

# Baraka

Business



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Boom! Like a thunderclap going off, the headache hits me.

It's no wonder, I had it coming to me. The past weeks have been pure insanity with Drum Major tryouts, math tests, impossible physics problems, a mock trial in AP European History, multiple other tests to study for, books to read, and worksheets to finish. Then there's the time I spend outside of school; National Honors Society, church choir, and preparing for youth group just to name a few. Not to mention trying to find a couple of hours for my family and friends. Add in the proverbial drama or two, and voila, a complete recipe for a pounding headache.

Or the flu. Or a trip to the crazy house. Its times like these when I begin to wonder why I'm here, why I'm not trying to graduate early, why I try to get A's when more than half of my classmates get by with a B or C average. Are the late nights and stress worth it? And that's when I start to remember... Its seven a. m. on a Tuesday morning.

Still wiping sleep from my eyes and wondering if I remembered to put on shoes, I stumble into the school and head to the second floor, where the morning Bible Study is. On a typical week, only about four or five of us show up, but those people are some of my best friends. Before we start the study, Rachel and I talk. She tells me that she is going to Kenya with her church, and offhandedly I remark, " Wouldn't it be amazing if I went with you?" Five months later, here I am, on a plane flying over Europe, on my way to Africa-Kenya, to be precise. The excitement has built and built for so long; finally the time is here! I couldn't stop smiling if I tried. Day four of the trip.

The African sun begins to peel back the cool fingers of night. The team finishes breakfast and we pile into the van. Today we are going to the Mathare Valley slum. We get to visit a school, and meet the kids there. I have the feeling something is in the air, there is no way I came all the way to Kenya for just another ordinary day.

Once we greet Pastor Vincent, the leader of the school, the kids begin to sing. There is nothing more precious than the sweet symphony of children's voices singing. Off key, in perfect unison, they sing to welcome us. They have no vocal training, no one has ever taught them how to put passion into their song. Their very lives are fuel for the words they sing. Every day, just by coming to school, they defy the odds.

AIDS. Rape. No Food. Drugs. Violence. Disease.

The fact that these children are in school right now is an oddity. They could never afford a government funded school, just because the price of uniforms is simply unaffordable. We learn that the school feeds them three lunches a week. Today is not one of those days. There is no way we will let that happen, so we put together enough money to buy their lunch today. I sit down with the kids and ask them, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" It was a question posed to me many times when I was young and I always had an answer.

Somehow, I expected these children to be different. Hopeless. Without Dreams. But out of their mouths came "Pilot" and "Nurse". Stunning definitions of the resilience they have, the possibility of a future. The struggle I face trying not to cry is almost overpowering.

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These are real children! The slums have not broken their spirits, the slums are not strong enough. Sadly, more than likely, nothing will come of these ambitions. High school, let alone college, is much too expensive to be an option for them. They will dream, but without help, that's all they will ever become, dreamers. We leave. The kids beg me to come back, soon.

I say " I'll try." Back home, nothing can ever be the same. My bed seems too comfortable, my food too plentiful. But the thing that hits me the most is my school. What a powerful word. School means education, and an education means a future.

Is it fair that these kids will likely move on to a higher school level? No. Not in the remotest sense of the word is it just. But what's even worse is that I am presented with the opportunity to go to high school, for free, and yet I complain and don't put in everything that I am. In fact, sometimes I try to get out of doing my work, doing the bare minimum or looking for a way to miss classes. " So what?" some say.

" Enjoy life, party it up, you won't be young forever. Don't stress, school isn't really that big of a deal". This is ludicrous. Its true, I won't be young forever, now is the time I have to make a difference. And while " those people" party, the children in the slums are longing, searching for their chance at life. And still, here I sit, pushing for nothing more than the minimum.

" NO MORE!" is the silent anthem screaming through me, longing to break out. " No more!" I want to give it my all, if for no other reason than the fact that I talked to and held children that would be incredibly grateful for even one year in a school like mine. Even if I never again do any work for myself, I

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have a motivation. The kids of Baraka Academy. In Swahili, Baraka means blessing. To them, school truly is a blessing.

Not a punishment or a chore, but a blessing. So today, when my head pounds and my eyes won't stay open, when I can't think about one more detail because my head is so full of things to be done, I remember. They are the reason I am in the harder classes. They are the reason I strive in school, not just survive. One day, I will give it back to them.

But if I fail now and give up, throw in the towel before its time, nothing will ever be accomplished. There will be no hope that the chains of injustice will ever be broken. And I will never become the person I was meant to be. A blessing. Baraka.