



I knew what he was saying when he said that.  
Steve Vinton, July 4, 2007

I knew Godfrey was sick, but I also just knew that he was disappointed and sad and tired. It had been a long and very frustrating day. He only left the Ministry of Education when they closed things down for the day at 4:30 pm and then he and I went finally for lunch. We ate mostly in silence. And then we went back to the guest house and Godfrey just went to bed. It's nearly midnight now and he hasn't woken up and so it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that we're not going out anywhere to look for any dinner tonight!

I haven't erased Godfrey's message yet from my phone. "Mzee we have a serious problem. They have refused to register our school at Sawala this year and the decision is in writing and already signed." He sent the message to me at 10:30 this morning. I was stunned. 13 months we have been at this. And now the decision had been rendered. And we had lost. I tried to call him as soon as I got the text message but he had already shut his phone off. I knew it meant that Godfrey had gone back into someone's office. I tried to concentrate on the work we had agreed that I was supposed to be doing today, getting documents ready that he needed to sign for the new school projects we're ready to get started in Ulolela and Mpepo villages down south in Ruvuma. 40 minutes later another brief text message. "Truly let's pray to God that they change their minds. They told me to leave their office so they can discuss it." The hours dragged on. I headed for the bank. I went shopping for books. I prayed. I tried to make myself useful. Mostly I just waited. Godfrey didn't say much when we finally met up with each other. "I got them to agree to rip up the letter and to think more about their decision tonight and tomorrow." He smiled. I smiled back and shook my head.

I was as stunned by that as I was by his original message. We still had a glimmer of hope, a crack in the door, we were not totally washed up. It reminded me of the old days when I was in Congo. You won by wearing them down, by not giving in, by not giving up. You wasted hours at the border in order to cross without paying a bribe by simply talking a lot, by being stubborn, by staring in silence, by smiling. You talked and talked to soldiers with all their guns until they relaxed and lost interest. Congo taught me patience and persistence. Six hours later Godfrey was out of their offices and back on the streets. He didn't have the registration for the school, but we weren't yet out of the game, it was 4th down and 99 yards to go with 3 seconds left on the clock, but we were not yet out of the game. We had been resurrected, pulled back from the brink, kept in the game. We were back to fight another day. Another day. Yet another day.

Godfrey will be in the office at 8:30 when they start. My job is to go to the bank (they didn't have any money today), to check a few more things off our to do list, to make myself useful, to pray, and to avoid the temptation of bothering Godfrey every half hour to ask him to tell me how things are going.

But for now I'm just laying here in my bed typing away in my computer watching the clock slip past midnight. Some 4th of July this is turning out to be! Before Godfrey's early morning text message I had envisioned a day that would end with him walking out of the Ministry of Education victorious, registration in hand, and he and I would go it wouldn't even matter where to eat nice food, enjoy victory, laugh and tell great stories and we'd celebrate that Sawala was registered, we'd make the

phone calls back to Sawala to let the word spread that the kids would get to take their exams, that the long nightmare was over, that it was the 4th of July and all was good and wonderful. No fireworks in the evening sky though here, and none in my heart either.

They rejected two schools today -- ours and some school way up in the north. Those folks just left. And who could blame them. That's what you're supposed to do. It is after all everyone knows pointless to try to change these kinds of decisions. You're just supposed to accept your fate. Just take your letter and go home and wait for next year. But next year is just too late for us. There are all of those kids in that little village of Sawala who have had a

whole lifetime to get used to being disappointed, but for whom getting to go to school offers the one chance they've got for their lives to sail in a different direction, the one lucky break that's come their way, and somehow after studying hard for these past two years it seems impossible, criminal even, to return from Dar and show them a letter that says they don't get to take the national exams this year and will have to wait until 2008.

Godfrey had stared across me at the table when we had finished our lunch. "You never gave up back in 2002 when I was your student and I needed to take my national exams." I knew what he was saying when he said that. He has no intention of throwing in the towel.