

forum

■ **LONG JOURNEY:** Began in Rwanda, ended in North Bay

From refugee to hospital nurse

DON CURRY

Special to The Nugget

Vicky Samuel's quest to follow in her mother's footsteps as a nurse took her from Rwanda to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to Tanzania to Malawi and finally to Nipissing University and North Bay and District Hospital.

Samuel, the first sponsored refugee student through the university and World University Service of Canada (WUSC), graduated this year and has been hired by North Bay and

Samuel

District Hospital. She begins work on the 3 West Floor this month.

Born in Rwanda in 1985, her family fled the genocide in 1994 to the Congo and lived in a refugee camp. Online sources say that beginning April 6, 1994, and continuing for the next 100 days, up to 100,000 Tutsis were killed by the Hutu militia in

Rwanda.

They moved from there to Tanzania, where her parents wanted to settle, but could not get work visas. Her father is a teacher. Then it was on to Malawi in 1998, initially to a refugee camp.

In Malawi her parents were allowed to work in their professions. Her two younger sisters are still in school there.

Samuel, whose first language is Kinyarwanda, learned Swahili in Tanzania and Chichewa in Malawi. All her classes in Malawi, except Chichewa language classes, were in English.

"But as soon as school was over everyone spoke Chichewa," she said. She said there is still French spoken in Rwanda because it was colonized by Belgium, "and if I lived in Montreal for awhile I'm sure I could speak it." Congo independence from Belgium was attained in 1962.

The cost of attending university in Malawi was prohibitive because she did not have citizenship. She decided to explore WUSC, which sent her application to several Canadian universities. A committee at Nipissing University reviewed her application and thought she would be a good fit for the university and the city. She was sponsored for three years and worked part-time to supplement that income. "WUSC doesn't provide a luxury

lifestyle. It's more like that of the typical Canadian student," she says.

That was in 2004 and her first year was a general year, improving on credits she brought from Malawi. The following year she enrolled in the nursing program, shared between the university and Canadore College. She enjoyed the work placements during her program, completing assignments at the Community Care Access Centre, Early Years Centre and North Bay & District Hospital.

"It helped me get to know people in the community," she says.

Now a proud holder of her Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree, she is very happy to be employed in North Bay. "I want to be a hospital nurse and I want to stay in North Bay and give back to the community," she says.

The hospital hired her through a seven-month internship program and after that is done she can apply for any nursing positions that come up.

"Unfortunately, North Bay & District Hospital has not been protected from the nursing shortage that has hit the provincial and national stage," says Tiz Silveri, vice-president, surgery and maternal/child care centres.

"We have implemented a number of programs such as a



Submitted Photo

Vicky Samuel pictured outside the North Bay & District Multicultural Centre.

recruiter and we are participating in the provincial new graduate initiative to combat the effects this shortage may have on the hospital and ultimately the community.

"We are very fortunate with the building of the new hospital

to have a very effective incentive for nurses and other health professionals to either remain or relocate to North Bay.

"We are very pleased that Vicky chose to remain in North Bay and accept a position with us. We are fortunate that she will

not only share her clinical knowledge but also provide cultural diversity to her patient care."

Don Curry is executive director of the North Bay & District Multicultural Centre