



STARCROSS
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Sharings

Summer 2007

MOWING AND PRAYING

A Summer Reflection by sister Julie

My favorite summertime activity is mowing on our shiny red tractor with flail mower chugging behind. Thanks to earplugs, the noisy tractor seems to purr.

The olive fields are beautiful - rows of silver grey leaves and bright green baby olives the size of popcorn kernels. Between the rows are tall grasses. I love the color and shape of the wild oats, pale yellow, like straw.

Slowly guiding the tractor over the hills requires my full attention. Even so, I am aware of life teeming all around me. Near the bottom of the field, a family of quail scurry into the blackberry bushes. Swallows go swooping to their nests on the eaves of the house. A few ravens drift in the breeze high above. Our faithful Welsh Corgi, Chap, provides comic relief as he bounds after jackrabbits and wild turkeys on his short little legs.

Mowing the fields takes many hours. Up one side of the row, down the other, and a third pass through the middle. The tractor hugs the ground. I feel like I know every inch of the land, every bump and ridge and gully. And while I do what I can to take care of it, I know that in reality, the land is taking care of me.

I like to mow in the early morning coolness and then change to indoor work as the sun gets hot. There are things that preoccupy me when I am indoors - our African AIDS orphan project, various teenager issues at home, people we know facing serious challenges, broken appliances, computer meltdowns, how to sell olive oil, etc. But when I can look out the window at the mowed fields, step out on the deck and smell cut grass, watch the willowy olive branches flutter in the wind, all problems seem manageable.

I am grateful to the land. Mother Earth. I think of the verse from St. Francis' Canticle of the Sun. "Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs."

What I am doing may look like work but it feels more like just living. There is a relationship, a give and take, a bonding that has developed. Most days, I am a mess, dirty and dressed in ragged jeans and T shirt. But who cares? I feel healthy and very happy to be here in this place helping it remain beautiful and sustainable. As much as I love to travel, this sacred piece of earth is home. It is everything to me.



Sharon O'Reilly: MY GIFT FROM AFRICA

As a member of the board of Starcross Kin Worldwide, I had the opportunity to go to Uganda and visit the children. Seeing the kind of poverty the children came from was a shock. But I was absorbing something else, something that I didn't realize was happening until after I had returned home.

When I returned, people would ask me about the dire circumstances many of our children had found themselves in - parents, aunts and uncles dead. It is hard to describe to people in the U.S. the total tear in the social fabric that is occurring in Africa due to AIDS. The reality of there being no family available to care for not just one orphaned child, but millions of them, is beyond our understanding. However, after talking about the devastation I also found myself struggling to describe something I saw all around me. Despite the fact that these people had virtually nothing in material things (by our standards), I found a willingness to help each other and to help one's family in ways that we don't see as the norm here in the U.S.

Starcross has always talked about being a neighbor-to-neighbor program and about building a bridge from our culture to other cultures around the world. Those of us who are sponsoring children are crossing that bridge by providing the means for a life, education, and future for each child in our House of Hope. After visiting Uganda, I feel that they are showing us how to create closer ties within our family and our larger human family.

A year ago a cousin I hadn't seen since I was a child was diagnosed with terminal cancer. One of my first thoughts was 'what would they do in Uganda'? I started working on it. My family actually ended up coming together in ways that I never would have imagined. We provided both emotional and financial support to the extent that each of us were able and my cousin died peacefully. I'm sure that a good part of my response was due to seeing how children in Uganda have responded to their crisis -- with humanity -- in caring for immediate and extended family and members of the human family. That awareness is the gift that Africa has given me.



AFRICA VISITS STARCROSS

Margaret Nanteza, the remarkable director of the Starcross Kin Worldwide (SKW) House of Hope in Uganda visited Northern California in June. The recipient of the 2007 BT Humanitarian Award, Margaret had the opportunity to meet many of the sponsors who have been supporting AIDS orphans in Uganda. Her two weeks in the US were a whirlwind of activity – meetings, presentations, and small group gatherings all over the Bay Area.

This visit strengthened a meaningful bridge between two cultures. Margaret got a sense of who some of the sponsors are and what motivates them to help AIDS orphans halfway around the world. For the Americans, it was a chance to understand the important work she is doing and the incredible difference sponsorship has made in the children's lives. All were impressed by Margaret's intelligence, competence and boundless energy.

SKW has cared for over 100 orphans in Uganda over the past 10 years. As youths grow up and graduate from our programs they are launched in life with careers and skills. All of our graduates are employed and are in turn supporting young orphans in our project and their own extended families.

We are ready to open the doors to new children. Margaret has selected 26 young ones in desperate circumstances. We hope to begin caring for them by September. Their stories and photos will be available on the SKW website under construction.

SUMMER MUSIC IN THE AIR

Music has always been important in our lives; it is part of our spirituality — singing psalms and chants, listening to our children as they learn to play instruments, and every year for the past 16 years, “Dad’s Birthday Concert” with David and friends playing in brother Toby’s honor.

Also, because when Tina was very ill at age 3 she loved music so much, especially 5-year-old David playing for her on his violin, we began “Tina’s Stars” to help young musicians develop their gifts, and to encourage them to see music as a healing art. We are also collecting strings and sending them to Third World children.

We would like music to be an increasingly important part of our life and work, so we are taking little steps to make it happen. In August we will have a two-day chamber music gathering of musicians. Perhaps their explorations will lead to an expanded annual event.

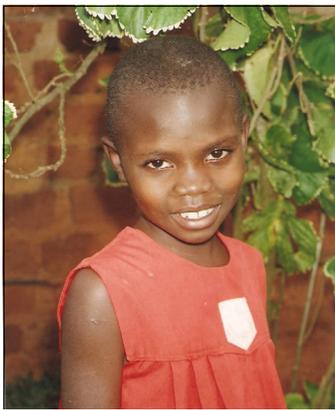
ACTS OF REMEMBRANCE

Each evening at Vespers we read about special people who have gone before those who love them. Family members or friends have written to tell us about their loved ones and have them remembered on a particular day. We feel enriched by knowing something of each unique life story, and we remember it as it is read out year after year at this gentle time of prayer and meditation.

Please tell us of anyone you wish us to include in the Vespers Memorial Book. This is a part of our sense of spiritual solidarity with you. Naturally, there is no fee or other obligation. It is an honor for us to do this.

Simply send us the person’s name, date of birth and death, and a sentence or two about them. Write, call or e-mail (community@starcross.org) and we will remember them each year on their birthday, unless you prefer the anniversary of their death or another special date.

HOPE FOR A LITTLE AFRICAN GIRL



There will very soon be an angel at our House of Hope in Kampala – for real! Eight-year-old Angel Namiro has been staying with her great-grandmother. Her father died of AIDS 3 years ago. Her mother is seriously ill. Angel and her siblings help their great-grandmother grow and sell vegetables. They barely have enough to eat themselves.

Despite her poverty, Angel is a jolly little girl who loves to sing. She is out of school now for lack of money to pay the fees. She is thrilled that a Starcross Kin Worldwide sponsorship will allow her to go back to school with her third grade class. She misses math and English especially.

For information on Starcross Kin Worldwide in Uganda, contact Sister Julie at sj@starcross.org.

OUR MAILING AND E-MAIL LISTS

We NEVER give out or sell the names and addresses on our mailing and e-mail lists. If you would like to be included in our periodic e-mail news and updates, just e-mail your address to community@starcross.org.

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE FUTURE

Some of the biggest things we have been able to accomplish (notably starting our AIDS orphans programs and the planting of our olive fields for self-support) have been the result of people remembering us in their wills. This kind of support allows us to do new things that don’t fit into an on-going budget. It also guarantees what we will bring to the future.

Please consider making this kind of gift. Our legal name is “Starcross Monastic Community”. We are an autonomous, non-profit and tax exempt corporation. Our tax ID number is 94-1687876.

Thank you for considering a bequest.

STARCROSS

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*A time for planting. . .
A time for healing.*

SUMMER 2007

WATCHING THE WORLD WALK BY

“When people truly care, they care about the total person, not just the ‘good news’ parts.” This was what one of you wrote and many of you had variations on that theme. I loved advice like — don’t just think about mortality “it is even wiser to plan for a continuing life of usefulness and productivity.” This was from a person in her 90s who had cancer treatments when she “was young” – at my present age!

In response to the many requests for updates on my situation; things look good for the long run. But, there is always the surprise du jour. I can imagine many of you nodding your heads knowingly.



Brother Toby

Naively, I thought when 8 weeks of radiation was over that was it. Oh, no. Now a fatigue settles in. My mind wants to run but my body says “no way.” Also, I have always had a weight problem, which got worse during two years of treatment, because my metabolism was stuck at 0. Now that will change, right? Well, maybe in 6 months to a year. Arggggh!

I have begun to have a lot of trouble just moving around. Going up stairs is difficult. Must be arthritis. No. New studies show that muscles are significantly weakened due to the treatments. For how long? Oh, not long – maybe 6 months or so. Double Arggggh!

So, it was not to be off the radiation table and into an active life. In town friends are driving me to doorways and urging me to use the Starcross electric cart at home. It has slowly come through to me. I am, at least temporarily, disabled!

I have started watching folks who have lived with this condition a long time. Sometimes they have to be absorbed in survival skills, like getting out of a car. At other times they accept that they are benched and watch the other players in life’s game. I find I am looking into the margins and shadows of life a lot more.

A French friend said many years ago, “Sit long enough at a table on the Champs-Elysees and everyone you know will walk by.” Well, now is my turn to sit at tables around home and see the people and things I love in a new way. Frustrating? Yes. But there are some definite rewards. Maybe I should get a beret.