

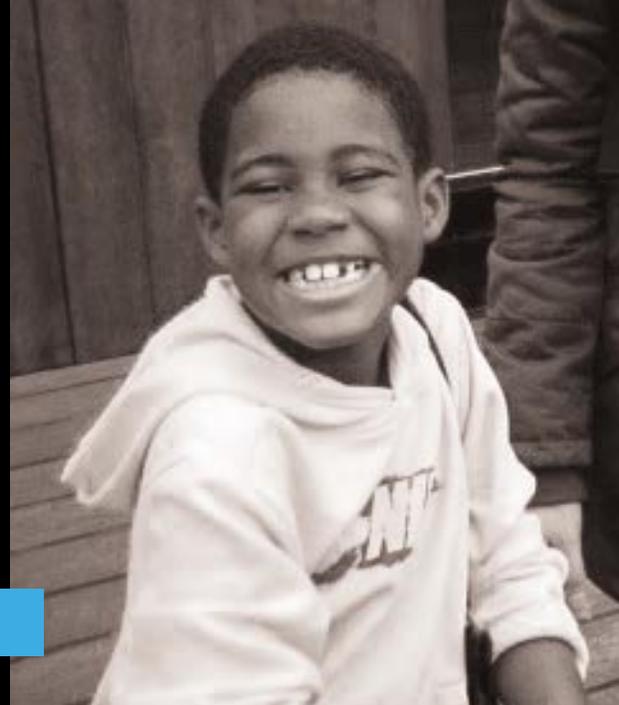
# Abandoned

by Most,

**LOVED**

by God

*One Child's Transformed Life*



by Peter Cerqueira

Located in one of the worst urban areas of western Europe, Sintra International School is a Christian school in Portugal that serves low-income immigrant families from impoverished nations in Africa, South America and Eastern Europe. This school functions on the basis of faith for its survival and development. Students' families pay what they can and sometimes nothing at all. The students receive quality, Christian education that exposes them to the freeing Gospel and teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. Classes are conducted entirely in English—giving students a chance for a future in the European workforce.

## Meet **DUKA**

Duka [name changed] is a young African boy who attends our school. Whenever he is close to me, he can't help but hold onto me in some way—he'll either slip his little hand into mine, or wrap his arm around my waist, or simply lean his face against my arm. Duka does not know his father. His biological father exists somewhere in Africa, and his mother's current partner works somewhere in northern Europe.

From what we understand, Duka is considered an "accident" by his mother. She is currently trying to contact relatives in far-away places to see if any will take the boy. In his early years, Duka was practically abandoned. While living with distant relatives, he was allowed to run wild in the fields and jungles of his homeland. Nobody wanted responsibility for him. When he was finally sent to Portugal to be with his mother, he had very little notion of how to live with others in a community.

When he first arrived in Portugal, Duka was put in one of the worst public school systems in the nation. After enrolling him

at our school for a symbolic fee, I visited his former school to pick up his records. It was lunchtime and I had to pass through the cafeteria to get to the offices. The entire elementary school was pouring into the cafeteria with their teachers. All the students were African and all the teachers were Portuguese. I held back tears as I watched in dismay at the awful way the teachers treated the students. I began to understand Duka's behavior at our school.

## A demonstration of **CHRISTIAN LOVE**

When Duka arrived at our school, we couldn't keep him still. He *literally* climbed up the walls, crawled under the desks, hit other students, tried to hit the teacher, vandalized our equipment, destroyed our materials, said incredibly nasty things to everybody around him and refused to do his work. Recess and lunchtime were nightmares as he did everything (that his young 7-year-old mind knew how) to distract people and make sure everybody knew he was too intolerable to be friends with.

His teacher couldn't handle him anymore and kept putting him in the hallway. But he just made a mess there too—tearing things up and yelling. I finally told his teacher that I would keep him in the office with me and the secretary until he learned to behave properly in class.

When he arrived in the office with his teacher, he began to act up again, thrashing about and making noises. I approached him and squatted down to get to his eyelevel. "Duka," I said with a smile on my face, "I know what you really want."

He stopped, looked at me and said, "What?"

I replied, "Kid, you just want love."

He stared at me like I was the craziest man in the world. The teacher, red in the face, looked on with interest. "So," I continued, "Every time you act up, I'm gonna catch you, hug you and hold you until I think you've had enough love to calm down." He scowled but the scowl turned into a smile that he tried to hide. He sat at a table in the office while I went to work at my desk. It wasn't long before he started to misbehave. I got out of my chair, walked over to him, squatted down and gave him a big hug. At first he resisted, but after a few seconds I felt his little arms wrap around me. He hugged me back. Our secretarial volunteer smiled. I could see her trying to hold back tears.

## A miraculous **CHANGE**

It has been a long journey for Duka and he is nowhere near the end of it. He came into our third-grade class not knowing how to read or even the alphabet. He didn't know how to count, much less how to do any math. We were forced to put him back a grade. Today, he is beginning to read minimally well, is good at math, and speaks English almost as well as any American child his age. He is a gentleman, opening the door for teachers, saying please, excuse me, and thank you.

When Duka arrived, he had never heard of Moses and knew nothing of Jesus. Today, he is always the first to volunteer at prayer time. He loves to pray, and he loves to end with "Jesus'

name." Even in our chapel services, he will be one of the few who doesn't mind praying in front of everyone. One of Duka's favorite classes is Bible. He and his mother now go to church.

Duka enjoys several friendships and there is one Brazilian student, one of our volunteers' sons, whom Duka calls his brother.

## Pray for **STRENGTH and WISDOM**

This is an abbreviated story of just one of our students. The transformations we see do not happen overnight. The students' behavior takes its toll on our staff, and we are constantly asking the Father for strength and wisdom.

Pray for us to maintain a heavenly perspective. Pray for continued strength and Christlike love. Pray for more workers—as we are tremendously understaffed—who will love these children because, for some of them, nobody else will. ■



*Peter Cerqueira was commended in 2011 by the assembly in Pawtucket, Rhode Island.*

**"Then they brought little children to Him...and He took them up in His arms...and blessed them."  
(Mark 10:13,16)**



**Clockwise from top left:** Duka and a friend; Duka and classmates on a school field trip; Duka; Duka and fellow students in class; Peter Cerqueira and Duka.