



From Andy Groome in the Eastern Cape South Africa

Dear Friends,

I have been out here now for over seven months. I want to tell you about my time here, and I feel it is my responsibility to tell you what it is like here.

It was always going to be a difficult task for me to write this newsletter, as it not only goes out to many in the UK, but to other parts of the world, including people many of whom live in the Eastern Cape.

Where the streets have no name

I want to start by trying to paint a picture in your mind. Wherever you are sitting I want you to imagine this.

In your mind I want you to walk into your kitchen. Imagine no fridge or microwave, imagine no dishwasher and no washing machine, you do all your washing by hand. Imagine no cooker and oven. Imagine cooking on an open fire, or if you are lucky a paraffin stove. You also need to grind all your own crops. Imagine no sink, in fact imagine no running water in your house at all, imagine you have to collect it from a river or if you are lucky from a tap in the location. As you walk into your living room, you notice there is no sofa or armchairs to relax in, there is no TV, and there is no carpet, imagine it is a hard mud floor. Your children are happily playing, not with toys, there are none, just playing together or with old broken bits and pieces. (See picture of children showing Andy their toys).



Now you are in your bedroom. There may be an old bed that you have to share, but you may just find a foam mattress or just a straw mat on the floor. There is also a bowl in the room that you will wash yourself in when you wake, as there is no bathroom in this house. Imagine winter feels cold and there is no heating except maybe an open fire in the middle of the room, but you



need wood for the fire, and you have a three or four hour walk to collect it, so that you can cook and keep warm. (See picture of Ncumisa and children return from collecting firewood). Imagine no lights or light switches, just candles. In fact imagine no electricity. Imagine no toilet, but a deep hole in your garden with a little tin shack over it. Imagine being a child waking up every morning and there being no mum or no dad, or both, as they have died and are buried in the garden. Imagine you have a member of your family who is very sick lying on the floor, but you cannot afford the

£14/R150/US \$28 to see a doctor, or £3/R30/US \$6 to go to hospital, or even £1/R10/US \$2 for the journey to visit the local free clinic. Imagine no ambulance will come when you need one and the hospital is poorly equipped if you ever get there anyway.

Imagine all of this in your little mud hut. Well, for many of you who are reading this I know that you won't have to imagine, as this is a daily reality. I am not saying that everybody in the Eastern Cape endures all of these things, as some families live comfortable lives, while others are wealthy. But many do, and a lot of these things are all very common. It is certainly not common in the U.K and most countries in the west, although I am well aware we do have a lot of problems that also need addressing. And I am certainly not saying that I think it is wrong to have a nice house and things.

Life is hard.

In the six months I have been here I have turned from visitor to friend. For many of my friends here life is hard, with no hope of employment, but with schools full of children keen to excel, which often lack teachers, practical lessons and a shortage of everything except a will to do well. Still many thousands of children have no opportunity of schooling for many different reasons.

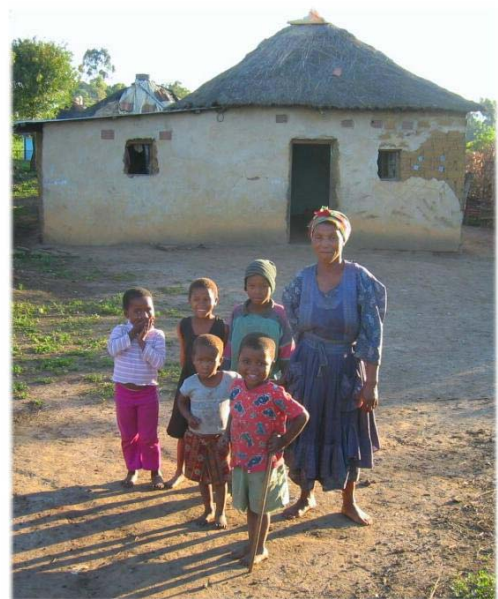
Trying to understand.

Since my arrival here I have often tried to understand why the situation is so bad, as it is in many other parts of the world. But if we could understand some of the faults, we may stand half a chance of solving some of the problems. Although the longer I am here and the more people I listen and talk to here and at home the more chance there is of understanding this persisting global problem.

Every so often I think to myself, if this was my home I would do things in a much different way, I would be much better than they are. But it's just not true. I would have been born into the same deprived economy and situation and I would be lacking all the same opportunities as my friends around me are. It could have been me.

A man, his wife and children.

I watched our friend Alfred die in the local hospital. He died a painful death of T.B. I did not recognise him, as his skeleton like body lay in the bed, where he received very basic treatment. I tried to feed him water with a teaspoon. He was there a week, eventually dying on a Saturday afternoon on his own. His wife heard of his death two days later as she could not afford the £1/R10/US \$2 fare to visit him every day. His widow Nowinile is left with three young boys and two girls. She works part time on the local plantation picking tea. There was no ambulance to take Alfred to hospital when his young children found him face down in his field. *(This picture shows Nowinile and three of her children with two friends outside their home in happier times when Alfred was still alive).*



“The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever” Isaiah ch 40 v 8.

On our visits to people's homes I have seen many sick people. Many have now passed away. Sometimes they are lying on a small mattress on the mud floor, and when the rains come as they often do here, the water drips through the old broken thatched roof onto the floor. It leaves me feeling very helpless, often fighting back my tears. Mostly unable to help in any way at all, and when I can help, having to decide who to help and who to leave. I want to somehow carry all my friends to safety; after all I am the white man from England. I should be able to do something. But mostly I have now just become a part of what is going on around me, sharing the grief of

what is happening. Many things that I once perceived as normality have disappeared into my past, often leaving me feeling desperate.

In another area nearer Durban a friend and myself accompanied another young friend to the funeral directors. She had just learnt that she was HIV positive, we all sat down in the undertakers office to open a basic insurance policy to help cover her eventual funeral.

Where is my hope? Well my hope is in the Lord even more now than ever before in my life. And this is what I am seeing in many people around me. They don't have the doctors, the health care or the money. But they call out to the Lord.

Jesus says in the bible "It is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven," Matthew Ch 19 v 23, and I can see why. Most of the time in the UK we are surrounded by all we need. We think there is no need of God. But many people I see here are entering the kingdom of God on a daily basis. They are close to him. Our wealth in the West could keep us apart from God if we allow it, but a poor man by his situation is better placed to see the need of God.

Forgiveness.

Funerals have kept to a steady rate; I don't attend all of them though. During one month it got me quite down. I have lost count of how many I have attended. On Boxing Day we buried two people in one family, a woman in her thirties and a twenty-two year old boy who had been brutally killed. The man of the family, also a friend who found the boys body spoke at the funeral. I learned a lot from his words. He spoke of forgiveness not revenge, and spoke of what Jesus taught in the Bible. I ended up helping to carry the young woman's coffin to her grave in the garden next to her home, trying to hold my emotions back as young children mourned next to me. How could I be the same person after my stay here? I often say God why have you sent me here, what can I do? But I am getting qualified in the real conditions and needs of people here and similarly around the world.

Killer Wave.

South Africa is a beautiful country; some of the scenery is stunning. You can drive through the Eastern Cape taking in some breathtaking views, thinking what a beautiful village that would be to live in.

(Picture shows some of the huts and scenery).

But until you walk into people's lives and share time with them, you cannot see the daily struggle they have to cope with. They may not have the devastating horror of a tsunami wave hitting their beaches. But there are smaller waves lapping at the shores of their lives, slowly but surely eroding their existence. And there is a larger invisible wave travelling around our planet, and it's not a tsunami, but it poses very real dangers. It's in the form of HIV/AIDS tearing families, communities and countries apart. Wreaking just as much havoc, if not more than the recent tsunami in the Indian Ocean. One of the world's most famous men in modern times lives in this area. A few weeks ago Nelson Mandela's own son Makgatho Mandela, a fifty-four year old attorney, died of the disease. The situation so desperate now that the famous father went public on the cause of his son's death, stressing that it was good to be open about HIV/AIDS.



It is not a disease for somebody else or just poor people in third world countries. It's real, and it's in your town near you, just waiting to affect you and your family. It's hard to imagine how bad it can be until you experience the effects it leaves. There are literally millions of people infected with HIV in South Africa alone.

Together we are changing lives.

So I have made many good friends here in the Eastern Cape and South Africa. People I will never forget, and I have been able to help many through your continual giving, which I am very grateful for. I want to thank you all and I will try to tell you all how your money has been spent. Obviously the need would appear endless and I believe that big projects in the community are the best way, for so many reasons, but we can completely change people's lives in a big way with a relatively small amount of money. The £36/R400/US \$67 that was given to Alfred's widow will feed the family for approximately three to four weeks.

Electrical work.

After my electrical tools were finally released from the port, I have been able to help people in their homes, making repairs to unsafe circuits, modifying and making additions, which has all been gratefully received.

Opening of the complex.

At Easter we are having the official opening of the new church, house and workshops, which has been built through South Hill Church in Hemel Hempstead. We are all looking forward to a good time with our guests.

Thank you.

I want to thank all of you that have written and been in touch. It has been very nice to hear from you all. And also to thank all of you that are praying for us here. Thank you to my support group, thank you to my family, and for also putting this together, and finally thank you to my church Luton Christian Fellowship for their support, prayer and for their help in printing this newsletter.

Orphaned family.

So as we draw near to the end I have asked Siyabonga Mcunukelwa to give us a few words about how things are working out for him and his family. You may remember from my last newsletter that his parents have both died. Leaving Siyabonga with his two twelve-year-old twin brothers Bheki and Zoli and his sister Nozibusiso who is fifteen. Back in September you enabled me to finance a small chicken business and money for food to eat as the business matures. This was to a cost of £259/R2950/US \$484. We did this to try and support him and his orphaned family.

Hope for the future.

Dear Friends,

My name is Siyabonga Mcunukelwa I am so pleased of what has happened to me. Although Andy and I didn't know each other, after he had seen my situation it was a blessing of what happened. Life was hard when my mother was alive, but when she passed away it got even worse. It was just my two little brothers, my sister and myself; my mum was not there to ask anything. I used to look for jobs, but could only find a few. I used to wonder what we were going to do. I used to go and ask my grandmother for food, she used to share with us the little she had, it was hard. But when Andy helped start the chicken business things changed. I was soon able to open a small shop in one of my rooms selling food provisions. With the profit I planted potatoes, spinach, maize and cabbage, which now feeds us and I also sell in my shop. So now I can provide for my brothers and my sister. Now they are like other children at school, if they need a pen or book, I am able to provide. I want to thank you all for what you have done through Andy. May God bless you and your families.

A plot in the village.

Also after some careful thought and prayer, I decided it was important to offer the funds to secure a plot of land in Siyabonga's village Ntlamvukazi, that would hopefully provide a site for a new church building at some stage in the future, with the thought that it would also serve some real practical needs in the village. This is still in it's early stages of negotiation and will cost around £44/R500/US \$85. The building project would be another step in the future for whoever God chooses to build it. So on that happier note, until my next letter,

Goodbye and God Bless

Andy Groome

