

Message 8- Dec 13-21. Uganda

On the 13rd of December, I travelled to Malava and arrived at Agneta's where many of her grandsons welcomed me. On the 14th, we met Roselyn Mutsami at Malava bus stand, and then travelled in a tortoise matatu(very slow one), and met Edith Wekesa and Catherine Wanyonyi in Chwele. We had invited Catherine, the USFW pastor of Chwele YM that borders Uganda to see if Chwele women could develop a sister relationship with Uganda YM. Edith's husband drove us to Lwakhakha where we walked across the border. We then took five pikis to Bukooyi Friends School. We ate a lunch we carried (peanut butter sandwiches and mango juice), while we waited for the Uganda women to arrive. They began coming after 5PM, it rained heavily, and others from western Uganda arrived after dark. We finally had supper at 9PM. To our surprise there were no latrines nearby (only ones of the school that were 3 football fields away!). We slept in a small windowless room in the rough brick building. They had recently smeared the floor smooth with cow dung, but covered it with a tarp. I was glad to have my air mattress, as we had five of us sharing 2 single mattresses on the floor as though we were sardines. None of us slept well.



The team with Rose Wamboka on right.



Catherine and Evelyn wait for food.

The conference really began the next morning in the Friends meetinghouse. The theme of the conference was Obedience. Mary Manana with Edith Wekesa's help led a session on repentance that challenged the Ugandan women. After the main speaker (Rose Wamboka), four talks were scheduled in a row for the afternoon including a session on Giving and Offeratory Management that I was asked to lead. I challenged them as the local women had come for the conference, but many did not pay the registration fee, yet expected food for the 4 days! We were all impressed with a young teenager from Mbale who stood up quickly and read in very clear English, any Bible verse that was used during the sessions. Then it poured heavy rain and we huddled away from the windows. That night, Evelyn Mukonambi came, and the two of us joined Sylvia Wopicho and her daughter in another room, so we all slept much better, though it was colder than normal (climate change). What a difference, a good night of sleep makes! . We enjoyed fresh bananas, and roasted peanuts (donated by the local church) for breakfast with the Ugandan style tea.



Edith preaching with interpreter. Rejoicing after sermon.



Pastors . Juliet and Rose preaching

On the 16th, we were glad that Rose gave Edith Wekesa a chance to be main speaker for the day, and she really spoke to the condition of the women. Instead of so many talks in the afternoon, we went outside and had walking races on the field followed by a jumping rope contest. They had several teams of Ugandan women who walked, a team of girls, and one of young boys. Then they wanted the Kenyans to race. We had been told to walk around the field, but as one started to go fast, a few of us did a mixture of running and walking, while Agneta only walked. She came in last, but they gave her first prize, as she was obedient to the instructions to just walk. The Ugandan women were experts in jumping rope. Benard, a young albino boy whom I had seen 8 years ago when he was around 4 years old, came and said he remembered my visit, when I had taught the women how to make a cake (that he had gotten a bite of). He then joined all the other youth in the area to help fetch us water.

On Friday, instead of many lectures, we divided all the women into groups. One was for married women only, one for widows, one for any men who were visiting, and I took the teens and singles to go help cut up the vegetables for lunch, so our meal could be served at a reasonable time. As I began cutting an onion, they said I was doing it differently, so I let them demonstrate how it is done in Uganda. They only gave us one knife, that was very dull with its handle falling off. When I asked if there were any sharper knives available, I was given a panga (machete), which we then used for chopping the cabbages and greens! Even Alfred Wasike, the General Secretary of the YM came and helped chop up the greens.



Racing Team from Kenya.



Two Uganda Friends cutting vegetables. Note the panga

On Saturday afternoon, while the women held a choir and a drama competition in multiple languages, the Kenyan pastors were asked to visit the original home of the Wefafwa family who had started Uganda Yearly Meeting. They gather each year around Christmas, and pray together for all the needs of the family. Numerous members of the multigenerational family are now preachers or leaders in churches (not just Friends). After the prayers we enjoyed a feast of vegetables, goat, chicken, rice, chapatis, and fruit—a big change from the usual meals of matoke (boiled bananas), and a mixture of beans and cabbages.



With Wefafwa family. Samuel, the eldest is in white shirt with black collar. Apollo, the youngest is on right.

On Sunday, we were surprised to be given a full sack of groundnuts (peanuts) to divide and take home along with some oranges. Since eating roasted groundnuts is commonly shared with relatives during Christmas holidays, it was much appreciated. Stephen Wamboga drove us to the Lwakhakha border. To our joy we found a young woman from Agneta's home village working as a security officer at the border. We went on pikis to Chwele, then matatus to our various homes. All reached safely home, but unfortunately, Roselyn a widow arrived home to find all her sukuma (kale like greens) had been stolen from her shamba (garden). Hunger and the high cost of food is causing an increase in theft, even from widows and children.

On Tuesday, 20 Dec. after a day of resting and washing clothes, I visited Miriam Were in her home in Bukura (near Mumias). Miriam was the first woman in Africa to be trained as a medical doctor, and she has received numerous awards as an expert in contagious diseases, such as malaria, Ebola, AIDS, and Covid. (AFSC had nominated her for the Nobel Peace prize recently). She is trying to get her autobiography printed. The first section on the book about the importance of her growing up as a Quaker child in Lirhandu in the presence of the earliest Friends here, should be of most interest to Friends in Kenya and the rest of the world. As a child, I found that reading about the childhoods of famous people, was inspiring and fascinating. Learning how those early Friends were well known for peace, for treating women ministers equal to men, and how elders supported but also lovingly corrected each other would be helpful to the Kenyan Friends today. I also enjoyed swapping stories with Humphrey, (Miriam's husband) who is a farmer like me.

On Wednesday, I went with Margaret Musalia to visit the home of Leonita Mugofwa. Leonita has travelled both to Uganda and Tanzania with me in the past, and she was a speaker at the USFWI Conference held in Iowa in 2016. Her daughter, Sue, just died of cancer in USA after

Leonita went to visit her. Since half the family is in Kenya and the other half in Texas, they hold a daily family prayer at 5am plus they have arranged the memorial service via Zoom.

My next message will be at the end of the year, after a Christmas visit of Connie Kincaid-Brown and Sussie Ndanyi (from Earlham School of Religion) followed by the African Pastors Conference in Mombasa.

In gratitude for all your messages and support.

Marian



Sitting on veranda with Humphrey and Miriam Were



Margaret and I with Leonita's husband and son