

Guide to the Holidays



Project Wellness doing well, digging wells

By Colleen Flanagan

Every child in George Klassen's two orphan care centers in Malawi has an unbelievable story to tell.

One story that sticks in his memory is of a boy whose mother died shortly after giving birth to him.

This would have been the mother's third child, her two older sons having already passed away.

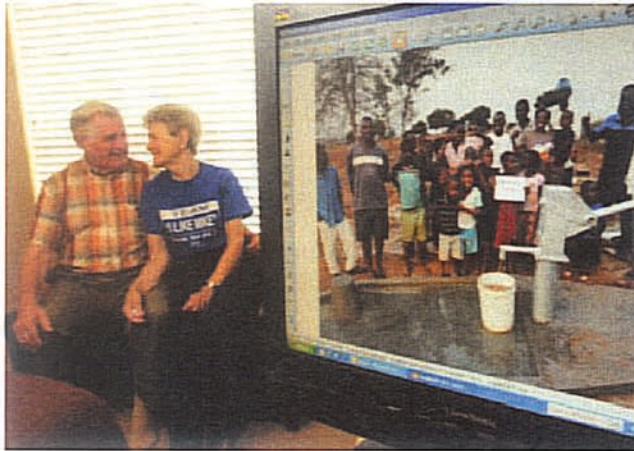
She was told by doctors that unless she had a cesarian section, she wouldn't make it through the birth.

"So, she had to come to the hospital. They opened her up, took him out and forgot the gauze inside," explained Klassen. "Three days later they opened her up, took the gauze out and left the scissors inside. And she died."

By the time the little boy arrived at Klassen's orphan care centre, he was already five-years-old, but only looked two or three.

Everybody would pick him up and hold him.

"When people from Maple Ridge came along and I said



Contributed

George and Sheila Klassen help the children of Malawi.

he's already five, they said, 'Really?'"

Klassen is the president of Project Wellness, a division of Amazon Evangelism Society, a non-profit charitable organization. Its goal is to provide for the needs of orphaned children in Africa.

Since 2006, Klassen and his wife Sheila have found themselves in Malawi building wells and helping children.

Malawi is a small landlocked country in southeast Africa with a population of

more than 13 million people.

It is one of the world's least developed countries.

HIV/AIDS is the leading cause of death amongst adults in the country.

Life expectancy is 54 years.

According to UNICEF, the estimated number of people of all ages living with HIV in 2009 was 920,000, with 650,000 children left orphaned because of the disease.

This means the need is greater than ever for Klassen,

who returns to the country three times a year.

Klassen takes care of two orphan care centers, one in Chinyamula and the other in Kasali.

In April, Klassen was feeding up to 300 children twice a day at the centers and also providing for their clothing and comfort.

Orphan care centers are different in Africa than in other parts of the world. In Africa, the children don't stay there at night.

"That's because they don't want to institutionalize the children to grow up to have that feeling, that they were by themselves," said Klassen,

Children come to the care centre in the morning and are fed porridge. Those who are of age go to school, while the others remain at the centre, where they receive early training that they wouldn't otherwise get in a home.

School children return to the centre in the afternoons, when they will receive their dinner. But at night, they go to house parents – a distant uncle, an aunt or a great grandmother.

In addition to the two care centers, Klassen has also built a school that is used to educate 700 children and provide meals for 130.

Klassen has also been busy drilling water wells, a total of 23 to date, four of those this year alone.

"Sometimes they have to travel as much as four kilometers to go for water. They carry it on their heads," said Klassen.

"It's a funny thing. We have to drill where the water is. The next time we come back the huts are around that well. They move," he said.

To build one well costs \$5,000.

Next year, Klassen is hoping to be able to build 10 wells during one visit. He has a good drilling company that he uses in Malawi that has recently bought an extra rig.

Klassen returns to Malawi every April to build the wells because it is the dry season and the water table is low. This means that they will drill deep enough to be able to have a functioning well all year.

Every trip to Malawi Klas-

sen always provides for the orphaned children with food, educational materials and gifts.

One his last trip, from Aug. 2 to Sept. 9, he brought donated soccer balls and jerseys.

One year, Klassen and his wife Sheila brought blankets for the children.

Sheila chuckles, thinking back to the day they handed them out.

"They were very happy because they had a potato sack," she said. "When they got these blankets, they went a little crazy."

George Klassen left for Malawi again on Nov. 3. This trip was mainly to feed the children and fill up the stock room with enough food to last until April.

Klassen is always looking for donations. With no paid staff, all donations go directly to helping the children of Malawi.

"It's a very big responsibility," said Klassen. "I am always wondering did I do enough with the dollar I got."

• To donate contact George Klassen at 604-467-8085 or email him at amazon2@shaw.ca or visit the website at www.projectwellness.ca.

Tax receipts given for donations over \$50. dollars.