

To grandma

Life is not about what you have. Life is about what you do. It is about the choices you make. Open up your heart to others. You are what you are because of who we all are.



In the winter of 2001 I met Grandma

Roelevink. She had attended the Christmas celebration at our school together with her daughter Jowina. She donated generously for our Zambian project and she invited me at her home.

She asked me to explain what Joy of a Toy was up to in Zambia. I spoke about our aids orphans in Kalwala's Village. About the promise we made to their dying mothers. We were never going to stop taking care of their children. I spoke about the orphanage we had built. About the education we provided.



At the end of the visit she said she was very satisfied. Likewise I was happy to have convinced her that her donation would be well spent. I packed my pictures and I started to leave.

That moment I heard her characteristic voice: Don't rush, young man!

She had made a choice. She had decided to put her savings to good use. She was going to help the orphans in Kalwala. In memory of her



husband Jan, she wanted to build a hospital. If a hundred thousand guilders would suffice?

Instantaneously I was filled with emotion. No because of the amount, but because of the compassion of her choice. She has opened up her heart for the vulnerable children of

Zambia as if they were her own. Besides her huge financial support she

has given these children her unconditional love. She has visited them and has taken care of them. That kind of solidarity will never be forgotten in Kalwala. Because life is not about what you have, it is about what you do.



The Janarie clinic has been

build, and the house for the doctor. And on top of that a primary school building has been constructed. In the mean time many children have been born in the hospital. Without the clinic they wouldn't have had any chance. They have survived thanks to grandma. Every day at school



hundreds of children discover the strength which lies within them. Thanks to grandma.

She was able to visit her African village twice. Fearless, stubborn, but first and foremost caring and respectful for others. Effortlessly she blended in with the African culture of togetherness.

My Zambian wife had just lost her mother, one of the elders of the village. But see: There was her new mother as if sent by heaven: "mama Roelevink_".

And grandma enjoyed in Kalwala. The laughter of children playing in the silver river. Women singing while their baby's move along in the same rhythm. Those baby's dangling at the back of their mothers in beautiful but ragged pieces of cloth. Grandma felt a connection with these women. And this connection is all



we really have as humans. What a joy it must have been for her to be so valuable for others. Deep within us we don't long for a maximum of possessions. All we really want is to be of value for others. Because the only way to live is in solidarity.

At this very moment the people of Kalwala are mourning. Orphans, pupils, parents and all villagers will cry their hearts out. That is our tradition. Because they will never forget their grandma. How she supported our dying niece Mwila. How she comforted her. How she helped women from the village to find their dignity by donating sewing machines and materials. How she inspired people. How she shared her love with the children. How she has saved Kalwala's village.

In the Netherlands she was the patron of our foundation. She participated wholeheartedly in many of our board meetings, discussing about her children. Together with her I visited many churches and schools. Shame on those who didn't show enough interest in her village. They were strongly reprimanded by grandma. Fearless, I said. And powerful. As a board we soon understood. From all patrons in the Netherlands we had the best! We felt protected. And what is more: We will be feeling protected forever.

We live our lives together. But nobody lives eternally. She has made her last choice. Time is an ocean but it ends at the shore. We from the Joy of a Toy foundation are enormously grateful to have cooperated with our grandma. Everything keeps on passing by. But what remains is the memory of mama Roelevink, our mother, our sponsor, our hero and our friend.

Dozens of years from now a Zambian child in Kalwala will point to the place on the wall of the Clinic with the name Roelevink written on it. Then her grandmother will talk to her about the legendary grandma from the Netherlands. And she will tell her: Life is not about what you have. It is about the choices you make. Open your heart for others, you are what you are because of what we all are together.

Grandma, we are together forever.

WE LIVE OUR LIVES TOGETHER

