



Letters from Africa

January 20

Helping others is part of Linda Clemens' nature. As a standout on the Boise State volleyball team, she worked as student director of the university's Volunteers for Youth organization, a program developed by the NCAA to allow college athletes to spend time with junior high school students. While working toward her B.A. in social work, Clemens was involved in volunteer fieldwork that included distributing food at St. Paul's Community Center.

But now Clemens' latest venture has taken her to the other side of the world, to the village of Bundibugyo in Uganda, where she and her brother, Bailey, also a former BSU student, are lay missionaries with their aunt, a Catholic nun who has been in the east central African nation for 18 years.

Linda Clemens, 23, and Bailey, 26, decided to join their aunt, Sister Mary, after Linda graduated from Boise State in the spring of 1986. The two Burns, Ore., natives arrived in Uganda in November of 1986 for a two-year commitment.

Since then, Linda Clemens, co-captain of the Bronco volleyball team her senior year and an ASBSU Hall of Fame inductee, has kept in touch with Darlene Bailey, her former coach at BSU. She also writes regularly to her parents, Del and Teresa Clemens of Burns.

Clemens' letters detail many of the sorrows of the poverty and sickness in Africa—including the treatment of AIDS patients. The letters also recount the adventures of adjusting to an uncivilized environment—from eating ants to dodging snakes.

Following are excerpts from letters Linda Clemens has written this year to her parents, Darlene Bailey, and her former teammates:

Wasio! In Africa (Rutoro) that means greetings. Here is a short update of our experiences here in Uganda. Bailey and I arrived at our final destination in Bundibugyo on Nov. 23. It took us seven hours to go 48 miles on a muddy, curvy road. The roads are really unbelievable for traveling. It takes a four-wheel-drive truck and even they get stuck several times. Once we arrived we were greeted by the Ugandan priest, Sister Mary, and many young children. Their custom is to give a welcoming dinner with singing and dancing. The people are very happy and generous in most everything they do.

Our house is located on the highest knoll overlooking the beautiful valley of Bwamba. From our back porch we are able to see the country of Zaire in the distance. The land is filled with greenery such as matooke (banana trees) and tall elephant grass plants. The beauty is indescribable!

Our home is an old remodeled church. We have many interesting little critters that come into our abode ranging from bats to lizards to rats. Sister Mary says they are our friends because they eat insects. I don't know whether I'll be able to say that or not after a two-year stay.

At times, our water system works, but if not, we have to carry it from the river. There is no electricity, so the kerosene lantern is our companion in the evenings. We hope to have solar power sometime in the future. It's amazing how much time it takes just doing the daily household chores such as washing dishes, laundry, and cooking. I think I can truly say I know what it was like to live in the 1900s.

Besides the household chores, Sister Mary and I are working in the women and children's clinic, seeing anywhere from 40-80 patients a day. Bailey is the organizer for the finances and medical supplies. We three are working among the people, immunizing, visiting various villages, and teaching primary care to improve their health, nutrition and physical needs. Our main



Above, photos of BSU alumni Linda Clemens and her brother Bailey record the daily experiences of the lay missionaries in Uganda.

purpose is to teach them preventative care so they can help themselves and others in such matters as malnutrition, dehydration, and many other preventable illnesses.

There are so many people with unmet needs here in Uganda. It is a very helpless feeling when you see a child close to death in a mother's arms because she has given the baby an enema of boiled tomato leaves to ward off the evil spirits. Not only do we have to teach them about health, but also help them realize their customs and native medicines can be very harmful to human life.

There are many variables here in Bundibugyo. First, we have no doctor to attend to the urgent needs of the people. Recently we had a woman who was unable to deliver due to an abnormality of the baby and a breech position which required a cesarean. As a midwife and nurse, Sister Mary is very skilled but unable to perform such a delicate operation. Fortunately, our Protestant friends provided transportation for the pregnant woman, thus enabling her to deliver at a hospital 50 miles away. The trip to the nearest hospital is seven hours away over muddy roads. We do our best to provide some kind of transportation, but our options are very limited.

In our spare time, Bailey and I get out among the young and do various activities such as playing volleyball, singing, drumming and dancing and also swapping some traditions among each others' cultures.

March 24

Bailey and I have been very busy. I still work in the clinic assisting Sister Mary in examining pregnant women and caring for sick kids. I also have helped in many baby deliveries. It is exciting to see a woman give birth. However, I have also seen many children die in the arms of their mothers. Those days are a bit tough, but all in all I have enjoyed the work thoroughly. I think I got in the wrong profession, though. Instead of social work, nursing would have been a bit handier.

As for recreation, Bailey and I teach the nearby neighbor

kids how to play volleyball. We set up a so-called net—a string across two poles—in our backyard. The kids love it! And when we're not showing kids how to play volleyball, Bailey and I have a grueling, sweaty match of one-on-one!

Besides sharing some of our customs, the people also have exchanged many of their African ways with us. We have already learned most of the Ugandan traditional dances and Bailey has learned all of the different drum beats. The Ugandans love it when we dance their dances.

Also, the other night the priest had us over for dinner. Well, some of the African delicacies are the stomach of a cow, grasshoppers, and ants cooked in peanut sauce. Well, I didn't around to eating the gut of a cow, and grasshoppers are out of season, but I did try a few small ants on my spoon. All in all, it wasn't too bad and it went down pretty smoothly with no crunchy aftereffects. I figure I might as well experience it all. Bailey just looked at me in disgust. I do suppose I will probably be needing a good deworming here pretty soon.

There are so many things that Bailey and I have experienced already, I wish I could share them all with you. Each day is a new adventure. Time is flying by so quickly I can't believe we have been here coming up on our sixth month. I don't regret coming here one bit, except I do get a bit homesick for all the wonderful friends and family. If you ever want a little more adventure than Boise, Idaho, catch the next plane to Entebbe, we'd be glad to see ya!

June 1

It has now been about eight months since we left the Boise air terminal, boarding the United Airlines and saying goodbye to everyone, knowing that it would be two years before we would return to American soil. As we look back, it all seems somewhat like a dream, but reality continues to hit each morning when we wake up and realize we are thousands of miles from home.

However, all the newness of the country has begun to wear off and we have settled into our two-year temporary home.

So for us over here, our world continues to turn. One turn happened last night while Sister Mary, Bailey and I were relaxing in our dining room listening to the BBC nightly news report. While listening I looked up and to my surprise I saw a snake



grey in color and about 4 feet long coming out of our kitchen and slithering toward us. I screamed "snake!" and within seconds everyone was standing on their chairs looking for the snake! Finally, Sister Mary escaped and ran for the hoe while Bailey played the snake matador with his chair, trying to keep it from going down the hall where our bedrooms are located. Unfortunately, I remained standing on my chair watching all of the action because the snake kept slithering under my chair. At last we killed it; Bailey continued beating its head for another five minutes making sure the thing was dead. We then showed the snake to our neighbors who seemed to think the snake was poisonous. So at 9 o'clock in the evening, Bailey got out the cement mix and went to filling every crack and crevice in the house. It seems we all agreed to buy brighter flashlights for our late-night trips to the bathroom! As for our house, we only greet guests with two feet!

Besides killing snakes, we continue to be very busy in the maternal/children's clinic, which seems to have many sick children these days. Last week we served 158 patients, and that was just one of the days out of the very busy week.

Most of the illnesses we treat—such as worms, malaria, malnutrition and diarrhea—are preventable. However, a disease that is not so curable which we have been seeing lately is the so-called familiar African name of "slim"—better known to us as AIDS. We have treated several children between the ages of 1 month to 1 year who have contracted AIDS through their own mothers, who are infected and are carriers of the disease, or by unsterile injections. It is a very sad sight to see. Most often the child will show signs of extreme malnutrition, diarrhea, septic sores all over the body, and a pasty white substance called "thrush" covering the entire mouth.

Although a large percentage of the cases are transmitted sexually, another percent is spread through the contamination of dirty needles. In the village there are many untrained people administering injections with no education of sterilization techniques. Consequently, they most often use the same needle and same syringe for all of the children.

In our primary health care classes we are teaching about such dangers and prevention of the different diseases to our village health workers and midwives.

As for further news, we just recently had a currency exchange in Uganda. It was a large procedure of changing the old currency from the government of President Obote's to the new currency of President Museveni's government. In the past, most of the presidents who were in power would have their picture on the currency. However, President Museveni elected not to put his face on the money, which is a good idea because as

presidents come and go here in Uganda, so does the money. It's a real hassle to exchange the money from old to new—something Bailey and I have never experienced. The announcement of the exchange was made over the radio and so everyone had 10 days to get their money changed.

Unfortunately, those who live high in the mountains or deep in the forest may have never heard about the exchange. So if they didn't exchange their money within the allotted 10 days, that old money just becomes worthless paper.

According to reports, the new currency was needed to better compete in the world market. Thus for every old shilling exchanged, 30 percent of it was deducted for government spending.

August 1

I am recovering from another attack of mango fly eggs and worms under my skin. Yep, Sister Mary counted about 50 or so. She also was infected, and so one night was filled with plastering one another with tape, then fingernail polish, then glue. Finally we smothered the little buggers, but they can sure make a person go wild scratching and itching!

Fortunately, Bailey hasn't had the pleasure, but whenever he gets a red swelling on his skin he thinks it is a mango!

Bailey is headed for Kanpala again this coming week to pick up the new sisters who will be staying here with us. I hope they can rough it a bit. I hope they like matooke and rice for the main meal, and get used to rats, bats, and lizards on chapel walls!

Also, Sister Mary is leaving this week so I am left here by myself once again to run the clinic, immunize in the villages, and teach the midwives and our health workers.

Then Bailey and I are planning a trip to Kenya for our vacation. After being in the jungle for nine months, this will be like New York City!

Every day is an adventure! We hope this letter finds you happy and healthy. You're in our prayers.

Linda □