

December 2019

Best Wishes for the Season from BIO-BENIN

Since selling my house on the Maine coast, I have embarked on a highly precarious but deeply satisfying life on the edges of poverty. My time in the Peace Corps from 2012-14 in Benin, West Africa, introduced me to Guillaume Lonhoudjo, a skilled restaurateur who trains young Africans to become chefs and who recently launched an artisanal brewery. He also works with the young to raise organic vegetables, poultry and rabbits for farm-to-table use in his restaurant. This is at the heart of BIO-BENIN, our new non-profit NGO to train the young as entrepreneurs and improve the local economy.

BIO-BENIN also employs local women to grow and harvest sorghum, the basic ingredient of the local beer, known as *tchouk*, which has never before been bottled successfully. Local women produce the 'starter' fermented grain, wash the bottles, and help in the production and distribution of our beer. In addition, they help Guillaume harvest and bottle juices from locally grown fruits -- mango, lemon, pineapple, hibiscus flower and baobab.

I work alongside Guillaume to manage the finances and develop a distribution network for his beer and fruit juices throughout Benin. It's a very different lifestyle, where from time to time I may encounter a Nigerien nomad in the middle of the dry, hot season on his dromedary, hungry, proud, swathed from head to toe in blue, his deep-set eyes challenging and haunting. His exotic presence a reminder of the harshness and simplicity of the lives of those who have no access to the comforts of the 21st century.

Life here is primitive, but not unbearable. We live without running water and limited solar power. I need patience and a sense of humor, letting life flow as it will, abandoning a false sense of control. Escape is no longer an option. Acceptance is paramount. As a friend who lives in the Caribbean reminds me, the society may be dysfunctional, nothing really works, but joy is always present.

At a time of year when those of us who have plenty enjoy sharing with family and friends, we ask you to consider helping us in our struggle to buy stainless steel tanks in which to brew the beer (\$4,000); finish drilling a well for pure, locally sourced water (\$5,000); install solar panels to pump water into overhead cisterns (\$7,500 for the solar panels, \$1,000 for two cisterns). Our annual budget this year is \$50,000 to bring hope and a source of sustenance to those in need in an impoverished corner of West Africa. Our BIO-BENIN website will soon be up and running to describe in more detail all that we are attempting to accomplish.

We ask that you send your donation to BIO-BENIN at 7483 Pinebrook Road, Park City, UT 84098. For tax exempt purposes our corporate ID number is 84-2747245. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts for helping us accomplish our goals and wish you all happiness and joy in the year ahead.