

Don McMath Foundation

Newsletter

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February 2003

Dear All,

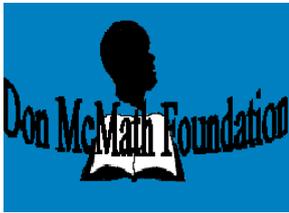
I returned to Gambia on the 4th February after two weeks in the U.K. While I was home I travelled down to Verwood, to meet some sponsors & would be sponsors. Mick & Judy McMath organised a buffet evening, so I was able to meet sponsors in that neck of the wood. It was very nice to meet you all and put faces to names. Also I would like to thank Mick & Judy for arranging the evening, especially Judy who did all the food.

All the children seemed to have settled down at the school, and I have ordered their second uniform - each child will have two. I thought you may be interested in the making of the uniform. White material is bought at the market in the capital, Banjul also dye, in our case blue. The material is then tied in such a way that when it is immersed in the dye, the dye can only penetrate certain parts of the material. It is then washed and dried several times, so the finished material comes out in our case as blue & white stripes. Then the material is made up into uniforms by the tailor. The teachers also have a uniform, -their request,- but this is different to the children. They have plain blue skirts and blue & white blouses with an elephant pattern. Again white material is bought, also the local carpenter carves a stamp of your design. (in our case elephants) Wax candles are then melted, the stamp is dipped into this and then pressed onto the cloth. This has to be done very carefully so that it is even and there are no air holes. When the wax is dry & hard the cloth is put in the dye. The dye only takes on the parts that don't have wax on them, so you end up with the blue material with white elephants. Some of you may know of this already, it is called batik. I use to just go to "Wards" and buy my sons uniform!

The children have had a school holiday the passed week, as it has been the Muslim festival of "Tobaski" (it is the equivalent to our Christmas). It celebrates Abraham going to sacrifice Isaac, and god sending a sheep instead. Everyone dresses up in their best African clothes, and the men go to the mosque in the morning. As soon as they come home they kill a sheep, if they can afford one. If they can't afford a sheep, it will be a chicken and for the really poor, their better off neighbours are required to give them "salibo" (charity). The sheep is usually cooked in a stew with vegetables and served with rice. Anyone who visits them is always offered food, how ever little they have. I was given a leg of sheep by a neighbour (maybe he thought I was in need of salibo) I do mean sheep and not lamb, because the Gambians eat mature male sheep and never the lambs. The meat is quite strong tasting and can be quite tough. In the late afternoon the children, who have usually been bought new clothes for the festival, knock on everyone's door they know, and you give them 1 dalasis (about 4p). They collect this together until they have enough to buy an ice-cream. As this is the only time of the year that most of the children have ice-cream, you can imagine what a big treat it is for them.

Last week Adam Howard, a sponsor came to visit the school. I think he was quite impressed and the children all sung him two songs in English. Remember this is from children who at the beginning of January could not speak English. Tomorrow I am meeting three more sponsors, Vera, Sylvia & Julie Davey, they are holidaying in the Gambia and would like to visit the school.

Our next important function is next Saturday, 22nd February as we are having our official opening. Each child is allowed to bring two people with them, I have had to restrict it to that, or else the whole of the extended family would turn up. Also we are inviting some of the local dignitaries in all there will be over 100 people there, including the children. It is customary to feed everyone at these occasions, so I have got three girls in their final year at Domestic Science College to do African food. Mick & Judy are flying out from England for the opening, and bring with them a magnificent plaque that Luke McMath has made for the school. (many, many thanks Luke for your hard



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work) I am sure Mick will bring his digital camera so hopefully you will see pictures of the occasion on the next news letter.

One last thing, apart from the usual about my spelling etc. if any of you would like to comment or if you have been here and seen the school, and would like to give your impressions, please do not hesitate to send us an e-mail, and we will pass it on to our other sponsors. Please keep spreading the word, as each new sponsor means another child goes to school.

Best Wishes

Anne McMath

16th February 2003