

HEY YA'LL! IT'S ME AGAIN! I'm back. I missed you. Yes, you reading this right now. What have you been up to? What are you doing right now as you're reading this? Me? Well, I'm j-chilling in my house enjoying Kenya's school break. Writing you this letter.

# NEWSLETTER NO.8



**I AM ONCE AGAIN ASKING  
FOR YOUR FINANCIAL SUPPORT.**

**Grant Update:**

So far we have raised \$11,249.67!!! That's \$1,214.33 away from our \$12,464 target! SO CLOSE! Now the way this grant works is that I don't see any of that money until we reach the \$12,464 target. So here I am once again, doing my best Bernie impression, asking for a little more money to get over the last hurdle. If I fail to reach the target the money raised will "disappear." (The Peace Corps will take the money and give it to other Volunteer projects 🙄. Yuck!) So let's avoid that travesty and hit that \$12,464 goal. 😊 THANK YOU! Here's the donation link again: [Donation Link](#)

**SHOUT OUT:**

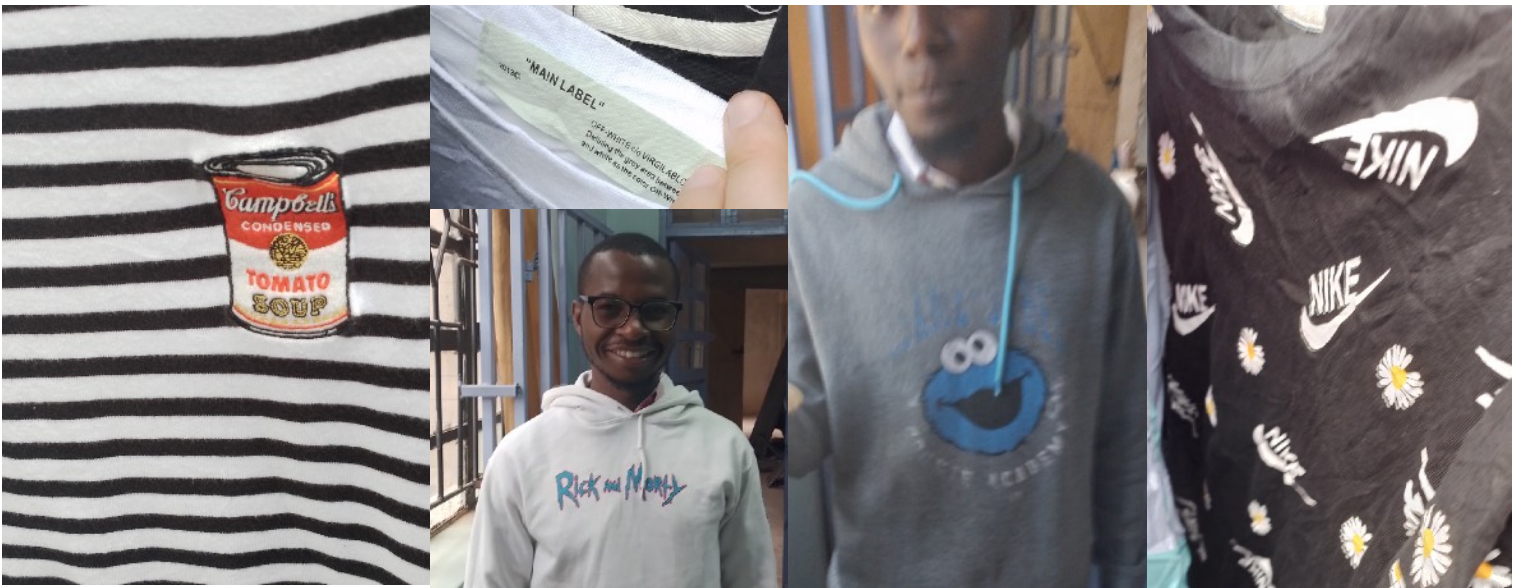
Thank you to everyone who has donated so far! And a special shout out to my home church in New York: UCC Manhasset. They hosted a benefit concert last weekend, which raised over \$2,100!

**Table of Contents:**

Alright on to the rest of the newsletter. We start with a long fashion report. (That ends with a very cool hat.) Then we have a section on drugs both licit and illicit. Next, I tell you about our chief's coronation. Then you'll see some photos of pole-vaulting students. Last, we finish off with about five or so vignettes. ENJOY!

## Fashion Report 🧶 🌀:

Here's a big fashion report that has been many months in the making. This time I went for quantity over quality. The first section is the random grab brag! We've got some knock-off hype-beast stuff, some random brands that Kenyans didn't know about, and t-shirts with bizarre phrases. Starting from the left we have an Andy Warhol inspired t-shirt owned by Ombito (Ombito was familiar with the concept of canned soup), an Off-White "Main Label" shirt, Anunda with a Rick and Morty sweatshirt (he has had it for four years and has never heard of the show), Nick with a Cookie Monster sweatshirt (he is both a fan of the blue guy and cookies, but didn't know about Sesame Street), and lastly a Nike X Flower Boy black t-shirt.



On the next row from the left we have child with a two-tone Obama beanie, another child in a red mesh balaclava, a student wearing a Mama Bear t-shirt (I screamed at him "GO BEARS!" He was confused,) and lastly my student Trevor (no relation) with an Office t-shirt from the 5k episode that reads "Michael Scott's Dunder Mifflin Scranton Meredith Palmer Memorial Celebrity Rabies Awareness Pro-Am Fun Run Race For The Cure." (This would be a great benefit to throw in Kenya because some of the cats and dogs here are infected with rabies. Ew gross stay away!)



Then here are three random shirts the classic “IF YOU CAN READ THIS SHIRT MY GIRL FRIEND SAYS YOU ARE TOO CLOSE,” an Ontario Milk Transport Association navy polo, and an extremely confusing shirt with a sentence around the Americas. I’m not sure where this sentence begins, but my best estimate is “THERE WERE TIMES WE WERE FRIENDS BUT TIMES I WAS...”



Next, we have Kenyans wearing cool drug shirts. First on the right is Raymond rocking a Carlsberg Jersey, then James with the classic D.A.R.E. tee. Then below on the left is a student teacher, Damaris, rocking a baby blue camel cigarette fleece, a student wearing an Anti Bitch Club tee (Looks like those Rolling Stones lips are swallowing a caffeine pill,) and my neighbor with an I Weed Humboldt tee. (This punk needs to be introduced to our local D.A.R.E. representative.)



Then our last fashion section. The controversial section. As we all know Kenya will soon be receiving a deluge of San Fransisco 49ers Super Bowl LIV Champion merchandise. Apparently, America also sends merchandise from Civil War losers as well. Here's a photo of me with my Matatu driver, Eric, who was wearing a camouflage REBEL stars and bars hat. Yikes! Please don't cancel him! He needs this job. Then we have a tuktuk driver with a Tonight Alive Indian head t-shirt. And in the bottom right is my student Kevin with a Bismarck Indians track jacket. I looked it up and Bismarck Missouri's school mascot is still the Indians.



## Drugs

Now a subject that everyone is interested in: Drugs. The only drugs that I have seen in Kenya are alcohol (Swahili: pombe), cigarettes, (Swahili: sigara), weed (Swahili: bangi), khat (Swahili: miraa). These four drugs are the only drugs that the typical Kenyan comes in contact with. I'm sure other drugs exist, but they're not pervasive.

### No. 1 Pombe - Alcohol

I don't really go out drinking with Kenyans. In my town, the bars consist of old men watching soccer highlights and demanding free drinks from me. You already get enough extra attention for being a mzungu, but when you're at a bar with a bunch of drunken locals the extra attention is unending. Locals love to close talk with rank beer breadth and are excessively touchy for my taste. (I'm Not sure if I mentioned this before, but men love to hold hands here. As a sign of friendship. This desire is amplified when under the influence.)



I did go out one time with teachers from my school, but they got stumbling drunk after only a couple drinks. One teacher had only drunk one beer, but he was acting as if he had taken 5 shots to the dome. He was rambling on and on about the correct amount of corporal punishment you should give to your wife, children, and students. He also confessed his desire to have a second wife. I thought one was enough! Another teacher passed out on the bar's couch after four beers. And I believe one guy through up in the bathroom. He's in his late 30s! What the hell!? In college, I was a lightweight. I'm still a lightweight, but compared to my fellow teachers I'm a tank. Well, that was the first time and last time that I'll be drinking with coworkers.

There are two forms of local/traditional brew busaa and changaa. Busaa is a 4% alcohol drink that is served out a shared basin with each drinker using their own straw. It's in the photo above. It has a distinctly sour taste, and it is ancient. There's no record of when it was first concocted, but it is at least a few centuries old. Changaa is busaa's stronger cousin. Changaa's ABV is equivalent to moonshine's. The Peace Corps was keen to show us multiple propaganda videos on changaa's danger. Did you know that it is brewed in old oil drums with rats and human shit? Yum! I didn't know you could turn poop into hooch, but if Jesus can turn water into wine anything is possible.

Fortunately or unfortunately I live on a church compound so my access to busaa dn changaa is limited.

### **No. 2 Sigara - Cigarettes (*Nicotiana tabacum*)**

Next up we have cigarettes. Kenya is the least nicotine addicted country that I have visited. I see fewer nicotine smokers here than in Europe, New York, the South, California, Canada, Mexico, Utah, and Idaho. I see a cig smoker maybe, once a week here (and that's a liberal estimate.) I have no idea why this is, but it's not thanks to policy.

Cigarettes are treated the same as alcohol. They are sold in the supermarket's alcohol/condom section, which is usually a walled-off area with its own checkout counter. There are no scary photos of lungs, gnarled teeth, or men suffering ED on the cigarette packs here. The legal smoking age is 18, and cigarettes are extremely cheap. A pack of cigarettes costs about 200 shillings (~\$1.35), which is less than the price of a beer. I have no idea why the world's most addictive drug is barely used here. Sounds like a job for an anthropologist.

### **No. 3 Bangi - Weed (*Cannabis sativa*)**

Then we have weed, which, like the US, is de jure illegal, but de facto legal. Just like plastic bags and corporeal punishment, there is a vast chasm between what the law says and what actually occurs. Outside many pool halls and bars you will find a weed dealer. He is the Rastafarian-looking man dressed in the pan-African colors of red, yellow, green, and black. He'll be toking away with friends while playing some incomprehensible card or dice game. He'll be bumping reggae music and there will be a Jamaican flag or a Bob Marley poster. I'd take a photo of him but again it is de jure illegal, and I don't want to dox him even though he's not being discrete.

#### **No. 4 Miraa - Khat (*Catha edulis*)**



Now the big one. The one that most of you are not familiar with: miraa aka khat or qat. You may have seen the Somali pirates in Captain Philips chewing on this stuff before they set go pirating. In Kenya khat is legal, but according to Wikipedia, “two of its active components, cathinone and cathine, are classed as Class C drugs.”

Further research wasn’t fruitful. When I search for drug classifying/scheduling in Kenya Google only shows me articles related to British drug classifying or American drug scheduling. The “Class C” distinction derives from British law where cathinone and cathine are also Class C drugs. In America, cathinone is a Schedule I stimulant and Cathine is a Schedule IV stimulant. A quick search on [erowid.org](http://erowid.org) tells me that its effects are similar to a strong coffee or a mild amphetamine. This makes sense because the people I see chewing khat are tuktuk, matatu, and truck drivers. I’ve also seen people chewing the leaves as they watch soccer games. Locals tell me it makes one very aggressive. However, the people chewing it in the bar don’t seem any more aggressive than the non-chewers.

I have never chewed khat because as a Peace Corps volunteer, I am a representative of the federal government, and it contains a Schedule 1 alkaloid! But feel free to try the stuff when you visit. It’s everywhere.



### **Chief Promotion:**

Here is my town's newly promoted chief: Chief Sarah. Our school hosted her coronation ceremony, which followed the typical Kenyan event format. Whether it be a wedding, funeral, graduation, holiday, or chief promotion the format is always the same.

The event starts late because the most important guest speaker is late. This time it was the Mayor of Kakamega's wife. She shows up three hours late. Once she arrives the event begins. Our guest speaker opens the ceremony with a 15-minute speech. (This is short for Kenyans.) When she finishes speaking she gives everyone in attendance 100 shillings (~\$0.80.) (Is she buying votes for her husband?) Then she promptly leaves along with half the attendees. They are smarter than me, knowing that none of the other speakers will hand out money. You sit in uncomfortable plastic chairs as dignitaries of lesser and lesser distinction give longer and longer speeches. These tepid speeches usually consist of an exhaustive account of their life, a list of their accomplishments, and end with a one-sentence acknowledgment of the new chief.

After four hours we move on to the gift-giving portion. I use my mzungu privilege to cut the gift-giving line and hand the new Chief, my gift - a cheap red, white, and blue scarf from America. I inform her of the item's provenance, which increases its value. After sitting in the blue plastic chair for eight hours the event mercifully ends. I get up and head home. Then I hear the principal call out, "But Trevor where are you going we are about to eat!" That's okay I'm not hungry. Knowing full well this will add another two hours to the event.

When I first came to my town Chief Sarah, who was assistant chief at the time, invited me to a land dispute hearing. (Have I told you about this before?) Anyway, we went to this land dispute and just like all the other ceremonies in Kenya it lasted an excruciating amount of time. Two neighbors were arguing about differences in their property border. Each possessed a contradictory map one from the 70s and one from the 90s. We showed up with surveyors to settle this dispute. After two hours the surveyors had no clear picture of where the border should lie.

So we moved on to the arguments. Sarah heard speeches from members of the affected families. Then she heard statements from village elders. Every speaker indulged in histrionics. There was shouting, screaming, crying, sassy comebacks, eye-rolls, and fisticuffs. The arguments lasted for three hours. She stoically listened to every person. Then she proposed a compromise: "A dirt road is to be created along the property boundary line." It seemed to me that both parties lost, but they were both happy with the outcome. The dispute wrapped up and representatives from each party gave Sarah brown envelopes, which each contained 2000 shillings. As we left Sarah gave me 500 shillings, "for dinner."



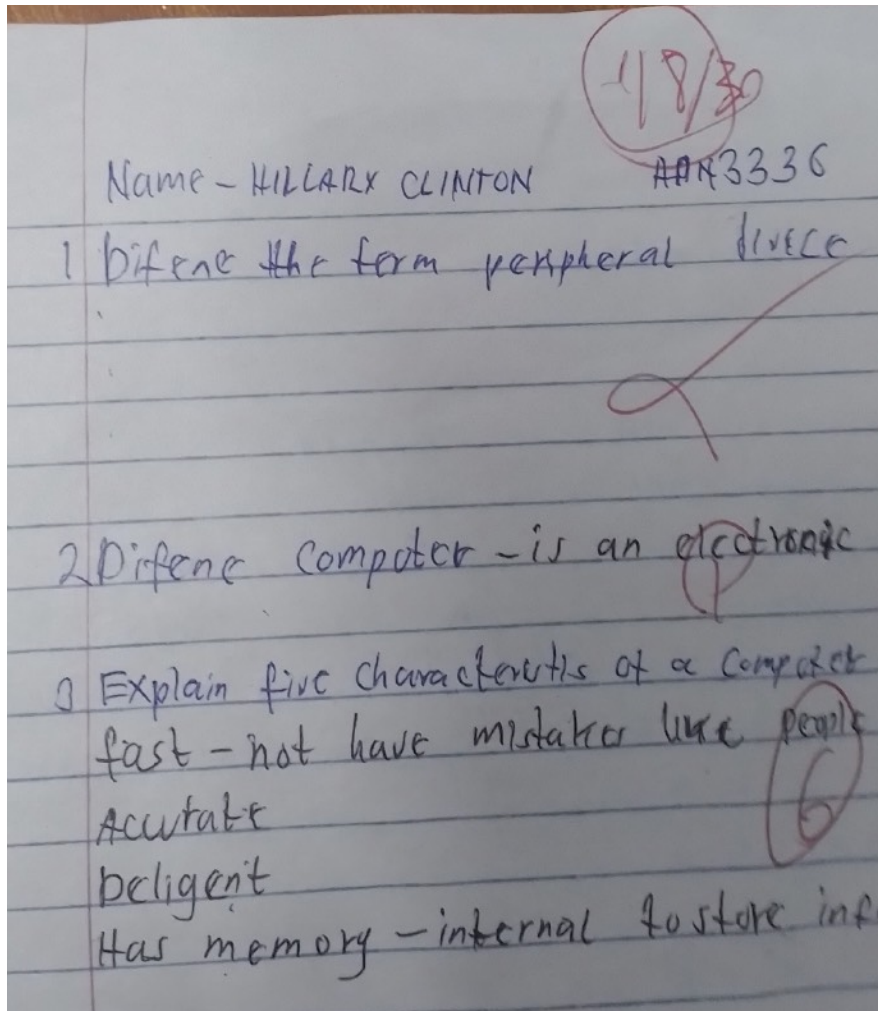
**Pole-Vaulting:**

Here are some pole vaulters from my school. The pole they're using is an extremely inflexible tree limb. I'm not an expert on the mechanics of pole vaulting, but the lack of flex in the tree has got to make vaulting way more difficult. The students rely on pure strength to hoist themselves up and over the limbo stick. I recorded a sick video of their vaults on my iPhone 11, but I can't attach it here. I'll show it to you when I'm back in America.



## Registering New Students

For the first five weeks of the school year, I was in charge of registering the new 9th graders. This year we have about 250 freshmen. I collected their contact information and inputted it into Kenya's national student database. Some of our new students have some pretty sweet names. We have three Baracks, which means blessing in Ki-Swahili, two Obamas, one girl named Michelle Obama, and one boy named Hillary Clinton. This place is crawling with Democrats! Don't believe me? Here's a photo of Hillary Clinton's first computer quiz. 18 out of 30 that's 60% not too shabby Hill-Dog!



## Vignettes

### Verbal Ticks

When lecturing Kenyans always say, “Isn’t it?” Or “Are we together?” Along with their Swahili equivalencies. Quick Swahili lesson: To say “Isn’t it?” You say “Sindiyo?” To say “Are we together?” You say “Tuko pamoja?” Sprinkle these phrases into every other sentence and you too could become a Kenyan teacher or a Kenyan public speaker. These verbal ticks are equivalent to a nervous American saying ‘like,’ ‘ummm,’ or ‘you know’ when speaking in public. They are equivalent to Ringo Starr injecting: “Peace & Love” between every other sentence. Or, pardon the vulgarity, they are like an Australian finishing every sentence with ‘Cunt.’ (You know I was gonna cut two of those three similes, but I’m not sure which two to cut ergo they all stay in.)

In the US when do you use the phrase, “by the way”? I use it when you finish talking to someone, but you want to add one more thought. Is that how you use it? In Kenya, I’m still trying to figure out why they use “by the way” all the time. `Have a conversation with a Kenyan and you’ll hear them say “by the way” every couple sentences. Are Kenyans taught in elementary school that this phrase should be used as a verbal tick? I should read every Kenyan elementary English textbook to figure out this phrase’s origins. I hear, “by the way” around 20 times a day. That’s too many “by the ways!” Do me a favor and after you read this count how many “by the ways” you hear in a day. Okay, thanks.

We had a guest speaker come to our school who pontificated on the beauty and power of abstinence. She spoke for an hour and a half. She said that after secondary they will, “all be having lots and lots of sex, and when you eventually have the sex you will use a condom. Isn’t it? And that is not a by the way you know definitely not a by the way!”

I’m hearing this talk bleary-eyed and uncaffeinated at 7 in the morning thinking, “why the hell is she saying ‘by the way’ so many times?” On final count, she said it 11 times in her talk. Why???

During my school’s 10 am tea break. You will hear “by the ways” bouncing around the room like ping-pong balls. I have not yet figured out this linguistic conundrum, and when I ask Kenyans about it they are stupefied. There is no Swahili equivalent to this phrase. The closest thing I can think of is “na pia,” which translates to “and also.” But this phrase is not used in the same context or with the same frequency as “by the way.” Well I’ll keep digging, and I’ll let you know if I make any discoveries, by the way.

### Sneezing

They do not say “bless you” after you sneeze here. Weird that in such a religious country nobody says “God bless you.” Whenever I accidentally say “bless you” to a sneezing Kenyan they look at me perplexed. In this country witnesses to the sneeze shall not say “bless you,” but the sneeze perpetrator shall say “excuse!” When I sneeze and forget to say “excuse” Kenyans will give me a look that says, “hey you forgot to say ‘excuse!’”

## **Invisible Dirt**

Before sitting in any seat a Kenyan always wipes it down. They use paper, tissue paper, a canvas bag, a handkerchief, a dirty rag, or anything lying around to wipe down a seat. If there's nothing around they'll use their hand. To me wiping down a seat makes sense if you see dirt on the seat. That's not the case here. Every chair is given a proper wipe down before being sat down. Even if there is no visible sign of dirt. Maybe this is because most paths in my village are dirt and in general every item seems to be covered in a thin film of dirt. Maybe I've gotten used to this level of dirt and no longer feel the need to wipe down imperceivable dirt. Am I the Idiot? Am I walking around my village with dirty trousers? Maybe, through the village grapevine, I'll hear that everyone has been calling me "mzungu chafu" (translation: dirty white person) behind my back.

## **The Boring Secretary**

My counterpart was frustrated with the secretary for not typing his assignment quickly enough because in my school assignments, quizzes, and tests are all handwritten by teachers and then given to our single secretary to be typed. Exams occur about eight times a year. Every exam period consists of three days of exams with three tests a day. Each exam is between two and three hours long. You got that? That's a total of 24 exam days or 216 testing hours. Most of the students spend this time passed out sleeping until a teacher comes in the room with a cane. To force compliance.

"If not by the book then they will learn by the pipe. You know the Bible says: 'Spare the rod, spoil the child.'" The exam bailiff says to me.

"Yes, but that's from Psalms in the Old Testament. I follow Christ and in the New Testament Jesus says, 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.'"

This retort, however, falls on deaf ears. Here's a verse that was cut from the Sermon of the Mount: "Blessed are the deaf, for they do not hear the sound of children being caned."

Well, where was I? Yes, our dear old secretary. So the week before exams this woman works nonstop to ensure that all the exams are typed and formatted properly. When does she sleep? Mind you our school has 35 teachers 25 of which who handwrite their exams. Is she overworked? Anyway during my first term in our school, my counterpart came into our office in a tizzy.

"What's wrong dude?"

"This secretary - our secretary!" He responds, "she is such a boring woman! The boringest or what is it you say? The most boring? Yes! The most boring woman I have ever known."

"Ummmm, what do you mean boring?"

"You know she is boring very slow and lazy. Isn't it?"

"Oh..." I explain to him the American definition of boring.

"In Kenya it is different."

"Yea okay."

I change the subject and we talk about something else. My counterpart is a man who does not like to admit he is wrong. So I shrugged off his saying, "In Kenya, it is different" as pride. Turns out I was wrong and he was right. Since this incident, another teacher, a student,

and a grocery store clerk have used 'boring' with this definition. I thought I was going crazy so I looked up the definition of boring. (You can look it up yourself I'm not doing all that work to attach it here; I guess you could say I am being "boring" too 😊) No, I wasn't going crazy. Boring doesn't mean lazy. So I asked some other Kenyans what they think 'boring' means. They gave that same definition that I found online. Finally, I asked one of my school's English teachers why some Kenyans use boring to mean lazy.

He replied, "Isn't a lazy person boring to be with and boring to talk to?"

"Ahhhhh."

*Quod erat demonstrandum.*

### **The Lazy Student**

Many months later, after the whole 'boring' fiasco, my counterpart entered the computer lab upset again.

"These students are so lazy! I should beat them."

"Yikes what did they do?"

"Look, look!"

He shows me a little piece of paper with a table of names and numbers.

"What is this?"

"The textbook number and the student who has it." He says.

"Okay, how is that lazy?"

"I did not want it on such a tiny piece of paper."

"Did you give them that instruction?"

"No, but they should know better, and stop being lazy!"

Again, I went on another linguistic odyssey to figure out the Kenyan definition of 'lazy,' but I won't bore you with that here. So here are the different definitions. Some take it to mean, "not wanting to work." Others say it means, "stupid and bad at work." While some say, and you're gonna love this, that it means: "boring."

*Circulus in probando.*

## **The Slow Laptop**

"Trevor my computer is broken it is running so slow it has never run this slow please see if you can fix."

I open the computer there are 10 Google Chrome windows, three Firefox windows, 3 Microsoft Edge windows, WhatsApp, WhatsApp web, 3 Excel windows, 5 Word windows, 10 file explorers, and 3 different anti-virus applications (AVG, McAfee, and Symantec). I explained to him Windows Defender does a fine job preventing viruses and If you NEED to have an antivirus you don't need 3. Also, that he should only have one or two windows open at a time.

"But Trevor of course I need three If I only have one they will miss some viruses and the other ones will catch it. You know there isn't one medicine that cures all ailments."

At this point, I am cursing whatever theorist appropriated the term 'virus' to describe malicious software. "A computer virus is not exactly like a human virus, and, to be honest, these antivirus programs are the biggest viruses on your laptop. Listen, you know that if you take too much of a medicine that medicine acts as a poison and kills you?"

"Yes, I know."

"So we'll be removing all of these antivirus programs, these poisons, from your computer and we will just rely on Windows Defender."

"No, I want to keep all of them. Maybe you tell me another antivirus program I should install? Because you know Ruto can see what you're doing on your computer, and he can see what you are saying in the WhatsApp."

"Okay, let's add Kaspersky and Norton. Five anti-virus softwares plus Windows Defender will keep you very safe."

"Yes, good idea please install those for me. Thank You."