

ANNIVERSARY... COMMEMORATION... HOPE

Today, the 6th of April, 2009 marks the 4th anniversary of my arrival in Rwanda. I came with two suitcases containing all of my possessions, \$5,000 cash that I raised through various small fundraising activities, and \$3,000 of my own personal cash. The sun shone on the trees, illuminating drops of water from the recent rainfall. The air had a light smoky odour. Despite having a terrible cold, I was very happy to have arrived at my destination.

Four widows were there to give me a warm welcome. At my hostess' Francine, we chatted a little, then they left; I was tired, and a bit sleepy from the medication, so I lay down and had a short nap.

During the four months preceding my arrival, I had spent all my energy trying to find a replacement for myself at work, getting all of my files up to date and ready to transfer over, selling a bit of my possessions, but mostly giving them away, selling my car, etc. After a week of visiting my family and friends, I set out on the long three day voyage towards my new life. I did not have much time to devote to preparing or planning.



Now that I was there, I was not sure what I was going to do, how I was going to be useful to these widows who had gone through such pain and despair, and all of a sudden I found that I was quite pretentious to believe that I could really make a difference in their lives. I visited them in their humble homes, and each night, I cried myself to sleep because of the magnitude of the choice that I had made, and the doubts that I had about my ability to really help them. I awoke to the sun each morning, and offered my day to God so that he might guide me in what I had to do.

I often went before the statue of the mother and child, erected after the genocide, and prayed to the souls of the mothers that were killed during those 100 days, asking them to bring me inspiration as to how I could help their sisters who had survived.

Through many small miracles, from generous donors and generous volunteers, today we are around 80 woman in the beautiful community centre, and together we share our everyday lives, our work, we sing, and we thank God for guiding us. It has now been 15 years since my sisters went through situations of rape, violence, the murder of their spouses and children, despair, hunger, poverty... they remember, and they cry, so do I...

Even if hunger, poverty and painful memories are still present, they now have a skill, a bit of money, their children attend school, and they have a purpose to their day, a reason to be. Thanks to their courage, and their will to not just survive, but to live, thanks to their faith in God, and thanks to the friends of Ubuntu, they rediscovered Hope...

Maman Nicole