



Tamara and Maggie's long journey to Lugoda  
Steve Vinton, May 20, 2007

Tamara and Maggie took the bus to the hospital in the village of Lugoda with five of their students from Sawala. Each of those kids had come individually to talk with them about going to get tested to see if they were HIV+ and so Tamara and Maggie said that they would go with them and get tested all seven of them together. Certainly I am thrilled for the good news I just got that all of them are negative (wow!), but I'm even happier that Maggie and Tamara have reached the level of confidence with their students that this could even happen. I so happy to know that they talked for weeks together about what they would do as a group to support and help each other so that those who were HIV+ would get the ARVs and stay healthy and stay in school, and I'm excited that this slowly might become a movement to get more of our students, and then through them more of their families, and through them more of the neighbors, to go and get tested. This is how it all began in the Madisi area with Susan making in-roads in the community through a few of her students and their families. And now nearly 11 months later Susan has over two hundred families -- "whole households" -- which are being helped in a vast network that touches now just about every nook and cranny in our villages.

Tamara and Maggie are excellent teachers. What they've done to prepare all of the teachers to teach to go off and open the schools at Idigima and Nankanga, Imauluma and Memya (in addition to teaching themselves) is so invaluable that it's almost mind-boggling how two people could have such an impact on so many people after having been here for only five months. What they've done in individual lives is equally wonderful -- like helping Christina, a girl who has come more than 400

miles from a small village to go to school and who not knowing a soul in this village now lives with Tamara and Maggie. All that is wonderful. Very wonderful. But what they've done by showing their students that they love them enough to get so involved in their lives to talk about the things that they live in fear over, to talk about what they would do as a team to help any in the group who would end up testing positive, and now to see the open doors that this might create to bring transformation and life to this community -- well that is beyond wonderful and it thrills me to the core of who I am.

It is often said that they won't care what you know until they know that you care.

Well Tamara and Maggie have in a very real sense earned already the right to be heard. They've showed that they cared.

Listen, VSI is no fun. Maggie and Tamara are the kind of people who won't talk about what they've suffered to get to this point. So let me talk about it. When they first started out at Sawala they slept in a house that was more of a storeroom than a house -- they've shivered through the night -- they've put up with the rats for months until Josh and Jonathan's cat Hobbes had kittens -- they've humbled themselves and worked under a principal who, while a sweet woman, was often less than competent and they've done it with graciousness rather than condescension because they saw a picture that was far greater than themselves and their feelings. They've missed out on going to town on the weekends "to get away" and instead have just lived in the village and made it their home -- they've walked everywhere -- they've learned to love

Tanzanian cuisine and the late hour of the day that it's normally ready. They've lived with very little money and known what it's like to borrow when you run out as all poor people learn to do, they've learned to not be too proud to say you're out of money and need help. They've struggled without knowing the language and having us just "dump them off" in the village to sink or swim and to accept being dependent upon their students and their fellow teachers to show them the most basic of things in order to survive.

In short, Maggie and Tamara have given of themselves these past four months not to teach their students – because teaching students doesn't mean you have to do all of these things – but rather they've given of themselves to really make 1 Thessalonians 2:8 more than just another verse of nice things that Paul wrote 2000 years ago but something that would be real in their lives.

"We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the Gospel of God but our lives as well because you had become so dear to us."

You know Jesus said in Matthew 9:37 -- "Pray unto the Lord of the Harvest to send out workers. The harvest is great but the workers are few." Godfrey and Emmanuelli are running around the country organizing people in villages to build more and more schools. The rains will stop soon and tens of thousands of people will get to work at making bricks. I know the money will come in for the metal roofing and the cement. We're going to aim to build 72 more classrooms and pull another nearly 3000 kids into the lifeboat that these schools represent for them. The harvest is great but the workers are few.

We need more and more Maggies and Tamaras.