

## **SARAH DURKAN – HIDDEN GREATNESS**

I was in 3<sup>rd</sup> year of College at Kinyamasika in 1970 when I met Sarah. It was around that time that I was seriously searching for a Congregation to enter with. Sarah came to Kinyamasika. When I learnt that she had come for vocation promotion, I approached her.

She was gentle and an assuming. Little did I know she would be my future novice mistress! I did not meet her again until September 1973 when I entered with the Daughters of Mary and Joseph. From then on; Sarah, Dona and myself started journeying together until Mary Kizito (who decided to leave later) joined us. Mary Moran too lived with us in Mary Hill staff house. Both Sarah and Mary M. were teaching at Mary Hill. Mary Kizito was a secretary at Mary Hill while Dona and I were teaching in Primary schools on Nyamitanga hill in Mbarara.

Often times Dona, Mary Kizito and I wondered why the sisters gave us such a formator who never corrected us when we made mistakes or disagreed with us. She never said a word. She would only mention it when one of us would go for spiritual accompaniment as by the way not taking it seriously. It was much later when I came to realise that Sarah was actually an exceptional formator. She let us be until we realised by ourselves that what we were doing was not right.

Sarah lived simply yet she was a woman of vision. Dona and I entered as grade two primary school teachers but she foresaw that sooner or later that grade might be phased out. She encouraged us to study privately and sit for O level exams at Mary Hill as private candidates. We were not excited about the idea of having to go back to school but we obeyed anyway. We did well and later on joined A. level. I look back at that opportunity given me with gratitude.

After the novitiate a group of us had a trip to Mombasa: Sarah, Anatolia, Dona, and myself, Fr Yvon, one of the Missionaries of Africa and Drs Jackline and her husband who were working in Ibanda hospital. We stayed at the coast for about two weeks. Sarah then received a new title; Mamsabo given her by a Kenyan man who was helping us with cooking. In Kiswahiri language, that title is given to a mother and a leader! Since then, she was known as

Mamsabo by most of us who lived with her and we always called her by her new title which made her laugh.

Sarah lived with me once again when I was appointed novice mistress at Ibanda 1993 -1996. I was very happy to be given Sarah to live with because I knew I could always tap on her wisdom and experience. I was just a learner so she helped me a lot and I am so grateful to her.

When Sarah returned to Ireland, I visited her when she was in Taraght community and later at Cedar retirement house. In 2014 before I left Rome I went to visit Sarah. She was still very alert then and we took a walk around the compound. We talked about everything from the time I entered until that time. Both of us were very happy to share what we had lived together. She remembered so many situations and events that had taken place in Uganda.

When I went back to visit Sarah after the Chapter 2019, it was very different. I nearly wept when she asked me who I was. Mary Doyle tried to explain but she was living in another world altogether but she looked healthy and well and she was loved by everyone. At the same time I was at peace I had seen her for myself. I went back again before I returned to Uganda but deep in my heart I felt that might be the last time to meet Sarah my novice mistress, friend and good formator.

Sarah had so many qualities but with her humility, I do not think she knew she had them. She had a gift of humility; she loved the poor and lived our charism of compassion practically. So many people in Uganda still ask if Sarah is still alive! Sarah enjoyed fun, peace and encouraged people to be happy. She had empathy and knew how to be close to those in pain in her discreet way. She was a peaceful person and could live with different personalities at peace. She had patience.

She had many groups to form after us but Dona and I pride ourselves for being her very first born.

As I continue to pray for you Sarah, remembering you with joy and gratitude, I want to end this with the following reflection by Henri Nouwen which describes you for me:

Hidden greatness

...Real greatness is often hidden, humble, simple and unobtrusive. It is not easy to trust ourselves and our actions without public affirmation. We must have strong self-confidence combined with deep humility. Some of the greatest works of art and the most important works of peace were created by people who had no need for the limelight. They knew that what they were doing was their call, and they did it with great patience, perseverance and love.

Bread for the Journey

By HENRI J.M. NOUWEN

Anna Mary Mukamwezi