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Wilson's Story

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Wilson’s Story

Wilson is currently a ten-year-old boy and one of the people I admire most. Wilson currently lives in the New Life Home family home in Nakuru, Kenya. The New Life Home family home is one of six children’s homes in Kenya that cares for orphaned and abandoned children. As a registered medical hospital in Kenya, New Life rescues abandoned babies in the first days of their life, nurses them to health and provides medical treatment to combat HIV or malnourishment, and raises them into happy, healthy children. Contagious hope overflows from the homes, shining a light in the often bleak outlook for the over 2.2 million orphans in Kenya. The New Life Homes prioritizes placing children in loving families through legal adoption in Kenya. Wilson’s story is unique, as he is one of the few children that will be raised as a member of the New Life family. Yet, Wilson’s story for me embodies the character of the New Life Homes, as the administration, staff, and caretakers embody an unparalleled spirit of giving, love, and generosity that is reflected upon the children in the Homes. Each child in the New Life Homes has a file that records their history. I wrote this letter to include in Wilson’s file, so that in a few years when Wilson has grown up, he can read this letter and learn how incredibly valuable his life, love, and story has been on the creation of my own story, my understanding of learning and growing through service, and the story of the New Life Homes.

Dearest Wilson,

When you and I first met in July of 2007, you were an absolutely beautiful five-year-old boy living in the Simon Newberry Cottage of the New Life Home in Kisumu, Kenya. When I walked into the children’s home for my first day as a volunteer, you ran up to me, grabbed my hand, and gave me a huge hug. To you, I was not a stranger; I was a new friend you wanted to welcome into your home.

In your quiet yet powerful voice, you gave me a private and enthusiastic tour of the Home. Stops on the tour included your bed, your teddy bear, your favorite swing, and introducing me to every other child in the Home. I was so impressed by you – you knew every child’s name and something about them. You shared their favorite foods, where they enjoy napping, what you appreciated about their friendship, or how long they had been your brother or sister at New Life. All of the other children loved you, respected you, and cherished your presence.

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I played with you for the rest of the afternoon. I was amazed by you – your love for the other children, your selflessness as you shared with the other babies, your compassion as you cared for the beautiful children with special needs in the Amani Cottage, and your insatiable curiosity and fun-loving spirit! You were admired by all those around you, and caretakers seemed to always count on you to do what was right despite adversity, to watch out for other children, to follow instructions, and to ensure that the happiness and needs of all those around you had been met.

At the end of the day, I asked you what you wanted to be when you grew up. Without hesitation, you responded that you wanted to be a doctor, so that one day, you could return to New Life and help all of the babies in the Home feel better and grow into strong boys and girls, just like the doctors did with you when you joined the New Life family. I don’t know if that is still a dream for you today; but, after hearing the story of how you arrived in the New Life Homes and your aspirations for your life, I immediately fell in love with you and with New Life Homes. Your understanding of the importance of selflessness, generosity, and giving to those in times of need as a five-year-old far surpassed the understandings of myself and most adults I had encountered in my life. Your story caused me to fall in love with New Life Homes, and after meeting you, I vowed to keep returning and to remain involved in New Life for the rest of my life. You made it obvious that New Life was a miraculous place, for you were a miraculous little boy who demonstrated intelligence, maturity, and kindness far beyond your age despite overcoming significant adversity as a baby.

I returned to Kenya the two summers later, when you were a handsome seven-year-old living in Kericho. I planned to visit Kericho at the end of my trip, and anxiously awaited the time I would be able to see you again! Even though I knew you would not remember me, you had made a lasting impact on my heart and on my life, sparking my return to Kenya and my dedication to sharing the miraculous New Life story. We had a great time in Kericho. We played on a swingset, ran behind a tire, and looked at tea leaves. Just as I remembered, your smile was infectious, and you immediately made all those around you feel happy. You were an obvious leader among the group, and you perfectly balanced compassion towards those around you while paving the way for others to follow your lead in making good decisions. I was amazed by your courage and strength, and your ability to love unconditionally while demonstrating a pure and uninhibited happiness and love for life.

After my time with you in Kericho, I began to hear directors of the New Life Homes speaking about the importance of preserving the paperwork and files of each of the children in the New Life Homes, especially the older boys and girls like you who would soon be old enough
to learn about their histories through the legal and medical files maintained by the Home. They spoke of your files with utmost importance – paperwork is what speaks for each child during his or her time at New Life. When all else is changing and uncertain, the history contained in the files is what remains constant – a constant documentation of growth and development.

As I engaged in these conversations, I began to picture you as a teenager, perhaps starting secondary school or preparing for university as you sought to gain the education to become a doctor, looking through your medical and legal files for the first time, learning about your history, how you came to New Life, seeing pictures of you from every stage of your life, reading birthday cards and letters from caretakers, and coming to grasp with your personal history and what molded you into the incredible young man you are today. I suddenly realized the importance of maintaining and preserving these files, so that you and the other boys and girls at New Life could have the opportunity to learn about your past and history when you grew older.

So, upon my return from Kenya in 2009, with the image of your handsome face and beautiful smile in my head, I started Carolina for Amani, a non-profit organization that fundraises for the New Life Homes and operates an internship program. The internship program allows university students to travel to Kenya for a few months each year with the goal of preserving all of the archives of all of the children that have ever lived in the New Life Homes. Throughout the past two summers, twelve students have traveled to Kenya to spend a few weeks in each home, scanning all of the files of the more than 1,300 babies that have lived in New Life into an electronic format so that if something happened to New Life, the documentation would forever be preserved. The electronic copies of each piece of paperwork would also allow children in New Life to have access to their paperwork permanently. You inspired a program that is preserving the histories of your New Life brothers and sisters, so that you and so many other children can reflect on your past, learn about your background, and remember that you were loved and cherished by so many people at New Life and beyond.

Wilson, I am writing you this letter today not only to let you know how absolutely amazing you are and to demonstrate to you the impact you had on my life and the lives of so many others, but also to say thank you. I want to thank you for inspiring me to look forward in the most selfless manner possible, to forgive people of the past and to move forward to do something amazing. This characteristic is exactly what you demonstrated in your aspirations to become a doctor – forgiving those of your past and looking forward to love in a greater capacity and give back selflessly to your community. Without you even realizing it, my time spent with

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you and the impact you had on my life directly impacted the lives of every single child that will ever enter New Life – an impact that cannot even begin to be expressed statistically or qualitatively.

In addition to the internship program, Carolina for Amani fundraises and advocates for the New Life Homes, giving me the opportunity to share your inspiring story with thousands of people each year. Amani partners with Kazuri Beads, a Nairobi-based company that employs single mothers to make beautiful, hand-painted beads from the clay of Mt. Kenya. At the end of every season, Kazuri donates any unused or imperfect beads to Amani. We bring the beads to the United States, and a group of students gathers weekly to string the beads into beautiful jewelry. We sell the jewelry in home shows and retail stores across the United States. All proceeds support you and your beautiful siblings in the New Life Homes. The image of your face travels with me to each event, reminding me that even one individual, no matter how young, can have an incredible impact on the lives of others.

When I returned to Kenya each year, I am just any other visitor to you, but you are a hero to me. I can’t spend enough time with you, I can’t watch you enough. I cry as you read books to me, for I am amazed at your reading skills and how flawlessly you read books beyond your ages’ reading level. I cry as you played with me, as I watch you run around, chasing your brothers and sisters, running after tires, holding my hand. I cry every moment we spend together out of appreciation, love, and joy for you. I can’t help but believe that there is a special connection between the two of us – as if you somehow knew that you had inspired something fantastic in me.

I don’t know if this letter can even clearly express how important you have been in the vision of New Life Homes. By inspiring the preservation of each child’s paperwork and files, you have made an impact on the lives of each child that has ever been in New Life, and all of the children that are to come. You inspired forward-looking, visionary thinking on the parts of all of the directors and administration of New Life, radicalizing the way in which we all approach the rights of children and the maintenance of their histories. You created a new standard for all children’s homes in East Africa. You allowed each child that was once abandoned to create a new identity – an identity of love, of significance, of appreciation, and as a child of God through New Life Homes that can be remembered and celebrated without barriers of time or space.

Wilson, you were placed into New Life for a reason. You began to create God’s kingdom on earth the day you were born, and continue to create a land of love, joy, selflessness, and peace every day. The impact you have had during the beginning of your life is insurmountable, and I cannot imagine the impact you will continue to have as you grow older.
You are truly an amazing boy, and every time I think of you, see you, or spend time with you, I see a pure reflection of selfless love. This letter has only begun to touch on the joy and love you have had on the lives of each person you have ever encountered. I hope that my encounter with you this summer will not be my last, and that we can continue to be a part of each other’s lives. I pray that this letter finds you as a strong, handsome man who is continuing to lead his community in selflessness, love, and joy. I hope that you will not allow circumstances, adversity, or the opinions of others to stop you from accomplishing the goals you set for yourself and achieving your dreams. I pray that God will give you a sense of understanding and strength as you walk through life, and that you will always feel his presence guiding your actions and your thoughts. I pray that you will always remember that you are loved, appreciated, and cherished, and that God is doing amazing things with your life. I pray for you every day, and I have been for years and will continue to. Thank you so much for the impact you have had on me, on the New Life Home, and of the lives of your New Life family.

Love,
Morgan Abbott