

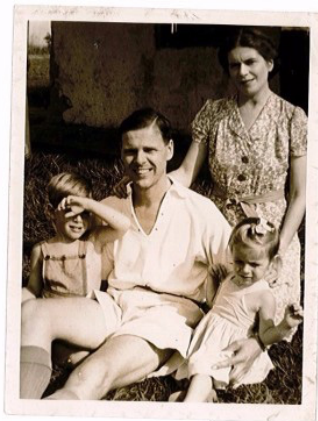
They say that “April is the cruellest month”, but this April proved unusually kind in giving us a series of special anniversaries: Shakespeare’s 400th; Cervantes’ 400th; Charlotte Bronte’s 200th; Yehudi Menuhin’s 100th; the Easter Rising’s 100th; the Queen’s 90th and my 75th!

So I am writing to invite you to help me celebrate my 75th birthday, and also to go forth and multiply. I will then make further additions to your multiplication. Please read on below to de-code this mathematical mystery.

Inspired by Shakespeare’s 7 Ages of Man, I am planning 7 ½ informal celebrations, spread throughout the year, to reminisce with friends and colleagues from each of the previous decades of my life, in the Congo, Sutton and Cheam, Cambridge, Manchester, Coventry, Sheffield, Warwick, Icomb and Ibba. More details at the end. I’m also hoping that it may be possible, over the next 7 ½ weeks, with your multiplication and my addition, to achieve something much more exciting and enduring than Shakespeare’s sad 7th Age “Last scene of all ...second childishness and mere oblivion, sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything” (As You Like It, Act ii, Scene 7).

As Kierkegaard said “Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards”. So to try to make some sense of my three score years and fifteen, and to shape and sharpen plans for the decades (!) ahead, I have been thinking increasingly about beginnings and endings.

As you may know I was born in the (then) Belgian Congo, where my parents were Plymouth Brethren missionaries. My father was a skilled carpenter and my mother a nurse and midwife. We lived in the remote village of Loto, (just 3 degrees below the Equator), where my parents helped to build and set up a clinic, a chapel and a school...until my father contracted multiple sclerosis and we had to return to the UK where he eventually died in 1955, when he was just 43, and I was 14.



Over 50 years later, sitting beside the Nile, one of my Warwick University students, Bridget Nagomoro, told me that she had had a dream in which she felt called to build a girls’ school on family land in Ibba, South Sudan, which she had recently inherited from her father. She had been the first girl from Ibba ever to have had schooling beyond the age of 10. (Read Bridget’s story on www.ibbagirlsschool.org). She now wanted other girls to have the same opportunity for education, and asked for my help in translating this vision into reality...

When I first visited Ibba (just over the border from DR Congo) with Bridget in 2009, the people and the village felt very familiar, redolent with images, echoes and smells from my childhood in Loto. It seemed that I had come back home.

“And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started, And know the place for the first time” (TS Eliot, Little Gidding)

Since then, as you may know, we have set up a small UK charity, Friends of Ibba Girls School (FIGS), which has worked closely with Bridget, the local community, the churches and the South Sudan government, to mobilise the funding and the skills to get the first classrooms and dormitories built, to appoint an excellent Head-Teacher and staff team, and in Feb 2014 to open the school with its first 40 ten year old girls.

IGBS has just begun its 3rd year, and now has 120 girls, with plans to enrol an additional 40 ten year old students each February until 2022, when the school will reach its planned capacity of 360 girls aged 10 to 18+.

We have developed a business plan and funding strategy for the next 10 years, which involves an increasing percentage of funds coming from within South Sudan and from small income generating cooperatives and businesses linked to the school. But we also face some more immediate short term needs.



So one of the challenges I have set for my 75th year is to try to raise £75,000 over the next 7½ weeks, to fund the building of a block of 3 classrooms needed for the arrival of the next 40 ten year old girls next February (and to provide sufficient classroom capacity for the following two years of new enrolments)

However, “dreams don’t happen because we dream them. They happen because we do something about them”. So I wonder if you would be willing to join with me in translating this vision into reality? The maths are simple and pleasantly surprising:

- ***If 500 generous friends are willing to donate £75 each that will raise £37,500 – half the target.***
- ***If you also sign to Gift Aid your donation, the government will add a further 25% - thus raising the total to £46,875.***
- ***I will pledge to add £28,125 to bring this up to the target of £75k, as part of my thanks for the precious gift of life till 75, and a laying up of treasure for future years.***

If £75 is too large or too little for you please consider giving any multiple of 75 – from 75p to £7500! The widow’s mite is as valuable as the millionaire’s tithe.

The costs for this 3 classroom block may seem high. Our building designs are as frugal and sustainably as possible (using solar electricity and solar pumped water) and using as much local labour and materials as possible (mud bricks fired on site, indigenous wood). But the devastation left by 50 years of war means that many materials (e.g roofing; solar panels) have to be imported from Uganda, at great difficulty and expense.

Of course, we are not investing primarily in the buildings but in the education and lives of a generation of students who have been deprived by war of the basic human rights which we enjoy – to safety, security, shelter, safe water and sanitation, and schooling. A 15 year old girl in South Sudan has a greater chance of dying in childbirth than of completing secondary education.

The multiplier effects of this investment are considerable. The 3 classrooms in this new block will make it possible for 120 girls per year who would not otherwise have gone to school to get 9 years of high quality education. Assuming that the classroom block lasts for at least 40 years this means that the £75k will allow 4800 girls to benefit from 9 years’ of schooling – plus all the added value that good education brings both to individuals and to the wider society.

These birthday presents will thus leave a lasting legacy in the lives of these girl students, their families, and their communities, and help to give them the knowledge, skills and values to contribute to the leadership of this newest nation.

So, please send a gift towards the classroom block to our Treasurer Gary Bandy at Clover Cottage, Stubbins Lane, Chinley, High Peak, SK23 6AE. (Cheques can be made payable to “Friends of Ibba Girls School”. Please ask for them to be Gift Aided, to add a further 25%) Or if you prefer you can donate on-line at <http://ow.ly/4nmtrV>

Please send this in the next 7 ½ weeks, so that when the FIGS Trustees meet on June 23 they can authorise the expenditure of £75k on the building of this next classroom block, for completion before the next 40 ten year old girls arrive in Feb.

We will be pleased to record and recognise the names of everyone who contributes to the building of this classroom block (unless you prefer to remain anonymous of course) and to send you regular progress reports from the school.

Please also let me know if you would like an invitation to one of the following nostalgic gatherings for friends and colleagues from the various decades. Here are the dates so far (all in Coventry or the Cotswolds) – plus 3 others to be held in Sutton and Cheam, Manchester, and Sheffield (dates and venues still to be confirmed)

July 2: CDP and Coventry Workshop

July 23: Friends from Icomb and Evenlode

August 20: Family friends

Sept 3: Coventry Woodcraft Folk, and the Bron Ddwyrd and Erquy posse

Sept 24: Cambridge Musketeers (not the Bullingdon Club!)

Oct 22: Warwick, Birmingham and Open Universities

Nov 26: Friends of Ibba Girls School, and the South Sudan diaspora

Dec 10: Family and relatives in my fascinating family “thicket”

and please also come and dance with me in Ibba in Nov 2022 at the “graduation” of the first cohort of IGBS girls.

In this tropical rainy season in Ibba, with its spectacular electric storms, I am struck by the existentialist idea that we have to “live in the moment between the lightning and the thunderclap, between the now and the not yet”. Many of us sense that, South Sudan is poised at a crucial turning point, with a historic moment of opportunity for restoration of peace, and for physical, economic and social reconstruction and development. This new classroom block at Ibba Girls School is a small practical step in the right direction. Let’s seize this moment.

Best wishes and warm thanks for your friendship and generosity.

John Benington

GIFT AID DECLARATION

Amount of donation

One-off donation of £

Regular donation of £ Per month/per annum

Title and full name

Address

.....

..... Post code

Email

I declare that I am a UK taxpayer and would like the above donation(s) and all prior and future donations to Friends of Ibba Girls School (Registered Charity Number: 1146220) to be made under the terms of the Gift Aid scheme until further notice.

I understand the charity will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give and I confirm I have paid or will pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax for each tax year (6 April to 5 April) that is at least equal to the amount of tax that all the charities or Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASCs) that I donate to will reclaim on my gifts for that tax year. I understand that other taxes such as VAT and Council Tax do not qualify.

Signed Date

Thank you so much for your generosity! Educate A Girl: Heal A Nation!

Please return the form to: Gary Bandy, Honorary Treasurer, Clover Cottage, Stubbins Lane, Chinley, High Peak SK23 6AE or scan and email to gary.bandy@mac.com