

POSITIVE PROFILES | Being Martine

March 2010

Martine Udahemuka, 26, says she oftens finds her heart back in Rwanda. She's been in New Zealand for 15 years now, and reckons that having the opportunity to pick the best from two really different cultures is a good thing. We talked to her about life and being Martine.

Who's in your family here?

Grandma (Late -Oct, 2009), Dad, Mum, Brother (Alain), Sister (Marie-Josee), Sister (Pamela) and Sister (Ange)

You've been to university – what did you study?

I completed a Masters in Industrial/Organisational Psychology in 2008. I'm planning to start PhD – hopefully in Humanitarian and Development Law, in 2011.

How did you get to speak at the Refugee Health and Well Being conference in November?

After completing my thesis I was looking for opportunities to present my findings at a conference and found the refugee conference after a search on Google and sent in my abstract for consideration... luckily it was accepted and they also asked me to share my refugee story at the conference too.

[You can read Martine's speech from the conference on the ChangeMakers website, full link at the bottom of this story.]

What are you most proud of?

I am proud of the moment I realised I needed to change, grow up and be a better person, and of my determination to succeed against all odds.

What's a strength that refugee-background youth have that other Kiwis don't?

The best of both worlds. Growing up in two quite distinctive cultures has taught me a great deal about life, most of all it has allowed me to pick the good from each culture and try to weed out the bad from the cultures. Specifically as a refugee youth who was uplifted from all things familiar in the blink of an eye, I have developed thick, resilient skin and a fighting - in a good way - spirit. I think the latter is true for most refugee-background youth.

What do you want to be when you grow up?

Haha :-) I want to work for an NGO helping new settlers in most aspects of settlement; I am particularly interested in workplace issues (finding work, training, well-being, success, advancement, maintenance) for migrants (voluntary and forced) (the before, during and after), all things employment really. Most important for me though is to find an NGO that is transparent and true to its principles.

What do you think it takes to succeed in life?

To me success is 'Responsible Happiness'. Do what makes you happy but be responsible and always think of tomorrow and the consequences of today's actions for tomorrow. Figure out your principles and stick to them. Foresight is very important and be very afraid of 'comfort zones'! Always strive to improve yourself.



What's the most important thing to you and why?

Happiness. To me, you could be rich, educated, famous, have status and all the rest but still be very unhappy. I don't believe that money or any of that can buy happiness. I think it is important to know yourself as much as you can (very hard as we're always changing), know what and who makes you happy, and stay away from what doesn't and everything else will follow.

**Anything else you want to say?**

If you are a refugee youth or 'older', I know how it can be when you first come to live in a new strange country, and even after 15 years, sometimes I find myself wishing what happened in Rwanda never happened and I was back in Rwanda. It can be lonely sometimes, so if you need a friend, a listening ear, an encouraging nudge, or whatever, email ChangeMakers for my email address and get in touch with me :-)

You can read Martine's speech from the Refugee Health and Wellbeing Conference, November 2009, by pasting this link into your browser:

<http://www.crf.org.nz/sites/crf.org.nz/files/Udahemuka.Martine.Refugeestories19thAUT.pdf>

If you know an awesome refugee-background young person that you think we should profile, get in touch with Tessa - tessa@crf.org.nz; or 801 5812. Anyone who is positive, enthusiastic and inspiring considered!