

**Name: Logan Gibson**  
**Title: Rwanda School Library**  
**School: Washington and Lee University**  
Student Information: Logan Gibson  
United States

#### Project Summary:

This summer, I worked to set up a library in collaboration with the Rwanda School Project, an organization my cousin, Robin Strickler, founded to build a secondary school in Rwamagana, Rwanda. I spent the spring before my departure selecting, purchasing, and shipping books, meeting with local librarians, and learning that there is a veritable army of forces behind the calm façade of an organized book shelf. In April, I shipped thirteen boxes of books to Rwanda while a school system in California shipped one hundred boxes. But when I stepped off the plane in Kigali, I found myself at the mercy of the Rwandan Postal Service. The books had not yet arrived. I spent the next few weeks teaching a community English class to Rwandan students ages 9-46 in Rwamagana and getting to know my new Rwandan family members.

In Maria, my new Rwandan cousin, I found a best friend and constant companion. Although raised in separate worlds, we shared everything in Rwanda, including a bed. Once a week we took a bus to the capital city to check the Post Office for book arrivals. I taught her to use Microsoft Office, operate a camcorder, and write a resume. She showed me how to cook ibitoki, wear ketenge, and respect her powerful faith in God.

Three days before I returned to America, twenty-one boxes of books arrived. More excited than children on Christmas morning, Maria and I ferociously un-boxed and cataloged the volumes – mindful that the only book most Rwandans have ever handled is the Bible.

Rwanda is currently building the first public library in the country – which will be located in Kigali. Ultimately, the Rwanda School Project hopes to make the Rwamagana library available several times a week as a reading room for the community at large – making it the second public library in all of Rwanda.

#### Project Results:

Because the school and library buildings were not constructed as of the end of this past summer, the library currently exists as un-housed institution. My efforts to spearhead the project were only the beginning of the task, and as shipments of books continue to arrive every day, the framework is set for future volunteers to continue the project

Back on campus at Washington and Lee University, I step with a purposeful energy. As campus president for Books for Africa, I relish trips up to the storage room to hand-select books to ship to Rwanda. As I flip through familiar pages, I am overcome with

nostalgia for the stories that shaped my childhood and a vicarious excitement for the Rwandan students who will experience the creative power of these books for the first time. I have allocated the remaining grant moneys to cover future shipping costs as well as a work-study stipend for a student at the school.

The Montgomery City School system has recently contacted me to offer a donation of 30,000 books to the Rwanda library. Shipping costs will have to be raised, but many volunteer-minded students at Washington and Lee University are interested in taking on the fund-raising challenge.

#### Implications:

Rwanda is a nation in recovery. In 1994, the international community stood by in silence as genocide erupted within the country – eclipsing the lives of about 800,000 people in less than 100 days. Twelve years after the genocide, resilient Rwandans are still piecing together their lives – Hutu living alongside Tutsi once again. The government-led reconciliation process is in full swing and the economy is in steady recovery. Yet, peace from the top-down is all too often ephemeral. A heartier, more substantial harmony must be cultivated at the grassroots level through education and community organization.

Captivated by Rwanda's peace and reconciliation process, I spent my free hours devouring books on the subject and found to my surprise that Rwandans were willing to speak intimately about what had happened. I traveled to Arusha, Tanzania to observe the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda where the masterminds of the genocide are put to trial. For two days, I watched the fleet of foreign lawyers bicker and bustle, wondering what could have been different if half of the energy spent cleaning up the genocide had been used to preempt it. When I returned to Rwanda – where chain-gangs of pink-clad prisoners lined the road-sides – I attended the traditional gacaca courts. Sitting cross-legged in a grassy field, the only *muzungu* in a sea of Rwandans, I watched murderers confess their crimes to the families of their victims and walk free – an indispensable human experiment in restorative, not retributive justice.

I have learned that a people, betrayed by their government and abandoned by the world, can overcome an unspeakable genocide and still have the strength and clarity of thought to sit side-by-side in a crowded classroom and learn English. The connection between my work and the Rwanda School Project will ensure that the library I am helping to create will not only be sustainable, but will grow and develop for years to come. My hope is to cultivate peace in a small way by creating a safe and stimulating environment where both Hutu and Tutsi children can come together and use literary access as a healing resource.

