

STARS & STORIES: Presenting the Personal Face

Our most recent communication, late summer 2023 celebrations, was bright with photos of the wonderful occasion inaugurating FEBA's Women's Center. This continues that great event from a more personal perspective, bringing pictures of the marvelous fashion show, but also some stories of young women in the sewing school & reflections of our North American group. Names are changed, & stories do not correspond to photos, to protect the students' privacy.

STARS



STORIES

"I was born mute; I couldn't talk. When the nurse told my mother that I was girl, she was devastated & said, "Why am I giving birth to girls? I am not going to see her. Look at her – she's mute." She rejected me. My father worked on boats & was away for a long time. They abandoned me because I was like a useless child. When I was 7 my aunt put me in a school for the dumb, no one wanted to take care of me... Later I learned to talk & married & had 4 children but my husband became abusive. No one would help me; finally I left... Then a man told me about FEBA. When I came I did not know how to read or write. I met Maman Monique; I was sick & she did everything to get me medical care. My teachers showed me love. Now I can read & write. I am sad because I don't have my family but I still come here to learn & I am still fighting to go on."

STARS



REFLECTIONS

[When I heard this story] "tears almost came to my eyes just listening to her. It was like 'Nobody wants me, I am nobody's child.' But thank God she found Maman Monique & the Women's Center. That Women's Center is like a beacon of hope for those girls because they know they can go there & from here on things are going to be better. Maman Monique reminds me of Mother Theresa because she wants to do good for everybody & is perplexed when she does not have funds to do it."

"...one of the students whose story was so hard: seeing the way she looked when she was sharing & then seeing her at the fashion show - I saw her just strutting down the aisle, so proud of herself, & it was so powerful & so touching. What wonderful work FEBA is doing there & how blessed we got to go & see it & to experience it ourselves."

STARS



REFLECTIONS

"I was really moved when all the testimonies were being said by the students. I would think that the teachers would have heard these stories many times, but even so they were tearing up and crying, and it just shows that they love and care for the students so much. That was very impactful for me to realize that it is all driven by love for them. Obviously, everyone has their physical needs, to just survive and try to address those, but just being able to love because Jesus loved us, that was very powerful."

"It was like being on holy ground. The stories that the girls told were so tender & gut-wrenching to listen to. You don't hear vulnerability like

that very often, especially in the United States where we can cover it up so easily. I felt so honored to be near these women and listen to their stories."

STORIES

"My mother was a member of FEBA; we are 5 children. But she had trouble in her marriage & came to FEBA for help. This is a place where women who have been abandoned or widowed come. It was very difficult for her to pay our school fees but FEBA helped. Last year she died & I could not continue at university to study medicine. Maman Monique helped me have a place to stay, & Maman Nadine & Papa Eddie (Monique's son) have adopted me & they are now my parents."

STARS



STORIES

"I came from a village. My mother was in an abusive marriage & could not care for me. An aunt in the city took me ... & made me a drudge to do all the housework. The aunt was a member of FEBA & the leaders of FEBA spoke with her about this abuse, so the aunt passed me over to my uncle & they treated me even more cruelly; my cousins made me do all their work. When I came to FEBA, Maman Monique told my aunt what her younger brother was doing & made her take me back. FEBA has given me a full scholarship & transport money, & plan to bring me to live in the Women's Center as soon as possible."

STARS



REFLECTIONS

In rural areas poverty hits you in the face. In the city it is more subtle; what struck me was the break-down of the societal unit. These girls who came to Kinshasa: there used to be a traditional mechanism that supported children without families, but it is breaking down & you see the fruits of that in the city."

"I was really struck by a lot of the conditions, & I have been thinking what does 'growth' mean?"

"The trip helped me appreciate more tangibly what challenge looks like there. How can you change from where you are to a different way when that's the hill you're trying to climb?"

"We got a very good exposure to the "eco-system," the environment in which our partners work in Kinshasa. At the inauguration we saw FEBA's position within the community."

"I keep thinking of these girls. That's where I see God at work. God leads these girls individually, everyone through different means, to Monique & to the Center. Their lives were so devastatingly bad in so many ways, where they experienced all that rejection & hopelessness, & suddenly they have these women who surround them & love them, & yes they teach them literacy & life skills & sewing & all that's amazing & it's part of their healing. ... Pouring out love is a huge gift; even in the worst of circumstances, even if they don't have money to give these girls, they use what they have & they pour out their love & I am always amazed by that."

STORIES

"I come from Lodja. In 2019 I married & we had a baby but my husband became very sick. They brought him to Kinshasa but he died on May 7, 2021, & I was alone with my child in Lodja. I came to Kinshasa to bury him but did not have a way to get home. A relative brought me here to FEBA. As a young widow I was crying all the time. When I came here I had to tell my story to Maman Monique. I was thinking "How am I going to pay my transport? How am I going to take care of my child?" Maman Monique is helping me with transport money, I can make peanuts to sell. I have had joy from the day that I came here; it is 9 months now. I can have some joy because I am learning

something that I can use in my life. She has put some joy in my heart; I didn't have anything that was giving me joy. Thank you so much, Maman Monique!"

STARS

