

## MANWANA



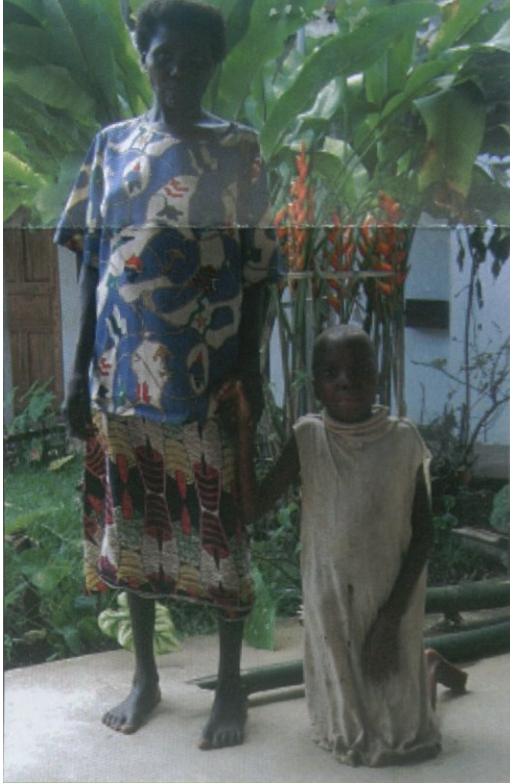
I met him in a small village 58 km away from Vanga Hospital. I had been traveling two hours by motorcycle visiting villages in the Vanga health district to investigate rising rates of water-borne diseases. In this particular village people had reverted to drinking from the murky river when their sole source of water dried up. While talking to village elders, I noticed a boy of around 10 years of age walking on his knees and dragging his deformed legs behind him.

I motioned towards the child and asked those around me if he was like that from birth (i.e. a birth defect) or had it occurred later in childhood (polio). No one seemed to know. The child knew I was referring to him and scurried across the dirt on his calloused knees to my side. His bright smile was in sharp contrast to his deformed body. He asked me for food or money. I stooped down and said hello, shook his hand, and asked him his name. "Manwana" he said (which means child with force). I gave him 500 francs (a small amount) and continued on my way. I never imagined I'd see him again. I was wrong.

Two days later while back at Vanga Hospital seeing patients before returning to Kinshasa, I was surprised to see Manwana waiting outside my clinic door. He and his mother had departed their village the night before to make the 7-hour walk to the hospital; his mother carrying him all the way on her back.

Often in this culture people don't come right out and ask what they would like, but rather tell you about their problems and wait for you to offer a solution. If they are asked directly what they want they typically start with a really big request and work their way down. "What can I do for you?" I asked in my broken Kituba, their local language

"I'd like for you to take my son", the mother said, "his father died years ago and the boy is all I have, but I can't afford to feed him". "No, I can't take your son", I told her. "Can we move onto the mission station" she asked, "and then and you can help me find a job so I can support us?" We get dozens of such requests each day. "I'm sorry", I told her, "there is no available housing on the mission station nor are there any jobs to be had". I asked if the child ever attended school. "No", she reminded me, "he is sick (disabled)". I told her the child was



not sick and could certainly go to school. "Maybe he could become a tailor or secretary and support you one day" I added. "No" she replied looking at her son and shaking her head, "he's sick (disabled)".

"What would you like", I asked the child. Children rarely speak up in front of their elders but young Manwana piped right up. "I'd like one of those chairs with wheels on it", he said, "so I can move around like other children and maybe one day go to school... and I'd like a new shirt he added". Indeed the sole article of clothing he had on was a worn-out shirt (a woman's winter blouse) that extended down to his knees. In fact this was the same thing he wore two days earlier, and according to his mother..., all he owned.

We will surely find a wheelchair for young Manwana and I gave his mother sufficient money to buy him clothes in the local market. I wish I could do more for the family.

How poor does one have to be when you ask a stranger to take your only child? How humble in spirit should a 10 year boy be that his most fervent wish is to have a wheelchair to give him the dignity of coming out of the dirt and see other children eye to eye?

Jesus reminds us that the poor will always be with us and indeed in Congo they are as plentiful and desperate as one can imagine. Mother Teresa once said, "The biggest disease today is not leprosy or tuberculosis, but rather the feeling of being unwanted."

Thank you for allowing us to live and serve in this place so we may extend the love of Jesus to children such as these and by finding ways to lift them up, remind them that they are more than just wanted but precious indeed, in God's sight!

With love from Africa,  
Ann & Bill Clemmer  
International Ministries  
Democratic Republic of Congo