

## Unexpected encouragers

### Sharper Focus

by Linda Manhardt –

I have so many great memories from when I was the training principal in Tanzania. The training college is on a large compound in Dar es Salaam, along with many other programs, but my personal favorite, Matumaini, is a primary school and home for physically handicapped children.

Children are brought here from all over Tanzania to have a chance for an education that would not otherwise be available to them. These 200 children are among the happiest children I have ever seen!

Each evening, they would gather in a classroom near my quarters, and sing their hearts out. Forget television! Every night between 7:00 and 8:00, I was given a personal concert of these (loud) joyous, uplifted voices. I couldn't help but be blessed by their enthusiastic singing.

When I knew I would be coming back to the United States, I decided it was time to lose weight. One would think that the temperature of 100 degrees+, along with 100 percent humidity, would do it, but no—not for me.

In the early evening, after classes were finished at the college, I would jog in circles around the compound for an hour. My route took me past the college, the corps, command headquarters, the hostel, the vocational training center, and finally, down a long stretch past Matumaini.

At this time the children would be congregated outside, waiting for dinner as I wound my way through them, dripping by, with my dachshund/mix dog, Muffin, alongside me. The children adored Muffin. They would point and shout in excitement, "mbwa mdogo!" (little dog). They had never seen a dog like her. Her legs were short. To them, she had a physical disability just like them, and they loved her for it!

As I shuffled my way past the children, they would clap and cheer me along, and on each pass around, different children joined me—hopping on crutches, artificial limbs, or in wheelchairs. They went as far as they could—maybe a few steps, or maybe as much as half way around the compound. As we "ran" together, we kidded and encouraged each other to keep going—each of us limping along



the best we could. And we laughed.  
Their encouragement turned the dreaded jog into a joy.

These precious children! These children who we would pity and feel sorrow for because of their station in life! These children are living examples of the joy of the Lord in all circumstances. We have so much to learn from them.

They are happy just to be alive—to have food and an education. And they keep on trying, even when the situation seems impossible. They are happy enough to infect others with their contagious joy. In just living in their joyous way, they became my unexpected encouragers.

Isn't this the way that God wants us to live? To be filled to overflowing with his love and joy in all circumstances, so that it spills from us in all that we do and unconsciously infects others?

I believe he has called each one of us to be an unexpected encourager.