

A Letter from Robin Strickler

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Greetings, Friends! In this newsletter, there is news about my 60-mile "Walk to School", our new website, the move to Rwanda, our Library Project and Things We Need.

This past week I saw the powerful movie "Tsotsi", a story about a South African gang leader who shoots a woman in the process of stealing her car -- and then realizes that her infant child is in the back seat. A seed of compassion remaining from the pain of his own childhood leads him to try to care for the baby, however ineptly. It is a story about human strength and frailty, about the possibility of change and redemption, and about our accountability to each other.

We can't fix all the wounds of childhood, but I hope that The Rwanda School Project will change the direction of some young lives and give them choices that Tsotsi didn't have. That's what motivates me to keep working on this!

When I first suggested that I would walk 60 miles to raise \$20,000 for the school, I really wondered if I could do it. The good news for my future students is that the cliché phrases "many hands make light work" and "step by step, we can accomplish great things" are true! Thanks to many of you who sponsored me, fed me, encouraged and prayed for me and walked with me, I enjoyed the walk immensely and we met our \$20,000 goal! Photos and commentary from the walk are at www.rwandaschoolproject.org/photogallery.html

The Senior Youth Forum at Davis Lutheran Church in California also completed their walk to raise funds for the school's water system, based on their theme of "Living Water". They reported that they had 24 walkers, including a 4-month-old in a stroller, a variety of students and adults and a woman two days short of her 80th birthday! Many thanks to them as they were able to raise over \$2000 -- almost half our budget for the water cisterns we plan to install.

We now have a website at www.rwandaschoolproject.org! You can find out about Rwandan history, plans for the school and current developments and you can also make a donation on the "You Can Help" page. Eventually, we will post student photos, student and teacher profiles, and projects and pictures of our classes, so stay tuned. Thanks to my sister Alison for hosting the site.

As for me personally, I am getting ready once again to change homes -- new culture, new language, new food -- when I move to Rwanda in July. I'm looking forward to seeing my dear husband again and looking forward to getting a first-hand perspective on what needs to be done to move this project forward. I anticipate some very challenging days

ahead as I deal with my own changes and also learn how to do things there, but also the excitement of *actually being there and getting started!*

What do you need to start a school? If I had to choose the most critical ingredients, I would say "students, teachers, and books". Of course, I have a long list of other stuff that we need as well, but we've been lucky to have several book sources contributing to the beginnings of our school library and the textbooks we'll need: a school district in California, a school in Michigan, a literacy program in Washington, DC and the incredible discounts at Green Valley Book Fair in Weyers Cave, Va. Many thanks to the individuals who are helping with that. If you'd like a list of the books on our wish list, please take a look at the "How You Can Help" page on our website.

I have been amazed at the way things happen when the word goes out, so it is in that spirit of "casting it out to the universe" that I mention the things we need most urgently right now:

When we get to Rwanda, we know that high-speed internet access will be a challenge. I've recently read about Solar-Powered Wi-Fi and satellite receivers, but *I am technically challenged!* Do you know someone who can interpret that information for us and help us locate, price and categorize what we need to make this happen?

Are you familiar with international container shipping or do you know an organization that ships containers to Rwanda? We are too small to ship our own at this point (a 20-foot container has 1100 cubic feet!) but we would like to "piggyback" some of our collected items with another non-profit organization.

Are you a person with fiscal management skills, fund development experience, or accounting background? Do you also have a passion for making the world a better place? Maybe you should consider being on the Board of The Rwanda School Project! Send a letter of interest to me at robinrutsi@gmail.com.

Finally, we've made an important first step of getting "lift off". As an organization, we're now six months old and we thank YOU for this wonderful start. There are still many mountains to climb (Rwanda being the "Land of 10,000 Hills"!) and there will be a shift in perspective once I am in Rwanda. We have raised about 1/7 of what we need to make a "full start".

And in all this, *you are needed*. It became crystal clear to me as I walked last month that this is not the "dream of one woman", as one newspaper said, but the efforts of many. Let us work together!

Grace and peace to you,

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Robin Strickler