

# BLACKIEONAMISSION

IN LOCKDOWN

LOCKDOWN AND TEACHING

How did that really work?

WHAT'S NEW FOR US?

Nothing Stays the Same...

WHEN FRIENDS LEAVE

And you have to explain to a 4 year old.

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PLEASE EMAIL US AND TELL US YOUR NEWS TOO!





This is us in lockdown - Rwandan Government made it a law that you could not leave your house without wearing a face mask. We ordered these, site unseen - and this is what turned up. They have been handy though and I boil them every time we wear them.

# LOCKDOWN AND TEACHING

## HOW DID IT REALLY WORK?

The last day I was at school was Friday 13th March, I said good afternoon to my students and went over to Fred's Teacher Training College information afternoon. And I have barely left the house since. Last Friday 15th May we had a zoom Pizza Party farewell to grade 2B and this week I am hosting parent zoom conferences. Then, school is done for this school year and I am officially on 'Summer Vacation' - I won't be packing a bag to Sydney and I won't be preparing my girl to stay with friends.

What I didn't know on March 13th was how long we would be off school for. Nor, had I ever heard of a 'zoom' call - now I'd like to say I'm a pro! I know just when to Mute those kids and I would not recommend a zoom pizza party because all you see on your screen is kids chewing pizza!

In 1997, I did my final University Practicum behind a microphone when I taught at Tiboburra School of the Air. While there were many similarities to this season of online teaching - it was also - so - completely different.

First of all I didn't have a four year old to also entertain during the days. In week 2 of lockdown, the government also banned Motos and Buses, and only essential workers could go to work. While my Nanny very much means an essential worker to me, she actually was not an essential worker, so for nine weeks of teaching full time, I was also entertaining a busy girl at the same time.

My days often started with a zoom lesson to my class, followed by all manner of activities with

Miss Flora, until she was in bed and then I would mark kids work, answer parents emails and plan for the next week all at about 10pm at night - needless to say this has not been a relaxing stay at home and do a puzzle or clean out cupboards kind of lockdown for us. It's been manic, chaotic and down right exhausting - like nothing I ever imagined or planned for.

I have to say my school parents were absolute champions, many of them also working full time, with more than one child at home and having to help with online learning at the same time, often sharing devices and struggling with internet connections. They were very supportive and I'd do it all again with the same parents.

Never have I worked under such supportive administrative team from school before. One Friday night we had four cupcakes delivered as a 'keep going you've got this' kind of gesture. And another evening they paid for a family meal for us that was delivered and made life that night so much easier.

I thoroughly enjoyed my one year (really only 7 months) teaching grade 2 and when parents cry in parent conferences saying, "I believe the Holy Spirit sent you here just to teach my boy because it was the first year I didn't hear the Teachers saying he had a disability or being called into the office every other week". Then you know what you did even just for one year - may have impacted one 8 year old boy to become a life long learner. My goal was to wipe his slate clean and give him a fair go - I think we succeeded!



# WHAT'S NEW FOR US...

Flora starts Pre-Kites in September 2020

In Australia she would start Kindergarten in January 2021, but here she will be one of the oldest in her grade, and almost a whole academic school year behind her peers in Australia.

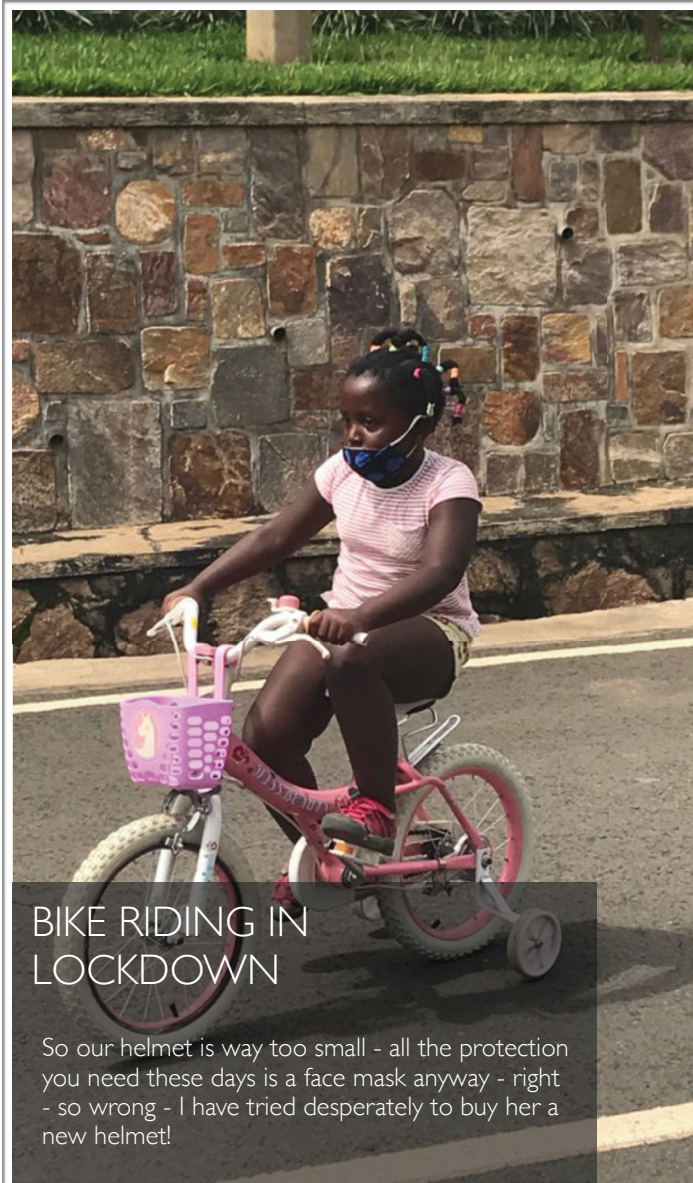
## PARENT / TEACHER INTERVIEWS WILL BE INTERESTING!

So KICS (Kigali International Community School), lost over 60 kids during the lockdown period. For an already small school that is a significant amount of students. The night I received the phone call, there was talk that the whole school would go to single stream. The Director said to me - he had 11 staff and only 6 positions and he had to make changes. I knew exactly what he was going to ask me and everything in me didn't want to oblige, but I kind of didn't really have a choice other than to accept the position of Nursery Lead Teacher.

YES - I will be teaching Flora - absolutely not my ideal and I think I am still coming to terms with it all. I just had this (unrealistic some might say) expectation that I would collect her from school and she would excitedly talk the whole way home telling me about her day and who she played with and how she loves her Teacher - you know - little girl stuff! Instead, I'm going to know who she played with, what they played and maybe I'm going to be the Teacher that she doesn't love at school!! Aaaah!

As we hope to expand the PreKites program, this year adding 3year olds to the program for the first time, as well as flexible days. The idea is that my role will look more like the 'Director / Manager' of the service as I mentor hopefully another three staff and many families. At this stage, until we fill numbers, it is just myself and another trained Teacher from Uganda. My hope is that I can take the three year olds and she would take the 4 year old group, so that she has more time with you know who.

I'm hoping to have the opportunity to work with Patience at KICS and encourage her to do some Teacher Training at Fred's Teacher Training College over time.



## BIKE RIDING IN LOCKDOWN

So our helmet is way too small - all the protection you need these days is a face mask anyway - right - so wrong - I have tried desperately to buy her a new helmet!

## Miss Blackie

MUMMY: "YOU KNOW FLORA, WHEN YOU GO TO SCHOOL, MUMMY WILL BE YOUR TEACHER AND YOU CAN'T CALL ME MUMMY YOU WILL HAVE TO CALL ME MISS BLACK LIKE ALL THE OTHER KIDS DO."

FLORA: "OH OK I CAN CALL YOU MISS BLACKIE - MICHELE BLACK!!"



# SOME REALITIES OF LOCKDOWN...

So many people affected.

Many many times I question myself and I am sure others do too, as to what impact they are making on the community around them.

When lockdown came to Kigali, it brought with it some cold hard realities for so many people, but especially for people we have grown to love and have the privilege of calling our friends.

Nearly every single day, for twelve weeks, we would have kids knocking on our gate asking for food or money. If it wasn't the kids it was the Mumma's with sunken eyes and a baby swaddled in blankets on her back, often no words just bashfully sliding her arm out from under the little babies foot to humbly gesture for money.

It was so incredibly hard having to turn them away day after day, and having an empathetic four year old who questions, "But Mum, we've got money and we've got food" - so little does she understand and little will she ever know just what her own roots were like.

I'm not sure if I have mentioned this before or not. Flora's Grandmother basically lives off the land, what they grow is what they eat, what they hunt or catch is what they eat. Well on the 29th March 2020, her 16year old half brother was fishing for food and he drowned. Unfortunately it was the beginning of lock down and so numbers were limited for funerals and plans were harder to make. This little girl, in four years of life, has lost four significant family members. How very different her life could have been and when I think about all the bureaucracy and red tape we are trying to hurdle through I am just so overjoyed that we have a happy and healthy little girl.

Our guard Theogene had a three week old baby the day lockdown was enforced and he was not able to go and visit her for another nearly four months. This was hard on him as a new Dad, but golly I was so so thankful to have him here with us during this time. He was not only our guard, he kept us up to date with all COVID19 news, often translating for us from Kinyarwanda to English. He played with Flora when I was doing zoom calls, he was absolutely worth his weight in gold.

Our driver Charles wasn't working and was housebound with his wife who has been unwell for years now with some mental health issues. He had four kids to care for, to cook for, to educate, to clean after - life was tough for a bit there. We have enjoyed supporting this family and having his children over for play dates. Sweet Charles dissolves to tears every time we bless him.

Then there was Fred, who as a school principal had to break the news to his staff that he didn't have any means to pay them - many of them had to stand down during a painful time in history without pay. Let's uphold them in prayer that the September 1st start date actually happens and life can get back to a bit of 'normal'. Fred has been such a good friend who often checks in, not only on us but also weekly with our Nanna and Pa in Sydney.

Relationships with our Rwandan friends have certainly been a privilege over this time. It is so important to me that Flora models how to share what we have with others, and to develop a sense of empathy for everyone she comes across.



The day before a global pandemic was announced, I had booked and paid for my flight to Australia. While it is of course, disappointing that I am not there right now, it is also such a blessing to have so much time with Flora as I embrace every opportunity of watching her grow and develop and change into a delightful four year old who makes me laugh every single day.

No holiday is complete without our sweet 'Poppy Angel' - she comes with us every where we go. After 13 weeks of not leaving our front gate we ventured out of the house for one night and stayed at a place called the Retreat - for what they 'normally' charge - it wasn't really that great, what I did like, however, was the only heated swimming pool in Rwanda - that was absolute bliss! For 4.5 years I've been slinking into freezing pools and now she can swim we found one that is heated - and I don't have to get in anymore!

## The Retreat...



We enjoyed a one night vacation at the Retreat - not exactly a month in Sydney - but it was a night away and just what we both needed!

## So many friends left...

Every May it is difficult as we say the annual goodbye to families that we have made good friends with. This year was particularly more difficult as families started leaving in March, often without the opportunity to say good bye to them, due to COVID19. As expatriate flights out of Kigali were announced, a new wave of friends leaving were also announced. As adults we can process this as best we can but for a sweet four year old who lost four of her closest friends she saw several times a week, it has been something she has taken a little longer to understand.

A few weeks ago I was trying to explain that a friend's dog had died to Flora, and the first thing that came out of her mouth the next morning as she woke up was, "Mummy did my friend Rayna die too? Because I have not seen her for a long time!"

Sweet girl!







THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT OF FLORA AND I

BLACKIEONAMMISSION@KICS

WE APPRECIATE YOU...

We totally understand, first hand that life is not as it was even just at Christmas time last year. We also know what it is like to have a drop in income. Unfortunately, however, with the decrease in the Australian Dollar, like many others we do have increased expenses that we didn't have before.

Should you feel like you could support us as a one off or more permanently on a monthly basis,

From Australia our details are:

Michele L Black

BSB 062 458

ACC 1007 3047

Internationally - our USD account is:

SWIFT/BIC Code BKIGRWRWXXX - and the address is Bank of Kigali limited. BK HQ 4Plot 790 12 KN4 Ave P.O Box 175 Kigali.

ACC No: 06971337

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