

To Be A Man Is Not Easy ~ I Want To Get A Life But I Can't Because I Am Waiting. Interview With Richard Kwasi Ntim



I am a native of Nkoranza, Richard is the name, 42 years old. In 1987, at the age of twenty, I decided to leave Ghana. Always I have had the urge to travel; for the sake of traveling, exploring new environments and meeting new people, not specifically to work or doing anything special. I had already visited three West-African countries before I went to Libya. Traveling is my habit. I was in Mali, Senegal and Cote D'Ivoire, just casual visits. I am an O-level student and completed secondary school here in Nkoranza.

So it was in 1987 that I went to Libya. I worked there at a company in Tripoli. Those days it was difficult to get a visa into Libya so I went by road. We passed through Agadez, then to Tamanrasset and on to Gat, which is a town in southern Libya. To get there you have to walk for three days. We walked with a group of Africans, eighty in all, from three cars. There were ten Ghanaians among us and many other West-Africans. Difficult! But interesting because I met other people and shared my experiences and before I knew it we had crossed the desert and were there. You have to be strong else you get sick or mad. Some people died along the roadside and we had to call their relatives to inform them of their misfortune. But I and the majority made it.

Then on from Gat to Tripoli. Not so easy but I was lucky for I had means to board a plane and flew to Tripoli. There I worked for a year. I had a job at a construction company. After a year I decided to leave for the environment in Libya is not conducive to peaceful living. Fortunately I got a visa at the Dutch embassy in Libya and went to Holland. It was hard to get the travel documents and they asked many questions at the embassy but I impressed them and they issued the visa and I took a trip from Tripoli to Amsterdam. Malta airlines, with a two-day stop in Malta. In 1988 I arrived in Holland. I knew nobody there so what I did is I

stayed for a few days in a boardinghouse in Amsterdam; later I got to know a man from Ghana who introduced me to other Ghanaians and the house where those from Nkoranza live. I moved in and it was nice for we all knew each other from Nkoranza from before; we were all born and bred in Nkoranza and as you know it is a small town. I lived with a person in one room, the apartment contained four people, in the center of Amsterdam near the Wibautstraat. Another guy from France came to join us. The rent was not too bad, 450 guilders for all of us, so we shared the rent and the light bill and so on. Manageable, a good place. My roommate was illegal and I too. I lived there for two years up to the 90's. At that time it was easy to find jobs. Work two hours here, then three hours there, then two hours cleaning a hotel in the evening and so on. Nowadays finding that kind of work is difficult in Holland but in the eighties it was easily available. Later I worked with 'Carpetland' which is a big company with branches in many towns. I worked with a job manager whose name I still know, Willem I think. They were good people at Carpetland and I traveled a lot for them.

One person helped me to get papers and so I used them. They were not my own paper as I had none so we shared them and I would pay for using the papers. So then what? Two years in Amsterdam, Carpetland. I had to process my own papers one way or another for I used those of others. So I decided to get a Dutch woman, she was from Surinam. We were going to marry but just then I received a permit for one year so we did not have to marry. The woman had to work and I also worked and stayed at my place with the Nkoranza people. We did not live together. It was friendship and we met each weekend, I worked and in the weekends I stayed with my girlfriend. I was twenty-five and she was over forty. No children with her she was too old but here in Ghana I have two children from before I left.

I had my residence permit for a year and now I did everything I could to obtain a work-permit. I even had a fiscal number. I was legal from the start for I decided to process my papers immediately. In 1989 I was legal. Then what happened I don't know because they got me. They got my papers too and kept them away from me. They started to give me problems. They said I should leave the Carpetland. Then I worked in a hotel and later at a blade-industry in Sloterdijk. I paid my rent, there was no problem. Fridays I go to the girlfriend and Mondays I come home and start work again. That's how I lived for two years in Holland, 1988 till the later part of 1991. Then all of a sudden, and this is fifteen years ago, I was forced to

return to Ghana!

I was processing my work-permit and already had my fiscal number. All was well. Then one day when I woke up in the morning the police came to my apartment. They say can we see your papers. I show them. They say 'pack all your belongings' and I did so, boxes and suitcases, all, brought it to the police car and it was sent to the police station. I went with them and later returned to the apartment. The next day I came back to the police to collect my things and I saw that the bags were destroyed. With hammers and knives they had been beating and cutting everything I had. When I came there all my things were scattered on the street, bags and boxes emptied out and ravaged, right in front of the police station.

I became very worried and made a complaint. The officer said 'Oh well I don't know' and that I should wait. I never found out, they said nothing to me. Before I knew what happened they put me in a car and onto the plane and back to Ghana! Forcefully I was put in a backseat of the plane. I had no passport, just before we landed they gave me my passport back. The one year-permit and all papers were removed from my passport, I can't believe it, still.

Upon arrival I went straight to the Netherlands embassy in Ghana as I was furious. I asked them why, why all this! They say they don't know. They say they would find out. They would send a telex. That is fifteen years ago and since then I have been waiting and they never came with any response at all. In 1991 I was so frustrated that I decided to just fly back to the Netherlands but when I reached Amsterdam they arrested me at the airport. They said all my papers are in Ghana not in Holland so I can't enter the country and they forced me to return to Ghana again. I went back like a thief. Up and down and up and down and nobody explains me what the problem is. I wait. I don't live, I am waiting. The embassy in Accra never said anything! I say to them: 'I went to Holland and they say in Holland that my papers are with you at the Embassy in Accra'. They say 'Oh no, we know nothing about it. Come later'.

My money and everything is gone! From 1991 till now I have been put on hold. For 15 years I call the embassy and nobody minds me. I am a very angry person. I don't work, how could I work, I can't even concentrate except about my papers. I hired a lawyer but nothing comes out of it. I want to get a life but I can't for I am waiting. I cannot take a wife because I have no money. I am not married. I am just

so angry. I do not rely on anybody anymore, I trust nobody. Where can I get employed? I have no brothers and no friends among my own Ghanaian people too. I am getting crazy. I thought the truth would come out but till now no truth has come out. Day after day I call the embassy but nothing happens at all. In the meantime I have done nothing wrong. If I were wrong I would not fight like this.

Why? I would have known it if I had an enemy, I have no enemy. If, say, I were a cocaine dealer or a smuggler, would I have come back the next morning? Would I? I would have disappeared! No but I returned for my luggage because I am innocent. My friends here in Ghana do not want to talk to me now. Why? Because they are rich and I am poor so they ignore me. They say I mismanaged and was repatriated and now they shun me. They don't care. They are all rich so they don't mind me. They don't like poor friends and they say I have disgraced myself.

I will never find out what happened but I will not start living till I have found out. I have done nothing wrong. I did nothing against anybody so why do you frustrate my life like that?