

# ARLINGTON ACADEMY OF HOPE



Building the Foundation for Hope in Rural Uganda

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## A Progress Report February 2005

Dear Friends,

This time, I am true to my word. A promise is a promise is a promise is a promise (is that not what the King of Siam said to the beautiful English teacher?). It has been two weeks since I last wrote to you, and I promised that my next progress report will be out this week. So without much ado, here is the news...

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### 1. How is Cynthia Doing?

In the AAH annual report I sent out two weeks ago, we reported that Cynthia Margeson, formerly a teacher at ATS and now a member of the AAH board, had returned to Uganda to teach at AAH for a few months. She was also asked to head the school as we looked for a new headmaster. Below is Cynthia first report from the school, in her own words:

*Mulembe* to all my friends and supporters in USA!

It has been two and a half weeks since I left USA and every single day has been treasure filled with some challenges but mostly rewards. I have discovered that the first day of school is the same in Uganda as it is in America. Children are filled with the excitement of returning to a school they love. They have greeted their teachers respectfully and then with uncontained enthusiasm. First graders wander with eyes full of awe, anxiety and anticipation. All teachers carry many bags. Most pencil sharpeners give problems. Many children greeted me with inquiries if I had brought any new books. How did they know that was to be my emphasis for my three month stay!!

Sixth graders were reassigned to be in charge of the flags each day. How proud I am to

watch them raise the flags of Uganda, AAH and the USA. Each morning we gather for assembly where students line up in grade rows similar to the class lines at ATS. It is in this assembly that we share news and encouragement. For the first week I was busy explaining the ABC's of success from a banner which Ms Hawthorne had purchased and sent with me. If some night you should be awakened about 1230 am do not fear; it's 8:30 am here in Bumwalukani and the students are just shouting our popular kindergarten cheer, "WE LOVE TO LEARN!" I told them I wanted their friends in the US to hear them.

At the first break of the new school year, P-1 and P-2 students were served their porridge at 10:30 am and then we reassembled very briefly to distribute some toys which were graciously given by Dr. David and Jeanne Madison. Ball skills have already improved as the delighted children received bouncing balls, jump ropes, flying discs and bendable figures. I hope you could see the light shining from their smiles. Thank you!

Another exciting time of the first week was my visit to each classroom to give every student a full color calendar with 12 beautiful photos. Most children here have only seen the black and white print of learning in this brown and green lush tropical forest, and the print on the black board and the print on the white paper. Imagine having a "book" of their own with twelve beautiful pictures. These calendars were the gifts mostly from Mrs. Lowery's class as well as from other ATS families and Staff. Inside of each calendar, Mrs. Hunn had helped me to put in individual letters from all third graders and Mrs. Larson's class. AAH students read them and felt the letter alone was a gift.

In one week, I have created 6 book bags filled with wonderful stories and photos from East Africa. Ms Hawthorne very generously supplied this collection. ATS has sent close to 500 children's book. They were all safely shelved in a cabinet. My first thought: GET THE BOOKS OUT! Books are for looking, touching, reading, learning and loving. At recess time I put a box of 10 books out. These were immediately snatched by eager students. The next time, I increased the box to 20 and now 30. Every book is being read over and over by individuals and small groups. The sixth graders are as interested (probably more) as the younger for they are realizing the power of reading. These students are thrilled by looking at books which show them another world so vastly different from this deep rural village. The popular choices for break time are football (soccer), jumping, running and READING!!

Ooch, my time is running and my taxi is here: Newsflash - Electricity arrived on Feb 9 via a generator. More details in my next communication. Hope all are well.  
Ps I think it is 90 degrees today. Love you all: Cynthia

## **2. World Children's Relief**

About two weeks ago, Jaime and I traveled to Phoenix, AZ to meet with the board and management of World Children's Relief (WCR). The WCR was conducting its annual leadership training and get together, and hosting its annual Dinner of Hope. We met Sarah Rotman, the WCR Program Director, Benjamin and Douglas Lodmell, the founders of WCR, other WCR staff, but above all, the four country representatives who are carrying out the mission of WCR in Haiti, in Senegal, in Burkina Faso, and in Uganda.

Penny Mbabazi leads the Uganda mission, and it was a great pleasure meeting her and discussing with her WCR's activities and plans for Uganda. Penny has already been to AAH two times and she gave us the latest news on the activities at the school. We also had a chance to renew our acquaintance with Geert, our friend and partner a few months ago during our trip to Uganda. The WCR Dinner of Hope was fantastic, with a genuinely African setting and foods, complete with live African dancers. They also had a silent auction featuring many art pieces from Africa and the US. At the dinner, the AAH delegation was specifically mentioned and welcomed.

Our meeting with WCR was most productive. We had a discussion session where we agreed on the support we would provide to each other in Uganda, and how we can share resources to minimize costs. WCR and AAH have the same basic goals in Uganda, and we are delighted that we shall work with them to improve the quality of education for the children in our rural communities in Uganda. We truly look forward to this partnership with WCR.

### **3. AAH makes the *Washington Post***

This is the greatest story of the month, and I am at a loss for words. How do I even begin writing this? How do I share this story of kid whose story and that of AAH fill an entire page of the *Washington Post* today? How can I trace the journey of this kid, whose only clothing on his first day at school was nothing but a shirt, a kid who grew up removing jiggers from his toes and heels, a kid whose claim to fame in his early childhood was that of the best corn roaster in the family? Growing through hunger, famine, deprivation, poverty, and much more, the only clear resolution this kid remembers was a vow to have enough to eat when he grew up. It was not clothing, it was not books, it was food that this kid wanted more than anything else, because more often than not, he went to bed with an empty stomach each night.

Well, this morning, this kid, now a man, finds himself the center of a story in the *Washington Post*.

One day, when the history of AAH is written, perhaps someone will dig up the background of this kid. By most accounts, he was an ordinary boy in his village. As a young boy, he was not known for many things. He was neither tall nor short, neither a narrator of tales (a village right of passage) nor a singer or a dancer. Growing up in a family of six boys and two girls, he never attracted much attention, not even among the village girls who always liked a good talker and a man of strength. This kid was always a second or third choice – among girls, or at school, or at home. In a village where one had to be strong to till the land, or eloquent to get the attention of village elders, or accomplished to attract the attention of girls, this kid was neither, and even his progress in school was unremarkable. True, he cut and carried bamboo shoots from the forest for his family on weekends, he searched the grass for mushrooms and locusts, he fetched water and washed the dishes and ran errands for the parents, and occasionally, he served as a go between for aspiring partners in the village. But nothing he did was remarkable or memorable, and not many people, even to this day, recall anything outstanding that this kid did as a young man. Until about 10 years ago, not many people in Bumwalukani would positively identify the man (not the fish) called Wanda among them.

Today, though, a few more people will read about yours truly and the village of Bumwalukani and a school called Arlington. For a number of weeks, the Washington Post has been collecting information about AAH, interviewing numerous people, including teacher Cynthia Margeson, and reviewing pictures and many background stories on AAH. In today's paper, they have produced a story on AAH that makes my eyes tear when I look at the pictures. Tara Bahrampour, a veteran reporter for the Post, has put together a powerful story on AAH, and captured many personal moments of our journey to this country. It is both a moving piece and a tribute to the generosity of this country that welcomed us so openly 9 years ago, and to the people who have been at the forefront of so many educational changes in the village of Bumwalukani. I feel extremely humbled that such a great paper has found our story worthy to write about. But I also know that without you all, there would be no story. This is therefore your story as much as a story on AAH. Find the whole story and the pictures at this link.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A45952-2005Feb23.html>

And if you are unable to access it from here, you should soon find it at the AAH website at [www.arlingtonacademyofhope.org](http://www.arlingtonacademyofhope.org).

### **And at AAH...**

Well, school is up and running. They now have 194 children in six grades, thus averaging about 35 per class. The school year began on January 31, so they have been at it for about three weeks. The children were provided with basic scholastic materials to start the school year. Because so much of our fund raising efforts last year were focused on finishing the buildings for the classrooms, we do not have sufficient scholastic supplies, or even lunches for the children. One of our board members has donated lunch for a month, but we would appreciate whatever other help we can get. We are short on text books, classroom supplies, teacher salaries, and the children have not received uniforms this year. Without a school provided uniform, many of these children have nothing decent to wear.

Other things though are going well. The school has received a medium size generator as we wait for the government to supply hydro electricity, so for the first time ever in the history of the village, there is some electricity supply for about two hours each evening. The school also has a cyclo styling machine for making copies, and all rooms in the school have desks for children and chairs and a table for the teacher. The compound and the drainage system have been fixed, the fencing done, and three new teachers, including a new headmaster, have been recruited. Cynthia reports that the children received toys donated by Dr. Madison and his wife Jeannie in California. The toys are making a great impression in the village. However, Cynthia also reports that what is lacking is also the very basics in classroom education – textbooks, batteries, sentence strips, thermometers, bandages, sharpeners, etc. All these things are available in Kampala shops. We just need the funds to buy them.

As you talk with friends and consider ways of supporting AAH, please note how far we have come with your support. We have already made a vast difference. But we need to keep the school supplied if we want to maintain the progress we have made and reach out to other kids. Please send your donation today to Arlington Academy of Hope, 511 N Edison St., Arlington, VA 22203.

Thank you, and until next time.

John Wanda