Refugee set for a new life - Cranbrook Daily Townsman

by Trevor Crawley - Cranbrook Daily Townsman

What a story! Cranbrook Daily Townsman picked a really sensational story for their paper, one told by a young couple who came to Eritrea to give voluntary service.

I would like to congratulate Nahom for his risky exodus from Eritrea and successful reunion with his Vancouver second family. The 2005-2007 presence of Kim Eaton and Barb Ryeburn in Eritrea established the good relationship for which Nahom should also be admired for maintaining the contact. But there was no need to conjure ugly stories to make a good ending.

The family is accusing a young Eritrean teacher of discriminating against their son, Lukas, a visitor who is a member of a family coming to provide free service in our country, not just casual visitors. The story is about a12 year old, 6th grade student, bringing the bad news to their son. It sounds like Lukas was attending a school which teaches in the language he understands—English—may be the International School. There must be other expatriate students in the class as well. Being an Eritrean and understanding Eritrean hospitality to foreigners I am totally amazed by the couple’s statement or the assumed Nahom’s involvement of the teacher telling his class to ‘shun this boy’! I am also not too sure of Nahom’s English at this age to be able to convey such a message correctly. I would even guess that the teacher himself may have been friendlier to Lukas and other expatriate students than the rest of the Eritrean students and that his message may have been “treat this boy with respect. We Eritreans respect our guests.” If the message conveyed to Lukas was true I am sure his parents must have also experienced similar situation where they taught. Using such bad excuse to support Nahom’s escape from home is shameful and a disgrace.

An additional accusation claiming that the teacher failed Nahom because he told Lukas that he (the teacher) said he should be shunned is ridiculous. Eritrean schools do not fail students for bad behavior but give them warnings and punish them differently. If the teacher failed him on purpose Nahom’s parents could complain to the school administration and demand to have the exam paper checked and get the teacher reprimanded. He can only fail a student if he performs poorly in his subject.

A second error I would like to point in the article is about Eritrea’s official languages. Eritrea has Tigrinya and Arabic as official languages. English is a language for external/international communication. The family having spent two years teaching as volunteers in Eritrea should have known better or should have researched more about the country’s culture and language.

All in all, what I can say is the volunteer couple came to Eritrea with bad intent, picked upon an unsuspecting young boy to extract from his country and family and use him as a scape goat to disseminate wrong information about Eritrea. **Shame on them!**

As for Nahom I hope he will realize the harm he has done to his school and his country and have an intention to pay them back in the future.