

## Impressions and Reflections



A retired doctor, Francine Leclerc had volunteered in Haiti and in Cuba before deciding to come to Rwanda to give generously of her time to the medical consultation clinic at the Centre César. She offered gynaecological exams as well as house calls for the older Mamans. She was very moved by her experience and will be back. She shares with us her impressions and reflections.

Following my first visit to the Centre César in Kigali this past April, I can attest to the vitality of the Rwandans that I met and worked with. The Mamans from the sewing workshop, or from the artisan workshop, the young men at the auto mechanics class, under the direction of Mao, or the masons and carpenters who were building the new daycare; all expressed how happy they were to have a job. All of these people were bright, affectionate and happy about what they were able to accomplish towards improving their quality of life, and that of their children. These people showed me another meaning of happiness. For instance, happiness is not about the accumulation of goods, and I live in a society of abundance, and people are more rushed than they are happy. The Rwandan people impressed me with their warmth, and their ease in showing their affection. Since my arrival, I have been forced to be introspective, and to rethink certain personal convictions, some that we all share.

At the airport, I wanted to cover Rodrigue with my umbrella, as it was raining. We were in the middle of the rainy season (April). Very calmly, Rodrigue told me that he did not need the umbrella. "The rain is a blessing for us". I was a bit thrown off by the response that was simple and made so much sense. Later, Rodrigue remarked to me that we, North Americans and Europeans, rush towards our death, whereas the Africans simply wait. Very philosophical for a young man who is barely 20 years old. His words have resounded with me ever since.

Why this frenzied race? And we see the negative results: burn-out, exhaustion. The lifeless looks, compared to those of Rwandans, so radiant. Even though, we are in the middle of April, the month of the Genocide Commemoration. The people reunite, pray and are courageous. We feel their sadness, but in spite of that, they welcome us with open hearts and open arms, and with so much warmth. I ask myself why, here, there are such differences between individuals, some hold back in giving of themselves, while others are open and caring. I brought back with me articles that were produced by the Mamans from the sewing and artisan workshops so that I could sell them here and send them back the money made.



Upon my return, I contacted the IGA (grocery store) in my neighbourhood, and they offered me the opportunity to display and sell the products in their store. This gave me the opportunity to meet many kind people, who thanked me for what I was doing for the Mamans. Others stopped and found the products to be so colourful and beautiful. These quiet moments, when time moved slowly, during those three days, when waiting for possible buyers to stop and browse, allowed me time to write some of my thoughts and reflections. There were those people who passed by me, not wanting to notice me, who looked in the opposite directions, almost at the risk of running into a wall.



To give, we must be able to think of others, and to be able to put ourselves in their place. If we think about it, right or wrong, rich or poor, we can't be sensitive to the suffering of others if all we are concerned about is our own fate. Everything moves too quickly: a good reason to not stop, to not open up to others, and to continue to be concerned only about our own fate? To continue to run. Isn't that what Rodrigue wanted to say: running towards our own end. Even our children are caught in the frenzy of consumerism and can't stop for a moment to think about others.

However, I did see a mother with her two children, aged 8 and 10, stop at my display and explain to them about the work that went into the products. She explained to her children that the Mamans need our help and our support. What a positive note to end this marvellous trek to Rwanda, that continues here in Quebec with the sale of goods that were produced over there.

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