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# RAFIKI FOUNDATION MISSIONARY NEWSLETTER



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Missionary #253

Dear friends and family,

The senior students titter and smile as I usher them through the door to the dining hall. The room where they have been accustomed to eating breakfast and lunch on schooldays looks different tonight—the tables, set with tablecloths and flowers, form a large U, and a Malawian feast of nsima, rice, chambo fish, fried chicken, chips, and sodas is set ready at the front in huge serving dishes. All the students have left their uniforms behind and dressed up, and suddenly, they looked more like men and women than like the boys and girls we know in class. As they greet their teachers, there is a new atmosphere of friendliness and relaxation between them. Tonight, at the much-anticipated graduation rehearsal dinner, we will sit and talk together on a new footing as we celebrate these eleven students moving from the status of students to graduates.



Graduation rehearsal dinner

As the evening wears on and the chocolate cake (a rare and rich treat!) settles, we moved towards the highlight of this event—a time where the students and teachers would take a few moments to stand and speak final words of thanks or encouragement to one another. The chatter dies down and everyone begins to smooth their napkins on the table and look around expectantly. Who will speak first?

This is usually my favorite part of the entire graduation week. The official ceremony is very nice with all the robes and the music and the formal speeches and the balloons and pictures. But this evening before the big party is the sweet, quiet moment in the middle of a hectic week; the calm before the celebratory whirlwind of tomorrow, where the students and teachers who have spent hours and even years together can speak more intimately to each other. As we all look around at each other, I am acutely aware that everyone sitting here together can testify to both the sweet and the bitter in these kids' journey—moments of disobedience and foolishness from the students, misunderstanding or failure from the teachers, exciting fieldtrips and laughter in class, inside jokes, tears in the headmaster's office, some narrow escapes from failing grades, even some suspensions that made us question



Rehearsing graduation speeches

whether a few of these students would make it to this point. In short, we have walked a winding path of “iron sharpening iron,” and I wonder what memories and final words will percolate to the top in this final evening together.

There is laughter and gentle joking about failures, dramatic eye-rolls about how tough certain teachers were, reminiscing from the more veteran teachers about the youthful behavior of certain students all the way back into primary school, but most of all, there is gratitude and love. One student says, “we sometimes thought you hated us, but now we can understand that you were trying to help us and shape our character.” Another day student nearly brings me to tears when she admits, “I didn’t understand how this place worked at first, especially the Bible classes. I had never seen anyone study the Bible like this before, but now I cannot imagine my life without Bible study every day. You taught me how to love the Word of God, and now my day feels wrong if I don’t start with the Bible.” A resident elicits hearty amens when he re-articulates what so many of the teachers have been saying —“I know that we have received something unique here, and to my fellow classmates, we have to go out of here and be ambassadors for Christ, putting God first in everything.”

And there it is, the two themes of the week—the uniqueness of a Rafiki education, and the love and loyalty to the training in Bible study and the worldview it has shaped. I hear it from the teachers and the students at this dinner, again in three different speeches on graduation day, and in sweet texts and words from the seniors to me personally. I hear it in the Kindergarten graduation program, when a father stands to address the room and says, “I have one daughter who graduated from Rafiki last year, and my youngest son is graduating from kindergarten today. I tell you, this is a unique and wonderful place. There is no other place where our children are being trained to know and live the Word of God.” I hear it in the speech of our retiring pre-primary teacher as she speaks to the assembled teachers: “I tell you teachers, don’t take this place for granted. I wish all schools in Malawi were like this...and madam, I will miss most of all studying the Bible with you. Please send me out with some of the Bible study!” I hear it in the exhortations of the Rafiki Mamas at our Rafiki family farewell dinner for our resident graduates—“you will find things very different out there; remember what you have been taught and stand firm in how you know the Scripture. You should be the leaders in your homes and churches.”



Honestly, the kindergarteners are the cutest graduates!

As every teacher, administrator, or parent of a school age child knows, the last month of school is filled with breathless activity and a hundred minor (or major) crises, and it is the same here—copiers breaking, tough conversations with parents whose children must repeat their grade, last minute news that a key teacher is interviewing for another job, entrance testing for the new year, the microphone going down hours before graduation starts, petrol shortages in town, and a hundred other things that make me want to tear my hair out.

## Prayer Requests

- *For our graduates as they begin their independent life outside of Rafiki, and for our continued wisdom and faithfulness in discipling and raising the remaining fourteen (so few!) in the Village.*
- *For all of the between term projects going on in the school—for our container to arrive with all our curriculum and other Village items; several minor renovations and one major building renovation to make room for a second class of grade four students; the head teachers and I preparing for me to be gone during term one as I take a few months' sabbatical in the States.*
- *We are praying for a strong new student intake for our RICE Program, which will start its new school year in September—and for forty students in order to stabilize the program financially and keep us on track with our national accreditation process.*





Who can resist a good graduation cap throw?

However, in these moments where we pause to celebrate and to speak final words to each other, I hear coming out of many mouths the answers to the prayers we offer over this ministry—may they know Christ and love His Word, may they be unique, godly thinkers and leaders in their communities, may this education in biblical worldview make them ambassadors for goodness and truth and beauty, lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. They seem to be getting it—slowly but surely the harvest grows.

As we close another school year, I am tempted to focus on the problems of tomorrow—this math curriculum did not get completed, are these lackadaisical eleventh graders ready to succeed as seniors or should I have held that one back? Is our new teacher fluent enough in English to handle the curriculum? What are we going to do if the elections cause unrest that interrupt the start of the new year? Where are we going to find the glass and furniture we need for the new classroom, and how can I manage to make a budget with prices going up and down like a seesaw on the deck of a ship in a squall? Yet here, in the final week, the Lord makes me pause—“stop, be quiet, listen. See what I have done, what I am doing. Give thanks! Not the African logistical nightmares, not the global economy rocking, not the gates of hell will prevail as I build my kingdom in this place.”

May we all continue to trust the Lord as we tend our portion of the garden of His kingdom, keeping our hands faithful to the daily tasks but our eyes on the eternal fruit we seek!

Love,

*Anna*

Anna Liebing



Smiling faces on graduation day



A welcome weekend breather on the Zambia savanna after school ends