

# REPORT - REGIONAL AFRICAN MEETING

Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> August - Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> 2017 Kigali & Kigufi - RWANDA

By Demelza & Sichella BENBOW aged 12yrs - Servas Malawi



## Pre-Meeting Preparation:

At our Servas Social 20<sup>th</sup> Jan' we talked about who'd like to attend the Regional African Meeting. 'Yes' said Jenny+2kids, myself, & Francis+Sichella. At the March Social, Rwanda was confirmed as the 'hosting country'. In

May we looked at flight routes + costs – the airfares were high with every airline+ their was Rwanda visas@\$30pp. Fidele=Event organizer+N/S said that the N/S=National Secretary's airfare upto \$700 & Conference Acc+Food maybe covered if participation=active e.g.leading workshops etc. I offered to split any funding with Francis if he'd come for sure. Then disaster struck – my 17year old daughter was, taken out of school and hospitalized with cardiac problems with seemingly no date of discharge. I found myself rushing around trying to find specialists, explain to Francis and Fidele and keep teaching my nursery class and deliver babies.

Time was creeping closer and closer – I was getting increasingly stressed – Fidele and Francis were getting fed up with me. My daughter was a little better and my husband said 'go on go!' and take Sichella – my 12year old.

Overnight I surfed the internet as power came and went (Africa!), visited 3 airlines finding the same priced ticket I'd got in March Met with Francis discussed choices booked flights, paid and got tickets.

*Travel makes one modest. You see what a tiny place you occupy in the world.*

## JOBS TO DO - Fast!

- ✓Print hostlist copies, ✓Interview new hosts. ✓Pick up a Sibusiso's x8 pots from Gift of the Givers (an NGO Servas Malawi is linked to), ✓x45 The Eye makes Chitenji Gift Pens 1 for each delegates, ✓2Copies of Peace songs CD. ✓Films +posters to put up and our hand-painted banner.
- ✓DVD's Malawi+Servas+Syle-vol
- ✓Order \$'s - there was none☹.

Sichella –'Mom made me run around like crazy packing and making Chitenje pens, finishing jobs at her school and picking up emergency medical food. She was clever to get the plane tickets coz the airlines

couldn't even work out the routing she worked out and so she had to show them how to do it. Then we got cheaper tickets \$744 each instead of \$986 via Addis!! I was also worried about leaving my sister but I had kind-of 'Malawi cabin fever' and I thought the meeting could be fun and it'd be nice to be just mom and me together - if she behaved well!

**Communication:**Fidele Whats App'd me back fast and I contacted our x2 Servas Hosts in Kigali.

**TRAVEL OFTEN GETTING LOST WILL HELP YOU FIND YOURSELF.**

**Travel and Arrival:** We flew from Chileka airport – Blantyre to Dar Es Salam slept there and caught a very early flight to Kigali next day. Felix luckily met Francis and gave us a lift too as Claudine hadn't received our flight details☺

**Food:** Great food & drink on the plane. We gobbled hot chocolate at Dar Es Salam airport and played guitar which was fun on the return journey as we wiled the hours away

## THE PROGRAM - KEY GOALS

1. **Sustaining Servas in Africa:-** African Servas country talking/planning/cooperation.
2. **Strengthening national networks:-** growing membership, make community ties.
3. **Building for the future:-** Sharing initiatives/ideas/resource mobilisation.

## AFRICAN MEETING ✓AGREED ACTIONS☺

- 1) African+N/S+Dep' WhatsApp group, Fidele+Demelza=Admin
- 2) Kenya to host next regional meeting: ✓ 2019: 1<sup>st</sup> week April. In Mombasa Philip support team=✓ Fidele, Moses, Demelza
- 3) Set-up SYLE-volunteer inter-africa. Each Country to link with x3 local NGO's=✓Rwanda, Malawi, Uganda, Cameroon. Seek members esp' youth to take part. 2weeks@hosts, 1-2 weeks volunteer work stay@longterm host, 1-2wks tourist travel own\$.
- 4)\*African Youth WhatsApp group. Dalton=Admin. \*Send2him\*
- 5) October SICOGA.N/s to apply early & agree2sign contract4\$

- 7) 6) Write/record new Peace song4 presentation at SICOGA Korea. ✓Done 30/8/17.
- 7) 7) Each N/s to write up a report on this event.



SAT 26 <sup>th</sup>	SUN 27 <sup>th</sup>	MONDAY 28 <sup>th</sup> August	TUESDAY 29 <sup>th</sup> August	WEDNESDAY 30 <sup>th</sup> August	THURSDAY 31 <sup>st</sup> August
✈️ Arrived by Malawian Air at Kigali Airport at 0650am from Dar Es Salam	Chill at Claudine's home with Cameroon N/s & Pamela.	Delegates meet at <b>Genocide Museum</b> +visit. Debrief +tea at EPR Kiyovu church. <b>Bus</b> to Kigufi venue (3hrs of winding vomit-inducing hill after hill of twisting roads.) Centre de Soeurs Benedictine de Kigufi. (Nun-Priest Retreat)  <u>DINNER</u> 630pm 🍷  Film🎬: Cry Freedom	-President words. -Gift presentations by India. -Rabavu Mayor's Visit -Group Photo outside under banner. -Country Updates: Malawi; Uganda; India; Cameroon, Australia. <u>LUNCH</u> 🍷 -Country Updates: continued -Germany, Zanzibar, Kenya, Rwanda. -Servas On-line. -DRC- Men Conflict Resolution NGO -Tea+ <u>Dance group &amp; Dinner</u> 🍷	-Recap of Tuesday -Development strategy for Africa, group work. – Helga. -Peace building Rwanda – Eddy. -Youth in Africa – Fidele+Maria  <u>LUNCH</u> 🍷 -Boat across Lake Kivu walk to Rabavu –Goma boarder.  <u>DINNER</u> 630pm 🍷 - 8pm Africa Delegate Meeting Film🎬: The white man & Mugabe.	-Re-cap of Wednesday. -Resource mobilisation & growing membership in African countries. - SICOGA Korea 2018 (Servas International Conference & General Assembly.) Who'll go? discussion. -Closing circle outside. <u>LUNCH</u> 🍷 - Bus back to Kigali - Café internet - Taxi to airport.
🏠 Host: Claudine's	🏠 Host: Claudine's	🏠*Kigufi, Lake Kivu, v. near the west Goma boarder with Congo.	🏠*Kigufi, Lake Kivu	🏠*Kigufi, Lake Kivu	✈️ Flying back to Malawi.

"This was my 2<sup>nd</sup> Servas conference - I went to my 1st in Rome, Italy in 2007 when I was 1 1/2 years old - ten years ago. I don't remember it really but I've seen the photographs of me learning to climb up stairs - I look fast- I still am now! At this Rwandan Servas conference I was 12years old and I could go up and say 'hi', sit and chat with anyone. Most people were friendly with each other and welcoming, kind and I enjoyed staying with Auntie Claudine, her son Davie and daughter Sandra. I liked meeting different people and chatting; at meal times I tried to always sit with new people and learn things about their lives. I didn't sit next to my mum in the conference room either and I tried to 'be useful' and 'do things', like take photos of people, put up the Malawi display and tidy the conference room. I liked Rwanda, it was very hilly and pretty. I liked the mayor who came 'coz he behaved like an ordinary person you could chat too and Uncle Fidele - who goes on about peace, and thinks we should all join Servas - so it what I thought my mom is still strange but she not alone being strange then huh?!"

## PERSONAL VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES

### Challenges & Difficulties

- Trying to get a reasonable priced and timed air-ticket 2 ½ weeks (last minute) before for x3 people!
- Sleeping at the airport for 5+hours both ways.
- Having no one pick us up at the airport in Kigali.
- Genocide museum upset me a lot. It would be better if there was an ending area or section on. **'Rwanda After...going forward and healing'**, with... *'Contact us on'*, *'We meet on tues at 7..@'* NGO, details etc organistations that survivors could go to help seek emotional/counselling and visitors could go give support/do volunteer work at.... Positive testimonies from people who've married, set up businesses, peace NGO's (Servas etc).
- I saw the emotional scars and felt the pain deep in people's around me constantly. I wanted to hug people repeatedly and say 'sorry', and wave a wand sprinkling healing-peace-for-the-mind magic all over them.
- \$ I read the Meeting advert saying, *'Non-Africans have to pay'*, thinking therefore, *Africans don't pay*. Whereas it should have said *'N/secretary's don't pay but everyone else does'*. Some people didn't have \$4it.
- On the boat trip I would have preferred to go see the 'market' rather than, the Congo-Rwandan boarder.
- Projector, laptop, DVD took too long to synchronise together – v. frustrating!! Modern technology not so gr8
- Not enough practical sessions. More cooperative peace games, chitenje pen making, songs etc=better.
- Getting my daughter to come running with me in the mornings – dragging of feet – whining – refusing.
- We needed to sit during meetings rather than in rows.
- Session on Rwanda male NGO bit boring – better if more 'active' e.g. put us into groups with a situation/question to discuss/solve with guy facilitating.
- Delegates need to be told, they can only miss x1. It made me sad how some people disappeared during conference time but appeared at meal times!! It undermined our group cohesion & the meetings value.

### Rewards & Joys:

- Organisation: Fidele was superb! Highly organized, great team leader, v.responsive on email, calm, encouraging, authoritative, yet willing to listen to other's ideas/input, welcoming it and being open and efficient.
- Hosting: by Rwandan families – great idea. Kind – *asked questions of us!!* Willing to share their lives and sometimes hard details from the Genocide in '94.
- Finding so many quick thinking, keen YOUNG people committed to peace involved in Servas Rwanda. Wow!
- I.D. badges cleverly organized in advance.
- 1<sup>st</sup> night Welcome Meeting in Kigali: Introductions were FUN and the food brought +drinks tasty – tx!
- Debrief after Genocide museum: Clever idea!
- Travel to Kivu – the bus was very POSH! Treat!! Tx!
- Beautiful location! Great choice! Perfect place to stay. Loved the beds, bathrooms, meals@then lakeside, nuns, their openness, wine-making!
- Sessions were quick-paced and kept my attention.
- Allocating w/shops/chairing2different delegates – gr8!
- Note pads given to each delegate=useful-tx!
- Mayors visit: remarkable in that he was young, humble, chatted naturally without pomposity-of-position
- Separate Africa evening meeting – very practically +rewarding especially the 'Action' outcomes we all agreed too! I hope it brings real 'Servas Africa growth'.
- Food was varied, tasty and GREAT! I loved it ALL.
- Free soft drinks – treat – thank you! Kind.
- \*Boat trip *was* a positive 'whole group fun bonding' activity. Tx for incl' its cost in our conference fee as I'd noted in our 1<sup>st</sup> briefing notes it said we'd pay extra4\*.
- Showing a movie-of-political-special interest was more popular than I expected and relaxing IF it worked
- Evening activities of playing guitar/chat/singing=great!
- Dance group was great! Fun, skilled, fit and obviously having fun as well. Thanks for paying for it!

### SUMMARY:

Clean progressive country, inspiring, justifiably so proud people, problem-move forward don't whine mentality, loved the volunteer clean-up your local community day each month and give a cow-share-a-calf-with-a-neighbour idea. So so so pleased I came and with my daughter. I have caught, *'peace fever'* from Rwanda and it has recharged my Enthusiasm-Peace-tanks. It was busy but it was also relaxing and fun.

### **Zikomo Servas Rwanda! Brilliant!**



Don't limit yourself because of past realities. Who you are right now is someone you've never been before. You have no real idea what wonders you're capable of manifesting.

Scott Stabile



No one in this world is pure and perfect. If you avoid people for their mistakes, you will be alone in this world. So judge less and love more.

As Helga said, let us not forget what is happening on our world's doorstep to the Rohingya in Manamar/ Burma. Let us not ignore it but raise up our voices and shout **'no!'**

Express your concern politely via:-  
embassy.myanmarisb@yahoo.com

**'Washing our hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral.'**