

QHOLAQHOE MOUNTAIN CONNECTIONS



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2014 News from Lesotho

Our four QMC board members, Lynn Minderman, Pic Schade, Debbi Hitchings and Linda Gorham, have recently returned from our yearly trip to Qholaqhoe, Lesotho. We make this trip every year at our own expense because we feel it important to be able to talk and to share the work underway in Likoting Orphan Village and at Qholaqhoe High School. There is always joy seeing old friends, meeting new ones, and working together. Our commitment is to help with projects that are requested, designed and maintained by Basotho people. Our goal is for these projects, involving food, water and education, to become sustainable and continue to improve the lives of people we have come to know and trust. After five years, there is much progress and a need for continued support.

Daily life is difficult (we might think it impossible) in rural Lesotho what with no running water, no electricity, impassable roads, rocky mountainous terrain, cold, snowy winters, lack of medical care and few job opportunities. However, in the stories that follow, the cultural strength, the resilience and the determination of the Basotho people to face these obstacles with endurance, spirit and hope, is evident. Our time with our Basotho friends never fails to remind us of our original good fortune just to be born where we were.

The Orphan Garden



Me Mampho, Me Mamotloang, Lebohong, Liphapang, and Itabile with their new sign.

Me Mampho, one of the grandmothers who started the Likoting orphan garden in 2005, greeted us with sobs and tears. She is a tall, beautiful, woman who has always been composed and confident, so to see her obviously distraught was upsetting. The language barrier has always been an issue, as we speak limited Sesotho and the grandmothers in Likoting speak no English. We wanted to know immediately why she was crying and had a sickening feeling that something terrible had happened. Through a tombstone in the field we learned that Me Mampho's husband had died at Christmastime. Ntate Moukuinini was a subsistence farmer, and cared for the Jersey cows that QMC purchased so that the youngest orphans could have milk. He was a small, fragile looking man who was easy

to spot on the mountainsides when he was herding his cattle because he always wore a bright yellow raincoat. He had been suffering with a persistent infection on his hand for nearly a year. During our previous trip a year ago, we had driven him to the nearest hospital for treatment, saving him from the five hour walk he had been

making for several months, staying in people's rondavels along the way or spending the night on the hospital grounds, as is common. Ultimately, it was the infection, or the ineffective treatment of it, that caused his death.

Their son, Mpho, an only child, having recently graduated from National University of Lesotho and more recently married, returned to his village to live with his mother. Though he has dreams of his own life, he is determined, as is common in Basotho culture, to "farm here, at home, with my mother." Well educated in agriculture, Mpho is now researching another sustainable food project. He will soon send QMC a proposal for raising rabbits for meat, adding a badly needed source of protein to the 175 orphans' diet.

The large vegetable garden for which the Likoting Orphan Village is known is not yielding its usual produce due to two planting failures. The garden, with its raised beds and chicken manure fertilized rows of pumpkins, corn, peas, beets and carrots, washed away in torrential early spring rains. A second planting was severely stunted by a late spring cold spell with heavy snow. There will be serious food shortages and hunger in the next winter months. QMC provides money for a monthly supply of maize meal for the orphans, as well as dairy meal and hay for the milk producing Jersey cows. One hundred additional mature laying hens have been purchased through a Maine District Rotary International grant. The children will have eggs, milk, and papa (corn meal) throughout the coming winter even if the garden is a total failure.

Qholaqhoe High School

Qholaqhoe High School is a long walk through family maize fields from Likoting Orphan Village. Along the way, men plow washed out fields with oxen, families join in together to hoe their maize fields, with babies secured tightly with blankets onto their mother's backs, everywhere people working together. When we arrive at the high school, students are working in the school vegetable garden and there is a busy, purposeful sense of energy on the school grounds. QMC is sponsoring 56 scholarship students this year. We were anxious to greet the children who have been with us for many years and to meet our 18 new students. It is an exciting time, as we catch up with their hopes and dreams, along with the realities of their lives, and meet their parents and families.



Neo in front of his home.

We were relieved to see one of our most promising students, Neo. We learned last year from Peace Corps Volunteer and maths teacher, Kevin Koryto, that he had been deserted by his grandfather and mother and was living alone, without food and warm clothing for the winter. He was near starving, often lacking the strength to make the daily 2 hour walk to school and then back to his rondavel. Neo is a strong academic student and had earned second place in a national science fair last year despite his living circumstance. We were worried, as was his principal Andreas, that during the summer he would attend "initiation school" high in the

mountains. When boys go to "initiation school" they stay away for three months and, too often, do not return to school, having been drawn into the ancient rituals and traditions of their clan.

So, it was such a relief to be greeted by Neo's smile when we arrived at school. His schooling is going very well and he is happy to be receiving food from the QMC Emergency Food Fund. We were relieved, even glad, to hear from Neo that the initiation school had not only provided him with food, but that he had met several men there from a neighboring village who were now looking after him and who encouraged him to return to school.

We first met Arabang three years ago when she was in her first year at Qholaqhoe High School. She and her family were extremely happy with her scholarship because, without it, she would not have been able to attend school. She had a strong sense of herself and an outgoing personality. She was happy to be living with her

grandmother during the school year because it saved her the daily three-hour walk from her home village to school and back.

Arabang was raped and became pregnant soon after she began high school that fall. This, unfortunately, is common in Lesotho, and although there are now laws against rape, seldom are men or boys arrested or brought to trial for their crime. Girls cannot attend school when they are pregnant, so Arabang had to miss the second half of her first high school year, a situation that would lead to most young girls leaving school permanently. But, in this case, Arabang's father sent his oldest son to school for her! He sat in on her classes, took notes for her, carried her books and lessons home for her and returned her completed schoolwork to her teachers. Because of her family's support, Arabang was able to sit for her final exams at the end of her first school year. She performed well on those exams and returned to school the fall. Her mother is raising her little girl. Last year, I spoke with Arabang's father about the wonderful understanding support given by the family. He spoke quietly, saying "She is my daughter; I love her." We sent word to her family that her sponsor definitely wanted to continue supporting her in school.

Arabang continued to do well in her second year and this year she has her smile, her happiness, and her spirit back. Her father, a tall, dignified man who supports his family by herding cattle in the mountains, addressed the parents and students during our annual parent meeting, to say how much he loved and was proud of his daughter, and how he appreciated that the school had supported her. His determination to see his children educated was powerful and it was hard for us to not to shed tears as he spoke.



Arabang and her father, Ntate Mohlolo



Tiisetsang, age 17

Tiisetsang, although he has always been a shy, quiet child, was clearly sad. He has been our scholarship student for five years, this year entering his last year in high school. His sponsor in California, Theresa, has a close relationship with him through their letters; he often sends her poems and stories he has written. We visited his home last year where we were warmly greeted by his father, and invited inside a small thatched roof rondavel made of rocks, dung and mud. There is one door, no windows, no furniture save a single mattress on the floor. Tiisetsang told us that his grandmother and mother had both died a few months before we arrived. He and his father were alone. He helps his father herd a neighbor's cattle to the mountains in the morning before school, and joins him again after school to bring the cattle home for the night. His father came to our parent meeting and said that it was important for Tiisetsang to finish high school. They receive food from the Emergency Food Fund, Tiisetsang has a winter coat on the way, and he has a school uniform and shoes. The many people sending support and encouragement want him to make a better life through his education.

His most recent letter to Theresa is on the following page.

QMC greatly appreciates the support of our many donors. We are happy, and anxious, to provide further information and would welcome the opportunity to share a slide and video presentation of Qholaqhoe High School and Likoting Orphan Village with any interested group. Thank you and please feel free to contact any of us, as we would enjoy talking with you.

Lynn, Pic, Linda and Debbi

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February 2010

Dear Theresa Maiseu

I am very excited to write this letter to you as a first letter this year. I hope you are still excited with your family.

Firstly I would like you to tell you what it is going on at school. Last year I was doing Form D and this year I am doing form E. This year is my last year at high school. Last year I managed to obtain positions 3 and 4 now this year I am in form E and I promise you that I am going to work hard like in last year.

This year the school still starts at 07:00 and end at 03:20 afternoon. After school from 04:00 PM until 06:00 PM we study are discussing. We have some groups in our class so we remain at school at discuss because sometimes we may not understand well in class so we are able to ask each other.

Again at school we have the YOUTH GROUP and I have joined it. In the youth group we are talking about things that challenge us as young people

such as being HIV positive. Again we are taught that we should be self confident.

Again what I would like to tell you is that I would like to be a teacher when I finish my studies. I want to help other people so that they can have bright future.

Again I am very sorry to tell you that during June last year I have lost my grandmother. After my grandmother's funeral my mother get sick and she was still going in the 1st check up every two weeks then comes the time that my father realize that she is very ill. He hired a van to take her to hospital and she took three weeks in the hospital. We were still going there to see her with my sister and my father. During the 28 September my father went there alone and unfortunately my mother was no longer alive.

When my father told me, I was not believing. One thing that I think it make my mother sick is the death of her mother because she loved her very much. Now I have believed that she has gone. With this words I would like to say thanks.

Hope you still going so well with your family. May God bless you and your family.

Your loving student
Tsetsang Thupane.

Highlights of our work in February 2014

Qholaqhoe High School

- We met with each student, visited the homes of eight students, and held a parent/guardian meeting with over 50 in attendance.
- We heightened our expectations for student performance, making it clear to the students and their parents that if they attend school regularly and do well academically, the scholarship support will continue until they graduate. However, if a child fails for two semesters, he or she will be released from the scholarship so that another child may be given an opportunity.
- We gave four donated laptop computers to promising college students who have graduated from QHS. Two are current students at National University of Lesotho, and two, who graduated last year with high marks, are seeking help with a Manpower grant in order to attend the Lesotho College of Education. They were thrilled with the computers that will help them tremendously with their studies.
- The Emergency Food Fund, managed by a high school teacher, will track hungry students and purchase food supplies to be delivered privately to the homes.
- Uniform items were purchased for over 90 students, the identification of needy students, the sizing and distribution handled sensitively by another teacher.
- Science teachers have submitted a well-researched, thorough proposal for an adequate classroom/laboratory. We met with the contractor responsible for refurbishing the building, the teachers, the administrators and a board member and will consider seeking help with funding. Students have won numerous countrywide science fairs for their projects and have done so without science equipment, hands on materials, running water or electricity. The science curriculum and the science exams are all focused on hands-on learning, but at QHS, the instruction remains rote because of the lack of proper teaching materials.



Form D and E Students



The current science lab.

Likoting Orphan Village

- The original project of a gravity fed water storage tank, designed and built by the grandmothers and villagers, continues to work well after six years. There is adequate water for the vegetable garden year round.
- QMC provided vegetable seeds for the upcoming spring planting, thanks in large part to a donation by Seeds for Peace in Saratoga Springs, New York. The grandmothers focus on high protein foods such as kale, spinach, pumpkin, squashes, swiss chard, beets, and those that can be planted in the cool third planting season, such as root vegetables.
- The original laying hen project is now sustainable. The older laying hens were sold for meat and young chicks were purchased. These new chicks will allow for reproduction, resulting in meat as well as eggs. Thanks to a Rotary International Grant, 100 new laying hens were purchased, along with feed and medicine for one year. This will help feed the orphans and grandmothers, who have now increased to over 175, from 140 last year. The goal is to have both chicken projects sustainable at the end of 2014.
- The original Jersey milk cow has given birth to two heifers, one of which died a few months ago. She had a disease and was buried. The other two remain healthy and a new calf is due very soon. The milk is given to the youngest orphans and babies. It is the goal to eventually have extra milk to sell. In the meantime we continue to fund hay, dairy meal, and artificial insemination services from the Lesotho Agriculture Department.
- The new kitchen building is working well and allowing the grandmothers and older orphan girls to be able to cook in rain and snow and not travel long distances to find wood or dung for fuel. This will be our last year to provide funding for propane, as the extra chicken eggs and meat will be sold for fuel.
- The new emergency shelter is also a great help, and no longer do children need to sleep on the floor of the kitchen building. This home was built with a grant funded by Soroptimists International, to give children who arrive at the village, a place to stay while a permanent home in a local village is found. It is the goal of the grandmothers and the local chiefs to keep children within the protection of village life. Sometimes children live alone, sometimes with extended family or friends, but always they are safe and looked after.

