

DMJ MY STORY - 25 YEARS AS A DMJ – Sr Rosemary Kamahoro

BACKGROUND



I was born into a family of 12 siblings. I come from a village called Gikoro in Kisoro District, Mutolere Parish, Kabale Diocese.

My father was a teacher and my mother a graduate from women clubs of her time. Both are gone to God (RIP). These two gave us education at home and at school. They also taught us religion and fear of God and how to live. I am grateful to God who gave them to me. I remember how Sundays were respected in my family. We were to rest from garden work and go to Church to pray. So I looked forward to Sunday because I loved to go with my mother to Church. We took turns to lead night prayers, and my father made sure that every one took part in this spiritual exercise.

I went to a primary school near our home but later joined another school to complete primary education. This was near Mutolere Parish about 7miles from home. With other children we walked to and from school together. As I grew up I joined lay apostolate groups and my favorite was the Crusaders. We were to guard Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. This was a special call though I did not understand what it really was because I never saw Christ who I was guarding with my eyes, but it gave me pleasure to belong to this group. Here I met girls of my age and we danced, played a lot and prayed together. The discipline of Crusaders was that we had acts of Charity every week that we would present at the meeting every Sunday, such acts were like helping the poor, respect of parents, going to mass and receiving Holy Communion on a given day in the week, drawing water for the elderly and looking for firewood for them. Throughout primary education, I was brought up in this discipline and it somehow shaped my desire to serve God, how, I did not know yet.

How I come to know the DMJs

I joined secondary education at Immaculate Heart High school owned by the sisters of Our Lady of Good Counsel. I was in senior two when Sr. Monica Beebwa (RIP) and Sr. Josephine came to visit our school. I remember that the lights went off when these two sisters started talking to us. The talk was so interesting that we asked them to hold on as we fetched lamps from our rooms to bring to the class where we were gathering. After their talk which most of us enjoyed, the two sisters were taken by the host sisters and we never saw them again. Those who would wish to join them would do so after senior six. This was four years ahead and I felt that was a long time away, so I shelved this idea at the back of my mind and waited for other opportunities. Many other Congregations presented themselves like the Comboni Missionaries, Our Lady of Good Counsel and Our Lady of Praise, Butende. I applied to these and was called to join but the talk that Srs. Josephine and Monica gave us made such an impression that my heart beat would always be for the Daughters of Mary and Joseph despite the worry of level of education. Time went by and I joined high school, thanks to Fr. Kabasharira Lazarus (RIP). By

this time, I had made up my mind to join religious life, informed my parents and had their consent.

I applied and Sr. Monica responded to me assuring me that I would join their congregation. I kept her response next to my heart. It was like a ticket to enter heaven. I went by her words in the letter.

However, my happiness did not last long. Evil robbed me of Sr. Monica. She was murdered and was no more. I called her name in my grief and asked her that where she had gone in no time, she would still pray for me and I assured her I would keep her promise. A few months later I was invited to visit the Sisters at Nyakakiika and I did. I saw the chapel where Monica's life ended and it touched my heart. I was welcomed by Srs. Liz McCarthy and Maureen O'Connor who asked me many questions but were good to me. During the day we would be in the house but we went to sleep in different places, not in our house. The aspirant would sleep at Catechetical centre while the two sisters in the Administration block at the Diocese in Kabale. I enjoyed my first visit. It was as if I had been admitted to join the Sisters! I had just finished senior six.

After A-level, I was advised by my family to add another three years training and qualify, then join the convent. This I did by God's grace. I was interested in nursing and so I trained in Nyakibale School of Nursing and Midwifery under the leadership of Franciscan Sisters of Breda, Holland. These Sisters were not only administrators but they mothered most of us!! Thanks to Sr. Reynilda our tutor, I qualified as an enrolled nurse.

In this school I discovered friends aspiring to different Congregations and I met Speciosa who was a DMJ aspirant. This made me so glad and we planned that we would join together. We became great friends and we joined together. We were received by Sr. Helen at Bethany and handed over to Sr. Peg Rahilly (RIP) who would be our postulant mistress. I thank her for her patience and wisdom. She was with Srs. Sarah Durkan and Matthias (RIP) and we made a lively community in Ibanda.

We were introduced to eating Rhubarb, which was an international food, failure of which would put doubt to our vocation to religious life!!! This was a strange plant to both of us...it was growing generously in our gardens behind our classroom. So we went on our knees that mother Mary and St. Joseph would give us a good appetite to swallow rhubarb and prove that we had the vocation to this Life. As heaven would have it, we came to love rhubarb and it would not miss on the menu!!!

We also learnt français with Sarah. Some melodies like "savez-vous planter les choux à la mode de chez nous", "Je cherche le visage du seigneur", still ring a bell. Srs. Sarah and Liz were our great French teachers and attracted my attention to love French. As years moved, I used this language to serve God's people in North and South Cameroun. Thanks to my sisters Sarah and Liz.

After two years of postulancy, Spes and myself were received as novices by Sr. Agnès Charles and Sr. Anna Mary was our Novice mistress. This was a special time for both of us and we were enriched by courses and encounters with other novices. Memories of our experience in the villages are still alive in my heart. Thanks again to Srs. Anna Mary and Sarah who accompanied us in this experience!!!

Time came for the two of us to make our first vows!! This was in Ibanda, where we had been groomed. It is not possible to fit all that happened on that day on this page! Just a few highlights..., we had a long procession and amid dances and songs, we entered the Church. I felt so small to see how everyone, young and old running around to make us feel loved and important. We wondered who we were to have attracted such a population. This marked our importance as religious young women. Thanks to Hedwig who made us look beautiful...When I saw Srs. Anastazia and Grace dancing at an offertory procession, I was filled with more zeal to serve as a DMJ. Then we got our medals and by this time joy and excitement ranked high. Thanks to Sr. Maggie O who dressed us with a medal. It was as if Angel Gabriel descended to Mary from above.

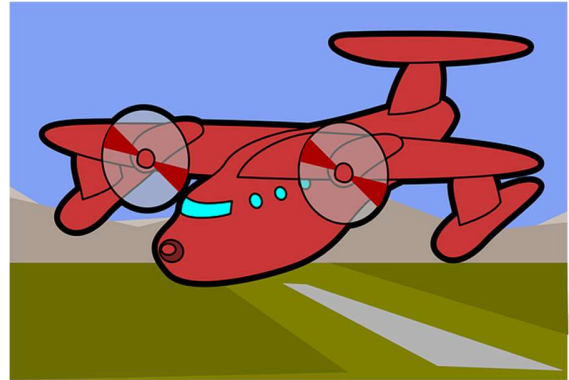
After the lively Liturgy, we were met with a delicious meal and as we were at high table, we were to really behave as important people. It was our first time ever, so no big laughs, no talking much, you know... but when Sr. Margaret O'Rourke (RIP) brought us dessert, we wondered whether rhubarb would be there so we winked at each other and served ourselves generously. Dear reader, it was delicious: so many things mixed together and with different colours ... the colours stimulated everyone's taste buds...

In the evening, we danced as many types and styles as they were, ranging from Irish, Karimajong, Kifumbira et cetera. All learnt the style on the stage!!! This filled my heart with joy to see all of us in it, superiors and inferiors alike. Sounded heavenly. You can imagine how my commitment to serving in this family rose like fevers in dry season. This was only a taste of many DMJ gatherings ahead.

The journey continued, the call grew and grew as I crossed roads with different companions.

Now is time to leave my milieu. International life was here to be actively lived. The first journey I made was a unique one. It was by air to Burundi to learn French and encounter a French world. It was really my first time. I had had a taste of French and liked it so I was eager to know more even how to fly...I first went to class, to learn how to fasten a belt, how to put on an oxygen mask in case I ran short of breath..., and how to put on a safety jacket, eh. All these increased my nervousness and wondered what had happened to buses and cars and motorbikes that use the earth not the sky to travel.

Sr. Margaret O had told me to follow her wherever she would go at the airport and this I did. I had thought that we would enter the plane together, only to see her give me hugs of good bye. Hedwig gave me sweets and told me to use them on the plane especially when it climbs up!!! Did I understand this really? Only much later! On I climbed a small plane among big ones and soon I was allocated my place inside. I did not see the seat belt, I was exploring this small gadget, looking at the passengers, wondering if I would see any familiar face. Then a loud voice said, "Fasten your belts", and I saw it under my legs. So I tied it successfully and gained confidence that all would be well. The journey started slowly but surely and then we flew from the earth to the clouds. Ha. How could I tell this story to those who used to marvel at planes with me in primary schools? I was on the plane now!!! As we moved I really enjoyed every bit of it, we were next to God above!



My bliss in the blue sky did not last long. We started meeting clouds and another voice said that we stay in our seats because the sky was cloudy (clouds meant nothing to me and into the bargain I had made up my mind not to move from where I had been planted in case the gadget descended!) He had not yet stopped the warning when the plane started shaking. I held my seat, then I held the man next to me and he shook my hand away from him. He was clad in white robes and I realized that he was a Muslim.

The shaking of the plane continued and it was annoying. The other man did not dare to look anywhere but held his beads. I looked for my Rosary in vain. I was devastated. So I heard voices saying eh eh eh. Did I really hear them? I tried to stand but I was belted! Then we passed out. I don't know where the plane went, up? down? I was no longer there. O God whereare you? Then as God listens, I found myself in my chair again, with my belt on. The blue sky reappeared again, life came back!!! Everyone was there, I mean the passengers! All were really frightened like me. It was like a resurrection! Then we would see houses and roads close by and we were told we are approaching Bujumbura. I held my breath as the plane descended until it landed with a bang. The small wheels had touched the earth again. Haaa. We had arrived. We all clapped hands I guess even the small gods- the pilots clapped. Little did I know that this experience would be the beginning of so many flights, in and out of Uganda to distant places and in bigger airplanes. My confidence was built little by little and I nearly became as confident as pilots.



Years did not stop to unfold despite these exciting experiences. I grew more human than before and learnt from the Master how to move from the clouds, back to the earth. I am now 25 years since I was called to try to live as a Religious. The one who calls us is faithful.

I want to thank you all who are not tired or bored of reading this experience. Thank you those who dared to live with me. We enjoyed and cried together, rubbed shoulders so as to fit in the narrow gate and we managed. We are here, still on the narrow road to eternity and as we travel, we hurt but heal, forgive and forget. Thank you above all for bearing with me, standing with me as we journey.

I will always be grateful to you my sisters. In your big and small ways, you show me Heaven.

“The Spirit by which I wish to see you animated resides essentially in an unlimited devotion to Jesus Christ, to his Church and all your sisters and brothers.” CVC Founder.

Je vous embarrasse fort.

With Love always,

Rosemary Kamahoro