

Grand-Bassam, October 2019

Dear Sponsors

I am extremely happy being able to write this Newsletter in place of Lotti Latrous. My name is Valérie Keller; for the last 13 years I have been working as Head of the Office of the Foundation Lotti Latrous. This summer I spent 3 weeks at my own expense at the Center of Hope at Grand Bassam and am allowed to report to you about the wonderful time I spent there.

“Ecolo, ecolo – la colonie de vacances!”

Around 40 children were waiting for the Highlight - “the holiday camp”, which was being organised for the fifth year. The participants were also the children from extremely poor conditions from outside our centers. The center was decorated, games were played, tinkered, danced and sang. All the children, about whom Lotti often wrote, were there; for example, the baby Marie-Noëlle, about whom Lotti wrote in the last Newsletter, who spent the day mostly being happy, sucking their fingers either in the arms of a nanny or in her baby rocker.

There was a group of wild 4 to 8 years kids with shining eyes, busy with crafting and playing; whereby all our efforts to bring some kind of order in the proceedings failed miserably and ended up having a bunch of loud singing kids romping about in the garden. There were plenty of joy and laughter - which after all was the main purpose. Now I can show you a group of happy kids with their body paintings prepared by themselves or our homemade lanterns, which shone in bright colours in the Soirée Lumière, where Lotti told stories to the kids.





There was also a campfire to roast marshmallows Bintou and Marie-Noëlle.

The outing at Songon, in a lagoon, where the kids could swim was also very interesting. Around the port of Abidjan the huts were built horrifyingly close together. It is unimaginable to have to live in such a place under such conditions. How good is it for the kids, who have found their place in the Centre Espoir.

Clarisse

Side by side of the daily great joy there was also great suffering. Clarisse was brought to the center in January by her aunt. Due to her high fever and a strong cough, it was natural to suspect that she had tuberculosis and for that reason the 12-year old girl had to spend the first two weeks alone in the isolation room. How happy everyone was when the tuberculosis test was negative. I thought "What luck, she "only" has Aids". Although this sounded terrible, it is true that nowadays with the right treatment you can live with this virus, which is clear seeing the other lively kids in the center. So, Clarisse was allowed to move in with them and go to school with them and was happy.

Unfortunately, the joy didn't last long; Aids is not "just Aids", or the disease has previously not been treated properly. Clarisse got fever again, got better but got sick again. Her condition deteriorated continuously and she got weaker and weaker. Lotti wrote me at the end of June that she was not sure if I shall see Clarisse and then again before I flew that she may not be able to meet me herself from the airport, as Clarisse had a very bad night and in case she was dying she will stay with her.

Lotti did meet me from the airport. The process of dying has become a mystery to me. The death didn't occur or can it be that Clarisse couldn't let herself go? Could it be that Lotti and the children couldn't let her go as they loved her so dearly? Or was it that the "one up there" thought the time had not yet come for her? The assumption was that Clarisse wanted to experience the holiday camp. It was terrible to see her suffer. She was brought near the ongoing activities in a wheelchair and she took part in the activities as a silent onlooker. But the spark of the enjoyment didn't catch up with her, for she was too tired, too exhausted.

She felt most comfortable at the small chapel, where Lotti arranged to place a mattress and often laid down beside her to tell her stories and to console her. Lotti affectionately called her "Mon petit papillon" - my little butterfly. Every evening we all gathered beside her to hold a

short mass. Mme Valérie the pedagogue of our Centre read something from the Bible or we discussed about topics like Love and Faith. We sang a lot and naturally also prayed. Everyone could wish about what to pray; of course, the desire that Clarisse would be relieved of her sufferings and fear and can depart quietly and peacefully was omnipresent.

Prayers were also said for you, dear Sponsors; it is clear that it is thanks to you that to the kids and the teenagers who were rescued are able to lead the life they have now. The evenings in the chapel were nice in their own way. But yet from time to time my heart was torn off and I could have cried out: "It is not fair; it is not fair that a girl like Clarisse should suffer so much!" Clarisse appeared to me to represent all the suffering children of the world. She stayed with us a bit longer than the end of the camp. On the evening of our last mass, I went back and stood at the door of the chapel. "Good night» I uttered silently and waved goodbye and she waved back. She passed away on this night, August 1st.



Clarisse in the middle with Davila and Adam in July 2019. Rest in peace, little butterfly.

Maman Lotti

After I came back Lotti informed me that she had a guilty conscious as she should have looked after me more. Yes, it is a fact that I didn't see Lotti a lot during the time I was there. Often, she got up early at 5 o'clock to go to Clarisse to go for a short round with her sitting in her wheelchair. At 8 o'clock Lotti opened the office, so that she can go to Clarisse at lunch time as well as just after the closing of the office, as Clarisse could relax only in Lotti's arms. It was quite clear that Lotti should be with Clarisse. I was only worried that Lotti may not have the strength to stand the strain! There was this helpless little girl who was afraid and only wanted to be with Lotti. In this situation demanding that Lotti should have looked after me more?! Surely not!

I was warmly and openly welcomed by all. So long I have been reading and publishing about what Lotti writes about the love and joy in her center and now to experience it myself with my own body and soul - the love and joy despite of all the difficulties. I am so grateful! Lotti insisted to lovingly prepare breakfast for me every morning. There was also Aziz, who in spite of everything took me to Abidjan, in the French Quarter of Bassam and to the beach. It was so interesting to discuss with him and so nice to drink an African bear with him. I got affectionate to "Papa Aziz"- as everyone calls him. I was also with Mme Valérie the pedagogue. There was Dr. N'Da, who looked after all my aches and told me about his son, whom he had lost. Not to forget the nurses, babysitters and social workers, who all expressed their thanks for all we are doing for them from Switzerland - I like to pass these thanks to you dear sponsors.

And the kids! There are people, whom you just like right away, although you do fall in love with them all. With all those kids, that was definitely so. Love comes flying to you and immediately you are more than ready to reciprocate this love!

What else is there to write? Yes, the singing of Carol, Marie-Jeanne and Léa. The seriousness of Abel in the chapel, as he quoted the bible verse, which Mme Valérie would then read. BAMAGOOOO - this great boy, whom 11 years ago they put as a mascot in the Chocolate Easter Egg! Emmanuel, who always called me “ Mia-Mamma-mia”. The quiet Adama with his charming smile. Valérie, the girl who was very reserved at the beginning but opened up towards the end. Bintou, who will surely follow her own path. Débo and Davila the two tender souls. The cheeky Josias. Kalifa... how he dances. Abraham, so sensitive and all the others - I don't have enough space to tell you about....



Bamago in the Chocolate Easter Egg...



...and today

Dear Sponsors I thank you from the bottom of my heart for all your support! Thanks to you Lotti and her helpers can carry on their priceless work by creating this small paradise “The Center of Hope” for so many people.

Many Greetings

Valérie Keller, Foundation Lotti Latrous, Zurich

