

April 1989

While working here in Grand Coteau, I felt very strongly about the need to receive from the people I helped as well as giving of myself. Also, I learned to listen closely to the people I worked with - to be present to their needs and especially to hear their own solutions to their problems. So my role was more to be a listener and facilitator while we were sharing each other's gifts.

Three years ago I headed for Africa to join our sisters in the Kenya/Uganda Province of the Society of the Sacred Heart. There I was sent to the northeast area of Uganda to work with a health team that went out to set-up a mobile treatment clinic in a different area each day near villages of the Karamajong tribe. Once again I found myself listening intently to these beautiful people whose life-style is so different from what I had been used to. I found them to be such rich, strong and proud people, I wondered and reflected on what I was really here for. Was I doing them more harm by bringing my western ideas and values? What message of Christ was I speaking to them by my life? Since I did not know how to speak their language, Ngkaramajong, I had great difficulty communicating. For a year I struggled with these questions while at the same time trying to learn the language and customs of the people. After shouting to God many times from my inner anguish "why have You called me here - what are You asking of me?", I began to realize several things. One being the struggle of some of the African countries, especially Uganda, to become a unified country with all its tribes working together as a nation in order to be able to take its place on the international scene. Another being the need of all Ugandan people to realize there is a world beyond their reality that has some things to share with them: but, hopefully, to do this respecting and being open to the beautiful qualities and values these Karamajong people have to share with us. So, you see, the lessons I learned in Grand Coteau continue to affect my life and my response to people in this far country.

The people of Uganda have suffered much over the past twenty years with many rebel wars and over-throws of the government. Right now, things ^{were} are more stable and are slowly improving. The people are so beautiful through all their sufferings - they get right back up and start again. The day after the National Resistance Army, whose leader, Yoweri Museveni, ^{is now} is now president, over-took the government in 1986, the people were out rebuilding their houses. Presently, there are many good things happening along with many hard things. The strong family life, the sense of always having time for others, even the children, the way they celebrate successes and major events with each other where all is shared, these are some of the great riches of this culture. The health systems are improving with good goals for the future, and I am glad we are playing a role in these goals. The education systems are still struggling with very few materials, aids, books and very low salaries for teachers, and I am dually proud of our role in this area too. The problem of AIDS is a critical one in Uganda, with whole villages being wiped out by this killer. And, of course, there are still rebel groups from the past in the bush. They come out periodically killing and stealing. But, in

general, life is lived like it is here in the U.S. - each day open to what may be His call to hear and respond to within oneself and the people there.

Another thing I have come to realize as being important for my being in East Africa is that our Congregation there is becoming indigenous and these young RSCJ need to be heard and supported toward the time when they will become self-directive. Along with this, I have gained so much for my life by this rich experience and now am able to praise and thank God for the opportunity and chance to have gone to East Africa. ~~I go back now for two more years knowing that it is important and good for me to be there.~~

Thank you all for your great love and many prayers which I have felt supporting me during this time, and you can count on my love, prayers, and a share in my work for you and your ministries. For all our work is One in God's Kingdom here on earth and will be one always.

Sr. Margaret Hoffman, RSCJ

Re. National Geographic, April 1988, pg 468-491.