

CASABLANCA -- 2012

I drove to LAX with three suitcases full of 300 PH&F scarves, 12 cases of chocolate, and 100 solar lights--in addition to the usual travel paraphernalia. I flew to JFK, picked up my mother, Dorothy, in Terminal 2, then proceeded to Terminal 1 where we met Dr. Deanna Pucciarelli of Ball State University. She and I are presenting at a mini-conference at the University of Buea, which is to be the beginning of the cocoa study center--we hope.

We arrived in Casablanca at 7:30 AM and hired a cab for the day and drove into town where we visited the Hassan II Mosque, then had lunch in a restaurant located on Le Corniche, across a bay from the mosque. Because it was the first day of Ramadan, all restaurants were closed, as people fast and avoid water from sun-up to sun-down. This restaurant (top, left) was open, though, as it caters to Europeans. We started with olives and pickles, then had the customary Ramadan evening snack consisting of a fried doughnut, dates, and a tomato-based soup. We ate two tagines--lamb with prunes and veal Berber-style.

After lunch, we went to a souk to purchase spices (top, right). I bought some argan oil for cooking and some for Eve. Argan is a tree that thrives in Morocco. The fruits are pressed to extract a flavorful oil that also serves as an emollient for the skin. We visited a bakery where everyone was cramming into the small space underground to purchase pastries for breaking that evening's Ramadan fast (bottom left).

These (bottom, right) are "Doigts au Sesames", or sesame fingers. They are made with almond paste, no flour. We purchase a Kg of mixed pastries, all wheat free, a box that served us in good stead for the next three days. Pure almond pastries keep extremely well



DOUALA

We arrived in Douala at 4:30 AM, having slept not a wink. We stood by the luggage belt for 90 minutes, and our luggage (4 pieces) never appeared! Kila Balon met us at the airport and we drove to the hotel, actually, the Baptist Guesthouse, where Kila found out that they had not reserved rooms for us. We ended up going to another hotel and managed to get to sleep around 9 AM. We rose at about 2 PM and drove to Kila's aunt's house in a suburb of Douala. She served us a fabulous meal--two kinds of chicken stew, corn fufu, rice, two kinds of ndole or steamed vegetables. His aunt, who was mayor of the community for years and who lives in a modest concrete block house, takes care of 22 orphans on the premises! What a great role model!

She and my mother got along famously.

We retired at 9 PM, and I slept 9 straight hours. Toward the end, I dreamt that I was in charge of a nuclear reactor located inside a chocolate brown cylinder. My job was to keep the water levels high enough to avoid the fuel rods going critical. But I was inattentive, the water level fell, and cesium and strontium were filling the bathroom where it was located. At that point of hysteria, my mother knocked on the door to wake me up.



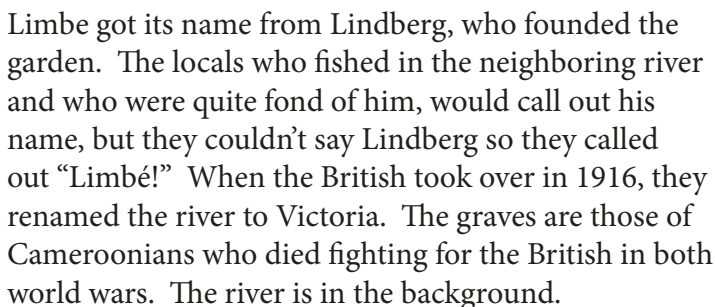
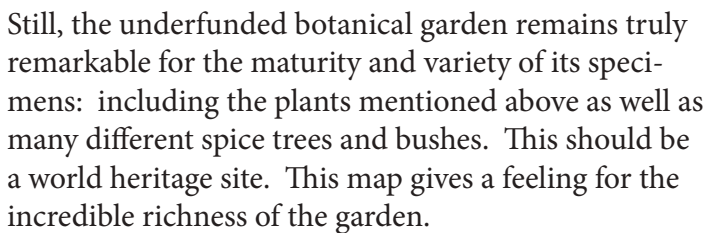
After breakfast, we called the airport. The bags had not arrived. But, not wanting to rely on the say-so of one person, we went to the airport to check about the bags. They were indeed not there. So we drove to the offices of Royal Air Maroc. The woman told us to call M. Christian between 1 and 4 that afternoon. In the meantime, we did a few errands and visited the downtown area, especially the pagoda building, designed, built and lived in by the Cameroonian hero, King Rudolf Duala, who was hanged in 1914 by the Germans for high-treason because he opposed the appropriation of Duala lands to be used for European settlement.

We finally got to meet M. Christian, who spent half an hour searching the computer for our bags. At the end, he concluded, "I am most certain that your bags will arrive tomorrow!" On that positive note, we elected to eat dinner. Kila found us this charming little restaurant, called "Le ZigZag". The roast chicken was fabulous--spicy, crunchy, and so very flavorful. I also ate Miondo, which are small rounds of boiled cassava paste and Ndole, a Dualan green vegetable stew with bits of smoked fish.

The rest of the evening sitting under the cupola at the Baptist Guest House where we talked about the cocoa study center.

Joy of joys, our luggage arrived! We picked it up after paying a customs official \$40 for the privilege of bringing four suitcases into the country. Our next job was to purchase the tools for the two villages we plan to visit. I spent \$1,000 for boots, machetes, sharpeners, shovels, picks, school books, and rain gear.





A photograph of a cemetery. In the foreground, there is a curved concrete curb separating a grassy area from a bed of brown mulch. Within the mulch bed, approximately 15-20 upright, rectangular gravestones are arranged in rows. The stones are light-colored, possibly limestone or marble, and show varying degrees of weathering. Some have inscriptions, though they are difficult to read. Behind the gravestones, there is a paved road or path. In the background, there are lush green trees and foliage, and a glimpse of a building with a blue roof can be seen through the branches. The overall scene is peaceful and well-maintained.

CHAPTER 11



My mother Dorothy admires a liana, one of thousands draping out of a single tree. Our guide called it a type of philodendron (“likes branches”)

Between the garden and ocean is this charming vacation cove with gorgeous views, even when it's raining heavily.



We drove into Limbé and visited the fishing community. West African fishing boats are amazingly sturdy and heavy, and take maybe a dozen men to haul up on the beach

Fishermen's wives collecting the catch.





Fishermen's wives grilling the fish, which smelled divine. We bought two bass as well as grilled Cameroonian plums and plantains.

BUEA

We drove to Buea from Limbe and arrived at around 10 AM. The University of Buea has about 16,000 students. Four of us gave talks about chocolate.. Dr. Andrew Egbe gave a talk about the cocoa plant. This was followed by my giving a talk about the cocoa market in which I discussed the bulk vs the fine chocolates market, setting a foundation for discussing how a bean to bar mini-factory could be set up in a cocoa study center.

I was followed by Dr. Minyaka, who discussed in vitro production of plant embryos, a technology that would circumvent a very vexing problem in cocoa-producing countries: how to produce sufficient seedlings to replace aging trees. Cameroon alone runs a deficit of 60 million cocoa seedlings, which leads to farms with older and less productive trees.



After a brief snack break, I talked about how chocolate and cocoa are produced, the different types, and I finished with a discussion of bean to bar technology, which promises to strengthen and enrich the position of small business in the chocolate business. I said that the bulk chocolate industry has done very little to enhance the sustainability of the cocoa farmer, in fact doing just the opposite. I showed an area of common interest: that cocoa-producing countries and farmers would add considerably to the value of their product if villages produced their own chocolate and if small businesses in the U.S. did the same, adding the concept of terroir, which has so greatly benefited wine and coffee producers and merchants in the U.S.

Deanna followed me. She discussed the history of medicinal beliefs about cocoa consumption, how the beliefs evolved and devolved. Nutritional beliefs can greatly aid the marketing of hot cocoa in Cameroon, where people are very influenced by medicinal beliefs, especially since there continues to be an important industry in the use of local plants to combat illness.

CHAPTER 11



Afterwards, we drove to a restaurant, where we were treated by the department chair. This is the parking lot of the restaurant, and behind it you can see Mount Cameroon which at over 15,000 feet, is second only to Mount Kilimanjaro, an entire continent to the east. Can't see the mountain? Sorry. It's enshrouded in mist.



Nevertheless, I had a balcony, from which I snapped this birdseye view of the town's market.



EKONA

After breakfast, we set out on our trek around the volcano. Our first stop was the IRAD (Institut de Recherche et Développement) in Ekona. We began with a talk with its director, Dr. Kingsley A. Etchu. He is very excited about our plans and proposed that we consider using buildings on his grounds for the center.

From 1981 to 1993, USAID supported this institute, constructing most of its buildings. Professors from the University of Maryland worked there, and graduate students abounded. A lot of research was conducted on genetic solutions to diseases of tropical plants. However, in 1993, there was some sort of grave misunderstanding between the governments of the U.S. and Cameroon, and the entire operation shut down. Since then, the buildings have been mostly abandoned, as the Cameroonian government has not found the funds to support research there. For example, they no longer have WiFi, which costs \$500 per month, as they could not make the payments.

We toured several buildings which could be easily adapted for the cocoa study center. This is a building of offices. It is very well constructed and has not aged much, considering how quickly masonry and wood self-destruct in the warm, moist climate.

CHAPTER 11



Above, left: Dr. Kingsley Etchu, Director of the Ekona Institute. Above, right: office building. Below, left: This handsome building has several laboratories that would serve well as chocolate and cocoa production facilities. There is also a cold storage room, which is in excellent shape. Below, right: The laboratories have not been used since 1993 and are filthy. The floor is covered with lizard excrement. On the counter are two lizards gawking at us.



On the way out, we came across this millipede, which stings and also emits bad odors to warn potential predators.



MUNYENGE

We drove around the volcano to Munyenge. It rained the whole time, but fortunately the road is rocky, not muddy. Below, left: We visited the chief of Munyenge, who is sitting on his throne and my mother is posing next to him. I got some good video clips of him describing some of the problems that cocoa farmers experience.

We donated PH&F scarves, hammers, twine, solar lights, machetes, boots, childrens' workbooks, and chocolates from Sweet Earth. Total value of \$550



TO LOUM VIA KUMBA

After visiting the chief, we drove to Kumba and spent the night. For dinner (below, left), I had porcupine (hérisson). Like most bush meat, it had a smoky flavor. The fufu on the lefthand plate is gari fufu, made by boiling gari (granulated, fermented cassava) and pounding it into a sticky paste.

We ate breakfast early to get on the road, because we were anxious to make it to the University of Dschang, where we were supposed to conduct another seminar. We knew that the road from Kumba to Loum, which was dirt, would be difficult because of the rains. (Below, right).

We set out, slipping and sliding on the mud, using 4-wheel drive to negotiate some very difficult situations. However, about 20 minutes from Loum, we were told by a forestry vehicle that the rest of the way would be impassable for us, as we were driving a Ford Explorer, which is not really designed for truly difficult situations. So, with heavy hearts, we turned around and drove back to Kumba.



CHAPTER 11

On the way back, Kila was pointing out cocoa drying ovens. We decided to take advantage of the situation and visit some of them. In some regions of Cameroon, particularly the areas around the volcano, cocoa farmers have to resort to drying with wood. The ovens are constructed with brick and mortar and a firebox crosses the width of the oven, heating the air directly above it. The hot air rises and bathes a wooden shelf, on which are spread the cocoa beans.

Fermented cocoa beans being spread over the hot surface. Heating the beans stops the fermentation and as a result, the beans deliver a blander, less flavorful chocolate as the fermentation byproducts are necessary for the development of flavor in chocolate.

The firebox, which consists of a long tube that crosses the entire drying oven. The gases escape up a chimney at the other end.



It took us 6 hours to drive all the way south and take another, completely paved road all the way to Dschang. On the way, we passed a 6000 foot volcano and then we reached the highlands region, punctuated by a wall of hills that are about 1000- feet high. We drove up the wall (called the falaise) and reached the western highlands. A few more kilometers, and we were in Dschang.

DSCHANG



After our meeting, we visited the soil laboratory. We unfortunately were too late to visit Dr. Julius Tanka, who left before we could get a tour of his facilities.

BAFOUSSAM

We got up early and drove to Bafoussam to have breakfast with Kila's stepmother. Also pictured is his step sister, who is wearing a pullover or some such article of clothing. (Below, left).

We had a most delicious breakfast, which included grilled fish, crudités, and banana fritters. The banana fritters are made by frying small bananas in oil, letting them cool, then pinching them and then refrying. They are quite excellent. The fish was delicious. (Below, right)



BANDJOUN

After breakfast, we drove south to the village of Bandjoun, where we visited a most extraordinary church. (Below, left). Below, right: I totally agree with this statement: "Real faith is accompanied by charity."



We continued to Monatele, a town about 30 minutes from the country's capital, Yaounde. We turned off the road and drove for half an hour on dirt road. Fortunately for us, in this region, they hadn't seen rain for 6 weeks (in the middle of the rainy season no less: take that, global warming deniers!) and the road was quite negotiable.

MONATELE



We began our visit of Monatele (population 6,000—stretches for a mile or so throughout the woods) by walking in the same farm we had visited last year. We had to descend about 50 feet down a hill; this was a challenge for my mother, who picked her way along the path carefully. We walked through the grove of cocoa trees to stand at the same, huge, leftover behemoth of the former jungle, a monster of the area's former glory easily 20 feet in diameter.

I escorted my mother, Dorothy, back to our starting point and sat with her while the others, including Deanna, took a walk to the river to inspect the village's biggest problem, a collapsed bridge. I took advantage of the opportunity to unload the car of the last tools. When the others came back from their side trip, Kila and two farmers took me on the same walk. Their purpose was to show me the fallen bridge (above, right), which has seriously slowed their ability to move cocoa beans to market. One of my companions agreed to submit an estimate of what it would cost to build a more permanent structure.

Below, left: One of the farmers who had led us to the fallen bridge stands on his porch. He is currently building an extension to his house. This man's financial success is clearly well above average. Below, right: As we returned to the starting point, I saw a small collection of cocoa beans, drying. My companions explained that they belonged to an old woman, who was no longer able to harvest a lot of beans. Also, she had not properly fermented the beans, and this is reflected in the purple color, present because few of the purple anthocyanins had been degraded.



CHAPTER 11



Top left: Behind the house where we were to hold our meeting was this mat of cocoa beans, drying in the sun.

Top right: The famous “Mercedes” variety, known for its profusion of flowers and early maturation. It starts yielding at 18 months. I have no idea whether the beans are any good. Bulk variety cocoa involve such low quality beans that perhaps such a “bush” would do well.

Upper left: The village cooked us quite a repast. One platter held two kinds of corn cakes. There were the customary greens—as usual, really excellent. Also pictured are fried plantains, myongo, which is the cassava sticks that are cooked and served wrapped up in leaves.

Upper right: We donated the usual machetes, boots, scarves, books, solar lights, etc.

Bottom right: my mother with a friend.

We left the village and drove to Yaounde where we spent the night.



YAOUNDE

This day was spent visiting people around town. Our first stop was a park where the government is collecting houses from around Cameroon. Unfortunately, the exhibit is still in process, so no one can enter. We resorted to peering through holes in the fence. Right: This house has collapsed during its construction. Unprotected mud walls cannot stand up to torrential rains.



We spent almost two hours with the Minister of Higher Education and his wife.. The purpose of our visit was to consult with them concerning ways to finance the cocoa study center. At first, he lectured us on liberal capitalism but after a while, he suggested that the cocoa study center was less about education and more about building business. After two hours of conversation, the minister wrote out an introduction to the Minister of Small and Large Enterprises, which we would supposedly put to good use the following morning.

The house is sumptuously decorated (below, left). On a far wall, an enormous flatscreen TV blared out a French cartoon. Below, right: the minister's wife meets the President's wife.



Similar to chieftancies, the walls are studded with pictures of the minister performing his duties. This picture shows the minister's wife greeting President Biya's wife. President Biya has been in office for over 30 years. The countryside of Cameroon sports large signs with his picture on it; next to it is the inscription, "La Choix du Peuple" or "The People's Choice" He usually wins elections with numbers approaching 99%.





Masks of Northern Cameroon

We were supposed to be at the TV station at noon, but we got there at 1 PM, as our meeting with the minister took a little while. They rushed us into the makeup room (below, left) where we were all dusted in order to eliminate glare. We were on a live show. They asked us about what we hoped to accomplish in Cameroon and the interview lasted about 3 minutes. There were no questions from the audience, so we left the set and walked outside, where we had a second, longer interview under the mango trees. This interview aired the next morning. Cameroonians watch a lot of TV. In fact, it is quite normal to have the TV going during waking hours. Like Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire, interview shows are quite popular.

After the TV interviews, we drove across town to Ernest Ehabé's place (bottom, left). He lived in the U.S. for 25 years. Both he and his wife are Cameroonian. They moved back to their country 3 years ago, and he has been working hard to establish businesses that generate capital for this various charitable enterprises, two of which are Bread for Life and Cadac. The former organization is religious in nature and is supported by Methodist, Lutheran, and Baptist denominations. Cadac is a-religious in focus.



Ernest showed us one of the businesses he's been toying with: distribution of cards made from painted bamboo on paper. Ernest took us out to an African burger-pizza joint. The bread is as usual superior to what we consume in the U.S. (surprise-surprise) and so are the fries. Believe it or not, West Africa grows potatoes and cabbage quite successfully.

We checked into a hotel. It took a while because two front desk clerks had a hard time checking in one customer at a time. However, the rooms featured running water, which is always a plus.

CHAPTER 11



We stopped by Pa Goddy's house. He's related to Kila; see last year's blog for a description of his wife Mary's fabulous meal! This time, we just sat around and talked about the cocoa study center and about the upcoming presidential election in the U.S. At first, we had a hard time hearing each other because about 25 people were singing and dancing on their porch--a group of people from NW Cameroon who gather at Pa's house monthly.

We spent the morning attempting to visit two ministries. The Minister of Small and Medium Enterprises was not there, but Kila was able to secure a meeting with him for Wednesday of this week. We also visited the advisor to the Minister of Tourism. Deanna expressed her concerns about Cameroon's real commitment to tourism because: 1), Cameroon taxes each passenger with \$750 landing fees; 2), Hotels are not available on the Internet, so you cannot reserve rooms in advance; 3), running hot and cold water, functioning AC, toilets that work are sadly lacking.

At about noon, we drove south to Douala and checked into the Baptist Guesthouse which is a great place: beautiful garden, clean swimming pool, OK rooms with hot and cold water, non-functioning AC (just blows), but only \$30 to \$40 per night.

We drove to the airport at 8:30 and sat around waiting for check-in. Sadly, there were no announcements and no one to help us. We stood in line for 45 minutes and when we finally reached the check-in desk, they informed me that check-in was closed. No effort was ever made to inform passengers. This, also, shows a lack of commitment on the part of the Cameroonian government to make their country tourist-friendly.

I was told to return 48 hours later, pay a penalty of \$60 and they'd let us on the plane. Whoopee: customer service Cameroon-style! Fortunately, does not jeopardize the mission in Ghana, as I was already wondering what we would do with the extra time. Peter, my assistant, can't make it, so trying to talk to anyone in Ghana about a cocoa study center is pointless. So, we returned to the Baptist Guesthouse, got the last room available, and spent the rest of the day working on various projects such as this blog.

During the night, I was battered by a fine case of food poisoning, and I spent from 2 AM to 5 AM climbing up and down a narrow circular staircase to reach the bathroom. In the morning, we ate breakfast and checked into Hotel Planete, which is about 100 meters from the guesthouse (which is full for the night). It costs \$120 per night (with tax), but I have in-room internet and everything works! Expensive but I don't have an alternative. And, I've done my wash and am busily allowing it to dry.

We made it to Ghana! There were still some adventures along the way. Got to the airport at 8 AM, spent another \$120 to get our new tickets, waited forever for the plane that was late, made it to Lome, Togo, then started to board the next plane. Turns out our lovely personnel in Cameroon didn't bother to put us on the passenger list, so we fretted and fretted. Imagine how my mother felt! I tried to remain calm.

We crammed ourselves into an old propjob and we tootled over Togo and Ghana at 14,000 feet. I felt like a WWI passenger.

ACCRA

CHAPTER 11

We arrived in Accra at 2 PM, had no problems through customs, met Alex, then drove to a fast-food (actually slow food) joint that does burgers and fries and fried chicken. Quite good, but extremely slow. I begged 4 times for the Coke so we could sip it while waiting for a slow food. Turns out you can't have part of your order while waiting.

We changed \$2000 into 4006 cedis (the cedi has lost 45% of its value just in 12 months). We drove (actually, crawled) to Agrimat and purchased 60 pairs of boots at \$8 each (half the price of the boots in Cameroon). Agrimat doesn't believe in maintaining stock, so we had to find another way to purchase \$1500 of machetes. This we did in a very clever way. Alex's step-mother's sister is married to a man who sells farm implements. Since if we had attempted to drive to center Accra during rush hour, we would have arrived 90 minutes after the store's closing, Alex asked her to contact the man and ask him to bring 300 machetes home with him, as he lives down the street.

So we drove to Alex's mother-in-law's house to wait. Alex's mother-in-law had 5 girls. The father died 15 years ago and, instead of remarrying, his mother-in-law elected to raise the girls alone. She did years of menial labor, including rock-cracking (the lowest of the lowest jobs). Under her guidance, the five daughters have fared wonderfully. Two live in GB, and two in the USA. One has an MBA, one is a nurse, and Alex's wife Gloria is the Ghanaian representative for South African Airways--a very prestigious job. Below left: my mother with Alex's mother-in-law, Alex's son, and Alex.



Above, left: Alex's mother-in-law keeps a daily supply of fresh eggs in the form of hens. Above right: Fresh water for the house is available at the outside wall of the family compound.



Left: Alex's wife Gloria and my mother Dorothy. Right: The machetes finally arrived at around 8:15 PM. I paid him 3000 cedis (\$1500). Alex is loading the machetes.

At 10:30 PM we arrived in Cape Coast and tried a hotel that advertises along the Kakum Road—called Hotel Friendly. Alex drove up to the gate and honked in the customary way. No one came. He honked again. Still no answer. So, he got out and walked up to the gate. Someone finally arrived and proceeded to lecture Alex on the impropriety of honking at 10:45 PM. In Africa? Decidedly, not a friendly hotel.

We drove to the next place, which we had tried previous years but which had always been full. Still full. But they had an “annex”. This consisted of a building that was a quarter mile away, arrived at over extremely rutty road. A young man used his bicycle to show us the way. This “annex” turned out to be a new building, quite handsome and African in its way—lots of whimsy with the concrete flourishes. However, it had no hot water and my AC was non-functional. The young man heated water for my mother's “bath” (shower) which she told me later was of a decidedly brown color. I elected to take a cold shower instead of waiting until after midnight. So did Alex.

The “annex” did not provide breakfast, so we drove into Cape Coast the next morning. Finding breakfast in a restaurant is pretty much an impossible proposition, since people eat breakfast at home if at all and that consists mainly of leftovers from the night before. We found a restaurant on the outskirts of town called “Sizzler”. They didn't happen to serve coffee, so we enjoyed some luke-warm tea. Mom and I shared a plate of Red-Red (cow-peas cooked with onions in very red palm oil served with plantains fried in very red palm oil—hence the name).

Alex ate Tilapia with something. Here he is, demonstrating the “proper way to eat a fish”, which is to crunch all the bones and the head in your mouth, to extract the fishy bits, then spit out the rest as a paste. I find that method a bit too fraught with peril, myself. All those spiky bones, teeth, scales, etc. But I'm sure it all tastes very good!



After breakfast, we drove into town and found my mother some film (which is becoming increasingly difficult to find). We then drove to the first village Adiyaw, located about 30 minutes up the Kakum road. One has to negotiate the usual rutted dirt affair for about 3 kilometers. They didn't know we were coming, so it was a complete surprise.

ADIYAW

As usual, we go through certain protocols. First they ask you why you are visiting them. Then we explain the three missions of PH&F: I say something, then Alex translates into twi. Even though they are a Fante people (living near the coast), they understand twi, which differs from Fante in the same way that American English differs from Highland Scottish.



We donated 5 pairs of three sizes of boots, 37 curved machetes, 37 straight-bladed machetes, 20 scarves, 5 electric lights, a handful of pens and a case of chocolates. A few minutes after I took this picture, one of the men decided to cause trouble by saying that certain people in the village were taking more than their share and hiding it under their beds. A woman in the crowd then asked him how he knows what people put under their beds. This caused much gesticulating and yelling. I think we will find another village next year, as these people lack leadership and organization.

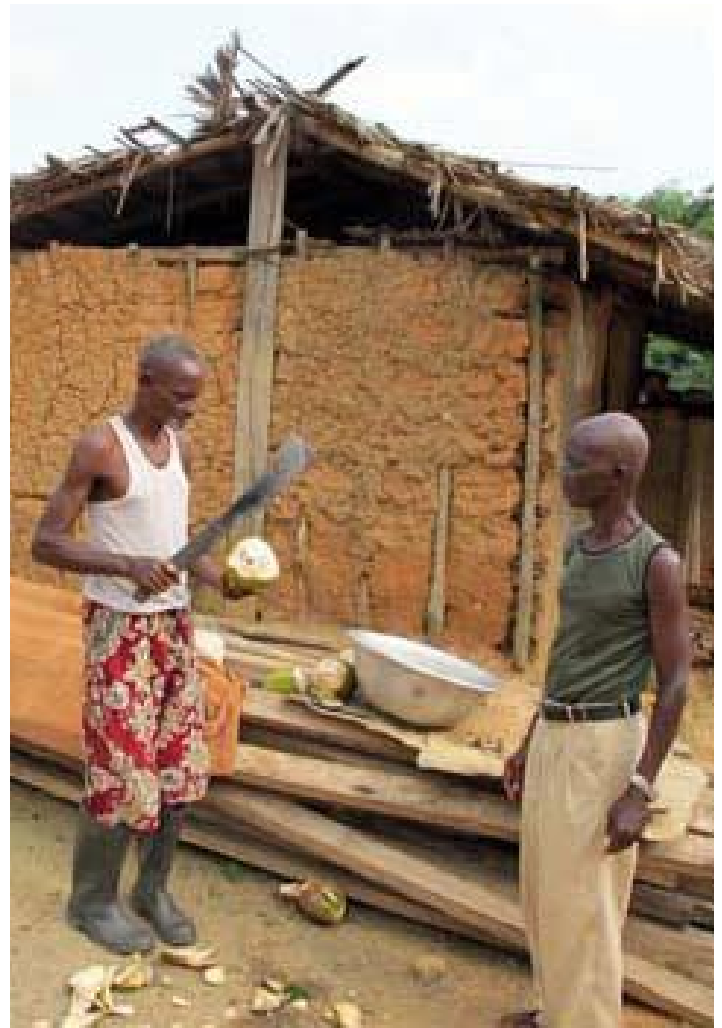
MMANIAYE

We then drove on the same road to the second village, Mmaniaye. Again, we have been visiting this village since 2006. I've always found the leadership positive and the people very industrious. They process a lot of foods, including gari, which is a shredded cassava product that is dried and sold to be reconstituted later.



He then insisted in posing with the cassava, which has been peeled in preparation for shredding and fermenting.





As we waited for people to assemble, I asked whether we could drink some coconut juice, as I try to get my allowance once per year. Right, the chief is preparing a green coconut for me. I just love the stuff. He cuts the fibrous exterior away, the hacks off the end of the nut. The beverage is mildly sweet, mild in flavor, and all around wonderful. After you drink it, he cuts it in three and you scoop out the gelatinous meat. One of the great rewards for living on planet earth.

Top, left: We presented the gifts—the same items as those presented to Adiyaw. Everyone was most appreciative and there was no fighting whatsoever. Bottom, left: On the way back to the car, I snapped this picture of fufu being pounded. This is made by boiling cassava and plantain and then pounding each until a gluey, gummy texture results. People eat it with their hands, usually with a “soup” that consists of a flavorful broth and meat or fish.

On the way back to Cape Coast, we passed a field of stones graded by size. People crack these granitic rocks by hand. Right: This woman consented to have her photograph taken in exchange for 50 cents—probably what she earns in two hours of rock-cracking.



GYAWARE

The following day, we drove to Gyaware, a town located about 8 km off the main road. Because of the distance, most of the children have no opportunity for an education. It's also hard enough to get the product to market. Gyaware is beautifully situated, backed up to one of the only remaining tracts of virgin rainforest, Kakum National Park. And, as you may know, rainforest gets its name from the propensity of trees to retain moisture in the local atmosphere and perpetuate rainfall. Gyaware, by the way, means "too far to come marry you."



Top left: main street. Top right: typical house. Middle left: the village shower. Middle right: goat basks in residual warmth of gari drying pit. Left, the man in the middle whom I had met 5 years earlier has aged way more than 5 years. He complained of eye discomfort; a cobra had spat in it.



Left: the village's one bicycle--a mute testimony to difficulties of transportation when you live in the bush.
Right: Dorothy and our donations to the village.

EBEKAWOPA

After Gyaware, we drove to the village where I am Development Chief, or Nkorsorhene. I am also called "Nana Edim II". I am hoping to build a small cocoa study center in the village where we would study the potential smallscale chocolate production in a cocoa growing village. This will require paying for the running of electrical wires from the main road to the village. Reverend Sampson is a leader of the village and with whom I have had regular contact since 2006.

Somehow all of the images about the donations ceremony were corrupted. Below, my mother and I followed the Reverend Sampson into his grove of cocoa trees, which occupies 5 hectares of land.



Rev. Sampson showed us the traditional West African method of fermenting cocoa beans_ to arrange banana leaves on the ground, then to pile the beans on it and finally to place banana leaves on top. The cocoa beans were quite warm: maybe 120 °F.

The beans have to ferment for 6 days, and they should be stirred every two days in order to ensure even heating and fermentation. This hydrolyzes or breaks down complex carbohydrates into sugars, which are consumed by the bacteria. Fermentation ensures the production of the important flavor precursors for chocolate. Insufficient fermentation produces chocolate with little aroma or flavor.

CHAPTER 11



Above, left: Rev. Sampson shows off his pile of fermenting cocoa beans. Above, right: the beans ferment a total of 6 days. Below, right: our donations to the village of Ebekawopa.

Our job is finished in Ghana. We spent the night in Cape Coast and then drove back to Accra. On the way to the airport, Soledad, who used to live in Mmaniaye, joined us at a traffic light. She needs 150 ghana cedis for her education. I told her to write me an email explaining what she has studied, what she plans to study in the future, and how well she's doing. I told her I would send her the money before the beginning of high school.

At the airport, we met Peter's brother. Peter Sewornoo set up the village tour in 2006. He is now working as an economist for the British Commonwealth. I gave Peter's brother an IBook that I had received as a reward for installing a solar system on our house.

The flight to Abidjan was eventless, and we met Albert Kouassi Konan at the Hotel Golden, where I have stayed since 2005. We also met Kelsey Timmerman, who is writing a book about where food comes from: coffee, bananas, tomatoes, cocoa, and two others.

Kelsey has by now (2019) written three books (Where Am I Wearing?; Where Am I Eating?; Where Am I Giving?) For more about his work, see kelseytimmerman.com.

DOUALA



We started by getting money from the ATM, then driving to St. Paul Cathedral (left) one of the most beautiful churches that I have ever seen. Designed by Italian architect Aldo Spirito, it was begun in 1983 and finished in 1985. It is a totally non-rectilinear building; the floor follows the line of the hill while the roof soars to heaven. Right: surrounding the grounds of the cathedral are the government buildings. This one is much the worse for wear because during the mini-civil war of 2010-2011 (after the presidential elections) there was a lot of fighting between pro-Ouattara and pro-Gbagbo forces

In the evening, we ate the truly excellent dish, grilled fish Abidjanese-style at Le Baron Restaurant in Port Bouet (next to the ocean). We enjoyed the sounds of ocean waves crashing.

Today we were supposed to start out at 8:30 AM. We had finished breakfast and had brought all the luggage downstairs. Albert and the driver didn't arrive until 10:15, however. Why? Because the Ivorian military was engaged in a firefight in Cocody and the road was blocked so the driver couldn't make it to our hotel. Gbagbo supporters supposedly attacked the garrison and left 7 dead.



We finally started out, but there were two errands to do first. One was to purchase flowers for Albert's wife. While we sat and waited, I took a picture of this ad for American rice. (left) The other was to pick up three pieces of furniture in Cocody to deliver to Albert's cousin in Daloa (below). .



CHAPTER 11

Furniture making is an important profession throughout West Africa.



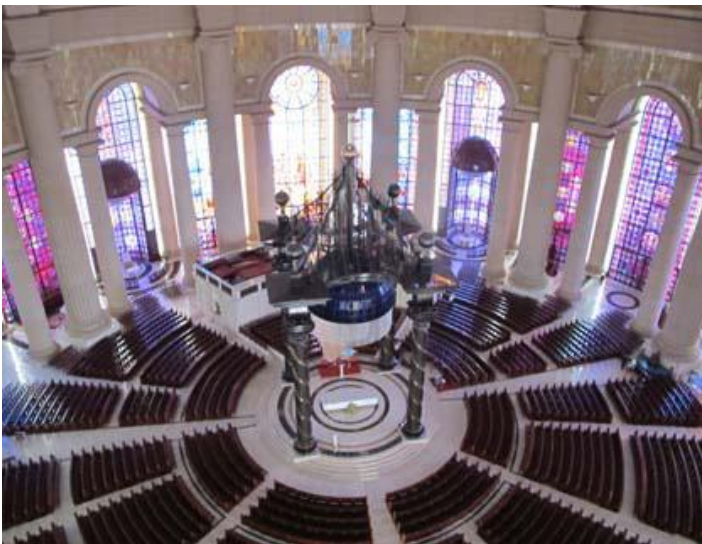
We drove from 11 AM to 2 PM, at which point we left the main road and drove toward a community, Lake Taabo, where Albert's wife lives. She prepared a sumptuous meal, including an extraordinary crayfish stew. I haven't had crayfish that good since 1973! Below, left: Albert's wife and child with Kelsey and me. Below, right: Kelsey with Albert's son.



We arrived in Yamoussoukro at about 5:30 PM. We drove to the presidential palace to check out the crocodiles, of which there were about 40, all sitting by the side, waiting for someone to throw them a live chicken. About 50 people were standing on the bridge across the lake to witness this spectacle of cruelty. Three chickens were sacrificed as we watched. We drove to our hotel, which is situated right next to the crocodile lake.

We began the day by visiting the basilica in Yamoussoukro. Built in the mid-80's "with the money of the country's president, Houphouët-Boigny"—actually with funds from a \$5.5 billion loan from the World Bank—this is an extraordinary edifice. It's a copy of St. Peter's of Rome. One story has the pope calling HB, asking him to keep it smaller than St. Peter's. HB obliged but then made the cupola higher by one meter.

YAMOUSSOUKRO



Above, left: The cross over the altar. Although designed by a Lebanese-Ivorian architect, most of the inside was made either in France or in Italy.

Above, right: Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, celebrated on Palm Sunday. Houphouët-Boigny is shown just at his base. The architect is shown off to the side.

Left: the nave from a balcony that circumvents the inside of the dome. All the stained glass was manufactured in France.

SINFRA



We drove to Daloa. On the way, we encountered this parade in Sinfra which delayed us by about an hour. We took advantage by watching it and enjoying the various participants. These are the infamous Dozos, hunters who are animist (following the traditional religion), who carry rifles and wear brown outfits that resemble Daniel Defoe's depiction of Robinson Crusoe. The Dozos killed four people in Broguhe, last November and they burned 10 homes.

COOPERATIVE ICAH

We visited our first cooperative, CoopICAH, which specializes in FT and Rainforest Alliance certifications. They have 720 farmer members and have been in existence for 2 years. I learned that they prefer Fair Trade because it allows them maximum flexibility to sell beans. Rainforest Alliance, on the other hand, involves purchasing futures on a crop, and the cooperative is locked into a price well in advance of the actual sale.



We ate lunch with the president of the cooperative. Our meal was rice and grasscutter (called agouti in French). This large rodent looks like a porcupine without the quills. On the way, we saw this mural depicting the inappropriateness of using child labor (right).

We drove to Broguhe, our first village in a list of eight. This small community is about 5 km up a dirt road. Halfway, we noticed for the first time a group of dozos. When we arrived in Broguhe, we were told that the town now consisted of half Burkinabe, or people from Burkina Faso. This is common, however. Ever since Houphouët-Boigny encouraged Northerners to populate the South, they have been moving there in large numbers. Under President Gbagbo, himself a Bété, that number dwindled. But with the current president Ouattara, the numbers are increasing again. This poses problems for the longterm stability of Côte d'Ivoire. I suppose an apt simile would be Hispanics and Whites in the U.S. They are different from "Us" and they often live separately. Both groups often distrust each other, with one group actually demanding proof of citizenship on the street--as in Arizona. under Maricopa County Sheriff Arpaio. In both situations, distrust is lessened through intermarriage.

BROGUHE

We went through the usual protocol. The chief asks, “What is the latest news?” To which Albert explains the purpose of our visit followed by my talk that describes the three missions of Project Hope & Fairness. We gave them 1/8 of everything we had purchased: 10 pairs of boots, 10 machetes, 12 sharpeners, 10 pickaxe heads, 5 solar lights, 30 pens, 14 Project Hope & Fairness scarves, and one of my Sweet Earth t-shirts (as of October 31, can no longer be worn in the U.S.)



Above, left: One of the chief’s four wives models the PH&F scarf. You can see how much the village has suffered on her face. If you look at the August, 2010 blog, she looks radiant. Now her face reflects the bad times: fleeing the military during the Civil War that raged around them after the November, 2010 elections when Laurent Gbagbo refused to give up his presidential seat and the general economic downturn.

Above right: during the ceremony the woman on the left was pounding foutou, made from any number of cooked starches, in this case cassava.



Right: Mom in front of the sewing room we paid for.



TETIA

We drove through Issia to the turn-off to Tetie and Djahakro. Tetia greeted us with some wonderful drumming and dancing. We enjoyed each other’s company and made the usual speeches.

DJAHAKRO

Afterwards, we continued down the road to Djahakro, which is about 5 km into the forest. We sat down and enjoyed cocoa drink, made from the juice that forms as the cocoa beans ferment. The flavor rivals the best fruit flavors. I could drink it every day.

After a brief chat, we left Kelsey with several farmers so he could acquire the information for the cocoa chapter in his upcoming book, "Where Are We Eating?"

We drove back to the road and continued our visit to the villages of Zereguhe and Depa. I have been visiting these villages since 2005.



DEPA



Left, Kelsey Timmerman and Albert Konan with Chief J. My mother was feeling dizzy and faint, due to the sun and to the exertion of walking across the village. We took her to a hotel to relax for 5 hours while we completely the mission.

We returned to Djahakro to pick up Kelsey and to enjoy the lunch that they had provided. Afterwards, we presented the tools and they dressed me up as a chief in order to show their appreciation for our gifts.

By the time we left, it was mid-afternoon and we had one more village to go as well as a visit to a cooperative. We drove back toward Issia and stopped at Pezoan, one of the first villages that PH&F has assisted. Everyone had given up on our showing up and had gone on with their day. The chief wasn't far away, so after half an hour of waiting, we had a quorum.



ABEKRO

Today, we visited the last village, Abekro, which is located like the 5 others near Issia. This is the village where Eugenie used to live--the woman who has graced our cocoa labels (although we do not use African chocolate yet!)

We exited the car and, lo and behold, the chief's house has gone solar! For \$500, he has enough electricity to light two homes and to run a TV. In all the villages we visited, we were told that having a TV to watch was considered to be a quality of life issue



We sat under the appatam and waited for Abekro-ites to accumulate. The bell-ringer banged on an old auto wheel to summon anyone available.

Before we did the donations, Kelsey asked a bunch of questions. One was to the children: "How many of you went to school last year?" Parents try very hard to send their children to school. Certain villages, however, are too far away and most children in those villages have no chance at an education.



Left, donations to the village of Abekro. Above, right: On the way back to the car, I talked to this group of women who were brewing up the West African recipe for anti-malarial tea. Malaria medication is extremely expensive and not affordable by most cocoa farmers, who make so little money thanks to the unjust system that works against them. I tasted the medicine and found it bitter. It would be better with a shot of rum.

KONANKUAMEKRO

After Abekro, we set out for Albert's land, 37 hectares located about 40 km over rutted dirt road. It took a little over two hours of bone shattering ruts and engine-drowning lakes to get to his village, KonanKuameKro, named after his father, Kuame Konan. Lousy roads mean lousy prices for cocoa. It has been my experience that a village located near a major highway is much wealthier than a village that is 40 km up a road that takes 2 hours to reach because of the road's condition. When we emerged from the car, we were greeted by about 100 villagers, singing and dancing.



Above, left: an okra bush. Okra tolerates heat and drought. The pods are used to make West African soups. The Bantu word for okra is ngombo. Above right: fruit bat in a vegetable sauce with African rice. Below, left: A pagne depicting a hunter. Below, right: after lunch, we presented our donations and then followed this with a question and answer session.



Left: Albert took us to the town's school, which consists of two classrooms made of local materials. The government has so far ignored this community of about 200. Right: Every village has its women's groups that wear the same clothes to show solidarity. In one village in Cameroon, all the Methodist women had the same outfit. I do not know what united these ladies.

We left at 4:30, which meant we were able to regain the pavement before the sun had set. I would not like to negotiate such a road at night!

SAF CACAO

The next day was spent mostly driving but it was capped by a very important event--visit of Saf Cacao, the fourth largest cocoa buyer in Cote d'Ivoire. We dropped Kelsey off at Djahakro so he could spend the day tromping through the bush. On the way to Djahakro, we ran across the chef of Depa, who was waiting for us so he could give us a price quote for a rice decorticator. This removes the brown skin on the outside of the rice grain, a culinary activity that takes too much time in a woman's day.

We drove south about 3 hours to San Pedro, the port from which most of the country's cocoa leaves. I have visited Saf Cacao since 2005, when I poked my head over the wall and the CEO yelled out, "You can come in!" Ever since then, I've been visiting this company, which is owned by the Lakiss family, based in Southern Lebanon.

We toured the cocoa drying and cleaning facility, the new coffee facility, and the grinding plant (below, right).

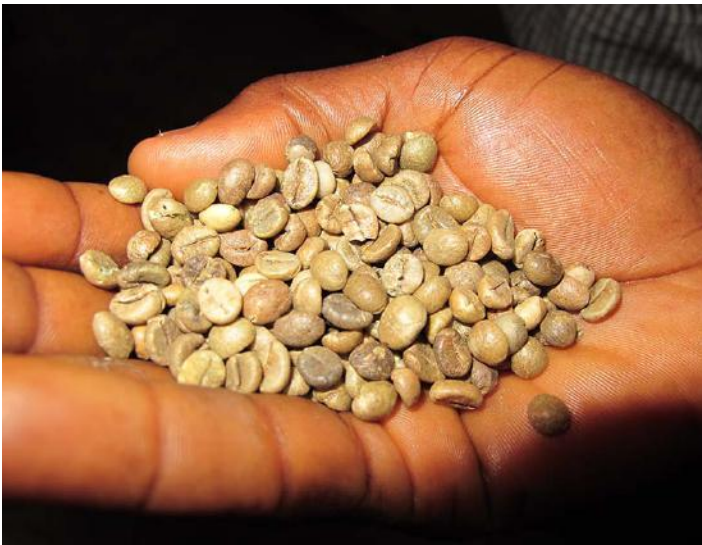


CHAPTER 11

We walked next-door to see the new coffee processing facility. The coffee they receive is 100% Robusta. Cote d'Ivoire is the fourth largest producer of coffee in the world. Most of it is Robusta, not Arabica.

Here we see the grades of beans. Top, left: the sorter that selects according to size. At the left is the German machine that sorts black beans from green by optical methods. Black beans have been picked underripe and produce an inferior coffee. Some farmers, instead of picking the red beans only, just strip the whole branch, so they produce coffee that does not roast equally and you get a lot of black beans.

Bottom left and right: dried (not roasted) beans after sorting. Left, beans that were picked ripe and therefore did not turn black. Right: beans that were picked unripe.





We entered the dirty part of the plant: that is, where the still unclean beans enter. Top, left: this machine removes some of the garbage that is still in the beans despite having been dried and cleaned once in the other facility. Top, right: bags are opened and beans pumped through the machine to remove bottom, left: inedibles and bottom right: improperly separated beans.



After cleaning, the beans are blown into this machine which cracks them apart so the nibs or pieces of bean can be separated from the shell

The shell is removed from the nibs in this machine, called a "winnower".

CHAPTER 11



Top left: roasting. Top right: grinding. Bottom left: tempering. Bottom right: checking chocolate liquor for quality. Ivoirian beans produce a mild flavor with strong floral (lavender) notes.



Chocolate liquor is poured into plastic-lined boxes. This room is about 60 degrees F, so it sets pretty quickly. Unfortunately, July, 2018 saw the last of Saf Cacao, which declared bankruptcy and was dissolved. According to newspaper accounts, the bankruptcy was caused by bad management. That, my friends, is a very vague statement! The company has re-opened under the name SACC.