

MY TWENTY-FOUR HOUR TRIP TO GERMANY

I left home for Idstein in Hessen, Germany on the 3rd of June 2017 at round 1pm together with my husband and my best friend Mama Monica. Being my first time to travel outside Uganda and the fact that I was to change the aircraft two times (in Nairobi, Kenya and Amsterdam, The Netherlands) before reaching my final destination Frankfurt, my husband was scared that maybe I would get lost. All this time my mind was racing through illusion and fantasy; my excitement was mixed with a lot of anxiety and all this time my husband was trying to assure me that all would be ok and the journey would be successful. At 7pm I was allowed to check in at Entebbe International Airport and that was the time I was left alone.

At Amsterdam International Airport I discovered that the plane to Frankfurt I was booked on had already left. I saw someone in a uniform and inquired what I should do next. He was kind enough to inform me that I should go to my airline's desk for the second booking. The greatest challenge was that most of the instructions were not written in English and I could not read other languages. As I wondered around the airport the *Angels* led me to right desk. The staff were apologetic and booked me on the next aircraft. We left Amsterdam airport at around 12:05. It took us 45 minutes to reach Frankfurt. I was received by Mr. and Mrs. Deinhardt who drove me to Wiesbaden. At this very moment all my senses were at a standstill and I couldn't believe that I made it to Frankfurt. The whole journey from Entebbe to Frankfurt was like a dream to me and I had to shake my head or pinch my body just to confirm I was not in a dream.

THE WARMEST WELCOME AT SCHOOL

I was treated to an honor welcome. Ululation and thrill filled the atmosphere of the school. Pupils and teachers struggled to take my photos. Pupils were seen climbing and peeping through the windows in the upstairs section of the buildings to get a glimpse of their Ugandan partner school head teacher. Salutations were made according to classes. Students of German intensive class 5th grade choir sang, Finn Schafer from 9bG read out a welcoming speech in English as Siddhart Jaggia moved around capturing the video.

MEETING PARTY REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF HESSE

I observed the highest degree of how democracy is instilled in the young minds. I was given a chance to observe how different party groups of Hessen freely interacted with the students through question and answer. Each party member presented the party's interest and left the learners to decide for themselves. I was moved by the sensitive and mature questions fronted by the learners ranging from climate change, employment, drug abuse, the issue of refugees and education.

EXPLAINING THE STUDENTS' SITUATION IN UGANDA TO PARENTS' REPRESENTATIVES

Both parents and children in Uganda and Kkindu in particular are well aware of the fact that education is the only way to improve the living conditions but in most cases this fact becomes an illusion to some families and majority of school going children especially girls.

People of Kkindu mainly rely on subsistence farming and small scale cash crop farming in coffee whose prices fluctuate on the world market. The parents have an overwhelming number of children (6-8) to cater for as school requirements are concerned. Both boys and girls walk long distances on either dusty or muddy roads depending on weather conditions. Education is free but the majority of these children stay on an empty stomach the whole day because the parents cannot afford lunch money of 76,000/=19 Euros. The majority of girls cannot afford the menstrual pads during menstruation; these girls keep at home for 4-5 days which makes them miss lessons. Due to these challenges girls become vulnerable. Men call girls on the way and lure them into sex by offering small amounts of money to them which results into early pregnancy that cuts their education life short.

Many parents do compromise girls' education because girls are looked at as a source of income through bride price. There are so many girls in Kkindu whose parents have no interest in their education. Such girls need a helping hand if the challenges in their journey of education have to be minimized. I explained to them that a sleeping house for the girls would play a major role in keeping girls from temptations met on the way to and from school.

STUDENT DISCIPLINE AT LIMESSCHULE

Students are well disciplined and have self control. They are well conversant with the regulations that guide them at school and observe them with or without the teachers' presence. For instance, they have mobile phones but you hardly notice a student on the phone during class time. They respect law and order.

THREE CHEERS TO GENEROUS HOSPITALITY

The young couple Mr. and Mrs. Schilling hosted me for five days. They made sure I never got any room for complaint. They did what ever it takes to make me happy. They arranged a barbecue and invited friends. It was all fun.

I was also given a chance to stay with a family of two members who were both men: Mr. Hoffs and his son Lucas, a student at Limeschule. I got to observe how father and son supported each other at home. They had machines to ease their work. Mr. Hoffs was always concerned about my well being and he would call to ask if there was anything that I needed so that he could buy it. I stayed with this family in the first four days of my visit and those are the days when everything seemed strange. They helped me to adjust to the new environment.

The deputy head teacher (Mrs Breuer) invited me to her home. We went to church together. We had lunch at a restaurant in Idstein with two of her daughters and then we went to her home for a dessert. Her husband was happy to meet me and he offered to show me around the Rhine area the following day but I already had a fixed program.

BENEFITS OF THE SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

I was told by students: "Before you visited us, the idea of the partnership had been unclear but now I have the interest and I will talk to my parents if they allow me I will visit Uganda".

People read about me in the press and children were talking about me at home.

In school, the pupils of the lower section could come and sit around me. They wanted to know more about how the students in the partner school who could not afford school uniform and lunch felt before their fellow students. They were saddened by my clarification.

I feel I helped some of the students and teachers in Limeschule to develop communication skills.

The students and teachers who initially looked timid became eloquent and comfortable with speaking English within the first week of my visit.

Several school functions were held during my visit and I noticed how students were involved in guiding the programs. I noticed that in such functions the teachers' participation becomes minimal and students do most of the activities. This approach is good because it raises students' self-esteem and I plan on doing the same at Kkindu.

My colleague and I together mapped out the dialogue projects for the two schools. We agreed to start a limes vegetable garden at St. mugagga Kkindu and vice versa. The St. mugaggas have already started on the project.