
The War

July 23, 2009



When it comes to cold, I am pretty darn stoic.

When it gets down in the 40's and we don't have heaters here, I am widely admired for how I handle the temperature. I've found that yelling 'I'm dying of the cold, and no one CARES' a dozen or so times a day does WONDERS for office morale. I've discovered that wearing a hoodie with the hood up under a winter coat is a wonderfully inviting image for impressionable young people who are nervous about college. Last week, when I could see my breath as I walked to the office, the joyful noises that came almost unbidden from my lips were probably an inspiration to all.

It is so good to be an inspiration. But I would trade being a role model to be warm.

Tabitha has had a tough life. Her father died when she was two years old. Her mother has AIDS. She has lived in a rented one room shack without power or water her whole life. No one can quite explain her sweetness of spirit, her brilliant mind, or her determination. There was a missionary couple who hired her to work for them, and they invested heavily into her.



The Howorths came to me and asked me to help her with studying in the United States. I told them that she needed to take the SAT. Many Kenyans desire to study in the US, and the SAT proves to be their undoing. Tabitha would get up at 4am and study with a solar flashlight we gave her. She did well enough that I began to contact colleges on her behalf.

Warren Wilson College accepted her, and gave her a generous scholarship, but we were still 7k short. Before we had a chance

to ask, an old friend wrote to us and said that he and his wife would provide the monies. A friend and colleague from Darlington School collected all sorts of great items for her to have. The Howorths wanted to provide her airline ticket. My sister and husband live fairly close, and offered to house her before school began.

She needed a passport. It should be a fairly easy process. You submit paperwork and pay your substantial fee, and it should be done. But Tabitha went to the passport office many many times and always got discouraging news. She actually had someone say 'I never have had an opportunity like that; why should you?' After 20 visits, each of which cost her a day of work and car fare, she was no closer.

I poured out my frustration to RVA's accountant, who is a wonderful Kenyan man with many connections. He put us in touch with one woman at the office who offered to help. It took three more times, but 23 trips later, Tabitha has her passport.

The only other hurdle was to get her student visa. Since I have taken dozens of RVA students through the process in the last five years, I was pretty confident that it wouldn't be a problem. We had all the paperwork, and we had paid all the substantial fees. We made an appointment and went to the Embassy.

Our appointment was scheduled for 8am. We arrived at 7:30 am and after waiting outside in the rain with hundreds of other people with appointments, we got through security and she went to the first stage of the process, where they make sure you have paid your fees and have all the appropriate paperwork.

And she was rejected. The woman behind the counter threw her passport at her and told her to leave.

She was rejected because she did not have a residential address. She has a PO Box. Like 90% of all Kenyans. I am not often at a loss for words, but I had nothing to say as we left. We drove straight to the Kijabe post office and asked them for a residential address. They informed us that there were no residential addresses in Kijabe- only PO boxes.



I didn't know what to do. Tabitha's sponsor wrote and asked what had happened, and I informed her of the rejection. She had an upper level government contact who wrote and asked what had happened.

Tabitha was rejected on a Thursday. The government contact wrote to me on Friday. On Tuesday, I received a call from the US Embassy inviting Tabitha to come to the Embassy on Wednesday for another appointment. This time, they didn't keep her waiting. They only asked one question: Where did you hear about Warren Wilson College?

She was granted her visa on Wednesday. She is perhaps the most excited person on the planet, which makes me realize how much I took my own education for granted.

But I hurt for all the qualified candidates who have done everything right and get rejected for no good reason.

It is a reminder that we are in a war. There isn't any easy ground to take anymore. Everything is a fight, and nothing is easy.



Most of the schools ran out of food last week. I got frantic calls from headmasters, but we just didn't have any money left to buy additional food. What is happening is this: around 11 am, students leave school to go search and beg for food.

I have been told that I'm not direct enough, so let me say it as clear as I can. We need more money to buy more food. I understand the horrible economy in the US, and please don't give unless you are supposed to. But if you are supposed to, please give. We are way under the monies we need for the September through

November term.

The guilt and disappointment I've felt in the past few weeks have been enormous. If only I was a better fund raiser; if only I was a better speaker, if only...

But He has done so many things to encourage us in the past few weeks.

RVA has a yearbook, and each year they dedicate the yearbook to a staff couple. On the night they presented the yearbook, I was leaning over to Nancy and telling her that I'd hoped my friend Wally and his wife would be chosen.

They announced our name. We were so surprised (I was; Nancy had figured it out) and so blessed to have the students pick us. We didn't deserve it, but we so appreciated it. And the picture of me dancing in the yearbook will again be an inspiration to all who see it.

I was sitting in a computer center last week, and I was as tired and discouraged as I could remember. I had a little girl tell me her dream was to own a pair of shoes.

The class came in, and suddenly I was watching kids without shoes learn how to query a database. It was so exciting and so encouraging; the progress they are making is so exhilarating. It struck me that I'm in a war, and spend much of my time getting the crud kicked out of me. But watching those kids get a fairly difficult lesson was like a year of being beat up and then



standing up and hitting the bully right in the mouth.

Every once in awhile, we get to hit back, if we realize we are in a war.

I was at Njira Primary School today, which is the most remote school we provide food for. They were out of food, but I knew they had been given enough to make it through the term. I was suspecting theft, but then I discovered that there were two schools nearby that did not receive food... and Njira had shared their food with these other schools.

Somehow, in the war, that had to really hurt the other side.

Your pal
S

PS. Our latest video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QGzeBIQFsWQ>

The Peifer's Quick Links...

[Our Website](#)

[View Steve's CNN Hero Video on YouTube](#)

Contact Information

Steve and Nancy Peifer
Rift Valley Academy PO Box 80 Kijabe, Kenya 00220
Mission: AIM PO Box 178 Pearl River, NY 10965
Home Number: 011-254-20-3246-458
Office Number: 011-254-20-3246-170
Steve's Cell: 011-254-0734-124292
Nancy's Cell: 011-254-0734-124291



[Join Our Mailing List!](#)