

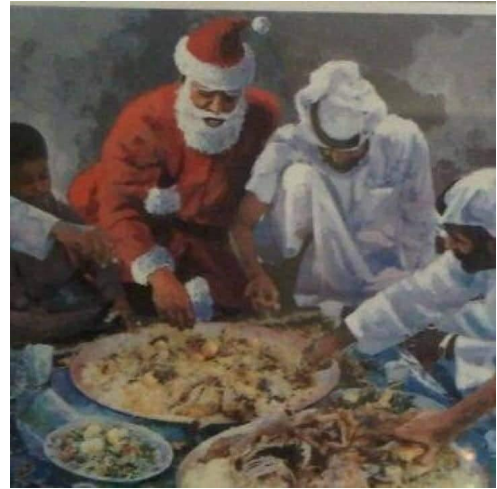
Greetings from Ghana #39

For A Christmas Present, Look Inside

Afeyhiapa!

That's Merry Christmas in Twi. It is two days before Christmas and I am hoping that you are still checking emails. There is so much going on I wouldn't blame you for shutting off social media to concentrate on living people.

After spending my life enjoying the brisk chill of winter and snow around the holidays, the smell of evergreen in the house, and the tantalizing smells of turkey and stuffing and the cinnamon and clove aromas of baked goods emanating from the kitchen, the dust storms off the Sahara don't quite herald the holidays with the same emotional ebullience. But it is getting closer.



It does get cooler here at the equator around the beginning of December. The average temperature drops from about 95 during the day to maybe around 87. Night time is a chilly 74. The skies are grey but not with crystals of ice ready to descend. Rather than heavy with moisture the skies are filled with a dryness of dust. The only similarity is the chapped lips and brisk sales of lip balm at the checkout lines.



Odd as it may seem, I get more holiday joy from this picture than the prefab, plastic, holiday trees that sparsely populate the city's commercial spaces. It may not have the needles or the scent of an evergreen but it has something far more based in the holiday, the Spirit of Christmas.

Someone took the creativity and time to give a sense of wonder and delight to others. (And unlike the ones from a box, this "tree" could easily feed 20 - 30 people).

That is evidence of Christmas that I looked for this year. It can't be the things from Christmas past. Those friendly ghosts and memories hang in a mist of dreams. And Christmas is not just gifts and food. Christmas is a time of gathering with those we care for and celebrating the bonds of fraternity and kindness. It is a time of giving and giving is universal.

I have a friend in Uganda. Life is not easy there but Livingston scraped what little he could through the year to be able to buy his son, Miguel, a Christmas present. Miguel smiled and his eyes sparkled with delight as his father told him they would travel into town to buy him a present. He began to wish for different things and was promised they would look at many things so he could decide what he would like best.

When you are from a poor farm the chance to go to the city to choose a gift is a welcome adventure. He was animated in his talks about what he might find, as if he was seeking treasure. Yesterday they set off to Kampala on their adventure seeking out the sights and sounds of the holiday far away from their mud huts. What they found was a gang of men who took their money and Livingston's phone. As Livingston related, "I was grateful we were not beaten as well."

With no money and after such a traumatic event it would not be beyond thought that Livingston and his son would find themselves depressed and despondent. But Livingston is a wise man. He knows that his son looks to him for guidance. He hugged his son as the young boy cried while being cradled in his arms and explained that the best gift anyone could ever have is love. New presents will come in time. And laughter and joy will also come again. But nothing is deeper or better than the love they share.

Then knowing that no matter where you are or who you are, it is the experiences you have that you remember, Livingston has decided to share as much of himself as he can with Miguel this year. Instead of something from a store he is giving the two most precious things anyone can ever give another. . . love and time.

I wish you the best of days as the year draws to a close and hope that as you are in the holidays you remember that Christmas is a time of giving; giving of oneself. Give an experience that only you can give someone else. It may be a hug. It may be a smile. It may be a walk together. Whatever it is it will be beautiful because it will be a gift of you.



Afehyiapa!

Merry Christmas