

Moses Mabhida Stadium in Durban built for the Soccer World Cup in 2010

*“Stand up to your obstacles and do something about them. You will find that they haven’t half the strength you think they have.”*

*–Norman Vincent Peale*

## UPDATE

This year of 2011 has a momentum unlike any other year to date and I wonder how many of you are experiencing the same???

It is significant that I am writing this letter on "Youth Day." It's a day that has been set aside to commemorate the horrible youth uprising in Soweto years ago by black students over the fact they were being taught in Afrikaans which was not their home language and the inferior education they were being given during apartheid. One youth, Hector Peterson, lost his life in this struggle and his sacrifice has taken on historical significance.

Now in South Africa, so many years later and after the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as President, schools have been integrated which means that standards of education for the black students are improving. And thankfully, there are fewer incidences of racial violence.

However in rural schools like Riversands and in the many townships around the country, there is still a long road towards improving the standard and calibre of education. Hands of Joy, with its student sponsorship programs, as well as art education, spiritual nourishment and health care, is just one vital link along this road...

Over the years, many students and their teachers, have been given hope and some even the opportunity for a brighter future.

Higher education of even one family member, has so often been the link to breaking the cycle of poverty for an entire family.

Ironically, on this Youth Day, my son Jonah (now 17) is playing in a Soccer Tournament in the Township of Mamelodi, where many of the best players are found among the disadvantaged black children. Jonah sees it as a tremendous privilege to be playing with them.

I recently read a statistic that in Africa today, over 40% of the population is under 15 years of age...

## NEW DEVELOPMENTS

A few years ago, myself, Thandie, Lisa (from The Village Church who taught Art with me) began to discuss the pressing need for a home for orphaned children. Initially, the idea was to build a structure on or close to the school premises which Thandie could oversee in some capacity...

However with the property changing ownership and new development plans in the works, no new buildings were permitted. We began to look for an alternative location. Through Lisa's initiative, The Village Church became involved as well as our friend and colleague Jennifer Mbushe who is currently The CLO Community Liaison Officer for Cosmo City. This is the development where the

squatters from Zevenfontein were relocated to, after the government built basic houses for them. Jennifer personally supervised the removal of 4,000 families. She informed me that some of the land in Cosmo City, had been designated for Community Development and thought a home for orphans would qualify.

Miraculously, only a few years later Imphile (Life) Home, is being completed! It will accommodate 6 children and the vision is to create several more houses of similar design in the future...

A team from the Village Church including a man who was a Project Manager for Housing with the United Nations, an American woman involved in Missions and several others all contributed their expertise. Presently, they are in the finishing stages and looking for funding and staff to run the home.

Jennifer's extensive knowledge of social needs in the community, together with Thandie's wisdom and practical knowledge, will be valuable in selecting both staff and children who will live there...

In future, myself and some of the Art students we taught, who now live in Cosmo City, hope to be involved in creating art works for these homes.

## NEW SPONSORSHIPS

I heard from, Petros Morobane who graduated last year, that he now has a full time position with Nedbank! He informed me that his sister Mavis has been offered a learnership from First National Bank and is waiting to hear about bursaries so this is all good news! Soon after Petros told me, I learned that the family who sponsored Mavis, had offered to sponsor another student!!!

The very next day, I went to Riversands to meet with Sister Thandie to discuss the children who needed uniforms as we had a generous offer from some Canadian friends to sponsor some ...

When I arrived, Thandie was sitting with one of the learners' Moms – Mrs. Nkosi and her beautiful baby girl. She introduced her to me as Mthobisi's Mom and I knew this was no coincidence! Thandie had asked her to come to the school two months ago but she hadn't yet responded.

The reason we wanted to see her, was to discuss her son and his problems as well as the possibility of sponsoring Mthobisi for High School next year. It seems the teachers in the Art Centre are very fond of him and noticed that he was distracted from his work. These kinds of things are often brought to Thandie's and my attention as there is usually a family problem at the root of them.

We learned that after Mthobisi's father had died more than a year ago (which in itself was traumatic) his mother had remarried and his stepfather was now mistreating them...



Anyway, she had come to discuss the possibility of sponsorship, after learning of this wonderful opportunity. As we began to talk, both Mthobisi and his home room teacher, David Ramapuputla were brought into the meeting.

To my surprise, David had already written a motivation for Mthobisi and promptly fetched it. It read as follows:

This letter is to confirm that Mthobisi Comfort Nkosi is a bonafide learner in Grade 7 at Riversands Primary School. He was born on 10/02/97, is responsible, disciplined and hardworking. He performs above average academically, displaying good skills in both leadership and communication.

In 2008, Mthobisi became a prefect and this year, he is Head Boy. He enjoys discussion in class, plays football for the school team and is also a good singer. In fact, he is a soloist and enjoys entertaining people whenever there is a school function.

With knowledge of a willing sponsor and all of these other factors combined, we decided to make an appointment for Mthobisi to write an entrance test at SSB before enrollment closes as this was the end of our school year. This excellent Independent School is Christian based, has strong academics and a school choir.

While David went to make the appointment, I listened with tears to Mthobisi as he sang for me. What a beautiful voice he has, combined with a quiet confidence. He assured me, if he was able to attend this school, there would be no trouble and he would do his very best. In the meantime, we spoke privately with his Mom about her marriage and she confided things to Thandie in Tswana. Before Mrs. Nkosi left, we prayed together about all of this and agreed to meet again.

As an additional bonus and sign of God's favor on this young man's life, there was an almost new pair of school

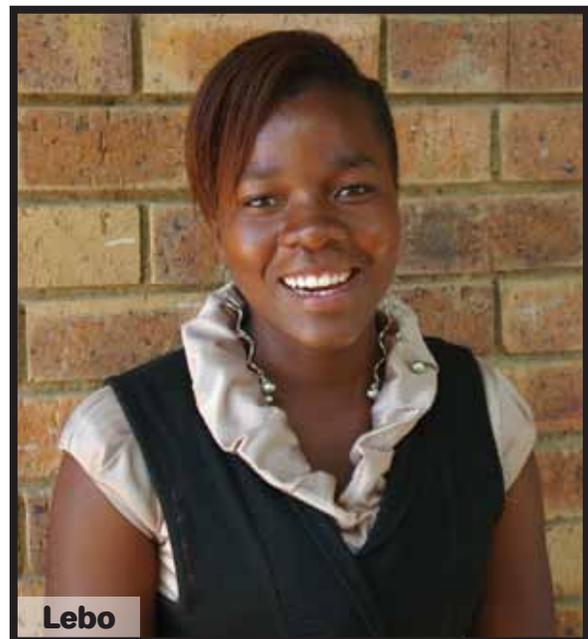
shoes in a bag of shoes I had brought with me that day. They were donated by a young hip hop dancer... and they fit him perfectly! His own school shoes were worn down and torn. When I looked over at his Mom, there were tears of gratitude in her eyes...

Mthobisi wrote and passed the entrance test and is happily attending SSB as well as singing in the school choir. We are overjoyed at Hands of Joy! This kind of opportunity to intervene and be part of God's plan to change a life and maybe even the destiny of a whole family is so fulfilling. And this is where our sponsors are invaluable...As the woman whose family is sponsoring Mthobisi and has lived in Africa, wrote;

"Africa is in my heart and blood and as I can't afford to come in person it is such a deep joy for me to have this type of connection in the lives of a few!"

We are so delighted that sponsored students -Patricia, Tommy and Zanele- passed well at SSB School last year! And especially that Zanele, as one of the top students in Grade 9, would receive a scholarship for her final 3 years of High School...

In February of this year, Zanele's Mom sent an SMS in desperation to ask me if I could help her older daughter who had been accepted to study Law, to find work. Lebogang is the eldest of 5 children and their father died when she was only 10 years old. There are no funds to further Lebo's education; in fact, the family struggles to survive. Mrs. Mogoathle works as a domestic worker and their grandmother who is illiterate, stays home to raise the children. For more than a year, Lebo has applied without success for loans, grants or work. She even inquired about returning to High School to improve her marks but all to no avail...



When I thought of how well Lebo's sister Zanele, progressed, I was eager to meet with Lebo to see how we could assist. Before we met, I suggested that she write out

her story and her goals. She was sincere in her desire to study Law - if she couldn't become a pilot- and had been accepted by UNISA, a correspondence University. Her motivation was partly due to the fact her father had wanted to study Law and also to conflict over property that she had witnessed. In her eagerness to help others, Lebo realized a real opportunity in Law.

After our meeting, I was encouraged to request assistance for Lebo's education by sending out an email to women who might be able to assist her with a monthly contribution. In an amazing response, we raised enough to support her for a year of studies! It was a happy day when we went to register. Lebo has received her study materials and has already begun to prepare for her studies that will begin in July... She writes with gratitude of how her whole life has changed and she has agreed to assist Jill in teaching art on Tuesdays...

You can read more of Lebo's account on the website; [www.handsofjoy.ca](http://www.handsofjoy.ca)

## HEALTH CARE CENTRE

Nurse Thandie is busy in the Health Care Centre and Laurie has returned to drive students to see the Doctor again on a weekly basis. This is such a valuable service that Dr. Sonia provides in the midst of her busy weeks. Lately the children have been suffering from sores, impatago and burns on their bodies which Thandie tells me are all related to their living conditions.

Many of the children sleep on the floors under blankets that aren't washed very often –especially in winter. Paraffin lamps and stoves are used for light and cooking. Now that it's cold, the rats also come in and some of the children have been bitten. I am holding back tears as I write but that is the truth of their reality and Diepsloot continues to grow!

(SEE Book Review at [www.handsofjoy.ca](http://www.handsofjoy.ca))

Like me, Dr. Sonia was horrified to learn this...

Some years, Rotary generously give out blankets and I hope this year, we will receive some new blankets for the children. We are so pleased to have been given new shoes for almost all of the children through Lonehill Village Church as well as some uniforms this year. And a private donation will enable Thandie to make up food parcels for some of the more needy children to take home over the school holidays at the end of June. Since they are used to having a meal each day at school, thanks to Milly and her team, they will need nourishment at home when it is cold.

As with any building, there are often maintenance issues with the Health Care Centre, especially plumbing and water. The school lacks the resources and knowledge to repair them. To his credit, David Marshall who used to teach Church with me, humbly comes and sorts thing out for Thandie as he seems to be able to repair anything!!!

We have awesome news that there is natural medicine available that is very effective for HIV Aids. This will be a blessing throughout Africa and we are praying for the effective distribution of it since it has finally been approved.

## ART CENTRE

Although Jill could not teach for the first part of the year as she needed to sell her home and move, she returned with great enthusiasm and is well into lessons now...At present, the students are drawing portraits, and Lebo, who is assisting her, is doubling as their portrait model.

Jill's husband is a talented architect who has lived and worked in the U.S. as well as South Africa. He was involved in the design and installation of the new airport in Durban before the World Cup Soccer but has not been employed since then. A qualified Art teacher, Jill has never taken a salary from Hands of Joy in the 4 years she has been teaching. At this time, although she is still not asking for a salary, it is necessary for Hands of Joy to provide money for her transportation. She is an incredible asset to the school and the children have really benefitted from her teaching!

## STUDENTS AND THEIR STORIES

We have been attempting to schedule a reunion with the students for some time now but this has proven difficult. I am happy to report the reason for this is primarily because so many have to work on Saturday. With such a high unemployment rate in South Africa – especially among the youth – we are very grateful!

Though only a few were available, we decided to meet anyways In Pretoria at the Art Museum, since there was a show of works by two very successful black artists. All of



**From left to right: Tshepo Phiri and Ashley Mashau and Abel Mosweu**

us were inspired by the work!  
Tshepo Phiri –now working as a night time garage attendant, Ashley Mashau –studying Accounting Management Sciences at UNISA and working part time in a grocery store and Abel Mosweu – interning

Landscape Architect.

Now in his last year of High school at SSB, Tommy Makhura assured me he was going to work very hard this year. And his first term report, was a testament to this...He has written to thank his sponsors...

In his own words Tommy writes:

“My days at Sekolo Sa Borokgo have almost come to an end. It has been a journey, a long and fruitful journey, one which will always stand out as a highlight of my life. This journey was initially made possible by you. Hands of Joy has certainly made a difference in my life and I am grateful for all you have done for me. May God bless you.”

## CONCLUSION

These days, with so much struggle behind them, some of the students have begun to write their stories and sending them to me. As I receive and read them, I am freshly humbled by their backgrounds and oh so grateful that we have given them a hand over the years to overcome and rise above their circumstances.

In future, portions of some of the stories will appear in these newsletters and full accounts on the website. I have sent a portion of Petros' Story to one of the editors of a magazine called 'Joy' in the hopes it may provide

inspiration to others!

At the end of this letter, I have added an article reviewing a book on the living conditions in Diepsloot. I am sure you will be touched by it...There are many NGO's and church organisations going in to provide support, it is encouraging. And we are so grateful for your prayers and support that help us on so many levels to make a difference in the children's lives, influencing the future for generations to come.

I am happy to report that we have been able to raise Thandie's salary for the first half of the year and pray that your donations will continue to support her vital role! As it was Father's Day recently, I discovered a verse that I wanted to pass on to my own father who is now 78 and still going strong. Then I began to think of how it is such a strong reminder of how the Father of all creation feels about each of us...

“Let the beloved of the Lord rest secure in Him, for He shields him all day long and the one the Lord loves, rests between His shoulders.” (Deuteronomy 33:12)

May God bless you and your families,

*Lou Ann*

## HANDS OF JOY - MISSION STATEMENT

### PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

- To introduce and teach Art and Church to underprivileged African children at Riversands Primary School in a manner that will enrich their lives by stimulating faith, creativity and confidence.

### SECONDARY OBJECTIVES

- Where possible, to meet the children's immediate physical needs for food, clothing and medical attention.
- To develop ways to empower unemployed parents and former students by teaching skills and creating job opportunities thereby helping to restore confidence and the ability to provide for their families.
- To sponsor Christian students who show some potential to attend special high schools. The aim is to continue a scholarship fund that will sponsor gifted, responsible students in both Art and Academics to attend secondary schools for continuing education. This has been largely dependent on donations.

**HANDS OF JOY** is a registered charitable organization. If you wish to contribute to it, please contact:

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