

ZAMDA is a registered charity (Charity No. CHY16728) dedicated to providing direct and effective aid to a number of projects in and around the city of Kabwe in Zambia. Our main priority is supporting “Sables”, a centre for Kabwe’s street children. ZAMDA has just been awarded a grant by the Solidarity Fund to purchase a vehicle for use as a school bus.

From Marino to Makalulu!

When retirement beckons I suppose a lot of us old geezers start to wonder, and worry, about what to do with ourselves! The golf course, and the back garden feature in the plans of many an ageing teacher and of course the chance to phone the Joe Duffy show and give out about teachers’ long holidays and short hours could be a daily highlight!

For us, however, having travelled back and forth to Zambia for the last ten years, there could be only one place to spend our retirement – Sables Nua School and Children’s Centre in Kabwe, Zambia.

So, when both of us retired, after 38 and 37 years at the chalkface in Dublin, we headed for Africa!

Sables Nua is a centre catering for 130 O.V.C.s (orphans and vulnerable children) from the slum compound of Makalulu in Kabwe.

I was going to write a big, long and probably boring, article about all the great work going on here but instead, as I sit here in the sun in a temperature of thirty-three degrees, I’ll just jot down a few stories which might be of interest to teachers sitting at home on a gloomy December in Ireland!

October 5th last was, you may be surprised to hear, World Teachers’ Day. Now this event might pass unnoticed in Ireland or Britain or the U.S. or elsewhere but let me tell you that in Kabwe it is one big deal indeed.

The day is a day off for teachers but not for other workers; so it’s a public holiday for some! Apparently it’s been a worldwide celebration for about the last twenty-five years so maybe the I.N.T.O. at this stage might chance its arm and petition the Government for a day off for teachers! I’d say our friends in the media would love that! (The ‘Liveline’ would certainly be hopping!)

Scheduled to start at 08.00, the celebrations actually got going at 10.20 when the parade started. (This is called ‘Zambian time’ - everything happens at its own pace, which is part of the charm).

Well over 1,000 teachers assembled at the civic building, a beautiful British Colonial building – (can’t believe I wrote that!)– and, led by a military band, paraded through

the streets of Kabwe en route to a rally in Railway Stadium home, as the slogan says, of “The Mighty Kabwe Warriors Football Club” (mind you, seeing as they operate in the bottom half of the First Division of the Zambian League rather than the Premier Division, they’re not so mighty! I digress, however – get back on track Mr. Pat.)

Anyway, the parade was great craic; unlike Ireland the onlookers shouted encouragement and cheered. There was only the very odd insult - I can’t imagine a similar parade of teachers through the streets of Fairview - the insults and abuse would be flying!

One lad, drunk as a skunk hurled abuse at teachers from his old school until his former Principal shouted something along the lines of “Murphy, is that you? You’re still a bit of a pup; now shut up or I’ll go over there and sort you out” and got the reply “Oh, is that you Sir? Sorry!” Priceless!

When the parade arrived in the stadium there was singing, traditional dancing, drumming and generally great craic.

The side of the pitch was stacked high with mattresses, blankets, electric fans, bicycles and lots of other big boxes in wrapping paper. You see, apparently, on this day every school is to reward every teacher with a ‘prize’ to show appreciation for the teacher and all the hard work done in the previous year! (now there’s an idea for Ireland). The level of prize given depends on how “powerful” the school is, i.e. how well off or how much of a show-off the school wants to be! (Our teachers got a cash ‘prize’ and were more than happy – I wasn’t carrying a fridge or a mattress around town!).

The best craic was the speeches.

First up was a Teachers’ Union official and he gave it socks! Reminded me of Ireland in the 1980s. When I was a very young N.Q.T. (before that term was invented) I remember being taken to a number of I.N.T.O. meetings which were organized as part of a big push for realistic salaries for teachers and listened to John Carr and Joe O’Toole tear strips of the then Government. I remember one great meeting in particular held in the Clare Manor hotel; the place burned down shortly afterwards probably as a result of spontaneous combustion due to the residual heat from the fiery John and Joe show!

Ar aon nós, this guy tore into the Government about teachers’ pay, hours, conditions, inspections, erosion of holiday time with paperwork and ‘workshops’ (in-service). Sound familiar?

He was a serious performer and he had his audience eating out of his hands! The crowd got behind him and the volume increased steadily until he reached his final clarion call -“Teachers!!!!!! We are the new poor!” and the response from his audience was deafening -standing ovation, stamping of feet, beating of drums.

That was only the start of the fun, however, as next up was the Dept. of Education Secretary. Now a lesser woman might be cowed by what had gone before but not this lady; if the union guy gave it socks, she gave back socks and shoes! “You are the new poor?” she cried, “You make me laugh! Look in the carpark outside this stadium and see the vehicles of those teachers who were too lazy or too fat to walk here and tell me teachers are poor...” Pandemonium.. but for a visiting observer it was pure pantomime! Wouldn’t happen in Ireland; this lady stood her ground and finished her speech to some, albeit grudging, applause.

There followed entertainment from the ‘Teachers’ Cultural Group” and fine culture it was too - a seriously suggestive dance (visitors will know the kind well!) and the audience members showed their appreciation by going on stage and stuffing money down the pants or tops of the performers! The Teachers’ Choir delivered a couple of numbers including a classic entitled, and I kid you not, “We do not participate in malpractice”!!! The song will hardly become a best-seller.

Then came the Prize Giving!

One by one the name of each school was called out and the Principal stepped onto the podium and called his or her teachers forward to be presented with their prize – electric fans were very popular as were cooler boxes and one very much sought-after prize was a petrol generator; that teacher must have been particularly good as, with power cuts here for at least eight hours every day a generator would be a God-send!

There were a few more speeches but, as your correspondent was by now (14.00) visibly wilting, he and the Sables Nua Brigade left discreetly and made their way to Tuskers for lunch. Hard to beat a couple of ice-cold Mosis at three o’clock in the afternoon under the shade of a mango tree in 33 degrees! Could have become very comfortable there but didn’t stay long. (Well, that’s my story anyway and I’m sticking to it.)

The next day we were visited in school by An Cigire – cigirí are the same here as in Ireland (take that any way you like!) and their arrival gets the same reaction (and you can take that any way you like too!).

On this occasion, however, the Cigire asked me to accompany him to his car as he had a present for the school. When he opened the boot out came two goats! He presented these to us in recognition of all our efforts. (DES inspectorate take note – how about a few gifts from the Cigirí when they visit?).

The kids were thrilled and the shout of “ukocha imbushi” (Braii or B.B.Q. the goat!) went up! The children rarely get meat to eat so the prospect of goat steaks on the braii was very enticing but that’ll have to wait for another while at least!

Finally, for now anyway, the best excuse I've ever had for a teacher being absent! In Ireland, the poor Príomh Oide dreads the late night, or early morning, call saying "I won't be in because.....". In Dublin 3, however, I never got the call saying "I won't be in because.....I've been bitten by a snake". It happened here this week - teacher walking to school through the bush stepped on a snake and was bitten on her ankle; she'll be alright but it was, I suppose, an acceptable reason for being out!

School in Zambia is certainly different but, just like Ireland, never boring!

If anybody wants to check us out you can get us on Facebook – zamda Ireland or our (out-of-date in-need -of -an – overhaul) website www.zamdaireland.com

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