

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Cummings,

July 1, 2010

My name is [REDACTED] and I am a rising sophomore at Tufts. I had the privilege of participating in the short term service trip to the Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village in Rwanda about a month ago. I would like to thank you for making this experience possible for me through your extraordinary generosity. The trip had a profound impact on my life and those of my peers. I wanted to write to you to let you know how grateful I am for your support and to share a little bit about how this trip has affected me.

This was my first trip to the continent of Africa and to a third world country. Having been in a country so less developed than the United States and immersed in a culture so different from mine, was really eye opening. From realizing how necessary it is for Rwandans to carry so many items on their heads (and babies on their backs) to adjusting my clock to "Rwandan time" (not very prompt), I felt so different from Rwandan culture but, in many respects, so connected by commonalities that all human beings share, no matter where they reside. For example, we all face losses of loved ones and have big dreams and life goals for ourselves. For the young Rwandans I met, these shared emotions were very poignant. I learned so much about myself from interacting and exchanging with the teens in the Village. When they asked me "Do you have parents? Do you have a family?" I was reminded of the importance of family and how fortunate I am that I have all my immediate family members. I believe these young Rwandan students learned a lot from us about life ~~in~~ outside their homeland. They asked me questions such as "Are there poor people in America, Are there black people in America? How is life in America?" When I observed them playing sports or relaxing with friends and how they have bonded with their respective "families," I was amazed how resilient humanity can be. After such horror, trauma and hardship, the kids at Agahozo Shalom still have hope, motivation, and vision for the future and participate in service to heal the world. The students at ASYV have inspired me to be a stronger person.

The group heard first-hand from the principal of the high school that he will never be able to forgive those who caused so much harm to his family. However, I was really moved at how Rwandan society is able to

function after the genocide with perpetrators living side by side with the victims and the above-all importance that they place on unifying the country. They have learned to move on, without ever forgetting the past. At the Murambi memorial site I stared death in the face for the first time. The bodies made genocide the most real it has ever been to me. Viewing the remains of the Rwandan genocide firsthand resulted in a stronger connection to the genocide of my own people, the Holocaust, especially so, because the Rwandan genocide happened during my lifetime. The realization that I was so uneducated about a genocide that occurred in my own lifetime has been unnerving; I am now motivated to become more active in observing and stopping injustices around the world.

Now that I have returned home, I feel that I am ready to be an ambassador to Rwanda and the Village and I look forward to sharing my experience with as many people as I can. Our group will work hard throughout the upcoming semesters to help bring the spirit of Agerhozo Shalom Youth Village to Tufts and our home communities. We hope to continue to fundraise throughout the year and have already begun brainstorming process for events incorporating the Rwandan genocide and general genocide awareness.

This group was one of the most inquisitive, cooperative, emotional, and motivated groups that I have ever been a part of. I have confidence that we will continue to work together to achieve great goals and that this experience will not be easily forgotten.

One of the toughest questions that I encountered from the Rwandans countless times throughout the trip was "How do you 'see' Rwanda?" Although I am still processing what I think about Rwanda and the issues there, I would never have had the opportunity to see Rwanda at all without your generosity and for that I am truly grateful. Thank you again.

Sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

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Dear Mr. and Mrs. Cummings,

I am writing to thank you for your generous support of the Tufts service-learning trip to the Agahozo Shalom Youth Village in Rwanda. As one of the students who had an opportunity to travel to Rwanda and the amazing place that is ASYV, I cannot thank you enough for making this trip possible.

For most of my life I've been studying the Rwanda Genocide and trying to understand the unfathomable. Yet nothing could prepare me for or compare to actually standing on the ground where it happened. Before I left for Rwanda I wanted to tell the story of what happened there as I had learned it from movies, books, and statistics with the hope that knowledge could prevent it from happening again. After visiting Rwanda, telling the story is more than a want, it is a need.

Standing next to the mass graves at the Kigali Memorial Centre I read the names of just some of the know victims of the genocide buried at the memorial. The Centre sits on a hill over looking Nigali and is the final resting place of 250,000 genocide victims from the Uigali area alone. As I read the names on a wall that stretched far in front of me, I realized that entire families had been wiped out. There is no one left to tell their stories.

We took a trip to southern Rwanda, to the Murambi Memorial Centre. There on a hill surrounded by some of the most breathtaking scenery I have ever seen. 40,000 people lost their lives in three days. These people were dumped unceremoniously into mass graves on which French soldiers would later play volleyball. A year after the genocide, the few survivors went back to recover the dead and it was discovered that in one of the graves 800 bodies had been accidentally preserved in the earth. The survivors took these bodies and preserved them further with lime and now all 800 are on display as a constant reminder of what happened in Rwanda. While there may not be anyone left to tell their stories, no one will ever be able to deny what happened in Rwanda.

Numbers like six million, 800,000, 250,000, 40,000 can't mean very much because they are just too big to comprehend, but I assure you no one can forget exactly how long it takes to look at 800 bodies.

These two experiences, for the first time in my life, showed me the kind of evil that people are actually capable of. However, this was not the only thing about Genocide or our trip to Rwanda taught me. I also learned that genocide is not possible without dehumanization. For decades there was propaganda used to reduce the Tutsis to "cockroaches." It was only after this transformation from person to insect that neighbors were able to slaughter each other in an attempt at mass extinction.

The most important thing accomplished by our trip was showing Rwandans and Americans that no matter where we are from or what our lives have been like, there are certain fundamental things that make us all the same. It might seem insane to travel halfway around the world to learn that people laugh and cry exactly the same way in central Africa as they do in America, but while this may seem like a trivial thing to learn, it has impacted my life in ways I am only beginning to understand.

Once our common humanity is realized, it becomes impossible to leave another human being in misery or watch as they are swept away in a genocide. What my experience taught me, and what I want most to communicate to the world is how similar the human condition is everywhere. Genocide could not happen without fear and misunderstanding being channeled into dehumanization. The Tufts and ASYV students created friendships, even bonds of family that transcended continents, races, and socio-economic backgrounds. These bonds cannot be broken and will assure that an unconquerable army of humanity will fight against atrocities like genocide.

We cannot go back and change the past or erase the horrors of the Holocaust, Cambodia, or Rwanda but through trips like ours we can work to create bonds of friendship and family. I truly believe this is the only way we will be able to stop future genocides.

I hope you continue to support trips like this because I assure you the ripples touch more lives than we can even begin to image. Thank you again for allowing this experience to take place. While none of us can promise that we will save the world, I know that no one will let his or her inspiration go to waste.

Most appreciatively yours,



Dear Mr. and Mrs. Cummings,

June 20th, 2010

I am writing to thank you greatly for the support you provided me and 21 other Tufts students that allowed us to have an amazing experience learning and serving in Rwanda at Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village.

Although I know it's a bit cliché to say that my trip to ASYU was life-changing, there is no other way to say it. My experience in Rwanda and in ASYU has had and will continue to have a significant impact on my life. What I learned during my ten days in Rwanda changed my goals, my perspective on life and my overall attitude.

When I learned that I was given a spot on the trip I did my best to prepare myself for the experience that I would have. I read books and articles, saw movies and documentaries, listened to interviews - I wanted to learn everything about Rwanda before I went so that I would be able to take full advantage of this incredible opportunity. But being in Rwanda and at ASYU for ten days I learned more than I ever could learn from reading a book or watching a documentary. No longer was I just reading words about the suffering that occurred in Rwanda, I witnessed the remnants of the genocide in people I came to call friends. No longer was I just looking at pictures of where the genocide occurred, I walked on the land which the most evil act took place. What I experienced during my time in Rwanda allowed me to form a bond with the country and its people that I am confident will never break. It's been over two weeks since I returned and it seems as though every minute I am thinking about my experience in Rwanda. I am working on fundraising for ASYU as well as promotion of the village and also am already looking into how I can get back to ASYU.

Every student I met at Agahozo-Shalom was devoted to learning and had powerful aspirations that they loved to share with us. Pacy, a fifteen-year-old girl I befriended during my time there, had lived in a self-organized community of orphans from the genocide since birth. After living on the village for only six months she has already become fluent in English, is teaching herself Spanish, and is valedictorian of her class. Pacy hopes to go to university and be an ambassador for Rwanda. She also spoke to me about how she intends to work to provide all the children of Rwanda with the opportunity to receive a good education like she is receiving ~~at~~ at the village.

Pacy is just one of the dozens of teenagers I met during my time at Agahozo who spoke to me about their dreams for their future.

and the role they hope to play in bettering their country. I am confident that all of these teenagers will go on to fulfill ~~their~~ their dreams and make Rwanda a better place, by daily promoting the values they are learning at ASYU and perhaps by becoming a leader who will transform their nation. These youth are not only without parents or possessions; they live with the trauma of the murders that destroyed their communities, in some cases before their eyes; yet their optimism, faith and courage shine daily. That was something truly inspiring to witness.

My time at Agahozo-Shalom taught me the importance of working to create sustainable change. Investing in the youth of ASYU is investing in positive change for Rwanda. My time in Rwanda also taught me the power and responsibility I have to make a positive difference at home and abroad. In Rwanda I was constantly reflecting on my experience. My most powerful reflection was done at the Murambi Memorial. Standing on the site where more than 50,000 people had been massacred and looking out over the beauty of Rwanda's lush hillsides, I wrote to myself: "Never forget the amazing blessing of life that you have been given. You can't change this horrible past but you have the power to change the world for a better future." I not only returned with lasting memories, but a new reverence for life and an empowering perspective on the role I am meant to play in society.

For everything I have just shared with you, I thank you. If it were not for your generous support, I would not be the woman I am today, shaped by my recent experiences.

Murakoze! (Thank you in Kinyarwanda)

Sincerely,

Tufts University '12

Bill Cummings

From: WSC [wsc@cummings.com]
Sent: Thursday, July 22, 2010 12:20 PM
To:
Cc: 'Rabbi Jeffrey Summit'
Subject: Rwanda... Agahozo Shalom Youth Village

Dear Charlotte,

My wife Joyce and I were very moved by your recent message, and those of the many other participants in your inter-faith service trip to Rwanda. Your many wonderful letters are abundant proof of the influence such experiences can have, and the enormous potential for good which can come from them.

All of you are extraordinarily bright and motivated, or you would not be at Tufts. You have long lives ahead of you, and there will be many opportunities for all of you to greatly influence the various communities in which you will live and work. Doubtless, a good many of you in your post-college years will be driven to help improve the lots of others well beyond your own communities, both in this country and elsewhere in the world.

I know you all appreciate the value of teamwork in achieving large goals, including changing unjust attitudes that may have become deeply rooted over centuries. While individually each of us can make meaningful contributions just by helping to eliminate the injustices we encounter in our daily lives, by working together we can increase our positive impacts many fold.

Certainly we can have no tolerance whatsoever for injustices arising out of race and religion, or for hatred of any sort. Agahozo Shalom Youth Village, and the spirit created there, provide a superb example of the great good that can come from a committed team working selflessly to help many in desperate need. Remember well the life-altering lessons you have learned during this truly life-altering experience.

With our greatest respect and all good wishes,

Joyce and Bill Cummings

P.S. Since yours is the only email address we have, we will very much appreciate if you will please pass-on these comments to Lauren Estes and to the other student participants when you have a convenient opportunity.

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