

GREETINGS FROM GHANA #15

I doubt there is anyone reading this who is not familiar with the Dignity Toilet project that my club, Nor'Wester Rotary, is doing in Togo. My main purpose in coming here was (and is) to marry two different projects, the Dignity Toilet project with a fertilizer processing plant where the main ingredient of the fertilizer is human urine.

Human urine contains all of the nutrients found in the chemical fertilizers, but unlike the manufactured fertilizers the organic fertilizer actually rebuilds the soil during its use. The cost of manufactured fertilizers has gone up about 300% in the past couple years. By capturing the urine from the Dignity Toilets we will be able to create a low-cost, highly effective fertilizer that farmers can easily afford. The profits from the fertilizer sales will pay for additional toilets. One project will pay for the other.

Urine based fertilizer projects are in place in several areas of the world and we have test fields and test gardens set up in Togo at this time. We are getting some surprising response from a small segment that somehow believes they constrained by their religious beliefs from using it. I find this odd when no one complains about the cow peeing in the field but know better than to argue.

I happened to mention my projects a few weeks ago to a dermatologist. Actually, what happened was that I brought some of the facial mask product we carry to see if he wanted some for his clinic. When I pitched that, well, it led to me talking about the company and nontoxic pest killers and that led to talking about the reason I was here. . .yada, yada, toilets, yada, yada. (You know how I can rattle on). He asked how an area might be considered for such a toilet/fertilizer project and I told him about the process called "Community Assessment." He asked if I would come to his area and speak with some people there. I readily agreed.

He told me he was a tribal King from Nandom in the northern region. I said that was fine with me. (If you get the idea I am agreeing to things I know not of . . . you are getting the picture. It turns out that Nandom is about a 15 hour car ride north). I agreed to do a community assessment for the area and said I would also see if I could present it to a Rotary club or two for possible support. I stood up as our time was up and after confirming the weekend as the time to travel, returned home.

His office called the following day and asked if I could advance my schedule as the King had something come up and would appreciate it if I would come a few days earlier and arrive mid-week rather than on the weekend. I said I would look into transportation to Nandom. I was told it was taken care of and he would send a car for me.

In talking to his business assistant, I learned that he was recently made the King for his tribe, the Dargarti. He is highly regarded as a tribal politician and has been involved with politics for over 50 years. He has also been recognized as the greatest entrepreneur in Ghana and has had numerous national awards prior to that. He has medical clinics throughout the country. He

runs a medical clinic in his district where office calls are at no charge. You only pay for medications. His business assistant and I were in the same large, black SUV for 15 hours. We had a few conversations as the country side rolled past and police checkpoints opened up to us so that we never paused on our journey.

We arrived in the early evening and I was taken to a nice guest house/hotel. I got checked in and was enjoying some light conversation with the driver, the business assistant now assigned as my guide, Ebenezer. A police crew cab pickup truck pulled into the lot and four police officers, two with submachine guns got out. The sargeant looked at me and said, "We were told to dispatch a security guard for you for this evening, sir, for your comfort. They will be out here," pointing to the side of the building. The two senior policemen exchanged pleasantries with me, got back in their vehicle and left.

I tried to introduce myself to my guards. The one in camouflage, Patrick, was a pleasant fellow. The other one was dressed in black and began spouting how "the white man cannot be trusted and historically the white oppression of Africa has caused . . ." He rambled on with his racist argument and headed for their outpost while his co-worker shrugged his shoulders and grinned as if to apologize. The one in black refused to talk with the white man, let alone to have his picture taken. I figured "as long as the gun stays pointed in the opposite direction, I am fine."



The morning after I arrived I was asked if I would mind addressing some youth about the projects I was involved with in Togo. I said "sure" and soon I found myself before a dias of the King and six of his senior chiefs. The seated audience behind me, it turned out, were "The Youth," a group of about 20 chiefs in their 30's and 40's. (Those on the dias were north of their 70's).



After the meeting, I found out that the tribe was holding a large celebration because a local girl was a finalist in the national beauty pageant and she was getting ready to travel for the competition. The tribal assistant for the King wanted me to know that there would be local music, dancing, traditional culture . . . and would I please attend.? I of course replied happily.

When my guide and I arrived I was told there was a seat for me next to the covered riser area for the King and Senior tribal leaders so I could see everything that was going on. I had packed one good set of clothes just in case I had to do something like this, so I was dressed well and comfortable to not be in the crowd.



As I was sitting there and trying not to get in anyone's way as people buzzed around and up onto the King's platform and back down, his tribal assistant, Suliga, came over and crouched down, "The Deputy Superintendent of the Police Brigade would like to sit next to you, even though you have armed guards behind you." I looked behind me and about six feet back were two submachine gunned gents standing at near attention. I turned back and said "Okay by me." and soon thereafter I was chatting briefly with the uniformed head of the multiple regional area police stations.

Another man, Abduo John, who had served as my interpreter at the morning's meeting with "The Youth" planted a black plastic bag next to my chair. "The King is going to give you a present. It is a cloak." I grinned at the surprise.



Musicians ran out before us and using what looked like a clavinet but made with gourds for a sounding board, began playing a rhythmic dance tune and a troupe of costumed dancers took to dancing energetically for a time that I think would have exhausted most.



Then members of the audience danced onto the area (at a much slower pace) and circling the musicians, dropped money onto their area before dancing off. I joined in and had a good time dropping a 5 cedis note as others had done.



I returned to my seat as the musicians finished their tune and exited the area. The King began to speak and was greeted by applause when he would pause. Suddenly but gently, Abduo John was tugging at my sleeve, “Follow me,” he said as the King went on speaking in his native tongue. “Here,” he motioned crouching down so as not to block the King and pointing to an empty space on a riser below the royal seat. He motioned me to stay there.

I had felt uncomfortable when not watching the King during his talking. I did not want to do anything that might be viewed as disrespectful. So I had been twisted back to see him as best I could while he addressed the crowds around the courtyard.



The King paused, there was applause and then I noticed that while the language had not changed he was now saying something and pointing to me. He looked at me and said in English, “I want you to be a chief in my tribe. Will you help us? (I nodded) You have said yes and this so all will know.” He motioned to a few of his chiefs and the Municipal Chief Executive (think civic chief – bigger than mayor) to present me with the ceremonial cloak.



People applauded and some cheered. As I turned to express my gratitude to the King and the Senior Chiefs, a young woman called out, “You are Maa Lu Naa!”

In the local tongue “Naa” is chief and “Maalu” means development.

I was asked to speak to the crowd and informed that the proceedings were being live streamed on Facebook and also over

television Channel 3 in Accra. I told them that I was there as a guest to see what the needs were and to see if any help can be found. They were very interested in the toilets that their King had spoken about and several asked questions through Abduo John. The MC/TV announcer asked if we could fill about four minutes and we said, “easily.”

