

CHAPTER TWO. 2004 TRIP: FIRST MEETING OF TOM AND EVARISTE

Tom came to Côte d'Ivoire in August, 2004, during the civil war that caused my country, which grows over 41% of the world's cacao to bankrupt itself. Tom arrived in the Abidjan airport at 10:30 PM, and my Dad, Evariste, offered to help him go where he wanted to go. Tom says that his first impression of Abidjan was darkness (it was night-time) and machine-guns (it was during the civil war which began in 2002 and ended in December, 2004). Evariste helped Tom get to the Novotel where he spent the night.

The next morning, Evariste ate breakfast with Tom and the two set out for Daloa, the town where Tom wanted to go because the Daloa township grows more cacao than any other equivalent area in the world (10%). Also, Tom wanted to visit Kavokiva, which was a Fair Trade certified cooperative.

The trip from Abidjan to Daloa was difficult. First, Dad and Tom took a taxi to the bus stop. Busses were actually vans (called navettes since Côte d'Ivoire speaks French). Tom remembers piles of garbage everywhere and lots and lots of people milling around. As the navette pulled out, Tom saw a dead body lying by the side of the road. Just outside Abidjan was the first police stop. In those days, shortly before the civil war, the passengers had to get out and stand in line, handing their identification papers to the police. Meanwhile, other police would closely inspect the tops of the navettes for weapons. It was common to hide machine guns in bunches of plantains. Tom had to pee and in Côte d'Ivoire, there are rarely any public bathrooms. So he walked over to a wall and peed directly under a sign that said, "Défense d'Uriner. Amende 5,000 CFA" or "No peeing allowed. \$10 fine". Well, guess what? A policeman ran over and said to Tom, "Can't you read? We don't need foreigners peeing on our walls!" And Tom had to pay the fine.

It took most of the day to get to Daloa, On the way, Evariste bought some freshwater shrimp which he and Tom enjoyed together.



The next day, Evariste and Tom set out for Gonate, a town that is West of Daloa, in the direction of Liberia. It took about half an hour to get there, and they were happy to meet the people of Kavokiva, one of the first Fair Trade cooperatives in Africa.

Tom wanted to see an Ivoirian cocoa farming village first-hand. The previous year, he had visited cocoa farming villages in Ghana and he wanted to compare them.

Georges, the vice-president of the cooperative, agreed to show Tom the village where he was the chief.



The picture shows some important attributes of an Ivoirian cocoa village. First, the houses are arranged in a circle around a central area. This allows children to easily play together while adults keep a watchful eye.

My Dad and Tom went to lunch with the top officials of Kavokiva. Tom had Pangolin Kedgereee for lunch. Pangolin is a scaly anteater whose flesh is moist and tender; its flavor is quite delicate. I love it, even though I'm now a New Yorker!!

Sadly, the pangolin is now considered to be an endangered species—partly because of the numbers of people who depend on African wildlife for sustenance.

I have found that American kids have absolutely no knowledge of Africa. Even my university friends know absolutely nothing! For example, they think that Africa is a completely wild place and when I tell them that Africans also suffer from the depletion of wildlife (like people all over), they just stand there with their mouths open, not believing me.

During the afternoon, Dad and Tom visited the farms of members of the cooperative's Board of Directors. One of the board members was Eugénie, a widow who ran her own cocoa farm along with her children.



The central area also allows young mothers to share tasks such as doing the laundry or washing a baby, and people can dry their foods together.





Eugénie standing in front of a cocoa tree. The fruits grow directly out of the trunks: called caudophylly by many botanists. Eugénie ran a very successful farm. The type of cacao that Eugénie grew is called Forastero.



Only 1% of flowers reach commercial maturity. Imagine if ag researchers could increase that to 2%!

After visiting Eugénie, Dad took Tom to see Ernest, who was vice-president of Kavokiva. They drove through fields of rice and corn to get there. The rice fields used to be low areas in the forest; the trees were chopped down in the 1980s when President Houphouët-Boigny invited people from the North (called the Dioula) to buy land and develop it.



Rice field with plantains in the background.



Hand-dug well. A rubber tire keeps dirt from falling in. The water is clean, but the bugs sure love it!

When Dad and Tom arrived at Ernest's house, someone had to go find him, as he was busy tending one of his fields. When Ernest arrived, Tom asked him whether he could photograph him, possibly for use on a candybar wrapper.



Ernest, Vice President of Kavokiva



Ernest's cocoa seedling nursery

In the photo, Ernest is sort of smirking because Tom had said, "Smile!" to Ernest and he responded, "What is there to smile about?" Possibly, he was thinking about the North-South civil war that was still raging. Ernest is holding a machete, which is the most important tool for the cocoa farmer.

Although I lived in Port Bouët, which is right on the ocean, Dad had taken me to visit relatives, so I've seen lots of cocoa farms. Cocoa farmers open the pods and extract the seeds, which they embed in soil in these little black bags. It is the job of children to water the bags and to tend the cocoa seedlings.

Once they are about a year old, they are planted in the soil. Another 2-3 years, and the little trees begin to produce fruit.

Dad and Tom left Daloa the next day. As usual, they rode in one of the navettes that connect towns. The road from Daloa passes through Yamoussoukro, which is the capital. At one point, they were stuck behind this truck carrying lumber.





The last day, Tom and Dad visited one of three chocolate factories owned by Barry Callebaut. They met with the Director General of SACO, one of three chocolate plants owned by the world's third biggest chocolate company, Barry Callebaut. Tom asked the director, M. Didier Buecher, "Why don't you use Fair Trade chocolate?" He replied, "Look at my laptop here. The screen is covered in a matrix of numbers. I have to make all those numbers work or else I am out of a job. This is a publically traded company, so if I fail the stockholders by spending too much on cocoa beans, I lose my job and then have a hard time finding another."

Mr. Buecher also said liberalization (when Côte d'Ivoire borrowed billions of dollars in the 1980s and in return opened their markets to control by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) resulted in a significant degradation of bean quality. Before liberalization, the Bourse de Café et Cacao (BCC) paid farmers who lived farther from the port extra so they could economically get their beans to market. After liberalization, such methods of providing a level economic playing field were erased, and farmers lost economic power. This forced a steadily downward spiral, eventually forcing them to stop using chemicals (pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, fertilizers) and yields and quality dropped, resulting in increased poverty.

That same day, they both went to visit with Mme Nadine Assemien, who was the country representative of the ILO, the International Labor Organization, a branch of the U.N. At the time, Côte d'Ivoire was being investigated for breeches of international rules regarding WFCL or "Worst Forms of Child Labor." During this interview, Tom learned that the average cocoa-growing family had 5-6 children, that children who do poorly in school are sent out to work, and that the going rate should you want to sell a child is \$100 - \$200. Should one child succeed in school, he faced class sizes of 100-200, with as many as 4 children sitting at a single table.