



2006

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Contents

January 1 2006.....	1
January 2 2006.....	4
January 3 2006.....	5
January 4 2006.....	5
January 6 2006.....	7
January 9 2006.....	9
January 12 2006.....	9
January 19 2006.....	11
January 24 2006.....	13
March 19 2006.....	15
March 29 2006.....	19
May 13 2006.....	22
May 19 2006.....	26
April 3 2006.....	30
October 23 2006.....	33
November 1 2006.....	38
November 2 2006.....	41
November 6 2006.....	43

January 1 2006

Happy New Year to you all.

I wish to thank so many of you for your kind Christmas and New Year's messages. I read them all, but the Internet situation has made it difficult to respond individually. Your encouragement and interest are greatly appreciated. We do not feel so far away from home at this time of year when you share how you are with us. As you return to work or your regular activities, I hope this has been a restful season for you. We are still enjoying the numerous, thoughtful Christmas decorations, Christmas socks for each one,

cards and surprises from Ruthie Mohammed. They have made this place festive and have made it seem like home. We miss Maeve and Sue and their good humour! We miss Gail, too, and continue to pour over her financial advice.

The mosquitoes have descended! As the days get hotter, these little darlings will become more invasive. They are smaller, generally, than ours and harder to catch. We are covered in welts and have resorted to spraying our rooms before bed, as the option of breathing that stuff is more attractive than staying up most of the night. They are so infuriating! Over the next month, I know they will increase exponentially.

Carolyn and I have been having a productive and quiet weekend. Cliff and his girlfriend, Luntu, have gone somewhere; Jesse and Mel have gone to Malealea. Jesse leaves tomorrow. Usually, we have so many visitors and meetings that it is hard to get the admin and finance work done. We have enjoyed the time and feel a sense of satisfaction to be closing out the year rather more organized and ready for the 2006 accounts. Cliff and Carolyn have gone out shopping and have prepared dozens of kits for the primary school orphans, to be distributed at the camp or given to the principals. They purchased toiletries, track suits, underwear, candles, soap, toothbrushes, etc., for the primary school children. It was fun putting the kits together. Cliff has had a real lesson in childcare! He is great—flexible and helpful. His business degree will be useful as he gets more familiar with our accounting and data management systems.

Since New Year's Eve day, it has been raining quite hard at night, and everyone is so happy. *Pula* is the Sesotho word for rain, and it is a real blessing, as there has not been enough to grow the crops. Some places have not even planted yet (it is the beginning of summer), as there has not been enough rain. When our 16 St. Mary's girls left for the holidays, we gave them the option of coming back here (and we would pay their transport) for New Year's Eve. Many young girls get pregnant then, and we have given them numerous talks on the subject. Each had to write me a personal letter promising me she would keep herself safe and how. I will keep the letters; each is dear and heartfelt. By 5:30 p.m. on New Year's Eve, none had come back. We were imagining a quiet and early evening for ourselves, and then Matsiba came. She is a sweet girl. We made her a nice dinner, and then we watched the *Sound of Music* CD that Carolyn had brought on my laptop. It was Matsiba's first movie ever! What fun to see her engrossed in the film. We bought treats and gave her basically junk food (typical New Year's fare). She was enamoured of the music, the voices, the dancing and the romance. We loved having her and were so glad she came. She had a nice breakfast and returned to her village with as much food as we could send. Her entire family lives on her grandmother's old age pension of 150 rand per month (roughly \$30 Cdn.). She was delighted. She was taken aback to have the use of an indoor toilet. I am sure she has never slept in a room by herself before—remember that she lives with 15 other young girls and many in the extended family she goes home to, who have taken her in.

The Anglican nuns had us for their lunch after church (which we skipped). They are sweet and do their utmost to look after us. The Sisters of Charity are so thoughtful in their remembrance of us on all these occasions. They text us with messages of goodwill. I have lived with them for so long that I appreciate each one and their good hearts. This is their time of rest, and yet they never forget us. I love them all. As we did at Christmas, we told the nuns we would make our own dinner to save them the trouble. We had cottage cheese that Mel had bought in Ficksburg, South Africa and fresh apricots off the tree beside the chapel. The meals here tend to be heavy on carbohydrates and far too much for us (which allows us to share). It is a treat to have a light meal. If one ate everything we are given, we would all be the size of a house. It is hard when remembering how many in this country do not have enough.

The nuns are having an annual conference for five days here. Carolyn moves back to Mel's, and two priests move in with me for the week. We have to do some serious cleaning up!!!! Without an office, I have the files in boxes, receipts piles for data entry.... It just won't do!

The Anglican Church here has been in crisis for six years since the appointment of the present bishop. He has been forced to resign of late, and there will be change afoot. It was an out-and-out mutiny. There was another scathing article in the paper last week, exposing all the dirty laundry of the Anglican Church of Lesotho. The shame of it, really, is that the church is in division in a vigorous power struggle at the very time when its people desperately need its leadership to fight against this pandemic. The Anglican Church is also fractured in its effort with other denominations concerning HIV/AIDS initiatives and other areas. On Friday, I had the most powerful Anglican leader in the country and his wife in for tea to see what we can do to help. I have spent time with him before. The YAH will be bringing Canadian experts in various fields over the next two years, and I offered to have one in conflict resolution spend some time with them if that would help. He seemed receptive, but we will see. He has not followed up on help I have offered before or on initiatives the Lesotho Ambassador to Washington has offered.

Since my last letter, we have been making real progress: Liabo Letseka has been hired for the position of YAH Basotho Coordinator. He seems a fine young man in his twenties who has worked with Care Lesotho for six years, is well experienced on the HIV/AIDS front with both youth and adults and is accustomed to rigorous financial accountability measures. He seems keen and appreciative to have been chosen from the over 60 applications and more than 25 candidates I have interviewed. He starts in the next couple of weeks. He must find a place to live in Hlotse.

Maseeiso Ramoholi has been hired as the HL Coordinator. She has broadcasting, NGO, administrative and HIV/AIDS experience. She is delighted to be a part of the team, and we all love her already. She will start Thursday and also must find a place to live. If necessary, she can live with Mel and Carolyn (Carolyn is sleeping on the floor) until she finds a space. Liabo and Maseeiso should work well together and be a real help to each other.

I am keen to get them both trained while I am still here. Carolyn, Cliff and Mel will continue throughout their stay here, assisting them both as they get more into their work. Liabo will need the support of the Help Lesotho team to get up to speed on the locations, general computer training and encouragement. Next weekend, the Canadian volunteers begin to arrive (Penney Place, Bruce Clark, Peggy and Peter Frank, Carol Pritchard and Ray Fines, Joanne Rowlinson and Brian Morton) for the leadership camp and then go to the villages and schools to which they have been assigned for the next few months. The leadership camp is from January 13-17, for which we are preparing. Carolyn had a coup in finding a local HIV/AIDS trainer to come to the camp. Liabo and I will have many local leaders, chiefs and faith-based and community-based organizations to meet with over the next three weeks. I have two Canadian youth (under 30) to hire for the YAH to be trained in Ottawa and then to arrive for the Youth Council training session in March. They will stay for two months, then do public engagement in Canada.

As you can see, our team continues to grow. Although the training and briefing time is enormous, it is worth it, and the systems in place should be manageable to administer. Each person is valuable, and there is a great spirit of kindness and a mutual bond of care for these children. Our only block at this point is that we have as yet been unable to secure office space for either YAH or HL. Housing is a huge problem. We have asked so many people, but the housing shortage in Hlotse is against us. I am confident that we will find a safe and suitable space for the right price, but I confess this is based more on sheer optimism than probability.

Carolyn and Cliff are leaving in the early morning to go to the village where our young pregnant girl is, to get an updated report on her first two weeks home so that we can advise the sponsor group.

January 2 2006

What a day! I had a meeting with the Mother Superior and the CFO here to discuss the possibility of five or six of their young nuns and novitiates joining us for the leadership camp (I have extended this to the RC sisters as well). This would give the nuns a chance to get to know each other from the different denominations and to get some real HIV/AIDS and other training. They could interact with our orphans there. The Anglican sisters have so little contact with the people, and many express to me that they would like more. We will see what they decide.

'M'e Ratia, the principal at Mahlekefane Primary School (the cover of the 2006 calendar and in the months March and September), finally got the message from a friend that I wanted to see her. Her school is twinned with Bishop Hamilton in Ottawa. She is a wonderful woman, so appreciative of everything we do. She is so excited about the new desks and benches paid for by Mary Durst's dinner party. Her children are 120 to a room, with 10% sitting on plastic chairs, 80% sitting on the floor and 10% sitting on paint cans or sharing turned-over milk cartons. We had such a nice visit for several hours.

Right there and then, I took 'M'e Ratia to the shop and bought her first cell phone. She has missed out on so much, because we cannot communicate with her. Her village is so remote that she will get only reception on the top of the mountain, but she can still call out and receive text messages. It was so fun to be with her for this. The lady at the store gave her a free T-shirt, and she thought it was Christmas. I bought her enough air time for several months. Now she will not miss the meetings and other opportunities. When we need information to help her, she will be within reach. It was such a pleasure to help her. We have a plan to approach the Ministry of Education about new classrooms and several other things. I wish you could have seen her face when she saw her students on the front of the calendar. It was a special moment. In addition, we chatted about Shauna Pollock and Michaela/Joel CoteSelig spending some of their time with her. She was so thrilled and desperate for help. It was a most enjoyable and productive meeting. She and I rarely get the chance to quietly sit down and talk. I like her so much. She has a laugh, robust and inviting, that would melt the heart of anyone.

Carolyn went to Mookho's today and was satisfied that she is well and getting proper care in her pregnancy. Carolyn will send a full report to the mentors and St. Bart's Anglican Church, who sponsor the project. The St. Bart's mentors were amazing when we told them about her situation. Without exception, they were supportive and will continue to help her. Tomorrow we have our second interview with the young girl who will take Mookho's place in the St. Mary's project. The new girl is lovely—sweet and happy to have this opportunity. Both her parents are dead, and she lives with her older brother (a herd boy) and young sister. The grandmother has been supporting them by buying clothes and selling them elsewhere for a bit more (called hawking). This will make such a difference to their family.

We have had a constant procession of people here to meet on various topics. It makes me glad we got so much done on the weekend!

I now have two priests here staying for five nights!!!! Goodness!

January 3 2006

6:00 a.m.: The birds are chirping, and the ground is wet after yet another good rain. The priests have gone to prayers. We are preparing for our volunteers and know that each one will be so well appreciated and welcomed. The plans for the leadership camp are coming but there is still much more to do. We so hope that this will be a breakthrough for many on the HIV/AIDS front. It is crucial and the main purpose of the camp. One day and one person at a time!

My greetings to you all and my appreciation for your interest in and support for Help Lesotho. Without you, none of this could have happened.

January 4 2006

This morning I woke up at 5:00 a.m. to a symphony of birds at my window. The shower had little water, but it was not as cold as it sometimes is. I took my time and prepared for the day with a rather troubled mind. In the past weeks, we have had a constant stream of meetings, worked hard on finalizing the 2005 accounts and made continuing preparations and plans for 2006 projects. Yet, the haunting reality here sometimes overwhelms me.

For example:

- I now have three priests with me. One is a young man, and when asked if he had children, the now familiar refrain came: "We have no parents. I have to provide for my younger four brothers and sister," (followed by a chronology and how he has supported them throughout school, the eldest now in tertiary education.) This is not said boastfully but rather as an explanation as to why he cannot marry and move on with his independent life. The reality for him is that the youngest is going into Form A this month (Grade 8), and it is a long journey yet;
- One of the priests showed me the most recent photo of the 20-year-old Anglican nun who died here recently and who is sorely missed by her friends;
- I received a call yesterday from 'M'e Ratia (the principal of Mahlekefane Primary) on her brand new phone to tell me that she may not be able to make our second scheduled meeting, because there is a funeral she must attend;
- A teacher told me that her beloved 20-year-old brother, whom she had looked after all her life, was shot dead by robbers for a measly R300 (\$60 Cdn.);
- The young man I just hired, Liabo, looks after his two orphaned nieces so that they may continue school. He is young and has sacrificed his own present and earnings for these children. The story is common and humbling;
- 'M'e Martha dropped in to explain that she cannot now be at the camp, as her dear 19-year-old niece has passed away;
- Our interview with Tankiso, who will replace Mookho, left me breathless. Her mother died in June, her marks slipped. Her grandmother was not able to let go of the loss of her precious daughter. Grief is sometimes just too much. This grandmother, who is probably younger than I am, already has so many dependents and keeps sleepless at night wondering, praying, how she can manage. The child is smart, sweet and deserves a chance at life. When I see the efforts made by this grandmother, I hug her and feel inadequate; and
- Yesterday, Cliff went with me to the bank as I was withdrawing a fair sum for the leadership camp and various orphan expenditures. As we walked down the tiny main street of Hlotse, a woman passed us, her face buried in a cloth, wailing with abandon. It breaks your heart, and you speculate on what trauma she has just experienced.

Because I spend most of my time on solution-based work, I try not to be overwhelmed by the sheer number of deaths and the postulating on how one manages. I believe that God weeps when we weep, and I keep asking Him how He can stand the din from Lesotho.... The subterranean grief and loss are a swelling tide, and one fears one will be swept away at times. I remind you that this is only a few of the happenings and tellings of *one day*. The journey of the days and tellings goes on, and the weight of the awareness grows heavy.

On the other hand, on that very same day, despite my email problems, I read:

- An email from Mary Ann Turnbull, which continues to amaze me in its compassion and generosity;
- Belinda Kent is already planning the incredibly popular Ha!Man Concert of the South African jazz cellist benefit for Help Lesotho at St. George's Anglican Church in Ottawa in October;
- Tessa Bell of Belleville continues her passionate efforts to help these Basotho she has never met (see the website for photos of the Belleville group in the Santa Claus Parade for Help Lesotho);
- Joan Ramsay Burns writes that her quilting circle is pleased to make a quilt for Tankiso so that she will be welcomed and will have one on her bed like the other 15 girls and that they also want to make a quilt for Mookho's baby;
- Another child sponsor has come forward;
- Marie O'Neill's son has given her the travel points to come to work here for us;
- Carolyn Seabrook writes to tell me of the efforts and monies raised at Holy Trinity Church in North Gower for our orphans;
- Brian Rozmahel writes to tell me about the enthusiasm of our latest twinned school, Viking, in Alberta, and gives me messages to pass on to Ntate Moses, the principal whom we all admire so for what he does for his orphaned students; and
- Ross Bruleigh continues to raise amazing amounts for the Bytown Orphanage by selling our calendars (\$5,000).

I want to tell the sponsors of the tear that invariably clouds my eye when I see the effects their letters have on these children. They have so little and need so much overt encouragement. That so many are willing to write regularly is a blessing I never take for granted.

One day in my life. The yin and the yang. Suffering and misery somehow comforted by generosity and compassion. The balance hovers—sometimes teetering one way, sometimes the other. The juxtaposition is what motivates me and keeps us all moving forward, for we must. It is unbearable to think otherwise.

The St. Mary's girls arrive tonight. They will have a vacancy left by Mookho, whom they all love. They will have a new friend to welcome. Tankiso has been in the same class as a couple of them, but being her first year in high school, her mother sick and then dead, she seems to have been quiet. We hope they will welcome her.

8:00 p.m. I just came in from saying good night to the girls. Tankiso seems content. When her grandmother dropped her off, she gave me long, appreciative looks. Language barriers have no hold on the communication of mothers. Her dear girl now has a future! She is so tiny, like Theresia was at the beginning—even tinier than Nkeboleng. They seemed happy to be together and were thrilled to each get a lovely Christmas card from Joan Stanton. Some got letters from their sponsors. Sebolelo showed her lovely stickers from the Nelsons. Tankiso looked on in amazement, I am sure wondering if she will have such a blessing soon. Each told me she had been faithful to our bargain and had been good on New Year's Eve. I hope so.

January 6 2006

4:20 a.m.: Again, these magnificently coloured birds are serenading me awake. Their volume might surprise you. The species here are so different. Their colours seem more resplendent and varied than at home. I wonder if one of the priests is afraid of the dark. Every morning, I see that he leaves the lights on in his room and the adjacent hall, despite the cost. He is the one who has sacrificed his future to look after his younger orphaned siblings.

I have just made my morning coffee. Carolyn gave me a Starbucks, one-person coffee-maker (plunger included), and her parents gave me a pound of Starbucks coffee for Christmas. I confess that that is the one thing I really miss. I have grown used to instant coffee here, but there is nothing like the real thing, and I delight in this time of solitude before the world wakes to its competing demands. Sometimes I skimp on the amount of grounds to make it last longer, but invariably I regret it.

As an aside, I have been asked to explain what YAH is. I had made the assumption that all were aware in this continuing saga. Building Governance Capacity and Community Engagement in Lesotho: Youth Against HIV/AIDS (YAH) is the initiative that Help Lesotho has partnered on with the Institute on Governance and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Kathleen Lauder took the initiative and is largely responsible for us getting the grant. It deals with youth (18-30) in our five regions and then all levels of Lesotho government. There is an announcement on www.helplesotho.ca for those who are interested. I will also post an explanatory note on the site this week.

The project goes to March 2008 and has some exciting potential to make a real difference on a systemic level. Over this period, we are offering Canadian expertise for various things (governance, conflict resolution, financial accountability, etc.), and all levels of government have been offered some of their time while they are here. The National AIDS Secretariat is chairing the Steering Committee. It is an exciting and demanding initiative to work with all levels at the same time. The focus, though, is decidedly on the community level and on getting the faith-based, community-based (NGOs, etc.) to work better individually and together to fight this scourge. The communities we are working in have few resources, which is why we are there.

My mind is again on one child: Nkeboleng, sponsored by Elizabeth May (Executive Director of the Sierra Club and recent Order of Canada recipient). She is a quiet child, doing well at school. She is very tiny for her age, well liked by the other girls. When the girls arrived this week, she was not among them. After being more than 24 hours late, my concern led me to talk to Sr. Marie Selina, who is in charge of the girls. She, too, was worried. The girls are to leave at 9:00 a.m. this morning for Quiting in the south for a three-day special outing. I knew she would not forget. Upon inquiring, it appears that this wee one went home to a hut with only an older sister, a brother and a small sister. Here in this world of approximations, there is a hand gesture to indicate a small child (which could mean anything from a baby to an eight- or nine-year old). Nkeboleng's father has "passed," and her mother has gone to the Republic to find work.

I wanted to get in touch with her. There are no phones or electricity in her hut. After investigation, Sr. Mary Selina remembered that one of the young nuns comes from the same village. We called her mother. She walked the 20 minutes to Nkeboleng's hut to investigate. The child is fine, but her elder sister would not let her come back. She insisted she stay to look after the young ones. I felt so sad for her. Nkeboleng never seems to complain or make trouble, and she deserves to be a part of this group and to

have this long-awaited adventure arranged by Sr. Mary Selina. We hope Nkeboleng will be able to bring the small sister and brother to the grandmother's and make it before the girls head off.

I tell you these things in such detail not to ramble, as you might hypothesize, but, rather, to lay the face of poverty and the paucity of all dimensions of well-being of these vulnerable children before you. As I finish reading Stephen Lewis' new book, I find myself so identifying with his analysis of Africa, especially in relation to education, women and children. Yet this haunting catastrophe in southern Africa, and, in this case, Lesotho, is not of multilateral organizations and statistics but, rather, of one child, one grandmother, one struggling mother at a time. The issue is too large for my troubled mind to grasp, but I can see one human being in need: Thakane nursed her mother as she died and then tried to concentrate on school; Tankiso, who lost her mother and then her grandmother, could not cope; Thato has had too many losses; Nkeboleng has no one to advocate for her; Rameketse lives in a family that cannot afford to feed her and that does not want her.

We interviewed six children yesterday who are having trouble in school. We tried to help them identify specific areas where they could use more adaptive strategies. Here you either do well in this memory-based, punitive system, or you are thought stupid. Those are the only two options. The system here is reminiscent of ours before the pedagogical revolution of the sixties. Children are caned for making mistakes, classes are large, and educational psychology has not arrived. Teachers take little or no responsibility if a child does not do well. Failure is always the child's fault: s/he is either bad or stupid. The system is entirely based on rote learning and uni-modal delivery. Many, many children fail. No one notices their struggles to learn against such horrific odds. As a mother, I have no idea how a child can learn who is hungry, abandoned, exhausted from her chores, fearful and anonymous in a class of 50 to 120. One so wishes there were the resources to hug, help and attend to each one...children often living alone or with siblings or wounded adults.

I read a most eloquent discussion of justice and forgiveness this morning in C.S. Lewis' treatise on the Psalms from the convent library. I struggle with these concepts more here than I ever have. A very comprehensive study (2004) of 300,000 South African youth and 9,000 Basotho youth (www.ciet.org) informs us that, in South Africa, by ten years of age, one-third of children have had sex, the rate of young girls being raped between the ages of 11 and 14 has doubled in the last ten years, more boys are raped than girls before the age of ten, 30% of girls believe they do not have the right to refuse sex with their boyfriends, and the rate of rape has doubled over the past ten years. Jesse and Mel met ten-year-old girls going into a pub with drunken men on New Year's Eve to offer themselves for a few and. I can't seem to let it go.

At 8 o'clock this morning, I went to see if Nkeboleng had arrived.... Not yet. I started back after a visit with the girls, and who should be coming in the gate but she and her two young siblings. Her six-year-old sister and 12-year-old brother (both very tiny, like Nkeboleng) had one small plastic bag, carried by the little one. Their father died in early 2004, and their mother was on death's door when she agreed to be tested so that her daughter could be in our program. Because she knew her status, she was able to go to the 'Tsepong Clinic (many of you will have seen the documentary) and get anti-retroviral drugs (AVRs). She is now much better. She lost her job when the garment factory closed a year ago, after the WTO quota decision, and is now working in Durban. She comes home every month to get her supply of drugs. The mother left the three younger children with the eldest daughter. On December 17, the daughter eloped, leaving Nkeboleng and her two younger siblings alone—alone for Christmas and alone for the holidays. If I had not called last night, she may not have had the courage to bring them to Hlotse to her

grandmother and return to school. She was so happy to be back where she can be a girl and not a homemaker/mother.

Our team is wonderful, and we laugh a lot. Each person is special and brings different skills. We continue to work hard, but each is kind and supportive (although adept at making fun of each other). It is a blessing, because we need the levity, and it makes the work go well. Training of Maseeiso and Liabo is in full swing, even in the midst of preparing for our volunteers (Carol and Ray arrive tomorrow, Joanne and Brian the next day, Peggy and Peter the day after). They are both fine young people, keen to learn, and are taking their new responsibilities seriously. Mel is working feverishly on the arrangements for them and for the 120-odd expected at the leadership camp, just while she is working on the games and crafts. Cliff is trying to finish the 2005 financials for our meeting Tuesday with Sr. Clementina when Carolyn is not calling him to shop for all the food, etc. He is a good sport and helps wherever he can.

January 9 2006

6:00 a.m.: Today is my eldest sister, Sandy's, birthday. I wish I could call her or give her a hug.

Pula means "rain" in Sesotho. During the last three nights, it has rained ferociously. Nature being the mixed blessing that it often is has overdone it. The strength of the downpour and lightening has rendered many homeless in nearby villages. Their roofs just cannot withstand such a torrential deluge. Soil is eroding under the pressure. How desperately we need the rain. It is such that King Letsie III appealed to all the churches in Lesotho to pray for rain (an age-old tradition). To his great fortune, it rained the next day, and he was credited with it! I wonder how expansive his laurels are, now that it has rained each day since!!!! As I write, it continues to rain, not in a worrying sense but in a steady, manageable way.

I will try to get this off today so that my mother, sisters, sons, friends and family do not worry about me. Bless you all, especially the ones who continue to work in Canada for these children and of whose efforts I am not aware yet.

January 12 2006

Yesterday, Liabo and I met for the second time with the District Administrator for Butha Buthe. This is the most important position in the provincial arena, comparable to the premier of a province. We also met with the District Local Government Council Secretary. On April 30, 2005, Lesotho held its first elections for a second tier of government. It was a most controversial election, as the government stated that they wanted to have 30% female representation. There were riots and much gnashing of teeth. In this highly patriarchal society, this was a bold move on the part of the government. In the end, although the turnout was not high, change prevailed, and over 60% of the successful candidates were female. Lesotho has ten districts (as opposed to provinces or states), and Help Lesotho and YAH work in three of those. As this YAH/CIDA initiative begins, it is essential that we meet with all the principals in these areas including the head chiefs and local chiefs. I have met with the key people on the national level, and now is the time to do so on the district and community levels. Help Lesotho has excellent relations at the community levels, but there is much more to do. The areas we have chosen to work in have few organizations there to help.

Our meetings went well. I took the opportunity to advocate for new classrooms for Mahlekefane while I was there. The timing of YAH is opportune for the local government structures. Never having had this

type of second-tier representation, the local counsellors need to define their roles and responsibilities. Neutral assistance on good governance policies and practices for this new level of government is a dream come true for them. We will give assistance at the national level and at this new level as well as in the communities.

We set out to meet with the two Principal Chiefs in the District of Butha Buthe, one responsible for Seboche and one for Bokoro. The drives were spectacular in this most northern part of Lesotho. Not so for the roads. Once off the tarred road here, the condition is entirely dependent upon two things: the rocks underneath and the amount of travel. To see one chief, very near our sewing project, one takes a detour to forge the river that looks as if there may have been a few dozen trucks on it. Beautiful, but a definite case for four-wheel drive. It would be impossible, frankly, for a car to get to these places. In each case, the villages of these traditional, hereditary chiefs are as picturesque as you can imagine. This is the Lesotho I love: villages which have been relatively untouched for hundreds of years, so remote that progress and technology have only now begun to touch them; villages with no roads to them. The Basotho huts, with their thatched roofs and field stone corrals, make one want to paint.

This afternoon, Carol and Ray, Joanne and Brian arrived. It is good to have them here. Carol and Ray will live in Hlotse for a month or so and then go to the orphanage in Maseru for a month. After the leadership camp, Joanne and Brian will move to Paray in the high mountains in the centre of Lesotho, about four or five hours from Hlotse. Joanne and Brian have an appointment in the morning for a visit to 'M'e Mojaje's weaving school and the 'Tsepong Clinic where the Canadians are introducing ARVs. Carol and Ray are going to the technical school and to scout around for building supplies.

Ray has done a tremendous job organizing a much-needed fixing up of things around the St. Mary's Hostel and Guest House. He has been raising funds for this for some time. He is also initiating two new projects: solar cookers for grandmothers looking after orphans, sponsored by the Raging Grannies of Salt Spring Island, B.C., and an inexpensive irrigation system for school gardens. He has been working with Tessa and Mark Bell on these two and will pilot them over the month they are in Hlotse.

Carol will do literacy development and math with the St. Mary's girls and will teach computers to the nuns (both Catholic and Anglican) and perhaps at the technical school. I am also asking her to go to Bokoro and do some sessions. She will also set up five teams of the young Anglican nuns I have been working with and three or four of the St. Mary's girls to go weekly to each adopt a family living with HIV/AIDS in the village. They are to help with whatever (gardening, care, playing with the children). The nuns are so happy to be doing this type of service.

Joanne is a special education teacher who is going to work in two of our twinned schools in Thaba Tseka and Paray (Sefapanong, twinned with Turnbull School, Ottawa, and Paray Primary School, twinned with Fielding Drive School, Ottawa). She will work with students and teachers and will help with the crafts for the orphans' initiative. More than 50% of the Paray Primary students are orphaned, and the principal, 'M'e Tsebo, has many initiatives for them to help themselves.

Joanne's husband, Brian, is a cardiologist who, bless his heart, has taken primary HIV/AIDS training in Ottawa and will work in the Paray Mission Hospital. He will work with the doctors, Paray Nursing School instructors and students and with the rural healthcare people and groups living with HIV/AIDS in the mountains.

Tomorrow, Peggy Frank and Peter Bardon arrive. They have been in central Africa for a month. They are from Salt Spring Island and, now, Victoria.

January 19 2006

As I write, I am sitting in the taxi rank where one waits for a “taxi” to travel. I have taken the risk of looking like a prosperous white person while I wait the two hours for the taxi to fill up. It is just too much time to waste. I rose at 2:30 a.m. to write emails so that I can send them from here, as they are most likely to get through on the faster lines.

I have been in Maseru for two days in meetings and want to return to Hlotse. If one leaves at 6:30 or 7:30 a.m. with those going to work, the transport is efficient, however crowded. Yesterday, although I started my first appointment at 6:30 a.m. in Hlotse, I was not able to leave until 8:45 a.m.—not a good idea. The one-and-a-half-hour drive took me three hours. One must take the first taxi (usually a 15-seater, sometimes a 20-seater with standing room for five) for R5 (five rand = \$1 CAD.) to Maputsoe, then wait again until the taxi fills for the R17 trip to Maseru. One arrives at the taxi rank to take a local taxi (R2.5) to the centre of town. This return trip may take me four hours.

I arrived in Maseru for the second steering committee meeting of the CIDA/IOG initiative, only to hear that it had been postponed a week without telling me! I met with ‘M’e Tsebo of Paray Primary for three hours. She is a beautiful, 64-year-old widow who works tirelessly for the 50% of her students who are orphaned. I like her so much, and she has become rather a hero of our team. Lesotho is so lucky to have her.

I did some other business and then met for three hours with the new High Commissioner to Canada. When I first phoned this person to arrange a meeting over six weeks ago, I realized that she did not know the appointment had been made. I did not mention it, but she must have wondered why I was calling. However, after three hours over dinner, we have already formed a friendship. The appointment has not been publicly announced, and I am not at liberty to name her. She is undergoing some training, but there is much to arrange. I assured her that Canadians would welcome her warmly. (As I write, people keep stopping and looking over my shoulder through the windows to see the computer. I have never exposed it before, but I cannot let two or three hours go to waste.) I had not expected to attract quite so much attention, especially when I go so far out of my way to avoid such things. I will not do this again. I will have to wait here until the taxi (a 15-seater) is full. It is very hot and sticky.

This morning I met with the head of primary schools for the country to advocate for new classrooms for Mahlekefane, the school on the cover of the calendar this year. They so deserve it. I was able to slip in the names and situations for all our other ones as well. My laptop allowed me to show him photos, which spoke more than I could ever say.

The camp was quite wonderful. Our team was amazing. In the end, we had more than 120 people—about 100 students from all over. I thank Ruth and George Toller of Ottawa for their generous support of this camp. I know that it has changed and maybe saved many lives. We worked so hard and were delighted to be there—without exception. We had the Lesotho Olympic Committee and Commonwealth Games people to give a sport and HIV/AIDS training. The World Food Program (WFP) came to show a well-constructed Sesotho video that dispels myths about HIV/AIDS.

Peggy has been living with HIV for 20 years and spoke so openly and movingly that many were finally convinced that it may be possible to live with this virus, if they look after themselves and get treatment—only available for 15 months in some areas, three months in others. Her husband, Peter, spoke with such love and candour about living with someone with HIV. Mathibiso spoke of living with HIV for six years and losing her first-born.

Ray looked after the kitchen and the simple but appreciated meals with three village women. Carolyn worked so hard on the scheduling and program with the team. Joanne gave sessions to both teachers and primary kids. Dr. Brian gave talks on the medical aspect of HIV and AIDS. Cliff and Liabo were terrific with the kids. Cliff is finding himself in a whole new way through these gorgeous children. Maseeiso is gradually taking over and after meeting so many will be most welcome in our communities. Carol gave sessions on communication, chaired the debate and was a wonderful help. Mel looked after crafts and games, keeping us all organized. We had sessions for the nuns (which turned out to be about 15 from both the Anglican and Catholic young ones) and teachers on counselling. We had goal-setting and leadership workshops and a wonderful debate in Sesotho on practicing abstinence and practicing sex. The team worked as a living example of cooperation, kindness, mutual support and positive, dynamic participation. I know that alone changed lives and perspectives.

The king never replied to our invitation. In the end, it was probably for the best. We had such a booked program.

We had so much fun—lots of sports, chatting, hugging. One of my highlights was to go every morning to the girl's dorm at 5:00 to touch each young one and wish her personally a good day with a smile. These beautiful, black bodies, luminescent with soap and water! I went in every night and tucked them in. Few have parents to touch them or give them any tenderness. We sang songs, held a Canadian bonfire and marshmallow roast on the last night, with us dressed as Basotho and had a campfire, singing and ping-pong. Our team practiced a few times, knowing full well we would be just awful compared to these magically harmonizing voices, but we also knew it would thrill them. We sang a Canadian song, and they had to sing a Basotho one. The kids put on spontaneous dramas filled with witticisms and nuance, with almost no props. We all remarked that so few of our own children knew how to amuse themselves so well. These 100 kids had three soccer balls (thanks to Peggy and Peter), four Frisbees (thanks to Ray and Carol), 17 donated recorders and a Canadian beach ball (thanks to Karen Morrison). The games were inclusive and non-competitive. There was not one argument during the five days. It was remarkable and a real testimony to the calibre of kids.

I told them repeatedly that each one was chosen; one person somewhere in the world really believed they could be leaders. The program was challenging and transformative. I confess that it was exactly as I had hoped. I have no idea what we would have done without the volunteers, but as with everything in Help Lesotho, it is done on faith that all will happen. The days were long, and we were always covered in the vivid, fine, red dust. Pitseng High School, twinned with Gulf Island Secondary School, and Guardian Angel Primary, twinned with Rockcliffe Park, were our hosts. The former has a large hall, for which we were grateful. Both are boarding schools to give us some place to sleep. The Sisters of Charity graciously allowed the team to stay in what I presume were teachers' quarters. We were thrilled to have one indoor toilet and running water. It made a difference. Our nightly debriefing over a cold beer from a tiny village store on the crest of a hill (thanks to Brian and Ray) were fun and happy times.

On the last morning, I was handed the following poem by a lovely young woman of about 16, which I asked her to read to the final assembly:

To you all:

I want to thank you all for making me realize that I can be absolutely anything I want. Thank you for opening my eyes to see that there is something out there for me. Not many of us in life have the chance that I did. Hundreds would kill for such a chance.

Thank you for opening my eyes and heart. Because of you all I finally realize that I am special to someone. Furthermore, I realize I am an important person to someone, but most of all I fully see that someone actually believes in me. You have opened my heart so much that I can understand that for me to be happy I have to find out who I am, love myself, be happy and proud of myself. Not all people can just give up what they have for people like us. It takes courage and determination and that's what you all have. You people came to Lesotho because you believe that we can make a difference.

In all these four days you have helped me to see that confidence, courage, determination and standing up for what you believe in can all take me everywhere I want to be. In my country, we say, "*Morena Molimo a le baballe, a le sireletse, tsamaeang ha Khotso ho fihlela re kopana*"— meaning, "God protect you and have mercy on you. Go in peace till we meet."

I will miss you all.

Ntsatsi Kotele
Pitseng High School

When we arrived home, Penney Place and Bruce Clark were waiting for us. They would have loved the camp and have been a real asset. The change of dates was after their flights were booked. I was able to see the Basotho hut where Penney will be living in Pitseng, working with our four schools there for the next three months. This weekend, the group goes to their assigned locations. Bruce goes "up" to 'Mamohau—very high and beautiful. The hospital van will take Joanne and Brian to Paray in the centre of Thaba Tseka for their work. Brian will work in the hospital with the patients and out-clinics, as well as the nursing school. Joanne will work with our orphans and two schools. Carol and Ray will stay and work in Hlotse before going to the orphanage. Peter and Peggy will go and speak on HIV/AIDS in our twinned schools.

As I write, the line of on-lookers scrutinizing my laptop comes and goes. Few speak English or can read what I write, but the taxi is starting to fill up. It is almost two hours since I came. Venders offer some form of product or nourishment every few seconds, respectfully, but people do eat and purchase what they need while they wait. This is the place of business where few whites go.

January 24 2006

I leave tomorrow. Our crew has gone on location; the guest house is now quiet. I was extravagant this morning and used three kettles of boiling water for a bath. Perhaps it is the thought of two-and-a-half days' travel which prompts me, but I thought it was okay once in two months.

The big news is that yesterday we got an office. Thank you all for your prayers on that one. It has been so difficult. There are few available and no places to rent that we could possibly afford. We have looked at many. Without transport it has to be very central; it has to be safe, etc. I have been keen that Help Lesotho and YAH share the same office so that Liabo has the support he needs to manage alone. The HL team is large and wonderful and will help him at every opportunity.

The house is old and very run down. It will take a lot of work to get it up to grade, but when we do, it will be great. We will clean and paint, fix broken lights, get some furniture, etc., and we will be all set. It is in the woods behind the Leribe Craft Centre, for those who know it. Maseeiso has named it "Sekhutlong," which translates to mean "A Secret Place," because it is behind other buildings and in the trees. It will be challenging to get our heavy suitcases and orphan supplies to it, as the path is difficult. We will have to have a couple of signs, or no one will find it. I am pleased that this is settled. It is at a rate we can afford and will not have to worry about. When the CIDA project is over, HL can still maintain the rent. The things we need for Help Lesotho will be paid for by the funds given from the Ha!Man concert last October 1, managed by Belinda Kent, just before their twins were born. We take over on February 1 or thereabouts. The team will have to get it all organized. We got this just at the eleventh hour!

Tomorrow, I will leave for Maseru. I will meet with the new High Commissioner briefly, do numerous other things and then attend the second steering committee meeting before going to the airport. I will fly to Johannesburg and meet with some people at the airport between planes. It will be a long few days.

We have had a great evening of feasting and dancing with the Sisters of Charity and another lovely lunch and evening with the community of the Holy Name Sisters (CHN). I wish Canadians could see how appreciative the Basotho are of their efforts. I am seeing how our presence with the Anglican nuns is revitalizing the convent. The young nuns are thrilled.

As I leave this time, I am so happy with the way things have gone over the past two months. We have a very special team—each unique and complementary. Mel, Cliff, Liabo and Carolyn are working so well together and are enjoying each other very much. Our volunteers are incredible people: talented, flexible and kind. I am so proud of them all. We have accomplished a lot with joy and commitment. We now have two new, full-time Basotho leading the teams, plus Cliff. We have many new and solid initiatives. We have a place in which to work and meet with people. The camp was amazing, and many new children are sponsored. We are blessed!

Again, I want to thank each one of you for the support, encouragement and all the work that has gone on during this time. It is truly remarkable and so appreciated by both our team and the communities in which we work.

I will look forward to efficient email exchange and to visiting with as many as possible in the next five weeks before I come back.

Sala hantle. (Go in health.)

March 19 2006

When my plane touched down in Lesotho this time, my mind surged with what I now see as my arrival pattern of concern for so many individuals. How are the children doing – this one and that? How can we motivate our schools to more directly address these notions of HIV/AIDS and gender inequity? How can I see all the people I need to? How are the volunteers doing? How can women be given choices over their lives?

It continues to rain daily – often in torrential bursts. This is the most rain Lesotho has had for 20 years. After 6 years of drought, many of the fields are now ruined, precious soil eroded. It is harvest time and the food shortage will be felt in a couple of months. The Basotho just can't win!

Many of you ask me to give your regards to Sr. Alice, which I have done. As she is no longer involved directly in Help Lesotho, I do not see her often. She is dear and has much work of her own for the congregation. We have had one visit and plan to have a longer one soon.

Here we celebrate every child, every sponsorship (now 110), and every tiny step forward. We have the blessing of seeing real progress – albeit on small scales- but this is the arena of our work and the focus of our efforts. Help Lesotho has specialized in small, workable and cost-effective projects. They are making a real difference. The leadership on the ground is, in most part, spectacular. Our methodology of working with only strong leaders is paying dividends.

Everywhere I go, I hear the difference our Leadership Camp has made. I hear young girls striving to step up, be leaders and have a voice in their communities. I am so very proud of each and every one. As I am fond of saying, the greatest danger of coming to Lesotho is falling in love with these beautiful children. It is a living pulse in my heart. The need is so great and we have the will, support and opportunity to make a difference. How can we do better, reach more deeply?

I arrived to numerous problems, as usual, but this time it was most disheartening. The Basotho Coordinator for our Institute on Governance/CIDA project (called YAH) has resigned due to some serious personal problems. He was not able to get his work done and our team has been struggling daily with catching up. I need to clarify that the funding from CIDA is not for Help Lesotho but for a separate initiative, working in our communities with older youth (18-30), levels of government, and civil society organizations. It is a partnership with the Institute on governance, funded by CIDA. We are building capacity and community engagement for governance, gender equity and HIV/AIDS mainstreaming. I took the two days to go to Maseru for the requested additional steering committee meeting of senior government officials – at a time and date of their choosing. Not one person showed up! I emailed this fact to them all and not one reply.

Our team has been amazing – each willingly and quietly stepping in wherever he or she can be of use. I now have to find another person, with this particular and hard-to-find combination of qualities and experience. It was not easy the first time but will be daunting now. We are back on budget, organized and moving forward but it has been round the clock work.

I am doing training from 8AM-6PM daily for our selected 17 youth committees from four of our nine communities. They are a good group and the content is appropriate and meaningful to them. We are covering 6 areas: HIV/AIDS, Gender, Communications, Leadership, Governance, and Skill Development. Half the program is in Sesotho. The youth (50% female) are keen. For many, this is their first training experience and exposure to numerous speakers exploring ideas close to their hearts and community

survival. The training lasts for 3 weeks, followed by 4 weeks in their communities exploring all the resources, potential and organizations that can be brought to bear on these staggering social and health challenges. As our budget is small, Melanie Theriault and Donna Bawden – the two Canadian Youth hired to be a part of it this year - are serving boiled eggs and bread in the morning to all the youth before we start. They have arranged for a local woman to cook very simple, two-pot meals for lunch. As I watch them eat, I see how grateful they are for a full stomach. The men take too much; the girls defer.

Our discussions have been interesting and challenging: the social cost to the family of not beating one's wife and children; does the HIV virus live in tomato sauce which people are trying to spread; what difference would it make if girls and women had some power; what will it take to make men give some of that power up and on. I see their minds in a flurry trying to struggle with these ideas and I feel encouraged. Week one is over.

In week two, we are having a day of HIV test counseling and testing – at their request. Many are ready to test but anxious. We are planning how to deal with the inevitability that there will be positive results for some, if not many. It is not easy. We are having the Director of the 'Tsepong Clinic speak to them – in Sesotho. Dr. Lekena is wonderful, smart and focused. We are lucky to have her time. Michael Bassett of the Institute On Governance arrives this week for the final week on governance. He is young, keen and will be excellent.

I have met with my friend, the new Lesotho High Commissioner to Canada, 'Me Motseoa Senyane for three hours. We have an easy rapport and are respectful of each other's commitment to the Basotho children. She is smart, wise and open. You will like her and she is a good choice. She has been a moving force within the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Lesotho for a long time and offers a valuable perspective. We have much to do and will make a good team. As yet, we still do not know the date of her arrival in Canada – things move painfully slowly here.

Our 15 year old Emely has had her healthy baby in October and has returned to school now filled with determination to do well. She is a particularly smart and focused young woman – one who is determined to be prime minister of Lesotho one day. I confess that I will vote for her! Carolyn has delivered baby food to her care giver for the term, funded by a former volunteer. Her sponsor, Shauna Baptiste has been a faithful encouragement to Emely.

Our young Mookho (16) has just had a healthy baby boy and both are doing well. We were all thrilled. She is still determined to return to school once she gets the motherhood thing down. Members of St. Bartholomew's church have generously donated funds for their food and Mookho's return to school. Sheryl Kennedy continues to write faithfully to Mookho and to give her support in moving forward.

We have purchased track suits (donated by the Ottawa Quilting Circle fundraising) and umbrellas (donated by Marilyn Denton) for our 16 St. Mary's girls. Track suits are the only pants girls are allowed to wear at school. None of the girls have ever had one before and their delight was wonderful. The need for umbrellas was pressing. The girls have over 30 minutes to walk to school and have been drenched many times. They have even been sent home because they were saturated and could not sit in class. When I brought the umbrellas into the room, they squealed with happiness and gratitude, opening them and promenading around the room. They will be able to use them all year to shield themselves from the sun as well.

Fall is upon us here – the nights are getting cold, the days dreary and damp. I am grateful for my fleece scarf (which I have on now as I write). Today may be sunny – it will be a relief and welcome (I was wrong – shortly after writing this we had a deluge of considerable proportions).

Our primary school orphan kits have been given out to the children (a back pack filled with a track suit, soap for clothes washing, soap for personal washing, sweater, new socks, pencils, note books, ruler, new shoes, socks and underwear, and candles to be able to do their homework at night – to mention a few things). We must be careful. One child was thrown out of the house because her mother was so furious that her daughter received charity. The child has nothing. It is distressing. The winter kits are being put together (coat, blanket, candles, etc). We can only afford to do this for the primary kids as the high school fees, uniforms and books (some schools charge electricity fees, etc.), exam fees are so high there is nothing left from the fund collected. Money from the calendar goes to top up these orphan accounts (glasses, medication, mattresses, etc). In some cases, we have moved children from very difficult homes to boarding schools and have those fees as well. There are few high schools but many primary schools. The boarding schools are simple and not at all what you expect in Canada but the children get to focus on their school work and have simple meals.

Our new project to build leadership and social responsibility with our five young Anglican nuns and our St. Mary's girls (sponsored by St. George's church in Ottawa) has brought new life into the whole convent – much needed. Each team has adopted a family recommended to be in real need by the AIDS Clinic. Our volunteer, Carol Pritchard, has done a marvelous job leading them along the path of sustainable leadership and community engagement. Last night the nuns were waiting for me when I came home from work to tell me they had had a successful meeting with one of the chiefs and were able to engage him in helping secure food for a child-headed household of starving children. Another success!

Our volunteers are all having incredible experiences. Ray Fine and Carol Pritchard have worked so hard. Ray has done remarkable things to repair and fix up things around the St. Mary's convent and is much loved by the nuns. Ray started the Solar Cooker project, funded by the Raging Grannies of Salt Spring Island and Victoria. Carol did a day of training with the youth this week and was a huge hit. They are currently at the orphanage helping there.

Joanne Rowlinson and Brian Morton are still in Paray where they went in January. Joanne is a special education teacher working in Sefapanong and Paray Primary schools. Brian is a cardiologist working in the Paray Mission Hospital. Although I have not spoken with them directly (Paray is high in the mountains with almost impossible communications), all reports are that they are having a wonderful time and being a huge help in their respective areas.

Penney Place (my neighbour at home) is a special education teacher, posted in the beautiful village of Pitseng. She lives in a small rondaval and has a young girl bringing water and cooking for her. Penney has a big job with four schools in Pitseng and regular visits to remote Mahlekefane. She is happy and loved by the villagers and children.

Bruce Clarke originally stationed in 'Mamohau, is now in Seboche. He is bursting with ideas on math and science – which are so needed here. Seboche is a dear village and he is enjoying the good people there.

Bruce, Penney, Ray and Carol went to 'Mahlekefane for five days to build benches to get children off the damp floors. They had masonite squares cut to make lap mats for children to write on. 'Me Ratia, the principal cannot say thank you enough.

Shauna Pollock has recently arrived, filled with enthusiasm and anticipation of her next 6 weeks in 'Mahlekefane and her 5 weeks at Paray Primary. She is terrific – ready to help out with anything. We have her working on data entry of HIV/AIDS surveys and computer lessons for a local woman. She leaves tomorrow morning and can't wait. Shauna secured many donates of office supplies to get us started. Michaela and Joel CoteSelig arrive in two weeks for four months in Mahlekefane and Paray. Alex Way comes about then for his time in Seboche. Our schools are so appreciative of this help and encouragement.

Our office, called Sekhutlong (which means Secret Place), is coming together. The lights are not yet repaired but we have desks and the bedrooms are set. Marion Abel from Kingston drove up with warm duvets and sheets. Peggy Cork donated single duvet covers. Judith Manley donated some sheets and kitchen things we desperately needed. One must have a change of sheets as things do not necessarily dry in one day. Sheryl Selwyn donated beautiful material, which Deb Lalande made into perfect curtains for each window – warm against the cold and dense for privacy. Allison Dingle donated a printer, we ended up buying in Johannesburg on the way from the airport (I rented a car to drive to Lesotho). Being able to print ourselves has been a real efficiency. Barb and Roly Hein had two sets of lovely signs made for Help Lesotho and YAH which give a professional air and are admired by all. Marilyn Rennick made us business cards for the team so we are all set. We are saving for a fridge, a carpet and some other things. All will be done in due time.

Sekhutlong is called such because you cannot see it from anywhere (hence the need for signs) and is topographically near the bottom of the whole area. All the water runs down, to rest around the foundation. We have had to have trenches built to direct the water. It is damp. Our lawn moor is a fine large golden-brown cow, we have grown rather fond of. Although he does the input/ output thing (as Carolyn would say), we appreciate her work in keeping the grass down.

We have been diligently working on the documents to register Thusa (Sesotho for help – as a verb) Lesotho with the government. This is really important for obtaining grants and building sustainability here. We have struck a new Advisor Board of 5 local business and community leaders. The papers are almost completed. We have also been developing a proposal to CIDA under the Small Grants Fund Phase III for approximately \$95,000 to support and enhance our HIV/AIDS work, especially the gender equity and HIV/AIDS Clubs in all our twinned schools and the Leadership Camp. A couple of ideas have just gelled for a problem I have been mulling for 6 months and feel so convinced that it will work – if we can get the funding. It must be submitted by the end of March.

We dutifully went for a beer on St. Patrick's Day! March 21 is Carolyn's last evening here in Hlotse. She heads to Maseru and then to England for two weeks before returning home. We are all going out to the local Leribe Hotel for dinner to celebrate many things:

- Carolyn's new position as Director of Programs for Help Lesotho;
- Maseeiso's taking over the reins of the Lesotho organization this week on her own;
- Melanie's acceptance into Carleton University for a program she is very excited about;
- Donna's acceptance for one of the two internship positions for HL July 2006-January 2007; and
- Our fully completed charity status as an incorporated organization on its own.

We continue to be touched and strengthened by all the support, prayer and interest for these lovely children. Each day we are confronted with the needs. I have just had a gentleman here, headmaster of a large and very poor school filled with orphans, who was so tenderly asking for help. In Pitseng, a child

from a small child-headed household was found dead a couple of weeks ago in her hut. Two boys drowned this week in the swelled river. Our new neighbour's husband committed suicide two years ago waiting for his HIV/AIDS test results, leaving her with three beautiful boys to raise. She is smart, good and kind. We will help her. She has agreed to join the youth HIV testing counseling on Wed. This must be very difficult for her. She also needs to get her children tested. I loaned her a book on grief and one on depression. I am keen to start a lending library in our office of such books.

One can't help but think of all the people with worn and leaky thatch on their roofs in these torrential rains, the child children of those who are in the hospital and sick and if they get enough food, the grandmothers who worry non-stop about how they will manage to feed and educate their orphan grandchildren when they and their bodies are failing. As they are fond of saying here: 'It is too much'.

This letter has become much longer than I intended. Thank you for your patience. I wish each one good health (sala hantle) and a hug.

March 29 2006

It is 4:30 am; the world is silent. As winter falls upon us here, the days are shorter; the darkness more intense. It is not as cold as is seasonable but it continues to rain heavily many days. The ground is saturated. My shoes are leaking and I regret not bringing my hiking boots. What I sacrifice in traveling light, I am paying for in wet feet.

I find it hard to parcel out the time to write. My days are long. I have only been able to interview one person (who will not work out, although very capable) for the position of YAH Basotho Coordinator. I have canvassed my colleagues and sent out an SOS. I leave in a week. Without the Help Lesotho team, we would not be able to manage.

The training is going well. I am so proud of these youth. They are all on-time, on-task, working hard and building confidence. We had a careful step-wise group of sessions on HIV/AIDS. Dr. Lekena, Director of the 'Tsepong Clinic was to speak to the youth for one hour and she stayed three. She easily sees the potential of educating these young leaders and was quite complimentary about their baseline knowledge and attitudes. The day of counseling and testing was tense for us all. I had invited members of the School of Home Economics, the staff at the Leribe Craft Centre (who are all disabled) and a few others. Population International Services – New Start came for two hours of general testing, then individual counseling. We used the two bedrooms as testing centre for their privacy.

We had over 50 people with us for the counseling, which of course was all in Sesotho. After this quality of preparation for 10 days, 100% of our group tested which was amazing. I was so proud of them. Melanie, Donna and I tested as well. All receive a *Know Your Status* bracelet. The fear in the participants was palpable all day. We were almost as tense as they were, fearing for those who would be positive, stigmatized, alone with the results, and unable to cope. As each one came out of testing room, there was always a look of jubilation. Those who were positive must not show it. Imagine, finding out what you have secretly feared for so long but must put on an impregnable front to protect yourself? The results are, of course, confidential. I know the numbers of those positive but not the individuals. Confidentiality is key to the success of the Know Your Status Campaign and must be protected at all costs. It took a long for the tension to dissipate and in some cases we see remnants of it during the days. Those we perceive

to be positive have a burden to bear. We followed up with information on nutrition and health maintenance – so much more meaningful after testing than before.

Help Lesotho struggles with this as well. When one of our sponsored children is tested positive, we are not at liberty to tell the sponsor without the consent of the youth or in the guardian the case of a minor. Even a negative result is confidential. Understandably, sponsors want to know to be supportive, but we are shackled with this provision. This is also the case with pregnancy. We should not be telling if a child is pregnant without her permission. We need sponsors to understand the issues from this side so that we are able to be faithful to the child's rights.

The Leribe Craft Centre only hires disabled individuals, some of whom are deaf. It presented a real challenge for New Start to counsel the deaf without an interpreter – one they continue to struggle with now. None of the deaf trusted their colleagues to maintain confidentiality and so were not permitted to be a part of the testing.

I invited a lovely Basotho woman who had shared her story with me. Her husband had died leaving her with three children. After being sick for months, he killed himself after a visit to the hospital. Her sister had been pressing her to test for the past two years. Secretly, she was sure she was positive. Her slimness was a seemingly confirming factor. In Lesotho, AIDS is considered the 'thin' disease. (People do not want to be too thin, lest others think they are positive). Understanding that HIV has no symptoms, people need to know that the virus can live in your body for many years without evidencing itself. They are indeed right that when one has AIDS, the body becomes thin and the disease visual.) She decided to test. The previous night, she lay awake in abject terror, believing the results to be positive and her children to be soon without a mother. I fail to find the words to adequately describe the fear which lies so barely beneath the surface here about testing. She had to wait until all the others were tested as she was not part of a group. She sat on the concrete edge of the veranda most of the afternoon, quietly praying. I sat with her whenever I could – also praying for this good woman and her children. I too was sure she was positive. It was to the point that when she came out, her face was blank and when she told me she was negative, I only heard positive. It took us both a few minutes to realize that she was safe. What a blessing for her and her lovely young children! As I write this, I feel again the overwhelming relief. We need to understand that most people here secretly think they are positive and live with the anxiety each day and each silent night.

The culture is complex here and nuanced in ways that are hard for our rather rational and pragmatic mentalities can grasp. It takes a very long time to read the signs, understand what is not being said, realize the role our *mokhooa* (white) character plays in how messages are given and received. I understand that we all have an existential guilt over the ravages of colonialism and what white insensitivity has done to Africa, but we all think we are the exception. We are prone to think that our personal sensitivity and good heart permit us to go into a culture and interpret it within days. It is not so and I have not done an adequate job in transmitting this to our volunteers. Although I may say things, it may not be heard. I feel the responsibility of bringing volunteers to Lesotho who have wonderful and loving hearts, are well read and good intentioned but are positive that what they think should be done is the right way. We have such a high standard of what we think children should have and often suggest luxuries rather than food. Basotho often disagree with our suggestions and cannot voice it.

This is an ageless culture with dusty layers of juxtaposed contradictions. Basotho will not tell you if they disagree. If you ask if something is OK, they will acquiesce to be polite but may later resent it. Our intervention, with our own agenda, however well intentioned has the power to disrupt situations,

relationships, and events beyond our comprehension. Sometimes there is a grave price to pay. One child was thrown out of her house for getting her few supplies we gave. Her mother is desperately poor and would not tolerate the notion that a foreigner was giving her things she, the mother, could not afford. Children have been beaten because they have had too many attention from white people and are singled out. Sometimes the frustration with us is taken out on the children. The fractures we can so innocently create can be destructive and are sometimes hard to repair.

I know that it is difficult for some volunteers because they are only here a short time and want to make a real difference. They want to move things forward at our western pace and see the results before they leave. They work so hard here and give so much and are sure the needs they are identifying will make that difference. In some senses too, we all want to go home feeling that we have finished something, that we leave something behind.

Help Lesotho has a particular methodology. Each project has a Project Leader, to whom we are responsible. Project Leaders fill out a Request for Funding Form, which identifies their most urgent need, its context and associated costs. We make sure these are financial sound and then as equitably as possible attempt to secure funding. Once funding has been designated, the project and the accountability are in the hands of the Project Leaders who are directly responsible to us. Receipts are given, reports are made. We as an organization do not suggest much over and above this. It may be a slower system but it preserves the dignity of all involved and ensures that all the needs are identified on the ground. If we are unsure, we simply do not proceed until clarification has been completed. Help Lesotho is here for the long haul and the pace in Lesotho is entirely different than it is in Canada. Our Project Leaders all know that they are in charge and it is not our desire to define their needs. I also worry that our excellent and carefully developed relationships with our communities might be jeopardized by our need to be useful. Help Lesotho is loved dearly and trusted in each of our communities. Our reputation is solid and growing at an incredible rate. Even in Maseru people are talking about our work. This trust is hard come by, precious and difficult to rebuild when damaged.

I see that we need to extend the minimum time volunteers should come, as it takes at least 6 weeks to get any kind of a grip on the culture (the longer I am here, the more aware I am of the amount I do not understand). The final weeks or months are usually the most productive and effective. Relationships take time to build, trust is slow. Our 'whiteness' so often gets in the way to honest exchange. We have a position here that we have not earned. White people come, do their good things and then leave. Life goes on.

Michael Bassett is here to deliver a week of governance training to our Youth Committees. He is their age, flexible and willing to learn. They like him and are receptive to his approach. I see the pieces starting to fall into place from all the input and exchange of the past 2.5 weeks. I am so proud of them.

Melanie Theriault and Donna Bawden will go to live in their communities with their Youth Committees next week. They will spend five weeks there. It will be a challenging but wonderful experience. Both have been terrific in the training, walking that fine line between participation and assuming leadership. They have been a huge help to me and are loved by the youth.

Maseeiso (Seei) Ramoholi, our new HL Coordinator has been wonderful, plodding along to learn all that is necessary, remember the multitude of details required, get up to speed on all the computer requirements and handle the personnel matters of staff, interns, volunteers. It is really a lot and she is a

real trouper. She is willing to learn, good hearted, outstanding with people and has a common sense and judgment beyond her years. I have grown to love her and know that she will/is a blessing to us all.

We have sent off the \$100,000 proposal to the Small Grants Fund Phase III to CIDA and will hear April 18. The Thusa Lesotho (Help Lesotho in Sesotho) NGO registration is almost complete and will get in by next week.

Today, the Lesotho High Commissioner to Canada, 'Me Senyane comes for a sleep over and will give a session to the group in the morning. She should be in Canada sometime in May. We also have four people coming from Blue Cross to give a session on drugs and alcohol and their implications in decision-making. It will be a good day.

May 13 2006

It is Saturday and I have the leisure to work in the morning without rushing. As I write, I am sitting in the sun outside the little guest house on the grounds of the Anglican convent of the Community of the Holy Name where I stay when not travelling. Sr. Maria, whom we all love, is bent over at the waist in the gymnastic pose so particular to African women sweeping with the small hand brooms used here. She is now 80 and takes great pride in caring for me and the house, despite the painful and persistent arthritis in both knees. Her kindness is equally touching and encouraging. She laughs readily and is a blessing to all who stay here. When travelling men come to the gate to ask for a room for the night, she puts them in the one-room rondaval on the grounds with no indoor toilet, to protect me from strangers. Each evening at dusk she lovingly lays a coal fire in the hearth to keep me warm during the evening.

It is inviting to come home at twilight after a long day to the glow of the fire and Sr. Maria's generosity in spending so much coal for one person. The fire is enough to keep the one room warm but cannot reach the bedroom or kitchen, let alone the bathroom. The lights are not working in the kitchen anymore, so she prepares my supper by candlelight. With my flannel pajamas and fleece jacket, I huddle under the heavy layers of blankets to stay warm at night. I am thankful to be warm but always mindful that others are not so lucky. It is ever more difficult to get up in the morning as the days get shorter and the nights colder. I usually work in bed under the covers until it is time to get up. This degree of cold is always surprising to Canadians, as it is not one's perception of Africa. Lesotho is the third highest country in the world, high in the mountains.

It has been two weeks since I landed. Upon arrival in Maseru, I had a quick visit at the Bytown Orphanage to deliver a donation to Sr. Margaret and to once again hear her gratitude for the faithful assistance from Help Lesotho, the volunteers and the dedicated efforts of the Quinte Chapter of Help Lesotho. To arrive by dark from the four-hour drive, I then immediately went up into the mountains with 'Maseeiso Ramoholi, our HL Coordinator, to see our schools in Thaba Tseka. The scenery is spectacular as each, although different, are surrounded by mountains, deep valleys and vistas one cannot forget. The road is ridden with potholes and peppered with sheep, goats and cattle. The herd boys are happy to wave as travelers go by. Fall descends on this rugged terrain with a vengeance. Although winter has not fully set in yet, it is bitterly cold at night and still frigid during the day. Frost embraces the vegetation during the night leaving its mark like finely sifted icing sugar on the grasses and still colourful autumn alpine flowers.

'Maseeiso and I stayed in a small, one-room hut with electricity and a blessed indoor toilet, for which we are grateful in the dark of the night, at the Paray Mission Hospital. The cold radiates from the concrete

walls and floors so that after supper we sit in all our layered clothes under blankets, hovering around the tiny electric heater provided for our comfort. 'Maseiso is so cold that we go to bed shortly following the setting sun to keep warm. It is hard to work in the cold, but we persist to get everything done that must be finished. We are never far from our haunting concern for all those children, sick people and grannies in their huts throughout the surrounding villages who sleep on the cold ground and have no source of heat, inadequate blankets and clothing. The nuns offer their modest fare for our morning and evening meal, humbly anxious that we are satisfied. We are grateful for their friendship and hospitality. I renew old friendships.

Our orphans at Paray High School and our two twinned primary schools in Thaba Tseka are doing well. Each has about 650 students, over half of whom are orphaned. Both of these schools are led by outstanding women. HL has many orphans in these schools. The children and teachers are poor and struggling for all manner of basic necessities.

Sefapanong, twinned with Turnbull School of Ottawa, is led by 'Me Mamoipone. A statuesque woman in her late forties, 'Me runs a school striving for excellence. It is truly remote, surrounded by a few small villages nestled in the mountains. Turnbull School raised enough funds last year to provide new uniforms for each child who needed one. This has changed the level of self-respect among the children. Although their coats may be ripped and thin, each has some item of clothing that does not need mending or apology. With help from Turnbull, they have set up a piggery and a chicken coup to be rivaled by none. The school has become the largest egg producer in the region. As she proudly shows me their progress, it is clear that 'Me Mamoipone has a serious soft spot for her pigs. I must admire them repeatedly. She shows her large school garden, tended by both students and parents. With the recent rains, she has enough produce this fall to invite the participating parents to help themselves. This is indeed a joy to her, for the past six years of drought have deprived everyone in Lesotho of the opportunity for generosity.

Perhaps the most exciting thing at the school is the new classroom stoves, donated by Joy and Dick Hudson, Kars Public School and Turnbull. Each class now has a small coal-burning stove, about the size of a kitchen stool. They are so proud to show me that the children no longer need to keep their coats, mitts and hats on all day. With 110 to 122 children per classroom, the difference this has made to the learning environment is remarkable. In the proposal for funding for the stoves, the plea was made that if children knew they would be warm, after a 45- to 120-minute walk in the cold and dark, they would come to school with a new determination. I see that it is so. I had to view each stove individually and admire its identical features. I was moved by their appreciation and delight.

'Me Mamoipone is inspired by her twin, Mary Ann Turnbull. The sheer joy on her face when I gave her Mary Ann's most recent letter was something I will remember for a long time. Before reading it, she held it to her breast for several minutes as a treasure. Despite the distance and socio-economic divide, these two have formed an affinity with each other which is a pleasure to them both. When I invited 'Me to reply to Mary Ann, she said, no, she could not write her friend in haste. When she composes the letter it must be with all due thought and care.

Paray Primary School, twinned with Fielding Drive Public School, Ottawa is equally a joy to visit. The principal, 'Me Tsebo, is a hero to many of us. At 64 years old, she is still beautiful and passionate about her orphans. I chatted with the children and admired the new water tank from nine-year-old Wyatt Merkley's fundraising leadership at Tecumseh Elementary in London, Ontario. I inspected the piggery where funds from St. John's Anglican Church in Kingston, Ontario will provide the new pigs and feed to build an income-generating project to feed orphans and raise funds for their keep. The school is awaiting

the delivery of stoves for each classroom, donated by Michael Pratt of Nelson, BC, so that they may have the same luxury as Sefapanong to learn in a warm room. St. John's is also repairing a badly burned out classroom so that the students can learn domestic and self-sufficiency skills. 'Me Tsebo makes every effort to teach the children, gender aside, how to look after themselves. Many are staying with distant relatives or old grandmothers who have neither the time nor often the inclination to pass on the basic skills of life. 'Me Tsebo dreams to have the room finished so that the children can have a room to learn to knit, sew, cook, make crafts to sell and take the curriculum courses in agriculture, etc.

Fielding Drive has provided the school with a layer house to raise chickens. 'Me Tsebo has a goal of providing the children with protein once a term. She is so proud of it and is grateful to Fielding for its generosity and most particularly for its friendship.

I met with one of our first-class sponsored students, whose pregnancy required her to leave school near the beginning of the first term. I was delighted to see and hug her, as we all worried a great deal about her when we heard the news. I arranged for her to volunteer for 'Me Tsebo three days a week and for her sponsor to pay for a nutritious lunch. She will get a small stipend at the end of each month for such toiletries as soap, Vaseline and shampoo. She is a double orphan (both parents are dead) and has no one to help her here. There will be a real reciprocity, as she will be able to help the young ones with their reading and English as well as work in the office, while keeping busy with meaningful work and avoiding the lurking depression of being alone in her remote hut to ponder her mistake. This orphan's sponsor has been loving and faithful during this course of events, and the girl loves her dearly, writing to her as I watched. Now she will have something special to do and not sit at home alone for months. They write to each other often, and the correspondence is a blessing to them both. The girl anxiously asked me if she can continue her schooling next January. Without finishing high school she can never look after her baby. She had waited for years to get sponsorship and return to school, and one can only imagine her self-recrimination at her brief weakness to a young boy who offered temporary affection for her lonely heart. Now he will have nothing to do with her, and she is on her own with the consequences of their actions.

Although I love to go to these schools and leave inspired by their tenacity, I am also haunted by the poverty of these beautiful children. We have given them hundred of hand-made hats, scarves and mitts by people in Ottawa, Belleville and the Northern AIDS Connection Society in Nova Scotia. The colours, quality and love that have made these are special. The Belleville group even put a small note in Sesotho in each hat. As we deliver them, we see how important these tangible gestures are—not just to keep them warm but as a reminder that they are not forgotten.

Joanne Rowlinson, a volunteer who has had a career as a special education teacher, worked at these two schools for three months (February to April) and was loved by the students and teachers. Each one asked after her and her husband, Brian, who worked at the mission hospital and nursing school. I could see evidence of Joanne's care in many places. We met with Sr. Marie Annunciata, another remarkable woman, to inform her of the generosity of Holy Trinity Church in North Gower, Ontario, which will provide support to the Paray Nursing School. She is touched and grateful.

'Maseiso and Cliff Sebatane work constantly to balance the administrative workload here with the provisions and care of so many orphans in our twinned schools. We are blessed to have their dedicated hearts and good spirits. Our team is cohesive in our shared dedication. We laugh often and support each other continually with pleasure.

The YAH Committees (Youth Against HIV/AIDS project partnership between Help Lesotho and the Institute on Governance, funded by CIDA) have now finished their last of four weeks training on governance, leadership, communication, gender equity and HIV/AIDS. This group of 17 young men and women has grown more in the past two and a half months than it would ever have been realistic to expect. They began timidly, unsure of themselves, unfamiliar with self-directed learning and terrified to stretch their minds. Many were rigid in their attachment to certain traditional values (in particular concerning HIV/AIDS and gender equity). None had experienced training before or had an opportunity to hear or discuss multiple views on subjects.

The developmental approach allowed them to challenge their own ideas and those of others through excellent Sesotho speakers, group work and five weeks of community assessment in their villages. They have emerged as confident young leaders who all know their HIV/AIDS status, are committed to principles of good governance, their communities and their personal growth, and who are determined to make a difference with their lives. They have become articulate, focused and happy. Each group has two well thought-out projects they will begin to implement in their villages.

We had a terrific last day with lots of reflection and transformative insights. I confess that I could not keep back the tears at their touching appreciation. I have told them that I am watching each one and will pick the best to be junior counselors at our leadership camp in January. They leave confident, determined and so very proud of themselves. I have grown to love each one.

Melanie Theriault and Donna Bawden, the two Canadian youth volunteers with the project, have been here since early March and return home with me at the end of next week for four weeks of public engagement. These two have been fabulous, quickly stepping into the void when the YAH Coordinator resigned in March. They are loved by the youth and have been a huge help to me. They are great team players and will be missed by the HL staff. They live at the office when not staying in the villages. It is a nice place to stay but very cold and damp as the office is in the lowest spot in the area and the dampness seeps through the ground and into the concrete. While we work, we all have our layers of clothing on and huddle around our one space heater. They never complain and are always cheerful. They are warm in the night, even without a heater in their rooms, due to the generosity of donations of down quilts, sheets and blankets.

After a diligent search and several interviews, I have hired Tlalane Tlali as the new YAH Coordinator! We have effectively been without a local coordinator on this project since the end of January, and I am delighted that Elizabeth has joined our team. She is young, smart, well trained and committed. I know she will be a blessing to the project and to the HL group on the ground as well. I will spend the next week introducing her to people, taking her to the villages and training her on the project. I confess that I have a huge sense of relief as the success of this wonderful initiative was in jeopardy without proper leadership.

I have interviewed a lovely young Mosotho woman for the position of psycho-social counsellor for HL. We have over 6,000 children in our schools here and many are visibly suffering from the ravages of poverty, grief and abandonment. She would counsel the orphans we are concerned about, speak to the HIV/AIDS Clubs in all our schools and give sessions for the teachers and principals on how to address these issues. She would also provide counselling for the teachers and principals who themselves have great burdens to bear both personally and professionally. I do not know how they manage with both the academic responsibilities and the worry and management of hundreds of cold, hungry and lost orphans. I do not as yet have funding for this position but am currently writing a proposal to a potentially receptive

donor. This need is so urgent that if and when funding becomes available, we can proceed immediately now that I have found a good candidate.

Hlotse, the town where I stay, has joined commercial paradise. Two weeks ago, Shoprite, a large South African chain grocery store, opened its third store in Lesotho, in our very own Hlotse. We have all watched it go up, right across from the Anglican convent. Its opening day was such a huge event that even medical staff at the 'Tsepong Clinic took part of the day off to avail themselves of the sales and see this wonder. Now one can get almost anything here—even the cheddar and cottage cheese and regular yoghurt we all long for. I have been wondering what this will do to the small vendors on the street and the simple shops on the main row in town. This morning was the first time I had a moment to go there—what a commotion! One could see all one's acquaintances there for sure. Even the nuns were out on the Saturday shopping they usually do in Ficksburg, the closest South African border town.

Tomorrow we again go up into the mountains to Mahlekefane, 'Mamohau, then Tuesday to Pitseng, Wednesday to Seboche and Bokoro. It will be wonderful to see many friends and especially the children. They are my delight.

As I prepare to leave Lesotho again, I feel even more the desperate need of these lovely people. Every evening brings another person to my door, often a nun, to tell me of some terrible circumstance and of the suffering or death of another. I feel helpless. Last evening, it was a young nun from our Baithaopi ba lerato group, sponsored by St. George's Church in Ottawa, Ontario, who are helping desperate families. The old granny she visits has become quickly and desperately ill, ridden with bedsores, unable to turn over. She has nothing to eat and no one to care for her. She needs to go to the hospital but there is no money and no way to transport her. Not even the chief in the village has a car. How does one get her to the hospital?

Another of the young nuns, a different evening, tells of the family in her care—a young mother, father and wee child. Both the father and the baby are critically ill with AIDS. There is no road to their village. They cannot afford the transport to get to the hospital. There is no one to take them. Only a cart and horse could provide the necessary transport. They will die if they do not get help. Another's family has three small children in a child-headed household with nothing to eat and no blankets. A phone call just before bed from my friend tells me her close friend of many years has just died of AIDS and she has returned from the far-away funeral heavy with the loss. Every day, every night the stories go on. The tears fall. I comfort them as best I can, but when will this end?

May 19 2006

We have had a busy week visiting nine of our schools. The weather has mostly been lovely; the scenery is always varied and spectacular on our travels. It is a joy to go up into the mountains and see the children. This is my favourite part.

I love 'Me Ratia—she is one of my heroes. At **Mahlekefane** since 1984, 'Me still has not finished her teaching qualifications, but she is the breath and fibre of the entire community. She cries every time she sees me in her gratitude for all Help Lesotho has done. Before we came, they had been entirely forgotten by the world. Now they are special. So much hope, joy and concrete help has been brought to these wonderful children, and they cannot say thank you enough.

Corpus Christi Elementary School and Sacred Heart Church, Ottawa, Ontario, bought 100 pairs of shoes for children who have none and will put on a roof for a new classroom for the school. There was enough from their donation to purchase warm uniforms and sweaters for some of the children in need.

'Mahlekefane's twinned school, Bishop Hamilton, provided bookshelves and beautiful, sturdy, proper desks and attached benches for the Standard Seven class who formerly wrote their exams on their laps. These desks are a real source of pride for the school and the parents alike. Volunteers Ray Fine, Bruce Clark and Penney Place built new benches on site so that the younger children did not have to sit on the cold, damp, earthen floor covered by a mixture of cow dung and soil. They painted the inside of the classrooms to brighten the dark earth walls and had Formica squares cut to serve as lap desks to write on. Penney had simple denim school bags made by a local woman to replace the ripped plastic bags used to carry books across the mountains to school. I saw them everywhere, being used and appreciated. Money raised by volunteers Shauna Pollock and Joel and Michaela Cote-Selig will allow the villagers to pour concrete floors for the classrooms. Shauna was there for six weeks. Michaela and Joel Cote-Selig are there now helping in the school. We brought warm knitted hats and scarves for the children.

The parents have begun building the new classroom, collecting and splitting the huge rocks. The mortar is mud-based. It is coming along, and the new roof materials are ready for installation as soon as the walls are finished. This is a huge accomplishment, and the community is to be commended for its hard work.

Children sang songs composed especially for me and to thank Canadians for their kindness. 'Me Ratia makes sure that it is the Canadians who are thanked and not a particular person or school. The needs of this school are more than one twinned school can provide. When I see the difference here since the first time I came, I am brought to tears that these children know fully we are thinking of them and that their world is indeed changing. Most will not go beyond primary school. The fees and boarding for high school are just not in the realm of possibilities. The overall grades of the school are very low; few teachers are qualified, and some have only primary school themselves. Who else would stay in this remote place? My next dream is to raise the money for each teacher there to take one step closer to his or her qualifications. I asked 'Me Ratia to provide a list of the current level of education of each staff (there are six) and the cost of the next step. For example, some could go once a month to the nearest town (Ha Lejone) for high school classes if funds for transport and fees were available. Ministry of Education courses could be attended in Maseru on holidays. I see clearly that this is the next step for these children: to educate their teachers.

Our time at '**Mamohau** in the afternoon was great. 'Mamohau is in a beautiful valley with the school on one side and the residence on the other. It is a large school and one which, again, has had a change of its deputy, Peter. They are so pleased to be twinned with Philomen Wright and are working to keep the correspondence going. It means so much to individual pen pals. We had a lovely visit with our many orphans. Unfortunately, we were unable to see the principal, as he had to be elsewhere for other business. Communication is difficult in this region, as there is no phone signal. All our girls at 'Mamohau complain of the cold water. They rise at 5:00 a.m. to bathe in freezing, ice cold mountain water. They must bare their bodies in the cold to stand in basins of cold water. The Basotho are amazingly clean people, washing completely twice a day in their plastic tubs. I told them not to stand in the water, as some are getting cramps and headaches from the daily experience. We distributed the letters from the sponsors who had sent them. Those receiving were so delighted. I have photos of each, which I will send when I get home to a more conducive electronic medium.

I love to go to **Guardian Angel Primary**, twinned with Rockcliffe Park, which has provided a new library. Funds from RPPS and Yorkhill High School, Thornhill, Ontario, will purchase two milk cows and build a

kraal to provide milk for the children. They were thrilled. GAP has a new principal, Sr. Immaculate Cecilia, whom I have known for some time. She will be so good for the school and has been finding her way since her arrival after Easter. We had a nice visit with our sponsored children there. I am so fond of each of these kids in every school and love to see them and catch up on how they are doing. Predictably, I see how they are growing taller and healthier as time goes on. The Basotho children are so beautiful, but we all find it hard to capture the sponsored kids well on film. They rarely look as well in the photos; often their faces are somber. Immediately after snapping, a huge smile comes out to transform the child, and the opportunity is lost! Our perpetual challenge!

Pontmain Primary was happy to see us. Their twin, Edmison Elementary in Peterborough, Ontario, bought uniforms and food for children. Fundraising on Salt Spring Island, led by Gulf Island Secondary School last year, purchased chickens and garden tools. Other individual donors have contributed to the feeding program to make a significant difference. Harcourt United Church in Guelph, Ontario, has donated the funds to build a chicken coop for the chicks now living and, truthfully, destroying a classroom (one cannot leave them without a proper coop or they will be promptly stolen). 'Me Mantoetsi is always keen to chat and tries so hard to work with us for the benefit of her students.

I spent a long time at **Pitseng High School**. We have many sponsored students there, and some are new to me. Again, I passed out the letters from sponsors. Unfortunately, a few arrived with the parents of our volunteer Alex Way and have not yet made it to the school. I hate to see the disappointment on the faces of those who do not get letters. They are all good kids and trying so hard. Pitseng High School is an excellent school, more expensive than the others, but they provide more opportunities. The HL HIV/AIDS Club there is thriving, and they love the bracelets they receive after their requisite number of attended meetings. We insist all our sponsored students in each school attend the Clubs. This may save their lives in the end. When I gave them the cheque for garden tools from Masonville Manor in London, Ontario, they were just delighted. Their twinned school, Gulf Island Secondary School, Salt Spring Island, purchased a new computer for the office administration of this large school. There are so protective of it that it is always covered and is quite a regular procedure to take the plastic off to use it.

Our small Anglican school, **Raphoka Primary** with only 150 students, is so proud to be in the HL twinned school group and striving to improve. They are twinned with Salt Spring Island Middle School. We previously gave the wonderful hand-made hats to the Standard 1-3 students. We took (on public transport) enough hats to give to the rest of the school. In each of the schools, it is so much fun to see the children wearing these warm, colourful hats from their Canadian friends. We will replace broken windows after 'Me Nomkase has held a community meeting with the police, 'Maseiso and the chief to gain a commitment from the community and the offending soccer club boys that they will protect them.

Penney Place was in the village of Pitseng at our schools for three months and was so loved. We continued to hear of her excellent work there. We do an exit interview with principals following each volunteer. They all loved Penney and look forward to seeing her next year. Marie O'Neill and Marion Myles will go there in our fall.

Molapo is our school in Hlotse, at which HL has over 20 sponsored students. It is an excellent school, making all efforts to provide a good education. All our St. Mary's girls attend there with the exception of Likeleli. Students speak so well of the school. The school will receive a new piggery from twinned Viking School, Viking, Alberta. They are delighted to have this new opportunity to provide nourishment for the students.

St. Charles, Seboche, twinned with Elmwood School, is always a pleasure to visit. I have been there often and love to return to this beautiful location. Alex is there working with our sponsored students, the HIV/AIDS Club and tutoring in English, Math and Science. He is having a great time and happy to see his parents for a week.

Bokoro High School is doing well. 'M'e Mapalesa (Mary Grace) is striving to improve in many directions. In the four years since she has been there, the enrollment has risen from 65 to now 320. She is proud of her students and looks after the orphans well. Its twin, Ridgemont High School, has given them a library and the necessary bookshelves. Ridgemont students work so hard to help with fundraisers and various initiatives.

The guest house is almost finished at the **Bytown Orphanage** with funds raised by the Quinte chapter of Help Lesotho, Belleville, Ontario. This has been a huge undertaking on both sides of the water. The small group in Belleville has managed Herculean feats of fundraising, in particular Rev. Ross Bruleigh, whom we call the Calendar Man for selling hundreds of calendars and raising awareness of the needs of the orphanage. Nicola Thompson heads up the child sponsorship portion of the support. Jane Blannin and Tessa Bell and their committee have participated in a multitude of activities to raise funds.

The leave-taking from Hlotse was difficult. The various friends, nuns and our wonderful **St. Mary's girls** all take such pains to say good bye. Hugs are all around, and they are concerned about how long it will be before I return. The girls are growing in confidence and their ability to express themselves in English. This will help each one so much in school, as the exams are in English. Each sees me as a representative of her sponsor, and I want them to know that the girls save every letter and card. They treasure these more than you could ever know. One said to me in a wistful voice, "You have seen my sponsor face to face!!!!" Their tears at our departure made me cry as well. They so long to have a mother, and I have become that for them. I love each one. I will miss them and carry each in my heart and my prayers.

I realize on my travels that one item we can bring over which would be easy and so very useful here are wool tights of all sizes. The girls must wear skirts, and the possession of tights makes a real difference in warmth for the day.

On our second last day, we took early public transport to Maseru for the fast taxi exchange at Maputsoe to Maseru. We met with the Deputy Minister of Gender, Youth, Sports and Recreation and the Director of Youth. They are keen to work with us and hosted our partner meeting for our huge NTJA-PELI initiative to bring a sequence of HIV/AIDS education, counselling and testing to all our schools and their communities. We hope to reach 10,000 to 12,000 people in this six- to eight-week initiative to begin in August. We had a planning meeting with our seven partners (Commonwealth Games, Lesotho Olympic Committee, World Food Program, Red Cross, Blue Cross (drugs and alcohol), Phela (fabulous pamphlets) and PSI-New Start (counselling and testing). Elizabeth will head this up.

It is the morning of our last day. I just received a call from 'Me Ratia (she calls between 5:00 and 6:00 a.m.) telling me that our visits to the Ministry of Education have been successful. A representative of the Ministry went to the school just after we were there to inform her that they will build three new classrooms by the end of the year. This is truly a miracle and will make all the difference. She has two classrooms and a tent now. One of those two is so dark and cold that it is difficult to learn. 'Me is so very appreciative. I am jubilant. It will change the school and indeed the community in immeasurable ways. Hurray!!!!

This morning, I have meetings with the new Lesotho High Commissioner to Canada. 'Me Mots'ea Senyane, Ntate Sefeane (Chief Executive Officer of the National AIDS Secretariat who is chair of our steering committee) and Ntate Makoetje (third in command at the Ministry of Local Government and also on our steering committee) to discuss further initiatives. 'Me Senyane and I also will meet with Barbara Nkoala, the Canadian honorary consul in Maseru, for a chat before I leave for the airport. 'Me Senyane arrives in Ottawa soon and will accompany me to a series of events, fundraisers and meetings in Ottawa, Peterborough, Belleville, Guelph and London.

'Maseiso and Elizabeth have a lot on their plates to get done as I leave. We keep generating more work! I leave all this in their very capable hands and know that as Help Lesotho grows, our efforts are indeed bringing hope, support and new beginnings to thousands of people here. As Donna, Melanie and I prepare to leave, we are amazed that we have been able to accomplish all that was necessary. When I arrived, I did not think it possible. We are thrilled to have a new YAH Coordinator and know that she will be dedicated, excellent with the youth and a pleasure to work with.

It is a pleasure to live in a country with few mirrors, where people do not seem to judge each other on appearance, where children are deeply appreciative and adults never seem to forget a kindness. The generosity emerging from their poverty is moving. We have so much to learn from the Basotho and so do our children.

In my reading of this before sending, I am struck at the number of projects, people and changes. Our team continues to grow. Soon dear Cliff will leave and we will all wish he hadn't. Mel will return to university and new adventures. Leslie Powers will join us in July. Reading the above renders the generosity and compassion of Canadians transparent. So much has been given by so many. As I embark on a six-city tour with over 30 meetings, sermons and speeches in the next three weeks, I welcome the opportunities to thank groups and individuals for helping these thousands of children, for being a life-giving support and encouragement and mostly for stretching beyond themselves for a small country filled with loss, death and wonderful people.

April 3 2006

I leave tomorrow. The rain ceased a few days ago, substituted by heat and sun, revealing the mountains in all their multi-shaded splendour. It has been glorious and renewing to all.

I confess that the anticipation of spending two more days and nights on planes is not that appealing. My mind strains to remember the myriad details left to discuss and with whom. Suitcases are packed with information, letters and scarves from the Leribe Craft Centre I hope to sell to help the disabled employees who make these beautiful things. I will return to Lesotho in three weeks after a flurry of activity. I leave most of my personal effects here, although it will be cold when I come back, and I will need my winter clothes.

Next week, April 20, is the HL reception with Stephen Lewis. The HL fundraising committee, led by Cindy Scott, has been amazing. I honestly don't know what we would have done without Cindy. She has been the height of efficiency and monitors every detail in my absence. There is only one ticket left to sell. The excitement is mounting. We will have the two-hour reception without press so that people can chat quietly. John Manley is the M.C., Stephen will speak for about 15-20 minutes, I will speak for a few minutes, and the rest of the time will be for people to chat with Stephen. It is not that hard to hear him

speak but almost impossible to have a chance to actually talk to him. There will be a short, quiet dinner after the event, for John, Stephen, Michael Potter and his wife, myself and a few press, catered by Les Fugere, before Stephen goes on to his next speaking engagement at Ashbury School. As 100% of the overhead has been donated, all the funds raised go to Help Lesotho, with 100% receiptable. We are grateful to Stephen for his willingness to do this for Help Lesotho. The *Ottawa Citizen* will do an article, I think, this week on it.

The YAH youth training is over. We had a party on the last afternoon with a special cake, balloons and the presentation of their certificates of participation. It was wonderful. Watching the youth develop over this three-week period has been a real privilege. Each committee of the three has a Team Leader now. Their remarks on completion of the course were touching and clear evidence of their new pride in themselves and their sense of common purpose. They were so proud of themselves for having tested to know their status. We wear our Help Lesotho bracelets and now the blue Know Your Status ones proudly. The fact that Mel, Donna and I tested as well was a good thing. We are all part of this campaign and must commit equally. Maseeiso tested and, too, overcame her own fears. I am so happy for her. In Canada, we can never fully understand this pernicious fear, nor pretend to.

The five themes of leadership, communication, governance, HIV/AIDS and gender equity were not easy. The youth have been punctual, diligent and fully committed since the beginning, each realizing what a special opportunity this has been for them. They learned much about themselves and their potential to make a difference in their communities. It was exciting for me to watch them blossom and worth all the hard work. Michael Bassett of the IOG has had a great week, learned a lot and worked hard. He was great with the youth – kind, responsive and flexible. He had to seriously modify the materials he brought to deliver to make them culturally relevant and comprehensive to these village young people. He did this willingly and with a good heart. He leaves today and feels blessed by the experience. When I return, we will have a one-week strategic training session to make sense of their findings and observations.

The new Lesotho High Commissioner to Canada, 'M'e Motseoa Senyane, came to speak to the group and to visit with me. She was outstanding with the youth. Her Sesotho session on leadership and community engagement was inspirational to them. She has done so much for her country throughout her life. She remains open and available to all. Each one appreciated her time in coming when she was so busy. She and I had a great visit, talking for hours into the night.

The youth now return to their villages to interview the community leaders and learn about the capacity of each organization to facilitate their community in working more efficiently and effectively in fighting HIV/AIDS. They have had training in interviewing (armed with a one-page questionnaire guide). They are nervous about being heard, as youth do not have status in the community, and this is an innovative approach. They are keen though. I told them I was watching each and every one to find the best leaders and help them over the years. I also want to choose some of them to be "junior counselors" at the Leadership Camp in January. We can build a small cohort of young people with the Student Leads of the HIV/AIDS clubs in the schools.

We have developed partnerships which will go into all our schools in sequence. One after another, they will offer these services in the nine villages in which we are working. We will start with the sexual-violence-specific curriculum, then the Commonwealth Games sports and AIDS awareness program (Kick-It-Out), followed by the Blue Cross sessions on the role of alcohol and drugs in decision-making, and, finally, PSI – New Start to do counseling and testing. We are totally committed to this approach and will involve the youth committees in the public engagement for the programs.

Mel and Donna have been terrific. They have worked constantly to help me fill the gap left by the YAH Coordinator's resignation. We spent all day yesterday building their work plans for their next five weeks in the villages. Each village is so different – topographically, socially and in terms of the available resources. Each is beautiful and struggling. It will be quite an experience for them. Mel has been here for seven months already, and Donna has spent many months in Namibia. They are excited and prepared. This has been the most difficult month I have had. No one has emerged to replace Liabo, and we have no leadership here until I come back. Donna and Mel will fill in the gap. I have full confidence in them but regret that they will not have more support. The Help Lesotho team, as always, will be here when they need it.

As we worked the other day on the veranda of our office, a small one came by to visit. Her mother died of AIDS; she lives with her grandmother. She is probably about three and a half, cute as a button and quite the little mimic with English phrases. Her grandmother had gone to a funeral for a couple of days, so this child was wandering around. I was alone at first when she came, focused on my keyboard and thoughts. I rather ignored her to indicate I did not have time to play. She slid her tiny body up on a chair, stuck her thumb in her mouth and watched as I worked. Her eyelids grew heavy, and she slept for a couple of hours – beside a white stranger in total comfort. No one came to look for her all day. When Michael, Mel and Donna came back from their visit to Pitseng, we played. It is hard for one's mind not to wonder how she will grow up, be educated and stay HIV negative. The children here are so beautiful, but thoughts of their vulnerability are ever present. One wants to protect them.

Last week I had a most wonderful experience. A dear friend of mine and I talked for hours about her fear of testing. She was open and frankly paralyzed by the notion, with a great deal of practice at compartmentalizing the subject. She is bright. She and her friends all confess that they will never test. They cannot face a positive result. I love her, and her health is important to many. When I asked her what it would take for her to test, she replied that if I were to take her there and hold her hand, she might be able to face this horror. The next day, we got transport to the testing centre, and indeed she tested. I confess that the length of time she was in the counseling room sent me into rather a panic, but in the end she was negative. Our mutual tears of relief are a bond we will share forever. I am so proud of her that even in the writing of this, I feel it all over again. As we were returning, we stopped in a field of blossoming cosmos to yell our thanksgiving at the mountains and skies and to take a few minutes to celebrate her life. We prayed together, laughed and shared our joy. It was awesome.

We are finished the registration application and supporting letters for Thusa Lesotho and will submit them within the week. This will allow the development of a truly Basotho NGO with time. Maseeiso will be an excellent leader and in a few years capable of leading it on with Basotho partnerships. This is so much the point of what we are doing to identify and build local leadership.

Our volunteers, Carol Pritchard, Ray Fine, Penney Place and Bruce Clarke, have left. They have been great and leave having made many new friends and valuable contributions. They have had a marvelous time. This evening Michaela and Joel CoteSelig arrive to start their four months in the mountains. I am looking forward to seeing them, however briefly, before I leave. Shauna Pollock came down from Mahlekefane for a couple of days. She is having a ball and loving every minute. She is a terrific young woman and will be perfect in Mahlekefane.

As this last day stretches before me, I wonder how I can accomplish all that must be done. This is a recurring theme in my life, and I appreciate those who are patient with me. We are doing our best, and

the challenges are many. The competing demands have been considerable, and I have learned a great deal. We have had unexpected challenges and few resources to address them. I pray many times a day that we will honour the confidence and opportunity that we have in these nine villages, that our plans and activities are useful, that we learn ever more how better to do things.

October 23 2006

I am back. Back to see friends, challenges and struggles with the staggering need. As I write, spring has come in full regalia to Lesotho. Flowers bloom everywhere. Birds are riotous in their delight at the warm weather. People tend their gardens. Children sweep the grounds. Greenery turns the mountains from a tapestry of beiges and taupes to an endless spectrum of green. Lesotho is indeed a beautiful country. It is wonderful after such a difficult winter.

Lesotho had the most difficult winter it has had in 40 years. The snow in the mountains was so prolonged and intense that many were stranded. I kept thinking of the women in the HL Grandmothers' Support Program in Thaba Tseka, being fed by the Kingston Grandmothers. Each looks after so many orphans and lives in tiny huts isolated in the high mountains. Our team was not able to get "up" for weeks for road closures or because the threat of being unable to get "down" was too great.

This spring has had an unusual amount of horrific thunder and lightning storms. Torrents of rain run down the streets, which of course are at the angle of the hill they climb. There are more people killed in Lesotho from lightning than in any other country in the world. It is a fearful thing to see. Apparently it is a combination of the altitude, deforestation and dry climate. Last week, Leslie, Bohang and I were caught in a hail storm that piled up the pea-sized balls as high as a foot on the ground. We were drenched to the bone. One thinks of the grandmothers and families with holes in the thatch of their roofs. We know of families who were entirely drenched inside—all blankets and mud floors turned to mush, clothing saturated. It is difficult.

I arrived on October 12 to spend two nights at the new guest house at the Bytown Orphanage, funded by the Quinte Chapter of Help Lesotho. Sr. Margaret was so proud to show me and get my approval on her decisions. The funds were raised by the Belleville group through incredibly hard work and fundraising, and she is so appreciative. HL staff and volunteers will stay there for a minimal amount, which covers the electricity, etc., and is otherwise used as an income generating project for the orphanage. It really is excellent.

Sue Veit and Maureen Nicholls from Victoria are there now for three months to work with the children and help Sr. Margaret with administrative affairs. Sue and Maureen have raised a significant amount of money, adding to funds committed by the Quinte group for a school bus for the 50-odd children. The children will be able to get out of the compound, go to school on rainy days, have educational outings. Of course the road must be fixed first, as it is almost impassable, but this is a priority and the funds are accumulating. The children are wonderful. Change happens slowly.

Lenore Dixon, of the Quinte group, is a musician and has recently released a CD with her new composition, *Tebello of Lesotho*, in honour of her sponsored child at the orphanage. It is a haunting piece, really lovely. A portion of each CD will go to HL. Because of the visit of the Queen, I was unable to play it

for Tebello but will do so next time. Lenore sent her a copy of the CD. What an incredible gift of music, a most precious thing here.

I stayed at the orphanage with 'Maseeiso Ramoholi, HL Coordinator, and Bohang Matsumunyane, our new OVC Counsellor (orphan and vulnerable children). I wanted to spend time with 'Maseeiso before the chaos of my visit began and to get to know Bohang better. I had interviewed her in May. We received funding in September from the Stephen Lewis Foundation (SLF) to hire her to counsel individuals and groups and conduct peer listening, etc., for the children. She will help teachers, principals, project leaders, nuns, HIV/AIDS Clubs in HL schools and others deal more effectively with fear of testing, loss, grief, loneliness, depression, etc. We are so grateful to the SLF for this funding and know that Bohang's experience and skills will make a terrific difference to the people under our programs (now over 6,500).

I spent three hours with 'M'e Majara, Director of Human Resources, Local Government, who has purview over thousands of people. She and I had spent hours talking at the International AIDS Conference in Toronto. I met with Claire Marshall, former Director of the Institute on Governance, who is here for a month in Maseru to help the National AIDS Commission and the Ministry of Local Government develop workshops, etc., to roll out their national AIDS strategy. She will give a one-day workshop in Hlotse before leaving at the end of the week.

Working with the national government is a frustrating experience. We have sent two governance specialists to help at the request of the government, but both times they have failed to use them adequately. I frankly do not see that we can be the benefit to the national government that we can to the district and local levels. Future volunteers will work at these two levels.

'Maseeiso and I met as well with the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Lesotho, Ntate Mohalalisi, to discuss various issues. He offered to help us in a number of ways and was most interested and cordial.

Early in the first morning at the guest house, I opened the door to find 'M'e Mamosa Lekhera, a beautiful young woman of 27 who I thought had died. 'M'e lives near the mine workers in the capital, Maseru, with her two daughters, five and three years old. Her husband died of AIDS in 2005. The measure of health deterioration with HIV is known as CD4 count. When the count has fallen below 200, one has full-blown AIDS and, where available, begins treatment on anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs). We have been very concerned about 'M'e Mamosa, as her CD4 count fell to 78, then to 42 and finally 23. She had no appetite and spent much of her time coughing. When we left Lesotho last, she was on death's door. The term "Lazarus effect" refers to when someone is almost dead, then takes anti-retroviral drugs and comes back to life.

'M'e began making the brooches we sell in Canada to raise funds (see the projects page on the website), which represent AIDS, orphaned and abused children, when she became too ill. We had 'M'e Motholo teach her how to make the difficult pins. She wanted to survive. She works so hard to make each one, knowing that this is a small future for her. Before becoming involved in the Help Lesotho Beading Project, she used to sell spices door-to-door, but no one could buy.

'M'e Mamosa's health is improving with the drugs, and she is eager to work. "I see a big difference in my life since I started making the beads. I can pay for my daughter's school fees and feed the baby. I know there is something wrong with my eyes, and I can see a doctor now. We do not have a home, so I will try by all means to work hard on the pins to have a home for me and my daughters. This really has changed

my life, and I thank you very much.” Help Lesotho will pay for new glasses. Just before she leaves, she says, “May God bless you greatly so that you may help many more of our suffering people.”

Young Queen Masenate came to the orphanage to visit, and Sr. Margaret was so keen I stay to join them. It was fun. The kids put on a number of traditional dances. They are so cute. This preparation, for the children’s part, of the tea and meal was an incredible amount of expense and work for Sr. Margaret and her limited staff. A tent had to be erected to shelter Her Majesty from the sun during the performances. It did turn out to be worth the time, as I had both tea and lunch talking with the Queen privately for a long time. She is young, 30 now, and has two daughters (3 and 5). She is pregnant and, of course, hoping to provide an heir to the throne. It is a considerable pressure.

Leslie Power and Donna Bawden, our two interns, have been terrific. Donna was here with the YAH project and has returned. Both have worked tirelessly to support the many projects and individuals associated with HL. Donna has supported some special projects, and Leslie has worked in the schools. We are blessed to have them. Both are low-maintenance (a huge plus), efficient, caring and lots of fun. I see how they are loved by many.

My first weekend in Hlotse allowed me to host Alexis MacDonald, Director of Programs for the SLF. Alexis stayed here at the guest house with me, so we had lots of time to chat. She is doing a terrific job for the foundation. On the Saturday, we took her to Pitseng with ‘Maseeiso and Bohang. It was really fun. The village was alive with a *Famina* church celebration, with many busloads from far away. I ran into many friends but was unable to find others in the crowd. I have never seen such an assembly in a small village. We visited Guardian Angel Primary (Rockcliffe Park, Ottawa) and Pontmain Primary (Edmison Heights, Peterborough). The chicken coop at the latter looks great.

We have had many staff meetings, individual debriefings and planning sessions. There is much to catch up on and lots of strategic planning required. As our staff grows, the office premises are already too small. As I mentioned, we have already outgrown our office space. It is constantly full of people, and it becomes more impossible to work. People come to the door constantly for help. It is heartbreaking to say no. We just can’t help everyone. Choosing between one and not the other generates a feeling of helplessness that is painful.

It is hard to believe when I look at the busyness and productivity that all this has evolved in only two years. Who could ever have imagined the incredible work our people are doing? For example, HL Ntja Peli multi-partner HIV/AIDS education, counselling and testing initiative brought 31 partner visits (Sesotho Media, the Lesotho Olympic Committee, Blue Cross, PSI) to six villages, reaching a total of 8,300 people with education and testing. We could have done more if the snow had not prevented travel.

Mookho, a charter member of the St. Mary’s Hostel Project sponsored by St. Bartholomew’s Anglican Church in Ottawa, Ontario, has a baby boy. We have just had a visit—she is so young. A mother at 16 is hard. Her 18-year-old husband works piece jobs in Johannesburg, while Mookho stays in the hut looking after the baby and the old grandmother, who has had a stroke. This was her first time back in Hlotse since she had to leave the program.

The generosity of the St. Bart’s mentor group has allowed us to help Mookho with food, books, baby things and extra medical benefits. She is a dear girl and so smart. Her delight in seeing me was touching. Above all, she wants to return to school. There is enough money left for her to have next year if her husband’s family will allow it. She would move back from her village to attend her old school here. We

have the funds for a woman to watch the baby, and her grandmother, 'M'e Mojaje, the Director of the Leribe Craft Centre, could keep an eye out. We struggle so hard to get these young girls back to school. We wait for the answer.

My day of debriefing with the youth in the YAH initiative was such a pleasure. I confess that they have surpassed my expectations, and I am so proud of them. They strive hard to accomplish their goals. Each group gave a progress report on their projects (for which they had had preparatory meetings to report to 'M'e Peg). They have become respected in their communities and have attracted many new youth volunteers. Khutliso reported that the Chief of Bokoro does not believe there is such a thing as HIV/AIDS. I have invited his Chief to come to Hlotse, have lunch with me in a restaurant and tour the Tsepong Clinic as our guest. Anything is worth a try.

Tlalane Tlali, the YAH Coordinator, is doing a wonderful job. She has established an excellent relationship with the youth, is efficient and so ready to learn. It is a joy to watch her grow in skill and confidence. We are lucky to have her.

Pat Cauldwell (Kingston, Ontario) and Marion Myles (Ottawa, Ontario) have come to volunteer. Pat is a nurse who will help in various ways. Marion will do literacy development in a poor school, Raphoka, in Pitseng. It was fun to welcome them and to see their acclimatization to Lesotho. They are both so happy to be here.

Our new initiative, *Thakaneng*, to build three or four youth centres in targeted villages, arose from an extensive needs assessment in the villages by the youth themselves and will be youth-led. It has been so well thought of here. The excitement is palpable. *Thakaneng*, in the Sesotho language, refers to a place to mold youth for the future by respected mentors. Sadly, the term has fallen into disuse, because there are no longer places for youth to be mentored. The *Thakaneng* centres will be educational places for orphans, vulnerable children and out-of-school youth. They will provide sports, health services and training in literacy, numeracy, gender equity, HIV/AIDS prevention, pre-employment and life skills.

There is a sad lack of any youth centres, libraries or places for youth to go—a startling fact given that, depending on the area, 30%–55% of youth are orphans or otherwise vulnerable.

They have no way to support themselves. School fees are prohibitive. There are few jobs, and many become caregivers at an early age and must look after family members living with AIDS. Out-of-school youth with nothing to do are, understandably, getting into trouble and suffering from a profound sense of hopelessness. The rate of crime is rising very quickly. Literacy rates are low among this group. They have little to build an adult life on in the context of their grief, struggle, hunger and fear. Many must abandon the sick and elderly to leave home in search of work in Maseru or South Africa, contributing to a Diaspora of Lesotho's young. Most become lost, as they are unequipped to find work or deal with the urban environment.

It will be a challenging task to find land for the *Thakaneng* and to get the necessary components in place before I leave. Youth will be trained to build community engagement and the actual facilities and to later run programs. We already have the funding for the first two. One is being funded in three sections. First, the youth-led consultation and building design phase will be funded by youth themselves in Canada in the Eastern Canada Kiwanis Key-Clubs (from the Manitoba/Ontario border to Newfoundland). The building itself will be funded by the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association, Ottawa, Ontario. We

are in negotiations with the group, who have expressed interest in furnishing the building. The entire commitment for the second *Thakaneng* comes from a group of churches in Guelph.

In Hlotse, we are partnering with the Linares Civic Association (LCA), a relatively new volunteer civil society service association. I know several members in this group and recognize the success and effectiveness with which they have advocated for the needs of their community. HL wants to support and partner with them in any way it can. This is an excellent example of people helping themselves.

I went to their weekly meeting on Thursday at which a youth delegation presented their case to build a library. These articulate and determined young men and women spoke longingly of their desire to have books to read (I invited them to our office library and made the librarian a special book to record loans and dates for return). When we discussed *Thakaneng*, they were beside themselves; it was truly a dream come true.

The government gave the LCA a falling-down room as an office. We will have a sign made for their door and business cards for each of their 11 executive, and we'll donate paint for the walls and the electrical box so that they can have power. We will have their logo taken from paper to print for cards and letterhead, so they will feel proud of whom they are. We will type up the information they provide and make some simple brochures for them to have on hand and give out. We have so many resources at home. I know people will be happy to help develop these simple tools. I personally have become a member and have registered YAH, Thusa Lesotho and Help Lesotho (each a 20 M membership fee—around \$3.00 CAD). It is really not that hard to give a helping hand.

The LCA also will help us develop an exciting project to support grandmothers looking after orphans in Hlotse (more later). I will meet with the executive on Wednesday evening to discuss this.

HL *Baithaopi ba lerato* group, sponsored by St. George's Church, Ottawa, is the group of young Anglican nuns that helps families living with HIV/AIDS in various villages. It has a proposal to present to local business people for help. At our debriefing, it was revealed that these 5 nuns are looking after 7 families totalling 45 people. Of the 45, 11 have been tested for HIV. Of the 11 tested, 10 are positive (91%), and several are in the dying stage. This statistic is the highest I have seen. Many have nothing to eat. Pat has gone twice to change the dressings of a positive woman who is dying of cancer of the bone.

We have met with the District Administrator of Leribe (comparable to the Premier of a province), the Chair of the Local Government Council, etc., to try to develop channels of communication. We are not here to replicate or sabotage any efforts being made or planned by the government but rather to support existing structures.

The Anglican Sisters of the Holy Name, in whose guest house I stay, have had new life breathed into them. The leadership has changed, with an interim Superior from England. In April, they will elect a new Superior, and we see smiles, new energy and a lightness that has been sorely missing. It is a delight to see. Sr. Maria, who looks after me, seems years younger with the stress gone. She is so tiny, so dear and so old. Every time we leave, she says, "I will not be here when you return; I shall be dead." Each time, we tell her that is not allowed, as we need her. She is now over 80, lots of fun and, frankly, would like to go. She works tirelessly to make the beautiful gardens we all enjoy.

It is with a real sadness that I tell you our Coordinator, 'Maseeiso has resigned. We all love her and have excellent working relationships with her, but the scope of the work has grown beyond her skill sets or inclination. She has been such a blessing but now needs to go on and find her own passion.

As you can imagine, this is very difficult. I am interviewing for a replacement with a view to the size the organization may be in 9–12 months. We are looking for a person with an accounting/financial, administration background who is also interested in development work. We will have to pay almost double for the new position to get a person capable of handling the financial and reporting expectations for proper financial transparency. These are not things to which donors want to contribute.

So far, I have spent time with a lovely woman who has worked for 12 years for World Vision. We will see.

I know this epistle is too long, but there is so much to say as I meet with our various groups to see the progress since my last visit. Many readers have specific interests.

Thank you for bearing with me and for caring to support Help Lesotho. The need here continues with persistence that I find both compelling and devastating. Only by working together can we help this wee country.

November 1 2006

2:30 a.m. The night is silent as I write. Those darned birds have not started yet. I am proposing a by-law that roosters are only allowed to crow for 2 hours in 24! Here they start at about 3:00 a.m. and seem to go on for a good part of the day. We all consider it cruel and unusual punishment. There is also a bird called the ibis, which is equally annoying. Donna and Leslie, who live in the office, feel sleep-deprived thanks to these creatures!

We have had a great deal of rain with torrents of water, thunder and lightning. It does not come daily but often and with the threat of its force. This rain is not often good for the soil or for the garden's sprouts of spring. The days range from cool to lovely and warm. When I think of the approaching cold in Canada, I shudder.

Marion Myles is well and happy in Pitseng, loving her hut and getting to know all the children in the village and the school to which she is assigned, Raphoka. She will do literacy work on the weekends at Guardian Angel. Sue Veit and Maureen Nicholls are delighted with their time at the orphanage. I will go to Maseru next week and see them.

Pat Cauldwell is visiting some of the families living with AIDS and training quite a number of our young leaders in computer and administration.

Our days have been incessantly busy. We are preparing all the financial accountability measures for me to bring back to Canada for our audit. As school comes to a close this month, children are writing exams, and principals are finalizing the paperwork.

Grades 7, 10 and 12 write standardized national exams.

Students' results are published in the national paper for all to see. This generates an incredible pressure on the schools and on the students themselves, as it is on this performance that the schools are evaluated. The tension makes it hard for kids to concentrate. It takes three months to get the results and

creates a pall over their summer and Christmas holidays—waiting for the gauntlet. Without sufficient marks, they cannot go on. Without adequate school showing, the allotment of teachers is diminished. The consequences are dire.

'M'e Ratia of Mahlekefane (on the cover of the calendar and twinned with Bishop Hamilton Public School in Ottawa) has arrived to see me. She brought the teachers who are able now to take courses to upgrade their credentials. They are so appreciative. The funds raised by the BHS will purchase a tracksuit for each child in the school. To think that each will have one new thing is such a powerful thought. This allows the girls to wear pants to school and to keep warmer throughout the year. There is even enough left over for a bit of work to be done on the teachers' residence, which consists of one mud room each in stone huts with earth floors.

Teachers are required to live at the schools, and the schools are responsible for their housing. As you can imagine, this puts quite a burden on their limited resources. These rooms are dark and cold. 'M'e Ratia is right to ask that some be allocated for this, as it is so hard to keep teachers in such a remote place, high in the mountains.

'M'e is a remarkable leader, totally reliable and dedicated to her school. She speaks of a story in the Bible where an angel comes to help a struggling but honourable man, and she insists that Help Lesotho is her angel who has come to support her students. She is proud to be the one who has named me 'M'e Mathuso, which means "Mother of Help." Apparently she goes around telling everyone of this appellation. She regales me with stories of the villagers' progress, insisting on a full roster of detail. She is a joy to me and a constant reminder of the value of our choosing strong village leaders to support. Without her, that community could not in any way be what it is.

My meeting with the representative of the Ministry of Youth, Gender, Sports and Recreation today was touching. She told me of their small initiatives to help the youth in the mountains. One week-long HIV/AIDS program ended in testing. Of those who tested in 'Mamohau, 95% were positive. As mothers and dedicated supporters of these youth, we shake our heads, look at each other and fight back the tears. What is one to do with such statistics?

My highlight of the week has been our Young Women's Conference, funded by the Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada. We are so grateful for their support. I kept thinking of these women who have entrusted us with their funds and how proud they would have been.

The theme of the conference was Step Out and Speak Up. We chose 30 young women from 15–25 from each of our high schools and the orphanage to join us for three days.

Representatives were chosen from various groups: Ntaoleng, representing St. Mary's 16 girls; Sr. Malifu, the Project Leader of the *Baithaopi ba lerato* group of young nuns who look after families living with AIDS; two students from each school; the young women from our YAH Committees; and some of our sponsored girls. We had a young woman who had her baby at 16 and Sr. Daphne from the orphanage. They stayed at the school for the deaf, which is the only accommodation we can find. They ate well and were joyfully welcomed. Each received a Canadian pin, a notebook, a pen, a name tag, a Help Lesotho bracelet and a bookmark.

Donna Bawden, our HIV/AIDS and Gender Specialist, took the lead on the organization and did a terrific job. Tlalane Tlali, our YAH Coordinator, led discussion sessions on being a young woman. She had them all

talking at once in Sesotho in a country where it is socially perilous to speak of such things. Leslie Power, who has a degree in health education, did a terrific session on female anatomy. Bohang 'Matsumunyane, our new OVC Counsellor, did sessions on feelings and the fear of testing. Our nurse, Pat Cauldwell, gave the kids talks on various health issues. Everyone pitched in to help.

We spent a lot of time addressing myths and misinformation: “Is it true that if you delay sex then you will go crazy and become mentally ill?” “Is it true that using a condom will make your limbs go spastic [my word]?” “Will using a condom change your body shape?” “Is it true that our hormones will not work if we delay sex or that the blood will not flow to the brain if we delay sex?” “If I use condoms will my body lose its tone and become shiny and everyone can see I am using condoms?”

We shared the three days with a woman who has been living with AIDS for more than 15 years, whose husband beat her miserably and constantly for having the disease and then promptly died of it himself. Women are blamed for almost everything. Two of her four children died of it, and she fights for the lives of herself and her two remaining but infected children. She stayed the entire three days and was as attentive as the girls. A rather rotund woman, she led prayer or singing from time to time with the enthusiasm and drama of a television evangelist. It was so much fun to watch her. We, of course, did not understand a word she said in Sesotho. She led a session for the girls on living with AIDS. ‘M’e belongs to a support group of those living with AIDS and has devoted her life to sharing her story so that others may live. Even the lady who does the cooking, a *sangoma* or traditional healer/witch doctor, tested—although she says she does not believe in HIV/AIDS, she was ecstatic to find she was negative. Donna is determined to educate her.

The three days were remarkable, and we are so proud of each one of our participants. Throughout the days, we would periodically join hands and scream at the top of our lungs, “WE ARE WONDERFUL!”

Many of our sessions were in Sesotho. We had sessions on personal growth, feelings, how the churches view women, how God views women, how to set and follow through on goals, how to choose a mentor, how to protect yourself against aggressive people, how to avoid having sex with older men. We talked of bullies and how they develop and why they use violence. We had sessions on health, our bodies, sex, contraception, condoms and abstinence, AIDS and treatment. We uncovered myths about HIV/AIDS and talked of stigmatization and risks.

We had a partner group, PSI, come in for a counselling session on testing, and then each girl had the opportunity to test. In the beginning, almost none would contemplate doing so. The young girls who are virgins even secretly think they are positive, because they do not understand the transmission issues. By the end, 75% of them tested, which is extraordinary. We hired a popcorn man to come and make popcorn for them as a distraction so that they could have fun while waiting to test. The stress beforehand was palpable and heartbreaking. The vast majority of those testing were negative. Those who did not test probably knew they were positive. We have seen this before. The fear of testing is paralyzing. They are afraid of rejection and discrimination. They are afraid to die. They are afraid to know. If we can catch them before they are infected, then we have a real chance to save them. We sang, laughed, played games and cried together.

We had the girls write speeches that we will have typed up and circulated among our schools here and in Canada to share the voice and pain of these young girls. They have a right to speak for themselves. Many are competing for the Shelagh M’Gonigle Speaker’s Prize and the Kathleen Lauder Leadership

Scholarship, which gives them about \$100 and a spot at the HL Leadership Camp and the chance to have their work acknowledged. I will let you know when they are typed up and will post them on the Web.

The sessions on violence—especially gender-based violence—brought forth so many memories for these lovely young women. It was the first time they had ever imagined one could celebrate the fact that they were female. They were stunned to know that God does not intend them to be abused and servile. The idea that being a young woman could be a blessing was transformative. One could see the barriers dissolving from walls of defensiveness to gossamer veils of health and self-protection. As they stood out and spoke up at the end of how they had learned that children have rights and that guardians should not abuse orphans, the tears began to fall. We all quietly cried for the collective pain of these little girls, the vast majority of whom are orphans, who have never felt valued or listened to before. I know it has changed us all.

The longer I am in Lesotho, the more I become committed to this type of support. I would like to have these regularly and for more young people, especially boys. Although we do focus on gender training in all our activities, it can never be enough until girls and women are protected from abuse and subjugation. Gender inequity is at the root of so much of the HIV/AIDS crisis. The value of creating a safe place to explore these ideas is so powerful. The girls' commitment to their own growth as they left was a dream come true and a blessing to us all. These young women are indeed wonderful, and they deserve to know they are important. The future of Lesotho depends upon it.

November 2 2006

As I write, the rain pelts down on the battered soil. I wait until it reduces in intensity to leave for the office. I will wear flip-flops and a skirt I can roll up past my knees so that the mud will not soil my pants, stored protectively in my backpack, leaving me cold all day.

The paths are rutted from constant wear on the bright, rust-red soil. We walk through fairly high grass to reach the office, dodging puddles and holes in the ground. On the way to the office, it is all downhill; coming home, all uphill. One must constantly watch where one puts her feet. It is easy to slip on the slick ground and turn an ankle, especially as the rain has been falling pretty steadily for two days and nights. Just as I write this last sentence, the rain pelts down anew like the vengeance of the heavens. We are trapped. Pat lives with me; she reads as I write. She is bundled up with a blanket around her knees.

Predictably, after my first two weeks here, I have been having email problems for the past week. There must be a wicked plot by Lesotho Communications to keep our Internet bills high. If you expected to and did not hear from me, please forgive me.

I am absorbed in the concept of loneliness. Jean Vanier articulately unfolds our inherent loneliness as a constant human condition. It is the special loneliness of Lesotho and its AIDS pandemic that stares me in the face daily and makes me feel impotent.

A principal dropped in yesterday, excusing her lateness by quietly mentioning that her sister had "passed"—a typical reason for tardiness or appointment changes. As families become ever more fractured, the individual is increasing isolated. No one wants to burden her colleague or neighbour, who has exactly the same problems. This is not a nation of tears, yet given a wee bit of tenderness and interest, the tears flow and the stories come forth, finally exposing the feelings of helplessness.

Lesotho has always had a wonderful, collective sense of familial responsibility and generosity. Before AIDS, there were no orphans. Now, one is dependent upon that person who gives you food or shelter. There is a saturation with loss and death. We are all alike. At some point, we need to speak our pain. Touching this level of sorrow in a whole society is painful—even from the outside. AIDS is not merely a medical and sexual issue. The toll of this kind of emotional isolation is amorphous and soul destroying.

Our trip to Molapo School is this week. We have many students there, including our St. Bart's girls. A Mosotho in Guelph, Ontario, Nomalanga Vales, held a fundraiser evening for HL and designated the funds to school stoves (Nomalanga's group also paid for chairs for Pitseng High School). We chose Molapo as they seemed to be in dire need. Leslie Power, HL intern, reports on her delivery of the cheque:

Yesterday I visited Molapo High School, twinned with Viking School, Alberta. The principal, Ntate Moses Phoole, met me at the office door, always excited to see Help Lesotho staff. This day was special, because I was delivering a surprise cheque for school stoves. I told him of the money that Noma's group had raised for stoves. He was beside himself with happiness. He told me how the teachers have been donating their own money into a hat in the staff room, because their only stoves had broken three months ago.

Ntate Phoole relayed that everyone had been praying to find some way to buy new stoves. The stoves are not only used for heating, but also to make bread to feed the students. Their two large stoves had both recently stopped working at the same time. Students have had no bread, a staple food in Lesotho, with their lunch for three months.

He was so excited that he called the deputy principal, the secretary and a teacher to tell them the good news. The teacher was overcome with joy. She, too, told me how teachers, staff and students alike were all praying for stoves. She said many of the students had written their final exams hungry. The bit of cabbage or mince meat was not filling them at lunch, especially as this is often the only meal they will have.

Ntate Phoole immediately picked up the phone and called the supplier to order the stoves. He called the lunch staff to tell them to get the ingredients to make bread for Monday's lunch. He cancelled two meetings for the next day to go to Maseru himself to pick up the stoves. The staff was so grateful for this kindness. The deputy kept repeating, "How did they know?"

I have hired 'M'e Konesoang Mohatla as the HL Coordinator to replace our 'Maseeiso. 'M'e has a great deal of experience and is lovely, incredibly hard working and has already gained our trust and affection. She is an accountant with extensive work experience, including 12 years with World Vision Lesotho, other NGOs and private business. We are so thankful for her tireless help in sorting out all the paperwork, which I must take back to Canada with me. 'Maseeiso will stay for the transition so that it will be smooth. Konesoang has both accounting, administrative and project management experience, and she is looking forward to the fieldwork. She is a godsend.

We are planning our HL Leadership Camp for January before school goes in for 2007. It will be for six days this year. The enthusiasm mounts in our staff and the invitees. All those who attended last year are so hoping they will be invited.

Each school and project is allowed to choose two leaders and four students (two female and two male). We send children whose sponsors have contributed the \$65 for transport, food and the few supplies we give. We also ask six Anglican nuns and six Roman Catholic nuns so that they can get training in counselling, leadership and communication, etc. My mother's retirement residence, Masonville Manor in London, Ontario, has sponsored ten people from their fundraising initiatives, which will send orphans with leadership potential. Both Carolyn Kennedy and I will be here.

We are having a new youth corps this year of junior leaders to give them a further chance for training and program participation. Leslie Power is taking the lead on the organization. It is a huge task. All the students and teachers must receive their transport money before they leave school at the end of November. School does not resume until the last week of January. The Leadership Camp will be held again at Pitseng High School and Guardian Angel. We have no idea how we will manage the numbers this year, which is double that of last year, but we will find a way.

November 6 2006

The rain has stopped, for which we are all grateful. What glorious spring days! Flowers are blooming; the mountains are spectacular in the clear mountain air.

Today was my granny-visiting day. HL has three granny groups in our Grandmother Support Program, which helps grannies living with orphaned children. The group in Thaba Tseka, which is far away, is sponsored by a dynamic Kingston group for food to eat. In Pitseng, one group, funded by the Raging Grannies of Salt Spring Island, just received beautiful postcards from their Canadian counterparts. The ladies were thrilled. The second group is sponsored by the HL Solar Grannies of Edmonton and Winnipeg. There are 39 grannies in Pitseng now, but only 11 could meet as today was the day to go to the post-bank for their pension stipend of R150 per month (\$23 CAD), and others had to work in the fields.

The recent rain and hail has decimated their planting. Each has received a solar cooker to save the toxic fumes, effort and expense of cooking with cow dung, paraffin or coal. The project leader, Setloke, translated. They were so dear. Many looked ancient with sculptured faces weathered by pain and wind. When I asked how many orphans each cared for, the numbers were daunting. They counted out the numbers on their fingers. I heard 11, 10, 3, 4, 7, 9, 5 and on and on. I wondered how their frail bodies could manage to look after so many children. They spoke of the children having "mental problems" from the loss of their parents. I have asked the Solar Grannies to use the most recent funds raised for new seeds, a pitchfork and a spade for each of them so that they can at least re-plant and grow some food. I wanted to hug each one, but they were too shy. They are not used to a white person—or to getting help. I hope my photos show their courage.

We saw Marion Myles today at Pitseng. She has been in the village for two weeks and is finding it hard. She speaks of her joy in the beauty but finds the nights long and lonely. She has fallen in love with the children and refers to herself as the Pied Piper. It was good to see her and to see her courage to live, eat and love a culture so very different from ours. It is not easy to see so much poverty.

Pat Cauldwell, our nurse volunteer, writes of her visit to see one of the families living with AIDS and visited by the Anglican nuns, sponsored by St. George's Church, Ottawa, Ontario. I asked her if I could share her story of her latest visit:

I visited a Basotho family today with Sister Thandeka from the Convent of the Holy Name. She is part of a group known as *Baithaophi ba Lerato*, in which the sisters care for families living with HIV/AIDS in various villages. The sister had purchased some groceries and paraffin gas for the family, and we were delivering it to them on her weekly visit.

We were fortunate to obtain transportation to the family in the truck of one of the businessmen of the community. We started out of town on the “tarred” road but soon turned off onto a dirt road, which became quite steep and full of holes and rocks. The sister is a large woman, and I was between her and the gearshift, so I was very happy when we reached our location. We were greeted by the man of the family and soon joined by other family members. Although the sister’s visit was expected, my presence was a surprise. Very few white people venture out into the countryside. We were required by custom to ask permission for me to speak to them. It was granted.

The family consists of the father, mother and four children ranging in age from 6–18 yrs. The father, mother and oldest daughter all have AIDS and are receiving treatment. The father does not have a lot of energy. He complained of sore, swollen feet but looked relatively healthy. He had been a miner in Johannesburg before getting sick, unable to work since 1999. Although his CD4 count was 125 when last checked in May, he appeared to be benefiting from his anti-retroviral medications (ARVs). People on ARVs are entitled to multi-vitamins, but these people had not been offered them, even though they had asked.

Mother was the spokesperson for the family, but was also the sickest. Her CD4 count was 28 and had been this low for at least six months. A count of 20 is supposed to be close to death. Although her medications had been adjusted and she was also receiving treatment for active TB, she was extremely thin, very weak and always felt cold. She had recently been in hospital to have her lung drained of fluid, but she felt that she had not improved since this treatment. She requires injections daily for her TB, in addition to oral medication, but lacks the money for transport. I saw no motor vehicles in any of the nearby houses, and given the condition of the roads and the level of poverty in the community, there probably aren’t any.

The eldest daughter is 18 years old, also HIV positive, but her CD4 count is 278. She was very, very thin (probably weighed about 75 lbs.). She is receiving ARVs and treatment for TB. She feels very weak and has almost no appetite. Her clothes are quite ragged with the elbows of her sweater in tatters and her straw hat as well. She spoke very little. The next child, another daughter, is 15 years old. She appears quite healthy, and because of this, she has become the caregiver of the family. She does all the cleaning, cooking, shopping and laundry. She never complains. She was required to withdraw from school last year to care for her family, and she misses it a lot. The youngest two family members are boys, aged 11 and 6. They seem healthy and happy. They received a few meager gifts from Help Lesotho and were thrilled. Interestingly, there was one too few hats for the children, and the healthy girl was required to give hers up to a younger one. She had been so happy when she received it but gave it up quite willingly. Fortunately, there was a nice sweatshirt, which she was able to keep.

The family appeared very hungry and indicated that they had little or no food. They gladly received the mealie meal, lentils and maize we brought. They desperately need to eat more in order to gain some strength to fight this illness. They have a small garden, which will provide *moroho* (spinach), carrots, beets, onions and a little corn but not nearly enough to feed them

during the winter. They requested assistance with planting mealie meal, since they are too weak to cultivate the land. The sisters have the seeds, but the labour is another challenge.

Their house was a stone hut. It was well constructed and had a good tin roof. The inside consisted of one large family area with a table and chairs, several cupboards and counters. There were two other rooms, which I think were sleeping quarters. There was no running water, electricity or indoor plumbing, but it was very clean.

In spite of all their difficulties, they were very grateful for what they had. They asked only for things we would take for granted like transportation to medical appointments and food. I expect the mother and possibly the 18-year-old sister to die soon. Men are not required to assist in the care of the family, so the 15- year-old will have to continue in this role of caretaker. Life is not fair.

As we go around and people ask Pat for suggestions about physical symptoms, it seems there is only one answer to almost all the questions: have they been tested! Each group of symptoms seems like classic HIV/AIDS.