

Personal Reflection – 2013

He Must Be a Bakuria

It was the summer of 1958. My friend, Sister Noreen, and I were on “holiday” at the mission of Rosana in northern Tanzania. We read and hiked and ate and chatted and enjoyed the hospitality of our Maryknoll Sisters who were working at the mission clinic and school.

The small town of Rosana sits atop a magnificent escarpment. Standing on the edge of the escarpment, one feels as though you are looking at the whole world. It is a Tanzanian Grand Canyon – with giraffe!

Noreen and I decided to climb down the escarpment to the very bottom. Such a hike was not dangerous but involved a day-long walk. We packed a light lunch and set off early in the morning walking through beautiful, quiet bush country. There was not a soul to be seen. When we got to the bottom of the canyon at about noon, we walked on, chatting incessantly. Suddenly we realized we were lost. We could not see the path back up the escarpment.

Undaunted, we sat under a large acacia tree and ate our lunch. Suddenly, there appeared a beautiful young man, dressed in the garb of the Bakuria people. He looked at us no doubt wondering, “Who are these strange creatures?”

However, African hospitality won the day and he greeted us politely in Swahili, not in his own Bakuria language. He told us he was *Marwa*, and we introduced ourselves, explaining that we were out walking and had lost our way. We wanted to go back up the escarpment to Rosana. “Oh, I know the way to Rosana,” he said. “Follow me, I’ll take you to the path you need.”

Marwa turned about and started to walk to the path back up the escarpment. After a few minutes of hard walking, with us taking two steps to one of his long strides, I said, “Marwa, just show us the way. We don’t want to take you from your journey home.” He smiled, and answered, “Oh, no! Among the Bakuria people, if a stranger asks you the way, you do not show them, you walk with them!”

“Oh my,” I blurted out, “That’s exactly what Jesus taught.”

“Well, I do not know who this Jesus is, but he must be a Bakuria.” Until I met Marwa, I thought I had come to Africa, to Tanzania, to teach. He showed me that I had indeed come to learn.

-Jane Vella