

June 17, 2009

Dear Supporters of the Children's Town Classroom Container Project:

I am pleased to tell you that after all of these many months, the 'classroom-in-a-box' container, filled by your donations and shipped by your contributions, has at last arrived in Children's Town, Zambia.

The container arrived on Thursday, May 21st, trucked out the last one hundred miles down a pot-holed dirt road from the metropolis of Lusaka to the tiny village of Malambanyama and to the Children's Town compound on its outskirts.



Container entering gate at DAPP



Crane waiting to go to Children's Town

The truck was accompanied by a motorized crane, which lifted the container off the truck bed and placed it on cement piers that had been poured several months before in preparation for its arrival. Even as the container was being put in place, the 250 students and 20 adults at Children's Town were busy preparing the facility – painting classrooms and outbuildings, constructing a new latrine, building a stage and seating area for local tribal leaders and VIPs – for the next day's festivities. The container itself – 10ft x 10ft x 40ft – was wrapped in a ribbon, on which was affixed a round 'gift card' created by the children.

I don't have to tell you what a relief it was to get the e-mail telling me that the container had at last arrived in Children's Town. Since I last updated you, much has happened, most of it bad, and only the happy ending makes up for it all.

A quick summary: When I last updated you last September, the container had just been shipped from the back lot of Resurrection School in Sunnyvale. The container had been there so long (two years) that the younger students thought that it was a permanent fixture of the school. Even the driveway on which it sat had been resurfaced – and when the container was finally removed it left an unpaved area that remains to this day.

Anyway, thanks to some last minute support from the attorney Dick Alexander and Cypress Semi CEO TJ Rodgers to help cover some unexpected costs, the container was on its way. Four hundred students from Resurrection School, along with reporters and camera crews from KNTV, KTVU and KRON, came out to cover the send-off ceremony. Mike Cassidy in the SJ Mercury-News, who had written a column about the project months before, wrote a follow-up on the send-off as well. It seemed like a perfect finish to a long and difficult project.

Little did I know . . .

The plan was to truck the container to Los Angeles, where it would be placed aboard a Maersk vessel to cross the Pacific, into the Indian Ocean, and then on to the port of Beira, Mozambique – where it would be off-loaded onto a truck and driven about a thousand miles inland to Lusaka, Zambia.

Well, the first part of the plan worked neatly. By early November, the container was in Beira. But at that point, everything began to fall apart. Apparently, the woman I was working with at the shipping company was in over her head when it came to shipping to Africa . . .and as a result, she failed to file the necessary paperwork. So, the container sat for almost *three months* at the port. We had no idea what was going on – until we were suddenly notified that unless the overdue storage costs were paid, the container would be sold and its contents auctioned off. After a quick scramble, I agreed to divide the costs between the shipping company, Maersk, and what little money remained in the Troop account from donations. We just made it.

So, finally, the container was off to Zambia, where it arrived in late February/early March (communications with Africa were never very clear).

Then we hit another snag: the container arrived at the beginning of the longest continuous spell of rain that Zambia had seen in a half-century – more than sixty consecutive days. Luckily, the container had a guardian angel in Rene Schulz, the Belgian director of Children’s Town’s parent organization, DAPP. He ordered the container placed inside of the DAPP compound for safe-keeping until the roads to Malambanyama were dry enough to handle equipment.

And that brings us to late May, and the transporting – at last! – of the container to Children’s Town. Even then, there were snags, most notably the added cost of the motorized crane that needed to accompany the container truck. Luckily, Marvell Semiconductor came through at absolutely the last moment to save the day.



Container arrives at Children’s Town



Crane lifting container off truck

By Thursday afternoon, the container was on its pad, the stage completed, all of the classrooms, living huts and outbuildings cleaned and painted, and the grounds trimmed and raked.



Digging for drainage



Painting the buildings in preparation of the ceremony

On Friday afternoon, a crowd estimated at more than 500 people – including students, relatives from nearby villages, tribal chiefs and elders, and government officials -- gathered at the school for the celebration of the opening of the container. The Zambian national television network (ZNBC) had a crew there as well.

There was a bit of a delay waiting for the special VIP of the day – the Zambian Minister of Education – so the crowd entertained itself by touring the school’s farm, workshops (where they make metal rakes, wooden beds, and bio-diesel from jatropha seeds) and grounds.



Showing the rakes & beds produced in Children’s Town



At that point, about 4 pm, just as everyone was starting to worry about the lowering sun (this being autumn in Zambia), a roar went up as the SUVs carrying the Minister of Education and his staff drove in through the front gate.

The Minister was greeted and given his place of honor in the special seating area (fancy chairs and couches under an awning) for the special guests and chiefs. The entertainment continued.



Minister arrives



The District Commissioner of Chibombo sitting with the minister

Then the Minister was formally introduced by Rene Schulz and Imasiku Sitali, the current director of Children’s Town. Sitali told the story of the school, dating back to its founding in 1990 from a single tent set up in the bush – and of the 1400 orphans and abandoned children who have benefited from the program since.



Rene Schulz



Imasiku Sitali

I’ll leave it to Rene Schulz’s e-mail to tell the rest of the story:

The minister replied with thanks for the warm welcome and showed his passion for the unprivileged and vulnerable children of the society.

The clock now showed 16,15 and it was time to go to the place of the public event.

Here around an old ant hill, under the shade of the tall trees, hundreds were gathered and deeply focused on a theatre group from the nearby Kafushi High School dressed in pink robes advocating for

safe sex in speech and songs. All of the honoured guests silently sat down and took part in the wise entertainment.



Theater group from Kafushi High School



Steel band at the theater

Then started the official program on the stage and from the speaker's chair. The national anthem was played by the steel band and everyone stood up in respect. The master of ceremony took us through speeches and entertainments

The project leader made his speech about the importance of a place like Children's Town where former street children can get another chance to learn and grow to be active members of society. The director of DAPP Rene Schultz told the story of the encounter between Tad Malone – the originator of the classroom container from California – and DAPP Children's Town and the collection of items among communities in Silicon Valley that was managed from the list made in Children's Town in 2006 when the Malone family took a walk around Children's Town and Tad realized the need for improvement in many areas of education and infrastructure. He also read the list of names of all of the people, companies and schools who contributed to the container project.

Then the honoured Minister was introduced by the representative of the District Commissioner of Chibombo District. The minister marched in front of the crowd of about 500 guests and students the 100 meter to the container. The container appeared as an enormous gift box with ribbons and balloons attached nicely.



Minister walking out to see the container Minister reading aloud

The launch ceremony was conducted by the Minister of Education. First he stood in front of a big greeting card placed on the middle of the big metal box. He read:

“ To Children’s Town – students and teachers - From Tad Malone, the Malone Family, the students of Resurrection School, and the people of Silicon Valley, California, USA”

Then everyone applauded and the minister moved to the end of the container, and the big doors. A small child carried golden scissors on a velvet pillow that the minister took and in one cut the container was declared open for Children’s Town to enjoy.

The big doors were opened and all 1000 eyes surrounding the container in that very moment tried to look into the darkness the best they possibly could. But the minister had the best position so to say and equipped with the big book of inventory that Tad Malone had sent some 8 months earlier – he could get an overview of what all those boxes inside consisted of.

Therefore, all went back to the seats to hear the speech from the Malone family in USA. It was read aloud by one of the older boarding students:

Dear students and staff,

I am very pleased that the container has now finally arrived and is ready to be opened. The process to get it there has been longer and more strenuous than I could have ever imagined. You all may not know it, but I feel as if I am the smallest part of the entire project. From the beginning, it has delighted me to see so many people willingly give their time and energy to get the container all the way from America to Zambia. In fact, the entirety of the donations came from a fifteen mile radius of my home. Never before have I seen a community come together to help shape the lives of students and teachers that are ten thousand miles away. So now that the container will be converted into the classroom I envisioned, I know that it was not I who made a difference, but all of you who made a difference in me. Thank you,

Tad Malone

From the Malone Family:

Greetings to the students, teachers and administrators of Children's Town. Greetings as well to the guests who have honored Children's Town today with their presence at this ceremony. The big metal structure you see before you today may look like a shipping container, but it is in fact of box full of dreams. The first dream was that of Moses Zulu, who dreamed of building this school for you. Then there were the dreams of your teachers and faculty to give you the best education possible. Then Tad Malone dreamed of filling your school with the textbooks and tools to make Children's Town the complete educational experience it deserves to be.

Then came the dream of hundreds of people in California – students, teachers, Boy Scouts, business executives, computer experts, and families – to share some of the bounty of our lives with your lives, to reach out to you in friendship.

And now, students of Children's Town, it is your turn to dream. This Dream Box is filled with books, uniforms, computers and a thousand other things to help you transform your school, to expand your knowledge, and to help prepare you for your careers and for the big world that lies out there. We have even provided the paint and equipment to convert this container into a classroom itself. It is our hope that in the months and years to come, every time you pass this Dream Box, it will remind you that you have friends throughout the world . . .and, even more, that it will remind you to always Dream Big.

After this speech there was a big applause and people were touched by the visionary speech.

The Minister ended the program with his speech, from which we quote:

“Today, I am pleased to stand before you to officially launch the family educational container donated by people from the United States of America. I am also pleased to be here at Children's Town, a school that educates our less privileged children picked from streets of big towns in Zambia and homes that are not able to meet educational requirements and other day-to-day needs of their children.

The government has a huge task of offering the Zambian citizens a meaningful life and education. Education is a catalyst to any development we can talk about anywhere in the world. I want to commend and thank DAPP in Zambia for this important work that you are doing of giving the less privileged children education, if we had many serious players in education like you DAPP, we would easily reach the Millennium Development Goal No. 2 and education for all before 2015. This is a true reflection of human solidarity and the willingness not only to sympathize, but also to undertake practical actions, in the search for a solution.”

In between, we had more entertainment from the different schools around Children's Town that meet each other at occasions like this and at sports and theatre tournaments.

The sun was low and long shadows paved the way for us back to the container. Here we saw box after box that were carried out of the container. And now it was show time.



Minister examines books from container



Just like Christmas



Hurray for the container



It got late

Boxes were opened with computer keyboards, monitors and PC's. Books, clothes, internet cables, sports equipment were revealed as examples and gave all lookers an idea of the great value that was received on the great day for Children's Town and its inhabitants.

And so, after three long years (a sizable chunk of my childhood), the classroom-in-a-box is now in Children's Town, its contents distributed around the school – I'm still wondering where they put all *six* pianos from the Sunnyvale School District – the library filled, the hundreds of uniforms from Resurrection and Stratford School now being worn by the students, the library filled with the thousands of books, and the container busily being converted into a computer classroom. When I began this project, I was a high school

freshman; the Children's Town ceremony took place just two weeks before my high school graduation.

In-between, you, I and the many volunteers along the way, spent an estimated 2,000-3,000 hours on this project. I've been told that this is a record for an Eagle project in the history of Santa Clara County, and perhaps in the century-long history of Boy Scouts of America. After that, it was something of an anti-climax to earn my Eagle award last week, coincidentally on the day I graduated.

I'll be leaving in September for England, to the Oxford Advanced Studies Program, to work on my A-Levels in preparation (I hope) for attending Oxford University. I leave a different person than the cynical teenager who started this project – in particular, I've learned something about the fundamental goodness of my neighbors in Silicon Valley. Each of you found the time, despite some of the busiest schedules on the planet, to give of yourselves and your possession, to poor orphans you'd never met on the far side of the planet. That is truly something wonderful and unforgettable. I cannot thank you enough.

I hope that you will always keep Children's Town in your heart – and if the opportunity ever presents itself, that you will help those children again. One day, those shiny new books will wear old, and the splendid uniforms will fade . . .and the orphans will need help again. And perhaps someday one of those orphans will use those books and computers to escape poverty and fulfill his or her dream of attending a university or coming to America to pursue a career. I hope on that day, you'll remember that image of golden scissors on the velvet pillow, and the doors of the container opening to a magical future – and that you will open your heart to that child one more time.

With sincere appreciation – and, Yours in Scouting,

Tad Malone
Eagle Scout
Troop 466, Sunnyvale, CA