

# Kwaheri

The day has finally come, the one you have all waited for since the time you started school. From a young kindergarten kid to a graduating student, I am proud of all the 2014 seniors. Congratulation for making it this far. I know it is a tough journey but be glad that you are one of the finishers, you made it to this point because of the support from your parents and from the support of your teachers.

As for me the coolest thing is that among the graduating class of 2014 is a group of nineteen exchange students from different countries and different continents who got to be part of this small awesome community of Vernonia. This is just because of the generosity of the people of Vernonia who decided to have a kid you have never seen in your life and don't know their behaviors, but they decided to make a difference by hosting them and of course Vernonia High School decided to give them a place in the school.

Words are not enough to describe my happiness that I made it to the end of my exchange year. I have learned more than I expected to from my lovely family and the best friends I made here and from my teachers and coaches and I hope for the same to the rest of the exchange students. I might not say that I enjoyed every bit of my exchange year but I believe that is how life is.

One thing every exchange student always thinks of is the comparison between their home country and where they are hosted. They all dream of having a lovely family and good friends on their exchange year. There might be a lot of differences; from the organization of the host family, the way of interaction among people in the surrounding community and the friends they make. But they strive really hard to get used to the new environment with lots of culture shocks, different language and most likely different accents but the funniest one is how people call different stuff. I am thankful to all those who never get angry when we try asking

the different questions, they are always there to help even though the questions might be silly and annoying.

I come from a country where the weather is always the same throughout the year. The number of day or night time hours is always the same, unlike in Oregon. I also saw snow for the first time in my life which is probably one of the coolest experiences I have had myself.

I will not say life as an exchange student is easy, it is sometimes stressful. You do not get or enjoy the same freedom you have in your own country, like your mom wants to know where you are every minute of the day.

Having pride in your own country reminds you that you are you're an ambassador and you need to do your level best to make a good impression about your country.

Going to a totally new place, strange country, meeting strange people, strange culture, strange foods, different school, different sports and the most awesome of all is meeting your new family, your new schoolmates, people you never thought or imagined. I say strange foods because of my first time in McDonald's, I was so hungry and I just got off the plane, my mom asked me if I would like to have something to eat. I told her I like fish and she ordered the McDonald's fish sandwich. I expected to get a real fish with bones, tail and the head as I am used to, but this time it came with a bread and some stuffs wrapped within the bread. I thought that was the appetizer and still waited for the real fish which never came.

Thank you to the whole Vernonia community and our host families. They changed our lives and you should be proud of that.

Thanks to our teachers, our coaches and to all those who organized the trips we have had this year.

My heart is going to be in Vernonia forever because I love you all.

My exchange year is soon over and I will leave my family and best friends to return to my family and best friends. We might be leaving the states soon but keep in mind that for some of us, it is not going to be a "goodbye," it is a "see

you soon."

At the end, I have come to discover that an exchange student's life is like a ride on a roller coaster. First, you are determined to ride it and fascinated by the idea, then it goes fast. You must enter and overcome the first uneasy feelings. Then there are highs and lows, but then it goes very quickly in the end. One is a bit sad that it is over, a little proud that you survived it, pleased again to have solid ground under your feet and you really would love to sit and ride it again but you always have to give a chance to somebody else.

We might not be blood brothers in anyway but we are always related in someway except that we were born in different geographic locations. You can always visit us someday in our countries for we are your daughters, sons, brothers and sisters.

I have some life philosophies; they are as follows:

- Don't cry because it is over, smile because it happened.
- There are no foreign lands, it is the traveler only who is foreign.
- It is the journey that brings us to happiness, not the destination.
- Home is where the heart is and as for me, I have two homes.
- For the exchange students, they build a life for 16 years and leave it for 10 months; they build a life for 10 months full of integrity and leave it forever.
- In a place you don't know, you will find the true self.
- If you are brave enough to say "goodbye" life will reward you with a new "hello."

And now to conclude, I would like to say something in my language, Swahili: "asanteni sana nyote mbarikiwe," "Thank you all and be blessed."

*Paul Lemaron  
Exchange student  
from Kenya*



## 2014 Vernonia Scholarship Recipients

### Five-Star Trades

Jessica Gardner \$1,000  
Bridger Steward \$1,000

### Gene Weller Memorial

Laura Rice \$250  
Hope Norton-Pavao \$250  
Nikita McCord \$500  
Tim Jennings \$500

### Hancock Forest Management

Bridger Steward \$500  
Tim Jennings \$500

### Hands-On Art

Jessica Gardner \$300

### Holce Logging

Stephanie Castro \$1,500  
Tori Dalebroux \$1,500  
Tim Jennings \$3,000  
Laura Rice \$3,000  
Jessica Gardner \$3,000

### Kaiser Permanente

Stephanie Castro \$2,000

### Micky Bruers Memorial

Jared Whitton \$500

### OSEA Chapter 67

Mariah Cook \$250

### Pacific Lumber & Shipping

Laura Rice \$1,000

### P.E.O.

Stephanie Castro \$500  
Laura Rice \$500

### Sisters Memorial

Jonna Trabosh \$500

### Vernonia Boosters

Hope Norton-Pavao \$250  
Bridger Steward \$250  
Laura Rice \$500  
Jared Whitton \$500  
Nikita McCord \$500

### Vernonia Community PTA

Jessica Gardner \$100  
Bridger Steward \$400

### Vernonia Education Association

Mariah Cook \$800

### VHS Alumni

Tim Jennings \$1,000

### Vernonia Lions Club

Sarah Wagner \$500  
Jarred Whitton \$500  
Tim Jennings \$1,000  
Stephanie Castro \$1,000

### Wauna Federal Credit Union

Tim Jennings \$750

### WOEC, Sam Hearing

Laura Rice \$1,000

### Zack Rumbolz Memorial

Bridger Steward \$3,000

### Chance to Become

Jerrid Whitton \$5,000