

Jewells in Africa



2020. Where to begin? This past year has certainly looked differently for us and our ministry at Rift Valley Academy, but it has still provided opportunities to see and experience God's provision!

The Impact of Covid

In Mid-March, RVA made the difficult but necessary decision to send all students home. This was very difficult for us as it involved some losses for us, such as Ashley not being able to chaperone the reef ecology interim trip (for some junior and senior students) and both sets of our parents having to cancel their trip to visit us that was planned for the following week. However, this decision proved to be the right thing to do because some students made it across their country's borders within minutes of being closed.

RVA staff, including Dave, immediately began to work around the clock to get an online program going. Dave began making videos and attending Zoom meetings as the junior high coordinator, teacher, and dorm parent. (Because RVA students have been located in various countries around the world during this time, RVA has had to use asynchronous learning. In 8th grade alone, Dave had students located up to 17 hours apart based on varying time zones!) And, similar to so many others around the world during this time, Ashley began facilitating Beau's online schooling while also attending to Everleigh. However, besides a few Zoom calls with our dorm guys to see how they were doing, dorm parenting has essentially been on hold for us during this time.

Due to various reasons, our emotional stress was also high during this time (as it was with many staff at RVA). Some of this was related to the fact that Kenya had put in rather strict measures (as did RVA, because of living in a community). In addition, our parents couldn't easily rebook their trip due to Covid and work restraints. So, with the incredible blessing of money being provided for flights, we made the decision to travel back to the U.S. to see family, while still maintaining our work responsibilities remotely. Upon arrival on October 9th, we began a self-quarantine and – lucky us 😊 – Evi developed symptoms of Covid six days after our arrival. She tested positive, as did others later on, and – long story short – we were freed from quarantine 33 days after we landed in the U.S. Because we were able to continue living with family (and Dave could continue his online responsibilities), it ended up still being a blessing.

What's Next?

Well, RVA is currently preparing to welcome students back to campus (in mid-January) for the first time since March! As soon as Kenya announced that schools could possibly be reopened in January of 2021, RVA began to plan for when students might be able to come back. After hours (and HOURS) of research, meetings, discussions, and surveys, RVA came up with a plan to open school – as long as Kenya does not shut schools back down again. So many students have voiced their desire for RVA to open back up and are so very excited despite all the different rules that will make life at RVA completely different. For us, we weren't sure if we could emotionally handle living exclusively with a dorm full of junior high boys during a pandemic, and so we did a lot of praying, reading God's Word, and asking others for wisdom. It was then that God really spoke to us – He reminded us that we don't have to know everything we are getting ourselves into because He will be with us. He reminded us that though it will be very difficult (after all, we're bringing over 500 people back together to live in community), it will be an opportunity to experience Him and His power made strong through weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). Through Priscilla Shirer's study of Jonah and our Pastor's (Phil Bubar) study of Mary, God again encouraged us in continuing in what He has called us to so that others may find Him. Whenever we feel fearful and unsure about what the future will bring, we remind ourselves that God has called us to it and is in it. We are excited to see how He will provide and to have our dorm boys back!

*Meeting with some of our
dorm guys over Zoom*



The Blessing of More Family Time

The most significant change has been having extra time off in the afternoon/evening as “just our family” (which we don’t normally have a lot of, living in a dorm). Because of that, we have been able to do some family activities to get us through the difficulties of the pandemic life. Family hikes in the mountainside forest right off campus have been one of our favorite things! Dave’s favorite days have been Wednesdays, when we have game night and camp out in our tent (which is set up permanently in the dorm lounge until the boys return) and fall asleep to the African night sounds we play from YouTube. (Yes, we live in Kenya, and play sounds of African wildlife!) Beau’s favorite days have been Saturdays, when we have a movie and popcorn night. And Ashley’s favorite days have been Thursdays because she would have her socially-distanced Bible study and grocery orders through the cafeteria. Evi pretty much found enjoyment in everything!



Above: Camping with African wildlife. Can you spot all the zebras and the lone giraffe? (Look how close the zebras got to us at night!)



Clockwise from top left: One of our favorite places to hike to – an overview of the valley! / Hiking the railroad tracks above campus / The new metal buffalo statue placed in front of Kiambogo (our main building on campus) / Dave realizing that remote teaching means there are no students in their seats / Online school has been challenging, even for Batman / Ashley having a “socially-distanced and masked” gathering with her Bible study group / Brother, sister, best friends



Thank you!

It’s been such a blessing to see how God has provided for us since first going to Kenya over five years ago, and this past year was no different. Although our monthly support is actually below where it needs to be, we received some wonderful one-time gifts that made up the difference! Whether you support us through prayers, monthly support, or one-time gifts, thank you so very much, and please know what a blessing you are to us and the ministry at Rift Valley Academy!

Prayer Requests

- That we are each able to get a negative Covid test in time to get on the plane back to Kenya on Dec. 28th! (Kenya requires a negative test for entry.)
- That God will sustain us and our dorm guys. (There are lots of restrictions in place with the hope that RVA doesn’t have to close down in the middle of term).
- Wisdom for the school administrators as they make so many decisions and figure out how to run a boarding school in the middle of a pandemic.