

Uganda Journal

I was merely part of a wonderful team headed by our Vicar, Dave Gardener. I can only write about my own experiences and while some of the memories might be shared: Dave, Mike and Sandra will have their own stories to tell. This is my story

Friday 16 March

It was an early morning start...02h45 at Drybridge Hill to meet with our gallant chauffeur, Rob Watson and his lovely wife Sandra, who was part of the mission team. We set off winding our way through the quiet lit streets of Woodbridge to collect Dave, the Vicar of St John's Woodbridge and then Mike.

The team was complete and we were on our way to Gatwick. The roads were clear and we made good time. "The Reverend" and I had little faith that our luggage would arrive in Entebbe so he bought the biggest green suitcase he could find and easily spot, which he further distinguished by a pale pink ribbon tied loosely to the handle. He says it was Karin's ☺...Our day packs were full of books and Bibles just in case we had meandering luggage.

Gatwick was a glad pit stop for us with refuelling and replenishing. Coffee and breakfast at Grafunkels. Mike restrained his desire for a full English breakfast and followed in Dave's strict Gillian Mckeith Footsteps...fruit salad and toast was the order of the day. I had a quiet chuckle...Mike's vices were soon to be exposed when the sophisticated Air Brussels stewardess presented him with a basket full of wrapped chocolates. I was nose buried in my Hello magazine, my flight indulgence, and couldn't help but notice the fistful of chocolates passing over my head. Needless to say, the airhostess missed me out!!

Brussels was quick, not much time except a frisk through customs and water purchases after having to relinquish two unopened bottles bought at Duty Free Gatwick. We were bound for Nairobi, which came as somewhat of a surprise but in retrospect a little taster of the unexpected we were going to have to embrace in the week that followed.

Mike and I enjoyed the opportunity to quaff a gin and tonic, myself justifying the indulgence for its quinine content. The flight was comfortable with suduko, crosswords, the writing of a sermon, a book on prophecy and the odd kip all part of the many hours we wiled away.

We had an extended stay in Nairobi due to a faulty catch on one of the luggage hold doors, it was amazing that something seemingly so small could delay the

whole departure but two hours later the announcement came from the Captain that we were ready to "push and start" we chuckled at the "push" as all we had heard throughout the two hours were drilling sounds and great thuds

We endured a severe thunderstorm over the mountain ranges between Kenya and Uganda so experienced a lot of turbulence but at about 00h30 we landed at Entebbe. It was pitch black and we had been warned that we would be escorted to what was described as a "temporary structure" once landed. All we could focus on were the thousands of flying insects, which we presumed to be mozzies, and the fact that we wanted to see our cases.

We did see one case, mine- a great relief, but alas, rotation after rotation of the belt saw very little more forthcoming...nothing until the belt ground to a splattering halt. Oh dear, One out of four. We questioned many officious looking people who assured us there were no more cases on the plane for Entebbe. I could see our team leader (The Rev) visibly sink into the floor, but in true Africa style despite the for- warning of lost luggage, a dear woman announced that there were more cases and amongst much jubilation and cheer the edge of the green case could be seen through the rubber curtain on which our eyes were fixed. Hoorah for that!!

Exhaustion and anticipation played dodgem cars with us all as we gathered our belongings and tunneled through various make shift over hangs only to be greeted by an overwhelming warm group of people from St John's, Kamwokya, who insisted on carrying anything we could give over. I will never forget the way in which Margaret ran into Sandra's arms -a meeting of a dear friend. They escorted us out of the darkened Entebbe airport into a Hi Ace van- an 8 seater. It was during our stay that we realised that "8- seater" was car manual theory only never to be adhered to in practical terms, the more the merrier really; it was the size of the people in the car that determined the numbers!

The dear people who met us: Margaret, Dina, Edith, Patrick, Edward broke into praise songs in their own language as we pressed our noses against the rain splattered panes trying to make some sense of the reality we were now in.. We whizzed down Kampala Road, the banks and stately buildings, passed boda boda's and late night shebeens, pedestrians, street markets and food stalls.

At home at last at Margaret's house where we were then welcomed officially by Edward and offered Ugandan tea, bananas and samoosa's, milo, apricot jam and bread. We shared what we could muster and then close to 03h00, crawled into our beds, tucked in our mosquito nets and turned out the lights...our first night in Kampala

Saturday 17 March

I remember waking this morning and the light was bright. I could see the azure blue sky through our meshed windows and I could hear the faint sound of a brass band amongst the morning courtyard noises of a hand broom sweeping the concrete floor and the rev of a motorcar engine.

By 09h00 in the morning the water pressure did not reach Margret's house so we washed using a plastic basin and jug. Dear Margret had a prepared flask of warm water to help us acclimatise but the cold was so refreshing and became somewhat comforting in the early heat.

I remember thinking that morning as I woke that an adventure lay before me. This was the day that the Lord had made let me rejoice and be glad in it. I was expectant. I remember so clearly the feeling of excitement and anticipation for what God had planned for the week.

Over the courtyard, Mike and Dave were braving a cold-water shave using the window reflection as a mirror until I bought out one of Margret's finest hand mirrors, which adorned our bedroom

Breakfast was at 10h00 upstairs in Margret and David's living room. The table was pregnant with food including some recognisable brands like Kelloggs Corn Flakes, Milo- a South African Malt drink, Nescafe coffee. The fruit juices were reminiscent for me to, Ceres again a South African brand and then the well-known Del Monte. There was fresh fruit, a gigantic pineapple which Sandra had the honour of cutting and mango, red skin peanuts, bread and honey or apricot jam. One could choose between sweet bread and sour bread.

It was at breakfast that we met David, the Vicar of St John's Kamwokya. He was recovering from malaria. Edward joined us for breakfast, as did Margret's husband, David. We looked at wedding photographs, talked about the Churches and the days programme and generally soaked up the atmosphere of a hospitable home in Uganda. I could not help but notice all the framed posters declaring God's promises amongst graduation photographs and numerous calendars and memorabilia. A visual feast against a cobalt blue wall.

We meandered down to the Church. It was the "clunk- clunk" of the heavy metal secret door that took us into the bustle of Tagore Crescent. A pot holed, red dust road lined with convenience stores: A hairdressers, a butchery and green grocer, and an mtn air- time kiosk. Then, a little further down the hill- a cluster of boda

boda biker boys, as I affectionately referred to them, gathered waiting for their custom.

The boda boda bike was a form of taxi- like a **moped**. They had a mini rank on the corner of Tagore crescent.

Along the road to the Church, we would pass bicycles carrying bundles of sugar cane 3 x the width of the handle bars, people carrying bagged peanuts in woven baskets balancing on their heads and then a familiar sweet seller who sat under the shade of an umbrella during the day.

We became familiar with these people and the hustle and bustle of street life as the days unfolded and as the walk to the Church became as familiar as our own neighbourhood street.

We entered through the iron gates at the Church. Before us was a traditionally shaped Anglican Church. It was built in red brick and stone- St John's Kamwokya. It was almost hard to believe we were standing outside a Church we had spoken so much about.

On a Saturday the Church becomes home to 283 children who are part of the Compassion project. These children are not orphans necessarily but are described as "the most needy" by David and Edith who run the Saturday group. They wear a uniform, which identifies them as part of the programme. They are taught life skills; they have their health and welfare assessed by staff on the programme. The children learn how to crochet and knit. They have Bible teaching and literacy. They are taught the basics about sexual abuse and Aids and offered liquid refreshment throughout the day and a hearty meal at lunchtime.

It was a true joy to be amongst these little ones. The delight in their faces as they received us, their visitors, is something I shall never forget. We spent time with them and gave the children a few things we had bought over- footballs, frisbee's, chalk for hopscotch, a skipping rope. It was a small contribution to such a big project but our hope was that the children would delight in the games and fun that can be generated from such things.

We entered the Church and sat on the wooden pews, which lay neatly on a stone floor. The simple cross facing me as I sat down was so powerful as was the plaque GOD IS LOVE, peeping out from behind the mission banner. 1 John 4vs 16

The mission banner printed onto white canvas in blue and red highlighted the verse for the week. One I shall never forget: Isaiah 45vs 22 "Turn to me and be saved" We sang with the people in the Church praise songs both in Lugandan and English often out of Mission Praise and we listened to a visiting preacher,

Christopher. On that afternoon there were no instruments just the harmonising of beautiful voices resonating through the Church

It was lunchtime at Margret's before an afternoon of intercessory prayer preparing us for the start of the mission. Matoke (steamed banana in banana leaves), cassava, peanut sauce, curried peas, beans, sweet potato and bananas and watermelon.

Intercessions in the Church- a time to focus our minds on God and the mission ahead. The worship was moving as were the earnest prayers offered to God. Sandra had prepared the intercessions and led us in them together with others from the Church. What struck me today was the way these beautiful people abandoned themselves before God in total surrender. Unashamedly showing their adoration for Almighty God. Their prayerful commitment and spontaneous worship and earnestness were enlightening to me.

How humbled and moved I was. I had come expectant and I felt God already move me in a way that was irreversible.

Towards evening our driver, David, drove us around parts of Kampala. We had the use of a 4x4 lent to us by World Shine ministries for the duration of our stay. We piled into the pick up with another dear lady, Canon Hellen Oneka. She was the head of the Mother's Union- a wife to Joseph, a mother of 5 and grandmother of 7. We met with her on many occasions during the week and each time she made a significant impression on me.

Thank God for David's discernment and expertise at negotiating Kampala's rush hour. Many a time there was but a hair width between the next mini bus and us. We drove past the consulate homes- stately and grand hidden behind great big metal fences and gates uninviting and austere.

Then into the city centre around roundabouts under construction with no traffic lights or road signs- it felt like we were in the midst of a fish run like we were in tin fishes scurrying along, pushing forward, swerving, breaking, accelerating.

Kampala is a dichotomy of wealth and poverty the hilltops boast Cathedrals and a massive mosque built by the Libyan president, Gadaffi. We visited the Anglican Cathedral set on a hill, a beautiful redbrick building. We walked the perimeter and then were lured inside by the sound of "angels" – the choir practicing, acapella, for the services the next day. The gentle swaying of the people as they sang melodious harmonies felt like a fragrance from God permeating the air. A true delight.

Dinner was to be had at the Imperial hotel. A strange contrast-, an oriental themed hotel in the bustle of Kampala city .A surreal experience as we sat amidst a wedding party and listened to a westernised band with very loud amplification. There was a wide screen television playing premier league football matches dominating the room towards which all the tables were orientated. It seemed so out of place in the midst of my experience so far but grateful we were to our hosts who treated us to a meal in that place.

It was home to a cold shower and then to bed. The sound of a city that never sleeps: late night television sounds carried across the courtyard hanging heavily on the still air, the chatter of bats in the papaya tree. What a day...

Sunday 18 March

I heard the early morning cry from the Mosque on the hill and then shortly after that at 06h00 the faint buzz of our alarm. It was an early rise with the first Church service at 07h00.I didn't mind, I couldn't wait for the new day.

Praise songs filled the Church as we entered the building on that morning. We found our places on the wooden pews right near the front and began to join in, singing unaccompanied, just voices and the odd jingle of a hand held tambourine. The choir, who were informally dressed the day before, were now in black skirts and matching blouses. They were to sing in two of the three morning services.

Dave had suggested that we might be called upon to give our testimonies. I could feel my heart pound in my chest, as I knew I was to speak during that first service. I remember praying to God asking that He would "unjumble" my mind and make my thoughts clear. I told my story which pivoted around three verses that through my life have been hugely significant to me. Psalm 46 vs. 10. Matthew 5 vs. 14-16. Matthew 28 vs. 19-20.

It was during this early morning service, I witnessed prayer like never before through Mary. I had noticed this beautiful lady, the day before, for her striking grace and poise. She sang and played the tambourine but when she prayed, she bared her soul and led others to do the same. She prayed with earnestness, she gave glory to God, she thanked Him for daily blessings and she fell to her knees pleading forgiveness and praying for Mercy. She appeared to be so unmasked, so real. It felt as if she grasped the Almightyness of God more than I ever had or

even dared to. The visual and spiritual impact of this woman, so alive in Christ, was unforgettable. I felt challenged by Mary.

Sandra and I were whisked away to visit the Sunday school, which is held in the adjacent Church Hall. It is a brick skeleton really - No doors or windows just a concrete floor. Despite being so unfinished, it had a real beauty to it. It functioned as a place where people could meet with God. It provided shade in the heat and shelter from the rain. The view from the windows were mostly of palms gently rustling in the breeze providing shade and ventilation. It was warm and inviting despite its austerity.

Sunday school was full of little ones who welcomed us warmly with a clap welcome that we had received before. We sang songs together and shared a little about where we were from. The framework for teaching seemed similar to ours but without all the props.

Dave preached (2 Corinthians: 3) his first sermon, second and third throughout the morning. Our work for God in Kampala had started. Sandra and I were asked to lead the intercessions in the second service. Whilst Sandra is gifted in this area, I felt totally out of my depth especially after witnessing Mary earlier that morning.

There was nothing in me that could even begin to describe how out of my comfort zone I was. It was for me, the feeling of being stripped of all I knew and totally surrendering to God and relying on the work of the Holy Spirit. I felt uncomfortable at first maybe even a little afraid but by the end of the week I felt exhilarated to have had the privilege of meeting with God in this way and many more times throughout the week. I was humbled by the power of God and moved by the way in which he poured out His Grace, to me and others around me, in such a significant way. I had to be obedient, to put aside my own agenda's, surrender all and follow Him. It was only later on in the week that the verse came to me that supported His calling.

The 10h00 service, unlike the earlier two services, was more traditional and all English was translated. The Choir wore traditional red and white coca cola sponsored robes and sang only in the vernacular of the Service. It was then that I first noticed a dear lady who was to become a friend- Samali Nakiryokia. She must be 80 years old, fine in stature. She wore a traditional Ugandan dress in greens and browns that buttoned in the nape of her neck. She had on that day a black evening bag. There was something about her.

We had lunch at Mrs Kyomi's home. She graciously opened her home to us and we shared in a meal prepared and provided by the Mother's Union. Most of the women wore traditional Mother's Union Dress. "Kaftanish" in style with varying

Mother's Union Logo's printed on cobalt blue fabric. Once married in the Church, women can join the Mother's Union. They offer accountability, support, prayer and fellowship for one another. We had traditional Ugandan food: matoke a steamed banana staple, rice, meat stew, curried peas, beans, boiled, skinned potatoes, pineapple, watermelon and banana.

Later that afternoon, we were back in the Church for the launch of a new service. A service specifically for the many migrant workers, who flocked to Kampala, lured by the promises of prosperity, leaving their families and children in rural Uganda far away from the city. These men were mainly hawkers and lived in and around an impoverished area of Kampala. The Church's vision and outreach to these people was exemplary and what an honour it was to join in this celebration. The men were celebrating and praising God, raising the roof in the Church. Dancing in jubilant praise and singing as if this was their last opportunity to sing. It was a new opportunity for them and the promises of God's harvest were so evident.

There was a man who caught my eye in the way that he sang praises to God. Both arms outstretched. He sang and prayed with his head back on his shoulders, eyes towards the Heavens, he was wet with sweat as he gave his all to God. I was struck by his boldness, His courage. He led the men in singing and dancing. It was powerful, uplifting and contagious. Would it be something like this when we meet with God face to face, I wondered....

The Bishop arrived amidst the celebrations. His smile was embracing, his face glowing with the Holy Spirit. He joined in with these men and now the whole church in praise and then he spoke. You could hear a pin drop. He spoke on Luke 9 vs. 28-36.- warning us against slumbering in the presence of God, he challenged us to WAKE UP.....

That night we wandered through the local zones at dusk, a warm glow filtered into the pot- holed streets from convenience stores hemming the sides of the roads. Grain in sacks, candles, peanuts, soap and Omo detergents to name but a few things for sale. We passed through narrow alleyways; crossed crevices of water and waste on make shift footbridges and tip toed through rubbish heaps. This was home for most of St John's Kamwokya's congregation. I was greatly humbled and even more in awe of the people we had met who thanked God for every blessing and journey mercy.

We ate at the home of Mr and Mrs Karamagi, traditional Ugandan food and fellowship. Mary had joined us and the evening was organised by Solomon and his recent bride, Deborah. This household was poor, we sat amongst many men, women and children squashed into a tiny room. We were sitting under exposed rafters, a playground for the inquisitive rat and yet we were welcomed and

received with love, with open arms with song. We ate until we were full, there was plenty to feast on despite the poverty. We were given the very best this dear family had to offer. We were blessed, truly blessed to be in the face of such amazing grace.

We walked back to Margret's house, a different route, soaking up the atmosphere of a place so new in experience, so full of challenges and so uplifting

Monday 19 March

The morning broke, the familiar sweeping, swish swishing across the courtyard. Water running, filling empty jerry cans in case the supply for the day was cut off. Still cocooned by the mosquito net, Sandra and I prayed together today aloud as if Jesus was sitting at our bedside. The nights were very hot and I began to look forward to my cold shower not only to refresh but to awake.

We were going to a school assembly this morning. Our first school. Captain David and Edward joined us as we met in the Head master's office of Anya Primary School. The weather was different today, it felt closer. The rain had come in the night and had persisted in the early hours of the morning. The air felt damp rather than hot.

The Children gathered shelter under the fronds of a leafy palm in the courtyard of the school. Dave spoke about the foolish and wise man and the message of building our lives on the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 7 vs24-). The school was in difficulty and was about to close and yet the children sang to us with delight: The Ugandan National Anthem, The Zone Anthem and then the School Anthem.

We asked the children if there was anything we could pray for and they boldly asked of us the following:

- For peace
- To pass their pending exams
- For the blossoming of knowledge
- To shine as a light for Jesus
- For the school to be built on a rock

I left this place somewhat saddened by the feeling that the end of their school was near. They sang with pride their songs of allegiance I hoped they would not feel betrayed and disappointed. They did have hope in the future; I could sense that in their prayer requests, I prayed that that would not be crushed for them. I thought about the rock and the wise man.

We then went back to Margret's for breakfast. We had settled in by now and Margret very kindly organised all the breakfast things to be laid out in the room adjacent to Mike and Dave's sleeping room. It had a home coming feel to it, I liked being there. The windows opened out onto the courtyard and the fine muslin curtain billowed in the morning breeze. We had flasks of boiling water and heated milk beckoning our return. We enjoyed Ugandan tea but occasionally our longing for a taste of home nagged and we succumbed to our tea bag stash bought from home. The familiarity of taste had a strangely powerful comfort factor despite it being just a cup of tea! We started to look forward to just a cup of tea, or I did anyway. Edward and David joined us that morning for breakfast.

Door to door evangelism started today with parishioners collecting in the Church to come and prepare from 08h30 every morning. We joined them at 10h00 that morning and were divided into groups. It was then that I met Mary Ntwatwa and Wilfred. Mary had a warmth that resonated from her, she was a woman who felt deeply and had a heart as wide as her arms would stretch. She had a kind of hug that you never wanted to leave. She was a gem- so wise, so calm yet so discerning. Wilfred was a mighty man of God; he stood tall and seemed to be a giant among men. He knew His Bible so well and had a heart for mission and evangelism. I was to learn a lot from him as the morning unfolded.

We were going to meet with a family who were expecting us to visit. I remember walking along side Mary trying to gain some information from her about the family, I learnt a little. We entered their comfortable home and were greeted first by David; I had a sense that he knew the Lord Jesus.

Slowly but surely and after some time the rest of the family gathered. I had got used to African silences. One is often in a crowded room where little talking is going on. I used the time to rest and pray. Mike and his team joined us soon after we had gathered. I remember being so pleased to see some familiar faces; I had never done this kind of home visiting before.

The family all spoke out their prayer requests to us, essentially a room full of strangers. I remember thinking how brave they were. Mike and I prayed for John. I remember that whilst praying for him, I felt a gentle breeze in the room, it seemed to fill the space brushing lightly against us, I watched the curtains fan and then still. It was beautiful

When Agnes spoke of her pain during childbirth and her aloneness I could not help but weep with her. She felt abandoned. During a time of prayer, God spoke into my heart for her and gave me this verse: "Come to me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest" Matthew 11vs 28. I remember almost dismissing it at first, doubting the fact the God could work through me but my heart was pounding in my chest again and I knew I had to be bold and speak

out. I looked across at Mary, and she too had tears running down her beautiful face. I was then asked to pray for Agnes. I put my hand on her shoulder and we prayed. We prayed in turn for the whole family at their request and then sang. We all sang, including John.

It was a moving time, I came away, blown away really by God. I left wondering if I would ever see these people again.

During the mission week, the Church provided lunch for everyone. We all came back and gathered together having experienced totally different people and situations. We had gone out in faith and returned almost stunned by what we had encountered. Lunch was welcome as was a bottle of ice, cold water. Small and her team faithfully prepared the meal each day outside under a tree using a cluster of coal stoves. When we ate everything was always hot. It amazed me, no mod cons and yet a perfectly presented meal. We ate off green trays and were offered a choice of water or a soda. I was instantly drawn to Stoney- a South African ginger beer.

After lunch we had time off. There wasn't really anywhere to go to get away from the hustle and bustle of Kamwokya. The courtyard, at Margret's became somewhat of an oasis. We bought the white plastic chairs out, caught up on diary writing, exchanged nail clippers, tweezers and the like, devoured Julian Graves yoghurt coated Brazil nuts and talked a lot. Well, I did anyway. It was lovely just for a couple of hours to be amongst ourselves enjoying the African sun and an English cup of tea.

At 17h00 each evening during the Mission week, there was a Revival service held at the Church. The light at that time of day made the redness of the dusty earth so intense against the green banana trees and palms. It was probably my favourite time of day. The sun beginning to slide towards night. It was dark at 19h00.

The familiarity of where we were was comfortable now as we entered the church to find our places. Voices of people praising God, the sun catching the silk flowers at the lectern, dust particles dancing in the light beams let in by the windowpanes. The sound of the men from St Phillips tuning their odougo's, the chatter of people gathering after a long, hot day. I felt excited to be part of this. I couldn't wait to sing, "things can only get better" and "Jesus is my driver". I couldn't wait to move. I couldn't sit still, I wanted to move with them, follow their rhythm and I did, we all did. There was something so infectious about the joy they had in their hearts. I remember feeling an overwhelming happiness. I had been touched by these wonderful people and moved, so moved to have had a glimpse of God through their eyes.

There was a little boy; he couldn't have been much older than five and to this day remains nameless to us despite asking many people. We affectionately called him "the drummer boy". He would sit alongside the purple shirted choir folk and play the drums with his bare hands and a stick. He showed amazing musical talent and touched all who witnessed his masterful beating of the African drums. We learnt that he was an orphan. My emotions were challenged again and again. Despite his pain and devastating hardship, this precious child found his joy in playing music, his belonging was being part of a choir. His family was the Church.

After Dave's sermon, we were led into a time of prayer. Intercessions often started in song and then continued in the spoken voice. The prayers were always moving and so striking in the way souls were bared before God.

Prayer ministry, followed. Led by Dave- Mike, Sandra and I stood behind the altar rail and people started coming to the front, kneeling, heads bowed. One of the first people I prayed for was the man that had struck me on the Sunday by the way he was praising God. I put my hand on his head and he put his hand on mine. I knelt down and asked him his prayer request. He whispered to me so I could barely hear. It was then that I called out to my God, the great healer, to have mercy. I will never forget that moment or him.

We prayed for many, many people that day.

We ate in Mulago zone that night, a hearty meal with many guests. The house was set on a hill and engulfed by satellite dishes. We saw Kampala twinkling below in the dark night. The water from the urn outside that we used to wash our hands was warm. The custom for all guests was to publicly wash their hands before sharing a meal. Many times we would hold our hands over a plastic bowl and a dear person would pour water over our hands to wash them. It reminded me of the Last supper.

Tuesday, 20 March

Another sunrise, another day dawned. We ate breakfast in the little room. The table covered in a crocheted cloth was now permanently full of goodies to eat. The bananas had softened in the heat and the fruit fly was moving in to hover and feast. Fresh mango today, fruit punch, samoosa's and peanuts, too.

We walked to the Church, greeting the storeowners as they went about their morning trade. They had grown to know our routine by now and smiled somewhat bemused as we passed.

Today we were going into the very poor area close to the Church as well as the market place. I was asked to pray for us as we went. I remember praying for the full armour of God to protect us (Ephesian's 6). The market place could be hostile, we were told. I remember praying in the knowledge that where we would go, Jesus had gone before. We would be walking in His footsteps. That was a great comfort; I knew that nothing I would do today would be in my own strength, I was prepared to "go" in faith. We teamed up with a member from St John's Kamwokya and headed out.

We visited a man who was terribly ill. We drew back the curtain- there was no door- his home a room. He was weak. I was more than uncomfortable as I looked around me, the room was dark and damp. This man had only the bare essentials -his own dignity had been striped from him. Through translation, I learnt that he was a Christian. We prayed for him as he lay, helpless, on the bed. I am not sure that he lived past that day.

Robert, my mission partner, had asked if I would pray in his home. He spoke in Lugandan to David and before I knew it I was being redirected into an entirely new part of the shanty- town. Robert was a migrant worker and had a rented room.

The homes I passed were nothing more than mud houses stacked close together. Doorways covered by Chinese netting veiled the inside from the outside. Most domestic activity took place in the alleyways as the inside space was so small and mainly for sleeping. Coal burners blazed as mealtime staples like matoke and rice were being prepared. Washbasins, with cascading soap suds, perched sideways on an uneven path. A montage of daytime activities on the street.

Robert led me deeper and deeper into squalor, there were many people we passed. Women with old pedal singer sewing machines delicately balanced in a pot-holed alleyway. Men repairing shoes. Men sorting bulk packaged peanuts into small cluster bags. Children sitting in the dust finding things buried in the earth to play with. Children gathering water from a littered well, women bent over sweeping, women feeding tiny babies. Men gathered around a home brew. A little girl, ill and malnourished dressed in rags, clutching on to the matted hair of a doll with no legs or arms. All these impressions, lasting images of my walk to Robert's home

I remember, too, the sounds of chatter but more than that, it was the faint cry "mazungu", (white person) which drifted on the still air as I passed. We eventually got to his "home", a room padlocked from the outside. The first thing I noticed was I LOVE JESUS spray painted next to the door. He called together his 3 room- mates and we prayed. I asked the one young man where he slept

and he replied "on the table". As he said that I remember the words of so many people, who said to me before I left, you will never be the same once you have visited Uganda. It was then that I knew that to be true.

We worked our way back to the Market place through rabbit warren like alleys different to those I had seen before. We stopped along the way, praying for people, inviting them to Church. I had a boldness that I had not felt before. I was being stripped of everything comfortable and known to me but in that I felt God was really at work in me.

As we entered the market place we headed for an internet shop. Unlike anything we know, the shop nestled in between two stores at the entrance to a bustling market place. I think it was an empty ship's container. We approached a man and explained where we were from. He drew his hands to his face and masked his face from ours, turning his head away. I remember thinking, wipe the dust off your feet and move on. I was on my way out.

As I looked back, this same man had pulled up two chairs. A chair for Robert and one for me. We stayed with him for the best part of an hour. He was Muslim. I told him my story, he asked many questions but most of all he wanted to know about the Jesus who saves, who forgives and who promises eternal life. He said that he would go to Church that Sunday.

I walked back to the Church to be still. What I had experienced that morning was profound. I had seen poverty like I had never seen before, I had seen God work, and I had seen the grace of God melt the hardest of hearts. I could hardly take it all in.

Lunch was once again, shared in the Church. We listened earnestly to each other's stories. I had not seen the rest of our team since early that morning. We all had had profound experiences that day.

We sat together in the shaded courtyard that afternoon before preparing to visit a school. We walked to the school, all of us, with Margret and David. I remember hearing singing in the distance and as we approached the school it was apparent that these children were all gathered together singing praise songs whilst waiting for us. There was not enough space to fit in so most children were very squashed or sitting on one another's laps. We enjoyed a time of fellowship with the children and teachers alike

Mike had had a conversation with a dear woman, who had a son. She was HIV positive. We had an opportunity to pray for healing, she was so heavy and sad. During the course of the week, we saw a change in her as she drew closer to God. Joy replaced sadness and her face began to smile.

The Revival service that night was especially moving. We spent a lot of time in prayer and praise and then had the opportunity to pray for one another. The whole Church joined hands and prayed. I felt so overwhelmingly blessed during that time as the Holy Spirit tenderly worked in my heart. I was so grateful for the prayers offered up to God for me. It was becoming more apparent that the more I sensed God the more I wanted to be in His presence. I felt like I was being filled up, replenished and renewed. For the first time, in a long time, I had a thirst that just couldn't be quenched.

We had dinner at Mrs Mulyambuzi's home that evening, all gathered in dim light. There was no singing and no speeches tonight just many greetings and introductions. I was tired and pleased to spray my "jungle juice" mozzie repellent and turn out the light.

Wednesday 21 March

Today had a different feel about it, I suppose because I knew we had a day to experience some of Uganda's natural wonders and we had some time off. The day was perfect, no wind, no rain, and the sun high in the sky. We had breakfast together including some avocado pear given to Mike during a home visit the day before.

We thought that today we were scheduled to do four school assemblies before heading out of Kampala. We changed our story for these schools and based it on Matthew 4 vs. 22-28. When Jesus told his disciples to be fishers of men. We laughed a lot as we watched Mike and Dave practice a skit using a mosquito net and lots of arm gesticulations. We had a song and felt we were sorted. That was naïve and after 5 days in Africa we should have known better

We piled in to the 4x4 this time with sun cream and sun hats and we were taken to the edge of a poor suburb of Kampala. The car had to park some distance away from where we were scheduled to meet, as the infrastructure was poor. We walked through a rubbish dump, weaving in and out of narrow spaces, it was like a maze. On arrival at the school we were immediately split up. What about the mozzie net, our planned story and song? I thought. Sandra was whisked away and Dave stayed put.

Mike and I were ushered on so we rearranged who would catch who in the net, who would do the prayers etc. We walked almost back to the car when Mike was told he was going in this direction and me in another. Well that put an end to our assembly plans, I handed the net to Mike- we shrugged our shoulders and

smiled, me somewhat nervously. I remember thinking: not in my own strength but yours, Lord. My mind was turning, which story should I do the wise man or the fishermen? Wilfred and Innocent were with me, I remember asking them about the school I was going to and they said that I was not going to a school but a home Church who were expecting me. Talk about being pushed out of the boat!! Yikes

I walked up the bumpy road to the gathering of people who had erected a shade cloth and carried a tiger print upholstered sofa out into the open space. They had arranged benches around the sofa and were waiting expectantly. As I approached they sang a traditional welcome song.

It was clear that English was not understood and Wilfred had to translate for me. I spoke on Matthew 4 vs.18-20. I remember focussing on how the disciples had to put down their nets and follow Jesus; they were called to be obedient. I had nothing planned, nothing prepared but God used what I had to offer to speak to these people. Not in my own strength but in yours Lord.

Captain David then came to collect me and took me to the school where Mike and Dave had now gathered. I joined in the song and then we meandered back to the car in the scorching sun telling of our new experiences in the Lord. Sandra had been praying with woman who had given her fresh passion fruit juice for our journey. We stopped outside Edward's house for a long time and then it was time to go. In true style it was many hours after the appointed time of departure. We had learnt "to go with the flow" and to expect the unexpected.

We prayed for Journey Mercy's or "Jenny Massies" whilst filling up with fuel. We were four to a 3-person seat in the hired taxi. No seat belts or air con just Angels and open windows. The ride to Jinga was hilly, fast, hair-raising, exhilarating, bumpy, squashed, sweaty and sociable.

We stopped to see the Shrine of the Martyr's. This is in memory of those who were killed for their Christian faith. Wrapped in wooden sticks feet down and arranged concentrically around an open fire, these people experienced a torturous death. It made it so clear to me how privileged I am to have the freedom to explore my own faith without persecution. Would I die for my faith? I felt challenged.

Sandra and I thought this a good opportunity to use the toilet, as there was an Anglican seminary adjacent to the memorial. We were directed through thick banana groves to a graffiti walled ablution block. Sandra bravely went first and opened the door to a mass of insects covering the walls. We thought that a natural amongst the trees would be a much better idea.

We stopped at a restaurant for lunch. I didn't feel much like eating but the others tucked into omelettes and our Ugandan friends to more adventurous traditional fare. I can't resist the temptation to mention that Dave was very pleased to see ketchup, I couldn't help but think of the title of Dr Gillian's book..."You are what you eat" ☺

We eventually arrived at the turnoff to the falls. The houses were more rural in construction. Sticks were used to make grid like structures, which were then filled with mud and left to set in the sun. The level of poverty was the same; the mass population of a city was just not there. We passed Soft power boards showing directions to a nursery school. Both Mike and I knew people who were involved with this project. It felt so familiar to see something you knew people had experienced in Woodbridge. I thought of Tina at the Riverside Theatre who had shown me her photographs after we spoke on the phone when I was enquiring about the screening of The Last King of Scotland.

The falls were breath takingly beautiful. So powerful, so unspoilt. I remember focussing on a fishing boat paddling up stream battling against the tremendous currents. I found a place on a rock, I loved the vastness before me, the sound of water rushing, churning. I could have stayed there for hours in the same place just soaking it all in.

On the way up to the car we all picked frangipani lying vulnerably on the grass. So perfect and yet fallen, so beautiful and yet so fragile. The flower was off white with a yellow centre almost painted on with the finest of brush strokes; it showed so much beauty in its simplicity and had a fragrance that was mesmerising. I shall never forget the scent. I remember wishing the fragrance would linger forever. What a contrast to the power of the falls but yet all part of God's amazing creation. " Oh Lord my God, as I in awesome wonder"...I hummed, quietly as I climbed the steep steps

We then drove to the source of the Nile, for me this didn't have quite the same appeal as the Bukwhali Falls. The site was more commercialised. It was an opportunity to talk amongst ourselves though in the fresh air. I sat under a palm tree with Margret for most of the time we were there.

On the way home we stopped for feeesh (fish) from hawkers on the side of the road. Captain David attached the fish to hang from the front windscreen wiper. We were amazed, bearing in mind that we had a 2 1/2hr journey home in rush hour traffic. Our Ugandan friends assured us that this was the "healthiest" way to get the fish back home.

We passed tea plantations, fields and fields of sugar cane bending in the wind. Coffee trees and the odd bill board advertising beer. We flew down hills and

chugged up hills, we overtook numerous heavy-laden lorries on blind rises and were often four abreast on a two-lane road. All in the dark with no street lights
Thank God for His journey mercies

We eventually arrived at the home of Mr and Mrs Tenywa. Later than planned but as mentioned before we were now used to African time. After the traditional hand washing and introductions we were offered a delicious meal. This meal different from the other meals we shared, as there was a noticeable western influence. Macaroni cheese and pizza. We all had some alongside our matoke and rice.

We arrived home and showered. I could hardly believe all that we had done, all that we had seen, tasted, smelt. My senses were beginning to feel overloaded. I could feel myself kick in to over drive. I was just so overwhelmed by my experiences so far. I reached for the earplugs that my lovely roommate had leant me and I tried to still my swirling mind. I didn't want to miss anything and was excited for tomorrow. I am not sure I had much sleep that night.

Thursday 22 March

It was breakfast as usual in the little room. We knew that this was our last full day and I remember wishing that each hour would stretch beyond the reality of time. We gathered in the Church after breakfast and then were divided into teams to once again do door-to-door mission. I was coupled with Rhoda. Dave and his team were heading out on the same adventure to the same place as I.

Rhoda was absolutely beautiful, svelte like in physique, her hair braided and pulled back into a high bun knotted on the top of her head. She wore beautiful tailored clothes in Ugandan fabrics. I was, unbeknown to me, going to visit her home later that morning.

We climbed some very steep roads to the top of a hillside looking down over Kamwokya. We started speaking to people along the way. I spoke to a woman cooking food for a living in a painted wooden shack. She was not interested in us and warded us off. We met a man on the road he was intrigued to know why these "bezungu" were in his part of town. Dave spoke to him.

Rhoda and I eventually stopped outside a brightly painted shoe repair shack. It was full of men hand stitching broken leather shoes, washing them in plastic buckets of Omo Detergent with bristly old brushes. We spoke to Happiness and Micah who were perched casually on a rickety wooden bench. Rhoda spoke to

these men in Lugandan at first. Micah could speak English but not Happiness. Micah and Happiness both committed their lives to the Lord that morning. We were able to purchase Bibles for them- one in Lugandan and one in English.

As I was walking down a steep, narrow pathway, Jackson stopped me. He asked what we were doing and we explained. He said he wanted to pray a prayer of commitment and so the morning continued. I encountered so many people on the walk down to Rhoda's home.

We called in at an elderly lady called, Topista. We spent a long time with her. She said she was Catholic but felt she just didn't know Jesus. I asked what she wanted me to pray and she said, "that her heart would be open to receive Jesus". Rhoda and I prayed for her, as did her nephew who had joined in the conversation earlier. When we left her home through a wooden gate. I asked Rhoda if she thought Topista would come to the Revival service that night. She shrugged her shoulders and said she hoped so. Rhoda then told me that Topista was her aunt. I was amazed. I never knew, in the whole time that we were speaking to her, that they were related.

We eventually arrived in a derelict courtyard. There were very poor people living here, dressed in rags. The children had bad coughs and barely anything to wear, their tummies were distended. There was a little boy almost naked, carrying a threadbare Disney character back pack- empty and forlorn. The little boy who sat next to me had open wounds on his face and ear. Another little boy looked as if he had lost an eye. It was in this courtyard, that the beautiful Rhoda had a home. She unlocked the padlocked wooden door and ushered me in. There was a sofa and an armchair in her little room, crocheted doilies, pots and pans stacked precariously in a glass cabinet nailed to the wall. I could see an old singer sewing machine behind another cupboard. I wondered if she made all her own clothes. The same "God is love" posters framed and nailed arbitrarily to the wall. She left me there alone for sometime while she went to gather her neighbours. I sat in silence, my eyes moved slowly in my head as I thought of my worldly possessions and all I hold so dear. I thought about the fact that I change my colour scheme in my sitting room annually. I thought about my social prejudices. I wondered about hers. Did she have any?

When she came back, I had taken a place outside in the sun. Dave was with her and he spoke to the people gathered and then led them in a prayer of commitment. A lady, who had said she had felt forsaken by God, recommitted her life to the Lord. She sat on the concrete floor with a child feeding on her breast and many more draped over her. Her name was Prossy.

We climbed up the hill passing many more people and stopping in many more homes to pray including a clinic started by Margret. We arrived at the Church for

lunch, exhausted and thirsty. When Sandra arrived, she said that Phionah had something for me. Phionah, I had met on the first day we arrived. She sang in the choir and had been part of the mission week. I had never really spoken to her or worked in the same group as her. Sandra had told her and me, separately that morning about her daughter, who when she was five, was given a beautiful handbag by her grandmother. She said to Sandra that she wanted to give it away; she knew it was her most precious possession and that's why she wanted to give that away.

Phionah presented me with a handbag, her most precious possession, a necklace and a heart shaped souvenir, which said I love you. I was moved to tears. This is a girl who is poor; she has no money to study, no work. She could have sold her bag at the market, it was from Accessorise and there is certainly no Accessorise in Uganda. It was worth something but she held it lightly. She was willing to give her most precious possession away with no expectation of receiving anything back. I thought, through a mist of tears, of my most precious possession, would I or could I give it away so freely?

On the way back to the house, I saw the boda bike I wanted to ride. It had a sticker on the back, which read, I am for Jesus. I called out to the driver that I hoped to see him later at the bike rank on the corner of Tagore crescent. He waved in acknowledgement.

I had a ride, sidesaddle. Fred was the biker boy who took me up and down the street. We talked about his faith and his witness to others and before I knew it we were back at the rank. He charged me double but I didn't mind, it was fabulous and I was thrilled to have had the experience.

Shopping that afternoon in the centre of Kampala was an eye opener we were taken into a wholesale place where Ugandan's buy their clothes. Rhoda was there and I bought a Kaftan made by her. Seeing her there explained her chic appearance and the singer sewing machine in her home.

That night at the Revival service, we sang and prayed and danced. Dave gave his final sermon. He dispersed Mike, Sandra and I around the Church, we joined hands, all of us and we sang at the top of our voices:

*Amazing grace! (how sweet the sound)
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.*

*'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear,
The hour I first believed!*

*Thro' many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.*

Together, all together, united as the body of Christ and all equally in awe of God's grace that saved us and opened our eyes to see. Kampala or Woodbridge, there was no difference, before God we are humbled by His mercy to save us and call us, what Amazing Grace.

Topista came to the Service that night

Dinner was hosted by the Father's Union. Sandra and I both wore our Ugandan kaftan's. We sat outside and Dave focussed his talk on Wild at Heart by John Eldridge. There were a few mutterings amongst the men and the talk was definitely food for thought. Hellen, The Canon, and head of Mother's Union, thought it was liberating and fabulous but then she too was brought up short as she wore an off the shoulder dress and not her collar or "combats" as she called it.

We were driven home by David and climbed into bed, our last night in Kampala

Friday 23 March

This day had a heaviness about it, strange really as I was excited to be going home. I felt relieved and sad, exhilarated and exhausted. You know what I mean, that last day of holiday kind of feel, where it's almost best to leave really early in the morning or the night before. I knew we would be leaving behind friendships and experiences that would never be the same again or never be repeated. I had grown comfortable in an environment I had originally found uncomfortable and I had learnt things about myself I had never known before. I was challenged in so many ways and on so many levels. It had been a journey, a life-changing journey. I would never be the same again

Daniel and Shadrach were home and Zach and Daniel, who had faithfully and lovingly cared for us, were about. Margret was busy wrapping gifts we had bought over from England. There was this finale feel to the day already.

We split up this morning to take school assemblies. Mike and I went to a very big school called Kajogge. The children were gathered in a courtyard all packed in and standing exposed to the beating sun. It was very hot. We had Edith and Joyce with us today and told the story about the Jesus calling the fishermen. It was hard as the sound system was poor and the children were agitated but what a privilege it was for us to be there. We sat in the head master's office for a while talking about how the school valued the input of the Church and then we left. The headmaster of this school hoped to link up with a school in England, we took his details.

We then gathered in the Church, later than usual to be sent out for the last time. Today we were scheduled, as a team, to visit the house of Mr and Mrs Ntwatawa. We did not know why or for how long.

We entered her home through metal gates and were warmly welcomed. I described Mary earlier as a woman with a big heart and a hug you never wanted to leave. I had one of those today. Mary had many children who had left home and she still had many children, orphans who filled her home. There must have been 6 young people who came through to sit amongst us. Mary and her husband had taken these young people in to their home and loved them like their own children. Dave spoke so movingly during our time there and we prayed for healing of Mary's back and Henry's leg. We sang and talked.

As we began to walk home we decided to revisit John and his family. They were so touched and delighted to see us. We prayed for them again and then found our way back to the Church for lunch. En route we stopped in at an elderly lady's home. She was a Christian but because of her age and health didn't make it to Church. We prayed for her and explained that we were part of a mission week. As we were about to leave, she disappeared into another room. She came out again, this time carrying a tray with some money on it. She said that the money was for the Church in support of the Mission. This money probably came out of her life savings. How humbled I felt.

We ate with our friends in the Church and then it was time to pack and shower and ready ourselves for our journey home.

Once packed, we walked for the last time down to the Church for the Revival service. I felt emotional, my mouth was dry. Goodbyes, at the best of times for me, are not easy. I knew I was saying goodbye to people that had touched my heart so profoundly.

For the last time the sound of the odougo's resonated a harp like melody in my ears, the drummer boy took my water bottle from me and came to sit alongside me. For the last time, I would tap me feet on the stone floor. For the last time I would sing "Jesus you are my driver" and "things can only get better". For the last time, I would catch the eye of Margret, Mary, Edith or Hellen. For the last time, I would sway to the melodious sound of St Phillips choir, for the last time I would feel so familiar in a place so different to my own home.

For the last time ...

We were presented with gifts from the Church and then a dear old lady, the one I had noticed on the Sunday for her traditional dress and evening bag, beautiful Samali, came up with a gift for me wrapped in golden paper

I wept and held her, she was frail and fragile. She was poor, so poor and yet I was on the receiving end of a gift from her. Words cannot describe how I felt. Tears rolled down my cheeks and would not stop coming, infact even as I write the tears flow. Samali Nakiryokia, I shall never forget you.

John and his whole family came to the service that night

We said goodbye and then enjoyed a light meal at the home of Dr and Mrs Watya.

We were truly on our way home now; we piled into the 4x4 for the last time and drove slowly to Entebbe. Dave was sitting in front talking to David whilst Sandra, Mike and I were discussing our favourite things:

What's your favourite movie?

Dr Zhivago, Ben Hur, Before Sunset

What's your favourite tree?

Oak, magnolia, acacia

And so we went on all the way to Entebbe.