



Lutheran Immigration
and Refugee Service

REFUGEE SUNDAY

Claudette's Story

"Resettlement in the U.S. is a second chance at life."



RESOURCES NEEDED

- Bible
- Map of Africa
- Picture of Claudette
- Poster paper to write answers

SCRIPTURE READING

"When his (Jesus) parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, 'Child, why have you treated us like this?'

Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety."

- Luke 2:42 (NRSV)

If more time allows read the full scripture text: Luke 2:41 - 52

FORMER REFUGEE STORY - CLAUDETTE

My name is Claudette. I was born in Rwanda with my twin sister, four brothers, and an older sister. As a family my brothers, sisters and I had a wonderful childhood while my mother ran a successful business. However in April of 1994, my home country of Rwanda exploded into a genocidal conflict that left one million Rwandans either dead or displaced.

I will never forget the day of April 12, 1994 when a grenade hit my home in Kigali, Rwanda and that was the end of life as I knew it. At that time I was 7 years old and my family was forced to scatter. My mother wanted to ensure that we stayed together as a family so she searched for several days for each of her children. Except for one sister she was successful in finding all of us.

After several days seven of us made the treacherous journey to a refugee camp in the Democratic Republic of Congo. I remember that at three years old, my brother slowed down our progress and made a lot of noise. His slowness and noisiness endangered us as a family. But fortunately we were able to make it safely.

As we all fled, I remember thinking and seeing just how important the children were to the parents. Papers, jewelry, furniture or televisions weren't important any longer, it was the children and how to keep them safe and secure that was on the forefront of the parent's minds. My mother was no different. Eventually, after many long days of walking, we made it to the refugee camp in the Congo. The conditions of the camp were difficult and what I remember is that everyone was trying to survive by any means necessary.



What was most difficult for me at 7 years old I remember was that there was no longer access to an education. I wanted so badly to learn but it wasn't possible in the camp. However, in 2002, my mother moved my family to the neighboring country of Zambia in hopes of providing us with a safer environment and access to a school, something she valued deeply. It was in Zambia that my twin sister and I met our first and possibly best English teacher.

Then in 2006, twelve years after we had fled our home in Rwanda, we were given the opportunity to resettle as refugees in the state of Rhode Island. We knew that being a refugee in a new country like the United States was not going to be easy but my mother had one very important goal for her children: to continue our education. My mother had always insisted that we had to go to school, she always put a huge value on education. So when we arrived in July 2016, my mother insisted that my sister and I begin school as soon as possible, so we were able to enroll in a community college in Rhode Island.

At first we only went to school part time because we also found jobs in order to support ourselves. I always wanted a career in the medical field thinking that one day I would go back to Africa to help people on the continent. But I soon found out that the Rwandan community in Rhode Island was also in need of help so my sister and I studied and worked to start an afterschool program for refugee children. The program my sister and I created provides supplemental tutoring in order to help new refugee children succeed in schools here in the United States. We mentor the children and try to encourage them to set goals for their new lives and new futures.

Resettlement in the U.S. was a second chance at life for us. Our hopes were renewed and opportunities for success were opened up. We have enjoyed our life here and the promise that we can lead a dignified life which is rooted in self-determination, desire, and most importantly, to see the pride in our parent's eyes since we have succeeded.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Like Claudette, Jesus too was a refugee. His parents first took him to Egypt to protect him as a child and then returned to Jerusalem. In Luke 2 Mary said to Jesus that she and Joseph had been searching for him 'in great anxiety'. How might you imagine and compare the initial fears and anxieties of Claudette's parents with the fears of Mary and Joseph?
2. At the end of Claudette's story she says that success is important and leads to "to see the pride in our parent's eyes once we have succeeded". What are the similar feelings between Jesus after his parents witnessed him teaching in the temple in Jerusalem and Claudette's mother after becoming successful in Rhode Island?
3. There are many challenges and difficulties in all refugee stories. Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service assists Lutherans and others across the country in the resettlement process. What do you learn from the story of Claudette that might assist you in thinking about the challenges and difficulties in settling into a new community?

ACTION ITEM

1. Pray for all refugees and those individuals and groups in our communities across the United States that assist in the resettlement process.
2. Log onto lirs.org and sign of for "Stand for Welcome" updates and materials.
3. Take up a special collection and designate it for the work of LIRS in assisting in resettling new refugees into the United States.