

Talking with the Women

In Rwanda, Congo, Burundi, Uganda

Nov-Dec. 2014.



Cindy Garris

Day 1-5

Charlottein Kigali, Rwanda with Isaiah.

Forty women attended this meeting. Charlotte is a pastor's wife, who moved to Rwanda from Kenya in March 2014. The Lord dealt with them to move to Rwanda permanently and minister with a specific church here. They sold everything and left their 9- & 10-year-old girls with Charlotte's mom to finish out the school term in Kenya. She was 6 months pregnant when she arrived and she didn't speak the Rwanda language. Friends in Kenya thought she and her husband were crazy for moving but she told them God's plans do not always make sense to us.

I was impressed by her testimony for many reasons. Here is a native African Christian moving to a different African country to minister to other African women. I think Americans tend to think of Africa as a whole unit when actually there are many countries with many cultures, tribes, and languages per country. Charlotte wanted to encourage the women in this meeting to listen to the Lord. When He deals with you to do something different, He always gives you what you need to prosper. Prosper can mean spiritual, financial, and many other things. He will bless your endeavors even if it is a struggle or hard work to make a move like this successful. She made friends, found help and gave help, and backed up her husband while he ministered in this new country. And God gave her a translator while she was in labor and delivery. Yes--they do have their babies in hospitals and clinics! (I asked!)

Charlotte also felt like the Lord hears women's prayers faster because their hearts are softer! She said she felt that way especially when she was pregnant. You never know what kind of servant of God you are carrying close to your heart. They did say in general, they think American women don't have problems. I asked them why on earth they would think that! Everybody has problems. And if you are saved, Satan is going to attack you because he wants you to go to hell.



The women are always excited and thrilled by the end of their meeting when Dale shows up for the evening revival service. He asked if I knew why the women's meetings go so well. I am not sure especially since they don't always talk or open up like Charlotte. I think when we all realize whether we are Rwandan, Kenyan, or American, our hearts want the same things: love, security, etc. We find a common bond

regardless of our circumstances. When we are born again of the Spirit, the bond with the Lord connects us even more. How we read His Word and how He helps us overcome, and how we seek Godly counsel makes all the difference in the world. I can't imagine what kind of life I would have without Jesus. So maybe that is why these meetings seem so good to these women? I don't know, but I always hope (wonder) if I make a difference and a lasting effect.

Day 6:

The ride from Kigali to Bukavu, Burundi.

It's usually little kids in the backseat asking this question. But it was me in the backseat asking this last night. How much farther? Are we there yet?

Our ride from Kigali, Rwanda to Bukavu, Congo, should have only taken 3 ½ to 4 hours. But with one mistake at the beginning of the trip, and a series of other unfortunate events (or comedy of errors-whichever you prefer), our ride took 12 hours. And we didn't even make it to Bukavu. Our host (Isaiah) has a taxi driver that he uses, and he arranged our ride. But he misunderstood where we were going and told his driver to go to the border of Goma, Congo, instead of the border at Bukavu. Two hours into the ride, Dale noticed some traffic signs and realized we were going north instead of south. We told the driver (even before we left the hotel) we were going to Bukavu, but all he understood was to take the Americans to the border at Goma. Ahhh, here we are in Goma. Our interpreter and contact people at the church are calling us from Bukavu wondering where we are. They are ready to pick us up. You are in Goma? What are you doing there?

The driver (who speaks very little English) didn't want to drive us to Bukavu, but he did. How long to get there from Goma? About 4 hours. Ok, not a problem. We will pay you more money to take us there. So begins the adventure! Wrong city, language barrier, road conditions, serious speed bumps, "S" curves up and down the mountain, no network connection to communicate, phone time running out, battery running low, no bathroom facilities (for me), and more. Four hours later—how much farther? ANOTHER 3 hours, really?! The border closes at 6 PM, so what do we do now?

At 6 PM, it's already dark. I don't handle the night darkness well, especially traveling forever on miles and miles of "S" curves, through the National Gorilla Forest, with some good roads, but lots of construction and gravel roads halfway through the forest. I thought, is this ever going to end? I made sure not to drink anything before we left at 10 AM, but now it is 7 PM. NO civilization; NO lights except oncoming cars and trucks. NO anything! I hung in until about 9 PM, then little tears started running down my face. Dale knew but he didn't want to press the issue.

I started praying for light in the darkness. I started praying for our driver. Dale asked if he was tired; Bosco said, “No! I am strong!” (I thought, OKAY for you.) I started praying very specific requests—a place for me, a hotel, any village or town with lights, get off this road, find a traffic sign with information, good phone connection, someone who speaks English!

At last, the communication picked up between our interpreter (Etienne) and our driver (Bosco). Etienne called us about every hour checking our progress. Evidence of life started showing up after we finally got out of the forest. People in Bukavu were looking for a hotel for us so we could spend the night somewhere close and then finish the trip. Etienne found someone to meet us in Cyangugu at 10 PM, make arrangements at the hotel, and pick us up in the morning. We paid Bosco for his room and the extra driving time and headed for a hot shower and our room.

The next morning, we had a thankful prayer hour! When Dale looked up our route, we discovered Bosco missed the turn for the direct road from Goma to Bukavu and that took us the long way through the gorilla forest. Ahh—just part of the adventure.

Here are the scriptures that helped: Psalm 112:4; Psalm 119:105; Isaiah 42:16; and John 8:12. Even though I could see no light at the end of the road, He brought His Word to me in the darkness and now I have a story to tell!

Days 7-10:

Three Day Conference in Bukavu, Congo

There was time for questions and answers which really turned up the intensity of the meetings. Lots of questions were good ones, but there were a couple directed at me. You have heard me talk about the dress code—this was in full force for these men. I had a hard time with some of this stuff because there are scriptures to back up a couple of things these men asked. This time it was women wearing make-up. (At a meeting in the spring with this same denomination, the question involved the head covering, the trousers, and the submission to men thing.) The second day when another pastor asked Dale about women wearing make-up, Dale said (I love him for this!): Good God Almighty! What is wrong with you men? People are living and dying in sin, and going to hell out there on the street and you are worried about a woman in the church wearing makeup?

Day 11 & 12: ***Mirielle at Chai Church, Bukavu, Congo***

Mireille was my translator for this woman's meeting; I met her last spring at the young married women's meeting in Penuel Church. The women at this church meet Monday from 7 AM to 9 AM for prayer and also Wednesday from 7 AM to 9 AM for Bible reading. Unfortunately for all of us, some breakdown of communication happened and I showed up at 9 AM on Wednesday and they didn't even know I was coming!

They were almost finished and a few of them were preparing to travel to Goma (yep! That famous ride) for a women's conference so we didn't have a lot of time together. We had 30 minutes to talk and we hit the high points: giving my testimony, reading and praying together which they obviously did, having a solid



group of women for support and encouragement. Not much, but Mireille has emailed me every week since we left!

Day 13 & 14: ***Bukavu, Congo. Yvette***

I talked to Yvette the last day of this Congo conference. I also met her in the spring at Penuel Church. She has been married for two years and they do not have a baby yet. She does not have a job either. I remember Diana (Noah's wife) telling me pressure is applied after you have been married a while and do not get pregnant. The same was happening to Yvette. Two years is a very long time to not have a baby.

I don't know which family members and friends had started pressuring Yvette, but she was obviously distraught. We prayed. I didn't really have any answers for her. God is the giver of life; who are we to say when He should give it? But that didn't make Yvette feel better. Michel, our host, says that is another attitude they are praying to change. A woman is considered cursed or worse if she doesn't produce a child in pretty short order.

Women have few job opportunities and choices. If they have the opportunity for an education, they can be school teachers, secretaries, office workers, typists, etc. Restaurants and hotels hire women who have attended colleges of hospitality. Mireille took 5 years of language at the University in Bukavu and she speaks four languages fluently. She is employed for Humanitarian Services (not sure what all that means!). She took off work that morning to translate for me. Our taxi driver waited for us since our meeting was so short. Mireille rode back to the church with me so I could join Dale. Then—in her fancy African dress—she hopped on a motorbike and went to work! I am wondering in Yvette’s particular situation as a young pastor’s wife, what can she do to earn money? Are there restrictions for her? This CEPAC group is so stringent; there are probably things she cannot do. I wonder what the women in Burundi face? I will find out soon enough!

Day 18: ***Sandra at Gitegi and Burundi***

Sandra was my translator here. Pastor Lambert pressed her into translating as “her service to the Lord.” When I found out she was my interpreter, I was a little concerned. Her English was OK, but I really wanted someone who was more fluid than her. I am glad that I didn’t push to get someone else because God had it all worked out. There was another woman in the group who would help her out when she got stuck. Now she feels confident that she faced this challenge and conquered her fears. She is ready to try it again with someone else.



At the women’s meeting, we talked about the usual things—reading and praying with each other in small groups, older women mentoring younger women, and praying for unsaved souls. They felt that American women have no problems, and life is always rich and good. True, we have no wars on our land, no extreme poverty, and more freedom for women, but we still have needs that are important and need prayer.

Approximately 80 women were there. I have found that if I make eye contact with each one, acknowledge them individually in some way that they feel special. They think I am coming to preach, but they find out I am a regular person just like them. It seems each meeting ends up about the same—we are friends.

Sandra's husband, Anthony, is Italian! He has lived all over the world, moved to Burundi 10 years ago, and is a peacekeeper for the UN. They have been married for about 7 years. He has children by a previous marriage—some are grown but he has Samuel who is 11, and they have Suzanna who is 5. Remember the "Jungle Book" movie? Suzanna wrinkles her nose just like Mowgli did! Suzanna is not afraid to try or do anything and is not afraid to ask any questions. She noticed the hair on Dale's arms (my daddy has hair like that!), and asked about my freckles. Anthony and Sandra had us to their house for dinner twice and drove us to the airport Sunday evening.

When Sandra goes to the local market, they know she is the wife of a white man so they wonder if she will talk to them. But she witnesses to them, tells them her testimony, and brings them to church to get saved. The Lord showed her one time that she will work with a white woman in the future and help the women in her country! The Lord also used her to pray for 2 women, one who had cancer, and they got healed!

One more fun thing: we went fabric shopping the day after the first service. The woman that I bought the fabric from was at the service! I couldn't find her the next day when I went to buy more fabric. Everyone wanted to charge me twice as much as she did. She was at the women's meeting and I was so happy to see her there! We joked and laughed and I asked her to bring me another 6 yards and I would pay her. Any color, any print—just more fabric, please! I had my money and a thank you note ready for her after Sunday services. She brought me 6 more yards as a gift—no charge!



Day 19: Sunday night.

It was time to drive back to Bujumbura from Gitegi and fly to Kigali, Rwanda to spend a week with Emmanuel Noah's brother.

Anthony, Sandra, and Suzanna drove us the 3-hour ride to the airport. Another couple from the Gitegi church met us at the airport to say goodbye. AMAZING! What a huge blessing this church and its people were for us. It was on this ride that I started making notes of all the different signs, slogans, and observations to write the trivia emails.

Day 20-Day 23: with Emmanuel at Kiramurzi and Kabarondo, Rwanda

We visited two village churches that were a 2-hour drive one way from Kigali. There was no time to have any woman's meeting at either place. Dale had to condense the messages for these churches because only 2 services were scheduled. He usually asks me to say a few words; I keep it pretty short. The bishop of Kabarondo asked me to come back Sunday to have my own women's meeting! I looked at Dale and Emma and said: I can't. We are already scheduled for another church in Kigali. He asked again—I honestly didn't know what to say! Sorry, but no.

On the ride back to Kigali, Dale was laughing so hard. He told Emma there was no way I would travel 2 hours away when he would be at another church. And who was going to translate since Emma was doing it for both of us! Poor Emma—he really wanted to please everybody and just didn't understand why I wouldn't do it.



Day 24:

Travels with Emmanuel and Rwanda Trivia

Rwanda is incredibly beautiful: *The Land of a Thousand Hills* with tea fields and sugar cane as far as you can see. There are miles and miles of highway in the mountains, with tea fields and walking paths. People are scattered everywhere digging, bagging, and sorting tea. They all have a special basket on their back, and some have a hoe or shovel over their shoulders. Where do they come from? How do they get there?

One pretty cool thing that I haven't seen anywhere else: very tall trees with what looks like a woven bamboo mat (actually papyrus) all rolled up and tied way up in the tree. Emma said these are beehives! I don't know who puts them up there and how they harvest the honey, but they are spaced about 3 trees apart on the edges of the tea fields.

Bicycles and motorbikes: Everywhere, in the city and villages, and in every country. They carry people and transport goods. *One bicycle can carry:* 10 Jeri cans (yellow 5-gallon plastic jugs) water or cooking oil, 40 + pineapples, two mattresses rolled up and tied on the back tire, a huge stack of wood, a wooden door. And 2 or more people! On several roads, guys would be riding a bicycle and hanging onto the fender of a truck riding up the steep mountain road getting a "free" ride. They would also do the same coming down—and that is scary because these are steep, curvy roads. *One motorcycle can carry:* a wooden bed frame, 3-5 people plus the driver, crates of produce, 3 sacks of charcoal, on and on.

PAY ME MY MONEY: We stopped at a market to get some water and use the public restrooms. The next day we stopped again at the same place, and a girl ran up to Dale demanding him to give her "her" money! Dale: What are you talking about? (He's thinking to himself: you want all my money? You are brave or foolish; I am twice as big as you.) Girl: You owe me money! You owe me 100 shillings. Dale: For What? Girl: You must pay to use the toilet. Give me my money! Emma: Dale, didn't you know you must pay? Didn't you pay yesterday? Dale: No, I didn't know. Here is your money! (We all had a good laugh in the car on the way to the church. 100 Rwanda shillings are about 15 cents.)

SUNBURN: Emma: I hear white people get red skin if they are out in the sun too long. Is that true! Me: Yes—it's called sunburn. Emma: I have seen white people get red in the face when they are angry or upset too! Me: Yes—that's also true (maybe he was thinking about when Dale got mad at him about a couple of things?!). Me: Did you know that if your sunburn is really bad, that your skin peels off a few days later? Emma: WHAT! Your skin comes off? That is really weird!

LOVEBIRD: Most of the time in these long drives, Dale is taking a nap. Emma and Pastor Miriam are chattering away practically non-stop. When Dale and I did talk, we would start poking

and laughing at each other. When we saw the guy walking down the street with a bright yellow t-shirt that said: MY FEET HURT! In big black letters; we couldn't stop laughing. Everyone walks everywhere! Emma says: What are you 2 lovebirds laughing about now? Dale: What does that mean: lovebirds? We aren't doing anything. Emma: You are always laughing and having fun with each other. Dale: Should we pray for you to find a wife, Emma? Emma: WHAT? NO. No. What are you saying to me anyway?

Day 28:

Lakeview Resort Hotel, Mbarara, Uganda

I am looking outside my hotel window at the big lawn, papyrus, trees, and lake at the hotel. I woke up to hear one of the gardeners running the weed-eater. That's how they "mow" the lawn at this hotel. I also see two women sweeping the grass cuttings into little piles to bag it up and use it for mulch somewhere. At least they are using the straw brooms that have long handles and not the short handles where they always bend over from their waist to sweep parking lots. It drives me crazy!

The lake has papyrus in it. It is tall with a big puff at the top. It makes me think of a giant green dandelion going to seed! It also reminds me of Dr. Seuss's books! Basket-weaver birds have a colony in a tree beside the lake. They are bright yellow, green, and blackbirds that weave their nests so they look like an upside-down basket! They flutter their wings and dance for the females to come to their nest. They steal grass and weavings from the other male's nests when they want the same female bird! These birds are noisy and constantly flying to the papyrus to bring long skinny grass to weave and knot around a tree twig to build their nest. Amazing to watch! No evolution in this design!

Day 29:

Esther Kamanzi's testimony

I met Esther on a previous trip. While we were at Lakeview Resort, I heard more of her testimony.

Esther is an orphan from Rwanda. When her parents were killed in the genocide, she was "adopted" by a man and his wife who raised her and gave her an education. She was protected by God and fortunate to have someone raise her as their own child. She has done many different things to educate herself; one is attending the College of Hospitality. She traveled back to Rwanda to see if any of her family was still alive and contacted a sister and an uncle. The uncle tried to trick her and she was almost sold into a false marriage so her uncle could gain the cows from her

dowry. Something got delayed and while she was waiting in a house for her uncle to return, a neighbor warned her and told her to run and hide. She spent the night hiding in bushes and worked her way back to Uganda to get away.

She met Jennifer, a Christian woman from the UK, who mentored her and prayed with her about her past tragedies. When Esther met David in Uganda, they became friends. Three years later he asked her to marry him, but she was afraid and bitter. Jennifer helped her through that, and she and David had a simple ceremony. Her uncle died a short time after her wedding to David, but she refused to go to the burial because she hated him so much.

David and Esther have been married for 5 years. Now they have 3 boys of their own, several orphans, and a happy marriage! David already was caring for 7 orphan boys when she met him. I think I would have been hesitant also!

When Dale came to Rwanda and Uganda a few years ago, he preached the revival message. But he found there needed to be healing and forgiveness in people's hearts concerning the Rwandan genocide. Esther and David had been married about one year, and through this message, Esther's heart began to heal. She and David teach all the young people in their care how to be a family, make a living, and the Bible. David also pastors a church in a different area of Mbarara, and Esther teaches different classes and sells jewelry to help support themselves.

Day 29:

Picture Day and Banana Plantation Church

This morning is specifically to take pictures of the Home of Hope children. We talked about what to call them—not orphans anymore. Finally decided that they are a family so it is the HOH family or kids!

Now—driving time again! I thought the afternoon church service was in Mbarara, but it was “not too far away”. I don't even know the name of the place, but once we got off the main highway, we drove on a good dirt road, then a rough dirt road, then a bumpy dirt path. Dale asked Noah: where ARE we going? We are inside a banana plantation!

Dale took pictures—banana trees as far as you could see. Little houses, people with banana bunches on their bikes, a few cows, and



lots of goats tethered to trees. Noah turned the car around a couple of times and we asked him if he knew where he was going! Some little kids saw us and yelled at Noah: “Pastor, pastor. Church is this way! Follow us!” They ran in front of the car because we were going so slowly on this bumpy goat path. They took us to a mud building (hard as rock) with no doors or windows—just open spaces. I am not sure how many fit in that small building, but it was packed. A bamboo mat was on the floor with some wooden benches and some old upholstered chairs for the pastors in the front! The Spirit flowed all around. One animal hide drum, a few singers and dancers, and a happy congregation ready for a revival message! What a day.



Day 31:

Bushenyi-Butare, Uganda with Peter

It is so funny when the men realize they are not invited to the women’s meetings! They simply are not used to that. Even Dale has only been to one meeting. Sometimes there is no woman who speaks English, so Noah or one of his brothers has been there to translate for me. Peter had all the men go outside to a covered area near the church. Poor Dale—he was not prepared to talk, but he did. I think they basically just had a question and answer session. We just never know what is going to happen. I have a basic format and then I wait to see what direction our conversations take from there. I give my testimony, talk about the importance of reading the Bible with each other and holding each other up in prayer. I tell them how strong they are and how much I respect them. Then I wait to see if anyone will give me their testimony. They were quiet, so I went through the group and just did random picks—they loved that! I handed them the microphone and said: ‘What is your name?’ I would shake their hand, repeat it, and then make them say my name. “How long have you been saved?” “What do you want to do for God?” Giving them three basic questions controlled the length of time they talked and gave more women a chance to be acknowledged and recognized. I tease, joke around, and just make friends with them. Some of the stuff they tell me truly takes me by surprise.

I had two women translating: Pastor Eliva and Deborah—the youngest Kamanzi daughter. It was like a family reunion at Peter’s church! Deborah is 21. I handed the front row 2 notebooks and they wrote their names and their children’s names down. I told them I would bring their names back and we would pray for them. (This also gave me a count of how many women were there. I wish I had thought of this at the other places.)

I asked them questions about courtship, dowries, and wedding customs. I found out some interesting stuff...not just from them, but asking Noah questions on the way to the airport a few days later. I was a little off-balance to begin with, but I had another meeting with the same women the next day. I wasn't sure how I was going to fill up another hour the next day. I shouldn't have worried! It all worked out.



Day 32:

Elivaat Butare 2nd Day

Most African women, no matter what country, are treated as second class people. The Lord showed me they needed to see that they were important to Him just because of who they were. I read a book called [12 Extraordinary Women](#) and Mary Magdalen is the one who I have used several times when speaking to these women.

Even though she is mentioned only a few times in the gospels, Jesus acknowledged her publically because she truly worshipped Him. She had 7 demons cast out of her! She ministered to him as He traveled through the countryside. She stayed at the cross and watched where His body was taken to be buried. She prepared spices and returned to anoint him properly. How did He honor her during her lifetime and how did He honor her in the Bible? She was the first person He talked to after He rose from the dead! These women never realized Jesus spoke to Mary Magdalene first--even before His apostles.

On the 2nd day with this group of women, I asked who had read their Bible that day. Out of 200 women, only a few raised their hands. Mary Magdalen was their example again. Why did Mary follow Jesus everywhere? So she could hear His words and teachings. She felt the power and authority and the life in His words. Mary had to remember everything He said. God has given us His Word, the Bible, so we can read it and study it anytime we want to. Who knows if she could even read? Do we not feel the need to have Jesus' words in front of us every day? Don't we think it is important to read every day so we can have Jesus talk to us? They promised they would read more from now on! This was the service where people came to the altar and prayed like I have never seen or felt before. I can't even describe it. Heart-rending? Dale, Noah, Peter, and I went through the crowd and just prayed and touched everyone. Pastor Eliva—my translator—was on her face before the pulpit praying and crying so hard, I just sat down next to her and prayed along with her. I squeezed in and out of the people and touched different women and prayed holding their hands. A couple of women who were so stoic and deadpan during our meetings pulled my hands over to them so I could touch them and pray at the altar with them. That surprised me because I just never know what some of them are thinking.

Day 35 & 36:

Katie and MiriamatKigondo

We are back at the Cielo Country Inn in Ishaka-Bushenyi. The next 2 days will be at a “church plant” of Peter's. This is another church in the middle of a banana plantation! What is interesting is: this was not the original church we were scheduled for. A bridge that we had to cross collapsed on Sunday and was not able to be repaired by Tuesday. I don't know what kind of bridge or why it collapsed. Maybe because it is the rainy season and things get muddy and soggy? Whatever the reason, I am glad it happened before we crossed it and not during or after it collapsed!

Now I know what the mud-brick homes look like inside. The front room is about 8 ft. x 8 ft. They have a small coffee table with 6 blue plastic chairs surrounding it. A calendar was nailed to the wall. There was a wooden door with a very large sliding lock on it. A set of wooden shelves was home to their eating utensils and food supply. This had a fabric curtain covering it. An open doorway with another fabric curtain separated this front room from the rest of the house. They cook outside over an open fire with a pot and pan. Katie served us something different at each meal: some boiled chicken or goat meat in a red broth, rice, potatoes, and the cooked banana dish. Fruit: pineapple, oranges, and fresh bananas. They put a plastic tub on the floor, give you a bar of soap, and pour warm water from a pitcher over your hands so you can wash before and after your meal. This is Katie's (the pastor's wife) home.

There were 72 women at this meeting; 50 directly from that church, and the others from Peter's main church in town or others who just walked from the houses around the area. Some came from 2-6 miles away. Pretty good attendance considering this was not the original church we were scheduled for!

These women were not shy at all! I gave my testimony, passed the notebook around for them to write their names, and then called on several of them to give their testimony. Miriam was my translator. She was from Peter's main church; 21 years old and had never done this before. She was nervous but she picked up the flow right away.

I told them how strong they were—walking, carrying things on their heads with their babies on their backs! I tried to walk with my Bible on my head but it slipped off. They all laughed.

I would pick someone from the crowd and hand her the microphone. One woman had been saved 4 years—the Lord healed her from being crazy—(her words). Another woman had been saved for 7 years; she was deaf and couldn't see very well. The Lord healed her when she got saved. Three others got up and told me their name, how long they have been saved, and what they wanted to do for God. When I asked for prayer requests, most of them named a husband or family member to either get saved or be deeper in the Lord.

They all agreed that they felt on a personal level that they, and women in general, were special to God. Women could be important to themselves and God as a person. They work hard but don't appear as downtrodden as the women in the Congo. We talked about how they needed to pray for the Congo women. They said they knew American women have problems and even if they are not the same as their issues, that we all needed prayer and answers from God. Then they asked how they could pray for me!

Only 5 women had Bibles. I told them the ones who had Bibles had a responsibility to read with the ones who don't: even Proverbs and Psalms would bind them together as a unit and make them stronger. Pass the Bible around the group and give everyone a chance to hold the Word in their hands and see it with their eyes. God will honor their effort and give them grace, power, and strength. Maybe by seeing their efforts, He will work it out to get them more Bibles! Bibles cost \$8.00 which is about 21,000 shillings. For some of them, that is one week's pay. We purchased 18 Bibles for this 2nd banana plantation church as



well as the church that Noah took us to. Pastor Emmanuel assured us he would prayerfully distribute these. Sometimes when a Bible or anything free is given away, there are hurt feelings if there is not enough to go around.

At the final church service, Pastor Emmanuel put his arm around his wife Katie and told the congregation how he appreciated her and how God had blessed him. That was really special. Men generally don't publicly praise their wives, and all the women clapped for them! When Peter asked for the church tithe, he also said for them to pray and whatever they were able to give, bring to the servants of God. Many people came up to me and Dale and pressed coins into our hands. When we got back to the hotel, the total was about \$5.00. My translator gave me a 2000 shilling note. That is about \$.75.



Day 37: Ladies of Hope Meeting

It has taken almost two weeks of being in Mbarara before I finally got to see some of the Ladies. Noah said now they call themselves the Women of Peace!

Twenty-two women were able to come. I knew there would not be a lot because they have either moved to a different area or have a job! I saw some of them at two different markets—several at the sewing booth and a few more at the hairdressing salon. I am pretty excited about both places. They are sharing the rental cost and space with another business that sews school uniforms. They have very tight quarters, but they are doing well. Fabric is hanging on the walls, zippers and threads are on display, and all the machines were humming! They are now sewing custom clothes and dresses too.

The hair salon was in a row with 3 others, but all of them had customers. It takes 6 months to learn the different ways to weave their hair; some of them take another 6 months of training and will be able to do anything when they are done. The LOH had two customers who were having their hair done while they were sitting on the floor as I talked to them. The cost of that particular style was about \$12.00. I told them it would cost about \$60.00 in my town. This is where Annette comes during the day.

I heard about Grace: she was a “madam” for some of these girls. Former clients were angry with her and she had to move out of her house and stay at the church for a while. Noah has security at the church and school and they reported men were starting to harass her there as well. She has now relocated to another village but is doing well there.

When we met at the church, I told them how proud we all were of their accomplishments. They still have their Tuesday and Thursday worship time together thanks to Ruth and Diana. We talked a long time about lots of things: The prayer requests for women in the other countries—the Congo women under the CEPAC hierarchy; the Kigondo women who have no Bibles, and the LOH women in Texas as well. We talked about the possibility that Dale and I have finished the mission in Africa and that we might not return. It was pretty intense, and we all prayed at the end. It was hard to say goodbye.

Day 38:

Riding to Kampala—Noah Explains about Wedding Customs

All the women I talked to were surprised that American men don't have to pay a dowry. Because the bride's family is losing a worker, the men have to pay for her! I was surprised that their dowry requirements are so high....5 cows at least. If you are a pastor or a government official, then the dowry is higher. If a cow costs \$400.00, where do they get the money? And what do they do with all the cows? This was the group at the Butare church--they thought my surprise was hysterical.

Noah said the groom and his parents have to start saving a long time. He can ask the bride to marry him before he talks to her parents, but he must still approach them and make a proposal. The pastor makes an announcement in the church to see if anyone opposes the contract. Then you open the wedding invitation to practically the whole village! People are supposed to help bring food if they come. They use one or two cows to kill and eat for the banquet and they might sell another cow to help pay for everything else. They do have a wedding cake along with the prepared meal. It only takes two months from the official announcement to the actual ceremony. The bride rents a bridal gown (which the groom pays for); they rent tents

and streamers, and a photographer. I have seen booths in the marketplace that advertise this as a package deal. Cops are out directing the whole affair. If you don't make a grand display, then it is a shame to the groom that he cannot provide for his wife.



I am not sure how women in the cities go through their betrothals. But after watching the wedding parties at the Sheraton Hotel, I am certain that 5 cows are not the dowry requirement! Policemen stop traffic to direct the limousines and all the cars in the procession. The men wear tuxedos, the women all have on long, beautiful dresses with fancy hairdos, and there are little girls carrying flowers. A photographer is posing everyone and photographing them at strategic areas. I counted 7 different wedding parties having their reception on the hotel grounds. If you have money, the Sheraton Hotel is obviously the place!

Day 38, 39, and 40: Travel to Kampala and then fly home.

This trip is completed. Four countries, 10 churches, 35 services, and 9 women's meetings! It is a 4-hour drive to Kampala from Mbarara, so we booked a room at the Sheraton and got there on Friday afternoon. Our flight home was scheduled for 11:30 PM Saturday night. Noah drove halfway there and another driver took us through the city. Diana and a friend left Thursday night on the bus so she could meet us there and spend one last afternoon together. We passed huge fields of papyrus, sweet potatoes, and carrots. We followed a cattle truck crammed with the long-horned Ugandan cattle going to the slaughterhouse. Six or seven guys are riding on top of the cage just laughing and talking. I watched all the little village markets for more crazy signs and logos.

We crossed the equator line and had Noah take our picture. That was pretty cool. We ate a quick bite at the café, and I watched a TV cooking show. The woman was outside cooking in her black cooking pot over an open fire! I couldn't understand what she was saying, but she was demonstrating the way she dried the cassava roots and how she made and bagged the flour. Too funny! The café had t-shirts for sale that said "Keep Calm. You are at the Ugandan Equator!"

When we came into the city, a skinny black Santa was selling red, green & white striped umbrellas in the middle of the street. They were the little kind that has short handles; he was twirling them around walking in between the cars saying, “Ho, Ho, Ho! Merry Christmas!” As we walked into the Sheraton Hotel lobby, I said, “Oh my gosh! It’s Christmas.” A tall Christmas tree was fully decorated with lights and ornaments and wrapped packages underneath. Garlands and wreaths decorated the desk and English Christmas music was playing in the background. I felt like I was in the United States! The receptionist looked at me funny, and I said: “I have been in a banana plantation for the past 2 weeks. I forgot it was December!”









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