

Late February 2010

Dear Family and Friends,

The highlight of the month of February was the arrival of a film crew in Brekumanso. Booker Sim, a Canadian who makes documentaries, was here to do a story about the transformative power of bicycles in Ghana. (Actually it might be about bicycles in West Africa.) We helped identify people to be interviewed for the film. He was especially interested in people who use their bikes for their work, like Benjamin pictured here who rides his bike to the surrounding smaller communities to sell phone cards. Or Joseph Adu



who rides his bike to collect payments on the items that his wife sells on credit. He also wanted to include women who have bikes, so Cynthia, the daughter of Nurse Winifred, was interviewed and filmed. Ntow's family was interviewed and so were we; riding our bikes, carrying water (not while riding the bike!), eating fufu, talking about our work as Peace Corps volunteers. Someday we might be on some obscure TV program.

Another part of the story will be about the Village Bicycle Project (VBP) which accepts donated bikes in the US, containerizes (is that a word?) them, ships them to Ghana and then sells/distributes them (for about \$20 US) to people in rural areas, usually with the help of a Peace Corps volunteer to do the paperwork and organization at the local site. VBP has staff which brings the bikes to the site and conducts a day-long workshop about care and maintenance of bicycles which is mandatory for all purchasers. They even teach how to ride a bike, if necessary! (This part of the documentary was filmed at another location.)

Thanks to the hard work of Ntow and previous volunteers about 300 bikes have already been distributed in this area. After 2 to 4 years, however, some of them were in need of major repairs, so Booker and VBP asked us to organize an "Advanced Level" Bicycle Repair and Maintenance Workshop. So one sunny Wednesday about 30 bike owners sat under the shady canopy of the orange trees in our front yard while Samson and Moro, VBP employees, helped owners take apart, rebuild and repair their bikes. It was eye-opening.



In the US we often talk about our throw-away society where we just buy a new something rather than repair the old whatever. It appears to us that repair and maintenance are even less appreciated in Ghana where there is much less money to replace worn out products. So to see the transformation of apparently worn-out bikes

into once again useful vehicles with a few new parts plus elbow – and real – grease was a great lesson. To reinforce the learning, bike repair tools were sold a half-price at the end of the workshop. Every workman needs good tools to do the job.

Notice how the bikes are sold – and the repair tools were sold – not given away. When things are "free" they are sometimes perceived to have no value. So by expecting/allowing the recipients to pay a small fee either in money or in labor the value of the item is increased. That's why the community has work days when they clean the site, carry water, or pound down the dirt fill in the classrooms for the school at KwakuSae. That's why we also charge a small amount for the handwashing gallons with the soap on a rope. It helps give value to the product and it also helps support the project.

Coincidentally, when Marian was a volunteer in Morocco, an official Peace Corps photographer came to "her" village. Photos of her patting a camel, drinking mint tea – any maybe doing some work – appeared in a couple magazines and a book about PCV's way back then.

We are looking forward to hosting another group of visitors in March. Two of Marian's nieces, one with her son and one with her husband, will be here. We love having company – it helps us see Ghana, again, with new eyes and excitement.



The Kg/school building is progressing nicely. The classrooms will actually have ceilings, which are rare in schools in Ghana – usually they just have a hot tin roof. There will also be concrete floors, not just dirt ones like some schools have. Floors↓ and ←ceilings. How basic.

There will also be gutters feeding the rainwater into a large polytank. Originally the tank was provided to be attached

to the Dining Hall so water would be at hand for the school feeding program, not carried from ½ mile away. "Somehow" the project never got finished and the tank has been sitting at the site unused for a few years. We are glad it will finally be functional.



We mentioned in a previous email that KwakuSae, the community where the school is being built, was getting electricity. That has been interesting to observe. About 20 workmen arrived mid-December. The small community had to house and feed them while they put up the poles and strung the wires. That was fine. By the middle of January most of the work was done BUT the workmen didn't leave because they

were waiting for the transformers to arrive. So then the community had to house and feed the men who were not working!! Finally after about three weeks of waiting all the parts arrived, the work was done and the "company" left town. Now the individual homeowners are having their houses wired and the Electricity Commission will bring the meters out. Imagine retro fitting a mud/adobe or concrete block house for electricity. Most families will opt for a single bare bulb in each room, plus a light and one outlet on the veranda. They will probably have a TV, but probably no fan and no refrigerator. We all have our priorities!



This picture of Marian in the window frame is reminiscent, at least to her, of the sculpture on the University of Nebraska campus, Girl in a Square, or something like that.

It was false hope when we wrote that the rains had started again in January. Only a few brief showers have come the last few weeks. It is hot and dry. The water situation is getting bad. The pumps on the two deep bore holes spoiled/broke a few months ago. The shallow, hand-dug wells are going dry or only have a thin layer of muddy water in them. That leaves the river as the only source for most families. We see more and more people gathered at the river to fill their buckets. Even trucks arrive with pumps and huge barrels to fill with water. We are fortunate that Ntow has a deep, covered, hand-dug well that still has water, even if it is murky with turbidity. It is safe for showering and to put through the water filter. We have had several meetings with the community leaders, and they have once again assessed everyone over 18 years of age 1 Ghana cedi. (We discovered the first money collected was used for a shallow hand dug well which is now dry, of course.) We have some funds from the sales of the handwashing gallons that could be used to repair the pumps, but we want to make sure that a system is in place to maintain them once they are fixed. Lots of talk, talk, talk..... It's a teachable moment, so to speak, so we hope a resolution can be reached.

Peace,

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