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Cover

Children in front of their school, Ecole Yenzi.

photo:

Courtesy of Tom Henley

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Letter from the Editor

Judy (Lady Moody-Stuart, wife of ex Shell Chairman Sir Mark Moody-Stuart), is a contributor, a volunteer and a philanthropist, so an issue on Shell expats and voluntary work just wouldn't be complete without a few words from her on the subject.

I caught up with Judy during one of her recent trips to The Hague where she is a board member of the Outpost Family Archive Centre (a centre that she was instrumental in setting up in 2001). As anyone who has met Judy will testify, it is impossible to listen to her and not be energized and humbled. Her drive is boundless, and she works relentlessly and voluntarily to help make the world a better place.

Judy has been an expatriate for most of her life, and during her life abroad she has always contributed to the community of her host country. Not that she would describe it that way - Judy would say she simply got involved wherever she was, and that volunteer work also proved a very good way to immerse herself in the culture of the local community. This is why, when the Moody-Stuarts were based in Turkey, she worked in the laundry of an old people's home for the poor, (and why, 25 years later, she can still iron, button and fold a shirt in just under 4 minutes!) Her ironing skills were not the only skills she honed in the laundry either. It provided a prime opportunity to learn the Turkish language, a skill that she continues to use today in one of her many current voluntary projects - a governance role on the British Community Council in Istanbul.

Judy's motivation to volunteer is simple. She believes it is unjust and impossible to judge another, that we must all count as equals and that everyone deserves the means to live a full life. For Judy, this means that "if someone is healthy and has enough money not to worry, then that person can, in fact needs to, put a lot back into society".

And this edition is full of stories about people doing just that.

The stories are diverse and inspiring and I hope you will enjoy reading them as much as I have. My only regret is that even having extended the usual allocation of pages for the focus stories, we still did not have room to share them all.

Season's greetings.

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The Sisters of Charity- Okpara Inland

Ogunu RA, Warri, Delta State, Nigeria

Jane Brown

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It's a scorching hot Monday morning on Okpara Inland Nigeria, as Florence lies on the grubby pile of mat and blanket that is her bed, on a dirty concrete floor. She hasn't eaten since Friday when Sister Freda came with food from her Meals on Wheels service, the only source of nutrition for this single young mother of three. Florence hasn't been able to walk since she endured severe burns to the rear left side of her body, singeing the skin from her foot to her buttocks, when she fell into an open fire during an epileptic fit. She shuffles as best she can across the filthy, uncovered concrete floor on her hands, right buttock and the foot of her good leg. It's a pitiful sight and the stench in her room is almost unbreathable.

Sister Dorothy checks the wounds and dressings and realises that there is no improvement in their condition and asks Florence if she is taking her antibiotics and other medication. She cannot understand why the infection isn't clearing up and the wound not healing. Florence eventually offers an explanation for the continued infection; the rats come in at night and nibble at her wounds. Horrified, I want to scoop her up there and then and bring her home with me to Ogunu Camp.

This was my first visit to Okpara Inland, a village some 45 minutes drive from our beautiful and lush Shell Camp at Ogunu, where a Missionary Post operated by The Sisters of Charity (a group of Roman Catholic Nuns), do what they can to provide the most basic of necessities to villagers.

Edith



I first heard of the Sisters and the work they undertake at Okpara when I arrived on camp and during my first year I was a willing participant for the fundraising events organised by the expat community to support them. The Sisters receive no funding from the Nigerian Government or the Catholic Church and rely completely on donations to undertake their work.

During that year I met the three Nuns mainly involved with the work at Okpara: Dorothy, an Australian nurse and midwife, ran the Primary Care unit as well as assisting with deliveries at the Missionary Hospitals' maternity unit. Mairead, an Irish lady was mainly involved with the religious needs of the community; and Freda, a Nigerian lady ran the small farm providing eggs, chicken, pineapple, pawpaw, pumpkin and fish to the mission. These ladies are an inspiration and I am personally in awe of their dedication to their work and conviction to their cause.

Being part of the fundraising activities on our camp was always something that I was delighted to do, but for my first year or so my part in it was very much as a participant at arms length. I had promised the Sisters on many occasions that I would come to their village and see first hand the work that they were doing. This was why I made my first trip - to see for myself where and how our donations were being spent.

I gaily headed off with two other wives, Kate and Pat, to have coffee with the nuns, have a look around the mission where they work and have a wander around the village that their work supports. What I saw shocked me; I simply wasn't prepared for the sheer scale of the poverty, deprivation and desperation that I was to witness.

In addition to visiting Florence, the young burns victim, we also visited an old lady, affectionately known as Madam Mary. She too was confined to a dirty mattress on the concrete floor of her "stall", unable to move due to a broken knee and without the necessary money to pay for hospital treatment. She had no door to her room which faced the street, no power or water supply and no family.

We also met Edith, a young mother of two, delirious with a fever and looking close to death. She needed immediate attention and once stabilised we were told that she has AIDS and that her baby boy of 6 months may also be infected. Her husband had abandoned her and their two



Sisters Freda, Maireed, Dorothy

children leaving her on her own to cope with no money, no support and no hope.

These three cases are just the tip of a very large iceberg as there are hundreds of similar cases in Okpara Inland and millions more throughout Nigeria, Africa and the developing world. I didn't sleep for days after this visit. How could I as an individual or even all of us as an expat community make any real difference? There were even moments when I considered that it would be so very easy to turn the other way and ignore what I had seen!

But the reality is we can make a difference, small though it may seem. We can help to provide hospital treatment for Florence to rid her of the infection in her leg and to help ensure that this young mother survives to raise her three children. We can help to fix Madam Mary's broken knee and get her mobile so that she can live her life with more independence and won't have to rely on people to bring her food and empty the pot she uses as her toilet. We can help Edith to improve her quality of life by obtaining the funds for the drugs that might help manage the AIDS.

So back on Ogonu Camp myself and many others from the expat community continue to organise parties, events, cake auctions, sponsored 10k runs and many other activities so we can keep giving to the Sisters who work so tirelessly for their cause. I participate in and help organise as many events as I can, and sometimes involve my own family and friends back in the UK. Last December I raised £500 in sponsorship from family and friends at home when I participated in a mini Triathlon in Ogonu.

But though our work for the Sisters continues, there are currently restrictions on our movements here in Delta State, and these prohibit me from visiting Okpara. The increased militant activity this year has curtailed my trips to the village and confined me to camp which is most frustrating. I have frequently been tempted to ignore our security advice and

head for the hills, but knowing my luck, I'd end up in the wrong place at the wrong time. So, we rely on the Sisters visiting us on Ogonu Camp instead as they are able to travel freely throughout the country no doubt protected by their calling.

What the nuns are doing here is really benefiting the Okpara Inland village, and I am proud to be able to contribute to their work. It also couldn't be more different from my pre-Nigeria life. Back then I was a businesswoman. Moving to Warri I sold my majority shareholding in a business that I was key to setting up, and resigned my position as Director and Chairman of the Board. I further removed myself from the business world by giving up my roles on the Board of Governors at Robert Gordon's College and the Chamber of Commerce.

I occasionally think of my pre-Nigeria life, the work I used to enjoy and the financial independence that it gave me. But the benefit to others of what I do now is immeasurable. I am no longer a mover and a shaker in the business world but I do have a purpose, here and now.

Florence

