

## Tales of Tucson #2

### Santa Has Funny Ears and a Passion for Rodents

When I was a little boy growing up in the northwest corner of Ohio I used to dream that I could sit on the edge of a cloud and watch the world go by. I'd look down on distant lands and marvel. I never told people of my special talent of cloud sitting. It was my cherished ability. I could travel the world and be home in time for lunch. The wanderlust has never left me.

There is a mindset you must adopt when you travel if you want to expand your mind and appreciation of other cultures. They, whoever "they" may be, are not wrong. Or less than you. Cultures are in many ways like people. They have their habits and beliefs and most are trying to work through things to become better. If you are accepting you will learn a lot. If not, you will be like a fellow soldier in England who, concerning the local citizenry, remarked, "Stupid foreigners." failing to recognize that it was he who was the foreigner and he was a guest in their country.

Even if you accept that it is you who is the foreigner, you must also try to be aware of where you are. And how you do not "blend." I went into a pub one evening shortly after arriving in the south of England. I looked at the barmaid, smiled, and ordered a pint of their local traditional ale. "Ah!" she exclaimed, "You're an American!" I nodded, smiled and said, "Yeah. But how did you know?" She grinned, "Your shoes." I took two steps back and looked down at my feet.

Sometimes my grasp of the obvious is slippery at best.

You also need to realize that nothing ever happens as you anticipate and to be prepared to find your way. I spent a week with a friend in the Italian Alps learning how to ski. Well, kind of. I went with brand new blue jeans and came back with white hip pockets. (Which gives you an idea as to how I came down the mountain).

The cost for the trip was very reasonable. The mountains and the village lived up to the pictures. The resort catered to European families and the villagers spoke a few languages; French, Italian, and German. On the second day there I went to the gift shops looking for an English/Italian phrase book. After several shops and no luck I managed to find an Italian/English dictionary and bought it. While I was restrained to conversing one word at a time with long pauses in between while I frantically thumbed through pages, I managed to learn that there were no phrase books available. There were three Italian/English dictionaries in the village. And I now owned one of them.

I know of a Rotarian who was proudly telling me of his humanitarian travels. I asked if he had ever lived in a village in the areas he had been in. He told me that if he could not stay in a hotel with air conditioning and color TV he was not going anywhere. I can't do that. Though bumbling as I may be in my efforts, I try to immerse myself at least somewhat in local culture to learn more of how the local people live.

When I first visited Togo I told my friend Taouvik that even though I had not seen it I wanted to stay at his house. It had three rooms, each connected to the outside. Each room had one window, one door, one light bulb and one electrical socket. "You won't like it," he said. I assured him I would. I mentioned eating local dishes. "You won't like it," he said. I said I would.

When I arrived at his family's house his father was seated on the ground in front of his room, on a mat where food was being placed in large bowls. Tao's mother motioned him to find me a chair. I waved him off and remembering the instructions I had heard from my brother Will (who also loved traveling) sat crosslegged, washed my hand in the bowl provided, then grabbed some food, dipped it in the sauce and popped it into my mouth. It was delicious and I said so.

I spent a week working with the people of Zogbedji and living as they lived, including the use of a field as well as a Dignity Toilet. As I was getting ready to leave Taouvik worried, "We never got to the mountains or the ocean while you were here." "And ya know something?" I replied, "I will bet they will still be there when I get back."

I would return to Togo on future trips by going first to Accra, Ghana and the taking a passenger van to Lome, Togo. It saved about seven hours in the air each way and dropped the price considerably. I soon began to explore Ghana on my way back and forth.

Opportunities change. After visiting Togo for five years I decided to move to Accra to be closer to the DT project. After living in Accra for almost three years I got to a point where I was not needed as immediate and decided to return to the U.S.

My niece invited me to check out Tucson and there is a lot here. There are things here I never considered before not the least of which is the temperature. In Accra it is typically about 95 during the day and 85 at night. In Tucson, it gets to about 95 at sundown. After being here several weeks I've adapted to where what was hot for Ghana is comfortable here.



Among new experiences, I have seen a hummingbird not flying, just sitting on a branch. The lizards that used to be in my front yard in Accra are in my back yard here. The brush and grasses of the SubSaharan have been replaced by the catci of the Sonoran. Ghana has heavy rains. Here they have flash floods.

People here are very polite when it comes to driving. It is not uncommon to approach a traffic light and see car lengths between vehicles with no one trying to fill in the gaps or upset they are there. I think Ghanaians would be

in shock to see such a thing and there would be at least three drivers of little metro car taxis trying to fit in the space.



As I have been here and learning more about this area and how people and nature have adapted I have run across a few tidbits. Bobcats, for example, live on people's roofs. There are groups that encourage people to allow it so the bobcats can raise their young there in safety. Safety though is not something afforded squirrels living in the same area.

Man and nature are finding ways to co-exist in this desert environment. On my side, eh, not so much.

Recently, I have realized I have a strong desire for being somewhere with a noticeable change in seasons. I appreciate every moment I have had both in Africa and here but I yearn for more than a couple square meters of greenery at a time. And so I will be relocating once again this weekend.

Traveling is fun and an adventure given the chance. However, it is always good to have friends and family within close range of where you are going to call home. I am going to move back to Washington state. My brother moved to Vancouver, on the southern border, a couple years ago. I am going to move to Vancouver to be near him. The real estate market is strong there and greenery abounds.

I will still keep writing and exploring for I have yet to find anywhere that does not have something of interest that others are unaware of. Again, I hope you stay with me as we explore together.

Keep Smilin'