



Don McMath Foundation

Newsletter

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The Don McMath Foundation Newsletter – 15th December 2005

Hello All

THE NEW SCHOOL IS FANTASTIC!

The official opening went according to plan (which is unusual in The Gambia) and the new school exceeded our expectations. It was a very emotional event for all who had been involved, both Gambians and sponsors alike, the children performed many songs and a short play and everyone was impressed by their skills which have been learned in such a short time.



The school was officially opened by the British High Commissioner, Mr Eric Jenkinson OBE and four of the classrooms were named and officially opened.

The Bidy Woods classroom, named after the late sister of one of our sponsors Peter Woods, the Alan Gale classroom, named after Anne's father, the Sue Cook classroom named after Graham Cooks late wife and the Mushtaq Ahmed classroom named after the father of one of our sponsors Samina Ahmed.



All the classes performed songs and plays, one of the most memorable was a play performed by Fatoumatta Sankanu, Penda Sowe and Lucy Nyelenkeh about catching malaria and subsequently visiting the doctor, their confidence and spoken English was impressive.

Most impressive as well were songs performed in English by the new nursery class who only started at the school in September.



The opening finished with the women serving food to all the guests, they had spent most of the two previous days preparing it, followed by live music and dancing which went on well into the night (so we were told).



There were in excess of 25 sponsors at the event and for a change we have some of their impressions of the school and The Gambia rather than our usual newsletter.

"Having been back in the UK for a few days and had time to reflect on my "Gambian experience", I am still overwhelmed by it all. The school is amazing, building and facility-wise. The enthusiasm of the pupils, teachers and parents was wonderful; they, the trustees and



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especially Anne can be very proud of their achievement. As a sponsor I am pleased to help, albeit in a small way and will be spreading the word to as many people as possible. I will be back for the opening of the next building.”

David Hanley

“I had chatted to Anne a few times in our local pub, been to her garden parties and sponsor a child. But the first real inkling I had that something extraordinary was happening was when we went to Anne’s house. Lots of children, some playing or singing or just sitting quietly, all listened to and watched “Anna” intently. It was Sunday so the school was empty and we had a good look around. Every child has a desk and chair and uniforms; all the classrooms have charts and pictures on the walls; there are toilets and a water tower. After the opening ceremony, during which the children sang and did a little play in English, they and their parents shook hands and hugged and danced with us. The gratitude they showed to us and especially Anne brought tears to a few eyes.”

Hazel Hanley

“I was so impressed with the achievements at the school and the opening was absolutely grand that I'm not sure I have words adequate enough to describe my impressions other than it is an absolutely marvelous achievement. I think the most abiding impression is the joy and happiness expressed by all those present, parents, teachers, guests and last but by no means least, the children.

Anne and her drivers should be congratulated on their determination and patience in obtaining all the necessary paperwork and cutting through miles and miles of red-tape to succeed. Water is laid on and plants now planted. The teachers, parents and children work extremely hard to keep the classrooms and playground clean and tidy. The sandy playing area is delightful and was much appreciated by all present. So much more should be noted as sponsors and the English end have provided support, funds and back-up. The opening proved very moving and those sponsors who were making their first visit could hardly believe their eyes.

Congratulations to all involved for each individual has played his or her part with love and devotion. Well, well done and loads and loads of luck for the future generations in Kotu South.”

Shirley Collier

“I would just like to say what a fantastic time Andy and I both had and going to the school just makes it real and makes you appreciate just what the money really means. The children really were fantastic and makes you remember you don't need all those expensive toys. I had a lump in my throat several times and I noticed even the boys put their sunglasses on when the children started singing I think there were a few tears forming. I am glad the children like the music man we had a lot of fun doing it even if we were very nervous and nearly didn't.”

Linda Whitehead

“As my first time to Gambia I wasn't sure what to expect, although overwhelming at first it is a beautiful country full of the most friendly and welcoming people I have ever come across.



Don McMath Foundation

Newsletter

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The children were nothing short of fantastic and so much fun to be around, they are so happy with so little. Watching them enjoy every second at school was wonderful and makes you realise this help is the least they deserve.

The opening ceremony was visibly emotional for everyone involved, and it was not difficult to see why as the school is incredible and a credit to Anne and all her hard work I just hope she takes the time to realise what she has achieved, how many people she has touched it is inspiring.

I had one mother hug me with tears in her eyes and as I have had little involvement in the school I felt very privileged to be part of something so amazing.

Congratulations to all that have put their time and effort into such a great project I hope it continues to go from strength to strength. Thank you for a remarkable week.”

Natalie Sole

Di Pomeroy has supplied us with and A to Z of her visit.

- A** Anne McMath – superstar – who was at Banjul Airport to greet us with bottles of water; taxi drivers and transport; and currency. Thank you Anne.
- B** Banjul – the Capital.
- C** Cauldrons of food cooked for the Opening Party.
- D** Dalasis – Gambian currency – the notes are very dirty – and stink.
- E** Electricity; very erratic; I managed to boil a kettle only once in the week. I never achieved hot water.
- F** Fatou, who makes the gorgeous school uniforms.
- G** Gambia - an experience of a lifetime.
- H** A Humbling experience when reminded of how wasteful we are and that even a mere carrier bag has a value in the Gambia.
- I** The Imam who led the Muslim prayer at the opening ceremony.
- J** Jades Chinese Restaurant where the group shared a wonderful dinner.
- K** Kachikally Crocodile Pool where we shook hand with Charlie, well, some of us did.



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- L** Lamin Lodge – ask Judy for her impression!
- M** Mick and Judy – thank you for all your hard work – may the support flourish.
- N** Nothing can prepare you for the Gambia experience.
- O** Official opening of the Don McMath Foundation School.
- P** Plymouth/Dakar Challenge – good luck Luke and Nat and thank you for your cheerful company.
- Q** Questions from everyone you pass. Such friendly people.
- R** Restaurants – we didn't have a duff meal.
- S** Sere Kunda Market – a total experience of Africa on the street.
- T** Taxi drivers – Ansu and Sisawo who looked after us so well – thank you.
also, Too-babs (Brits: two bob ie 2/-)
- U** Umbrellas, I was glad of mine for shade.
- V** Vulture on the roof of Sailors Beach Restaurant.
- W** Wolof, the main language of the Gambia.
- X** an excellent adventure.
- Y** Yasmina Restaurant – Brandy and Tia Maria? Ask those who were there, especially Shirley and Mary.
- Zee** me and you, you and me, as the children sing – and together we can make a difference.”



We would like to thank Luke and Nat who provided us with some very professional signs for the school and the classrooms.

We would also like to thank Paul Ferguson and Paul McMath who organised a charity golf day in Cranbrook Sussex which raised a massive £1,420 for the school.

Hopefully this will now become an annual event.



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In case Di's A-Z has got anyone wondering about the letter L, we had lunch one day at Lamin Lodge where Judy was bitten on the arm by a monkey, which for some reason everyone found amusing – including Ansu our taxi driver who had to stop the car when he heard as he was laughing so much.

Good luck to Paul Nayton, Luke McMath and Natalie Sole who set out on their 3,700 mile trip from Verwood to The Gambia on 26th December. We'll give you all an update on their adventure in the next newsletter.

It just remains for us to wish you all a very happy Christmas.

Anne, Judy and Mick McMath

15th December 2005