

FRENCH JOURNEY.

This was a journey of journeys in my life; going out of the country (Uganda) for the first time. It was at 12:00a.m of the 12th/01/2013 when Anna my colleague and I as postulants set out on a bus to Burundi to learn French.

Tracing back a few events before that mid-night travel commenced; starting with pursuing of the passport which I didn't get until later on when I was already three months in Burundi up to the buying of the bus tickets. Having no passport didn't deter me from going on the set date since a travel document was issued for me. I spent the D-day in Coloma with Anna and returned in the evening ready for the journey.

Everything prepared, all instructions about the border and related advice grasped, "we" waited for that mid-night. We had an early supper and were advised to take a nap but I thought that was not necessary due to the excitement. "My first time out of Uganda" and learning French ironically a subject I dreaded most long time ago when I was in secondary school. And yet a language I was so eager to learn and speak which was quite unimaginable for me.

I informed the sisters that I was to keep vigil until the hour of setting off because I could hardly wait. To my surprise it was only a few minutes later according to me that one sister was calling out my name and shaking me to life. In all my bliss about French, I had slept instead of staying awake. I didn't even hear our heavy suitcases being rolled along the corridor for both Anna and I were deeply asleep. I awoke after the great shake to find everyone waiting for us since it was almost midnight. I said my goodbyes with heavy eyes and off we were driven to the bus park praying that the bus had not left us. To my relief after inquiring we were reassured that the bus was about to arrive.

The bus didn't arrive until 1:00a.m and by that time all sleep was gone with the anxiety of waiting plus the morning coldness. I wasn't prepared for the shock of having no seat yet we had booked and bought tickets two days earlier plus a long wait in the wee hours. To make matters worse the conductor seeing the size of my suitcase which was not only very big but also equally heavy decided that I would be left behind and travel by the next bus. I was running mad with disappointment yet I couldn't part with that suitcase. At that time I didn't mind whether it meant holding on to the side mirror as long as I got to Burundi.

Fortunately after some struggle my load fit in the trunk and at last we were offered seats "the bare metallic floor of the bus." with a condition of not speaking a word since we were strangers as the conductor explained in that bus although we were still on Ugandan soil. Every time I tried to say something Anna reminded me of the pact of silence. This fuelled my desire to learn French since I would be able to inquire from other passengers who were probably all French speakers why we were treated so.

It was not a pleasant start of this journey nevertheless I slept only to be woken by feet stepping on me and others over my head. I screamed for I was being trampled over like bananas when making the local brew. One passenger came to my rescue and blocked others from passing over until I was on my feet wondering what was happening. Using signs I got the explanation that we had reached the border. Despite the trudging over, I had my pen ready and all the necessary documents as instructed/ advised earlier. Anna and I never left each other's side and so together we ran to join the line at the customs office.



Later on we got proper seats.

This journey was very long, the longest I had ever travelled. I read every sign whenever the bus stopped hoping to see Ngozi but in vain. At last when we reached this place, I jumped from my seat and ran along the pew waving goodbye to other passengers who were still on board. I couldn't hold back the joy of arriving and being waited for by sisters who had not met us before though I recognized them straight away.

This journey did not end after arriving in Burundi but continued as I learnt French and is still going on even now for I got many lessons for life from the experience of that day.



For it was a French journey and indeed French I did learn.

Catherine Nyamata.