

Journal #2: Steps

Walking in Rwanda is tricky. While many of the roads are now paved, there are some that are little more than dirt paths littered with rocks, bottle caps, or roots. While walking on the streets in Kigali, I always had to look down or I could hit a rock with my toe and go sprawling forward, heart pumping, panic in my eyes, groping for something to break my fall. And while I missed out on some of the sights, I decided it was much more important to get to where I was going without bleeding or breaking a bone.

Now steps, steps are another story altogether... In the US, stairs must conform to measurement standards - they are all the same - uniform.

However, in Rwanda, they can be steep, narrow, shorter, taller, wider, made of rock, made of concrete, made of dirt... There is no uniformity.... And when I was walking, either up or down the stairs, I found myself forever stumbling. I would be walking along, up the stairs, thinking I had the rhythm of it down, and boom. A taller stair would cause me to stub my toe because I didn't lift my leg high enough. Or, going down the stairs, I would think I had the rhythm again, and nope. The stair would be shorter and I would find myself smashing my foot into the concrete, expecting the drop to be greater than it was. The stairs in Rwanda forever kept me on my toes - or heels or knees at times.

As I reflect on my journeys through Rwanda, I think I can take some lessons from these stairs - from the Rwandese:

1. Always keep your eyes and mind on your goal. Don't look away - even for a moment - because you are liable to stumble. Sure, you may miss out on a few things along the way, but the ultimate goal is to get where you want to go, isn't it?
2. Even when you think you have it all figured out, you don't. You may think you've gotten over something, but BAM. Just when you least expect it, there it is - an uneven step. It may be too tall, too big, so it reminds you you aren't quite as good or far along as you thought you were. But it's okay. It may take a little more effort or it may hurt when you stub your toe, but it's a reminder that your past - and the things you thought were behind you - will not be forgotten. They shouldn't be forgotten. They are where you've come from; they are who you are now. Move forward, move up, but take time to remember the past - or, when you least expect it, it will jump up and remind you...
3. And some of life's obstacles aren't as bad as we make them out to be, just like some steps aren't as tall as you thought they were. Remember that. Enjoy the easy ones because you never know when a truly steep step will occur...

While I'm sure the Rwandese had no intention of building nonconforming steps to teach these lessons, to serve as reminders, they have reminded me of these important things - the steps and the Rwandese.

I met so many amazing people - Freddie, Mama Rose, Simon-Pierre and Caritas - who have done such incredible things in spite of uncertainty, stumbles, and tragedy. Just because the road is unpaved or the steps are unpredictable, it doesn't mean you can't travel the path successfully...