

## WHERE HAS ALL THE FUN GONE?

(And what can we do about it?)

I found myself in Kenya last year. I'd gone to see Africa's wildlife for myself. And, while on safari, I visited a Masai village or *kraal*. The Masai are tall nomadic tribespeople – famous for their red robes, beads and spears. They wander the vast grasslands with their goats and cattle, and live in simple huts made of mud and cow dung, protected from lions and other prowlers by tangled thorny barriers.

**T**HE KIDS CAUGHT MY ATTENTION. They always do, eh, when you travel. With their black faces and wide eyes, they were as cute as kids anywhere. They showed us their kindergarten – stick walls, dirt floor. One cautious little girl with a shiny bald head stared at me (like, "What planet do you come from?") – but

I must have passed the test because she later recited the alphabet in Swahili. And then they all sang the ABC song in English.

Another dusty little fellow posed for a photo. And when I crouched down to show him his pic on my digital camera, I was promptly mobbed by giggling, barefoot little urchins!

I wish you could see what these people had. NOTHING ... nothing, by our standards.

No books, magazines, cars, power, TV, running water, flush toilets,

regular wages, bank accounts, supermarkets, shopping malls – none of the things WE all take for granted.

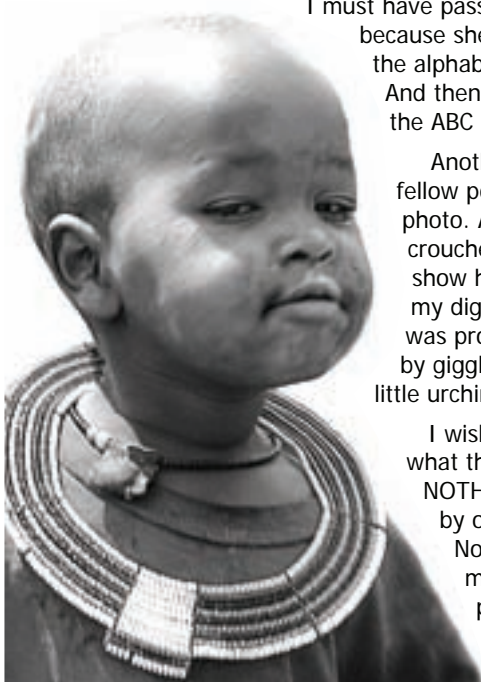
But they seemed happy – content. The parents obviously love their kids and cows and beads and spears – and they're in no hurry to swap their ancient lifestyle for something more modern. And the kids are like kids everywhere – full of mischief, curiosity, and irrepressible fun.

**F**OR ME, IT WAS AN unforgettable encounter that put family life (and our material possessions) back in perspective. I mean, I've long believed that kids were meant to be enjoyed, not endured. And I've long suspected that our enjoyment of kids has very little to do with the money we earn and the things we spend it on.

On a personal level, I happily acknowledge that if it wasn't for my kids and grandkids I wouldn't be a father or grandfather. Between them they've raised me ... brought me up ... straightened me out ... and taught me almost everything I know.

If it wasn't for the little people in my life, I might've forgotten what fun feels like. I might've been too embarrassed to make sandcastles on the beach. Or play hide-&-seek in the backyard. Or chuck water-bombs around the kitchen.

If it wasn't for these youngsters, I would've missed out on canoeing and campfires and cuddles ... on Lego and Matchbox cars ... on Dr Seuss and Narnia books and High Five and the Wiggles.



If it wasn't for my kids and grandkids, I may never have discovered how immature and grumpy the editor of Grapevine can still be when it suits him. I would never have known how much growing up a dad or granddad still has to do ... and how much forgiving a child is capable of.

If it wasn't for our little guys, I'd be poorer by far. I would not understand the extent to which these small invaders (some of whom are now overgrown young adults) can enrich a man's life.

I would have a great deal less to thank God for ...

**G**RAPEVINE'S MISSION, you may recall, is *"to inject fun and hope and wholeness into homes all over the country."* And FUN should be high on our list of priorities, as far as I'm concerned, because it's missing in too many Kiwi homes.

Some parents worry me, they really do. They look like they've been baptized in vinegar! They're so upright and uptight ... so staunch and starchy ... so determined their kids won't go off the rails that they're no longer enjoying the journey. And I don't know how their kids feel, but I'm not sure I'd want to live at their place – would you?

I'm reminded of Steve Biddulph's observation in a Grapevine interview – that some of us treat parenting as if it were a list of management tasks. *"But kids aren't 'to-do' lists,"* said Steve. *"If you see your kids as a series of PROBLEMS, you'll have a terrible time!"*

*"If, on the other hand, you enjoy them and enter into the fun of being with them, the time will fly. Your children will BECOME really delightful – because of your delight in them! The fact is, parents who get the best out of their kids have the attitude, 'Well, parenting isn't the only thing I'll do with my life ... but I want to be whole-hearted about it!'"*

That's a good word, eh. For ALL parents and grandparents. One that Grapevine will continue to highlight.

**B**Y THE TIME YOU read this newsletter, the giant offset printing presses at PMP will be churning out another brand new edition of Grapevine. It contains heaps of FUN – you can count on that! But it also carries some priceless insights:

- ☑ Our cover story is **'WIRED: HOW COME WE'RE ALL SO DIFFERENT?'** Ever since Adam we've known it. And ever since Eve we've tried to work out why. *You like to sit and think – but your partner likes to talk. Your daughter must have everything neat'n'tidy – but her brother couldn't care less. You're a born get-up-and-goer – but you're married to someone who has never got up and gone anywhere.* How come? Well, read the next Grapevine for the answers ...
- ☑ Our interview **'A BOY, A BOAT, & THE BLACK DOG'** – is more sobering.

It's about suicide, a down word, a bleak word, a word that gives most parents nightmares. On an April weekend last year, that nightmare came horribly true for one couple. Their son ended a 26-year battle with a serious mental illness, and took his own life. This isn't a story with a happy ending. But it's their story, a true story. And it deserves to be told ...

- ☑ Oh, and while you're at it, keep an eye out for (i) Tony Campolo's inspiring account of the **'PARTY IN ROOM 201'** ... (ii) a wild report about **WHITE WATER RAFTING** ... and (iii) the long-awaited launch of Grapevine's **WEBSITE LIBRARY** – giving friends and readers access to our family resources: features and interviews from past magazines.

**I**'M EXCITED! I ALWAYS AM, when a new edition is about to hit the streets. And I hope you're excited, too. Over the past 25 years we've printed and delivered 210 different editions – this will be No. 211! – and that's been made possible each time by the kind, generous, loving support of people just like you!

155,000 copies don't come cheap, and it costs an arm-and-a-leg to put Grapevine into Kiwi homes. Many times during those years it's looked impossible, and we've wondered where on earth all the money's going to come from. It's often been a real struggle, and we've often only just-made-it. But month-after-month, year-after-year, you've reminded us that we're not alone ... that you, too, want to **"give families a lift"** ... And your gifts, street sponsorship and donations keep making the impossible possible.

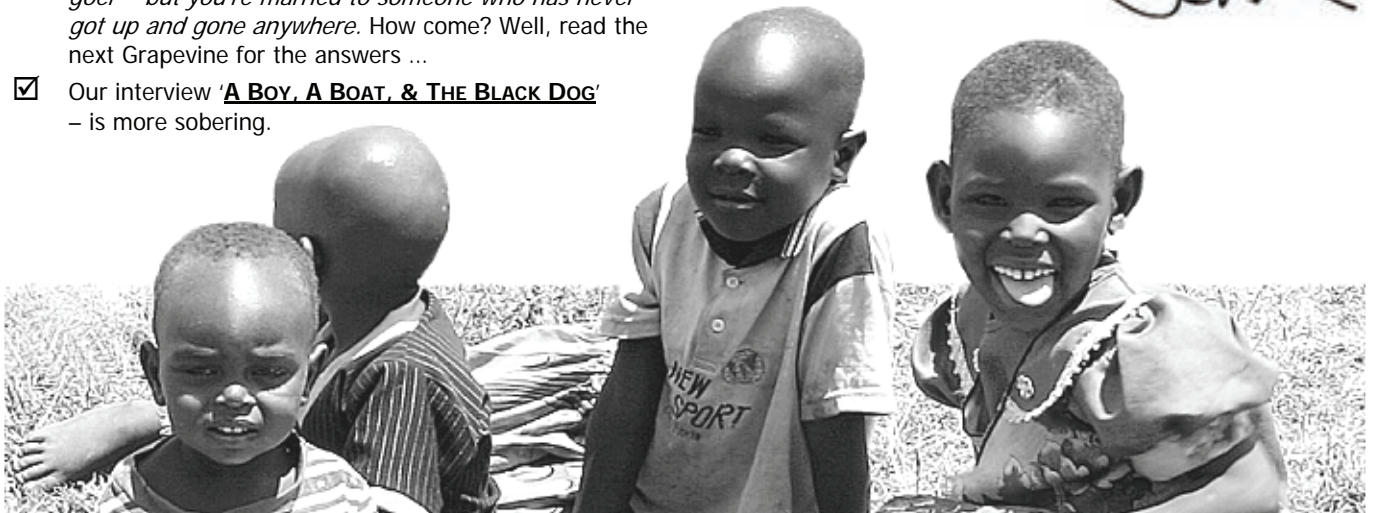
Will you do it again? Will you help us inject some more "fun and hope and wholeness" into families all around the country? Will you help us put this brand new Grapevine out there where it's needed ... and where it can do good?

Please send your March donation as soon as possible:

- ⇒ \$50 if you're able ...
- ⇒ \$100 if you can stretch a bit further ...
- ⇒ \$500 or \$1000 or \$5000 if you can afford to invest that much ...

It costs \$1 (approx) to print and deliver each magazine – and every extra \$1 helps us give Grapevine to families that would otherwise miss out.

Thanks a million – on their behalf, and ours ...



**CLICK HERE** to make a donation