

“Would you like to see my little ones?” Ronel asks excitedly after welcoming us into her family’s home. This is a family home in every sense of the word, I think to myself as the dogs excitedly jump up to greet me. There are children playing everywhere!

In a room upstairs, a bunch of little ones lie fast asleep on a big Christmas bed on the floor, obediently taking their afternoon nap. Ronel starts telling us some of the horrific stories of what these innocent little children have been through, aged two to four years old. Rape, molestation or abuse is what they have had to deal with, and this at such a young age.

About 7 years ago, Ronel and her husband Johan felt the need to make a difference in this harsh world we live in, and started by donating food to children on the street. On a day like this, they delivered left-over food to a children’s shelter in Vanderbijlpark, not knowing that their lives would change instantaneously. One little boy amongst all of the children stole their hearts the moment they laid eyes on him.

“We couldn’t leave him there,” Ronel said, and since that day, they have taken care of 37 children! Currently, they are caring for fifteen children, usually sent to them by Child Welfare. “These are all my children,” Ronel says, smiling at her little ones.

Johan works a full time job, and puts everything he earns towards his family. More unselfish people, I have never met. Their biological daughter is the eldest of the children, and plays the important role of big sister to all the little ones. Johan and Ronel also have one adopted daughter, and what a little ray of sunshine she is! Regardless of the fact that times may prove tough both economically and emotionally, Ronel and Johan can’t find it in her hearts to show a child away. What will become of the child if they do?

Food and electricity is their biggest concern. With a house full of children, this can amount to quite a lot! When a child is placed with them, they usually arrive with the clothes on their back and nothing more. The little ones share the clothes that she has for them, which is also on their list of urgent needs.

“It isn’t always easy,” Ronel sighs. “There are good times, and there are bad times.” She goes to the courts on a regular basis to fight for the children, and although it is an emotionally draining ordeal, she would do it for them in a heartbeat! Sadly, they

occasionally have to say goodbye to a child if they are placed back with their biological parents.

“A piece of me dies every time a child leaves, no matter how long he has been with us.”

Ronel says sadly. “He is still my child.”

Friday night is concert night in the Riekert family home! Ronel laughs heartily when she tells us about the ‘most organised chaos’ she has ever seen, and the funny things that the children can come up with. It is times like these that make it all worth while. Laughter is indeed the best therapy.

When asking Ronel how they do it, day-in and day-out, her answer is simple: “All it takes is some time, tears, love and most importantly, prayer. The gift of seeing a child blossom after what he has been through, makes each tear worth while.”