



And some of the them are going to be just like Godfrey ...
Steve Vinton, March 6, 2007

Today to the cheers of 312 students Godfrey officially proclaimed the opening of our newest school -- Idigima Secondary School -- in the village of Idiwili! It's on days like this that I can't help but feel in my heart that I'm absolutely the luckiest guy on the planet that I get to be here in Tanzania doing the work that I'm doing.

No one expected us to be in Idiwili today -- certainly we didn't! Yesterday as Godfrey, Emmanuelli and I were nearing the crossroads at Makambako we got the phone call we were waiting for from the school inspection office and we made the snap decision to go west instead of east. The potential pay-off was great -- a chance to try to finagle the one last signature we need from the school inspectors, plus a chance to meet with the leaders at a mechanics schools in Mbeya and to talk to two promising young guys they've proposed to work with us, plus a chance for a long overdue and surprise visit to see the progress the people have made on their school in the village of Idiwili.

So here we are driving west, it's getting later and later, we're stopping in town after town and finding out that there was literally "no room in the inn" and so we just kept driving and driving and driving until we finally found ourselves at 2 in the morning all the way to the little village of Idiwili!

The whole village was asleep (even the dogs!) -- and so we just drove out to the building site alone and in the bright moonlight and the still of the night we wandered around and marveled at what Hadji had managed to build working with the people in these seven villages. Absolutely wonderful! Incredible even. We

head back, find the house where Hadji is sleeping, bang a bit on the door, and then plop out on the mats so tired that we just sleep in our clothes. First time I remember sleeping with even my shoes on!

In the morning Hadji takes off so silently we don't even know that he left us. When we do eventually wake up we open the little shuttered window that has kept the place pitch black and the sunshine floods in and the news that the ladies in the village have prepared tons and tons of hot water for us to bath. It's going to be a glorious day! Eight in the morning and we know already it's going to be a glorious day! Except that we know that we're off for a meeting with the leaders of the village who are going to pressure and plead for us to agree to open the school when, well, as nice as it is all the work that they've done on building the school, quite frankly the cold hard fact is that it's just not enough. Sometimes you know you work really hard and you put all your effort into something but it's still just not enough. We discuss how we'll go about telling them the truth -- no school this year -- while at the same time encouraging them to just keep on working and to not give up.

On the way to the meeting, we drive by the school and we're amazed to see hundreds of kids on the school grounds -- all in work clothes, all hard at work. They've been here every day for the last two months Hadji tells us -- carrying water for the builders, clearing off the land, planting flowers and trees, hauling bricks and sand, every day they sing the national anthem at 7:00 and then work until 3 in the afternoon. Only a person complete devoid of a heart would fix his eyes on the work that's not yet finished and tell those kids that

it's just not enough and that nonchalantly we'll just open school next year. And so we huddle off in the corner for a few minutes to make the only decision that we could possibly make. Some times you just have to know what to look at and what not to look at in order to see what's really important.

And then Godfrey, Emmanueli and I are standing in front of those kids saying that all of the letters and pleadings from the government officials, the village leaders and from their parents couldn't change the cold hard facts that the buildings just aren't ready, standards just aren't met, school just simply can't open, and you can just see the look on their faces and know that some of them are ready to cry. And then the statement -- the fact that they've been there every day at 7am working hard, clearing the land, hauling water and bricks and sand for the builders, sweating day after day in the sun, getting wet in the rain, well that's a fact that's the most important fact to us, the fact that wins out over all over facts, the reality that is more important than all other realities -- and so Godfrey as the Director of Village Schools Tanzania does the right thing and declares school officially open, says that we'll send a team of teachers on the 26th and

they'll teach under the mango trees if the classrooms aren't totally ready yet! The cheers went on and on and wouldn't stop. Those kids just wouldn't stop!

And I looked over at Godfrey standing in front of all of those students and all I could think of was that this was the same Godfrey who years ago when I was the principal of a little school near his village was just a kid who wanted nothing except the chance to go to school, who didn't have a nickel to his name, who said that one day he'd pay me if I'd just let him go into class ...

I am indeed so lucky to get to do what I do.

312 kids in the village of Idiwili are getting a chance at an education. They range from age 13 to 29. They come from 16 different villages. Some have parents to help them. Many are orphans. Some of them are going to be able to pay their schools fees. And some of them are going to be just like Godfrey. They're not going to have a nickel to their names, they're going to come into the office and say that they really want to go to school, that they don't have any money now but if we just let them go into class that one day they'll find a way to pay us ...