happy!!!! What this will do for the sixty children! I see the ones who are back from school — hug many, watch them play. It is a good place and these young urchins are well cared for. This past week, I met with the Minister of Health, Dr. Ramatlapang — a fine woman — and with the Minister of Social Welfare, ‘M’e Chisepo. Both are kind and receptive to our work. I meet with the Director of Health Planning tomorrow to discuss how we can work together with these ministries. I have met with some potential funders. It is hard slugging going from place to place to seek assistance. Not on one’s career path!

We have progress on Plan B for the centre construction following the murder of our previous contractor. After a meeting of several hours today and yet one more site visit, I think we are finally coming to a place where we can proceed — and with haste. I long for the day when this is behind us. So many have kept this vision with us and the need has never wavered. By January 2010, we should have the most wonderful opening.

The grandmothers continue to enjoy their Grandmother Days — so happy to be attended to and to learn. Here are the grandmothers gathered for the Grandmother Day inside our “lappa” at the Pitseng Centre. Fifty grandmothers — in chairs — are happy not to sit on the ground with their worn and aching bodies. They learn about health and how to manage better. They sing and delight in each other’s company.

As I watched the grandmothers coming from afar for the Hlotse Grandmother Day, I could see that they are a visual representation of the situation in Lesotho. Many walk precariously with canes, some have facial paralysis from strokes, some are almost blind with cataracts and others have growths or infected teeth. One old woman comes with a scarf around her jaw to moderate the pain radiating from her gums. They come in hope, with anticipation of fellowship, singing, good food and education on things vital to their lives but to which they have no other access.

At our staff meeting today, ‘M’e Mapoloko reported that six orphans died in the previous weeks. Some are HIV positive and suffer greatly when taking the drugs on an empty stomach. The grandmothers stop the drugs. Once food is found and the drugs are started again, the wee bodies cannot handle it. One can never take a day off the anti-retroviral drugs. The little ones die. Others have not been tested and the cause of death is approximated — perhaps the “running stomach” as it is called here or fever! The sadness never ends.
I asked ‘M’e Mapoloko to write down some stories to share with you:

**Mamolefi** tells us: “I am 70 years old. I live at Pitseng Hamajara. I take care of nine orphans. Five of them are at school while four of them are still at home. In December 12th one of my grandchildren who is 12 years fell sick and after two weeks she died. She was positive and under treatment, she died of dryhoea and vomiting. We did not have enough food in the family and yet she was still taking medication, so I think the disturbance started there (taking medication without food),” she cried and said she couldn’t survive… “On the 12th at night she died, I was with her and the other children. I called the neighbour. We sat there till morning. We couldn’t take her to the mutual, because I did not have money. The next day, it was how to bury her. No money, no coffin ( she cried again). Some villagers came with the idea of using card boxes. They got them from the local shop. They patched them together and made in the shape of a coffin, she was buried like that (tears came from her eyes). I always think God has forgotten all about me."

**Marethabile** shares her story: “I am taking care of 11 orphans. One died in December. I asked myself how am I going to bury her, where will I get money. We cried the whole night with my other grandchildren (she cried again). With God’s mercy I am still surviving. Only two have gone to school, the rest are at home. I always cry when they ask for food because I don’t have any means of providing. I am sick, stressed because of all these problems. I sometimes think deeply about these children, what will happen if I die, who will take care of them.”

**Mapule** says: “My name is Mapule. I stay at Hamalesaoana village. On January the 5th at 11 p.m., we were preparing to sleep with my grandchildren. Every night we pray before sleeping. While we were praying, I heard a noise from outside. After praying the noise continued. Some boys were kicking the door and trying to push it to open. One of my grandchildren started praying again (her voice shakes). They continued till they managed entering. Myself and the other two children escaped and ran outside. They followed us and I fell down. Before running away, we shouted but no one came to our rescue. So they caught me, beated me on the head, six times and on my waist (she cried). I was bleeding so much that I didn’t have strength. But God gave me strength. I crawled to the Chief’s place, I knocked and they opened. I don’t know what happened from there. The next morning I found myself at the hospital. What I remember is that when they were beating me. They kept saying we have to kill this witch. It was a group of four boys in their middle twenties. I thank God so much I have survived. Now because I used all the money for hospitalization, my grandchildren cannot go to school because they don’t have uniforms. I will not even be able to go for the checkups” (she cried again and she couldn’t continue with the story, because she was touched).

What balances the sadness for them and for us is that we are doing something. I do not know of any other organization that has one staff totally devoted to grandmothers. My best to you.

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**Winter 2009 – Letter #4**

As I write, I look out on the magnificent mountains of Thaba Tseka. Here, on the edge of this mountain, overlooking the canyon below, I feel a sense of repose that is rare and previous. The beauty is arresting. Tuesday was ‘M’e Ikaneng Taole’s first day with Help Lesotho as Director of Finance and Operations. She replaces Konesoang who will shortly move to Germany with her new husband. We will miss Konesoang.
She has steered our organization through many rough times and is loved in the schools and by the children. We all wish her well in her new life and know she will always be part of the Help Lesotho family, wherever she is.

‘M’e Ikaneng is an experienced chartered accountant and we are thrilled to have her. She has a good heart and a willingness to provide the financial accountability and governance our donors expect. She has significant experience in several African countries and is making a big leap to come to such a small town as Hlotse. ‘M’e Ikaneng has now seen a part of Lesotho she had not known existed. Her inauguration into Help Lesotho has been via the precious children, grandmothers and overwhelming need.

Her first day was unusual. Immediately after breakfast, ‘M’e Ikaneng, Rob Nelson — from our board in Canada — and I ascended the mountain passes from Hlotse to Thaba Tseka. It was a gloriously clear day. After a couple of hours, we turn off the tarred road for the treacherous journey to Mahlekefane. As the driver, I confess, I broke out in a cold sweat when I had to come to a dead stop on a staggeringly steep vertical climb to wait for the herd boy to get his sheep and a couple of cows off the boulder-filled road. In all my travels, in many countries, this stretch of road is the most terrifying. It is a vertical drop of more than 300 metres a few yards from the road. Our truck is huge and heavy. The thought of it rolling backwards is paralyzing. Rob and Ikaneng were terrific passengers. It is hard to have your life in someone else’s hands.

We wound around the mountains, through streams and potholes half a metre deep until we crested the hill that overlooks Mahlekefane Primary School. Four and a half years ago, it was the most destitute school I had ever seen. It has oft been featured in the Help Lesotho calendars for its rugged beauty and tragic poverty. There were 126 children in each class, sitting on the dung-smeared floors. Principal ‘M’e Ratia is one of my oldest friends in Lesotho and an amazing leader. Mahlekefane has a wonderful relationship with its twinned school, Bishop Hamilton School, Ottawa. Its principal, Alison Goss, is originally from South Africa and understands how difficult things are here. Help Lesotho has provided the school with clothes, shoes, a roof and supplies but other than friendship, the most significant was our intervention with the Head of Primary Education for Lesotho for new classrooms. When we saw the new school in the distance, I was overwhelmed at the change. For the first time, there are outhouses for the children to go to the bathroom, a staff room and chairs to sit on, desks and unbroken widows in the two new class blocks. The old classrooms are still used, the poverty and hunger still exist, but these new buildings and desks are a visual representation of hope. Remarkable!

We returned to the tarred road and climbed for hours — into the sky, an awesome vista at every turn. I contend that this is one of the most beautiful drives anywhere, even the last hour and a half on windy dirt roads! Ikaneng and Rob were taken aback at the beauty, as they should be.
We stay at the priest’s house, our base of operations. Changes here as well! The geyser to heat water has been fixed, two new rooms added, a coat of paint – all clear evidence of the new young priest who has taken over — a budding entrepreneur!

The next morning was the Thaba Tseka Grandmother Day — a thrill for all of us. I wore the red sheshoeshoe dress they had given me, to be admired by all. Ah, the grannies! Their cataracts are visible from a foot away. They bring what little they have to share. Their poverty is painful. How they love these grandmother days. The leaders report the yearning of other grannies in their villages to be part of the Grandmothers’ Group. In my last letter I mentioned the lack of funds for coffins. This week one grandmother buried her grandchild in a maize sack, unable to even get cardboard!

We visited Sefapanong – a 45-minute gorgeous drive on painful roads. One little boy had never seen a white person. He was visibly terrified as his eyes filled with tears. Turnbull School in Ottawa has been an outstanding twin for four years. Sefapanong has more than 114 children in each classroom. With the new Turnbull Hall, the school has a place for concerts, community activities, a church service, classes, etc. As you can see above, it is beautiful and so appreciated. Once furnished, it will be a blessing for decades, funded by Mary Ann Turnbull herself.

Paray Primary, twinned with John McCrea Elementary, Guelph, has 390 students. Paray Primary and Sefapanong are the only two schools in the entire district (province) that have stoves in their classrooms. The winter is colder than even a Canadian can imagine — biting winds, no insulation, heat loss from every crevice. These stoves allow the children to take off their coats to learn.

Katlehong Primary, twinned with Corpus Christi School, Ottawa, is bursting at the seams with 900 students. The children sang for us and did a wonderful drama they wrote themselves. Most schools have four children to a small desk. The common themes in the primary schools are the lack of clothes and shoes and the presence of hunger, especially for the little ones who have AIDS and are on treatment. One teacher, I know to be on treatment herself, advocated compassionately for food for the children with AIDS. The boy in this photo will have four slices of white bread and some watery beans — his intake for a twenty-four hour period.
We visited **Thaba Tseka** high school, isolated on a protrusion of a mountain to meet our sponsored children. We spent several hours at **Paray High School** where Help Lesotho has many sponsored students, tasked with getting shoe sizes, updates and letters to sponsors. One of our girls needed to be taken to the hospital. Ten years ago a huge boulder fell on her leg, leaving her with a badly damaged and often infected bone.

Rob has been a real trouper — easy, helpful, appreciative and caring to everyone we meet. He considers it a privilege to be here. He has put a great deal of thought and interest into this trip, reading about Lesotho before coming. I know he will have even more understanding of what we do here and the challenges.

Stephen Kendall is here now for seven weeks, helping support the programs and financial accountability. He and I are diligently working on the program and finance review. He has been a real blessing to our staff and to me.

This week we have many changes. There are two employees leaving (Lillo and Konesoang), Ikaneng starts and Stephen integrates. It is a busy place. There is nowhere to work and we can hardly navigate in the office.

The week has been such a pleasure. Despite the need, we have seen many good things and remarkable people.

As I conclude this letter, a woman, visibly exhausted, has come to the door asking for food and 20 Maluti ($2.50) to take her and her daughter home from the hospital. She brought her daughter down to the Motebang hospital with pneumonia but lacks the transport money to return home. Her husband is deaf and cannot provide. She slept on the floor beside her daughter’s bed last night. She had not eaten in the two days. It is unusual for me to be asked directly for this kind of help but she had nowhere else to go. How hard it was for her to beg from a stranger!

I will send one more letter home before leaving. I contemplate my return to Canada and our ease of living in comparison to what I experience here. It is a stark contrast.

I wish you well and look forward to seeing my family and friends after such a long absence.

**Winter 2009 – Letter #5**

As I prepare to return to winter in Canada, I feel a new sense of optimism about what we have already accomplished, confidence in what we are about to accomplish and gratitude for all those who have helped us. Juxtaposed with this is a haunting and ponderous sadness at the increase in poverty, orphans and the aging grandmothers. There have been many changes, many advances. Indeed, Help Lesotho has been responsible for thousands of orphans, youth and grandmothers moving forward in myriad ways. I
do see positive signs of government progress — some new schools have emerged, there are more indications of inter- and intra-sector cooperation. These are hopeful.

One could never have imagined how many thousands in both countries would become involved in each other’s lives. Close to 122,000 people have read the Help Lesotho website thanks to Jith Paul Design (http://jithpauldesign.com)! No seer could have predicted the loyalty and care our donors have for these grandmothers and children. Thousands of emails, letters and notes from both sides express concern and kindness, gratitude and love. Who could ever have envisioned all this?

For example, Rob Nelson, Stephen Kendall and I visited Motati Primary this past week. It is the school on the front of the 2008 calendar, with the photo of the missing roof, the children with nothing to sit on but stones. This school is special, twinned with another remarkable school, Deep Cove Elementary on Vancouver Island. I spoke there last June and was touched by the bond they feel with this dear struggling group of wee children in Lesotho. We advocated to the Ministry of Education on their behalf. They now have a new school. It is finished and truly beautiful. The guardians and children toil to make artistic gardens worthy of these proud buildings. No rain will force them to stop learning; no snows will freeze them from their classrooms. The children are just as poor, just as hungry, just as barefoot but they have roofs over their heads, desks for the first time, a staff room to work in and book shelves (no books mind you). It is a wonder to see the contrast. This teaching team is the most organized, dedicated and effective team I have ever seen. The principal, ’M’e Mpho, is a fine leader. They were so happy to show us their new buildings. They have been in them for less than two months and they still can’t believe it themselves. Teachers and visitors alike toured with the reiterative exclamation: “This is so beautiful!” I picked up my cell right on the spot, with all the teachers present, and called to thank the Director of Primary Education to whom I had advocated . We had a great chat and the teachers were beaming.

Every room has indicators of their friendship with Deep Cove — drawings and messages from Deep Cove hung from the ceilings and the walls. We delivered the delightful class projects Deep Cove classes made for their counterparts, each sensitively done to maximize the commonalities and minimize the differences. Each one was perfect. The teachers ululated and sang their joy. A wonderful morning! Joanne Nelson and Mary Mahoney are living at the Pitseng Centre working with the Grandmothers and with the children. They bravely faced the challenges of no electricity or potable water and have bonded with so many villagers. They have been wonderful for the children’s literacy development and had fun playing games with them. Maybe their greatest gift is the care they have shown to each person who comes. They attended three Grandmother Days in different locations and have grown to love these dear old grannies. Our staff, grandmothers and children loved having them. They will be missed and never forgotten.

This month we started a new girls’ leadership program, the Basotho Girls’ Leader Corps. In each of two villages (Hlotse and Pitseng) where we will have centres, twenty girls will be chosen for a program of
training in community development, peer role modelling, HIV/AIDS education, gendered equity and leadership, funded by Pearls for Girls and led by ‘M’e Ntea. We are excited to get this rolling. It will be the beginning of a much larger program in the future.

Most of you know of the wonderful Pearls for Girls jewellery groups sell to support Help Lesotho girls’ leadership programs. See http://helplesotho.ca/projects.html #3 Leadership) you will find a report on how the funds are used. Mary Murphy works tirelessly engaging people to make and sell the gorgeous cultured pearls for our dear girls in Lesotho. You will marvel at how many are reached by these funds.

Much of my time (and Donna’s) has been spent on the new centre complex Help Lesotho will soon begin constructing. The property is fully fenced now and is beautiful. As I tramp around it, it is easier to believe we will make our deadlines:

- Construction completion late Oct. 2009
- Functional opening Jan. 2010
- Grand opening Feb. 2010

So much work has gone into this. I like to imagine that it is behind us and envisage the thousands of people who will benefit. If you could see how crowded our office is — there’s not one flat space to work anymore — you would be amazed at how our staff manages to be so productive in these cramped quarters. Who could have foreseen we would grow so quickly?

I am ready to go home to see my family and sleep in my own bed. I am excited about the opportunities in the next few months to tell people how much good their funding has done. I leave confident we will achieve our goals! Too much is at stake not to!!! I look forward to seeing many of you soon.

Fall 2009 – Letter #1

I come at this time every year and see the land transformed from the bitter starvation and cold of winter to the promise of rain and crops. There are signs of spring everywhere: early flowers blooming, green creeping like a fog to cover up the lifeless shades of beige that act as a visual representation of the misery here — always the hope that comes with spring!

As my plane touched down on the Lesotho tarmac this time, I was acutely aware that Help Lesotho is now five years old. I am incredulous! I have lost track of how many trips, how many tears, how many moments of deep sadness at the death and suffering. What overwhelms me now is how much has been accomplished in only five years with the funds you have provided. I have never lost the wonder of how many fine people have stepped forward with Help Lesotho to support children and grannies in this tiny kingdom. It is indeed time to step back from the relentless work and celebrate all that has been completed.
Help Lesotho will be having a wonderful event to celebrate these five years on **November 30 in Ottawa**. I will send you a “save the date” reminder this week with a more complete invitation to follow soon. This will be an opportunity to recognize the many people who have contributed to these amazing accomplishments. Finally, I will have my wish to thank people properly!

Among the remarkable things to celebrate is the willingness of **His Majesty, King Letsie III**, to travel to Ottawa to attend this event to personally thank those who have worked so hard for the children and grannies. I spent an hour with His Majesty yesterday at the palace planning his trip. He is so humble and appreciative of all you have done. He mused, with our new calendar in hand, at how he might help. You would have been deeply touched had you heard him speak of all Help Lesotho has done for his people. More about his visit and the event later!

One of the first things I did in my jetlagged stupor was to visit the site of our new Seotlong Complex in Hlotse. Construction sites always look horrible, but it still is a beautiful place. As you probably well know, we have been raising funds for this project for two and a half years now. Many of you have donated to it. I cannot rest until I see it complete — which should be at the end of December, then the furnishings and setting up of programs, etc. We are about six weeks behind — as construction projects go. With your donations and the incredible generosity of the FACET Foundation from the UK, we will be able now to complete it debt free. We are so grateful to the FACET Foundation, as this centre will benefit thousands more people for decades. There will be two centres in the complex: the Support Centre for Orphans, Schools and Grandmothers, and the Graff Leadership Centre, named after Mr. Graff, who is the founder and benefactor of the FACET Foundation. The leadership centre, and its girls’ hostel and library, will allow us to increase the numbers and efficiencies of delivering our leadership programs to so many who need our help. It will also support the development of civil society in the region and provide a kind, caring place for people.

By the time I leave in early November, the walls will be up on both buildings. I will spend much of this month getting furniture organized and ordered, etc. Nothing is easy here and our policy to buy as locally as possible makes such things additionally challenging, as the selection is so sparse. When I return in January for ten weeks, the centre will be getting ready for the programs. The date of the grand opening to celebrate the community has been set for March 6, 2010.

As I write, at about 3:00 a.m., I hear my friend “the rat” rumbling around in the ceiling of my wee cottage. He clearly made it through the winter well, as he is making lots of noise.

One of the next things I did was to have a good visit with my dear friend Sr. Alice. She was the one who started all this and we love to catch up each visit.

It is lovely to see the staff again and to marvel at how tirelessly they work. They are on time in the morning, cheerful and kind. It will always be challenging to get and keep good people in Hlotse because it is such a small town and cannot compete with the bustle and promise of the capital city, Maseru. We appreciate the commitment our team makes to work in remote areas. Gillian Walker, who has been in
Lesotho as an intern for over a year, has joined our staff to support the gender and leadership programs. We are happy to have her. Her tireless contribution and positive nature are most appreciated.

In my suitcases, as always, I brought my favourite cargo: letters from sponsors and schools. The hope, encouragement and love in these letters is profound and a testimony to how much our sponsors and schools care about the children. Each one brings more comfort than words can describe.

There is so much to do in what seems like so little time. I will complete my individual meetings with staff, join grandmother groups and meet our new crop of Help Lesotho Youth Corps, who begin their training next week. As the Lesotho school year draws to a close in the next six weeks, I think of all those who have been able to attend classes because of this sponsorship program and who would never otherwise have had the chance.

I conclude this letter with an excerpt from a note that our fabulous Orphan and Vulnerable Children Support Officer, ‘M’e Mampaka, sent me this week. It is so difficult to go to each hut for home visits in places one can barely find and then to deal with what one does find, as ‘M’e writes:

“After leaving the family, whose hut was falling down, we visited ________ (age 17). To my surprise only to find ________ with a baby boy born on the 25th August 2009. She said she is okay health wise but the problem was on paying hospital fees. The family had to borrow the money. It is not settled yet. Another problem is with food and clothing for the baby. Already the family situation is not good, one cannot imagine how they are all surviving. The family had not eaten anything since morning and it was around 11:30 – 12:00 noon. I had no option but to go and find a solution. The following items were bought: 25 kg. Maize meal, 2 kg. dry beans, 2 kg. dry peas, 5 litres cooking oil, 500 g. powdered soap, 2 kg. Sunlight bar soap, salt, sugar, tea and 2 loaves of bread. Baby clothing was also bought and I tried to buy 6- to 12-months-old clothing. What I forgot to buy as we were very much in a hurry to pick up ‘M’e Peg from the airport, is candles for the night. She mentioned that there are none.”

We must celebrate all that has been accomplished. Yet the need persists and, in many ways, grows ever greater. As the number of orphans increases, so does the poverty.

Salang hantle (go well)

Fall 2009 – Letter #2

It is 4:30 a.m. and the world around me is awakening. As I write, I think of the orphans and grannies in the mountains rising in the dark to fetch water and start fires to heat water for washing. The Basotho are an incredibly clean people. The effort they expend to have spotless bodies, clothes, shoes and houses puts us to shame. The beautiful spring days are often broken by raging and sometimes perilous storms, rendering water unusable. In my cottage, the post-storm water is so saturated with dirt that one cannot even brush one’s teeth.

I had the most difficulty sending out my last letter and the Save the Date for our wonderful celebration of Help Lesotho’s Fifth Anniversary on November 30, 2009. If you did not get them, please let me know or email events@helplesotho.ca. I will not send a photo with this one to see if that helps.

We are diligently working with the Lesotho High Commission to Canada to ensure His Majesty’s visit for the celebration is a special experience for both him and our supporters. Mary Ann Turnbull, chair of Help Lesotho’s Fundraising Committee, and our board chair, Jennifer Parr, are working tirelessly “on that
side,” as they say here, with Mary Durst, Diane Ross, Margie Hooper of Keller Williams Ottawa, Jith Paul Designs and Kate Herweyer.

“On this side,” our staff are doing such a fine job under challenging conditions. I spent a whole day at the Seotlong Centre in Pitseng with the youth and grannies. It does my spirit so much good to be there — seeing the library busy with readers, the floors dirty from the amount of traffic, the lappa (gazebo) bursting with laughing children. There is a sign at the entrance testifying to the donation of land from the Anglican Diocese of Lesotho and the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association of Ottawa for funding the whole project, but this can never convey our gratitude. This centre has become a lifeline for hundreds of children and youth on a weekly basis for villages all around these magnificent mountains. If you have seen the new 2010 calendar (orders@helplesotho.ca), there are several photos of the activities around the centre.

Grandmother Day was so much fun — the grannies are so dear one must fall in love with them immediately. They sing and dance to welcome me and are a delight. Several of this group have died lately from age, illness, poverty and despair, and a few are too sick to attend. It will ever be thus and their individual lives are heartbreakingly destitute. But the Grandmother Support Program is so fabulous!! They are like new women, understanding their challenges in whole new ways. They no longer feel alone. They tell me they are much better equipped to handle the depression of their orphans because of the education they receive each time. Their will to survive is now strong again and each group is working on small income-generating projects. The grannies were given seeds to start their gardens this spring and to help build keyhole gardens. As they left, each had her food parcel funded by the Food Gifts for Grandmother Program started by Mary Mahoney and Joanne Nelson after they saw the poverty and the needs of these women. I told them about speaking to the Kingston Grandmother Connection recently and how much they are cared about. The grannies beg me, yet again, to convey their thanks to those who sponsor them and the granny groups in Canada that pay for their program. I tell them they are loved, prayed for daily and will never be forgotten. Their toothless smiles and penetrating glances convey more than my words can describe.

We are beginning a new three-month training program for our next group of youth trainees called the Help Lesotho Leader Corps (HLYC). Five youth from Pitseng and five from Hlotse have been carefully chosen to become our new community youth leaders. We invest a huge amount in these young leaders, providing education, support and mentoring on a constant basis as long as they are with us. Building leaders among the orphans and youth is one of our five key priorities here and we strongly believe that this peer influence is a powerful force against the ravages of HIV/AIDS and gender inequity. We will, of course, grow to love these young people and value their insights and contributions. I confess that seeing their transformation within our training program is one of my greatest joys here and makes the long hours of work worthwhile.

In that regard, this coming weekend we are hosting another “Step Up and Speak Out” Young Women’s Conference for 30 more girls from the mountains. Most of them are sponsored girls who are brought here from our villages and twinned schools to spend three days learning about health, safety and how to grow up. The same group will return five or six months later for a second version to reinforce the learning and provide the support that is so essential for meaningful change. These girls’ training is funded by the Pearls for Girls jewellery you are buying. It is a remarkable gift to these young girls.
As we hold these trainings in our cramped, dirty, overcrowded room, I imagine our new centre and having the space for such groups — that we will not have to share with boxes, food for grannies, stoves for granny days, etc. It will be wonderful.

Our new intern, Lara Cousins, arrived on Thursday, excited to start her year with us here. Lara will work as the Youth and Leadership Officer supporting our training programs. On Saturday, we held our belated Canadian Thanksgiving dinner for our small group just as Dr. Naida Hyde arrived for six weeks to work with our girls’ training programs. Naida, a psychologist, was here a couple of years ago and will be so helpful in enriching our courses and staff insight into adolescent development.

I spent several hours yesterday with my St. Mary’s girls. In December they conclude their five years of sponsorship by St. Bartholomew’s Anglican Church in Ottawa. I spoke of this with the girls and discussed their planning for next year. I so remember these tiny girls as they were five years ago — their frightened faces and slumped shoulders. Now they are mostly around 20 years old and have been lovingly looked after by St. Bart’s for their entire adolescence. Without this sponsorship, they would not have been able to go to school. Many would have had abysmal lives. The girls have had five years of leadership camp and mentoring, staff time and monthly letters from their mentors. What a gift! Rob Nelson and Elizabeth May have championed this project and these girls for five years and have supported us every step of the way. It could not have happened without them.

As I conclude this letter, the warm African sun has blessed the earth yet again for another day of struggle and hope. A new day begins. Ever the need and the promise!

Salang hantle (stay well).

Fall 2009 – Letter #3

I start this letter on a very sad note. ‘M’e Jacinta Ratia, principal of Mahlekefane Primary School, died in a tragic car accident. She was one of my heroes. She had the most wonderful laugh and was Help Lesotho’s strongest advocate here. You will remember so many photos of Mahlekefane in the previous calendars. When I met ‘M’e five years ago, that school was the poorest of schools high in the mountains. It now has new buildings and safe places to learn. ‘M’e Ratia singlehandedly upheld that community. So many weep for her passing! I do not know how they will all survive now. We honour this amazing woman and her selfless struggles to feed, educate and clothe thousands of students over the years. She was the rallying point of the entire community and will be sorely missed.

On a happier note, I had a long visit with Sr. Margaret of the Bytown Orphanage, as usual, going over her needs and ideas. The difference in the orphanage in the past five years is remarkable, thanks to so many child sponsors, volunteers and fundraisers. She is so appreciative and asked that I pass along her thanks. The rental units are up and generating income. The children have a full-time teacher to help them. They sit for exams now and we wish them well.

So much is happening here. We started a three-month training program for a new group of nine youth as Help Lesotho Youth Corps. The three-day Young Women’s Conference was again a huge success. Guided by Gillian Walker, our staff put so much into it, each giving a session (60% Sesotho, 40% English) and
forfeiting a weekend with their families for these girls. The 30 girls, ranging from 15–18, are chosen on the basis of leadership potential. One girl noted in her evaluation that this was the best thing that had ever happened in her life. Predictably, we all end up in tears at the struggles these young girls go through against hunger, abuse, isolation and depression without parental support. Each is invited to the camp in January and then to another three days of training in April. This reiterative training will reinforce their learning and their self-esteem so that they can contribute to their communities. As in all our work, we help youth to then help their villagers and peers. It is a marvellous transmission of knowledge and hope. Again, as always, our training ends with HIV/AIDS counselling testing. My concern remains that there is no follow-up for those who are told they are positive. I have spoken to so many officials about this and yet there is still no support. Imagine a 12-year-old being told she has HIV and then being left without help!!!

On October 26 His Majesty, King Letsie III spent the day with me to learn more about our programs before going to Canada to thank our donors and attend our Fifth Anniversary Celebration on November 30 (see the home page of our website for tickets and information). He had read our 2008 Annual Report and visited the website in preparation. What a time this was! I will never forget when I told our cook, ‘M’e Mpho, that she would be making salads for the king. She squealed, hugged herself and exclaimed for five minutes. She made my day. ‘M’e worked so hard to feed the girls for the conference and then immediately set about making food for His Majesty’s lunch the next day with renewed energy! After she met him, she proclaimed that she would tell her family for generations that her hand had touched the king!

His Majesty was scheduled to arrive at our tiny office at 9:30 a.m. At about 8 o’clock the palace security, district security and police arrived to discuss the route, advanced security and schedule. The district administrator of Leribe (comparable to a provincial premier) was in attendance throughout. There were about two motorcycles, eight cars and, in the end, an entourage of 30 people! His Majesty arrived from Maseru exactly on time. He met our staff, had photos taken and met the youth and grandmothers who were there for programs. We proceeded to the new Hlotse centre site and spent time discussing the construction, usage and donors. We then travelled to Motati Primary School, twinned with Deep Cove School (on Vancouver Island in British Columbia). I had met several days earlier with the principal and deputy principal but instructed them not to tell anyone but their chief. Had we allowed people to know, our office, site, school, etc., would have been filled with people and no work would have been possible. They were wonderful. His Majesty was able to see a school transformed by our help (see the 2008 calendar photo of the school without a roof). He went into each classroom — what joy for the children to see their reigning monarch! It was such fun to see their faces when in walked the king! He was able to see the beautiful banner made by Deep Cove School hanging in the school office and the decorations around the classrooms made by their Canadian school friends. The deputy gave an impassioned speech about Help Lesotho and Deep Cove School. He was introduced to each staff member and they all sang for him.

We then proceeded to our Seotlong Centre in Pitseng where the king saw our precious library, met with ‘M’e Bernice, the centre librarian, youth leaders, grandmothers, our Basotho Girls Leader Corp, ‘M’e Mantoetsi of Pontmain School and ‘M’e Nomkaze of Raphoka Primary. These two principals told the king about how much Help Lesotho and Canadian schools had done for their schools and their children, of the uniforms, shoes, camp and friendship. Children from each school sang a song.

Our staff had gone before us and prepared a wonderful lunch. The soldiers finished off every morsel! That is a lot to feed there without electricity. His Majesty left mid-afternoon and I stayed on for a
business meeting with Ntate Lerotholi, the king’s private secretary, to finalize the itinerary for His Majesty’s trip to Canada.

Without exception, each person to whom the king was introduced was beside themselves with delight. He was unfailingly gracious, asking each person something about the work. We were so proud of the youth as they explained to their king their training and how their lives were being changed. He was most impressed by them. He is a fine man and we all look forward to welcoming him to Ottawa and showing him Canadian hospitality. This is a real honour for Help Lesotho.

Our efforts continue on the Hlotse Centre. To date we are on budget! It is time to order furniture, choose doors and flooring, etc. The construction is coming along — with the inevitable delays. The persistent torrents of rain are not helping either. It will be wonderful.

If I may digress, just at dawn as I worked this morning, I opened the outer door to air the rooms. Without my awareness, a tiny chick slipped into the room. I could hear the chirping but could not find the downy little thing. Well, suffice it to say, she took a tour of every corner, under and behind every possible object with me following, trying to gently guide her to the door. I was in stitches; it really was hysterical. Finally, she was broomed out the door — honestly! Better than the cows and hens it might have been, which often inhabit my yard!

Dr. Naida Hyde has returned to Lesotho with her good heart and considerable skills as a psychologist to support our youth and girls programming. Her commitment to these young people is remarkable and appreciated. Since her first trip a couple of years ago, she has rallied so many people to sponsor children and support our programs, as well as sponsoring four girls herself.

Our focus on raising funds for the centre in Hlotse has resulted in fewer funds coming in for orphan relief and sponsorship. This was a worry. As this school year concludes we find we have paid for approximately 400 children to attend school this year but have not raised the funds necessary to cover the costs. I wonder if we have failed to adequately convey the impact of child sponsorship. We pay an additional $10,000 for boarding for students who live too far away to attend school without living in the school dorms. This is not covered by the sponsorship fees. During this past year, touted to be the worst fundraising year in 40 due to the economic crisis, some sponsors were no longer able to pay. We have not dropped these children, as once you are in the “Help Lesotho family,” we try “by all means” to keep the children and grannies with us. We cannot let them down.

The stories of two children that Stephen Kendall sent me today are examples of the need for Orphan Relief:

**Thabo** is 12 years old. His father died in 2005 and his mother in 2006. He lives with his mother’s sister and her husband, neither of whom work. One of their children works somewhere out of the country and occasionally sends money to support the whole family. They do not have enough to live on. Thabo lives somewhere not too far from Pontmain and wants to go to Khethisa High School because their reputation is good. He intends to walk the 45–60 minutes each way. The boy is finishing Standard 7 in third position in his class and his marks are excellent (e.g., 90% in Math and 95% in English). He intends to apply to the government for the appropriate coverage, but he will need extra for shoes, uniform, and stationery. He is a fine, well-spoken boy.

**Hloiaisi** turned 13 years old on October 6. He lives alone in his parent’s former hut in Ha Piletso, about 10 minutes on foot from Pontmain. He has a 28-year-old brother who is somewhere in South Africa but he has not heard from him in years. His 20-year-old sister is married and lives in...
a village quite a bit farther away on the other side of Pitseng. Her husband does not work and she supports herself, her husband and her own child by buying bags of apples and re-selling them individually on the streets for a small mark-up. She manages to occasionally send her brother a bag of corn meal and some cabbage. Right now the boy is eating two or three meals a day of papa and cabbage, until it runs out. Sometimes the teachers provide him with some food. Hloiaisi is a solid student who is finishing in fourteenth position out of 66 students. He had 72% in English and about 68% in Math. He has a dream of becoming a pilot in the armed forces. He is also a well-spoken boy.

We are providing education to thousands on hand washing and oral hygiene. If anyone has access to toothbrushes, please let us know. The grannies even say the orphans take their toothbrushes! There are never enough to go around. We are hoping to provide floss, toothpaste and brushes to as many as possible. It is a small thing but essential to the health of these orphans and grannies. So many here have teeth rotting in their mouths and infecting their blood!

Finally, a note on the grannies: Last year, we used funds to repair the thatch on the most broken roofs of the grandmothers’ houses, as they had to stand in the rain and snow inside the huts to stay dry. It was such a blessing. This year, we are repairing the doors and windows of those we can. Many have such broken doors that they do not close properly and certainly have no locks. This leaves these dear old ladies and their orphans vulnerable to attacks, theft and worse. With the food parcels, education, keyhole gardens and these repairs, your funds are making such an incredible difference in their lives.

The children here are writing final exams. I leave for Canada now. We have a great deal to look forward to. I am excited for this November 30 event when I can thank you all formally and introduce you to His Majesty, King Letsie III of the Kingdom of Lesotho.

I will see you there!

Salang Hantle.