

Dear Family and Friends,

Ghana was a country I had a hard time leaving and will have an even harder time forgetting. I know I often write about how kind the people of the countries I go to are but the people of Ghana showered me in their kindness making me feel welcome in a country where I stuck out like a sore thumb. I am unsure if my confidence as a traveler has grown or if I have become even more fascinated by different cultures as I travel but for whatever reason during my time in Ghana I would find myself sitting down and talking to locals for hours. I would start a conversation I thought would take fifteen minutes and it would turn into a few hours. Over the course of the short four days I was in Ghana I met many people but two of those people truly had an impact on my life and I think the best way to describe Ghana to you all is through their stories.

Johnbull was born in Nigeria in a rural village. He grew up in a Christian home and learned about the program YWAM, a non-profit Christian ministry, when a few missionaries came to his village when he was young. Years later he became a missionary and pastor. During his schooling he met his wife, Stacy who was from South Dakota. Together they started a non-profit Christian ministry called City of Refugee Ministries in Ghana an hour outside of Accra. Johnbull & Stacy rescue children who have been sold into child slavery and sex trafficking at Lake Volta (the largest man-made lake in the world). These children are taken from their homes and forced to swim in the polluted lake to untangle the fisherman's nets. Many children die or become infected by various parasites. Their parents receive less than 20 cents per day and will most likely never see their children again. This slave trade is illegal in Ghana but many authorities turn a blind eye. When Stacy & Johnbull learned about the horrible treatment of these children they raised enough money to start a small 'orphanage' and school for these children. They started the program in 2006 and now have 60 children living at their small 'ranch.' I use the word ranch because the area reminded me of a ranch in WY with sparsely placed buildings and self-sustaining amenities. The school they have established serves over 120 other children K-12 in the surrounding village that come for the day. These children receive one meal at school, sometimes the only meal they would receive for the entire day. I had the amazing opportunity to spend the day with these smart and loving children who were just beginning to learn how lead 'normal' lives once again. The most impactful part of my day was to sit down with Johnbull and see how his love for the Lord was the driving force behind sacrificing an easy life in America for a more difficult but rewarding life in rural Ghana. He wanted nothing more than to see these children succeed and to show them God's love. I would love to return to CORM in the near future and spend more time volunteering with their ministry.

[www.cityofrefugeoutreach.org](http://www.cityofrefugeoutreach.org)

Prior to arriving in Ghana I was given the email address of Boakey-Yam Boadi, a native of Ghana, who is the cousin of a PHD student in the USA, who is friends with my friend Josh's dad (I know, crazy connection). Yam (the name we called him because we had a hard time pronouncing Boakey) kindly offered to pick Sara, Josh and myself up from our ship and show us his beautiful home. The day we spent with Yam, his wonderful niece Tracie, and his best friend was one of my favorite days of my entire semester abroad. We spent the day visiting the church he attended, the university where he received both his BA and MBA, and other historical sites around Tema and Accra. We ate lunch in his aunt's restaurant where I had fufu (plantain and maize dough ball) with grasscutter (a RAT) all in a thick spicy soup. We ate everything with our hands and laughed the entire meal while we discussed marriage, education, and Yam's personal favorite, Donald Trump. He told us how he had 28 siblings and that his father had three wives. This was very typical in Ghanaian culture in the past and I met many other people who had similar family backgrounds. We stopped at a craft and wood working market where I met a man who knew every state capital in the USA and every country capital around the world. He even knew Buffalo Bill founded Cody, WY (CRAZY). Before our day of adventuring through tourist sites and personal hangouts came to an end we stopped for a "quick visit at a friends house." As we walked up to the stucco wall surrounding the house, sounds of people laughing and talking in the native language of Ga filled the air. We opened the gate to the most elaborate outdoor birthday I have ever attended. The tables were lined with gold runners; the centerpieces were made out of bright pink feathers and sparking gemstones. There was a popcorn machine, slushy maker, and buffet style warming trays for homemade food being

made over a Ghanaian BBQ. The party guests welcomed my American friends and I into their home and showered us with hugs. We sat and talked with the party guests about everything under the sun and made multiple commitments to act as tour guides of Yellowstone when they all came to visit. We felt so honored to be a part of Meredith's birthday and even learned how to sing happy birthday in their native language. On the way back from the party we all drove Yam's car through the narrow streets of Tema (he was more confident in our driving skills than I was). Saying goodbye to Yam and his family was more difficult than expected. However, I will forever hold onto the memories of that day and be thankful for all that I learned about a country in Africa where I now consider myself to have friends.

My time with Semester at Sea is quickly coming to an end. We arrive in Morocco in a one day and then sail to Germany to disembark. I am in the midst of writing final papers, studying for exams, and trying not to get too emotional about leaving my friends, professors, and this indescribably amazing semester behind.

Until next time,

Gabriella



