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# RAFIKI FOUNDATION MISSIONARY NEWSLETTER



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Dear friends and family,

## **THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY**

Lately, I have been listening to Ellen Vaughn's biographies of Elisabeth Elliot. Most people, if they are familiar with Elisabeth Elliot, know her primarily as the heroic missionary who served in Ecuador with her husband, Jim, until he and his colleagues were brutally martyred as they attempted to make contact with an unreached people group. After the murders that shocked the evangelical world, Elisabeth became a missionary legend—the stalwart widow who would not turn her hand from the plow, but instead took her baby daughter into the remote jungle to live with and minister to the very people who killed her husband. Her example inspired a whole generation of missionaries and believers, for which we ought to praise God. And yet, fewer people know that Elisabeth's time living in those jungles was a complex and frustrating time full of fruit, but also confusing setbacks and hard providences. No one much talks about the fact that one of the main reasons she came off the field was due to conflicts within her mission team and various disillusioning machinations of the missions agencies that she worked with. In the years after her return to the U.S., her passionate love for Christ and His kingdom never changed, but she became very frustrated with the average Christian's view of her experience and foreign mission work in general. She felt that it was "white-washed" and overly romanticized, and when she publicly set forth what she thought was a more honest picture, she found herself frequently criticized and losing popularity.

It has really made me think about how I present my mission work to you dear folks at home who read my reports from across the world. I do not pretend to be any Elisabeth Elliot, but I do feel a deep resonance with her sense that there is a danger of the average western evangelical Christian over-romanticizing mission work, and over-heroizing missionaries. I am a prime candidate—I serve in one of the world's poorest African countries, and in this Village, we raise orphaned children and I head a classical Christian school that reaches especially out to underprivileged children who could not afford this education in almost any other circumstance. I could fill this letter up with pictures and stories of monkeys in the mango trees and red dirt roads washed out during rainy season; with bright-eyed children who walk to school from homes with no electricity, and smiling graduates who came to us as babies with nothing and now are prized leaders in their university classes. All of these things would be beautiful and true. But they would not be the whole story. As with everyone's life

all across the world, my work here is a marvelous, messy mash of the good, the bad, and the ugly. So let me give you a glimpse into each.

## THE GOOD

One of the highlights of the last couple of months was having a team of teachers here from a school in Lilongwe, the capital city that is five hours south of us. These five women came for a week of curriculum training because their school is adopting the Rafiki curriculum, which is an exciting outreach milestone for us! For a week, they stayed in our guest house, observed classes all morning, did seminar sessions on classical Christian education all afternoon, and learned Reformed theology all evening. It was a full and exhausting week, but exhilarating! Our visitors were observant and thoughtful, asking great questions and enthusiastically embracing classical Christian philosophy. My teachers were warm and welcoming and did a great job demonstrating in the classroom and also explaining curriculum and best practices in afternoon sessions. In fact, I think having these new partners here was inspiring to them as they had to think through and explain exactly what we do and why it is wonderful.

On my part, I came away from the week thinking, “yes, this is why I’m here!” In many ways, it was the kind of week that I used to picture in daydreams of serving the Lord on the mission field—cheerful children chorusing “good morning!” in the classrooms; afternoons spent explaining classroom management, biblical worldview, and how true education is about capturing our students’ hearts with truth, beauty, and goodness; evenings with Bibles open around the table, answering earnest questions about election and “Sola Scriptura.” In our last morning devotions, the visitors looked around at all our teachers and said, “we have been up and down the country looking at schools, and we must tell you that Rafiki is probably the best school in Malawi—keep on!” What a week of joy and inspiration for all of us!



**The Good:** a team of visiting teachers training in classical Christian education



**More Good:** showing our visitors how things work in these lovely classrooms with such eager students!



**And Even More Good:** Rafiki pre-primary teachers explaining the details of the Rafiki curriculum

## THE BAD

What these lovely visiting teachers did not see behind the scenes, though, is that Maureen and I were under great pressure as we have been running the Village with our administrator, Jay, out of the country since mid-December. Jay had been having trouble with deteriorating vision, and so he was forced, with just a few days’ notice, to fly back to Michigan for surgery on both his eyes. He worked hard to do as much as possible remotely, but we two ladies on the ground were still stretched thin physically and emotionally as we picked up the necessary extra duties and simply missed Jay’s presence. We were feeling frayed by late night and weekend Zoom meetings, hosting a government pre-accreditation inspection for our teachers training college, being called out of normal duties to deal with HR issues and finances, etc. We were so very thankful when Jay arrived back (with suitcases full of presents!) last week.

To top it off, I woke up the night before our teacher training week with fever sweats and a jack hammer inside my head. Why, God? That meant a run to the clinic for a malaria test instead of other training preparations that needed to be done. Thankfully, it wasn’t malaria, so I popped a bunch of ibuprofen and powered through the next few days, making sure to dress in layers so that I could wrap up or peel sweaters off as the chills came and went!

The Lord provided every strength that I needed, but these things do highlight why we pray so earnestly for the Lord to send more workers to the field to support and help us—perhaps this is something the Lord would call you to pray about?

## THE UGLY

Meantime, many of our resident children who were so lovely and impressive as they hosted the guests at evenings meals, were spending early mornings and late afternoons in intensive discipline sessions with the missionaries and the cottage mamas. It began last term with our discovery of some forbidden items on campus, and the battle for truth and respectful responses to discipline had been raging hot ever since. The Rafiki mission of “cultivating a multitude of godly contributors” through raising and educating orphans sounds lovely in a PowerPoint presentation, but the daily reality of doing it does not always make for a pretty postcard. Many of our children truly love the Lord and work hard to do right, which delights our hearts, but our teenagers, just like those around the world, are often tempted by “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life”—from smartphones to junk food to imbibing in all the popular secular trash that media and a sinful culture offer. Just like Israel, they know that they have been plucked out of Egypt by the power and the goodness of the Lord, and yet they get sick of the manna, and they look around at the nations and want the gods that they can see. Are we not all similarly tempted? And so, we grieve over their foolishness, and we talk, and we speak Scripture, and we consult on how best to disciple, and we ponder the Proverbs about the foolish, the wise, and the naïve... and sometimes we fall discouraged into bed wishing that we didn’t have to do it all over again tomorrow.

And yet, we grow—not in spite of, but because of all of these things. Despite the fact that I may wish that I could present you with a neat, tidy picture, that is certainly not how the Scripture is, is it? We have just finished studying David’s and Solomon’s lives in Samuel and I Kings. In His wisdom, the Lord shows us the peaks and the valleys of these mighty men, because that is the reality of a holy God working in a sinful world. It is through the sweetness and the struggle and the failing that Christ reveals himself, calls His people out of the world, refines them as gold, and makes them fit for the joy of His presence. And in the meantime, He graciously grants us glimpses of the fruit, even in the toughest moments—excited teachers training new “classical converts”, a faithful student helping out before he’s asked, a sweet note that says, “my classmates are learning to be kinder to each other after our discipline”, a graduate who is now passionate about working with other orphans.

Please praise Him with me for His perfect discipline, His unending patience, His gentle compassion; and pray in all these things for His kingdom to come, here in our Village in Malawi and all over the world, so that “every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord”!

Love,

*Anna*

Anna Liebing



The Rafiki family enjoying a Christmas party in December. These kids are the joy and sometimes the plague of our hearts—a feeling every parent knows!