

# Don McMath Foundation

## Newsletter

[www.donmcmath.org](http://www.donmcmath.org)

[info@donmcmath.org](mailto:info@donmcmath.org)

Don McMath Foundation Newsletter 7<sup>th</sup> March



Dear All

To give Anne a much-needed break, Judy and I are writing this edition of the Don McMath Foundation newsletter.

I'm sure you will all be pleased to hear that the opening ceremony was a great success. Judy and I arrived in The Gambia on Friday 21<sup>st</sup> Feb in the evening after an 8 hour flight (it was diverted to The Canary Islands to refuel before continuing to The Gambia). After a few drinks and a meal at The African Queen we had an early night in preparation for the next day.



The whole of Saturday was spent preparing for the opening ceremony which was due to take place at 5.00 p.m. The cooks arrived at Anne's house at about 8.30 a.m. they had been recruited from the local Domestic Science College. Here's a picture of them preparing the food. They cooked Chicken Benechin (a local Gambian dish) for about 150 people, Anne had been to the local market and bought 150 chicken portions plus assorted vegetables and several large sacks of rice. This was all prepared by the cooks in Anne's back garden and took most of the day. The food was then cooked in an enormous cooking pot over a wood fire, the chicken first followed by the rice, the end result was put into enormous washing up bowls and transported to the school where it was put in the kitchen ready for the feast later on.



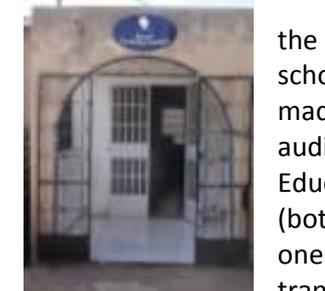
While the girls were getting on with the cooking we walked over to the school to put up the sign that Luke had made, with the aid of a school desk and 2 chairs we managed to get holes drilled and the sign erected, it is now fitted permanently over the front door. We also hung a photo of Don over the blackboard in the main classroom.



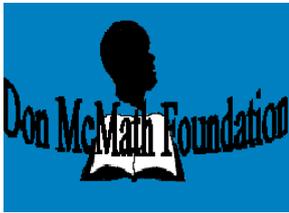
While all this was going on several of the local lads were arranging the delivery of 100 chairs, which were delivered to the school by donkey and cart. These all had to be washed before they could be put out in the playground for the parents to sit on. Everyone lent a hand which meant that we were able to return to Anne's house to help her to write her speech!



Parents and children started to arrive at the school at about 4 pm. (The last ones actually arrived at 6:20 when most of the ceremony was over!) All the women were wearing their best dresses so it was a very colourful occasion. The few men that turned up were also in their best clothes including one looking very smart in a dinner suit. As



the children arrived the teachers (Marlin and Elizabeth) got them dressed in their second school uniforms which had been delivered earlier by Fatou who had arranged for them to be made by a local tailor. They then brought their chairs out and were sat at the front of the audience. The main guests, Sheikh Lewis and Mr J Gaye from the Department of State for Education arrived at 5:00 pm and shortly after that the ceremony started. Prayers were said (both Muslim and Christian) and Mr Lewis made his opening speech, the children then sang us one of the songs that they had learned in school. Anne then gave her speech, which was translated into Wolof (the main local language) by Mr Lewis, she spoke about how the school



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had come to be set up after her and a few friends had started sponsoring some of the local children at other schools and how it all grew from there, she also announced that we would be opening a new class in April for another 30 children. The speech was well received by the audience who all applauded in the right places. We then had a very good short speech by one of the parents thanking Anne and the directors for setting up the school.



The official launching was then performed by Mr Gaye from the ministry who gave a long speech on the importance of education in The Gambia.

I then thanked everyone for coming and specifically thanked all those that had helped to get the school ready on time. The food was then served by the girls from the Domestic Science college. There was enough food for all the audience, all the children and anyone that happened to be passing in the street at the time. It was fun to see the



children crouching round the food bowls sharing the food.

The school itself looks fantastic, the general opinion of everyone that saw it is that it is one of the best they've seen in The Gambia, there is one very large classroom, two smaller ones, a bathroom, a kitchen, a storage room, a large playground at the front and a smaller space at the back. There is easily enough room for the 75 pupils that Anne plans to have by the beginning of 2004.

Over all the day was a huge success and everyone really enjoyed themselves and the food. The event was covered by Gambian Television who made a video of the occasion and was reported in The Gambian Independent newspaper. A link to their article is here:

<http://allafrica.com/stories/200303030055.html>



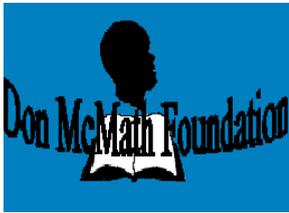
We have a copy of the video. If anyone would like to borrow it could they send me an email and I'll put it in the post, I can make more copies if necessary.



I have included a note from Julia Davey who is one of the sponsors that came out to The Gambia a couple of weeks ago. Julia says: Just to let you know I returned from the Gambia yesterday and had the most amazing time. Would recommend it as a holiday destination to anyone as the people are so friendly and there is a lot to see and do. Great food and weather too. It was so good to meet Ann and to visit the school with which i was very impressed. (We saw a couple of other schools too and these were



very much how I imagined African schools to be i.e lots of children sat on benches in a small hut with little or no equipment). The Don McMath School on the other hand is in a more modern building where the children have different rooms for different activities. Ann has great ideas for including a sand and water area and extending the Art room (as a primary school teacher I know how important these are to the children). Loved the playroom, book corner and the labelled trays - just like at my school. The children have tables and chairs to sit at, to work (though I understand more will be needed as the school grows). I loved reading the timetable on the wall and was pleased to see the children have plenty of time to socially interact and play with each other as well as formal lessons. The teacher and support assistant are both lovely



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women and it was great to see them working with the children. The children themselves are a joy to meet. Beautiful singing and smiley faces and so smart in their uniforms. (My mother had some of the dresses made for my nieces in the UK)

Many thanks to Ann who I hope to meet again ( in Ali Baba's garden for more gambas and another rendition of Redemption song!!)

Congratulations to all involved as it really is a school to be proud of. Hope the grand opening goes well. As for me - I cant wait to book my return trip asap.

see you soon

love and once again thanks for a great trip.

Julia Davey

There are several other people who will be in The Gambia next week, Graham, Frank and Rosemary who I will ask for their views when they return and include them in the next newsletter.

Thank you all for your support and please forward this on to anyone who you think may be interested in becoming a sponsor.

Mick & Judy McMath

7th March 2003