

Warm greetings from Mustard Seed Academy,

Diane Falk (right), who serves as both Secretary and Vice President for the RPU Board, joined me in Uganda on Feb. 22nd. The last time she was in Uganda was in 2017. During her six-year absence, the school improvements were numerous – she was awed and found it difficult to get oriented.

While experiencing three weeks of activities, she was disciplined about writing her blog. We are sharing a few entries here.

International Women's Day

The cake-cutting ceremony came next. A large cake standing about a foot high was placed on a table. Elaine had been



designated to cut the first slice, but I was invited to help, and then several others added their hands onto our hands. At the count of three, we cut the first slice. It seemed impossible that the 600 or so children waiting patiently in line for a piece of cake could be fed, but everyone appeared to get at least a bite full.

Finally came the debates. The Primary School hosted one debate, and the Secondary School another. Elaine and I were approached by a Primary School teacher and invited to their debate, so we attended it, unfortunately missing the other. The

proposition being debated was “Ugandan women have contributed to society.” It was the boys versus the girls. The boys argued vigorously that women were not suited for leadership, that men had been the inventors, and so forth. The girls, led by one particularly articulate older Primary School student, argued even more vigorously that women work hard and contribute much to society. Each side had a chorus, which would chant in unison support or disdain for the side presenting. The girls often chanted, “You are incredible!”

JR's story

At some point, John Robert (Head of Education) joined the class and took us back to Marvin's question about dreams and money. He volunteered to tell his story. He engaged the students in following his journey from an impoverished background, the death of his father, his quest to go to school, his aunt's sacrifice in selling cows to pay for his school fees, his initial failure on the Primary Leavers' Exam, his decision to repeat the year and try again, doing better but not good enough on his second try, repeating the year, and finally doing very well on the exam and advancing to Secondary School. He summarized his career so far, saying that he has now achieved a Master's Degree and hopes to find a way to get a doctorate in education.

John Robert's talk was just what students like Marvin needed to hear. John Robert attributed his success to people willing to help you and determination. I wrote on the blackboard in large letters, "Persistence," and pointed out how important it is to persist despite failure and disappointment.

Peter thanked us for our "very professional" presentation, and the students expressed their appreciation.

On our last day in Uganda:

Elaine had contacted the Mustard Seed alums she knew were living in or near Kampala and invited them for lunch.

Ten of them showed up. There they were, young adults working or finishing their university degrees, coming together as if we were all one big family. I don't know all of their stories, but I know that all spent their early years in extreme poverty, many being taken in by a grandmother who somehow managed to enroll them in this new private school, where they received not only an excellent education but also uniforms, meals, healthcare, and individual attention.

Time and time again, we see that Mustard Seed is far more than a school. It is a supportive, loving, and caring family. You have made this possible! Add our voices to the big THANK YOU from Uganda!