

African Leaders of Tomorrow

Newsletter Four

News from Tanzania,

Dec. 30, 2012



ALOFT

AFRICAN LEADERS OF TOMORROW

Dec. 26 was a big day for ALOFT. We had all available kids together for a special meeting centred around our oldest student Stephen. He managed to get home to Moshi for a couple of days before an Accounting exam on the 28th (he is in first year Economics at Aardhi University in Dar Es Salaam).

Randal and I had asked Stephen to speak on the subject “What it takes to Succeed”, and we all jammed into my hotel room to listen. I had never heard Stephen speak formally before and was very pleasantly surprised to learn that he is very eloquent. You could have heard a pin drop for 20 minutes while Stephen traced his journey, recalling the moment he recognized as his “Golden Chance” (his phrase) to get a good education, the day he approached Randal about a scholarship from ALOFT three years ago.

Like most life stories, his wasn’t a smooth and easy path to success. Randal had known Stephen for a while, and her initial response was to chastise him for past misbehaviour, making it clear that our scholarships were not for irresponsible individuals. She gave him six months to “pull up his socks”, improve his grades and drastically revise his behaviour. He responded, taking advantage of his Golden Chance, recognizing it was the only one he would get.

Stephen told us his keys to success are: Regular Prayer (I have to admit this surprised me – I didn’t coach him in any way), Hard Work, Respect for Everyone, and Making Your Own Schedule (his version of time management or being a self-directed learner). Partly because he is already respected for his success, partly because of his eloquence, Stephen’s words had a profound effect on the other students.

Randal and I have been labouring away as English tutors to our kids throughout the month of December, during their five week school break, with Primary (Elementary) classes in the morning and Secondary in the afternoon. All our kids need “extra tuition”, as it is called here, because they did not start their schooling in English, but in Swahili, and have some catching up to do. Our three youngest (in grades 5 and 7) have only 2 years of English teaching under their belt. English is the second language of Tanzania, but is the language of success. This is our first year making this effort and it certainly has proven to be a good idea, though exhausting for the old retired educator who had hoped never to teach another kid.

Access to books at their level in English are rare apart from textbooks. School libraries have very few and the public library likewise. So one of the tasks has been to start a small ALOFT library to which the kids will have access all year. Educational research and experience show that reading for pleasure is invaluable in increasing fluency in a language. We have now pretty much exhausted all local resources. A used bookstore a few blocks from my hotel has provided many kids' level novels and stories, many with Canadian settings, and we have set Robbie and Ivani to work making a catalogue. Of course I brought a suitcase of books with me, but those were mostly for teaching purposes. Next year I will concentrate on fiction.

Ivani and Robbie have been my paid assistants during my visit and have shown themselves very capable and reliable, well trained by Randal over the years. Ivani's job is Teaching Assistant and he helps out in the Elementary class where a Swahili speaker is sometimes very useful. Robbie has been my Administrative Assistant, helping with everything from changing money to buying me essentials to life. They are each paid 5000 (KSh.300) Shillings a week; a bit excessive, but they earn it all.

It has been our goal to have all our Secondary kids gainfully engaged during this school break, in addition to their English classes. Fortunatus opted for a business loan to go into the shoe business during the break. See our Facebook page for an account of that. He made 18000 Shillings profit the day before yesterday ! It is his hope to earn all his spending money for the coming school term. Keyfa is taking a computer repair course at the local technical college, expanding on a talent he has shown since age 13.

We are continuing classes to Jan 11 when kids go back to school here in Moshi and Randal and I head to Dar Es Salaam to visit Stephen at his university, and Jones, who is attending Form Five there.

Thank you ALOFT supporters. You are the ones who make all this possible with your donations. It bears repeating that your donations do not pay for my travel here or my accommodations etc., or Randal's travel on behalf of ALOFT. All of your donations go directly to the children's needs.

Happy New Year to all.