



Back home at Agahozo-Shalom what a special feeling and what a special place. It is a bit surreal as I watched the lights of my Chanukah candles burn with the beauty of this lush landscape outside of my window. Although the kids from the village are away on their Christmas break the village remains alive with new staff and volunteers who have just arrived and are being trained by those that have been here teaching and working for the past year.

I can't believe that a year has passed since we were here December 15th 2008 to greet the new students at their spanking new campus. Last year at this time we were unsure of so much – Will this unique model work? Will these kids who have endured trauma and hardship in their early lives make the adjustment to living together in the village? Can we truly help “restore the rhythms of life” for these kids, counselors, and housemothers who have endured so much hardship in their recent past?

Within weeks of their arrival, our kids and staff had bonded. Within this past year they have become family. It is unbelievable that this has all been accomplished in a short three year timeframe. Next week, we will be welcoming the second class of 125 students. Only this year they will be greeted by those who arrived a year ago. These “veterans” of Agahozo-Shalom told me that they would mentor the newcomers and ease their transition from their individual difficulties and circumstances into this special village. The entire village has bought into the core values that we have been working to instill – Living as role models, respect, and integrity, the interest of the child, a learning community, support, and commitment.

We are staying in the Guest Houses next to the farm. Unbelievable that a hillside of weeds and rubble is now a lush garden and farm filled with mangos, bananas, beans, tomatoes, and avocados. The kitchen now serves fresh fruit and vegetables that are producer on out land by our staff and kids. The food is amazing; cassava root, rice,, beans and vegetables.

The world is indeed getting smaller as I read my blackberry in the midst of the village where I received e-mail from both of my daughters wishing Chanukah greetings – one from Becca who is presently traveling down the Mekong Delta from Thailand to Laos and the other from Jen now a sophomore at Penn State; who gave the village a present informing us that the second Race4Rwanda is scheduled at Penn State on April 7th 2010 and their goal is to raise funds to support a student at the village. From near and far, anyone who has come into contact with Agahozo-Shalom becomes a member of this special community. It is indeed infectious.

Looking at the night sky, I think of how far we have come since I first arrived at this hilltop nearly three years ago. We have not only changed the environment and built this magnificent village, but positively affected the lives of not only our kids and staff but for this magnificent country where the people just smile and say thank you.