

*Carty House is a transitional home and
a community for refugee women in
Ottawa*



CARTY HOUSE

WINTER 2013

A Secret To Share

To: My High School Principal and all my teachers.

I have a secret to share before graduating from this wonderful school. In November 2006, my mother arrived in Canada leaving my four brothers, my father and me in Rwanda. Soon, my father was nowhere to be found, and that is when a family friend took us across the Uganda/Rwanda border for our safety. Being new and only 12 years old in the country of "Uganda", I was scared of what was going to happen to my brothers and me. Here we were, living with someone we did not know and surrounded by people who spoke a language that I did not speak. There was this lady we called "Aunt" because in Uganda anyone who could be your mother or older than you, you called her AUNT. She was a University student and I do not know how she knew us but she was really nice and caring. She knew how to treat little kids.

We stayed at a hotel before we found a house to live in. We went to a school that was a minute away from the new house. I barely knew how to speak or write English. The only words I knew were "Good Morning" and I learned that from my youngest brother's T-shirt. With the help of the loving teachers and friends I was able to learn English and the Ugandan national language "Luganda" really fast. After a year, our "Aunt" left us to get married to her fiancé. We were left alone with the owner of the house, who was also the owner of the school and a man of God.

His wife was one of the people who helped me improve my English skills. My friends and my boyfriend were the primary people who taught me English and Luganda. Pastor and my mother communicated regularly. He cared for us, my mother sent money for supplies and he helped with shopping. I was excited to be in charge of my brothers aged 8, 7, 6 and 4 because I felt like a grown up and I had never been in charge before, but it was scary.

I heard stories of how people there kidnapped young kids and how they raped girls. Sometimes I couldn't sleep thinking that there was someone at the door. I always prayed that this miserable disaster would not happen to any of us.

I felt comfortable and happy around my friends but when the night hit, I couldn't sleep.

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NEWS FROM THE CARTY HOUSE COORDINATORS

With 2013 just underway, we reflect on 2012 and the many challenges and opportunities of the past year for the refugee women who make Carty House a home and community.

The residents continue to be active attending ESL classes, pursuing certificates in Childcare Worker, Personal Support Worker, and completing Adult High School. To respond to their needs, a series of in-house workshops are planned. These include a new series from the *Sexual Assault Support Centre of Ottawa* on "Dealing with PTSD", for women who are survivors of war and violence. Presentations will also be made on Refugee Law, Women's Health, Housing Help, Self-esteem and Empowerment.

Our many volunteers are involved in piano tutoring to the residents, ESL conversation, website/graphic design, driving lessons, cooking nights, fundraising and awareness campaigns at the University of Ottawa. We are continuing our outreach this year, with presentations to church groups, colleges, community agencies, and schools in the coming months. We would like to pay tribute to the staff at Sandy Hill Community Health Centre. We benefit from their support despite the drastic cuts to refugee healthcare and the difficulties for many in accessing services.

This January two women graduated from Carty House and moved into a home of their own. We trust they will do well with the strength and independence they have gained and the continued support of the Carty House community. We now have two new residents - a young woman from Burundi and another from Congo.

Events at Carty House over the winter included a wonderful Christmas celebration on December 9th and the 'Dinner for Six' event on January 26th. The latter event was a huge success with three Community Developers from Sandy Hill Community Centre and their partners joining us as guests.

On December 15th of 2012, Bill C-31 became fully implemented, causing drastic changes to the refugee determination system. This has severe impacts for women at Carty House and refugees across the country, with extremely short timelines, mandatory detention for many, denial of the right to appeal, delays on family reunification, and discrimination based on nationality. It is all the more important during times like these to stand up for the rights and freedoms of refugees in our community.

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'A Secret to Share' Continued:

Every day, I did what mothers do. I cooked, cleaned, played with the kids, shared stories and told bedtime stories.

My mother came to visit us twice, once when "Aunt" left and once when I broke my hand. She was so worried that she travelled all day from Ottawa to Uganda. She could not imagine me working with one hand. Carty House, a home for refugee women, where my mother lived when she first arrived in Canada helped her buy a ticket to travel to see us. I thought we were going to go to Canada with our mother the second time she came to Uganda but we did not. It was heart breaking but I kept dreaming of this day. I knew that one day, I was going to be able to relax and have fun.

We arrived at the Montreal airport on September 2nd, 2009. The Creskeys, my cousins and other people I can't quite remember met us. The Creskeys brought us gifts and I still have the sweater they gave me. I am not sure how long it took us to get to the apartment that we settled into, but I do remember that when we arrived, there were a lot of people waiting to welcome us. This was where I saw Grandma Maureen for the first time. I was so excited and happy that night that I couldn't sleep. It is now three years since we have settled in Ottawa but sometimes it feels like all this was just yesterday.

It is really hard to get boys to listen to you. For me, I get along with my brothers very well. I give each one a duty and I tell them that if they do what I ask, we would play a game and have story times. It was not hard until we got here. Now they listen to me but not as much as they used to in Uganda. I love all my brothers and I care about them and I would do anything for them that I could. Being in this situation taught me a lot of things: being responsible, loving, caring, holding on and having faith. Now I am ready for the next big step of my life. I never thought I would be where I am right now but I love it and whatever makes my brothers happy, makes me happy as well. There is a lot more to my story but I just wanted to share this little something before I graduate in June.

Never Give Up, Know How to Survive.

Everyone has a different story to share but this one is the beginning of mine.

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You can donate to Carty House directly by mail or through

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Determined to stay up-to-date and respond to these challenges, Carty House, and other refugee services agencies initiated the Ottawa Refugee Network. The Network was inspired by the Refugee Coalition in southern Ontario, and supported by the FCJ Refugee Centre. The purpose is to meet and share information, discuss challenges, and work together to better serve refugees in our community. We also attended several conferences and training sessions throughout the past months, including the Canadian Council for Refugees' Consultation in Toronto, and the Community Legal Clinics' Settlement Workers Conference in Ottawa.

Finally, it is with great pleasure that we welcome a new staff member, Munita Sharma, to our House and community. She has joined us as the Overnight Coordinator. She has had a wide variety of work and volunteer experiences that will help her influence the lives of the women at Carty House.

Glennie-Ruth and Lena

OTTAWA CATHOLIC SCHOOL BOARD PEACE CONFERENCE (OUTREACH)



Jenny Waterman and Nancy MacDonald, members of the Communication Committee for Carty House, attended the OCSB annual Peace Conference on Dec 14, 2012. Representatives from the high schools worked in small groups, brainstorming feelings, ideas and concrete suggestions for creating an accepting environment in their schools. Their suggestions were posted and shared via Facebook. Although only a few students visited the Carty House display, the students were presented with a "test your knowledge" quiz about refugee issues. The Conference also provided an opportunity to make contacts with the chaplains of two of the schools.

Nancy MacDonald



Thank you to all of our donors. Your support is critical in these tough times.