



Komera Newsletter Special - September 2010

BLOG of the Rwanda Visit. 10th July – 5th August 2010

This is a very much abridged report giving highlights only. The original Blog, which runs to 14 pages, can be found by following the link on the District Web Site. The entire Blog (in chronological order) can also be found on the website.

Travel & Arrival. Saturday 10th July

A 24 hr journey, arriving in Kigali to discover 7 suitcases missing. A warm welcome from Julienne & Bishop Samuel then squashed into the mini buses & off to bed.

Day 1

4 hours sleep, 3 missed alarms, late for breakfast & Malaria pills!

Church in Kigali 3hr service. Singing & dancing with them! Singing in Kinyawanda, translated by Anastase. Meeting the local people (very friendly & welcoming) the children wanting photos with the group. Communion & return to the guest house. Missing suitcases Found! Showers, relaxation & dinner.

Day 2

Brief history of Rwanda. Tour around Kigali. Contrasts between rich & poor. Kids happily waving & shouting Muzungu! (Westerner) as the mini bus passed!

Lunch with local delicacies. A visit to one of the Genocide Memorial Centres (opened in 2004 to mark the 10th anniversary of the genocide). In the garden - elephant figures represent remembering the ones that have been lost & a wall of names in honour of the dead (with space left for those still being found).

Return to the guest house to reflect & discuss the very emotional experience.

Day 3

A long drive (on narrow dirt tracks) to visit a youth group in rural Rwanda. Locals took time out from jobs & routines to greet us with singing & dancing - an amazing sense of love.

Shown around the building that we helped to fund - future use of the building includes youth clubs, worship & weddings. Gathered together to sing & dance & interact as one community. They explained the impact of peace work on their village & thanked us for visiting them - they found it hard to believe that people from another country would help them. We gave them gifts and there was great delight on their faces at the sight of them and great amusement to see how the westerners worked (when later we helped move sand for the building) our weakness & lack of speed compared to their rate of work! Visit to a shopping centre – realisation of the great difference between the rural areas & the more Americanized parts of Rwanda.

Day 4

A visit to PHARP to see their work with women. Welcomed again with singing & dancing. After shared prayers, we viewed some of the items the women had made, from table mats to giraffes, all were handmade & very impressive.

Football with the youth group - overwhelmed by the number of people from the community who turned up to watch the match. An opportunity to mix with the local people again & to begin to understand the contrasts between England & Rwanda. The children were fascinated by the group & were very grateful when given our water-bottles. Many photos taken with the locals & the mothers in loved pictures of their children & babies. The children didn't want us to go & ran after our mini-bus. Many of us were very touched by the whole experience & sad to leave.

Day 5

Back to PHARP to see the women work on their sewing machines. As they worked we sang to them & they said they wished to learn an English song - we taught them "Praise ye the Lord". Lunch in Kigali. Then a visit to two Genocide Memorials - very emotional & hard to explain in words the horrors that took place there (full report on the web site). We left feeling emotionally drained, it had an effect on every one of us. We needed some time to reflect on the horrors we had seen.



Day 6

We attended a the first morning of the Methodist Church Conference in Kigali - this year Bishop Samuel was re-elected as Head Bishop. In the afternoon we prepared for our next destination, which meant buying food. In the evening we were invited to go to Julienne's house where we met her family & some friends while enjoying a buffet meal. Julienne is one of the main organizers of PHARP & has been with us throughout the week.

Day 7

Another early start as we leave Kigali to go to Kibogora . We arrived at our camp site at 5:30pm where we inspected our minimal facilities! No electricity, toilets (holes a short walk away) & only cold running water. All of this is compensated for by the amazing view over Lake Kivu. There was no space in the bungalow so the majority of us camped outside. After homemade Lasagne we were ready to go to bed. For those

sleeping outside it turned out to be quite eventful when noises convinced us that there was someone in the bushes! We quickly headed inside with our sleeping bags but it turned out that it was the monkeys in the trees making the noises !!

Day 8

Sunday – An invitation to attend a church service at Shara Peninsular -15 minutes boat ride across the river to their village. Greeted with singing & dancing as we got off the boat. We were welcomed into their church where a large number of people were present. During the service gifts were exchanged & the church was presented with a cheque so that they could rebuild their church. In appreciation the members of the church provided the group with a buffet lunch which was very unexpected. Again plenty of pictures were taken before we then returned to our accommodation for showers & sleep.

Day 9

An early start, some the group went to Kibogora Hospital where they were greeted by Julie who has been a missionary in Rwanda for 3 years. As we toured the wards etc. it was interesting to see the conditions in their hospital compared to England. Rooms were small, beds pushed together & 3 or 4 patients were often squashed onto two beds. We were told that this particular hospital in Kigali is very well supplied with medicine & materials compared to others in the area. There were also family members who must come & stay with the patient to look after their everyday needs such as changing their bed, bed pans & general personal hygiene!

That afternoon we did a holiday club for 73 children which meant an enjoyable time for all.

Day 10

One group again visited the hospital, this time to do occupational therapy with the children. The things given to occupy them were too simple. So we taught some English songs with actions. It started as a small group but after 2 eventful hours of singing we had attracted a larger congregation of patients - it felt like the whole hospital! After a break we went to the second day of our holiday group. At the end of the session they were very hyper & happy that they had had the opportunity to come to the club & play.

Day 11

8am start. 1^{1/2} hrs drive on very unstable dirt tracks and we arrived at the church in Nyabinaga. The whole village greeted us with song & welcomed us humbly. We visited the local primary school which is twinned with Elmore Green. All of the children sang in English and others had obviously put in a lot of effort to learn phrases in English so they could welcome us with speeches. We gave them some exercise books which Elmore Green had given, along with a cash donation for the school. In return they presented us with some handmade gifts for their twin school.

Later we visited the local health centre (described as one of the better ones in the area) but we were still all shocked by contrast between Rwanda & England. Some of the donations given went to buy bed sheets for the wards and they were very grateful for this practical gift.

Our final destination was Gitsimbwe school, which was where Bishop Samuel taught for nine years before the genocide. We were told of how nine out of the fourteen teachers at the school had been killed in the genocide, along with many other sobering facts which gave us food for thought along with the food for our bodies they provided.

Day 12

A long 8hr journey back from Kibogora to Kigali.

Day 13

Visit to a school for the mentally handicapped to see how people in Rwanda with special needs were taught. In Rwanda, mentally handicapped children are sometimes hidden away by their parents because they are not always accepted into society. Considering the poor surroundings the children looked really happy where they are. The teachers need praise for the miracles they have performed with such a limit on resources & in a society that is not accepting.

Afternoon - a holiday club for the children of the church - great fun for everyone. We noticed that, as this is more of an urban area, the children were able to speak & understand more English making activities easier to explain.

Day 14

2nd day of the holiday club. Today word seemed to have got out so there were more children wanting to join in. They all enjoyed using different resources – again a big success. Afternoon - Retail therapy with a visit to a craft market for souvenirs.

Day 15

Sunday - A (4hr) service at Bishop Samuels church and refreshments after the service with the choir. A free afternoon - It was nice to relax & have some time to ourselves.

Day 16

The last day of the church holiday club – another joyous session. At the end of the session we awarded the children with medals for their hard work.

Afternoon – In contrast, a visit to two HIV/AIDS groups. This was very moving as we got to hear some of the stories about how they became infected & found out about their condition. After we had seen & heard these tragic stories we, as a group, decided the right thing to do was to give up our lunch for the next day & give the money to them so they could put it towards something that is needed.

The second group was in a health centre for those suffering with HIV/AIDS and, as we arrived, we could hear joyful singing coming from inside the centre. The leader of the group explained the purpose of the group and we heard from one woman who was extremely traumatised by her own experience & didn't trust anyone she met. Since joining the group, her spirits have been lifted & she is now able to live her life.

Both these groups have been helped by PHARP and, through them, by the Wolverhampton & Shrewsbury District. We have sent them sewing & knitting machines which allow them to make a living out of the items they produce. We plan to



raise more money to send more machines to them so that they have the opportunity to further increase their income so they can afford food, medicine & support for their families after they die.

Day 17

A very early start leaving at 7am to travel to a refugee camp on the Congolese border with Rwanda. There were 18,000 refugees here. This was only one camp of three. We were welcomed in to the Methodist church in the camp with singing & dancing. They saw us all as being one group of brothers & sisters. They thanked us for the roof which we had raised money for & we were then shown around part of the camp. As we got out of the bus, hundreds of children came to greet us. They were eager to hold our hands, touching us & shouting "MUZUNGU". These were the worst conditions we had seen children living in. Some of these people had lived here for 15 years & we were told they were "Existing not living". Everywhere else we have visited there has been a sense of hope & a plan to improve but here, there was nothing. There was no hope & no plan. The population was increasing, not because of new refugees entering but because of the amount of children being born here. This is all they know & each new child will have to stay living in a refugee camp - they will know nothing different. Their source of food comes from the United Nations World Food Program. If this doesn't arrive, they don't eat. They depend on others completely. Their homes are nothing more than mud bricks with the UNWFP polythene roof. We had a meeting with the leaders of the camp & they told us how they needed a plan to improve the camp. The problem is lack of publicity for the camp. As nothing changes in it the media are NOT willing to cover the issue. The second problem is where to start when so much needs doing. Their main worry was the lack of education in the



camp. They need funding to improve the schooling beyond Primary level. We had a lot to think about on the 4 hour journey back to the guest house.

Day 18

Journey to Kibungo. This usually takes 2 hours, however due to yet another tyre incident, it took almost twice as long. We were only 15 minutes away from our guest house when there was a loud bang & black smoke surrounding our vehicle. All we saw was the military police with their guns running away from our car. As the smoke subsided we realised the tyre had completely blown out. The car was then encircled by locals having a look at what had happened. Between John, Tel (our driver) & a few helpful locals, we jacked up the car, put on the spare tyre and continued on our journey.

Day 19

After breakfast it was out to the car to go to the holiday club half an hour away. We stopped at the sector office to report to the authorities our presence in the area and finally arrived at the holiday club where we were greeted by a classroom of 35 singing children. As with the other holiday clubs activities were much appreciated & enjoyed by all. After lunch we went to look around a local secondary boarding school which took both boys & girls. There were around 350 boarders & 150 other day pupils. 60 pupils are in each class and 3 or 4 share one desk. It was hard to imagine how any structure is managed in a lesson of this size. Per term for the day pupils it was 50,000 Rwandan Francs which is about US \$100 & 80,000 RwF for boarders. The group played volleyball, rounders & basketball with the pupils & returned to the guest house dirty & tired.

Day 20

The second day of the holiday club. We sang to the children & taught them some of our English songs such as "Praise ye the Lord". We performed "The Wise Man & The Foolish Man". The actions to the song was learnt by the children & they copied the moves as we sang the song.

After lunch we returned to the secondary boarding school to play a (long) game of volleyball which all the players enjoyed!

Day 21

The final holiday club and the children were ecstatic to see us. They were singing & dancing & wearing the bracelets, badges & hats which we had made together. Seeing their joy gave us a real sense of achievement. The children enjoyed working on their workbooks as they were able to keep them once they had completed the tasks. It also helped to build up their English which has only been introduced into their education system during the last 18 months. It is amazing how far they have come with their spoken English in a relatively short amount of time.

At the end of the club we left the remaining resources, such as sports equipment & paper with the school. We felt very sad to leave as we had all built up a relationship with the children in our groups.

After lunch we were "tourists" - taken on a 2 hour drive to a well known waterfall on the border of Tanzania & Rwanda. After checking with immigration we were allowed to go half way over the bridge as we had to stay in Rwanda. The waterfall was much more powerful & larger in scale than expected. After lots of photographs we headed back to our Guest House in Kibungo.

Day 22

Sunday & the last church service of our trip. It wasn't far from where we were staying & started at 9am as the usual tradition. They played live music as the congregation came in & it was lovely to see all the children at the front dancing without a care. They looked truly happy. They presented us with gifts as a thank you for visiting them & helping & interacting with their children. At the end of the service we all gathered outside to meet the congregation on a more personal level. It was quite emotional leaving as this was the last village we would be interacting with.

Day 23

The Safari!! We awoke at 4 am in order to be at the park for 6 am, as most of the animals are visible at this time. After

collecting our guide we set off on a 4 hour safari - however we were told that because of the dry season we were unlikely to see any elephants or herds of animals because they moved up north where there were swamps. Luckily he was wrong! As we travelled round we saw see a herd of zebras & were lucky enough to be able to take some close up shots. In the distance we could see a giraffe's long neck & head towering over tree-tops and, as we approached, there were a number of giraffes together & we were again able to get close up shots. There were more zebras with their young and some buffaloes and number of baboons – even a baby one! As we drove along, a large number of antelopes were crossing our road ahead. We were able to get quite close to them before they hurried off into the trees. When we arrived at the Lake we were able to get out of the vehicle to see the hippos which were bobbing up & down in the water. We then followed the track onwards and, as we turned a blind corner, Tel slammed on the brakes! There in front of us there was an elephant! After our 4 hour safari we felt very lucky to have seen as many animals as we had & thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience. We headed back to our guest house for lunch before returning to Kigali in the afternoon.

Day 24

We returned to PHARP to collect our ordered items. They welcomed us again with dance & song. As we were leaving, Julienne presented us all with traditional Rwandan outfits. Skirts & tops for the girls & shirts for the boys. We proudly modelled them all for the workers of PHARP to see their handy work. Anastase then took us to see the new PHARP building which is in the process of being purchased. The building is much larger than the one they have now & the grounds outside are more spacious and we were pleased to see Anastase showing it off so proudly.

At 4pm Bishop Samuel had asked us to go to Gikondo. However, he hadn't told us why so we were all guessing at what lay ahead. He had organised a farewell ceremony for us. They offered us biscuits, muffins & refreshments. After giving a few speeches of their gratitude of our hard work & our thanks to them for offering us the wonderful opportunity we were all presented with a gift of a friendship basket, which is told to hold our secrets of relationships & friendships. We were all very moved by this generous gesture. We were then taken to the next building, which is the school for the mentally disabled where there was a large audience watching different performances. We were seated at the front & watched groups sing & two dance acts. A prayer was then said for all of us to wish us a safe journey & to express that our friendship, once formed, will never be forgotten or broken no matter how many miles there are between us. This whole evening became very sentimental & will be cherished by all of us.

Day 25

One group went into Kigali town centre with Julienne to do some last minute souvenir shopping but second group headed to Butare for the day to visit the King's palace & The National Museum of Rwanda. The King's Palace was not at all what we expected, being a group of bamboo huts. But it was very interesting to see inside and learn about the history & traditions. Next we travelled into the centre of Butare to visit the National Museum of Rwanda, which again was very interesting. There were different sections to show the different parts of Rwandan culture including agriculture, weaving, clothing & music. As a group we were struck by the skill that was employed in every aspect of their daily lives. We found the museum very insightful & it was an excellent way to spend the penultimate day to our trip.

Quote from one of the Leaders on their return –

“We had a wonderful time with an exceptional group of young people.”



NB The different format is for this issue only to enable a larger amount of information to be shared.