

My Entry into the DMJ community.

I completed my Teacher Training at Namagunga (Regina Caeli) in December 1962. I was to be posted by the Uganda Government to any Secondary School of their choice.

However, in those days the Church had a lot of power on its own founded Schools, so a White Father, (Missionaries of Africa) went to the Ministry of Education and asked that I be appointed at Rushorooza Girls Junior Secondary School, Kabale. This is my own home Town in the South West of Uganda. The School had been started by the “Ladies of Mary”, now known as Daughters of Mary and Joseph. His request was duly granted.

Early January 1963, the same priest drove from Rushorooza, the first Catholic Parish in Kabale, to my home in Kakore. It is about 20 minutes’ drive. His mission was to look for me.

Arriving at the School where my Dad was teaching, he asked dad to send for me from the field where I was working with my Mom. I arrived at our house trembling not knowing what on earth I had done! He then broke the news that I was needed at the school urgently to prepare for the opening of the New Academic Year, because the then Headmistress of the school and her co-teacher had been in an accident in Tanzania where they had driven for their holidays. Both of them had been hospitalised; the headmistress had had a fractured back! I was expected to be the Acting Headmistress and other teachers would be looked for in due time! I tearfully protested that I had never ever been a teacher before, I did not know the school etc., but my Dad said that all would be fine because he would give me hints and advice on what head teachers do, as he was one himself. I agreed and started packing the few possessions I had, then left home.

Two days later, while at the School, the DMJs arrived to help me. They were sad about the accident but still full of joy in receiving me and helping me to set up the essentials needed for the school to open. It was Sister Margaret Mary Ascott and Sister Teresa Clements. They stayed for a day and a half then returned to Mbarara, where the DMJs had started and were running Maryhill High School.

The Opening Day came and the pupils began to trickle in from all corners of Kabale District. Before they went to their Dormitory, they had to pay: School fees, Caution Money, School uniform, there was money to be paid in case one got sick etc.: the Girl Guides had their bits to pay,**There was a lot of money for me to cope with.** I got a big cardboard box and all went in as it came! Amidst all this, people were arriving with food for the school (for it was a Boarding School). There was also fire wood being brought for the kitchen etc. No problem for me, the box of money was under the table so I would reach out and pull out whatever amount was to be paid for each item. At the end of the day I carried the box of treasures to my room.

A few days later the two DMJs arrived: this time with Sister Kathleen Rathe. They found it a struggle to get the accounts sorted out! Theresa worked at it with me the whole morning but we did not finish. Later, a white Father called Charles Brunet who was Treasurer at Rushorooza and had been told the story, came to my aid and sorted everything out, teaching me what I should do in future. Did I really ever learn? (You are free to answer the question.) Later on the DMJs teased me a lot about it and many other things. I got to know them and liked their simplicity, understanding and the jovial spirit.

Some months later when I asked to enter with them, they were delighted and for sure they had some idea of who they were taking; but I did not know them except through those school contacts. I was then informed I would have to go to England for Formation. That made me hesitate a bit. Going so far away was frightening. And what would happen if I did not make it through the formation? I was assured that even then I would just come back. In the end I agreed.

On 1st September 1964 was the day I said goodbye to my mother and my home. Jennifer Condron, who was then a lay teacher in Maryhill High School drove the school van to my home to collect me. We arrived at Emmaus community in Mbarara, with my Dad, my sister Mary, my brother John and two friends. It was my first time in the convent and the first time to meet all the sisters together. Mary Moran quickly whisked my suitcase to her room to check if I had all that I might need. She pulled out some of my dresses and shoes which she told me would not do in the convent! I sadly parted with those, passing them on to my sister. Mary Moran added into my suitcase some of her own stuff and asked Jennifer if she had an over-coat for the cold and winter. All was new language to me. Jennifer kindly gave up hers too. All was well packed and I was set for the adventurous trip.

I joined my family in the parlour and we had lunch. Immediately after lunch I was given a "small book" and was told it was my Passport. Opening it I found my photograph and all the information about me. I was reminded to guard it till I would return to Uganda. That afternoon the family set off for Kampala with Sr. Kathleen and Sr. Margaret Mary; our accommodation was at Rubaga.

On 2nd September at Midnight, we said our goodbyes and for the first time I climbed the ladders into the KLM. I watched what people were doing and did the like. As we took off I felt a big lump in my throat and wept silently, as then I realised I had reached at the point of no return!

I opened my eyes to see that we were descending towards the land. We then filed out into a huge building full of Europeans moving up and down long corridors. I did not know how I would get my suitcase. I asked one English lady if we had arrived in London. With a posh English accent she informed me we were in Amsterdam! I thought I was lost. How would I now find a plane to London? I had been always travelling by Buses and Lorries. These were easy to locate in their parking places, and as for buses the names of

the Destination was written on. What was to be the procedure here? I had to be smart. I went round asking different people about their destinations. Anyone that said “**London**” I marked well their dresses and figure. As soon as I saw them get up, I followed them and we boarded the plane for London.

Arriving at Heathrow Airport, I did not know what to do next. I followed the crowd. Soon we were gathered at a spot with what appeared to me as moving “platforms”, turning round and round. I saw a whole lot of suitcases on the move and people were identifying theirs. I looked for mine till it came round. I grabbed it. I asked the nearest person what we were to do next. I was told to follow “**EXIT**”.

Outside there were crowds of people waiting for their relatives, friends etc. There was no DMJ in sight! I put my suitcase in some corner and waited eagerly to see the sister or sisters who had come to meet me. I had been assured there would be someone. After what seemed to me was a long time, I saw these two sisters who had been standing in one spot for a long time; eyes searching all the arrivals. But they “were not my DMJ”. These were dressed in **a black habit but with a blue scapula**. Those in Uganda were always in White but they too had a blue scapula! Would they be like “Cousins”? With this in mind, I went over to them and asked if they knew of sisters in Uganda who dress almost like them. One of them called Sister Eileen Davy almost screamed: “**Are you Josephine?** “**Yes**” I said, with tears in my eyes.

She hugged me with her own eyes wet. The other sister was Sister Mary Michael (Josephine Whiteside.) We drove to Forest Hill, where we were greeted to a very good Breakfast and then I was sent to bed to get over the Jet-lag before beginning the Postulancy programme.

If you need to know what happened later on in my life, please contact...

Josephine Kashemeire Beebwa

