

An Opportunity

If you had the choice, would you choose to go to school? Would you walk miles just to get the chance? If you had no family to support you through it all, would you still do it?

Fortunately, as American citizens we don't have to worry about these questions. We don't even have to think about them. We don't have a choice whether or not we go to school, and we certainly don't have to walk miles to go to it. Many of us have great families that not only help us with our problems, but they support us through the rough times in our lives. I don't know a lot of people that are truly grateful for these things. Do you? They only see the negative side of things. Such as, "School is boring, school is dumb, I hate to ride the bus; it's smelly and it's gross, and my parents are so annoying." I've heard these phrases too many times in my life and I will even admit that I've said them all myself. We as American citizens take all of these things for granted.

Not a lot of people actually know about the country of Uganda, Africa and its conditions. In Uganda, millions of children are orphans because all of their family has died of HIV/ AIDS. These kids live extremely tough lives that no one could even imagine. But to them—it's their *reality*. They live in small homes (usually with some family) with rarely any electricity. This is all normal for them, but to us, it's like having a power outage during a tremendous storm. They even wake up before the sun rises to complete tons of chores. They have to walk miles and miles just to see one doctor to get any medical attention. These are only a few examples of their hard lives. Can you ever imagine switching lives for a day?

Many kids in Africa don't even get the chance to go through what we call elementary school. It is very rare that you would ever get the chance to move onto the college level. Because so many people are sick and dying, families don't have the money to send their kids to school, so they just stay home and do chores and help out their family.

One spectacular school in southern Uganda, provides not only FREE education, clothes, food, and medical attention, but they create the one thing that is most important—a community. This school is simply amazing. No other words can describe it.

Nyaka AIDS Orphans School is the most generous school I know. They take in orphans who live alone and give them a family. They give them a chance to become something special.

I know of one very special boy named Bruno. He is a student at Nyaka and lives by himself because all of his family has either died or moved for work. When Bruno gets scared at night he recites his homework in his head and that makes him happy. Hearing about Bruno and this school compels you to be thankful for things we take for granted every day, like a dad, a sister or a roof over your head at night. I believe that everyone deserves an opportunity.

Mr. Jackson Kaguri is the man responsible for all of this. He grew up in the village where Nyaka is located and realized that something had to change. He was fortunate to get a college education and persevere through all of the hardships and obstacles of building a school that is

tuition free. Can you guess the number of people that doubted this man? He is only one of the people that I look up to and call a hero. He has the biggest heart in the world.

Many kids in Uganda would do anything to get into this school. They walk miles to get to school and wake up before dawn. They go to Nyaka because there they can *learn*. These kids want to learn and they would die for it. These kids have gone through so many things throughout their lives and yet everyday they smile. They are so outrageously thankful for every little thing they have and are the most loving people on Earth. They are so outstanding, special, and unbelievably kind. They inspire and empower me to become a better person every day.

I learned about all of this in sixth grade in Ms. Heather Simon's classroom. We as a team wrote letters to the students at Nyaka as pen pals and we even put on a POL (presentation of learning) for our whole school. We also met Allan, a boy who goes to Nyaka but came to America to get surgery. Allan is so smart, polite, and lovable. His smile could melt your heart. When he came here he couldn't walk on his legs and the doctors didn't expect him to by the time that he would leave. Well, Allan was too determined, and now, he can walk! How extraordinary is he? Seeing how Allan's surgery was such a success, our class sent persuasive essays to famous celebrities asking for help to bring Justine (a burn victim from Nyaka) to get surgery here in America as well. All of our hopeful sixth grade hearts were filled with love and optimism and although we didn't hear back from many celebrities that year, her journey is now being planned.

The whole experience of learning about Nyaka and its students, becoming pen pals with the kids our age, and helping Allan and Justine has forever changed my life. I am now more grateful for everything I have, especially my mom and dad, my sister, and my education. I am so lucky to have had all of these superior teachers such as Ms. Simon who introduced me to this wonderful school, and Mrs. Baker who is helping me put it all into words.

When I look at the world today, I now see hope, hope that someday I can change the world and help it become a better place. Because the world needs more people like me, people who would do anything for anybody. I mean, where would this world be without them?

I believe that everyone deserves an opportunity. If you were never given the opportunity, you would never truly know what you were capable of doing. All of the students at Nyaka were given the opportunity to learn. And you never know, maybe you'll look up to them one day....