



Children of Fire

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Newsletter No. 4 2008

All I want for Christmas ...is a full head of hair...

Top left: Little and large, our two Samkelos together.



All I want for Christmas is a full head of hair. Zenette van Wyk aged 10, won't get that. But she could take the next step on a six month surgical road, if a kind plastic surgeon could pop another tissue expander beneath her scalp. These imported medical balloons now costing about R3500 each (depending on the exchange rate), make all the difference between being the bald or the beautiful.

Zenette's not sure who her Dad is, her Mum died long ago and she then became a Children of Fire child. Taken under the wing of the burns charity, over several years it has helped to straighten her arm, straighten her hand, improve her neck, improve her hairline and alter her foot. The charity even found her and her cousin a foster mum, Nolwandle, who is now the loving anchor to Zenette's life.

She was a beautiful girl in the beginning but only recently has she started to realise it.

All the same, she wants hair all across her scalp so that she can be a real girly girl and have extensions, and "relax" it, and try every hairstyle that a young South African lady should be able to try.

Zenette's had one expander already, and the injections can take months before the "balloon" has stretched the hair-bearing skin enough to move it into place. It's a little like being pregnant on one's head. The skin has to give and give.

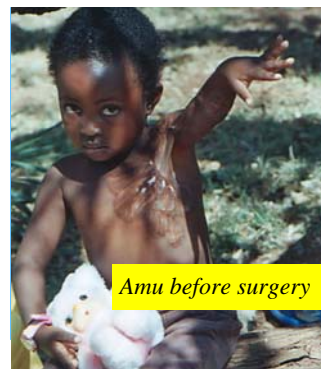
Faces and hands are areas commonly scarred in burns survivors. And they are the areas vital for social interaction. People shy away from a scarred face. Their distaste is visible, tangible. And if the face is not too bad, if you have to shake hands with a scarred hand, or a hand missing fingers, or have no hand at all – it is devastating.

Some issues of appearance depend upon which community you live in and even, sometimes, on race. A bald black boy in Africa is largely ok because many people choose to shave their heads anyway. But a bald white boy is assumed to have cancer and pitied from the outset.

There are many beautiful bald black models but, quite honestly, most girls would still prefer to have hair. Or at least the choice to have hair. Shirley Seqhobane (17) wants her hairless patches fixed. Londeka Ngidi (16) wants the bald area above her forehead sorted. Karabo Tebedi (8) longs not to wear a hat.

Salome Aphane (14) understands that hair is not ever an option for her. But she would *really* like some ears. *Continued page 4*

Children of Fire—Africa's first burns charity



Amu before surgery

Amukelani (also called Amkewani on some documentation) Dube is a sweet-as-pie four year old girl. She is burned on her chest and arm and had an axilla release with Z-plasty by Dr Chetan Patel and colleagues on December 8th at Johannesburg Academic Hospital. She is happy to have joined the Children of Fire family and quickly became firm friends with Zanele Jeza aged five. Amu takes great pride in colouring-in pictures very neatly. She began occupational therapy on 17th December and went for plastics review on 22nd December.

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On the First Day of Christmas we'd like a creepy crawly cleaner

On the **First Day of Christmas** we'd like a new creepy-crawly to clean the swimming pool and a new yellow basket for the leaf filter.

On the **Second Day of Christmas** we'd like two sturdy garden benches.

On the **Third Day of Christmas** we'd like three double-tube fluorescent light fittings for the office and diffuser boxes and the fluorescent tubes; and a diffuser box for the light fitting when you first walk into office.

On the **Fourth Day of Christmas** we'd like four disabled-friendly taps for Dorah's new bathroom.

On the **Fifth Day of Christmas** we'd like five sturdy scented rose bushes that survive our dry African garden and fool-proof planting info.

On the **Sixth Day of Christmas** we'd like an environmentally-friendly lavatory that has a half flush and a full flush option, with a button

that a disabled child can use. (Six loos would be nice, but one would do).

On the **Seventh Day of Christmas** we'd like seven new long, tough, roof gutters.

On the **Eighth Day of Christmas** we'd like planning permission for the new bathroom.

On the **Ninth Day of Christmas** we'd like Custom-made metal steps up to the entertainment terrace (from outside) and someone to break a hole in the wall in just the right place, so nine children can play table tennis there.

On the **Tenth Day of Christmas** we'd like ten energy efficient lamps and a loooooong safe ladder to reach the impossible fittings.

On the **Eleventh Day of Christmas** we'd like a competent electrician to move a distribution box through a wall.

On the **Twelfth Day of Christmas** we'd like airline tickets for all the exciting outreach planned for 2009. And a real rest.

Depression is closer than you think

Our thoughts to: town planner CP who has been fighting depression. His depression struck hard about a year after his divorce. But family stepped in and that's made all the difference. We hope you're fit again to help our kids' planning needs in 2009.

And former trustee at our associated school, caterer Julia Hill, also found that it was about a year after her father died, when the emotional issues hit home really hard. As that time coincided with the charity being cruelly defamed on television, we mistakenly thought she'd abandoned us in our hour of need.

And young burns survivor Mittah fluctuates between putting on a tough veneer and coping less well, with the death of two sisters in one year.

Depression is a long term problem. It is certainly a frequent problem for burns survivors. And for their carers as well.

If there is one thing you do this Christmas, think about your circle of colleagues, friends and family and look at who really needs you.

Do you even know who lives alone? Or in an unsafe or unhappy home? Maybe now is the time to find out.

People are rarely hermits by choice. If they are single, they may well be lonely. The divorced "man-haters" or "women-haters" are mostly defending themselves from further hurt. They could do with a great big hug.

The childless would so welcome a child's smile or greeting. And old people don't want to be in old people's homes. They want to remain part of a society that includes all the generations.

Because Christmas is a public holiday in

much of the world, don't limit your thoughts to Christians. People of other faiths or no faith at all, still find themselves alone at a time when they know other people are surrounded by family and friends. Surely there is space for an extra person at your Christmas table? If not on actual Christmas Day, maybe on the day before, or the day after? Please issue them a clear invitation and don't take "no" for an answer. Sometimes one act of kindness will save a life. **Happy Christmas to you and all those near you.**

Zanele hopes to smile again

Zanele Jeza looked like she'd gone a few rounds in the boxing ring after surgery on December 9th 2008. She had cuts each side of her tiny mouth (a converse type commisroplasty) and right low lid ectropion release and canthopexy. Often children with burned faces have eyelid contractions where the eyelid turns a little inside out. If an eye cannot close properly, there is a risk of eyesight damage in the longer term. That said, many of our children learn to sleep with their eyes open. Thanks to Dr Chetan Patel and Craig Wittstock for their surgical endeavours.



Reaction to Top Billing pro-

The fact that Children of Fire is based in Auckland Park in Gauteng Province where so many media folk also live, means that our kids attract a fair bit of media interest. So, when a glamorous lifestyle TV programme decided to do some good in the community, it was almost by accident that we became the happy recipients of its kindness. Not only did the kids get a better bedroom but there was some prime time publicity as well.

Here's a few comments from viewers:

Just caught the repeat of *Top Billing*, after several people told me about it. Looking wonderful – great job and all positive stuff. Sue Richardson, translator.

I was watching *Top Billing* last night and was very moved by the article that featured your haven. I would appreciate it if you could please send me some details regarding what you are doing, besides offering a home to the unfortunate children that are currently housed there.

Mention was made about the children (some) being blind and what you are doing in that aspect and in fact in the greater Johannesburg area. As previous Rotarians with the Rotary Club of Polokwane (Pietersburg) one of the major projects there was for Siloe: School for the blind.

For those corporate travelers to Port Elizabeth who make bookings directly with ourselves, as opposed to through a booking agent, we will donate 10 per cent of our rack rate to yourselves. Yours in support of those less fortunate than ourselves, Lynn and Graham Futter, Homeleigh Halt Guest House, Port Elizabeth 041 5817111

I saw your charity on *Top Billing* last night and was wondering whether there were small things that were needed by the house/children to make Christmas a bit better. Regards Jackie Longmore

Very touched by the *Top Billing* show, would like to assist. Kindest regards. Ms Jay Ramkissoo, Property Administrator Landsec. I would like to know if you have a similar charity in the Cape Town area. Nici de Wet, Entertainment writer, YOU

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Congratulations of the lovely article on *Top Billing* last night. It was very well done. The children looked wonderful and how lucky you are to have that new bedroom and the new patio. I must hand it to you, you are fantastic with the children and you have such a knack of getting things done. Well done. Keep up the good work. Regards **Margaret Hirsch**,

Toys shared at Jo'burg Gen again

We don't actively seek toys but they keep coming in so we keep sharing them out. On December 8th 2008 when we admitted four children to hospital for surgery and one for a ward round assessment, we took presents in again to Ward 275.

Lucky recipients of soft new blankets, *UTristani noThobe baya Egoli (Tristan and Thobe go to Jo'burg)* storybooks, toys and more, included boys Lesley Mhlanga (3yrs 2m), Ntandazo Dlamini (1yr 2m), Mato Cry (13yrs), Ayanda Mhlambo (3yrs), Zenele Sibiya (3yrs), Tebogo Salome (1yr 6m), Bonele Semaphosa (8yrs), David Ndlela (12yrs), Sherlington Dlamini (4yrs), Mangan Abraham (4yrs) and girls Mohate Maseotsa (18yrs), Malgas Charne (6yrs), Palesa Tiane (13yrs), Ndebele Malene (4yrs), Agnes Dube (4yrs), Zueida Hassim (10yrs), Kinilwe Smouse (14 yrs), Thobile Molotshwa (3yrs), Caroline Moyo (7yrs) and Kgothatso a baby girls aged one month one day. The gifts eased their pain this December. Thanks to you who give, and give us the chance to share.

Lebogang the younger

A second Lebogang joined our kids in need in late 2008, hoping for help with his burned feet.



Hirsch's Home Stores.

Volunteers, interns, sabbaticals

Here's the faces of some full time and part time helpers that keep the charity on track with its heavy workload



Rosie teaches children swimming and applies architectural wisdom.



Simon, a retired nurse, takes children to hospital appointments.



Tryphina aspires to manage the office

All I want for Christmas, continued from page one.

It is possible to reconstruct ears. But everything you fix with plastic surgery involves robbing another part of the body. If you have part of an ear left after injury, surgeons can cut into your chest and extract the cartilage at the end of your ribs, to start to rebuild the ear shape. When a lot of the ear is lost, in truth the rebuilt ears aren't very pretty.

A better option is a prosthetic ear.

There's a tiny pool of expertise in South Africa to make good false ears. But the likes of Dr Joe Schmaman at Wits University's Dental Unit, is a dab hand at shaping and painting ears, noses, fingers, eyeballs – most any body part you can imagine.

Attaching them is another matter.

There can be glue-on ears or ears on implants. There are many tens of thousands of rand stages in making implants, checking the bone density and drilling into the skull to insert metal, onto which the ears will clip. The public and private sector have to co-operate with people like Prof Dale Howes in Morningside sorting out the positioning and Dr Greg Boyes Varley putting the metal into the skull.

If you've just lost one ear, then radiology departments make digital scans of your skull and surviving ear, in X-ray-like slices of parts-of-a-millimetre. They then send these digital images to places like the Central University of Technology in Bloemfontein, whose clever computers then produce a perfect mirror image of the surviving ear.

Doreen Msimanga (11), a veld fire survivor, would *really* like two ears as well. And Bongani Madlala would be happy with just one false ear to match his flesh one. Bongani had a prosthetic ear before but with a violent father thumping him, the implants were damaged. Then he lost his ear in the forest. Finding a brown silicon rubber ear among all the leaves on the forest floor proved impossible. So he's had more implants put in and hoped for an ear by Christmas.

Dorah (14), the most badly burned little girl in the world to survive, wants surgeons to take her seriously. They think she doesn't mind the tight elastic-band-like contraction on her chest. They think she's not clever enough to warrant attempts to give her a short thumb on one arm stump. They think that people who are blind as well as burned, cannot learn anything.

Dorah would also like Jo'burg City Council to give permission for her own bathroom to be built. She has no concept why in a building that has stood unopposed for 15 years, men in suits decided that she cannot now have a disabled-friendly bathroom of her own. A poster was hand-delivered to Mayor of Johannesburg Amos Masondo's office, outlining the problem. He did not even acknowledge receipt.

And Sicelo (10) was glad to have a new nose made but what he'd really like for Christmas is a course of laser treatment to remove the hair on the outside of his nose. And a cure for HIV-Aids would be good.

Sizwe (7) still wants his little finger to line up straight. And his lip not to be pulled down. And his eyelids to close properly. And both nostrils to be the same size. He'd also like his "brown mummy" to say sorry for hurting him. All Feleng (7) wants for Christmas is a new forehead. He hasn't had one for six years and he's off to Switzerland soon, to move four of his ribs into his head, to fill the void.

Thulani (16) has no Mum or Dad anymore. He's trying to reintegrate into his community in Standerton. All he really wants for Christmas is a grant to live on, so that he can try to finish school.

Jana, aged 26, who was trapped in a burning car three years ago, would like a job. Mittah aged 19, burned in Soweto by an electric stove, and Kezia aged 20, burned in Pietermaritzburg as an infant, would both like to study psychology.

Seiso a torture survivor aged 4, would like justice if he knew what it meant. He'd like the state to get on and sentence the boys who harmed him. And for sentence to rehabilitate them into decent compassionate human beings who showed remorse.

Zanele a hot polish burns survivor aged five, would like a proper house for her family of nine people, not a Soweto garage. Irene Peta aged 19 would love the chance to become a singer. She'd dance if only she had feet.

Tapera (almost 3) is the starved face of Zimbabwe's youth. He is 8.5kg where he should weigh double that. His feet are terribly badly burned from walking into hot ashes on the ground. All he wants for Christmas is his appetite back; for his kwashiorkor to be a distant memory and for a chance to save at least the toes of one foot.

Thapelo (2) is an exploding stove survivor. He'd like a straight arm, hand and a shoulder that moved freely for Christmas. *Continued page 5*

All I want from Christmas, from pages one and four

And Thapelo would like the South African government to enforce the laws that make exploding stoves illegal.

Little Samkelo would like his facial scars reduced. Simamkele would like his eyes to close when he sleeps. Older Samkelo would like to be a great lawyer. Andani would like a world without teasing and some maths and English coaching. Musa Zwane, 19 and Mfundo Ntamehlo 21, would like to be designers.

Our kids don't need Barbies, teddies and soccer balls.

All the Children of Fire kids have practical dreams. Just to look a little bit more normal. Just to be a little bit more acceptable.

They want to walk the streets without an "eish" or "how!" or "ag shame". **All they really want for Christmas is for you to accept them for who they are.**

Seiso's attackers await day of reckoning

Children of Fire was distressed in December to learn that justice is still "on hold" for torture survivor Seiso. We are told that "the lawyer is ill. Sentencing is postponed to January 28th 2009."

Seiso's original prosecutor was Ms Rose Baloyi.

His more recently-appointed prosecutor was Mr Pecks Mopiango.

We had hoped that this chapter of Seiso's life could be closed on December 9th 2008.

It is unconscionable that his grandmother cannot move on emotionally. The whole family needed "closure" for Christmas. Children of Fire hopes that justice delayed is not justice denied.

The long road to justice

For four year old torture survivor, Seiso Ratswana, justice has been a long time coming. After multiple postponements, the youngsters who tortured and burned him with hot liquid in August 2006, have been pronounced guilty of attempted murder. They are now to be sentenced in January 2009.

The case, reminiscent of the Jamie Bulger murder case in the UK, was first heard at Garankuwa Magistrates' Court on the 17th of September 2007. After hearing the shocking details of Seiso's torture, the Magistrate ordered that both Seiso and his grandmother, Jennifer Ratswana should receive counselling.

However, neither Ms Ratswana nor Seiso have received counselling from the State to this date.

During the court case the assailants, aged 11 and 13 at the time, claimed that they had been told by 'the Bishop' to kill a young boy and bring the body to him. Investigation into these claims has proved fruitless as the alleged Bishop could not be traced. He may be a figment of the assailants' imagination or an excuse for their barbaric deeds.

People reading about the little boy's terrible ordeal, approached Children of Fire for help. It is particular thanks to the persistence of Mr Alex Bisset of Cape Town that Seiso was brought to a medical charity where his road to healing began. Seiso had been treated initially at Odi Hospital which did not have the skills and equipment needed. The George Mukhari (Garankuwa) Hospital was asked to help with surgery but did not do so.

On arriving in Johannesburg, Children of Fire in the role of guardian, obtained Seiso's full medical file with assistance from Bowmann Gilfillan attorneys. It became clear that there had been excessive use of antibiotics without testing and the child had developed painful bladder stones as a result. These had been misdiagnosed by several medical professionals.

Seiso's first complex procedure with the charity was removal of bladder stones at Johannesburg Academic Hospital. *to p6*

Alex Arson

21st December 2008

The warm rain-free Sunday night was appreciated by 49 people left destitute by fire at 161, 10th Avenue Alexandra in the early hours of the same day, as they had not managed to fully rebuild their shelters yet. Six further families remained unaware that their homes have been lost. Many had seen their Christmas bonuses and new clothes go up in smoke, in the fire attributed to arson. For Children of Fire's first-time UMashesha (quick mover) volunteer Mortain Dube (42), going to help was a sobering experience. He said: "It was a sad sight to view. Only dejected faces made up the crowd. Men were busy removing debris, corrugated iron "zinc" sheets and broken bricks of the burnt shacks. According to the victims, nothing at all was recovered from some 13 shacks. There were other shacks that were only partially burned. "Six of the shacks had no one inside because the owners had left for the Christmas holidays, so the value of the property destroyed could not be established yet." Dube added: "They will be so shocked when they come back to the city."

UMashesha Louis Rutstein (40) said: "We distributed blankets, food, books, clothes and toys to these families and it was touching to see some of these people smiling, despite the fact that they were still worried as to where they were going to sleep."

Tristan Jones (17), the country's youngest volunteer fire fighter for the past two years, is also an UMashesha volunteer. He said: "The brick-built structures surrounding the shacks slowed down the path of the fire." **Continued page 7**

day of reckoning ... continued from page 5

He was then seen by five different leading surgeons in two cities and his long term medical care, including counselling, was professionally costed at some R435 000.

The little boy then had a groin contracture release at Netcare's Milpark Hospital with Dr Gereth Edwards and Dr Pieter Beddings. He had a subsequent groin contracture release at Johannesburg Academic Hospital. And then he started the long process to ear reconstruction, also with plastic surgeons at Johannesburg Academic Hospital.

In Children of Fire's care, Seiso has changed from a fearful boy who used to scream even when one took a T-shirt over his head for dressing or undressing, into a well-balanced child. T-shirts around his face reminded Seiso of the time when his torturers bundled him into a bag after burning and cutting him.

Seiso started his Road to Health chart with the charity, getting vital vaccinations that had been missed out before.

Children of Fire also arranged DNA testing at Lancet Laboratories, to clarify his parentage. Seiso's father is a private in the SANDF who had not previously formally acknowledged his son.

While the issue of maintenance remains a thorny issue between the biological parents, the charity wanted to know if the child was entitled to medical aid through the Army.

Finally it has been accepted that he is entitled to that medical help and in 2009 Seiso will get his next groin contracture release from a plastic surgeon in a military hospital.

If Seiso accesses private health care, it frees up a place for another child in the state sector. But as the military hospitals are in Potchefstroom and Pretoria, some procedures will still be carried out in Johannesburg so that the charity can monitor them more effectively. The charity has worked with Seiso's grandmother, uncle, mother and father to try to get him the best future. Seiso's young parents are no longer a couple and his mother, who hopes that she has matriculated this year, now has another son from a different father. The social circumstances remain difficult but there is a caring extended family.

Seiso feels equally at home at Children of Fire where he is much loved by Tapera, Tristan, Sizwe, Simamkele and others. He is also very fond of the two dogs Cognac and Buttons, as well as climbing the tree in search of fat purple plums or having a swimming lesson with Swim SA.

He attends school each day and learns fine motor skills, shapes, colours and pre-writing skills in Grade R at the Johannesburg School for Blind, Low Vision and Multiple Disability Children.

He has also had the chance to participate in many extra murals including cookery and drumming. He sings very well.

Seiso has travelled to the Durban seaside, to the Drakensberg Mountains where he went on the exciting Four Rivers zip line, met the King of the Amangwane Nation and visited many fire brigades. In Gauteng he has travelled to Maropeng and the Sterkfontein Caves in the Cradle of Humankind.

Seiso will have many medical procedures in the years to come. His face is largely unscarred but a large patch of scalp is missing and the process to try to restore it will start when he is about eight years old. He will also need extensive counselling, especially in adolescent years. Children of Fire gave evidence as a Friend of the Court about what the future would hold. It also investigated the suggestion of juvenile detention in the Western Cape, phoning seven institutions to find out what the rehabilitation of offenders involved. The answers were not promising.

The charity is not convinced that the two assailants feel remorse or have demonstrated it.

Children of Fire is not confident that facilities exist that are small enough and personal enough to try to turn two cruel children into

compassionate adults who can contribute to society. We hope that there will some attempt at family therapy for the assailants as mothers have been remarkable for their absence and grandmothers cannot be expected to cope with the situation on their own. Fathers are non apparent. For Seiso – **he does not know that January 28th 2009 is a special day.** But one day he will.

He deserves to never have to face his assailants again. While it seems likely that their period of incarceration will be short, part of the future problem is that the attack occurred next door to Seiso's great-uncle's home. This is a significant place for family gatherings and Seiso would want to feel free and safe to visit there.

So while protection orders and restraining orders are largely pieces of paper with limited power, Children of Fire feels that it would be reasonable to insist that the family next door should be ordered to live elsewhere.

When children commit crimes, the sentence and the solution should be for the families of the perpetrators as well as for the youthful assailants.

If this is not allowable in law, then maybe it is time to the law to be reviewed. And one day, Seiso Ratswana will google his own name or search a newspaper cuttings library.

He will not want to be remembered for some voyeuristic rehashing of his past again and again. He will want to be remembered for a smile so brilliant that it makes your heart skip a beat. An exuberance of soul. A jumping chuckling child who likes plastic *to p7*

Alex Arson cont.

Those helped at the fire included Phyllis Rangolu and two children aged five years old and two months old; Morris Ndlovu and partner; Johannes Seqobela and a two year old child; Sydwell



Crumpled "zincs" after fire



Louis (in yellow) and Mortain (in green) taking donations off the GT Trading bakkie lent for the humanitarian delivery on December 21st. Photographer: Tristan

day of reckoning ... continued from page 6

motorbikes cycling at full pelt over noisy stones.

Seiso will want you to know that through being injured he has spent time with other children even more injured – and he has shown love and kindness to them.

He likes cars. And music. And singing lots and lots of songs with such a big voice that you wonder how such a little body can produce it.

Seiso is a great kid. He's a survivor..

Bronwen Jones and Lindiwe Ngwenya, Children of Fire 8th December 2008. *Thanks to Susanne Bode for initial research and to all the Children of Fire volunteers, all the medical personnel, the teachers and others who have helped Seiso to come this far.*

Court dates: 17 September 2007; 18 October 2007

(Children of Fire medical researcher Marietta Neumann testified about Seiso's future medical needs and associated costs. The boys had pled guilty by this point)

13 November 2007; 22 January 2008; 27 March 2008

(This was just an information-gathering session from correctional services and a psychologist to determine sentencing. Psychologist not present and had not examined the assailants so postponed until 22 July 2008)

22 July 2008 (postponed to the 24th of July for lack of criminologist report and sick lawyer)

24 July 2008

22 August 2008 (postponed – psychological evaluation not done yet)

29 September 2008

9 December 2008 (sentencing delayed to lawyer illness)

28 January 2009 sentencing.

Reader response:

You write so beautifully, and tell this heartbreaking tale so well. I wish Seiso all the very best. The children and their bravery is the reason we continue to support Children of Fire. Elaine, London, UK.

Let's hope that justice will be done in January, and that 2009 will be a good year for Seiso and his family. Susanne Bode, Netherlands

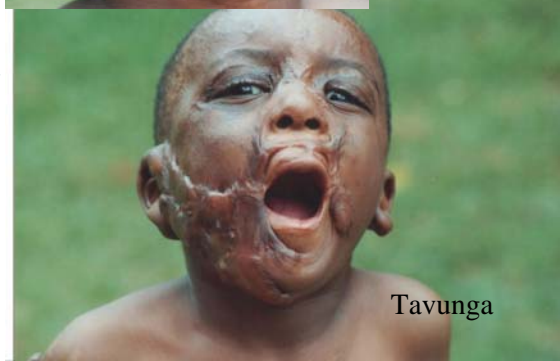
Mthombeni and partner; Roger Sithole and two dependents including a 16 year old; Lucas Mawasana with dependents aged 3 years, 15 years, 19 and 21; Boda Bilusa; Venase Shondlani with a three year old; Lizzy Thobakgale; Jeffrey Ntimbana with partner and a two year old child; William Sekgobu with partner and four children; Phillip Malaudzi; Gumede Themba; Sam Mabunda, his partner and 13 year old child; Alex Chabalala, his partner and two year old child; Susan Magane with children aged three years and six years; Lefuno Molaudzi and children aged 14 years and nine years old; Louis Nkwampana with four younger children.

The councillor for ward 76 Dunah Madise and Disaster Management employees Fency Nkoele and Godfrey Sigudu, thanked Children of Fire for its assistance.

Dube said: "The majority of the victims we asked about the cause of the fire, said they suspected that someone could have attempted to kill Matotoba, the owner of the shack where the fire started.

"These victims thought so because some unruly people had quarrelled with Matotoba and had left swearing against him. This man, Matotoba said that the fire started around 12:30 midnight from outside his shack and spread to nearby shacks."

Surplus children's blankets delivered by Children of Fire were taken for storage at Sandton Fire Station for the fires that follow.



Tavunga

Tavunga was referred to us from Pretoria after an article on the charity in the Sunday Times. He said to his father that the photos were of "children like me". He wants life without keloid scars and able to open his mouth fully. His road to reconstruction starts in 2009.



Swimming lessons at no. 58.

Physical activity is an essential part of rehabilitation for every burns survivor.

Load-bearing exercise is often the best for optimum bone density, but swimming is sometimes easier on the injured limbs.

This was particularly apparent for foot burns survivor Tapera who first got in the pool in late December 2008.

Tapera has started walking again, but he finds it painful and sore, as he has lost all the toes on one foot and those remaining on his right foot are fused together for now.



We hope plastic surgeons will put another graft on top of his foot to bring those toes forward and to make them useful digits again



Thapelo back in a shack

Thapelo has much better use of his arm and armpit now. We just pray that his shack-bound family continue splinting and occupational therapy that is needed.



Mittah and her sister upon discharge from hospital

Breast Surgery at Helen Joseph

Mittah has waited a long time to feel really good about herself.

Thanks to the deft hands of surgeon Charles Serrurier now she feels great! Mittah was badly burned when her clothing caught alight at the age of eight years old. She was warming herself by an electric stove. Now she has had nipples rebuilt and, simply put, she feels so much more like a girl. The little things in life really do matter. Thanks Dr Serrurier.



Spinnathon leads to "ag shame" infomercial

Melville's House of Fitness gym (see www.houseoffitness.co.za) 's kind offer to hold a six hour spinnathon (cycling on the spot) to fund raise for the charity on 29th November 2008, made a youth television producer aware of the needs of burned children.

This led to several meetings to discuss *their* ideas and *our* needs.

We agreed that it would be great to talk about burns prevention and fire safety on youth television. But even more importantly, we'd like their help to film an infomercial about tolerance.

Actually a major retailer had promised us around December 2007, that it would help us to film that exact infomercial... and then forgotten its promise. But the need was still there.

Well Yo-TV got the point straight away and we settled down to planning the filming. Shoprite Checkers was great as the Cresta branch in Johannesburg provided the filming venue. Then we gathered various young would-be actors—burned and unburned—to be stars-in-the-making or potential extras.

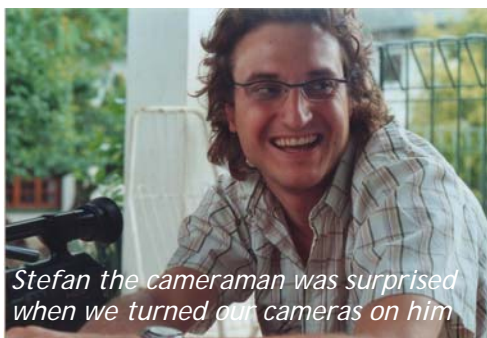
Then a kind donor arrived with snack

"Yo!" —a South African greeting, an expression of surprise, short for "youth" or half a yo-yo....



Burns survivors Musa (left) and Mfundo (right) just loved hanging out with pretty television presenters....

packs that were just right for a long evening's film shoot. And so Sizwe aged seven walked up and down shopping aisles as passers by muttered "ag shame" ("what a pity") at the sight of his scars. At the end of the aisle, Sizwe turned full face into the camera and asked: *"Is it a shame that I am alive?"* The infomercial has already been aired to significant emotional effect—all credit to the children with the original ideas and Yo-TV for pulling it off. We hope to air it further afield and get people thinking about their deepest prejudices.



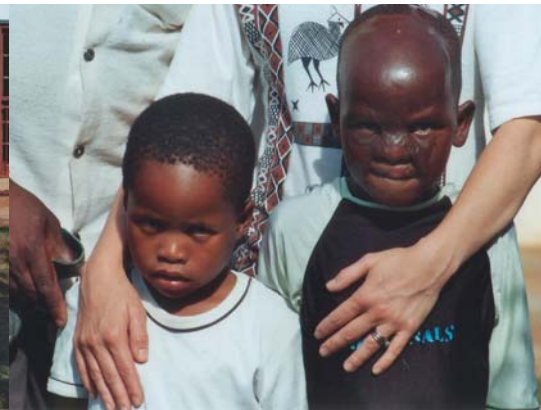
Stefan the cameraman was surprised when we turned our cameras on him





Tapera walked into a rural cooking fire on the ground

Tapera is growing stronger by the day. The Zimbabwean burns survivor arrived with terrible kwashiorkor as well as terrible feet burns. First he had to regain weight and some muscle tone; then skin grafting was possible, thanks to Dr Mark Steinman and colleagues at Jo'burg Gen.



Most fires in formal housing are due to electrical faults. Check your compliance certificate and don't be cheapskate. It may cost you your life.

Nonkhululeko wants tissue expansion to restore his hairline. He was noticed by a well-wisher who saw his uncle, a car guard. The little boy was rather scared to be left with us at first, but soon settled into all the fun activities, visiting TV studios, going to the theatre, swimming lessons and more.

Psychs "go nuts" when the fire engine sirens wail

South Africa's youngest volunteer fire fighter, and UMashesha, Tristan Jones (17), put his fire fighting on hold during the Matric exams. But in December 2008 he was riding the engine again, in active community service.

The 15 hour shifts through the night were a mixture of car crashes, false alarms and serious fires.

Many callouts were to small incidents, "due to human stupidity" he said.

At one hospital, someone left a plastic crate on top of kitchen equipment vents. Like er, vents are there for a reason, aren't they...? Same reason you mustn't cover the back of your television or computer with a cloth.

So the equipment overheated and the crate caught fire. Result: ten thousand rand or more in equipment loss and a fire brigade call out. As they approached the hospital the fire fighters

were asked not to use their sirens. Why? "It makes the psychs go nuts and they try to get out of the ward..."

At another fire, someone had left a pot of porridge cooking on the stove. The smoke was terrible, the flat owner could not be found, the landlord was out—so they kicked the door in and turned the stove off. Moral: turn off the stove or lose a good door!



Sizwe's an old hand at interviews it seems... seen here chatting over strawberries to a Sunday Times reporter about the newly-elected USA President Barack Obama.

Johannesburg's safety in Audrey Gule's wise hands

I was honoured to meet Dr. Audrey Gule in late 2008. She is head of the whole Emergency Services (EMS) in and around Johannesburg, from Alexandra to Soweto, from Seswetla to Diepsloot. She is not a trained fire fighter but has a lot of useful experience all the same. What I liked best was her humble manner. She makes sure that EMS is working for us and completing its mission to save lives and property. She is also involved in community development and in community safety. Gule is in charge of 1650 staff members including volunteers. She considers herself privileged because she is a woman working in a male dominated area who can influence and empower other EMS women.

Gule felt it important to run a course for female staff, teaching them how to improve self-esteem and confidence in their working environment through "internal soft skills." Courses also taught women how to be the best coaches in their jobs despite the discrimination that they face. The women learn how technical skills help with the challenges of being a firefighter, even though men usually have greater physical strength.

In the past two years Gule said that there was a shift within EMS because of increasing use of the latest technology equipment. The very expensive machines enhance services to citizens and women can use skills rather than physical strength to operate machinery.

EMS is on a tight time line to improve its services before the influx of foreign visitors for the 2010 Soccer World Cup. This requires lots of new staff and volunteers to be trained to keep the City of Johannesburg safe during the tournament. EMS has to prepare even for possible terrorism as international events place the country in the political limelight and make it a target where it might not normally be of interest to extremists.

Gule said that there are now emergency services learnerships (six-week apprenticeships). Adults who passed the South African school-leaving examination called Matric, who are very physically-fit and who have a driver's licence, can apply. There is a chance for those with the Basic Ambulance Assistance (BAC) qualification to be considered as fire fighters as well. More than 10 000 people applied for the course recently, of whom 125 people were taken on. EMS faces a problem of people leaving after they get their qualifications, to find jobs elsewhere.

Gule knew a bit about Children of Fire. She was due to speak to our UMashesha volunteers in Alexandra about four years ago, but somehow it never happened.

As our Director explained what the charity does, Gule was interested at the synergy between EMS and us. Children of Fire (ChiFi) assists burns survivors and works in communities at risk.

In squatter camps like Slovo and Alex, when there are shack fires, if the people or Disaster Management phones to ask for help, we give out disaster recovery bags to keep them going for a few days. Contents depend on what has been donated to us but they usually include second hand clothes and

soap powder, toothpaste, plasters, basic food and even blankets if we have them. Burns survivors that we help can be helped for ten years or even longer. They might have more than 20 major operations. Help is for the burns injury and every other possible aspect of their lives from schooling to housing, eye care, nutrition; ChiFi does just about anything that a good parent would help their child with.

Gule was interested to learn that we work both in the private and public sector.

The meeting covered some history between the organisations as ChiFi was the first entity in South Africa to start fire fighting training and First Aid courses specifically for squatter camp residents. Our Director explained the benefits of fire fighting water tanks and how we still needed the fire brigade to buy into the process of refilling tanks and helping to maintain what became a community asset. When a shack catches fire, the local people can run with buckets full of water to stop the fire from spreading before the fire brigade arrives. Red and green food colouring is placed in the water to prevent people from taking the water for washing or drinking. Gule was interested in our safety infomercials and was supportive about them being filmed at Brixton Training Academy if need be. She was also made aware of communication unanswered by her department, dating back more than two years! It was regarding statistics of blankets handed out by Disaster Management in greater Johannesburg from March to July 2006. Dr Gule promised that we would have the answer within a couple of weeks.

Our Director and Dr. Gule were in agreement that cartoon posters don't really work with safety messages and that people need to see something that they believe is real. Safety messages also need to have a lasting impact. The two tough women pledged to find more ways to work together, once the glitches of the past had been fixed. This included clarifying when people from EMS were acting in a personal capacity for a rather discredited foundation that ChiFi will not work with, and when they were acting as officials from EMS. Gule seemed genuinely interested and impressed with what we do. It looks like the renewal of a good working relationship. I was proud to be part of it.

Mittah Lebaka, Intern (19)



Mittah, Sizwe, Dr Gule, Feleng

Notice Board

Medical dressings are always useful.

Please can we have some **Bactigras** (paraffin-impregnated gauze) from Smith+Nephew.

Also: **Grassolind** paraffin gauze in individual packs, made by Hartmann AG.

Also: **Jelonet**

Also **Acticoat** 10 by 10 cm individual packs with Nanocrystalline Silver.

Interesting websites to check out:

www.grossmanburncenters.com

Tapera Jani became a little bit renowned on 26th December in an article on the IRIN news service for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, by Ms Jaspreet Kindra. This Indian-born journalist was unaware at first that she also had a historical link to the Director of Children of Fire through one of the most famous, and now very elderly, Indian journalists Khushvant Singh. A friendship across borders dating back some 57 years, became relevant again! For the item on Tapera and the charity, check:

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=82103>.

Salome Aphane, a Hammanskraal girl, swimming in November 2008 at no. 58 Auckland Avenue.



Congratulations to British trustee Alexandra Martin and her husband James on the birth of their daughter Eibhlin (Gaelic spelling of Evelyn) Alexandra Martin who arrived on Wednesday, 5th October 2008 at 13h27 weighing a bouncing 9lb 4oz! The parents say: "We're absolutely smitten...." For those of you who live in the modern world, lb is a pound in weight, an archaic form of measurement. 2.2lbs are equivalent

I was delighted to hear that our teddy bears are still being distributed since our visit to S. Africa We also delivered 500 teddies to Baragwanath Hospital. You are making a difference in the lives of the children. May the Lord grant you strength to continue your work with the knowledge that the lives you touch with your love and care will be forever changed through the contribution they will make in the world.

My husband, Henry, and I wish you a Joyous, Healthy, Holiday Season and a Happy New Year. **Pear Silver, Canada**

Media coverage recently has included:

Top Billing programme and repeat on SABC television on 30 November 2008

Top Billing's December magazine.

Yo TV—about 16 inserts. Wow!

The Citizen (on Seiso)

Beeld (on Feleng)

The Star, *SABC Radio News* and *Radio 702* on ChiFi helping at the Alexandra fires





Facial transplants for the future

The United States performed its first part-facial transplant operation in December 2008, the fourth such operation in the world. The Cleveland Clinic, in Milwaukee, announced that reconstructive surgeon Dr Maria Siemionow had replaced 80 per cent of a woman's face with that of a dead female donor. The leader of the UK Facial Transplantation Research Team says a full transplant will be announced in Britain in 2009. Professor Peter Butler said: "We congratulate Dr Siemionow and her Cleveland transplantation team and wish the brave patient well for the future. "This latest operation shows how facial transplantation can help a particular group of the most severely facially injured people, for whom reconstructive surgery has not worked and those who are unable to live a normal life. These are people who would otherwise live a terrible twilight life, often shut away from public gaze."

Asked when the UK team would perform the world's first full facial transplant, Prof Butler said: "We hope to make an announcement about this within the next 12 months."

The team, based at the Royal Free Hospital in north London, has ethical permission for a research programme of four facial transplants. The world's first partial face transplant took place in France three years ago on a woman who had been mauled by her dog.

Two others have been announced since then - a Chinese farmer attacked by a bear and a European man disfigured by a genetic condition. Such transplants are controversial, because they are aimed at improving a patient's quality of life rather than saving it, and require recipients to take immune-suppressing drugs for the rest of their life.

Dec 17th 2008, copyright Sky News

Acid Burns survivor seeks to burn assailant into blindness

By Thomas Erdbrink (summary)
Copyright Washington Post December 14, 2008

Ameneh Bahrami once enjoyed photography. Her work for a medical equipment company gave her financial independence. Several men had asked for her hand in marriage, but the hazel-eyed electrical technician had refused them all. Four years ago, a spurned suitor poured a bucket of sulphuric acid over her head, leaving her blind and disfigured.

Late last month, an Iranian court ordered that five drops of the same chemical be placed in each of her attacker's eyes, acceding to Bahrami's demand that he be punished according to a principle in Islamic law that allows a victim to seek retribution for a crime. The sentence has not yet been carried out. Implementation of Islamic law has often provoked controversy in Iran, where many people decried such sentences as barbaric. This case is different. Tehran journalist Asieh Amini, who writes about human rights and opposes the sentence, said protest has been muted because people have been moved by the story. Bahrami, 31, said she has fought long and hard to obtain what she views as justice. "I am asking for someone's eyes to be dripped with acid, because I don't want this to happen to any other women."

"If propaganda is carried out on how acid attackers are punished, it will prevent such crimes in the future," Mahmoud Salarkia, deputy attorney general of Tehran, said after the court issued its ruling. There are no statistics on the number of acid attacks against women in Iran. Amini said "Social violence will not be cured with more violence." In 2002, Bahrami was a 24-year-old electronics student at a university in Tehran. She and her friends felt sorry for a sometimes bedraggled younger student named Majid Movahedi, so they collected clothes and asked a staff member to pass them on to him. In 2003, Movahedi's mother called Bahrami's parents to propose a marriage. "I declined," Bahrami said. In early November 2004 after stalking her, Movahedi tapped her on the shoulder. As she turned around, a burning fluid splashed onto her face. "A bystander came with a can of water. I splashed it on my face, but that only caused the acid to run down my arms onto my body."

Someone took her to a nearby hospital. The doctors ordered a worker to hose her down in the hospital's courtyard. "They didn't take her clothes off or wash her eyes properly. That could have softened the high degree of burns," said Farid Karimian, an Iranian ophthalmologist who began treating Bahrami two days later.

Movahedi turned himself in to police two weeks after the attack. After the operations, doctors referred her to an eye clinic in Barcelona for a last attempt to restore some of her vision. Bahrami had no insurance. Iran's president at the time, Mohammad Khatami, personally paid a large portion of her bills and promised that the government would make the remaining payments.

Doctors at Barcelona's Instituto de Microcirugia Ocular, an eye surgery hospital, were impressed by Bahrami. "She only wanted one thing: to be able to see again," said Ramón Medel, an eyelid surgeon at the hospital. Medel and other doctors focused on Bahrami's right eye, which was less damaged.

In August 2005, almost a year after the attack, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became president, and the payments for Bahrami's medical costs and her Barcelona apartment suddenly stopped.

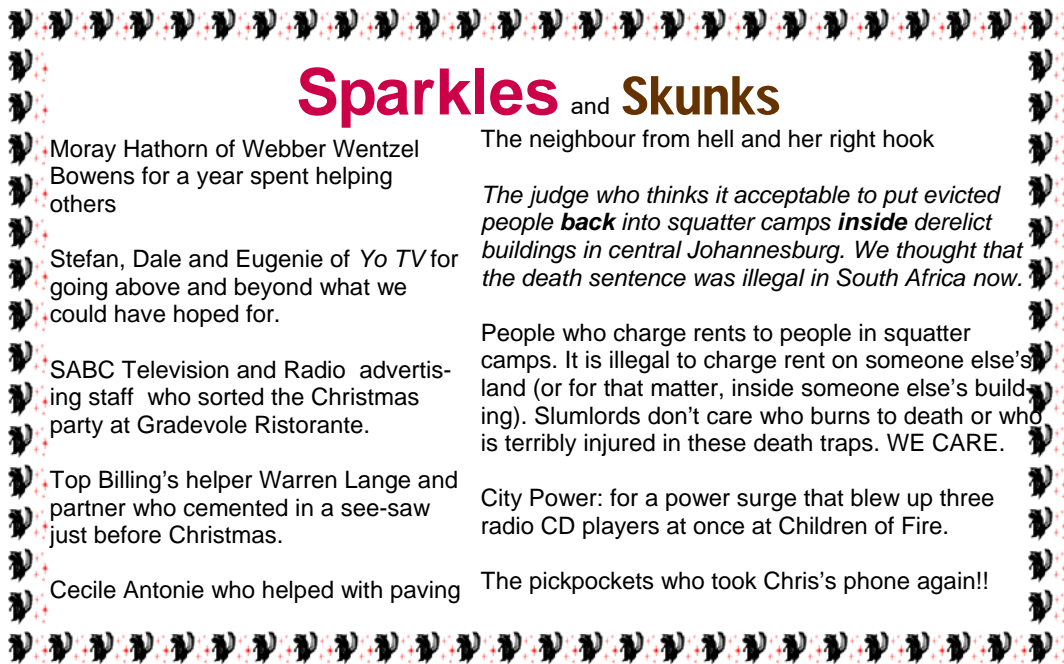
Iran's ambassador to Spain at the time, Morteza Alviri, said he had nightmares after meeting Bahrami. Bahrami returned to Tehran in June.

Movahedi showed no remorse. A convict has 20 days to appeal the verdict.

Dr Medel was shocked to hear that his former patient had asked for another person's eyes to be taken out.

Reference: **An eye for an eye Al-Maa'idah 5:45**

Children of Fire opposes all violence and intentional physical mutilation, even as punishment of criminals. We think Movahedi should have to work among burns survivors to make amends for as long as an Iranian prison sentence for this charge.



Sparkles and Skunks

- Moray Hathorn of Webber Wentzel Bowens for a year spent helping others
- The neighbour from hell and her right hook
- Stefan, Dale and Eugenie of Yo TV for going above and beyond what we could have hoped for.
- The judge who thinks it acceptable to put evicted people **back** into squatter camps **inside** derelict buildings in central Johannesburg. We thought that the death sentence was illegal in South Africa now.*
- SABC Television and Radio advertising staff who sorted the Christmas party at Gradevole Ristorante.
- People who charge rents to people in squatter camps. It is illegal to charge rent on someone else's land (or for that matter, inside someone else's building). Slumlords don't care who burns to death or who is terribly injured in these death traps. WE CARE.
- Top Billing's helper Warren Lange and partner who cemented in a see-saw just before Christmas.
- City Power: for a power surge that blew up three radio CD players at once at Children of Fire.
- Cecile Antonie who helped with paving
- The pickpockets who took Chris's phone again!!

Thank You

AMB Financial Services for keeping our Director afloat

Dr Moreko Mashilo for helping transport two kids to/from the Pretoria area.

All the different people who have made the time leading up to Christmas special for our kids.

Top Billing for making a scruffy room into a pretty room, and plants for the yard

The Garden Shop for our Christmas Tree

Yo TV and Urban Brew for raising awareness of burns injury and tolerance in December.

Valerie Moonsamy and friends for toy dolls that pray!

Sonia Scholtz of Die Ossewa Antiques for taking the kids out for lunch.

Bic for 20 Tshirts, caps and packs of pens (very useful for our squatter camp literacy scheme)

Hewlett Packard for Encarta, two keyboards and a computer mouse.

Swim SA for taking Kezia Samuel on a swimming instructors course

Saab for a great pledge of faith in difficult times, especially for helping Feleng and Dorah

Everyone who helped with the Christmas Day parcels for Joe Slovo squatter camp kids especially Ozlem of Elements Travel who provided 35 rucksacks at no notice, on Christmas Eve... and poor BJ who then packed them until 5 a.m. on Christmas Day.

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Children of Fire

Account number: 614 920 23919

Sort code: 25-65-05

First National Bank

Melville, Gauteng

South Africa

Children of Fire

Account number: 901 033 30

Sort code: 20-17-92

Barclays Bank

Canterbury (East Kent branches)

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