

Rwanda revisited

We are delighted and honoured to welcome Prof. John Guillebaud to this column while Dr. Colin Butler takes a break to focus on his new job at Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia, where he is helping to establish Australia's first postgraduate degree in global health (differentiated from international health). Prof. Guillebaud, environmental campaigner and pioneer in contraception, has been a friend and adviser to BODHI since 1994. He writes about a visit to Rwanda (where he was born and spent the early years of his life) from which he recently returned.

Readers of *Bodhi Times* may recall an article I wrote a couple of years ago on the 10th anniversary of the world's fastest-ever genocide (c 1 million people in 100 days) in Rwanda. I was born in what was then called Ruanda-Urundi. When my father Peter along with Eustace Kajuga and other Rwandan teachers together opened the first Protestant secondary school in the northern country, my sister Meg and I grew up with Eustace's children Husi and Wilberforce — speaking Kinyarwanda in preference to English. Sadly, the bodies of my friend Husi and his (Belgian) wife, also of Wilberforce's wife and 3 children and Eustace himself are among 250,000 in the mass grave at the Genocide Memorial museum in Kigali, which I have just visited.

Our family has 5 generations of association with the Region, starting with my grandfather who in 1925 produced the very first Grammar for the language and translated most of the Bible. My parents and several of my aunts then spent the major part of their working lives in the field of education and literature translation, from 1939 into the late 1980s. In 1995 my parents returned to Rwanda to assist in post-genocide reconciliation work. After my father's death my mother worked (alongside my sister Rev Meg Guillebaud) in Byumba, an hour's drive north of Kigali, until she also died at the age of 86, helping to the end the widows and orphans of the area through range of income-generating crafts. Meg now continues that work, along with writing, promoting reconciliation and teaching Church leaders of the local Diocese.

Our nephew Simon works with wife Lizzie among the young people of the troubled country of Burundi to the south; and, since December last, young Zac their firstborn begins generation 5!

My own latest visit to the region, this October, was in a party comprising: my aunt Veronica — last surviving sister of my Dad, now 86, who herself assisted in translation work in the 1950s but had also as a child aged 6 been on safaris in Rwanda with my grandparents during the pioneering 1920s; Jonathan my eldest son; and sister Meg our stalwart local host, guide, chauffeur and translator). Our journey had many purposes, including:

◇ To celebrate the 60th Anniversary of my father's founding of Shyogwe Secondary School, which we found to be a thriving institution of 850 pupils (many trilingual in French, English and Kinyarwanda) who gathered for a special school assembly in which we were Guests of Honour. As well as many speeches, a specially written ode to the Founder was read to us by a senior pupil — though we squirmed, as he certainly would have, when he was referred to as "St Peter". Somewhat garbled historically, but probably not we thought representative of Shyogwe's teaching excellence!

◇ To donate to the National Museum three unique watercolours of King Musinga's Court



that were painted in 1927 by my grandmother, in the presence of the British Ambassador and the Rwandan Minister of Culture — and with the accompaniment of the exuberant drumming and dancing of the Urungangazi cultural troupe. We learned that these seem to be the only colour representations in existence and as such the Minister declared them of great historical and cultural significance. Indeed, when next day we visited the site where the now long-gone thatched palace (an ultra large hut for King Musinga with many smaller huts for his wives and retainers) had been recreated for tourists, the local guide agreed at once that their own blueprint for the Court buildings must have been wrong ... The paintings show a much higher surrounding stockade and he planned to suggest that this would be corrected in due course.

◇ To open a building in Byumba housing a craft workshop, small sales outlet and meeting-rooms for the many impoverished widows of the area, in memory of my mother.

◇ To cut tape for a second time, in a ceremony to open a Library and Information Technology building in Kigali centre, in memory of my father.

◇ To meet the Minister of Health for useful discussions about the Government's new concern to promote family planning; given that all those who died in 1994 have now been replaced and the country is expected to double its population by 2050.

◇ To visit Urunana, the radio soap opera modelled on the Archers, which conveys health education messages within the story lines. Some of the well-known obstacles to acceptance of family planning were discussed, such as entrenched religious objections from both Catholics and some protestant groups, also cultural pro-natalism, the concept that the size of a group (tribal or religious) gives more political clout — and various local myths such as that the Pill causes permanent infertility. But Kalisa the Managing Director agreed that radio has the power to correct misinformation and even alter behaviour. Now the government



A/left: Genocide memorial, Kigali: below the slabs are 250,000 skeletons, including our friends in the Kajuga family. Also in pic are Jonathan and Christine (Museum Guide). A/r: Replica of King Musinga's domain with Husi's mother Marion Kajuga; the local tourist guide; Veronica; and Meg; Facing: typical Rwanda scene (in background); JG plus local schoolboy on Lake Mohasi ferry.

Courtesy John and Jonathan Guillebaud

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