

Habari!

23 September 2006

Well, we have hit the six-week mark since our arrival in Africa and so, it's a good time to send a synopsis of the last few weeks. Kenya is beautiful, awesome, breathtaking, and we feel privileged that the Lord has us here. Culture shock has been minimal, partly due to the setting we are in, but also, we are definitely content in being here. We live on the slope of an escarpment, and although the view of the Great Rift Valley below is obscured by the many trees surrounding us, we do catch glimpses of it while walking around the campus, and the surrounding mountains are always in sight. Here at RVA (Rift Valley Academy), there are over fifty houses, and twenty dorms in which to house the boarding students. We live in a two-bedroom stone "cottage" that is attached to another by an open-air hallway. We live on what is called "upper station". We are surrounded by the local village which has homes, a church and stores. There is also a "lower station" which includes a hospital, Bible college, and "motels". I hope this gives you some sense of the environment in which we live.

The RVA community itself is a supportive, encouraging community. People here are willing to help in any way they can, especially when you first arrive, and they go out of their way to make you feel welcome. We have had many dinner invites and Kate and Anna have open invitations to play at friends' houses. It is, in many ways, what you would imagine "living in community" to mean. We have been blessed by the people here.

Kate and Anna have had adjustments to work through, although I would say that Anna's adjustment seems to have worked itself out. Initially, she had the hardest time with homesickness, partly due to the fact that everything happened so fast with the selling of the house. Anna missed her home, her friends, and Precious, our cat. However, since school started, she has made friends, and she also has a close friend who lives behind our house; they play together all of the time. Kate has also made a couple of new friends; however, she continues to miss her friends in Guelph, her teachers and school. Initially, she didn't seem to be lonely, but as we've settled in, she seems to be missing home more. Part of this is her age, we know, but we're hoping that soon she will feel more at home here. The freedom they have here is wonderful, and they are loving that!

RVA has five hundred students made up of boarding kids and "station kids" of which Kate and Anna are two. There are approximately two hundred students that live on the "station" with their families who are on staff here. RVA is a culture in itself; staff attempts to provide a place of security, belonging and nurturing for the missionary kids and others who attend here. For example, many of these children have lived in the "bush" or dangerous areas of Africa. As a family, we take an active part in supporting the children, through helping out with the many extra-curricular activities on campus, and also, each family has a specific group of students to care for, spend time with, and with whom we attempt to develop a close relationship; we have a group of five Grade Seven girls, one of whom, Anna, is very homesick.

Initially, we had experienced a struggle regarding working here when we had seen so much need all round us. Being in Nairobi was a huge eye-opener: thousands and thousands of people on the roads, walking, sitting, selling, and children everywhere. We saw the slums where three million people live. Mud, smoke... and when the rains come, I can't even imagine the despair. People living with no water, one room. The impressions will remain forever, I'm sure. The travel from Nairobi to Rift Valley takes about an hour. Travel through the rural countryside is much like what you see on television. Mothers with babies on their backs, sitting on the sides of roads, again, children everywhere. Poverty is a stone's throw away from where we are, so many from

the local community work here at RVA. When you arrive, people knock on your door, looking for a job. Initially, we were uncomfortable with hiring someone to work for us, but now, we realize that they need these jobs to put food on the table, and we are blessed by them as well. A man named Joseph tends to the garden; he has seven children, and Sarah is our inside “worker” and she has four children; they both walk an hour to get here. We are getting to know them, although language can be a barrier sometimes. But they are introducing us to their culture and this is a good way for us to connect with local people. Tim also buys most of the groceries from the local people; there are women who come to the campus and sell fruit, vegetables, flowers, etc., twice per week and they look forward to seeing him come. They always ask him what he will need for next time, and if he misses a day, they ask him where he has been.

Tim’s role here is varied. He works with the “titchies” (K-6) and coordinates a Friday nite program for them. As well, he has a couple of maintenance projects on which he is working. He has been able to go to Nairobi with a couple of German missionaries and speak and share his testimony at a Som\*li outreach event. He has also recently been approached by the person in charge of Outreach here; help is needed to coordinate the Outreach days in which the students get involved in the local community by visiting orphanages, teaching Sunday school, handing out food, visiting widows, building projects – the list goes on and on. Kate and Anna will be able to participate as well and we are glad for that. We are hoping to get more involved with outreach, although my time is more limited at this point and I have come to terms with recognizing that my role is first and foremost with the students here. As I get established in this role, I hope to be able to focus on the local community as well.

I am teaching English to eighty Grade Twelve students and fifty Grade Seven students. I am blessed by these kids. I am especially enjoying getting to know the seniors; they have lived lives that I am moved by, experiences that I cannot even imagine, and yet, they are not jaded by these experiences, with many of them wanting to attain their degrees and go back into full-time service for the Lord. They call themselves “global nomads” because many of them have moved as missionary kids; they really don’t know the extended families they have left behind in North America, Korea, etc. and so they have no real “home” to go to when they finish high school. And so, they are open to going just about anywhere. During the first week of school, I asked the students to write down their goals for the future; I was moved to tears by what I read. In their eyes, there is nothing that is impossible. I am also looking over many of their college applications. Here is an excerpt from one of these college essays.

This is a snapshot of Linda’s life:

Witnessing the events of others’ lives has taught me much about my own life. I realize how fortunate I am to have a complete education. Two years ago my eighteen-year-old Tanzanian friend lost her mom to AIDS. I saw her hopes for a future education disappear. I have been in the chambers where slaves were kept on the island of Zanzibar before being shipped to foreign lands, and seen the after-effects of the Rwandan genocide that ravished the people. My heart is heavy when I witness man’s atrocities toward one another. I have attended Bible studies at a local Kenyan girls’ high school and felt their hospitality, love and devotion to God. I have played with AIDS orphans and children who are recovering from surgery on their club feet or cleft pallet. I have seen hardship and joy first-hand, and through them, I have become increasingly thankful for all that I have.”

When I first came here, I prayed that God would give me a heart for these students, and now I can’t even imagine that I worried about that. I am thankful for the opportunity I have to encourage and

support them each day, because I am so blessed by them each day. I am asking the Lord to sustain me in this work.

Thanks to all of you for giving us this opportunity; we are truly privileged to be here, and thankful that this is part of God's plan for us. We think of you often and although we may not respond to your e-mails individually, it is mainly because the internet is very slow with all of the students here, and it is unpredictable (this week alone, it was down for three days). I have attempted to send pictures as well, but it hasn't worked out yet; we need a computer-savvy friend!! The bottom line is that we are thankful for your help and encouragement.

A few prayer requests:

- that Kate would develop close friendships
- that our family will be strengthened
- that we would make connections with those who have a desire to encourage and support one another spiritually
- that, as a family, we will be involved in reaching out to others, both here at RVA and in the local community - that we will take every opportunity we have to share the love of God
- that we won't miss what God has planned for us this year because of the busy-ness of ministry

Praise for:

- God and His glorious goodness to us
- the blessings bestowed on us by the RVA community
- the SIM Kenya family who have supported us greatly
- Tim's developing relationships with some of the local people
- Anna adjusting to school and friends
- Glenda being encouraged by her students
- all those who have placed us here
- being "stretched" in our various roles
- safety and health

"Give thanks to the Lord, call on His name; make known among the nations what He has done. Sing to Him, sing praise to Him; tell of all His wonderful acts. Glory in his holy name..." (1Chronicles 16: 8-10a).

With love,  
Tim, Glenda, Kate & Anna