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RAFIKI FOUNDATION MISSIONARY NEWSLETTER



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Dear friends and family,

One step back, two steps forward—ever on the move!

As I was en route to Malawi on New Year's Eve, I was consciously thankful for the time of rest and re-filling that I experienced with my family and friends in the U.S. during the fall. I felt rested (well, as rested as you can after a forty-hour plane trip across three continents), eager to see my Malawian family, and ready to get the new school term rolling.

Before I even landed in Lilongwe, though, I started receiving messages that hinted not all would be smooth. My missionary partner, Bryan, was admitted to the hospital with kidney stones. The rains in Malawi had been so intense that a key bridge on the only major paved road between Lilongwe and Mzuzu had been washed out, making my planned drive back to the Village temporarily impossible. The first hotel I tried was booked because it was New Year's Eve, and the city was teeming. When I finally arrived at a place for the night, the power went down, and I spent the rest of the afternoon and early evening in darkness. Welcome back to Malawi!

None of these things are catastrophic—thankfully, Bryan was out of the hospital after a few days, and my amazing driver Sam managed to find us a detour that was slippery with mud and added two hours to our drive, but we made it! The Village was peaceful and bright with generator-powered light the night I got back. But the first thirty-six hours back in the country reminded me...well, firstly, that American infrastructure is a thing of beauty; but secondly, analogously, that the kingdom's course of growth is rarely smooth or fast.



Detour! Waiting our turn to get some momentum in our bid to get up the muddy hill

So often, the visual progress of our work here seems to feel like not just "two steps forward, one step backward"; but two steps forward, one back, three forward, five back, two sidesteps, two more steps forward on a slightly different trajectory, one back, then circle back around to step number one before jetting forward five more steps. Oops, you have landed in quicksand, now crawl back one step and look for a way around! As I settled back into the headmaster chair, there were some circling-back steps to be trod, and as we have moved forward through January and

February, there have been, as always, some unexpected boggy spots and shifting sands. But the time away has also given me fresh eyes to be able to look at our current work in the context of the longer path we have been walking for years. And sure enough, the progress is forward—the signs of the kingdom expanding are unmistakable!

In RICE (our teacher training college), we had hoped to bring in a new cohort of students back in September, but missed the mark. Then we spent some significant time dealing with staff challenges, followed by a round of spurious WhatsApp advertising that spread word like fire around Mzuzu that anyone who came to RICE would get full scholarships! Three steps back, it felt like. And yet, these things brought some good and needed discussions with our valued university partners and among our Rafiki team, and we were suddenly flooded with applicants to the program! Once the snafus were worked out, we were still in a position to bring in a new cohort of students, and I got to help lead a dear group of wide-eyed students during orientation in a Hebrews Bible study and an introduction to classical, Christian education. The room was full of staff and students who, we pray, will be learning to think and study and teach in a revolutionary, biblical way.

In ChildCare, I keep running into students whose graduation I oversaw in July, and are now getting scholarship details settled so that they can start various vocational or academic programs. They look grown up and confident and excited to take on this next stage of life. I also got to speak to some of the older graduates just before they left for Lilongwe to start their second year; they told me about their involvement with a very solid church, and holding each other accountable for studying hard and living wisely. Three steps forward!

At the school, we have been lacking a key language arts teacher for months, and each candidate we interview seems to have some major disqualification. Then, in quick succession, one teacher went on maternity leave, and another key department head resigned. This news came to me in the middle of a stream of students flowing into my office, assigned to see me because an epidemic of allergies to homework completion had apparently broken out. Four steps back. And yet, when I enter the primary, I see the fresh new faces of two new teachers who are former Rafiki residents. They were among the first of our kids to graduate from university, and we hired them as eminently qualified to teach the very curriculum that they were educated under. They are strong, motivated teachers with amazing English skills and a true understanding of our vision—the first fruits of our classical Christian education now returning to pour into the next generation. That surely counts as at least five steps forward!

Later that week I stepped into teacher in-service to introduce our newest study in the Book of Hebrews. We read “[I]n **these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...**” (Hebrews 1:2). Several years ago, the teachers would have simply looked at me and quietly waited for me to exposit. Now, hands shoot up and Bible pages start shuffling as a lively discussion of stages of biblical revelation and modern apostles and prophets starts. The following week, it was a question of the offices of Christ, and slowly but surely, the teachers who have been here for several years studying the Word (especially the Old Testament law books) begin soundly piecing together how Christ fulfills the Scriptures perfectly in His deity and humanity, qualified to deliver us in His roles as prophet, priest, and king. Several thrilling steps forward!

Our Outreach Program is also moving forward. Three schools attended a week of training last term, led in my absence by one of our veteran Rafiki Headmasters from another Village. For the first time, two of the schools are right in our area, so last week, I got to send out my early childhood teachers to check on them. They found one school that had just two small rooms and no resources other than the letter and number cards we had given them. They were unsure how to use the hymnals and a little overwhelmed by the curricular instructions. Another



Catching up with some graduates before they head back to school



Everyone getting back into the routine for term 2

school still had not opened the curriculum because they were intimidated by it. Ouch—two steps back. And yet, they received our teachers with joy, asking them to sing the hymns and demonstrate the curriculum. Teacher Lekani and Flora stayed most of the day, encouraging them, showing them exactly what to do, and planning to visit them again soon with some spare resources from our campus. The day ended with pictures full of smiling faces, and we believe these schools will become great successes as we work with them and grow their confidence. Two steps forward!

In every room and department, the kingdom moves forward—student literature discussions evolve into Trinitarian analysis, residents work through a study of “The Fear of God” on the weekends, container orders for next school year are being prepared, emails fly back and forth as we prepare to welcome several visitors from the States, and other various projects and relationships lumber along, each with its own winding but (we trust!) ever-forward path. We continue onward with gratitude for the things we can see, prayer over the inevitable pot holes in the road, and faith that the Lord’s Word and work never fail!

Love,

Anna

Anna Liebing



Visiting our newest outreach schools to give some coaching

Prayer Requests

- *Unity and good teamwork on the missionary team as we seek to move each of these programs forward.*
- *The Lord to bring excellently qualified and committed, visionary teaching candidates to two key upper school positions.*
- *For the flourishing of RICE in its still fledgling year—especially for the students and staff to love the vision and one another.*
- *Twenty new long-term missionaries to go out and serve with Rafiki.*
- *All Rafiki children to be fully sponsored.*