



Rachel and Hawa and their sodas
Steve Vinton, June 14, 2007

It's so good to be HOME! I was greeted by Yona running to the door and it brought to mind the images in the cartoon of the way Hobbes often greeted Calvin when he'd come home from school! I found Susan, Veronica and Rachel all sitting around the fire in our kitchen. Veronica was quick with her greetings and bolting out the door because very obviously if the Mzee was home from the long trip so was Godfrey and she was a whole lot more interested in seeing her husband that she was in seeing me!

Rachel was bubbling out the story of Hawa -- the star student in 8th grade-- who had actually gotten 100% both on the English final exam and on the Math final exam. Rachel wanted to celebrate with her and so she invited her to come over for a soda and it was then that Rachel got to learn Hawa's story -- how this young girl had studied so hard throughout all of her years at primary school, how the year she finished she waited with everyone else all of those months for the results of the national examinations only to find out that she hadn't been chosen to get to go to secondary school, and how that meant for her that she had began what was to be her life as a picker of tea in the tea fields of Mufindi plateaus of central Tanzania. Hawa would undoubtedly already be married by now, she might even have a child or two, and she would be spending the rest of her life picking tea leaves hoping to pick enough pounds of tea (for a couple of pennies a pound) so she could take care of her children. But

instead after a year picking tea day after day, her life took a decidedly different direction. It was her older brothers, none of who had gotten the chance to go to school themselves, who when they learned that our school Madisi had opened up and that there was a special scholarship program for girls, made the family decision that Hawa's life in the tea fields should come to a close and that this little girl should get to go back to school. Hawa is indeed brilliant-- and she will almost certainly finish tops in her class with straight As when we announce the grades tomorrow morning. The fact that Hawa isn't picking tea all day long and is instead getting As in school is one very small, but yet somehow very significant victory.

None of our victories actually are all that big in the grand scheme of things I guess. Starting Madisi Secondary School will certainly not alter the course of human history, it won't change what happens on the continent of Africa -- but so what. It has altered the course of the life of a young girl named Hawa. And knowing that makes me all the more determined to start more and more schools in villages all across this country and this continent-- until we finally reach the day when no young girls work in tea fields instead of getting the chance to go to school.

The national anthem of Tanzania is a glorious song that asks God to bless the children of Africa. May He indeed bless them. Each one of them!