

Rwandan Sitting Volleyball player Solange Nyiraneza gives us an insight into her life



Solange Nyiraneza

I am currently 20 years old and live in a rural area, about 20 kilometers from the city of Ruhango in Rwanda. It is a wooden house with two rooms and one dining room. The toilet is outside and also the kitchen, but that has a roof above it. Our house is not built for people with an impairment, but I can manage. The only problem is that our house is situated on top of a hill and the way towards the house is very bad.

Already for my whole life, I live with my brother. My parents were killed during a robbery. My father and mother had a mixed marriage (Hutu and Tutsi) and at that time my father was an important business man. I think the thieves were jealous. They entered or forced themselves into our house and killed both my parents. And they took everything. I was just 5 months old. My brother and I were raised by my elder sister, who was only 12 years old herself. I never knew my real parents. My childhood was difficult, because after the robbery we had nothing. We survived thanks to some income we get by growing some vegetables (we have a small piece of land) and by the small allowances from our government.

Normally I wake up at 7 o'clock in the morning; I wash myself and clean the house. After that we take a cup of tea, if we have it, and sometimes we have breakfast. I wash the clothes and prepare the food for lunch. My brother does most of the work on the land, partly because I have to go to school. After dinner we talk to each other and go to sleep.

I have an amputation of my left leg. When I was 5 years old, I was just running in the streets, like all children do. I fell. Because there was no doctor around, we waited for a few days. But after a few days an infection started. It took about a month, before I could go to the hospital. At that time the infection had already spread around and was too far gone. They could not save my leg anymore and it had to be amputated. The infection was also active in more parts of the body. I had some surgery on my arms too. The whole process of rehabilitation took around 3 years. It is still possible that the infection becomes active again, but until now it goes very well. Only rarely I use some medication. I have a prosthesis, but it needs maintenance. Sometimes I use a crutch. Especially on long distances, because that is the hardest for me, to walk over long distances over bad roads. For the rest I can do anything.

Actual it is really weird, because if I didn't had my amputation, I probably would not have been in school. And I probably would have missed all the experiences with the national Sitting Volleyball team. So, should I be happy to have this amputation? Because of this amputation I received small allowances from the government and from the Liliane Foundation in the Netherlands. The Liliane foundation pays my school fee. Without all this money, I would not have been able to go to school. Instead, I would have been a full time farmer now. In the past, most people especially my half-brothers had the idea that I was useless. But now, there are very jealous of me.

I am used to other people talking about us. If they talk badly about us, I just let it go and don't show it to them. I can keep my emotions to myself. I think I know myself rather well. Because we had to raise ourselves, I learned to learn from others and to take care of our own issues.

How did I get into Sitting Volleyball? Together with Alice, Yvonne, Providence and Carine, I was asked by Dominique. He was the Rwanda National Paralympic Committee scout. Now I can show them all, what I can do with Sitting Volleyball. When we became the African Champion in 2015, that was a great moment for me. I was emotional and had to cry.



Rwandan women's team during their training camp in Slovenia

First I was a setter in the team, but the coaches changed my role to libero. As a setter I didn't play very much, but now that I am libero, I can play almost every game. That is cool.

Because I am a player in the National team, I experience many new things and can travel to all kinds of destinations. I am curious and certainly not afraid for new things. Let it come. I also taste and try all the new foods and drinks. I hope that the coming years I will see many other new things. For example I want to travel in a train, see big ships or walk in the desert (The Sahara). I think all new experiences add value. I can share them with other people and in future it will give me some benefits.



Solange Nyiraneza and team members in China
for the World ParaVolley Intercontinental in 2016

To children with an impairment I want to say: *“accept your impairment, go and join sports.”*

In this world I would like to create more balance between the rich and poor. And I would like to teach everybody to do good things. Even when somebody has already made a mistake before. All people deserve a second chance.