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## To Be A Man Is Not Easy ~ Dollars In The Wall. Interview With Mr. Babbs Haruna From Nkoranza



You know it is difficult to make money here in Ghana so that's why I decided to go to Libya. Twice I went there and both times I had bad luck and returned empty handed. But as soon as I have enough money I will go for a third time. Until I succeed.

My second attempt to make money in Lybia was in 2003. I learned from my first trip and so I took another route. To Bawku, the border town, and from there with several trucks and vehicles to Agadez, which is a desert town in Niger. That road

to Agadez by the way is the worst in West Africa, worse than driving through the desert itself. Humping and bumping through deep potholes in the road, broken vehicles everywhere, mummified cow-skeletons along the road and a burning sun. So, up to Agadez the route was the same as the road I traveled before, but once in Agadez, where you pass straight into desert land, I made a different choice from my first journey. It costs more but it is worth it if you have the money. You wait until there are enough people, 200 in all, and then you are pulled into a large truck, the type we call 'combine', and that truck brings you right through the desert where there is no road to a village called Durku. That is the last village in the country of Niger, after that you are in Libya.

We were with over 200 people in that lorry, packed like fish standing on their tails. It's a miracle that we did eventually arrive. After Durku there is nothing anymore except sand and stones and you wait. You may wait one week or three weeks if you are lucky but some can spend four months or more over there before they find transport to Libya.

Staying in the village of Durku gives a problem for each day you have to eat, at least something. The water is free for there is a natural water source over there. Everybody is careful with his money because it is needed for the connection car to Libya, cars that are run by Libyans and costs 60,000 CFA per person. That is the amount you pay but you also have to have money at hand to pay for a present for the driver for there are always more people than cars. These connection people make good business. Now if you are not careful and spend too much on food while waiting for your connection and you have not enough to bribe them then you can go back to Ghana and have to start all over again!

I took a connection car and went straight and painlessly to Libya, to the town of Saba. The other border town is called Black, that's where I went the first time when I crossed to Libya, which was in 1997.

Let me tell you about that first time. That time I took the Mount Hogar route, which is less costly but much tougher. It may cost less money but has claimed a lot more lives. That first time I suffered too much before I reached Libya. It took me 12,000 CFA to pay a guide in Agadez and a lesser amount for a car that brings you to the foot of the Hogar Mountain. There you are all dropped in the sand and that is it. The cars return and you are left to yourself. You and your guide climb over the Mount Hogar which is very difficult and if you make it you walk for a week by foot through the sand and you feel thirsty or sometimes you feel nothing,

you just walk, only walk. It is a horror. It is important to dodge the official borders so you cross somewhere secretly into Libya. That first time it took me three months to go from Ghana to Black in Libya. Some got sick, some started acting abnormally, some also died.

My best friend, a man from my hometown Nkoranza, died and left me alone. He and I walked together through the desert. One night he slept and the next morning he did not get up, he was dead. He was my very best friend.

Over there, there is no shade. You walk in the sun and at times you sleep. Always short sleeps. We were with a group of two hundred people and in our case five of them died. I don't know why my friend died. No snakebite, nothing like that. He still had some water and some food. He just died. If someone dies we don't use tools, we have none, we use our hands to push the sand away and we put the person there in the manhole and we close it with sand and put some stones on it.

During the desert crossing the way is indicated by way of second hand tires but some are lost. When in 1997 I arrived in the village Black, in Libya, I was exhausted and had to rest for three months. My friend was dead, I had a fever and my money was finished. I then went to town to look for work and was hired to wash people's clothes. Then I did mason work which is very popular work in Libya. The Egyptians and the Libyans are the contractors, they are the bosses. We Ghanaians mix cement and plaster walls. We get paid per contracted work after completion. Some times we would be hungry while working three months on the construction of an apartment and get pay afterward and be rich. You earn more than in Ghana that is why we do it. We stay in connection houses where Ghanaians live. I stayed long enough in Black to recover and earn money to travel to Tripoli. In Black I saved 150 dollars and I spent 75 dollars to go to Tripoli. So I had some money left and ate better and gained some strength to do the same work in Tripoli. There I saved 1500 dollars. With that money I had enough to pay for the connection to Europe so I paid them. But the connection got busted. They arrested us and the sea-band which was steering the fishing boat to cross us over to Europe was jailed. They threw me in prison, took my money and flew me back to Ghana. I had lost.

Had I decided to cross from Morocco instead of from Libya the chances would also have been equally poor. They arrest you there and maltreat you for six months before they also send you back to Ghana so there is no reason trying the

Morocco connection. The Malta connection is good.

In 1999 I returned to Ghana after being in Libya for two years. In Nkoranza I had to tell the parents of my best friend that their son had died. They did not take it easy but were grateful to me for telling them. I told them all the details, as much as I could. Between 1999 and 2003 I lived in Ghana by renting out bicycles but two of the bicycles broke down and the business went bad. How do I live? My friends sometimes wire me Euros from Spain, the ones that made it. I am also married and had two children before I made my second journey to Libya. My wife is in agreement of course, she knows what it means to always live without money so she said 'please do it, go for us'.

The second time that I decided to go to Libya I went through Durku as I told you. Then from Durku to Saba with a car, no more by foot to Black! Then straight on to Tripoli, where I had spent one year doing the same work as I did before, which is mason work. I was going about my way very successfully when out of nowhere there was an announcement over the radio. Al-Qathafi: 'Out, all you Ghanaians. No more Ghanaians in Libya, out, all of you!'□

At once, within a few hours, we had to go to the airport and mostly we had to leave everything behind. We were deported right away, because the Libyans had a problem with the Americans and when they settled their problem they wanted only blacks that are from America in Libya, that's why they wanted us, the Ghanaian blacks, out. But I am not sure if all that was true.

So that was in 2003. I had to run and I could not take my money home with me. So far I had saved 900 dollars. You can never leave money in your pocket let alone in your room. It will disappear. So we have what we call the 'wet-bank'. You wrap your dollars in plastic and stuff them in the back of your bowels where they are safe. You put a lot of cello tape around it or else your money gets wet and falls apart. But I had, this time, saved my money by putting it in a hollow in the wall of a house that I was plastering. I had it safe behind the plaster, in fact it is still safe! The only problem is that I will never see it again! How can you go later to someone's house and say: 'My money is hidden in your wall behind the cement'. You are not even allowed in a Libyan house because blacks are not allowed in Libyan houses.

I put 900 dollars in that wall and lost it for good. But as soon as I have the chance

I will go for a third time, and that time I must succeed. Soon you'll see me go again! By the way there's more dollars in those walls than mine alone!

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## **To Be A Man Is Not Easy ~ A Scar Reminds Me Of The Day I Wept. Interview With Kwame Baffo**



Baffo returned to Ghana in 1994 and stayed at first in Accra, the capital, because the financial expectations of his family home in the village of Nkoranza were far too high. Much more was demanded of him, paying this hospital bill, that funeral and those school fees, than he could afford. Even now, after twelve years, his 'been to overseas' status makes him the banker of the family. This happens to all who leave Ghana and then return as 'a rich man'. Baffo now invests his money in building a second house. Should he have put his money in the bank instead he would have spend it all on family matters. Now the cash is simply not there, it has become a wall, a roof, a building. 'Should I tear down the building to pay your child's bill?' Baffo helped a junior brother through university and now his brother is also 'a success' and helps to share the family burden. His brother follows an exchange program in the Netherlands.

*This is Baffo's story:*

In 1989 I decided to go to Libya. I was a driver in the hospital at Nkoranza but I wanted a better future and my friends who had gone before urged me to join them in Libya where money comes easier as they said. So I did. It took me 26 days to reach there. Niger, two days waiting for transport at the capital, a day and a half in a truck and three days waiting in Agadez for transport through the desert. The desert treks are risky so the cars depart three at the time. Pick-ups, filled with 25 persons each. You think there's really no more place and then another few persons are pressed inside but eventually full is full! Drivers stick together

because of desert storms and mishaps, alone may mean lost. We went. You stand there body to body in the back of the pickup and you cannot turn or move. It was so risky that I wanted to come back but there is no way back. You have one gallon water for three days and you put salt in it which helps you to go slow on the water. You drive at night and in the day you wait somewhere in the shade. You reach the Algerian border town which is called Tamanrasset. Here you stay a week to treat yourself from your illnesses, nose bleedings, heatstrokes, malaria, craziness. If you pay the Ghanaian agent he cooks for you. Then there is another trip for you, five cars in convoy this time. A three day journey.

You go again with your gallon of salted water, now to the Mount Hogar. There you walk, you have to climb the mountain by foot and it is tough and you are weak. The bag you have is too heavy so people throw one by one their luggage away. If you are lucky you reach the mountaintop and you rest. At four in the evening you start walking. You walk for three days through pure sandy desert, again with another gallon of water. You have hired a guide who leads you to the border with Libya. You see so many corpses dead in the sand and everywhere along the road that you want to return, but return, how?! We Nkoranza people are more in number, in my case we were four, so we looked after each other. If one is sick we tell the guide to stop and wait for the Nkoranza friend to recover. If you are alone the guide does not mind you but if four people say stop he will stop. These guides are from Niger and Algeria. They show you the light of the southern city in Libya and then they return and you go alone. If you miss the light that night you have to wait another day till it is night again. Short of water, short of food, no shade but all you can do is walk on.

Nowadays Mount Hoggar passage is no more used because of armed robbers. In my time it was safe, at least from robbers! Once in Libya there is police everywhere because of the border and so you travel at night, secretly. Again two nights through the desert and then you get to the town called Obare. Now here you know you have made it. Border patrols stop here. I took a bus to Saba and went on to Benghazi. Tripoli is not as safe for black Africans as Benghazi because many more Ghanaians are deported from Tripoli, that's what I was told.

I arrived and settled in the 'Nkoranza house' in Benghazi. At that time there were between forty and sixty Ghanaians from Nkoranza living there. This is how it goes. In the morning you wake up and you go to a certain place. You sit there. A car stops and you all rush and jump on that car. The man says: I need two, you

and you. So you sit there and run to each car that stops till they pick you up to work. Work in Libya can be okay but mostly you are cheated if you have to work that way. So I worked my way into a company. We cannot trust the Libyans for they do not see us blacks as humans, they see us as work machines. If the machine breaks they throw stones or leave you to die alone. Not all are bad of course. Say after two years you have completed a job and you wait for your pay. They may just chase you away. A Libyan can bring you to a nice farm in the desert and give you a nice little house to live in. 'Run the farm for me, okay?' The owner goes and comes back a week later with some food and maybe some money.

'Well done, continue, next week!' People are taken prison for there is no way to cross that desert by foot. I heard of one man who had been alone for a year like that! Ghanaian friends were near to that farm in the desert, they were buying a sheep in that region of the country. Suddenly they heard shouting in our own Twi language: 'Come, come!' They went and it was something! That man was so happy, could not have been made happier by anything but the company of real people, his own people, he had not spoken to anybody for over a year. They spent two days together and talked and talked and talked. Ate the sheep! So then they left him and the man knew a little bit more about the outside world. I heard about another friend who was hired like that. He drove with the Libyan to the desert and after many hours they reached sheep, a lot of sheep. The man said: 'I get you a camel and you look after my sheep, herd them, see that they eat and no one gets lost.' Our friend is from Ghana and does not know a camel but he said 'Okay'. He had no bed to lay his head at night, no roof against the sun, a gallon of water, some food and the owner was gone. The owner returned each week to give him medicines, food and water. After six months the Ghanaian escaped through the desert and came to our Nkoranza House in Benghazi. We thought we saw a ghost or a wild animal, dirty, smelling, burned deeply black and wild hair all over him. The man never made it, he became mad and died.

Egyptians are the dirtiest people. Poverty drives them to Libya, Egypt has no oil. They have no manners at all, no dignity. They can shit in public, they stink and what do they do? They may run a farm and bring one of our black boys there to work. The Egyptian sits there with a heap of stones beside him. If the farmer gets tired and slows down he throws a stone, then another one.

Libya is not a good country apart from the money you can earn. Their women are worse off. Once they marry they are never allowed outside the house not even for

shopping. From a slim girl you see them become fat and sloppy within a year from doing nothing and being bored. After puberty they are always escorted and if we blacks even look at them the Libyan boys throw stones at us. They go with a police escort to their schools and no one can come near, not even the Libyans. When they reach the age of 18 the father plants a flag on the house. Here lives a marriageable woman. Two flags, two women. When after 25 they are not married the flag is taken down and their lives are over. Then the woman spends the rest of her life just being there, a life sentence for being an unmarried woman! No husband, no sex, no child, no outings, nothing.

Our women who go to Libya become prostitutes. They are owned by a Ghanaian man and together they share the income. As even black women are not allowed to cross the streets at night the Ghana prostitutes are dressed like boys, a cap, a jackets, pants, a cigarette, that is how they are escorted by their men to certain houses where Egyptians or Ghanaians or Malians live (very seldom a Libyan man) and brought to a room and used by ten to twenty men one after another. Then they go home in the morning and count how much they got.

I was lucky. I made it so that I worked at a British oil company. They were new in Libya, not yet registered, and so they paid me in local currency instead of in dollars. They wanted me. After they received their registration as a company they said to me: 'Go back to Ghana and get an official visa and come back to work for us so we will pay you in dollars'. That's what I planned to do after two years, to go back to Ghana to make my stay in Libya official, but when I was on my way to the airport I was robbed of all I had, everything. The taxi-drivers! They all know who goes back to Ghana with money! The taxi that drove me diverted me and then robbed me and left me on the road. I waited. I did not weep. I wept only once in my life, which was during my time in Libya.

The rumor went in Benghazi that police would raid our Nkoranza house and arrest us. So every night we slept dressed and ready to run, shoes on top of our chests, that's how we slept. Then after seven nights no one came and we relaxed a bit. Then one week later they came at night. We were forty or so. We fled all possible ways and they only caught one of us. I ran into a forest and my back was injured by a branch. I did not notice it till we all returned from different hideouts and came back to the house. I felt my back and saw that my hand was covered with blood. Blood, dark red blood. When I saw the blood on my hand I wept. Till now I carry that large scar on my back to remind me of the day I wept.



Anyway I was robbed and my Ghanaian friends took care of me and they nursed me back and then they brought me to my company and explained what happened and I worked there another year to earn money for the journey back to Ghana. This time by plane and I transferred my money by bank.

Once in Ghana, just at that moment, there were sanctions and suddenly no more Ghanaians were allowed into Libya! It was my bad luck! Stuck in Ghana. But I decided to get a visa to Europe instead for I did not have enough money to build up a life in Ghana. It was going to be Czechoslovakia instead of Libya. I paid a local connection man here in Nkoranza and he got me a visa for a trade fair in Prague and I went. We were two men together from Ghana, we planned to go from Prague to Austria because I knew people there. I called Austria but the man said 'No, I cannot come for only two persons'! He said: 'Go to the university in Prague instead and you will find black people there. They will help you.'

The first thing you do in Europe when you have nobody and you are stranded is sleep at a train station. I did that for some days. If you don't meet a black man at the train station then you ask for black disco. That's where blacks come and if you are lucky they will bring you home. At their home for a price they will help you further.

We went to the university, were lucky to meet a black man from Zaire and we stayed at his house. We stayed for one month so this black man also extended our visa. He collected 300 dollar each from us. We should pay another 200 dollars and he would take us to Germany. We had no money so I called my uncle in Hamburg for money. It worked. The connection man from Zaire gave us each a Benin passport. He said we should learn in one hour our own name, the name of the president of Benin, the flag, the capital of Benin, and how to sign the signatory on the passport. And what money they use in Benin. At that time with a Benin passport you didn't need a visa for Germany. It was very cold when we crossed the German border and that was our luck! The custom man stayed in his warm office and stamped our passports unseen. This was our second attempt to cross to Germany, the first one failed and we were sent back to Czechoslovakia.

Winter 1992, we were in a car with our man from Zaire driving to Hamburg. The Zairian took our Benin passports back to Prague and never gave us our Ghanaian passports back because of security checks. So we had no passports. Long drive, over 24 hours to Hamburg. My uncle met us at the train station and the Zairian

returned home. Once in Germany we could not stay unless we would seek political asylum so we say we are both wanted in Ghana and it is not safe for us to return. I filed at the detention place but there were 500 people in line before me and it was only the next day that they took my credentials and transferred me to a house for asylum-seekers. A line of people of all nations, Philipinos, Chinese, blacks from all over Africa, a long line, and every day more people, I was amazed. After a month they transferred me to Heidelberg and they gave me a bed and food, 260 Marks per month. Then you get an ID card and seek work. They don't speak English in Germany so you need to learn five sentences: 'Good Morning', 'How are you', 'Where is the boss', 'Can you give me a job', 'Thank You Sir'. After two months I had a job, baking bread, it was a nice job for the people were nice to me. I worked every night in the bakery and overtime too. But they still worried me for I had to come to court and when they said 'No, you can't stay here' I had to make an appeal. While the lawyer is fighting for you, you just work. After a year at the bakery the lawyer said that all was refused but he was going to make another appeal.

One morning I come home to my rented room and from the hall I see a police car. I suspect that they come for me and go into my room and lock it. Then I open the window and climb out and into the window of other people. They were from Zaire. They did not see me and I slide under their bed. The police searched everywhere and also came into the room of the Zairians. Police said they were looking for Mr. Baffo, they mentioned my name but the Zairians said 'no, we have not seen him for three days' and then they left and I crawled from under their bed. They gasped! I heard that my workplace too had been told that I was wanted. With the Zairians we were still discussing how I could run away and then the police car returned to our building. They went to my room straight, I heard them, they now went for the other Ghanaian who lived with me, his name is Adyei. He was there for he could not be warned and they arrested him and sent him to Ghana. I heard it all. Later I ran to my worksite and asked for my pay saying that they are after me. They pay on certain days only but I was lucky that the bakers woman was good enough to hide me there for 5 days till they gave me my pay. Then I had all I wanted. I went to my room to pack my things and hide but the police were there! You know why? The woman who lived down from us was spying on all of us and informed the police that I was around! Police arrested me with handcuffs. Court. The judge asked why did I not leave Germany on the date given. I said because the lawyer made an appeal. They said if we send you to Ghana now what will you

do? I said nothing. My lawyer told me he was still fighting. They sent me to another center but I was down and lost interest. I started to think. My mind counted my money and my prospects and said to me: 'Better go home now'. I had already bought a minibus from my overtime money which I had shipped to Ghana and I had saved some money. 1000 dollars and 6900 German Marks. I decided to stop this thing and go home to Ghana. I was not all that sad for I now had money to make a life in Ghana though I wanted more. Two policemen came to sit at my side on Swissair and I went back to Ghana like that, like a thief. In 1994 I was flown back to Ghana. That is my story!

From my savings I built a house. It is the house I now live in. The bus eventually collapsed because it was already second hand to begin with. I have a wife and two girls, 10 and 6, and I moved back to Nkoranza where life is easier than in the big city of Accra. I have a good life, despite the fact that my family comes to knock at my door day and night. I say please I have no money but to your family you can't say you have no money when there is a sick one or a coffin to be bought. You have to do it. Other times you should not do it. It hardens a bit to say no, but much of the time it is 'no'.

Do it again? No, never! If someone wants to go I advise him against it. It is too risky and people die on the way. Everybody regrets but halfway you cannot turn back and sometimes when you come back to Ghana you only tell the good part. People here in Nkoranza see those who were lucky and return with money to build a house so they say 'why would I not also go?'

Nkoranza is the most important Libya-connection town in Ghana. Long ago two people went to Libya and came back to Nkoranza with tractors. That story went around the whole country and so Nkoranza became the centre for travel to Libya. There are people here who do passports, yellow fever, connection for travel, money transfers, all can be done here. People come from everywhere and wait till they have a chance to go to Libya.

To Europe too, I would never go again. It is tough. You work hard and have no other life than work and being chased. At times in Germany we had the skinheads who would aim at blacks and gang on us, knife us to kill, things like that.

Other blacks give Africans the bad name. Gambian people in our flat in Germany were bad news, they sold cocaine, openly even. One night we saw people

knocking on our door and they had masks. We were very afraid. We thought they were skinheads. But they were policemen and came with guns and they searched the whole building and made pictures of everyone. They found cocaine in between the panels of the doors of the Gambians. The dogs sniffed it out. We never saw those Gambians again, arrested, in jail. But we Africans get a bad reputation because of those Gambian drug dealers.

In Libya they throw stones at you and spit at you, cheat you and let you work like a slave. All bad things you can imagine happen in Libya! No, I do not advise anyone to go either to Libya or to Europe. Not now, there is no work now in Europe and there is work in Ghana. Somewhat better, Ghana. Many people who have suffered so much from these journeys have mental problems. You see them here in Nkoranza too, they were unlucky and never recovered from the shame. They got mad.

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## **To Be A Man Is Not Easy ~ My Hotel! Interview With Michael Sarpong**



Should I start with my name? My name is Michael Sarpong, a citizen of Nkoranza. I stayed in Ghana for a number of years and I want to tell you my own story of why and how I got overseas. My wife had a health problem and she decided to go to the US for medical treatment. That was in 1987. She applied for a visa which was issued for two years and she left soon thereafter. During her stay, which was at the time that Reagan was president of the United States, she, together with many other foreigners, was granted amnesty and received a residence permit, because she had stayed for a certain number of years. My wife was lucky being there at that time and she began processing her papers towards permanent residence in the US. She called me over the telephone

one day and told me about this and asked if I wanted to join her. I said all right.

At that time when I talked about my plans, people said: 'No, don't do that! Nkoranza is a village!' 'There is no light, no water, nothing in Nkoranza'. 'There is no road to Nkoranza, too!'. People told me to reconsider and build my hotel in any town but not in that small village of Nkoranza. But I said 'No, you wait and see'. And look at it now! Now there is electricity, now there is a tarred road, and now many people visit Nkoranza and the hotel is always full.

I believe in my goal and I have been right when I said: 'Very soon things will change.' Things changed! As a marketing man I am not short sighted. I plan for the far future and I must see how things are in a few or many years from now. That is my field: planning and concentrating on succeeding.

So even when I acquired the land people did not like it because it was too near to the cemetery. So what I did was this: I looked around and saw a good piece of land nearby. It belonged to the Presbyterian Church but it was not used. I said: 'That is the right piece of land which I need for my hotel!' I saw that the church had not made any lease and did not use the land and so I put sand and blocks on it. One day they saw that someone was building on their land. I got a letter from the District Council summoning me to come and so I came. I asked 'What do you need me for'. They said the committee of the church had reported me to the Council for taking their plot. So we all met and sat down and then during that time the DS was a woman, Dora Adyei. And I presented my case to her, while the people too presented their case. She said to us: 'Oh but this is a good plan, this is good for the town! The town is developing and we have a lot of visitors and always we have to send them to Techiman so stay overnight. So when you, Michael, have decided to build a hotel here it is a good thing for the town and we should encourage you! People build houses for themselves and you are going to build a hotel which serves not just yourself but the whole town, so I decide to give the plot to you!' She then asked the other people to present their lease and their side-plan and all the papers and they had none. Dora said: 'Okay, this guy has a good project for the town so I am going to divide the plot into two, one is for the hotel and the other is for the Presbyterian Church. Half for you, the other half for you.'

So I started. I was again lucky for this was the time that they brought electricity to Nkoranza and started to improve the roads. I decided to hire the grader and

level my land, that's why now the lawn is so beautiful! So that is how 'Mikesap' came into being. It is named after me: Michael Sarpong!

So I joined my wife in Washington and earned more money for my project and also gained more experience in hotel management over there in the USA. In 1990 I went to the States while in the meantime I continued working on my project, for that was my purpose in life, to run my own hotel!

I worked in all kind of different hotels in Washington so as to get as much experience in my field as I could gather. I worked in the Embassy Suite, the Marriott, the Holiday Inn, the Best Western, many of them! I gathered hotel-experience. I worked in housekeeping. I worked in the laundry. I worked at the front desk. I worked as a bellman. I also worked in a restaurant as a chef so, really, I was able to gain experience in almost all of the aspects of managing a hotel. Then I stopped working in hotels and went back to school to learn something about computers because the world is changing.

So now while I'm here in Ghana I put all my accounts on the computer in order to easily check it overseas. Up until now things were different and it was not easy to supervise my hotel and the money from such a distance. People write things in a file and all kind of things can happen to that file includingly being burned! That's why I applied myself to learn computer science, to keep my accounts correct.

Then I decided to work a little more for the sake of gathering money towards my hotel and in a few years my wife and I will return to Ghana to enjoy life here in my home town. So that is the short story I wanted to tell you.

The hotel is a dream of my youth and now it is not only realized but extended with a conference hall and more rooms. I know why I chose my hotel as my purpose in life. At that time I was traveling a lot. I was the sales and marketing manager of the pharmaceutical company in Kumasi so day and night I had to be on the road. My experience led me to see that there was an excellent opportunity in the hotel business. I saw that there were some towns with nowhere to sleep. At times I had to sleep in my car. I realized then that in Nkoranza too there was no hotel and people slept at the lorry station or anywhere at all, in big lorries during the night. Yes there was the need for a hotel in Nkoranza. I am in marketing and I see that there is a good market here and so I decided to start my project.

Had I been a pharmacist then I would have gone into research or in the hospital-

field but since I did marketing I saw that hotel business is where the market is. I had long made up my mind to make my future independently and not to spend my life as a working man for someone else.

So when I saw this hole in the market I immediately started investing in my own hotel here. I studied marketing here in Ghana at the University of Kumasi, after attending secondary school. I needed money to further my education at the university and since I was not all that rich I had to work for it. That was why I came to Nkoranza, my home town, and worked at Nkoranza Hospital. I met you and Dr. Konthuruthy there. At that time you were a young girl with long hair. Very young, maybe straight from medical school, and you were so quick in doing all kinds of operations and you didn't eat! You drank a beer and came back to see the patients and we all loved you! You came in 1973 and you left three months later. I left in 1975 to Kumasi. When you returned to Nkoranza in '83 I was still in Kumasi as the marketing man for this large pharmacy. I worked with them from '76 all the way to '90. My wife had already gone. She is now a US citizen and I am too. We are dual citizens. I've got a lot at stake in the US. I have two houses. That is because I saw that the housing business is good! At first we stayed in a mixed neighborhood but it was very unpleasant, Africans made the place very noisy, so we decided to move to a better place and I bought a townhouse in a good neighborhood. Its equity has gone up since I bought it. So from the equity I bought a second house. My son is now going to university and my plan is that I will sell the town house and give the other house to my son. From the revenue of the townhouse I can invest in my business in Nkoranza here.

My wife and I are ready to come back to Ghana because we are reaching an age when we should slow down and enjoy our own town. We are in our fifties getting towards sixty and we have built up some pension funds which we can use to retire here. It won't be too much of the relaxing type! Since we have put much in the hotel we have to come home and invest more time in it. So it is not exactly retiring but here in Ghana we will enjoy life better, life is slower and sweeter. Of course I can go many times for a vacation to the US, I will have to do that. I have a lot of contact with the Ghanaian people in Washington who also one time or another want to return home. They don't have a reliable person to invest in Ghana for them. If I return here they can trust me to handle their affairs for them. Some want to build their own house and that sort of thing and they know I can do it. So that will be another business enterprise in a way. Nkoranza people, Kumasi

people, Accra people, they all approach me to build for them here in Ghana. So I will have enough to do when I come home.

It is hard when you are old, sixty or more, to keep up the American pace. Here you can come home and do business and relax at the same time for it is home. So roughly in five or six years we will be home, enjoying, going around my business and relaxing. By that time the extension of the hotel will be completed, we'll have the 18 rooms and the conference hall on the second floor. It will be gorgeous.

It is important too keep it neat and gorgeous. That is why I have worked all these jobs in the hotels in Washington. Hotel business means cleanliness. If somebody comes to a hotel room and sees something dirty, that person won't come there again. The rooms, the bed sheets, the bathroom, all of it needs to be clean. I bring everything from the US. When I see that the bed sheets get old or the color is fading I give them away and replace them straight from the US. The rooms, the bath, the floor, I look at everything. I replace the shower curtains every time I come to Ghana. I buy all these things, the detergents, soap and spray, all, from the US.

When you get into a room in my hotel you see that it smells lovely and it looks good. All the time I dedicate them to keep the place clean, both outside and inside. So when I came this time we started painting the summer hut because, you know, that is the first appearance of the hotel business. If somebody comes and sees the cheerful appearance at first sight that person may develop an interest to come here and stay here always. You know last year I met a lady, a lawyer from Kintampo, who came to my hotel for lunch. She said: 'Oh this place is very neat. How much a room?' 'Can I go and look there?' 'Yes of course.' So they opened a room for her and she said: 'How beautiful! I am not going to Kintampo, I will stay here!' So the lady stayed here and said: 'This is my home, I will come and stay here each time I am around!' So she does.

So this is my priority and I am trying to get it through to the staff that maintenance is of key importance, inside out. It is not easy because I am away for a year but every day I talk with them, I call them daily on the phone. Also I ask people in town to go there and see what is happening, so they go there and report to me: this needs to be painted and that broke down and so on. And I call my people and tell them to accordingly. I had a problem with my hotel manager but now I interviewed a new person who is going to take charge as the next manager



and I will be in touch with him each day till next year when I return. I used to come every other year but now I come one month during each year. I will lose two weeks pay in the States but I will come for it is important. I need to do the supervision here very well and I can see to the construction of the new wing. I may lose some pay but the loss will pay itself back.

My son too is closely connected to Ghana. Last year he started an internet café in Accra and he does it very well. As a student he has put all these machines together and made something out of it! So it seems he is also an industrious man, like his father. Maybe he is planning for his future. Ghana is a quiet country where you can live comfortably when you concentrate on doing your business well. It is good here, no troubles, it is safe, the weather, the environment, everything 'it is pleasant'.

We can do it, we Ghanaians, but it is hard work and you need to be serious. That is what made America rich, the small businesses like mine. Here too, that is what I tell people, we can do that here as well as in America. You start a small business and you employ some people. You help these people because at the end of the month they take something home as pay. And there is a variety of opportunities, internet, a restaurant, Mexican food, Chinese rice, there is so much, you can create something for yourself! If only you are serious and keep to your goal then you will succeed.

That's what I keep saying. People don't want to invest with the little resources they have. They don't want to do something. They all want to build their own house and what do you get from a house? Nothing! At least you can invest in something that creates capital for yourself. A house creates no revenue. But my hotel does for every day I get revenue from it and it is an asset for me too, you see.

My mother is here in Nkoranza and is happy. She does not demand anything except transportation to go to the hospital if she needs her check up! You know why, because I look after her. Every month she gets something and so my mother is content. She lives in the village of Dotobaa. My father passed away some time ago. Next week I will go to the funeral of my mother in law and then we will return to the States. My wife is arriving in Accra today. We will be attending her mother's funeral together and then return to the States.

I am changing the restaurant and brought a lot of glasses and cutlery from the States. You know I am teaching them, before I return to the States, for they don't know how to set the table. They misplace stuff, I need to tell them where to put napkins and they need pepper and salt sets on the table. Next week I will buy those things in Kumasi. You will see that the restaurant will change! And next year I will employ a lady who has an advanced degree in catering and she will introduce a lot of new dishes to our customers.

I am always investing; that's how I am, I enjoy it. Whatever I do I use money to invest in the next opportunity and at the same time earn a revenue. That's what I do, invest in projects. How shall I explain that! It is called being an entrepreneur. I get a loan from America. I compare interest rates and I choose the US and I use that loan to keep investing.

Last year I got an award. My hotel got an award! They called it budget before, but now the hotel is a one star hotel. After two or three years, when finishing the building, I will go for the two stars. And so on. That is my goal. I will get another award, for my place is clean! There are so many people who are customers and always return because they love my place. Many are professionals, doctors and agriculturists and so on. That's why I want this conference room, people ask for space for seminars. There is no such place in Nkoranza and people have to go as far away as Sunyani or Kumasi. They will love my place when it is ready, be sure of that! I will make my dream come true!

From the beginning I say to people you must have a goal! Even with everything I do or wherever I go I keep my goal in mind. For example I was in a store in Washington and saw a solar light and I thought: that is for my hotel and I bought it! Now it is here in the garden. I brought it with me when I came. People admire it and ask 'what is that?' So next time when I come I will bring a lot of them and make it more beautiful all the time. Light in town, no light in town, here in our hotel garden we will have our own solar garden lights where we can enjoy relaxing and drinking our beer! So by just keeping my goal in mind I am succeeding.

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# To Be A Man Is Not Easy ~ The Boys Of The Band. Nkoranza (Name Changed). Interview With Akosua Asantewaah



She's called Akosua Asantewaah, a solid, good-humored woman of about forty years old. Some time ago her husband took his colleagues, all civil servants, as well as his own family by surprise by going to Accra for shopping and ... calling his wife the next morning from New York! Her husband Dominique has worked as an accounting assistant for over fifteen years. He is known and well liked in town. His wife kept silent but rumors were quickly spreading that he had indeed left Ghana. 'He went to New York, with the people from the band!' people whispered to each other and congratulated him on his luck.

Akosua Asantewaah, stout earthly and always where her business is, has three children and sells second hand clothes on the street. I ask her about the rumors and this is what she tells me: Oh yes, he left! How long ago? I don't know exactly, it will be a year or more ago already. It was no surprise to me, I knew that he was planning something with his friends, but of course he never told me in so many words. I felt it however and I was proud of him when he called me from New York that morning and when he said: 'I'm here, I'm in America!' I called my children together and told them: your father is a hero, he has made it to America! They danced! We made fufu that day which you know is the food we like the best and we had a party. The neighbors came. I won't forget that day!

He whispered over the phone as if somebody could still overhear him and send him back! Beforehand, yes, he told me that he wanted to go away to earn money for us, but no details. I didn't ask him. Then when he called from New York I knew he had made it. He sounded so happy. But I asked him 'Why did you not greet me before you left?' He laughed and I laughed too. Of course he had to seize the opportunity and go at once so there was no chance for saying good bye. He has a

very good friend, a musician. Often this friend gives concerts overseas. One time when things were really hot my husband did something very good for him and his friend said: 'One day I'll pay you back, I'll help you.' So I knew that he was waiting for help to get out of Ghana.

When this musician was invited to perform in New York he took Dominique with him as one of the band members. No problem with the visa at all. When they all left for the plane my husband joined and it all went smooth, he said. That's how he came to New York!

Now I am alone with my children but people always stop to greet me and it seems they are proud of us, so I am happy. We just pray every day that he may reach his goal and try not to worry too much. Or drink too much! We all pray that one day he comes back safely. And rich of course! I am more worried for him then for myself and my kids. He does not have it very easy. But he calls me as often as he can. Almost every week and when the children were sick he called every day.

He works at a hospital somewhere in New York. He lives in The Bronx if I remember well. It is a rough area but Dominique is not afraid for he too is black like all of them there. There are three Ghanaians together living in one room. Two work and the other one sleeps. They take turns. He already has a white friend who invited him over for Christmas, so he is not very lonely. They alternate working, cooking, sleeping. He has no papers and works under someone else's name. But now, or soon, he will have his own papers processed so things will go better. He may study and get a better job. In fact I think he got his papers now, because he is there over a year. It costs 2000 dollars to get them. He used to work with the name and picture of another Ghanaian but now with 2000 dollar he has received his own working papers.

I? I stay the same! I sell my clothes as I used to and pay chop-money and rent and clothes for the children, these things. My husband used to pay the school-fees and now too he has sent three times 300 dollars which covers the school-fees. So in fact not much has changed. But I think with the papers he can work under his own name and earn more.

The Ghanaians live together in a house and we look after each other in every way possible. He is not alone. He can even go worship in our own language in The Bronx!

There are blacks there like in Ghana here and we Africans do not look strange to them. It is easier to stay in New York than say in Germany or in Europe.

I think a lot of him. Every day I think a lot. Sometimes I wish I could see him, I long for him. I always pray that things go well. If I am faithful and don't think of anything but him then all will be well. The kids however ask every day: when is papa coming home!

Yes the kids miss him and I am thinking of him but I pray. The danger is to take a lover and I don't think he or I will do that. I care for him a lot and I know he does this for us and cares for us. Now with his papers he will come home and everybody will be happy and the children will all ask: 'papa what will you bring me, what did you buy for me'?

I have a good relationship with his mother, my mother in law, so when he returns there will be harmony. She wants money. All children have to look after their mother. I have a good relationship with her and anytime he sends money I tell her and give her what I can. So we will not quarrel.

I can advise other women in my position for I know how it is! Some take a lover, some only want money, some insult their husbands because they don't send enough money. It does not befit to insult your husband. Me, I pray every day for him. That is better. That is my advice. If you take another lover your husband never will help you again. If you are not free and easy with all the family then there is going to be quarrels too. Always.

*Telephone conversation between author and Dominique:*

'Upon arrival here I went to the house of a boy from Nkoranza and lived there and used his papers to work. However after 4 months he left and evicted me from the room and I had no more papers to use to work. Then I knew another Nkoranza boy and stayed with him till now. At the end of the month he too is leaving and wants his papers back. Then I don't know what to do. When I live with a guy I pay for the rent and pay for using the work-permit so there is not much left. I could not save anything. I hope at the end of the month to find another person that will take me in so I can continue to work. There used to be a general amnesty for us but they stopped that. Maybe there will come a time that they will start it again. I keep hoping. What people do is marry someone, not a real marriage but for the papers. You usually pay a thousand dollars and sometimes you get cheated. After

you pay the person may disappear. Anyway I have not decided to even try that yet.'□

*Second call week later:*

'Maame, yes, it is 8 here and we are preparing for church, a large Pentecostal church and all who worship there are Ghanaians, about 400 of us, not counting the children. Yes and the preacher is also Ghanaian and there are no black Americans or whites just us. The relationship with the American blacks is okay, it is cordial but we do not know what they are saying. Sometimes they are saying something like 'hey man', and we always lose track of what they want to say, but we are cordial. Of course they are also pretty rough! One night I came home from my shift and a black man was standing there and looking at me angrily and said 'Hey, what are you looking at me for, man, are you looking at me, you fucking son of a bitch, what are you glaring at me for!' He was going to chase me and I looked away and said I am not looking at you and reached my house in time. He laughed. Did you find another room? Not yet, but I'm leaving for church now!'

*After almost six months I went to greet the wife and asked her how she, the children and her husband are faring. Apologized for the long delay!*

'He is all right. Still the same. Same. I don't know what happens to him. But he still calls often and I still miss him a lot. Same address yes!'

She is short.

*Three months later, I tried to call him but the telephone seems dead. Then two weeks later I call again.*

'What the fuck are you calling me for! Fuck you man. Fucking shit why don't you leave me alone. I am trying to sleep, lady!'

I hang up. It wasn't him.

Now what?

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# To Be A Man Is Not Easy ~ Peace Of Mind Or Success? I Want It Both. Interview with Kojo Apiah Kubi (Brian Osanhene Duako in Chicago)



In Ghana they call me Kojo, Kojo Apiah Kubi. Back in the States I use the name Brian Duako, which is the name in my passport and also Brian is easy for Americans to pronounce. But now I'm back in Ghana and my mum says 'Kojo, you are home'. My family and friends make me feel so good, it's so sweet to be Kojo again!

I'm 35 years old and I was born in the village of Tanfiano near Nkoranza. After school I attached to an artist in order to develop my drawing skills which I possessed since early childhood. If people ask me who I am I say I am an artist. As a small kid in the village I would make drawings from anything I saw, houses, trees, faces, a village road. I lived in this small mud-house in Tanfiano and made drawings on all the walls included the ceiling and my parents said: 'you have talent!' I started developing that talent.

People were amazed at how well I would copy the scenes on paper. 'Kojo, good for you!' They would say. I did secondary technical education in Sunyani and then started my own art studio over there. For five to six years I worked happily and independently in my studio and by then I had my own apprentices who attached to me.

Then I got the chance to go to Chicago because my sister lives there and she helped me get the visa. Once there I went straight to school to work on my Bachelors in graphic designing. I got there when I was 26 and now have been eight years in Chicago. I like that city, it suits my taste. It was easy for me with the visa and I got married there and that way I also received a residence permit and now I am a USA citizen and a family-man with two kids. I had to combine

study with work and so I drove a taxi to finance my studies and help support my family. Nowadays I alternate times of studies at the university with time spent working. I work full time in graphic designing and screen making and I drive the taxi when I want to make some extra bucks. Last time, 4 years ago, I came with my wife and boy. Now I also have a baby girl, eight months old, so my family stayed home this time.

My wife is very interested in what you do here with the handicapped children. She works at the Howard community with handicapped persons and one day when the kids have grown she wants to come help you as a volunteer! She reads your website and is really interested.

Right now we don't know how to organize it, the kids have to grow somewhat, but we will come! My wife's mum is from Ghana and her dad is from America. The first time I came with my wife, 4 years ago, the experience was bittersweet. First of all I was of course so happy to meet my mother and the family but also it was a confrontation that was too hard. Now we are used to things different in USA and in Ghana it is not the same. I try to adjust. For example I cannot drink the water anymore without getting sick, that kind of thing. Ghanaian food however I love and thank God it never makes me ill.

Sometimes I get sad in Ghana for things stagnate in the village and I went ahead to live in another world. That too is hard to reconcile. I left Ghana and I come back four years later to visit, and again four years later, and every time it is a shock. The two worlds just don't compare. Although I don't have to be too sad for at a slow pace things do change. Mentality changes. Thinking changes. I sense a change of attitude in Ghana, it is coming and it is needed, imminent! Changes are happening now though Ghana, yes, though we still have a long way to go. I believe in Ghana's progress, no, I see it, for coming to Ghana every now and then you pick up the changes easier than when you live there all your life. But back to my family here; I find it hard to explain my situation in America for it is almost impossible to explain! Explain the subway! They think dollars are everywhere and never ever believe how I have to struggle. I understand them and forgive them of course for how could they know. But sometimes miscommunication is a problem. It makes me lonely here, at times.

To be frank with you if I decided to stay in Ghana again I want to do the same work, graphic designing. That is me! I do it here and I do it in Chicago. Now I do that full time in Chicago. I have a family in Chicago and I have one in Ghana that



is waiting for me to bring one thing which is money. I work very hard to fulfill all my obligations. My question is: do we at some time like to come back to Ghana with wife and children?

I cannot come back now, because of the family in Chicago. Yes, I wanted to go and learn and come straight back! But life went different and I now have a wife and children and then it became another issue. My wife supports me in whatever I do. In any case I can go back and forth every year or so.

Computer designing is my passion. When I was young I had no computer knowledge, all was by hand which I did well. In the beginning the computer designing was hard but gradually it replaced hand drawing and now I even feel lazy to lift my hand and draw with it! After graduating from school I worked at a sign company and then another one with the dual purpose of earning money to buy my own equipment and getting more experience. I succeeded and bought my own tools and started for myself. When I went to USA I wanted further education and a straight return to Ghana. Now I have a family, advanced skills and get a name and I have access to artwork in Ghana and in Chicago! As I said now I work freelance from my house in Chicago. Graphic designing, signboards, screen-printing and so on. I have a name in Chicago, especially among the Ghanaians but others too. My neighborhood is Rogers-park, a small Ghana.

You know from Rogers-park to Morse to Loyola University is now an all Ghanaian neighborhood and that's where I live and my countrymen know the quality of my art. I like living there and have many friends both Ghanaians and others. It is good to socialize with your own people and talk your language that makes you less homesick. I am happy to live in America, I say yes. It is very tough but better than here. Economically first of all. If you are forceful to do something you achieve your goal. I work from home and while my wife works out I can also look after the baby.

It is hard but we get by with mouth to mouth advertisement. You know what? I feel more at home in Chicago! Chicago is where my kids are. Also Chicago is no nonsense, go for it and do it. It is fair. I don't like to feel that way for home is home and that is where your mother is. My mother is here in Ghana. In Chicago however I feel at home and here I feel warm with my mum who calls me by my old name Kojo, so I am a world citizen!

I think about success and what it takes, life and what you make of it. I like to say: brighten the corner where you live. Just do something!

My brothers the African Americans her, hey man they live in the past. Talk about ages ago and slavery and beg for a quarter. I fight for a room and a job and I make it by myself. We think them strange the African Americans, nothing to do with us, who have style and dignity.

Here in Ghana you can have a dream but it is much harder to achieve. It's more relaxed living here for sure. But really, how can you relax when you can't make a living! A trade-off: peace of mind or success. I want both.

Here people have 2 dollar a day or less and they manage. In the USA there is more money but more stress. Money is important but peace of mind is the most important. I want both so what I do is keep my peace of mind wherever I am. Even in the taxi in Chicago. It is tough, you have to drive aggressively, people can be rough and all that. But hey if you need money you drive a bit and you overcome all stress for there is a goal to keep in mind. Money is not a goal, it is means to bring happiness to my family and to myself by starting my own business. I have a goal in mind: my own art-shop both in Chicago and in Sunyani. You see? Art, I live for art. In Chicago my business is settled. Now I want a business in Ghana again as well, that is my overall purpose.

In Chicago when I drive around in my taxi I always register stores that I could use, hey, here is a store where they have digital printers, here is a store to visit for more ideas, and so on. You know that makes life real for me. My purpose! Some Ghanaians in America drive a taxi for twenty, thirty years and do nothing else and then what. They become desolate and poor you know why?

They have no drive and no vision in life. They live from day to day and spend what they earn and if you are sixty you can't drive anymore and then you sit in a room. You cannot depend on your children like here in Ghana. You even see some of us begging, the old ones, 'Quarter, quarter, quarter, please'. Homeless. They did not have foresight. I do not agree with that and never understand it and always advise my people. Some are too far gone they really suffer. They cannot come back here to Ghana for they neglected their Ghana family and have nor even fare for a plane. And there they get old and lonely and it is not their culture. Sorry to see them. But mostly our people do well and are ambitious. Only few get old without

joy and with drink and in poverty. But look here too, you sit in the village and what do you do, some drink and complain and get more depressed! People need a goal in their mind and a driving force in the heart.

So before I return to Chicago next week I hope to start a business in Sunyani.

Four years ago my own old art-shop was still there, years after I left. I left it to my apprentices, family, but they did not do well and the shop collapsed.

I would want to staff the new art-shop with family-members but realize that I should not primarily help my family into jobs because they may steal and mismanage like anyone else. This time I brought a big machine with me and won't install it till I am sure of good management in my absence. The equipment is very expensive. I do not go to my family, I look for a reliable professional. I will find him, sooner or later. My family does not take this easy but in the end they will understand. Twice I have been cheated out of my shop which I set up, so no more friend and family services, I am after the professional. Now I have the equipment in my own room in my house here in Nkoranza and you know what? The design I made for your car, included the 'hand in hand' logo, that is the first thing I made from my machine in my own room. Nobody knows! This is how you start a business. You make things for people, a sign here, free, and signboard there, free, big or small, and people appreciate the work and the quality and they say who is this Kojo? Good, let me order some!

I've sent two people to Kumasi for training. Hopefully they can run my business after they complete their school. I go back in two three weeks and I like it here, there is no place like home. Wish I could come each year but you have to save money and my family is there too in Chicago. I wish that soon I could come again with the family and I wish that my wife would volunteer with the mentally handicapped children here. She would love it. You know quite suddenly Ghana has changed. You are here and you make a call and hear your wife and talk to her, you go to the internet café and look up the whole world, there is electricity, but you know what, there is a new way of thinking coming in Ghana! Even about mental handicaps and mental patients. They have somehow stopped about witchcraft and spirits. It is an important change. Now I work on two fronts. I bought this machine and brought it to Ghana. If not this year then next year when I come back. Next time I come I will also bring the largest digital printer. I leave in two weeks. I will email you. I am a world citizen. With a purpose.