

## **BABY LUCY**

*or why figures and statistics are sometimes not important to us!*

She came last Monday. It was a bright morning and the children were buzzing with excitement. We had some visitors from England on that day. They had come to do wonderful art and music with our children. There was laughter and chatting all over the place. Every one was busy and happy! Children produced interesting pictures and sculptures and shouts of admiration went across the room! What a joy!

Earlier in the day they had called from a Nairobi hospital and requested a vacancy for a 5-months old baby girl whose mother had been arrested a week ago. The mother, we were told, was found repeatedly drunk and unconscious in the ditch with the crying infant at her side. As the child was sick and had been returned twice to the hospital with complications, the doctors had reported the case to the police who in turn finally arrested the mother.

I agreed to admit the child because two of our babies had been recently adopted. This allowed for new admissions.

When the baby arrived in the afternoon we all received her with a welcoming song. Our nurse and social worker invited the caretaker who had brought the baby to the office for admission paper work. When we heard baby Lucy's story that nice, bright day suddenly turned dark for us: The baby had been raped by her own father. Part of her intestines and reproductive organs were torn and had been removed. The openings were stitched closed and a colostomy had been performed. Seeing the condition of that child made all of us cry!

Lucy is a very quiet and calm baby, too quiet, but still smiles when caressed and cuddled. Caring for her is quite expensive. She needs special equipment and diet and a medical bath three times a day. A new day-caretaker and an additional one for the night and off-days relief is needed to look after Lucy (and our Baby Mercy who has a shunt). This is an extra salary to pay but I know God will provide for that.

We have been trying to follow up the case history of Baby Lucy. Since she is with us we have spent many hours in prison talking with her mother, and with the police officers who rescued the child. We learned that the mother is 22 years old. She had four children. One has died of negligence.

We went to the slums where Baby Lucy's grandmother and relatives live. We wanted to know what had happened in order to decide how to best help mother and child. We also want to establish whether there is an entry point for us with any of the family members or relatives which will allow us to instil or revise human values in them. How otherwise will this little girl grow up carrying such a heavy burden?

On the first visit to the family we rescued the siblings of Lucy, two boys aged three and six years. We found them with their grandmother who at 9 o'clock in the morning was already so drunk that she was unable to respond to us. The boys had not eaten anything in

two days. They were very filthy, full of scabies and had infections from jiggers on their feet. They were also very underweight and their eyes were yellowish. The room was unbelievably dirty, with all kind of things and rugs scattered on the floor, and human faeces covered with sand. We asked the neighbours for water, cleaned the boys and bought them milk and bread. They ate like hungry wolves – all the time viewing us suspiciously. We heard from the neighbours that the grandmother had 12 children fathered by different men. Two died of negligence. We found the youngest child wrapped in dirty rugs on the bed. The little boy, maybe 8 months old, was totally malnourished. He showed all symptoms of an alcohol damaged infant. There was not much we could do for the baby at that particular moment apart from reporting the case to the police and children's department.

Looking further around in the neighbourhood we met an uncle who lives nearby but said that he had given up on his alcoholic sister. That's why – he explained to us – he did not pay any attention to the children who were taken to the grandmother after her daughter was arrested. He took us to the house of Lucy's parents. We were escorted by plain clothed police officers because the area is of high risk where many criminals live. People stared at us disapprovingly and we had some scary moments when a group of youngsters gathered a few metres behind exposing threatening gestures. (There has been an outbreak of violent crime during the past months in NBI. About 60 innocent people were murdered only last month, among them an old lady missionary from USA)

We found the house locked. The aunt to the children who happens to be a neighbour narrated how she took food to Lucy and her brothers on Christmas day. When she had come to the house she found the father naked and the baby crying. The two little boys were traumatized and confused: they had watched how "Daddy has broken Baby's body". When asked why she did not scream for help to arrest the man the aunt claimed that she didn't know what was happening and that the baby was not bleeding. They took the baby to the dispensary not until next morning because she looked "funny". The nurse at the dispensary referred the child to the hospital and informed the police. Since that time the father is hiding. We found the neighbours quite hostile, which is an indication that they know where the man is but are too afraid to disclose anything.

We – the team who works at NEST - need to understand. We are confronted with the results of so much evil: Sodomy, rape, physical and psychological abuse, murder, children who witnessed all kind of crimes, children who have barely survived starvation, or children who were sold or stolen and trafficked. We are deeply affected ourselves. We need time to digest what we experience and time to sort out our own feelings.

We don't judge – we have seen too much poverty, too much sorrow, too much suffering. It is not our role to judge. We are the ones on the receiving end - it is our role to heal where healing is still possible. We are not professionally equipped with psychologists, doctors, counsellors or special counselling tools. We have only our bare hands to feed, to wipe away tears, and to caress, and our open arms to hug, to comfort and to hold each other until our children have learned again how to laugh! God has been so good to us – HE has given us many kind and open hearted friends to stand by our side and to pray with us so that we are able to continue being the ones on the receiving end.