

BLACKIEONAMISSION

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We had visitors...

My friend Amber, whom I started school with when we were five - ooh about 20 years or so ago (ha) came to visit me in early February. The lead up to her visit was just as exciting as seeing her walk through the doors of Kigali airport. When she first said she was coming it was just going to be me - then a certain baby came along and bless Amber, she organised a baby shower and travelled across with a suitcase filled with everything for 'Flora'. I also worked with Amber for 13 years and so with her help we were able to guide the teachers into making their learning centres at the school.



In the same week we had Sam and Catrin (originally from Sydney) visit us from Dubai. They too, brought 60kg of 'baby things', including a high chair and play mat. So this girl who started life with a sad tragic story is now living the life of privilege - lucky her. Sam is an ophthalmologist and gave some diagnosis's for children in the school.

What I noticed about everything these two lovelies brought over was how clean and new and fresh everything was - nothing was layered in red dirt!



It's been a long time coming...

There is something about popping in for two weeks on a mission trip and going home satisfied, but it's another thing altogether to have a nine year relationship with the Teachers at Fruits of Hope. Yes, it has taken nine years for them to change their thinking from 'rote learning' to 'learning through play'. We have also been working on this concept since I arrived in August and I have met with the nursery teachers regularly, and talked about what it would look like and how they could achieve it. Well, in the middle of February, everything we had discussed was brought into reality. To the untrained eye, clipping coloured pegs onto a basket may seem like a meaningless task. To the early childhood educator they can see that the children are learning, fine motor skills, colour recognition, matching, sequence, patterns, co-learning with their friend, socialisation and so the list goes on and on. About three weeks later one of the teachers said to me, "Michele, the learning centres are wonderful, the children in my class have stopped crying because they look forward to playing". A girl can't ask for more than that now can she? Fred's vision is for Fruits of Hope to be a model school - I think we are on our way!





Yes Valentine's came to Rwanda!



- NO - I'm not going to tell you who they were from that would spoil the intrigue!



She's healthy and strong, and growing just the way she should be. She slept 13 1/2 hours last night, gotta be happy with that! She's had all her immunisations and she barely flinches when those needles go in. Lets just say she is thriving!

It was a comedy of errors...

So, I could write this story down in the long format but I am going to give you the abridged version. Driving a car over here is like - and yes I fear I may offend every snowboarder I know, but I feel, driving here is like snow skiing - on the mountain, as you ski, you have to be constantly aware of where the out of control snowboarders are at all times. Well when you drive over here it is the same with the jolly moto's - they are unpredictable and they come from nowhere!

So.....I live on probably the worst road in Rwanda and it is no mean feat just to drive to the tarred road - but alas - I have done it a few times. Today was the day Samantha and Catrin were leaving and we had a taxi picking them up for the airport at 1pm. As all good women know you shop till you drop and so we shopped for as long as we could, leaving the shops at 12:30pm. At 12:45pm as I drove over a speed hump, my car stalled, as I tried to start it again and move on - while I was still stationary, a rotten moto hit the side of the car, and with his foot pedal clipped the front bumper and literally peeled it off the front of the car. So in my best Kinyarwanda I get out of the car and try to sort it.....there is something about being the only white woman in a community. We were close to home and both of my most used taxi drivers came to my rescue, they were like having your big brother there to help you in time of need. Meanwhile the airport taxi driver is phoning saying he is at my house - just wait - I've had a car accident - what - should I come - no stay at the house - it's 12:53pm!

Like I say this is the abridged version - the car stalled another four times on the way home and when I took the last corner the steering wheel wouldn't turn so easily, so when it stalled for the fourth time - now after 1pm, I left it on the side of the road and told my guests you have to walk home! So we grabbed all the shopping and walked down the worst road in Rwanda. I phoned the owner of the the car and told him he needs to go and retrieve his car - I'm off to the airport!!!

As we drove to the airport - that's another whole story there - there were a few screams from the back seat, after we told the driver to go fast he tells us he would like to be a 'larry' driver (a rally driver), and well yes he was driving like a larry driver!





We invited the nursery teachers from Bugesera to join us for the afternoon as we trained the Fruits of Hope Teachers on learning centres. I have since seen footage of each teacher not only implementing the learning centres but also grasping the vision and philosophy behind why we would use them - this excites me greatly.

A visit to the Eastern Province...

It was my first time to visit the preschool in the Eastern Province that Fred is in charge of. It was certainly visiting a preschool at the grass roots, they literally have a classroom, some students, tables and chairs and a teacher! And that is it! They were a very remote community who didn't even have something as simple as a station for washing hands. It reminded me a lot of visiting Fruits of Hope back in 2007 and it gave me great joy to see how far Fruits of Hope have come. With the vision, calling and pure determination of their principal Fred Buyinza they now have quite the esteemed school community.



Because the Eastern Province is also closer to the Ugandan boarder than when we are in Kigali, we heard some stories along the way of the genocide. The area is located around a lake and during the genocide many bodies were placed into that lake. So as we sat and reflected about the school in a poor community and we drank soda and listened to stories of the genocide it certainly was quite the day - hence we went out to a restaurant called 'Heaven' for dinner!

Some funny t.shirts...

I have recently heard that Rwanda is going to stop all second hand clothes from the western world and only have shopping facilities available as a mall, not as markets. It's become quite the game to spot the funniest t.shirt over here, and some I can write and some I probably shouldn't! These are worn by both men and women and I always wonder if they know what they say! Some include...

'I make good babies'

'I like to fart'

'Smile if you're not wearing undies'

