Newsletter

Quashie School Project

October 2022

A fruitful time in Ghana

Dear visitor,

There is much to tell since my last newsletter so this time an extra long one. The word that best summarizes my stay in Ghana and the time since is "fruitful". I hope that as you read the newsletter, you can feel it as well.

In this newsletter stories about:

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- Visiting schools
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Enjoy reading!
Warm greetings, Moniek

From a house to a home

Welcome home! Honestly, I imagined it differently. The house we rented looks beautiful but when I step inside, the emptiness is overwhelming. Owusu has been living there for a few months and he has no more than a mattress, a (desk) table, a chair and some cleaning supplies. His university is "around the corner," and this way we save his hostel fees and he is supervising the house. Owusu has vacation and Emmanuel's education doesn't start until January, and both are eager to help. Lucy and her children have already cleaned a lot (read previous newsletter) but there are still many tasks waiting.

For more homeliness, we have mostly gone to local markets. Whenever possible, I try to buy handicrafts to support the local middle class. Beds, sitting areas and cabinets in the kitchen were made by furniture makers. For curtains, I went looking for Ghanaian handprint fabrics to make folding curtains. No Ghanaian could imagine anything like that so it was quite a job to gather all the materials together. Cord and rings came from the market in Kumasi and the fabrics from the market in Accra. For ribs, we used the thinnest construction steel available. We probably have the first Roman blinds in Ghana but certainly the first Roman blinds with construction steel.

Owusu, Emmanuel and I are a top team and we got 2 more weeks of help from Yaw, during his vacation in June. Consultations in the morning about the plans for the day and a joint closing in the evening. In the beginning, we came up with mostly household announcements but later on more and more personal topics and life questions were discussed. Then we sat at the table on the porch for hours and continued inside when the mosquitoes started dancing around us. 'This is great,' the boys said ‘every family should have this!'

Every day we worked, except one day. Then we went to the pool and ate pizza and fries. 'Thank you for this experience, Moniek. I've never been in a pool before,' Yaw says to me in the evening. Cozily we are sitting on the couch (each with his smartphone, though) and I look around with satisfaction. It's nice and cozy. Owusu tells me 'Moniek, here it feels like home to me. I never lived with my parents and there was no real place for me elsewhere. Regularly I had to sleep on the couch or on the floor because there was no room. Here I have my own place and that feels so nice. Thank you'. It moves me deeply to hear the boys' confessions.

The house has been transformed into a home, not only by the furniture but especially by communicating with and listening to each other.

Visiting schools

During my stay in Ghana, I always visit the schools our students are attending. This year it was the university in Kumasi where Yaw is studying, Owusu's university in Koforidua and a Senior High School in Kibi where Paakow is taking his exams this year. The plan was to also visit Louisa at the Senior High School in Cape Coast. She started her first year in April but the school administration felt that freshmen should not receive visits until after the first semester. That will be in September.

The university Yaw attends is a beautiful and well-maintained complex on an expanse of trees and shrubs. Yaw has no class the day Owusu and I visit and shows us around. We have contact with Dr. Ofori, Yaw's architecture teacher. He is very appreciative of Yaw and Yaw likes having lessons from Ofori because he lets the students discover and figure out a lot on their own.

Owusu University is close to our rented house. The period I am in Ghana, it is vacation time at that university so I visit an empty school. There are students who live far away and do not go home but they do not have classes. This university is poorly maintained, much less attractive than at Yaw. I even find it a little depressing, but Owusu feels happy there. He proudly shows all the departments because most of the buildings are open. The teacher he wants to introduce me to is not present. Better luck next time.

The Senior High School of Paakow, it is a lively place. Everywhere students are sitting with family members on benches or on the ground in the garden. Or like us, near the car and using the trunk as a bench. Paakow's teacher is also not present; we only spoke to the janitor.

All three often forget to eat, so whenever possible, we eat together. I also gave each one a filled bag with food and other basic necessities. This little extra is worth its weight in gold to the students.

Gigantic embroidery machine

Finally I see the embroidery machine that you (donors) gave to Adwoa. I also understand now why she waited so long to use the machine. The road in front of her shop is still half open so the red sand has free play. The road near Adwoa's shop, is now finished. And there it is, a gigantic embroidery machine. Adwoa proudly shows me what she has learned. Her designer training comes in very handy because there is more to it than just threading threads. Below is Adwoa's story.

“My name is Adwoa and through the Quashie School Project, I received an embroidery machine with your support. I would like to thank you very much and let you know how it went so far.
In May this year Moniek came to visit me and I was very happy to show her the embroidery machine. The transport from China took longer than expected and once the machine was in Ghana, the street in front of my shop was broken up and there was too much dust to use the machine. I was also advised to buy a stabilizer because Ghana has to deal with power cuts quite often. In short, it took some time before I could start using the machine. I immediately started taking lessons so that I could start practicing with my machine. To be honest, I was also very anxious to get started and Moniek gave me the first push by ordering face towels with the school project logo. I was very happy that she did this because now I could practice extensively.

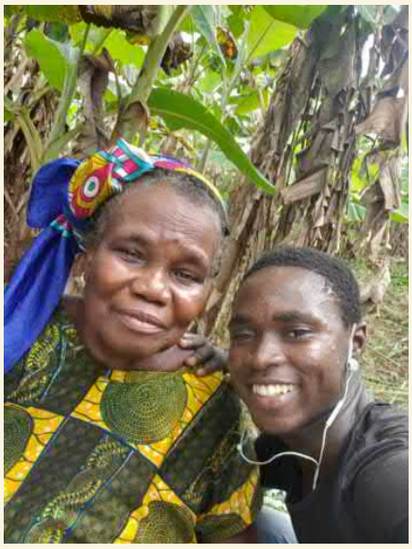
I can put my graphic design background to good use because I must first create a design that the embroidery machine can read. Here the color order is very important, e.g. first all areas that are blue are embroidered. I must therefore draw these first. This continues with all the colors that will be used. I must stay with the machine when it is working because the thread may break or run out. Also, the machine may make a mistake. It is a challenge but fortunately I am getting more and more proficient at it. The machine makes a lot of noise when it is working and that makes the customers in my shop curious. A great opportunity to talk about my embroidery possibilities. Things are not going fast yet because there are also customers who first have a logo made (for this I am also paid) and come later for the embroidery. This way they can save up for the next phase. I started in July and have been able to do 8 full embroidery jobs so far.

Internship

Owusu and Yaw are second-year university students in Ghana. Owusu is studying computer science and network administration in Koforidua and Yaw is studying architecture in Kumasi. This year's exams are just about over and both have found internships for the last few months of this year. Owusu at a bank and Yaw in construction. The Quashie School Project encourages internships and extra practical opportunities and contributes financially to outings to companies or construction projects. It is arranged by the universities, often by the teachers themselves so these costs are in addition to the fixed cost of education.

Owusu writes about his first day of internship:
Today was my first day at Rural Bank in Koforidua. The work is Monday to Friday from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. I was placed at a workstation where I could help customers with deposits and withdrawals (filling out forms for 'Ghana Pay'). The bank's IT technician started training me on how to use the bank app and how to enroll customers. It went quickly and I loved it. Ghana Pay is a mobile money service app offered by universal banks, rural banks and savings and loan companies to individuals and businesses. It is just like any other mobile money service, but with additional banking services designed for financial convenience. An IT expert is supposed to help with IT-related work. I can help because I am the only IT professional doing an internship. There is a friend here who is an intern, but he is studying accounting, so he doesn't get much involved in IT solutions.

Yaw informs us:
At the end of October, my new internship starts in Mampong. My grandmother lives there and I now have some time to help her on the farm. She is very happy that I am back from school and have a break and honestly, I am enjoying it too. My selfie shows the joy we had when we finished our work for the day.



Intake for vocational training

'Moniek, I'm actually not allowed to take pictures,' Emmanuel sends me trough Whatsapp, when he is having an interview last month. During my stay in Ghana the application period for tertiary education opened. Emmanuel wanted to become a pilot but there is no such training in Ghana and it turned out to be far too expensive. His mother recommended an education in healthcare but Emmanuel resisted this by tacitly and deliberately doing nothing. I have had several conversations with Emmanuel. Not that we sit down for it but just between business. He is a bright kid who knows very well what he wants. He is a caring person, so healthcare definitely suits him and he is starting to see that for himself. There are 3 schools on his list but his favorite school is not among them. He is afraid to apply there, afraid of being rejected. Again we have a talk about this and Emmanuel decides to apply for his 1st choice as well.

Registration must be done online and in Ghana this is anything but flawless. Owusu is good with computers and helps Emmanuel. He helps a lot of students with registration, I find out later. While Emmanuel is sleeping soundly, in the middle of the night Owusu finally "gets it" and is able to register Emmanuel. At all 4 schools! Now we just have to wait and see where Emmanuel can go.

In September, Emmanuel was invited to two schools for an interview, which he said was going very smoothly. He does not have to visit the other schools, they only judge on exam results. By the end of November the schools will have responded and Emmanuel can choose. The field of study will be determined by the school, but it will be healthcare training, no matter what. The training will begin in January.

Follow-up computer system for Oyoko clinic

In the previous newsletter, I talked about a project at the Oyoko Health Center (Automation of patient records). You donated generously. The total amount was almost € 6,000 and we have already received more than 50%. Thank you all very much for this. **At the moment, the project for the clinic is with Wilde Ganzen.** Should it be approved, they will contribute the other 50%. We will get the results in three weeks. I will keep you informed. Fingers crossed...

Although it never feels fair to name someone special, I would like to give attention to the action of group 6/7A of the St. Joseph School in Emmeloord. At the end of their school year, the students raised € 300 by collecting empty bottles, baking cupcakes and doing chores. I was still in Ghana and students Owusu and Emmanuel were at my house. Miss Dorien van Ettekoven arranged an online meeting and so 'Holland' and 'Ghana' could get to know each other. It was a great experience, both for the students of group 6/7A and for our students. The money is for the clinic in Oyoko but also for a new school/laptop bag and pens for Owusu and Emmanuel. Thank you group 6/7A for your efforts and Dorien for organizing! We will keep you informed!

Free at last!

In June, I met Paakow at his Senior High School in Kibi. There were tears of joy because finally he got to visit again. Once a month, family members are allowed to visit their children but in this case that didn't work out. The school is too far away from Lucy's home and 'just driving to school' every month is too expensive. I have never seen anyone so nervous before an exam as Paakow. I would like to take him out of school in a heartbeat but of course that is not the solution. He had to get through this period. But now he is finished. Just waiting for the results. The first two weeks he did nothing according to Lucy. He needed time to de-stress. Now he is preparing for a second (supplementary) exam. 'But I don't go to school, I learn at home and only go to school for the exam,' he reveals. He is taking this second exam at a Senior High School near where he lives. The best results will form a Senior High Diploma. And then, no school for a while as far as Paakow is concerned....

New student

"How are your classmates when they pass the exams, do they also move on to further education?" I asked Emmanuel. 'Not so. Two of his friends had graduated with very good grades but they hadn't applied anywhere after Senior High. Since our house is "just around the corner" from Koforidua Technical University, I asked Emmanuel to carefully sound out, without making any promises, whether the two were interested in a technical education. Through a lecturer at Koforidua Technical University, we were given the name of a female student. She is a freshman but is looking for financial support for the second year.

Lucy takes over from here because she can stay in touch with the students more easily than I can. One of Emmanuel's friends drops out because he doesn't want to go to college in Koforidua. The female student hardly responds, if at all, to emails and phone calls from Lucy. One serious candidate remains and that is Albert. He writes an honest and open letter to us and comes with his mother to Lucy for an interview. She, like the board of our foundation and me, immediately embraces Albert.

For Albert it was all very unreal. He hardly realizes what is happening but through the persistent phone calls from Emmanuel and Lucy he starts to believe that something positive is going on. We invite him to come to Koforidua and meet Owusu. Emmanuel was there in support of Albert. Through an online meeting, I and the board meet Albert. Full of emotion, he talks about his situation, his disbelief and the opportunity he has been given through our school project. We sit and listen with tears in our eyes. We offer him a chance and he gives us an enormous gift in return. If there were any doubts about continuing with the Quashie School Project, it was immediately dispelled by this great and sincere moment we witnessed.

Albert's education will start in January 2023 and, like the education (including laptop, internship and teaching materials) of our other students, will cost €2000-€2500 per year (four years).

Would you like to become a personal donor to Albert and (partially) pay for his studies, please let me know. Send me an email and I will contact you. Throughout the year you will receive updates about your student.

You can also give (smaller) contributions via the payment options under the button below

financial contribution Albert's education

Our motorcycle

At the end of 2020, through donations, the Quashie School Project was able to purchase a motorcycle. Ampofo is proud of it and takes good care of it and the motorcycle looks perfect. We really wanted a motorcycle so Ampofo could easily visit our land (Homeland Oyoko). Construction is still pending but supervision and maintenance is important so Ampofo can be found on the land regularly.
During my stay in Ghana, the bike also proves super handy. Nephews and nieces are brought on the motorcycle to come and stay. Together with Ama but often also alone, Ampofo comes to our house in Koforidua to do some work. Of course, we make several visits to Homeland and Ampofo is there every time too. He feels responsible and wants to know everything that is done or agreed upon. If Ampofo had to travel by trotro (small vans), he would be on the road for one to two hours. Now he is on site within 20 minutes. He can take shortcuts with the bike, which saves a lot of miles. In short, we are very happy with our bike!

Ghanaian market is a happy place

That's what I love most, strolling around the (vegetable) markets in Ghana. Once a week Owusu, Emmanuel and I go to the market. Emmanuel makes a shopping list and keeps track of expenses. Owusu determines the route to and across the market. So Owusu leads the way, I in the middle (so they can't lose me) and Emmanuel closes the line. The market is large and there are several markets in Koforidua but we still always go to fixed stalls to do our shopping. A bond develops with the market women and occasionally an extra bell pepper, tomato or bunch of onions is put in our bag. Sad faces when the market women hear that "this is the last visit because tomorrow I am going home" but immediately I get a big smile and lots of good travel wishes.

Lentil soup from the cooking bag
Below is a suggestion of vegetables you can use in the soup. Don't hesitate to add other delicious fresh produce from the market. **I would love to hear how you make your lentil soup.**

Ingredients for 4 persons

- 500 grams brown lentils
- 250 grams of minced beef
- 3 large onions
- 3 garlic cloves
- 1 leek

Preparation
Wash the lentils and put it with salt, (bay) leaf and thyme in plenty of water. Bring to the boil and cook for 3 minutes. Then put in the New Cooking Bag for 40 minutes.

- 1 bell pepper
- 4 tomatoes
- 2 winter carrots
- 250 grams of mushrooms
- 1 can of tomato puree
- sunflower oil
- 100 grams of raisins
- red pepper
- thyme
- possibly 2 bay leaves
- salt/bouillon cubes to taste
- water

Meanwhile, fry the minced meat. While stirring, add the sliced onions, sliced red pepper and chopped garlic. Then add the leek, bell pepper and carrot pieces. Let this fry for a few minutes. Now add the tomato paste and diced tomatoes.

Add the vegetable mixture to the lentils and finally add the mushrooms and raisins. Bring the soup back to a boil and return to the New Cooking Bag for a few minutes until the soup is well cooked.

Enjoy your meal

Creative gifts

Holidays are coming! If you are looking for gifts, please consider our wonderful craft products such as:

- flag garlands, 4 meters long €20
- necklaces and bracelets from €5 to €45
- glass beads from €1
- batik fabrics various coupons
- hand woven baskets €45
- New cooking bag small €67 and large €77

***** This fall 6 mandala cards (instead of 4) for €10 *****

Check out our Facebookshop, send an email or call 0031 (0)6 2028 1979 and make an appointment to visit our store.

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We are happy with donations of any amount

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Laposta