

## **René en Marianne Lako**

**The Netherlands - USA,**

**Dec-Jan 2009, # 124**

**Running the race together .... Heb. 12:1**



Dear family and friends,

We wish you all a very good and meaningful 2009. We had wanted to send this update earlier, but through various circumstances and our travel in the USA, this has been delayed. This was our first Christmas back in Holland since 2004, and it has been great to spend time with family and friends.

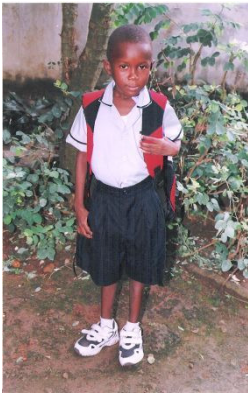
In the two and a half weeks I (Marianne) was in Holland, we visited my mom and Rene's parents and some friends in our home town, as well as fit in a dental appointment. We were glad to be there for René's dad's 89<sup>th</sup> birthday on 30 December. As we traveled to the USA on 31 December; this was my longest birthday ever because of the time changes: 32 hours!



What a celebration to meet and hold our grandson Porter a healthy, sweet, cute little guy who is doing very well – even though he was born about 2 weeks early. We arrived in Denver Colorado, two hours before the beginning of 2009. We spent 12 days with Stefan, Genae and Porter before traveling to other places in the USA: Van, TX; Nashville, TN and the mountains of Montana. We will finish our time in the USA in the Denver area before traveling back to Europe.



During our time in Holland, we were in Middelburg, enjoying time with Mariska and Jacco and our granddaughters Zoey and Esmee, doing fun "Opa and Oma" things with them. We went to a big indoor play ground, McDonalds (of course!) and went to town with Mariska and the girls; just simple things, but fun to do because we have not seen each other very often.



Some of you have asked how Joshua David is doing. A week after my departure, I received an email with the news that he was placed at SOS Children's Village as of the 6<sup>th</sup> January. Our staff member, Evelyn, will continue to be his caregiver; this means that during holidays and some weekends, Josh will be able to visit her. We are very happy that she cares and is committed to him. During his first month at SOS, he is not allowed to have visitors so he can get used to his new home and family. Another girl we helped, a former Anastasis patient who had received surgery for a huge tumor, and who became an orphan since her successful surgery, has also been placed at the SOS Children's village. We thank God for showing us again his love for the orphans and homeless.

As you read in our previous newsletter, our time in Sierra Leone has come to an end. Twenty nine (29) years in missions and international work has taken its toll, especially in our departure from Sierra Leone. The last several years have been very intensive, busy and work-oriented and we are very tired.

This has been a turbulent time in our lives. We are actively pursuing counseling to help us to work on our new priorities and seek healing for the wounds of the past. We are in the process of dealing with feelings like sadness, disappointment, hurt, sometimes anger and we are trying to find healing and restoration in the love of God. We put our hope in promises like Ecclesiastes 4:12: "Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." That's a picture of the two of us intertwined with God and this was our marriage scripture.

At the same time, we look back on four great years in Sierra Leone. It has not always been easy, and looking back, we may have done some things differently. But we do know that it was God's place for us and we said goodbye with pain in our hearts. The work of the fistula center, including the outpatient clinic for children, is still in the process of being taken over by a new organization, and Mercy Ships will be a supporting partner in procurement and shipping of supplies. Sadly, the New Steps project for people with disabilities was closed the end of last year. Saying goodbye to our national staff was emotional and cost many tears. Through the years, we had good relationships with many of our local staff.

So what is in our future? At present, we feel that the leave of absence we have planned until 1 April probably won't be enough time, and we won't be ready yet to step into something new. We have no clear direction as to what the next step will be and where we will end up living and working. We know that we want to follow God into what he has for us, but we also sense that we need more time to deal with the past events and the emotions surrounding this, and not rush into something new right away. It is our desire to allow the next several months to be a much needed sabbatical after 29 very intense years.

For those of you who have been our supporters/sponsors, we would like to ask if you will continue standing with us for another several months until we have some more clarity about our future. We will stay in communication with you and will keep you informed about the developments in our lives. We are so grateful for all that you have done for us and for being an important part of our lives.

We're also grateful for a home that is available for us near our home town -- a safe haven to find rest...and we want to thank our home church and friends who have been with us in this journey for 29 years. So really... we are thankful for all of you reading this letter!

**We thank God for:**

- Porter's birth and good health.
- My (Marianne's) continued transfer of work to the remaining staff in Sierra Leone;
- Joshua David's placement at the SOS Children's Village.

**Would you join us in prayer for:**

- Clarity and direction for our future.
- Our relationship as a couple; restoration and healing after these difficult times.
- The continuation of the work in Sierra Leone and Sandra, who will continue with the children's clinic for another several months.

Needless to say, we find ourselves in a time of major transition; while the world has an economic crisis, we feel like we are going through our own personal crisis in a critical time. It is in times like this that we want to hold on to God and put our trust in Him, realizing that we need Him most. "He is the rock we can hold onto and lean on".

Much love, and with thanks for your involvement in our lives,

Rene & Marianne

