

GOLD DUST FROM UGANDA

On 7 April 2003, I got on a plane with Marie-Claire, Jess and Fee, having only spent a week together. We were starting a five-month trip to Uganda, staying in Mityana (about two hours west of Kampala on a very bumpy road). I received a bit of a shock in the first few days when I realised that Uganda is first of all not savannah with villages consisting of huts in circles and isolated from everything including water. Uganda is in fact a highly fertile country, hilly with much green vegetation, red dirt roads and very many banana trees. The local people and the church, mainly comprised of young people, immediately welcomed us. For the rest of our time there we got used to Ugandan culture, taught in two primary schools, and a nursery school, and visited the hospital. We also took an active role in the church, leading bible studies. The five months we spent left us with some unforgettable

memories and reasons to praise God, many new friends, and a vow never to eat Matooke again (their staple diet: a savoury species of banana which they mash like mashed potato, but is much more bland). But not only that
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As I packed up, I clutched in my hand the 'gold dust' that were the two four-track master tapes of the choir. For the second half of the placement, I had been running a choir with the top two years of Mityana orphanage primary school. One rainy Friday afternoon, as the rain beat on the tin roofs so loud that we could not hear ourselves to sing, and I watched all the rain run off the roofs to go to waste, I had a brain wave. We had already thought of recording the choir and selling tapes to raise money, but now we knew what it would be for. From this point forward, God has blessed our venture and been with us at every step so that now the orphanage school has a water tank to collect rain water! They used to have to walk down the hill to a spring to collect water, which meant children would miss lessons. The roofs of the school buildings were big enough to trap hundreds of litres of water. So we had a plan.

Don Cribbs, a missionary from Texas, had a four-track tape recorder, so three weeks before we left we had a day of recording the choir. We also recorded an infant choir and the church choir to give some variety. The day was as rewarding as it was stressful.

When I arrived home, my way of dealing with the withdrawal symptoms and reverse culture shock was to put my mind to turning that gold dust into a CD that might sell for a reasonable amount to raise money. The result was a 16-track CD, with an eight-page booklet with photos and

some of the translations in it. In October I started my first year at Emmanuel College and while having a fantastic year, my former teammates and I set about selling the CDs. I sold them to parents at music concerts, put an ad in my home newspaper, and even an ad in Emma's own *ROAR!*, persuading many friends that the CD was an ideal Christmas present. By Easter 2004 the end was in sight and almost all of the 200 CDs made had been sold. The total profit was £1000! Plans were made to return to Mityana to set to work. Armed with bursaries from Emmanuel College's own Charities Committee and the Isaac Newton Trust, I was able to afford the flight and travel insurance.

And so, on Thursday 15 July 2004 Marie-Claire, Jess and I flew back to Entebbe airport with £1000 in travellers' cheques, with some vague plans of what we would do. But our trusty local, Wycliffe, had done a lot of research for me, suggesting a 5,000 litre water tank, and finding builders to do the work and getting quotes.

When we arrived we spent the first weekend greeting friends and getting used to Uganda again (not least the heat), and I met the headmistress of the school to discuss the location for the water tank. For security reasons the only place that would be safe from vandalism was within the school courtyard, since there is no boundary fence to the school. On the Monday we went to Kampala to put a deposit on the tank and get measurements so that we could build a base for the tank. They were cheaper than anticipated, so we ordered a 6,000 litre tank and calculated the whole project might only cost £850!

The main building work started on Wednesday. We made ourselves useful by going to the spring to collect water, and convinced ourselves the water tank was very much needed! It was an hour round trip for us, and we had to stop a lot on the way back. It is very hard work carrying two full 10-litre jerry cans in each hand! The children who came with us put us to shame, and we were almost hysterical by the time we got back. Deciding we were more of a hindrance than help, we switched to organising a line to pass bricks from the pile to the foundations, and helping mix cement.

On the Friday Wycliffe and I went to Kampala to collect the water tank. Carrying 2.3 million Ugandan shillings (£750) on my person was quite disconcerting, but I survived. They had, however, given our transport to another customer, so we had to settle for it being delivered first thing (Ugandan style, it was 11am) on Saturday morning. But the builders were not available that day, so we challenged them to build the wall around the tank and plaster it all in one day. They managed it on Monday despite

having to find a plumber to fit the tap and having lost some of their equipment.

On Wednesday morning the guttering was fitted to the roofs of the buildings, so it was all in place by the time we had to leave at lunchtime to take Marie-Claire and Jess to the airport. Luckily I had already planned to stay on longer, so I could finish and paint it. Marie-Claire had designed the mural for me, a fish tank scene with castle, seaweed, fish etc. The verse we chose to put on it was John 7:37-8 'Jesus said: "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Streams of living water will flow from within him who believes in me"'.

I had willing helpers for all stages of the painting, and we surprised ourselves at how good it looked when finished. On the third Monday I was in Uganda I handed the key to the headmistress, and we took the first water from the tank, which was almost full after heavy rain the day before.

Emily Valentine (matric. 2003)