

# ACTS HEAL THE HURT

RWANDA MAY BE KNOWN AS THE 'HEART OF AFRICA' BECAUSE OF ITS LOCATION, BUT AS KATE WEBSTER DISCOVERED, IT IS A COUNTRY THAT IS FULL OF HEART

WORDS AND PHOTOS:  
KATE WEBSTER

As the world is gripped by the changes in daily life due to Covid-19, we are being forced to slow down, take some time and reflect on what is really important to us.

This has got me thinking about my recent travels to the small East African country of Rwanda. I knew nothing about Rwanda, except the country had been through immense conflict with the genocide. It was a mass slaughter of Tutsi in Rwanda, which had started in 1990.

Directed by members of the Hutu majority government, during the 100-day period from April 7 to mid-July 1994, an estimated 500,000 to one million Rwandans were killed. Neighbours killed neighbours, colleagues killed colleagues, lovers killed their lovers, all because they were different.

This loss of life amounted to an estimated 70 per cent of the Tutsi population. More than half of a racial population was eliminated in just 100 days.

To comprehend that as I walked around the Kigali Genocide Memorial, reality hit me in the heart like a freight train.

I felt so heavy with sadness as to how humans could inflict so much pain and destruction on a fellow human being just because of their differences.

However, years on from that they have found such a resilient peace that has much to teach us. From those dark days, Rwanda has risen to a country that the rest of the world can learn from.

It was on the streets of Kigali that I learnt the word *Ubumuntu*. *Ubumuntu* is a Kinyarwanda word that means "to be human", carrying a similar meaning to the word *Ubuntu*, a quality that includes the essential human virtues; compassion and humanity. *Ubumuntu* is to be humane: to genuinely care about others, to be generous and kind, to show empathy, to be sympathetic to the plight of others and to recognise the humanity of others.

It was also on those streets in Kigali that I

BE INSPIRED  
PLAN NOW,  
GO LATER



was privileged to take part in another Rwandan tradition, *Umuganda*. With a shovel in my hand and a pile of soil in front of me, I helped pave a new road in this capital city.

As I stood shoulder to shoulder with local Rwandans from the town, they explained to me that on the last Saturday of every month, Rwandans come together for nationwide



community work. *Umuganda* is the practice of self-help and co-operation. In traditional Rwandan culture, members of the community would call upon their family, friends and neighbours to help them complete a difficult task.

These two words have been etched on my soul since I heard them, and since returning from Rwanda, I have tried to implement these

in my everyday life. To be human is such a profound thing and it is in times like now that amid all the chaos of the Covid-19 pandemic that we are starting to see that human spirit.

I ask you all to learn the meaning of *Ubumuntu*, practise *Umuganda* and adopt it to your way of life. Now more than ever we need a little bit of this Rwandan culture and practice in our lives.