

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 then 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.

To Be A Man Is Not Easy ~ It Is Love For One Another That Makes Us Continue. Interview With Kojo Sampson



I am Kojo Sampson. Three years ago, in 2002, I traveled to Libya and returned last year. I am a plumber but in Libya I did different work. I worked with German people at a gas-company near Tripoli. That is a factory that sees to the transport of piped gas. The pipe is government property but the contract has been given to a German firm. I planned from the beginning to find work there and succeeded in doing so. That helped me for the conditions of living are better with the Germans as compared to the Libyans. So relatively I had it easier. But I was away from my Ghanaian friends in Tripoli and I missed them. Therefore I did not also know how bad they had it. I thought I had it bad the way I was treated and at a certain stage I wanted to run to Italy for I could no longer stand the humiliations. Only later did I hear that those Ghanaians who work contracts in Tripoli suffered much worse from the local people. I had hoped to receive money from my family but they disappointed me and so I had no money to make the trip to Italy.

I started thinking about going to Libya after completing school. This was because I needed money to establish my own business. I have no helpers in life and so I had made plans to help myself.

I started to save money I earned here and there with the single aim of paying for my trip to Libya. The business that was in my mind was opening a store in Nkoranza where I would offer combined plumbing works and the placing of tile-floors and bathrooms. That was what I had in mind since I completed school where I learned these skills. I attended the Technical Training Institute at Abetifi in the Kwahu Mountains and specialized in plumbing and tiles setting. I also

decided that I wanted to be my own boss.

I went to Libya and worked hard in order to come back with enough money to establish my own store. I am back now and as you know I am in business and it is growing and doing well. I have become known in Nkoranza already!

At that time it took me two million Cedis to go to Libya, which equals 200 dollars. I took the route through Agadez in Niger and from there I went to Tripoli where I have spent two years making money.

The journey was rough. I did not like it. I will not advise anybody to go to Libya because the trip is too dangerous for any human being. I would not have done it if I knew then what I know now. The road is bad. The cars are not maintained in fact they are terribly overloaded. A pickup from Agadez to Druku is filled with 27 Ghanaians in the back, while there is place for only 10. If you make it during that trip, there is another pickup waiting for you to drive you through the desert to Libya. Same situation, overloaded with again 27 people and the car is old.

They treat you like cattle. The pickup shakes and there you are with two hundred percent overload. You take turns and sit in the back or hang over the edge of the pickup. On the way between Agadez and Druku I fell off. The car goes at night and we all get sleepy. They drive at night because of the police patrols during the day and also the sun gets too hot. So we travel late evening till early morning and during the day you can't sleep either because you have to protect your money and your belongings. One night I fell asleep, however much I struggled to keep my eyes open. Everybody pushes all the time and I fell, I did not even notice it till I hit the ground. Because we are all Ghanaians, Nkoranza people, we look out for one another. If not you die. They saw me falling off the car and knocked hard on the back window of the cabin to make the driver stop and pick me up. If no one would notice it or if they are strangers then you lay there and you are lost in the desert. So it is important to travel with your own people.

Then during the second stretch, the desert stretch between Durku and Libya, we missed the road and had to stop somewhere in the middle of nowhere. We don't even know how we finally reached Libya. The drivers sat together in the sand and did not know their way, we could see it. The water got exhausted and some of us got afraid. The drivers were doing some bad praying and performing some secret things, kind of Voodoo, and then all of a sudden, alone and out of nowhere, came a man walking towards our car. He was a ghost and he was able to direct the car the right way. There was no village around and no one knew where that man

came from. The drivers connived to call him to lead them out of the desert. They do that, they use black magic. We were all thirsty and exhausted. All 27 people in the car were from Nkoranza and we all made it! We really got to know each other very well and all of us will be friends for life. From car to car we all stay together, all the way from Nkoranza to Libya. So, yes, we all became one.

Only from Agadeze to Druku one Nigerian joined us. He said he was from Accra but soon we realized he was a Nigerian. He was not a good person. He started fighting in the car. Then we dropped the guy out of our car because he troubled us too much.

If we drop such a person we only do it when we are sure another car with Nigerians is behind us to pick him up for we can't let him die all by himself, trouble or not. Those people wherever they go they create problems. For example any time we meet police we all pay up but the Nigerian said: 'I don't have money, no money there' and the police says: 'If you have no money how could you go to Libya? Better return now!' You see, these kind of things. We Ghanaians, we know how to behave ourselves but for them they create problems wherever they go and they steal too. So we let him off the car.

As I said the car that left from Nkoranza carried the same group of people that eventually arrived in Tripoli. Even one of my best friends is now in Italy. He slept in my room in Nkoranza until our transport arrived. We did everything together, we traveled side by side all the way. But after making enough money in Tripoli he traveled by boat to Italy and that's where he now is. He calls me, we write and we remain close.

He sends money to Ghana for others to continue to Italy. I too I wanted to go to Italy but my family disappointed me. They delayed sending money for my boat-trip for they had none. My family would have sent the money through a connection-man. There are connection-people there in Libya who arrange for the money of many Ghanaians. They have been there so many years that they know all the ways and they stay there and that is what they do for a living. They tell your family in Ghana to send money to Libya and they give it to you in dollars. They charge of course. The money for transport to Italy amounts to 800 dollars. No passport, only the boat. You become a refugee. Dangerous! One of our friends died on the sea, he was one of the friends who worked at the same company in Tripoli. He drowned. He is from Nkwabeng and recently they have sent his body back to the

village, it was a very big funeral. I know his family and often talk with them.

So one day the police trapped me and simply sent me back.

Love between one another is what makes us continue. The Libyans have no love for us. When they call us we just look at the way they shout at us! They won't allow you to drink from their cup, rather break it than give it to you as a black man. If you have music they hate it and destroy your machine. They shame us, they treat us less than animals. That is why many of us do not want to keep working in Tripoli. It is because the Libyans are so hostile that we are driven into the sea and try to reach Italy. Once in Italy you are treated well and you can feel what it is to be a human being again. Not so in Libya, we are not considered to be human there. I will never go there again. We want to make money and then go back to Ghana to do something with it, but the cruelty of those Arabs makes us get into these shaky boats to risk our life trying to cross the sea to Italy. More often than not also they catch us and take all our money and then you have to start all over again.

The German company provides a good environment for us. But the directors are Libyans and out to attack and humiliate you, to insult your mother, to kill sometimes. That is the normal thing for them. Only some Libyans who know Ghana or have traveled overseas are better. If they have been to Ghana they call you and start a conversation: 'I have been to your country, I was in Kumasi', that kind of thing. Most of them have never even been outside Tripoli and those are the ones that make you want to run away.

No juju, no, they just pester and try to kill you. Some times small boys climb on a car when they see a black man in the back and they tease and beat us and try to throw us out of the car. Nobody minds. They have no culture. They are bad.

I came back as a deportee but I came back with my money. I brought 800 dollars back with me. The police picked me up and brought me to a Ghanaian camp and from there they flew me straight to Ghana. They had no chance to steal my money. October 11th of last year was the day I flew back to Ghana. I was shocked but went straight to Nkoranza and started right away with my business. It is now a year later and I am doing well. People trust me and they like my work. I have reached success already.

I have no wife and children yet. I want to set up the business very well before I

get a wife and start a family. The worst experience was the desert!

The car that got lost in the desert and the insulting. I remember them still in my dreams. I would not allow any of my family to travel the way I did. I see bones in the desert, piles of bones with a passport on top. You stop, you look at the picture, if you know the person you take the passport and bring it back to the relatives. When the car lost its way and we ran out of water I thought I was going to die. I dream about it often. Some guys became mentally mad and violent too. We helped each other.

The stranger, the ghost, came and finally we met in Libya with the other cars but then we saw that one of the three cars was missing. We left Druku with three cars, one to the left and another on the right side. One, a car with strangers, never arrived. We all waited and then the drivers of our two cars went back to search in the desert. They returned. We waited overnight and the next day we waited. So we know 27 persons have died and that is one out of three. We were lucky and now I am lucky to be back and will never go again and never allow anybody to go again!

To Be A Man Is Not Easy ~ I Saw Dead People Covered In Dust. Interview With Mr. Darko



I am Mr. Darko, 37 years old and I am married with two children. I'm from here in Nkoranza and I work as a car electrical mechanic in town. I will tell you about the experiences I had on my way to Libya. About three years ago I went to Libya. I started from Ghana, passed Burkina Faso and went on to Niger and then straight into Libya. That's what I thought, but it happened otherwise.

From here to Burkina the road is acceptable but once in Niger the going is rough.

From Burkina you get to Niamey which is the capital of Niger. There are many Ghanaians there waiting for their chance to get transport into Libya. In Niamey you wait until about thirty people have assembled, then you all get into an Urban minibus. These buses take you to Agadez. Ghanaians wait for each other till they have the money to hire the car together. We Ghanaians, we like to travel together.

“Everyone pays about 300,000 cedis which is 30 dollars to the driver. The driver is not from Ghana, he is from Niger. You take off and although the distance is not too long the road is so bad that it takes you three to four days to get to Agadez. This town is the second capital of Niger and lays at the edge of the desert. The military police stops you many times and each time you have to pay up. When they see Ghanaians in the bus they say: ‘stop, out, pay.’ If you don’t pay they will throw you out of the car. You waste a lot of money on that stretch alone. Every time they stop you, you pay 5 dollars, this is on top of the 30 dollars which you already had to pay to hire the car. Every time the police halts the car they take our passports and documents and we don’t get them back till after paying the bribe.

So after three days and much money you get to Agadez. After Agadez it is all desert, there is no more road. There is a trail which the drivers know but they miss it sometimes when there is a desert storm.

Whenever we stop we sleep beside the car. Really to be honest you cannot sleep. We don’t feel sleepy for while you sleep anything can happen. People will grab your food and your money if you are not alert. So it is not sensible to sleep, so we don’t sleep. It is also very cold the more you get into the desert so you could not even sleep if you wanted to.

There are Toyota land-cruisers and heavy trucks in Agadez; these are the only cars that can drive through the desert. With 30 other people I got into a Toyota Land-cruiser to start the journey through the desert. If you are less lucky you get into a large truck which takes two hundred people at the time! You stand like sardines in these large trucks and the sun burns you and the desert wind fills your eyes and your mouth and even inside your ears with sand. Whatever type of car it is, it is overloaded and still, some people force themselves to get inside by sitting on the edges or by just jumping and clinging to the car.

Once in the desert

Once in the desert everybody is allowed a 7 gallons container with water to drink, and some small gari to eat, nothing else. The water-containers are tied to the car and hang outside, side by side. Everybody strictly keeps to his own water else there is murder. This water has to last you. When there is a stop you take your tin cup and put some gari in it and then add water and then you eat. Everybody loses weight but we Ghanaians are strong and we don't care. In fact we can do anything, anything at all.

From Agadez to Libya it is '*live or die*'. Everybody becomes serious and has to struggle for himself. There are middle-men in Agadez who organize a car for you. You have to pay them to get into a car. Everybody likes to earn money from us and we have no choice but to pay. So you board your overloaded car! There is not any shade on the way and there is no road, some cars miss the signs and get lost, in which case you die.

But we went in a line, a caravan of five cars from Agadez to Durku, which is near to the border of Libya. That trip is a four day journey through the sand. When the driver gets tired he makes a stop. Then everybody sleeps in the dust but no-one actually sleeps. Early morning the driver shouts 'hajaaa', 'hajaaa', which means up, up, and you go again. You take some of your water from your container and mix it with your gari and that is your breakfast. Every time there is a stop the same you eat and rest a bit and go again.

Some start walking

When your car breaks down there is trouble. A breakdown is painful and then everybody fights for himself to live. You have to get on another car. Some start walking but the dust covers everything and you may panic and then you easily get lost with that sand everywhere.

My car did not break down but another car gave up and we saw people in the desert from that car. We took seven extra people aboard from out of the sand who otherwise would have died. No one knew how they still could fit into our car but they did, they joined our car. The other cars also took as many people as they could. If you did not make it to a car you died.

I saw dead people there, and what they do is cover them with some dust and put their passport on top of the heap. This is because someone might pass who knows them and if they do they take the passport and show it to the relatives.

Stranded in Durku

When we arrived in Durku we thought we had made it but then the big problem

started! It was in December, three years ago. The trip had taken more than two weeks in all, and we were close to Libya. But then in Durku we got stranded.

There is only one type of car that can bring you from there to Libya. The land-cruisers in the meantime had returned already. When I came to Durku it was just at the time that Al-Qathafi had made a decree that nobody should enter Libya through the desert borders anymore! We were all locked up in Durku, what could we do? We waited because the president could change his mind which he often does. But no, he never lifted the ban and we were stuck in Durku, which is the farthest village in the desert of Niger.

The food was running out. Only water in abundance because of a natural source, but there was no food to buy except very expensive bread.

With me there were more than 500 Ghanaians stranded and many others like Nigerians and those from Mali and Niger. The Ghanaians stayed together, waiting.

Every day more people assembled in that tiny village. The land-cruisers brought loads of thirty to forty people and the heavy trucks brought them by the two hundreds. It was a complete refugee camp and nobody wanted to turn around and go back to Ghana. We ate what we had and we bought when we had the money but there was little money on me.

I kept all my money safely on my body and counted it every day. Some people had not enough to return with. Some were too adventurous and tried anyway to force themselves with that one car into Libya. We all waited but they did not succeed. After a number of days the car came back with only a few people left, very few people left. Most had died from thirst. The driver said that heavy border guards were patrolling at the border of Libya and there was no way through.

Waiting

All this happened because some Nigerians and Malians has smuggled cocaine and drugs into Libya through the desert. The president got to know of it and closed the borders just when I had arrived for my passage to Libya. It was a very hard blow to my plans.

You count your money every day and the day you find you have just enough to return then you have to return. We stayed three weeks waiting. We were quiet because of those who had died trying their luck crossing over to Libya.

I decided to return, I had enough money for myself and I could pay for a young boy from Nkoranza. I looked after him and took him back with me.

A few women were there too but mostly all this is too hard for women. Women also cannot push a car when it gets stuck so the drivers don't want them.

I left Ghana in December and I returned with the young boy in February. I was forty days on the road and three weeks in that border town, waiting.

I could not call or send a message but the word went to Ghana that we were all coming back. My family and my wife and children were so happy to see me alive. They had all heard about the news that many people had died. So they rejoiced but all the same my wife was sad that I had failed to get into Libya.

Your home town

If you help a friend who has no money you have to take a friend from your own town. That is the only way by which you will get your money back. If you see someone stranded from another town like Nkawkaw you don't help him for you never find your money back again. Those who have no helper will die, they just roam around till they drop down in the sand. There in that place we all have to fight for ourselves alone.

The boy from Nkoranza was lucky that he met someone like me who helped him. He is from my town. The boy paid back and he became a friend. His family is very grateful.

My wife was happy but sad. Happy for life but sad for the wasted money which we had lost. We wasted three million Cedis then, that would be five million now because of inflation. That is 500 dollar. We still cry about the waste. When I have the money now I will go again and this time I will succeed. I want to go for here in Ghana there is simply no future for me and my family.

Once in Libya you can either earn enough to start your own business here in Ghana or, if you are lucky, you get into Spain and then you get more money for you take any job you can. My brother is in Spain for over four years. He often calls me and tells me how to go about getting out of Ghana. He was the one who gave me money to travel to Libya when I failed and had to return. Right now last week he called me again and said 'Come! Try again!' Yes I am soon going to try again!

Interview with Mr. Darko from Nkoranza (Ghana) - October 2005

Ineke Bosman - To be a man is not easy - Stories from Ghanaian emigrants

From the Preface

It all started with Kwame Baffoe, the guy who *'only wept once'*.

Kwame was the hospital driver at the time that I worked in Nkoranza Hospital as tropical doctor. One day Baffoe disappeared. After two weeks his relatives came to ask for his end of service benefit. I was then the medical director as well as the administrator and I had to say 'no, he vacated his post. Sorry no entitlements when someone walks out and does not return within ten days. Trade Union agreement. But where is Baffoe?' They smiled silently and left. This was in the mid-eighties.

I returned to Nkoranza after studies in Chicago and, apart from caring for my mentally handicapped children, I had received the appointment from the Ministry of Health to be regional mental health director in our regional capital, Sunyani. This meant a lot of travel up and down. I bought a car and then ...I saw Baffoe! It might have been 1997. He was operating his minibus as a taxi and looked well, the same half-smile plus now a tiny little belly. I asked him 'Can you help me? Drive me to Sunyani any time I need to? Which is often?' 'Yes', he said. Baffoe is not a man of many words.

That's how we met again and, many words or not, one day he told me his story. How and where he traveled and how and when he returned to his country Ghana. I was impressed, flabbergasted is the more appropriate term maybe, especially since he told me the story the way you talk about a shopping trip at the supermarket. Facts, not emotions.

I felt the topic of his 'end of service benefit' still hanging in the air. And yes a few days later he asked me why I withheld 'his money' when he left for Libya. I told him that I did what I thought was right and that it was not 'his money' but 'the hospital's money'. 'Okay', he said. 'Now, older, and after understanding all that you went through, I might have been milder', I said, which is true. 'No, you are right. Okay'. Speaking about it after so many years settled the issue so the case was closed.

In my dreams his hazardous travel stories kept following me and one day last year, when I had some more leisure time, I decided to interview him once again and to document his experiences. He agreed readily. So did thirteen other persons here in Nkoranza. It became a passion, almost an addiction, to hear these stories and write them down metaculously. All these interviewee's became my

friends and we keep meeting in town. I could have done hundreds more of these interviews but to everything there is a natural end.

See also: <http://www.operationhandinhand.nl/>

The former Dutch tropical doctor Ineke Bosman once had a very special dream: the creation of a safe and loving place to live for intellectually (and often multiple) disabled children in Ghana. These children are still undervalued and abandoned, among others as a result of the widely spread fear for “evil spirits”.

By founding the *Hand in Hand Community* in Nkoranza in 1992, Ineke Bosman was able to make her dream a visible and unique reality. Ineke retired in 2009 and left for Holland. Since then Albert van Galen, together with his wife Jeannette, has taken over the leadership of this wonderful community.

To Be A Man Is Not Easy ~ No Other Treats Than Daily Fresh Insults. Interview With Yaw Charles From Nkoranza



It was a few years ago that I went from Nkoranza to Libya to look for work. This was because I had no job and nothing to do in Ghana.

During the two years in which I stayed in Libya I lived in Tripoli. I did contract work, mostly mason jobs and welding jobs. I was there with my brother Sampson, but Sampson got into a company while I worked on daily or weekly basis or whatever longer contract work was available. Life is better if you work with a company in Libya. Because Sampson worked with a

company outside Tripoli far away from the capital we did not meet much of one another during our time in Libya. After our journey together all the way up to Libya we lost contact, although we Ghanaians all know from each other where we are and how we live and so on.

The desert trek was all right for me. I don't mind whatever happens to me as long as I am alive and can fetch some money. So yes I got work to do and I saved money and decided to go to Italy.

Mosaratta is the place in Libya where you get boats to Italy. Just when we were preparing to get into the boats and take off over the sea towards Italy the police came to cut us! They put us in prison for four months and then they simply sent us back by plane to Ghana. Libyan people are not good. They are so arrogant that for example they don't let us, black people, into their houses. They do not talk to us.

In prison they treated us very badly. They kept beating us every single day and we got nothing to eat. We received no other treats except daily fresh insults. During these four months in prison we did not even get a bath! No soap, no water, no towel, nothing, except beatings. Actually they enjoy disgracing us. Cruel people they are. Now I am back and have nothing to do except some little farming work.

I am waiting for money and then I will try my luck again. I have a friend in Italy who may send me the money to go back to Libya. I am waiting. Now I am weeding the farm while I wait for my chance to go.

I am not married. I will get settled with a woman when I return from there with money. I cannot disgrace a woman by staying with her without money or marrying her in order to just go away again.

The Libyans disgrace us but I can stand it for it is the money that I need.

Next time I go however I will do it differently. I will not try to go to Italy. I will return to Ghana as soon as I have gathered enough money and then I will settle, take a woman and start a business.

Next time I will get into a company the way my friend did. Now I know how to go about it. It is a matter of paying the man who leaves the post. The deal is among Ghanaians of course for we look after our own. I will wait in Tripoli till a friend at the company goes to Italy and then I will get his position. It is all a matter of being in the know and paying. To get the job you pay the man who is leaving, that is all. I will go and stay for two years and then return. And then I will settle with

my woman and we will live happily and get children and all that.

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?

To Be A Man Is Not Easy ~ Mercy, The Girl With The Red Leggings



The rumor arrived before she herself made her appearance: 'Mercy is back!' 'Mercy? Really, you are kidding! Mercy back?' 'Yes, she is in the country and will be here any day now!'

Two days later Salamata came inside my house and announced with restrained excitement as if she

introduced a famous star: 'Here ... is ... Mercy!' And there was Mercy! Glowing, beautiful, graceful and courteous Mercy, with Philomena in a sling on her back and a present for us in her hand.

We all started talking at the same time. Mercy, you are back! You look so great! Hugging, exchanging compliments, truly happy to see her so well. She had hardly time to sit down because she had not seen her own parents yet and had to move on with her taxi to the small village nearby. Of course we could not keep her long and yet we did, we simply had to!

Mercy, who worked with us at our home for the handicapped children, left four years ago and she left rather unceremoniously. Mercy had been a very good caregiver and her children Inno and Philo had thrived by her playful and loving care. When she came to me that Friday night four years ago she cried uncontrollably. 'I am so sorry but I have got the ticket to fly to Italy and the flight is Sunday and I simply have to go, it is my only chance'. Taken aback, though these kind of sudden departures happen quite a bit in Ghana, we kissed and I thanked her for her work in our community and waved her good-bye.

Life goes on. We heard about her every now and then. In Italy, always good news, and once we saw Philo in a beautiful new dress. 'From where?' Oh, Mercy has sent money over from Italy and the caregivers together had bought the most intensely beautiful dress for Philo from the money. Philo wears that dress every Sunday. And now this... Mercy is back!

She left like a girl with red leggings and a gentle though somewhat casual style of doing things and she re-appeared transformed into a demure, graceful lady! 'Mercy, tell your story if you will?'

Well, they did get a ticket for me, my uncles in Italy, and I was to look after a child, was to be a nanny. Then I worked extremely hard all the time and everywhere, mostly in textile factories. I still do, from early till late at night. People in Italy like hardworking foreigners and next year I will get my Italian citizenship. And also ... Mercy is married!

Did you know him before you left Ghana? 'No, but they told me about him and I had a full year in Italy to study his character and then I said yes, I want to marry Ebenezer'. What we gathered is that Ebenezer, her new husband, was originally in Holland but as the immigration laws in Holland got tougher every year he had drifted down south to Italy where seemingly it is easier to become a legal immigrant. That's by the way why many boat-immigrants travel overland from

Spain to Italy where they can breathe freer without being immediately picked up by the police. Spain too is difficult for immigrants. Whatever the cost was, and it must have been a whole lot more than the few hardships she had endured in Italy of which she talked about, she reappeared as a woman radiating success and we were so happy to see her almost majestic appearance.

She left, really had to see her own real parents now (Bob and I are like second parents to her) and so we kissed and she was gone. She will come back in two years, by that time an Italian citizen with her lawful young husband Ebenezer. Who knows, a baby as well. We are proud for her!