

June 2001



Dear Everybody,

Remember Gift? She was a tiny, orphaned elephant, who wandered alone into our Luangwa camp one day to forage on marula fruits. Her entire family had been slaughtered by poachers. This was not unusual in the Luangwa valley in the 1980's; in fact, five per cent of the elephant families we

studied were made up entirely of orphans. Since Gift no longer had her mother, sisters, and aunts to teach and support her, she tagged along behind the males, Survivor, Long Tail, and Cheers. And probably because of this abnormal society and over-abundance of testosterone, Gift became pregnant at a very young age, and gave birth to a little calf we named Georgia.

Female elephants learn a great deal about maternal behavior from the matriarch and the other female relatives of their group. But Gift was alone with her small infant in a crocodile and poacher-infested wilderness. We hoped that they would join another family, which would surely improve Georgia's chances of survival. But the two females, who looked like sisters lost in the bush, wandered on their own through the golden grasses below the escarpment. Gift wasn't a model mother and left her calf unguarded at much greater distances and for longer periods than did experienced mothers. Sometimes Georgia would come squealing through our camp, her tiny trunk flailing about, as she searched for her teenage mom, who had left her behind once again. Fortunately they stayed near our camp, where the poachers were less likely to find them, and Georgia grew into a healthy, quite independent calf - much like her mother. A few years later, Gift had Gem, another female calf.

This is apparently the way a decimated elephant population recovers its numbers and social structure after losing 97% of its elders - and their collective wisdom and leadership to poachers. The orphans do not join other family units, but instead form their own new ones. Elsabe Aucamp, who is continuing our elephant study in North Luangwa, advised that recently Gift gave birth to a son. This is not simply the birth of another squiggly infant in the tall grasses of the Africa savanna. This is a new beginning for the elephant world. Gift had the genes, the spunk, and enough know-how to start again. She has become quite the little matriarch. You gave her that chance.

You remember Hammer Simwinga and Albert Chilambwe from our North Luangwa Conservation Project: somewhere along the rim of the escarpment, high above the elephants, they bounce along on a motorcycle, heading back to remote villages to promote and assist wildlife-friendly agriculture, set-up cottage industries, promote wildlife conservation, and distribute medical and school supplies. Recently, Albert trained and equipped ten villagers for bee keeping, and ten more are in the works. Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, a long-time sponsor of our work, bought a new project motorcycle, so that these village development programs can be increased. UK based, *Harvest Help*, is also assisting the project with support for agriculture and clean water. Villagers now sell honey instead of ivory. They grow sunflower seeds and press them for cooking oil instead of poaching elephants in the park. The people have a better life, and a small, new elephant family can wend its way through the hills, led by a young matriarch, who was once only an orphan named Gift.

The relationship between bee keeping, sun flower presses, education and elephant conservation was difficult to explain to people at first. Now that the idea has caught on, why not apply it in America?

What does the educational program, Head Start, have to do with grizzly bears? There are a lot of people across our country that want grizzly bears saved from extinction. Most of these people live far from grizzlies, and they certainly don't plan their livelihoods around them. But a few human communities have grizzly bears as neighbors, and they suffer a few consequences, which perhaps we should all share, if we, as a nation, want to have the bears.

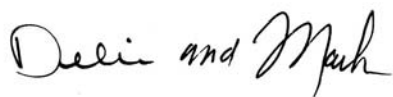
For example, in the Great Inland North West, a few remote counties are blessed with forested mountains and rugged terrain that shelter grizzlies. But as much as 75% of these counties is federally owned as National Forests. Little private property is left to generate tax revenue for schools, roads, and other county facilities. Jobs are hard to come by. When you believe that grizzly bears reduce the quality of your child's education, your first concern is not the bears! We should all chip in to lighten the load for those who carry the bears for the rest of us.

We are raising money for an education center in North Idaho grizzly bear country, one that will house a Head Start program and other important community programs. Just as we helped with education in villages in Zambia, we want to help children in grizzly country, those who don't have a Head Start facility because they share their county with endangered species. If this seems a bit far-fetched for a conservation organization, think of Gift and her growing family, roaming freely beyond the Beekeepers. It is impossible to conserve the natural world without the support of local people. They are the gatekeepers. Please help us help these children, not just for their sake, and the sake of the bears, but to prove that an idea that began in a remote village in Africa can work in America.

Twenty-eight years ago, among the moon-swept dunes of the Kalahari Desert, Mark and I began our study of rare and endangered brown hyenas. Not long ago a young man requested funds from us for his study of Kalahari brown hyenas. It tweaked a tender spot in our hearts. The circle has closed. Thanks to you, we can help the elephants, the 'elephant people', the grizzly bears, the 'bear people,' and brown hyenas.

Chances are you will not see an elephant, a grizzly bear, or a brown hyena today. But they are out there in their natural world of clean rivers, grassy savannahs and forested mountains, which we all need for a quality life. We must all share the responsibility for securing, rehabilitating, and protecting vital wildlife and human communities, and the ecosystems on which we depend. Thank you for your caring and commitment.

Cheers,



Delia and Mark

#### ***NOTES FROM MARY:***

\*Thanks to all who have advised their address changes. It saves a lot of time and money. ☺

\*If you'd like to receive updates by email, advise me at [marydykes@compuserve.com](mailto:marydykes@compuserve.com). Also, check our web page for updates & photos at [www.owens-foundation.org](http://www.owens-foundation.org). You can purchase from Barnes&Nobel.com through our link and a donation will be made by B&N to the OF. You can now donate by credit card to the OF on our web page.☺

#### ***A FEW THANK YOU NOTES:***

\*Many thanks to **Seattle's Woodland Park Zoo** for their ongoing support for the people and wildlife of N Idaho.

\*Thank you to **Harvest Help/UK** for partnering with the Owens Foundation to build on Delia and Mark's village outreach work to assist the people and the wildlife of North Luangwa benefit one another.

\*Special thanks to **H.R.H. Prince Bernhard of The Netherlands** for his generous donation to underwrite the new motorbike for NLWCCDP. For nearly 90 years HRH has worked to make the world a better place. Cheers!

\*Also – many thanks to **Elefriends of Australia** for a grant to help with the operation of the NL motorbike.

\* And again – a very special thanks to **Tom Steeb** for his ongoing work in support of the OFWC web page.