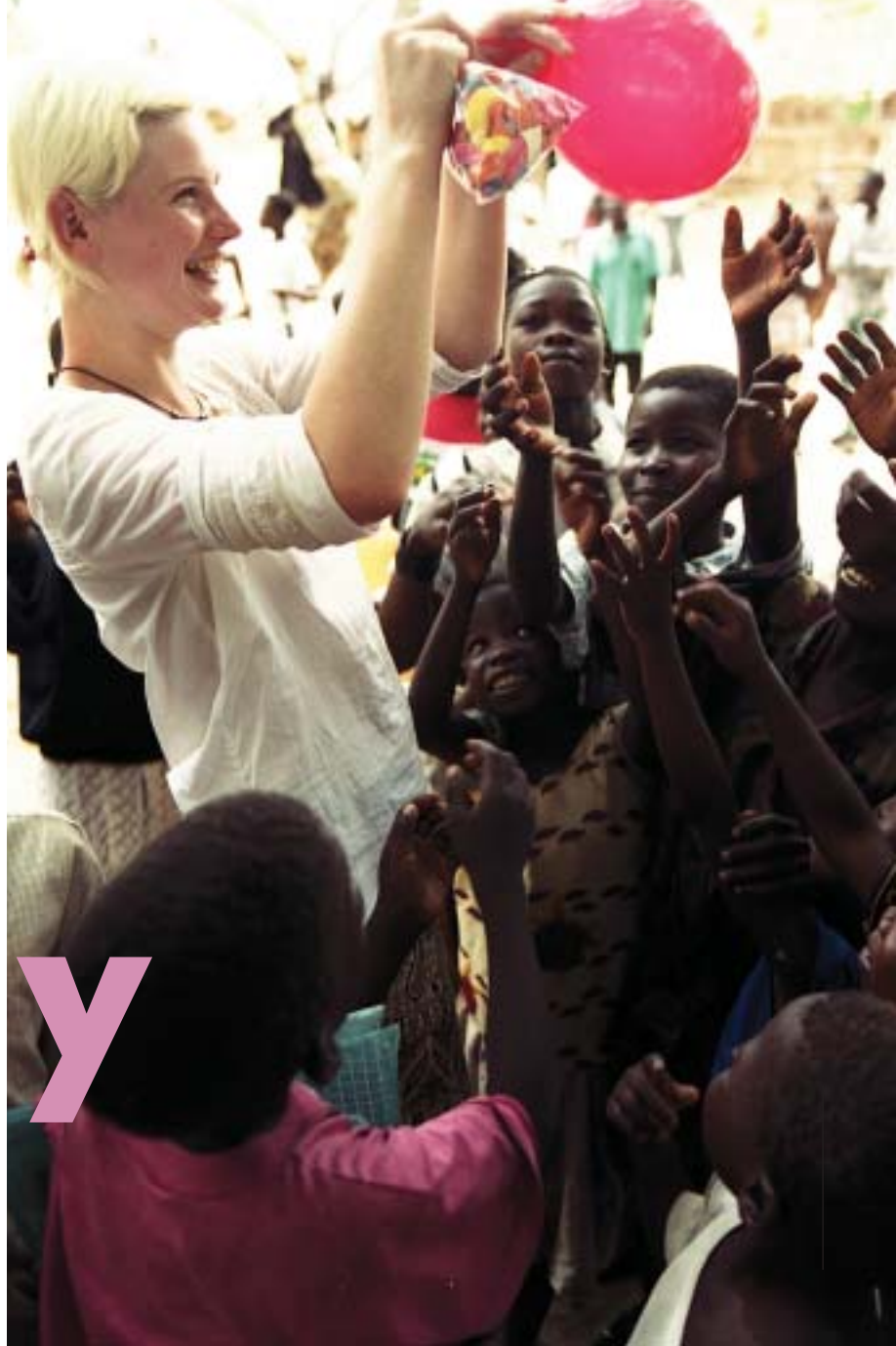


Jenny Richards, the winner of Channel 4 television's 'Model Behaviour' has been supporting World Vision's 24-hour Famine. Recently she visited Mozambique to see World Vision's work for herself. Here is her account of the trip.



Jenny's diary

Like many teenagers, I happily took part in World Vision's 24-hour Famine when I was 13. It seemed a fun thing to do and, of course, the issues we were trying to tackle were comfortingly remote. Now, six years later, I've had the rare privilege of re-visiting the 24-hour Famine, this time seeing for myself exactly what that day of hunger can achieve.

'What I found was a very positive and influential experience, with lots of great memories'

World Vision asked me to visit Mozambique with them, and I have to say I jumped at the chance. When we landed in Maputo, Mozambique's capital, I felt a pang of apprehension. We had a full week ahead of us and this was our first day – with a temperature touching 40 degrees!

We were soon on our way to visit Namacurra Area Development Programme (ADP), an hour's bumpy drive from Quelimane, Mozambique's second biggest town and our home for the next four days. Pulling up underneath a cashew nut tree I was struck by the sound of singing and wonderful smiling faces, mixed with real poverty. I realised that this trip was going to be an extremely moving experience.

The effects of poverty were graphically shown when I met Econonico, a boy of eight who looked

no more than two. He was severely malnourished and his sight was failing, but he was great on the drums. He became a very powerful image of the trip for me.

Our next stop was at a school which had been built with World Vision's help. When I saw the makeshift school where the villagers had previously studied, (hot, dark and certainly not ideal to learn in) I realised how much these people must want to educate themselves – often with the help of World Vision. It was great to see how sponsors' money is combined with the hard work and determination of the people who live in the ADP. It really does make a difference to people's lives, enabling them to get an education and attain a level of self sufficiency, which in turn gives them self esteem and self respect – two of life's most valuable assets.

The following day we visited a health clinic in Muiebele. Built in 2000, it provides 15,000 people



far left: **smiling faces as Jenny plays with the children of Namacurra**

left: **helping the nurses at the health clinic in Muiebele**

photos: Jason Buckner

in the surrounding area with basic health care. Before it existed, people were dying from simple illnesses such as diarrhoea and the resulting dehydration, which I found absolutely shocking. I remembered the number of times my own daughter Lacey has had something as elementary as diarrhoea.

I met some amazing people at the health clinic; it doesn't shut until the last person is cared for – which sometimes means never ending days of round the clock nursing for the three nurses, Lizet, Joel and Elizabeth.

Back in Quelimane we visited an HIV/AIDS voluntary counselling and testing centre for people who think they may have contracted HIV. It is used most often by sex workers and truck drivers. The objective is to reduce HIV/AIDS in pregnant woman aged 15 – 49. I was incredibly sad to hear that HIV/AIDS is still a very taboo subject in Mozambique and that people still thought you could catch it from kissing. I also found it astonishing that they were targeting children as young as 10 to teach them about HIV.

On our final day in the field, and still feeling subdued by the seemingly endless task of an

operation like the HIV/AIDS centre, but inspired by the energy and commitment of the people within it, we visited the Namange malaria project. This aims to teach people how to prevent malaria and the importance of using mosquito nets. These nets cost 60p to buy, the same as a day's wages.

When I was initially approached by World Vision to go to Mozambique, I was scared that it may be a depressing, sad experience and that I might suffer emotionally. I wondered how someone like me could help to alleviate such awful poverty and it was with great trepidation that I set out on the trip. What I actually found was a very positive and influential experience, with lots of great memories.

The most inspiring part of travelling with World Vision to Mozambique was the fact that I am now able to put faces and names to the appeal. I am glad that I was able to help in some small way.

facts

- **Namacurra ADP is located some 60 miles north of Quelimane in Mozambique's Zambezia Province**
- **Started in 1998, it was the first ADP in Mozambique**
- **Number of sponsored children in the project: 2,401 (plus 63 awaiting sponsors)**
- **Population within project area: 36,000**



Personal story

Mixed emotions on a visit to Zambia



Photos: Chris Young

And all she wanted was a pair of shoes

How would you react if you met your sponsored child for the first time? Press Association journalist **Natalie Walker** relives an unforgettable experience.

When I was first diagnosed with Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome two years ago, I thought nothing of it until my doctor told me it was likely to reduce the chances of my having children. Although being a mother had rarely crossed my mind, the news made me re-evaluate certain aspects of my life.

I was happily working as a journalist for a busy news agency and had neither the financial stability nor desire to settle down to have a family. Yet, when a friend told me about the child sponsorship scheme run by World Vision, I thought this might help me come to terms with my illness. I was right.

Since 2001, I have spent £20 a month sponsoring a girl, Ngawa Phiri, now aged 12, in Zambia. Knowing I was helping her to get an education and vital healthcare made me feel good – proud even.

World Vision sent me regular photos of Ngawa, my 'adopted' daughter, but this was not enough.

I needed to see this gorgeous African orphan who had captured my heart. I knew her mother had died of chronic pneumonia when she was aged just two and her father of malaria three years later. Her elder brother Christopher was left to look after Ngawa and her older sister, Nyondwa, 15, in their tiny village.

What surprised me was how nervous I felt during the five-hour drive from the capital Lusaka to Nyamphande, where Ngawa lives. Would she like me? Would I disappoint her or do anything to offend her? Question after question popped into my head.

As we drove into her tiny village a group of children ran towards us. There she was. She stood out from the crowd, as she was the only girl wearing a dress – her best dress and the only one in the whole village, as I later discovered.

I had been warned that Ngawa might be quite shy. She was not. Her gorgeous brown eyes shone like stars as she grinned and

stretched out her delicate hand to greet me. "Welcome Natalie," she beamed.

That moment was unforgettable. Here was the girl I had grown so fond of, yet had never even met. Through an interpreter she told me about her life. I sat awestruck at her honesty. She said she was very grateful for the gifts and letters I had sent.

Sponsorship, she said, had enabled her to go to school for the first time. Previously she had not been able to afford books, pens and a uniform. Ngawa asked about my family, lifestyle and job. I could not help feeling guilty as I described how I had a modern flat in Glasgow, a loving family, a good job and a fulfilling social life.

I asked her if she could have anything, what would it be. "A pair of shoes," she grinned. My heart sank. What was I doing taking pens, paper, bubbles and colourful wraps when all she needed was a sturdy pair of shoes to make her 10km walk to school and back more comfortable? I quickly got a

piece of paper and drew round her rough and swollen feet and promised to send her and her sister some shoes.

My friends would have been amazed to see two tears roll down my cheek. What was £20 a month to me? I just wish more people would help – there are at least 2,000 youngsters in this area who desperately need assistance.

In Ngawa's village I met four severely malnourished youngsters who were so sick their bellies were swollen and their hair had turned blonde.

Statistics of infant mortality in Zambia shot through my head. With one in eight children dying before their first birthday – it is six in every 1,000 in the UK – and





the life expectancy at just 38 years of age, I panicked. I wanted to do more to help my African girl and others like her.

Over the next six hours I helped Ngawa go about her daily chores. I watched as she went fishing – and caught nothing – in a filthy river near her village. The same stretch of water claimed 30 lives a few years ago in a cholera outbreak. Ngawa merrily cleaned pans and clothes in the river before cupping her hands to drink from stagnant water. That was the most heart-breaking sight of all.

World Vision plans to build a borehole in the area to give people clean water. That could not come quick enough, I thought. It is building a school nearby for 500

pupils and has also built a bridge that gives 5,000 people better access to a feeding centre for pregnant women, orphans and sick children.

Ngawa has been given a mosquito net and gets help to buy medicines when she needs them. The money I donate also helps to pay for monthly food supplies including maize, sugar and cooking oil, which Ngawa said made a big difference to her diet.

As our time together came to an end I felt an incredible sadness. The hours we had spent together felt like minutes. As dusk began to fall, I knew we would have to say our goodbyes.

I got Ngawa on her own with an interpreter and told her how

much I had enjoyed meeting her and her family. She seemed lost for words. "I will keep in touch and send you some shoes," I told her. "But will you come back and see me again?" she asked. I told her I hoped so.

As I got into our vehicle for the long journey back, I thought about the courageous child whose life I felt extremely lucky to be part of. I was delighted to have seen my African girl, but felt I needed to do more in the future to help her and others like her. †

To find out how you can sponsor a child, log on to www.worldvision.org.uk

the day I met my Ugandan pen pal

After 10 years of exchanging letters, freelance journalist Claire Bowman travelled to Africa for an emotional meeting with the girl she has sponsored.

When I first sponsored Florence 10 years ago, the possibility of meeting her seemed as remote as flying to the moon.

To me, Florence was the little girl from Uganda with whom I exchanged letters, birthday and Christmas cards and who, in the photographs I received, seemed to live in the kind of place frequented only by aid workers and missionaries. There was Florence with her brothers and sisters standing barefoot outside their tin-roofed home; there she was posing proudly for the camera in her canary yellow uniform in front of the village school.

In her letters, Florence told me about her life: that she liked English lessons but wasn't keen on maths; that her favourite pastimes were playing with her dolls and sweeping the backyard; her favourite food chicken and maize; and that it rained a lot. In return, I told her about my life, or at least as much as I could without confusing her (house moves and boy troubles, I reasoned, being of limited interest to an eight-year-old girl in a developing country).

What I had not expected was



that a simple philanthropic desire to do some kind of good, however small, could work in reverse. Even now I can recall the warm feeling I had when, after a bad day at work, I would arrive home to find that familiar pale-blue airmail envelope on my doormat, with its sweet words of gratitude for the ribbons or coloured pencils that I had sent. They were humbling and soothing at the same time.

And then I got the chance

Above: The first meeting – Claire Bowman finally meets her Ugandan pen pal Florence and her newborn daughter, Angel. Florence's village is situated only a few miles away from Kampala (right), the capital of Uganda.

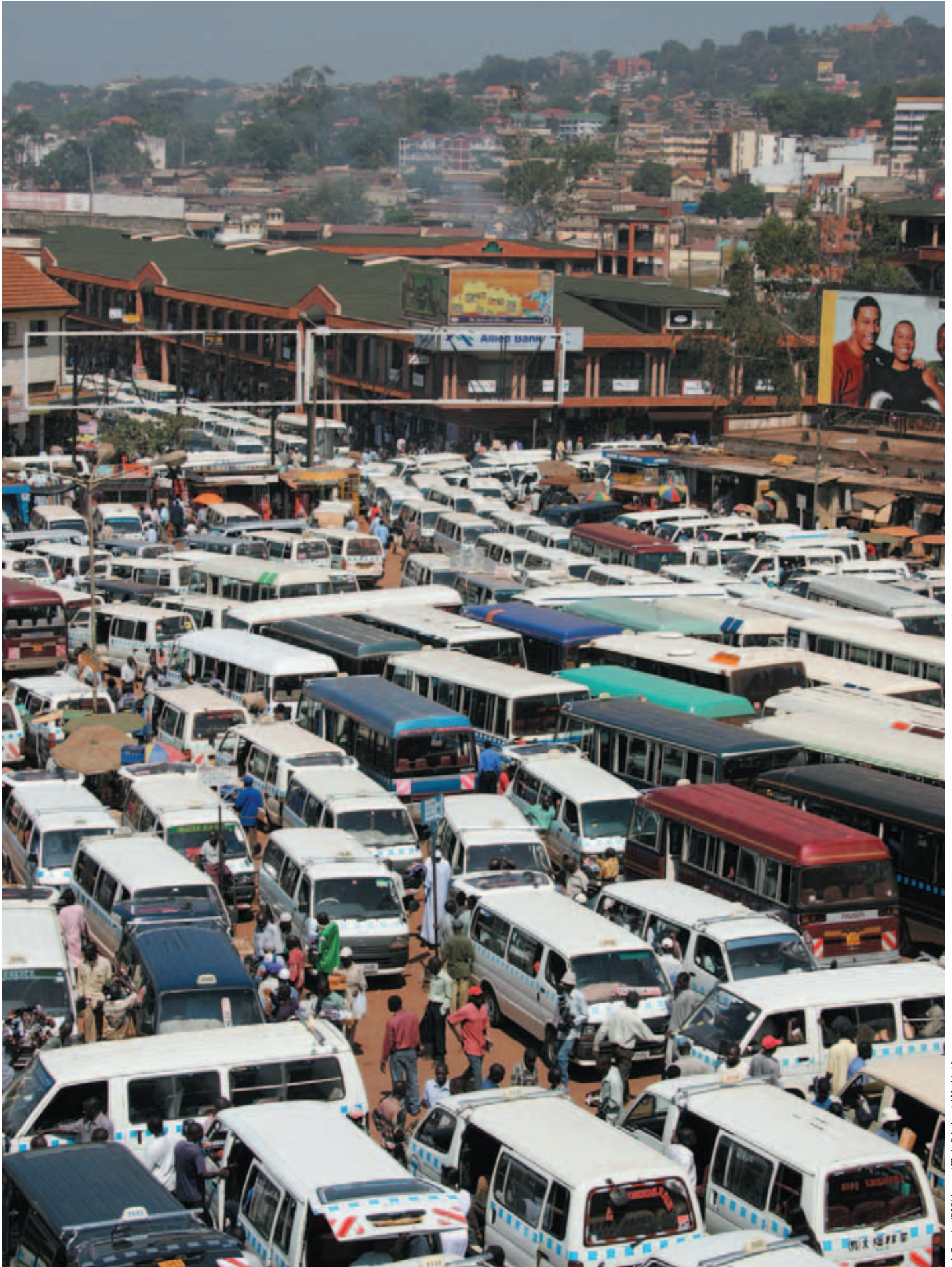
to visit Florence. For me, it was the culmination of years of correspondence, an opportunity to meet the little Ugandan pen pal whose progress I had charted as closely as any godchild. Though by now Florence wasn't so little; she was 18 with a baby, a three-week-old daughter called Angel.

Touching down at Entebbe airport I experienced the same flurry of nerves usually reserved for exams. Even the name Entebbe conjured up images of hijackers and the Israeli commando raid in 1976. What had I let myself in for? Would I be ambushed by machete-wielding rebels? Would I expire in the heat? Years of oppression under Idi Amin, as well as brutality at the hands of the Lord's Resistance Army in the

Planning a visit?

Do you want to visit your sponsored child? If you do then call World Vision's sponsor visit specialist on 01908 244442.

Please note that visits to sponsored children have to be arranged through World Vision.



Rob Bowden/EASH-Images/Chris Fairclough/Worldwide



north of the country – and the HIV pandemic – have taken their toll on its image.

But throughout my week in southern Uganda I never felt anything other than safe. Nor could I have been more struck by the friendliness of its people, from the hawkers selling roasted maize cobs and deep-fried grasshoppers on the streets of Kampala to the smiling faces of the children racing from their mud huts to greet the “muzungu” (white person) and the young men more interested to know my thoughts about Arsenal than to hassle me for money.

As for the sweltering heat – that never materialised either. Despite being on the equator, southern Uganda is one of the most

temperate countries in Africa, rarely rising above a comfortable 28°C.

Winston Churchill described Uganda as the “Pearl of Africa” and it is hard to take issue with that. It is beautiful – a lush, fertile landscape of rolling hills, tea and banana plantations, wetlands and, of course, Lake Victoria, vast and dazzling, the size of Switzerland. One of the highlights of my trip was a thrilling motor-boat trip across the water to Bulago island and what looked like paradise – a jetty leading up to a white sand beach with a sugar-pink adobe hotel and turquoise thatched cottages – and hippos to provide an early-morning wake up call.

Ask any adrenalin junkie and they’ll tell you that Uganda is also the place to go whitewater rafting

Above: Hippos gave Claire an early-morning wake-up call during her trip to Bulago island. Above right: Claire cuddles baby Angel.

on the Nile and bungee jumping. For wildlife aficionados there are six new national parks with mountain gorillas, chimpanzees, leopards, the whole safari experience; for bird-watchers, the splendour of 1,000 species of exotic birdlife.

For me, though, no amount of wildlife could compare with the experience of meeting Florence. After a dusty one-hour Jeep drive from Kampala, we arrived at her home.

When it came down to it, I realised that I was unprepared for the almost biblical scene that greeted us: Florence’s mother stoking a fire in the dusty front yard; her husband’s second wife (he has three) washing clothes in a battered tin bath, her baby Isaac strapped to



© A. van Zandbergen/AfrIPics.com



There were no dramatic embraces, no Hollywood-style denouement. But there was a tacit understanding of a journey shared, a friendship forged.

her back; chickens pecking at the parched, red earth.

It was like stepping into the pages of a *National Geographic* feature.

And then I spotted Florence. Of course she had grown since I had last received a photograph of her, aged 13, but there was no mistaking her shy smile. Dressed in a stripy shirt, blue skirt and flip-flops, she appeared to be holding a bundle of pink cotton. When I pushed back the fabric I saw Angel, her newborn daughter.

It is a strange feeling to meet someone that you have corresponded with for a decade, even stranger when that person is from another continent so far removed from ours. There were no dramatic embraces, no Hollywood-

style denouement. But there was a tacit understanding of a journey shared, a friendship forged.

Florence gave me her baby to hold and we began communicating through the interpreter, our Ugandan driver Sam, assisted by Florence's mother. In the tradition of mothers the world over, she offered us a cup of tea within minutes of arriving, and invited us to sit on the low, child-sized stools in the shade of a mango tree. A pan of milky tea was heated on the fire, a tray hastily produced, set with a plate of biscuits and her best floral china. After tea, Florence and her mother gave us a guided tour of the garden, the plot of land behind their home on which the family grew yams, maize, sweet potato, plantains

Did you know?

Uganda...

...covers 236,040 square kilometres, which is slightly smaller than the UK (244,820 square kilometres).

...has a population of over 27 million people (UK: 60 million)

...has a life expectancy at birth of 52 years (UK: 78 years)

...is successfully fighting HIV and AIDS, reducing the number of people living with HIV and AIDS from 9.51% of the population in 1997 to 4.1% in 2003.

World Vision UK has been working with World Vision Uganda since 1990.

Currently, World Vision UK is supporting programmes in northern Uganda and four area development programmes across Uganda: Lwamata, Kati, Kibigi Mulagi and Rukiga.

To sponsor a child in Uganda call World Vision on 0800 50 10 10.

and cassava. And then it was time for me to produce the carrier bag that had crossed continents – an assortment of toys, pens, sweets, stickers, books and baby clothes. “An African baby for an African baby,” laughed Sam, pulling out a black doll for Angel, and jiggling it before her.

As we were about to leave, Florence disappeared into her house, only to emerge minutes later with the first photograph that I had sent her – a grubby, dog-eared snapshot of me in my early twenties, barely recognisable even to myself. It seemed like a lifetime ago, and it seemed like only yesterday.

This article was first published in The Times, Saturday December 24, 2005.