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# Sharings

Autumn 2004

*Reflections from brother Toby*

## A TIME FOR GENTLENESS — AND FOR PEACE

November can be a healing time. I say this knowing full-well there are serious problems in our world and in this country.

No matter what the result of the election, we are a polarized nation. For those of us who work on a person-to-person basis with children and adults in other nations, the pain caused by conflicting points-of-view becomes very personal. The gap between the well-off and the poor is widening. There is an acceleration of fear. Force is increasingly the preferred response to conflict. Many people are dying for other peoples' ideologies. Dreams and hopes die with them. I am painfully aware of all that. Still I say there can be healing and each of us should use it to prepare for the future.

In Northern California, where I live, there is often no real rain until October. That first rain seems to draw a curtain across the stage of my anxieties and preoccupations. The scene has changed and the damp earth softens the pace and the shrillness of my life.

My steps no longer echo on the parched and hard ground. They are cushioned and I am aware of new sounds. The gravel paths have a deep crunch which I both hear and feel. A little snap is added as I step onto the carpet of twigs and cones under the pine trees which surround the house. Standing beneath the branches of those pines, which I rarely do in summer, I can look out on the horizon I see every day and I feel protected. Disengaged? No, simply not as vulnerable.



Thanksgiving Day has a similar kind of protected and gentle feeling at Starcross. It comes before our very busiest weekend, processing orders for the wreaths and fruits and getting them ready to ship starting the next week. We have a nice meal but the emphasis is really on celebrating our being together. There have been, and will be, times when we are separated by distance or by death. So, at Starcross, as in most homes, there are quiet spaces in our day.

That is as it should be. Thanksgiving in the United States is not only our version of the harvest festival, nor is it simply a memorial to the Pilgrims. In 1863 President Abraham Lincoln made our first national Thanksgiving a day for giving thanks after the victory of the Union forces over the Confederates at the battle of Gettysburg. However, Lincoln also wanted our prayers to reflect a "humble penitence for our national perverseness" and the need to help "all those who have become widows, mourners, or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife." Similar needs will often be with us.

At this time of year, we have opportunities for peace before the wild storms of winter — and of life. It is important to make of it a blessed time in



## HOMELESS TO MVP

Our own Thami Shozi was named Most Valuable Player in his high school soccer league playoffs in KwaZuluNatal. 15-year-old Thami has come a long way to earn this honor.

Thami, and his younger brother and sister, were left orphaned and destitute when both parents died suddenly from AIDS. The children were very relieved to come to one of

our Houses of Hope. Thami often organizes soccer games in the neighborhood. He was admitted to an excellent high school nearby, and works as hard at school as he does in sports.

Like so many others, Thami's middle class family was thrown into poverty by AIDS. The lack of affordable medications meant that his parents sickened and died very quickly. No social safety net is yet in place to care for the many children left orphaned by the AIDS pandemic.

Our program provides a permanent home, food, clothing, medical expenses, schooling and a trained foster mother for 41 kids in KwaZulu-Natal and 93 in Uganda. The children are thriving, but we have a long waiting list. We'd like to do more. The problem is funding. As the Houses of Hope were being established a U.S. dollar could buy 10 South African Rand. Now a dollar only buys 6 Rand. The worsening exchange rate means we need more sponsors to support the children we have, and we cannot expand. We have had to economize on things like furniture, outings, and clothes. The one place we cannot cut back at all is on the school expenses. These children recognize from a very early age that education will be their ticket to a "bright future."

Sister Julie will be spending January at our African Houses of Hope. Nothing would make her happier than being able to take in more of these wonderful kids like Thami and give them a second chance. If you would like information on sponsorship, please contact Julie by phone or mail or at

## SISTER MARTI REVEALS THE COSMIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS YEAR'S WREATHS AND FRUIT!

**We have a serious financial gap. No, there is no juicy Wall Street scandal here. The demand for our services is simply increasing and the money has been decreasing. Why? These are hard times for a lot of people who support us, and the international dollar-exchange rate has been dropping (look at the other column on this page.)**

**Fortunately a solution is at hand as we start our major annual self-support activity – the sales of wreaths and fruits! If we simply increase our sales 10% we will close the gap.**

**I urge you to purchase wreaths and/or fruit for your home and as moderately priced and much appreciated gifts for anyone on your holiday list. And, if you send gifts to clients, customers or colleagues please consider wreaths or fruit – they will be remembered long after a bottle of Scotch.**

**A flyer is enclosed and you can order by phone (1-800-960-1500) or on-line by going to [www.starcross.org](http://www.starcross.org) and clicking on the wreath picture, or mailing in the flyer.**

**In addition, some friends have taken up the challenge and are: sending e-mails to everyone on their list urging them to buy wreaths (we can send you one of these letters as a sample); giving out flyers to clubs and churches (we can mail you flyers); sending us lists of members in organizations to which they belong so we can mail out flyers (we do not keep these names on our list.) If you want flyers or have other ideas please call me or e-mail me at [sm@starcross.org](mailto:sm@starcross.org).**

**We think self-support is healthy, which is why we sell wreaths and fruit, and why we have planted 1,800 olive trees, from which we will hopefully produce some oil next year. But we will always need your help.**

**Thanks so much for lending a hand.**

## THE VALIANT VOLUNTEERS WHO GET THINGS DONE

Many of our activities simply would not get off the ground without some amazing folks. People from all walks of life have come forward to lend a hand. More and more we rely on them and have opened a modest "Volunteer Center" in Santa Rosa to provide some space for everything from high school students making bows for wreaths to emergency meetings of our advisors on problems in Africa. It is not possible to mention everyone here but I want to introduce you to a few.



Sharon

**Sharon O'Reilly**, a banking analyst, came up with the idea of selling quilt raffle tickets to purchase a house for AIDS orphans in South Africa. She also organized the whole thing, with a group of friends made the first quilt, and goes places to sell the raffle tickets! Sharon's frequent flyer miles help get Julie to Africa. **Lety House**, a former executive in managed care, is organizing a golf tournament to help our children in Africa. She has also planted olive trees, helped Marti in the office, transported and hosted visitors, and generously responds to whatever is needed. **Carey Sakai** has developed community outreach programs for wineries. She shares with us her background and gifts in architecture and design. Carey brings an aesthetic sense to various projects from planning renovations, producing brochures, getting a sign on the door, writing a public service announcements requested by a radio station, moving furniture, and much more. Carey, Sharon, and Lety are also very active as advisors on the AIDS Orphan projects. Fortunately for us, **Walt Wishard** can fix just about anything. He is retired from technical sales work in commercial refrigeration and knows electricity, plumbing, carpentry, how to organize a workshop, make a door work, and whatever needs doing. Walt has generously given us many days of excellent and needed volunteer labor.



Lety



Walt



Carey

And there are a lot of other folks like these! Many live in Northern California and some far away. To each of our hardworking colleagues, our heartfelt thanks!

As we increase our activities more helping hands are needed and welcome. If you would like to be involved in some way, call or send me an e-mail at [sj@starcross.org](mailto:sj@starcross.org).

### INSURING THE FUTURE

Our friend, Annette Lomont, suggests that you can help insure the future of Starcross as a place of peace for ourselves and our friends on all spiritual paths by adding a simple paragraph to your will. The language your attorney would use is something like this: "I give Starcross, a California nonprofit corporation, located in Annapolis, California, the sum of \$\_\_\_\_\_ (or alternatively \_\_\_% of the residue of my estate, or the description of real property) for its general purposes". We are tax exempt and our ID number is 94-1687876.

### AN ACCIDENTAL E-MAIL NETWORK

We sent an e-mail to those who had given us their address, asking for help in increasing wreath and dried fruit sales. We have been delighted at the response, and have sent other e-mails about our life, activities and some reflections. Many asked us to continue communicating this way from time to time, and we will. If you would like to be put on our e-mail network for occasional communications, send an e-mail to sister Marti at [sm@starcross.org](mailto:sm@starcross.org) or go to our emerging website ([www.starcross.org](http://www.starcross.org)) and register on "Starcross E-net".

*It's cool and sunny.  
The leaves, changing green to  
red,  
fall to the brown ground.*

*Big, black, starry sky  
waiting for us to wish on.  
Cool wind, milky way.  
Holly (14)*

*As day starts to fade  
olive trees shimmer in light  
dancing in the breeze.  
David (18)*

## STARCROSS

STARCROSS MONASTIC COMMUNITY  
34500 Annapolis Road

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Permit #20  
Santa Rosa, CA



**AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2004**

THIS TIME OF YEAR THE BARN IS THE CENTER OF OUR LIVES. No sooner do we get the last pears and tomatoes canned and the cider press packed away than it is time for the wreaths. On stormy days we stay busy mailing flyers, making bows and entering orders in the computer. This November we also harvest a few olives. There won't be much oil this year but it is a promise of what's to come.

Brother Toby says a Barn is any farm's cathedral. We all relish those quiet moments at the beginning and end of the day when the hustling around has stopped. In the loft we can look out at the bare trees in the orchard. Below us on the barn floor are hundreds of wreaths boxed and ready to ship out to gentle folks across the country. We recognize many names, like old friends. Leaning on the railing, as farmers have done for centuries, problems in our world and our lives are seen in a new, and refreshing, perspective. But about then the power goes out or we remember the box stapler is jammed and it is back to work. However, those quiet moments, even when short, remain with us. Working in a Barn is a good way of

