

MAY NEWSLETTER FROM BIO-BENIN

"Those who live in the shadow of a plague, have the humanity of shared vulnerability, the humility that comes with an understanding of the precariousness of life and a fierce solidarity that emerges during a long struggle against an invading force."

David Brooks, *New York Times*

This recent quote helps me understand how Africans, like my partner Guillaume, are coping with the Covid-19 virus with such equanimity, and the character traits we might all aspire to in these precarious times.

"You have to realize" Guillaume told me on a recent phone call, "at least 5,000 people in Benin die each year from malaria. This is nothing special." Even so, he promises me he is washing his hands more frequently, wearing a mask when he goes out and not mingling in the crowded marketplace

Life goes on, despite all the difficulties of a lock-down around the world. *Chez Guillaume*, his restaurant, is closed, so he has no income. But he is already brewing beer, using the hops we brought back from South Africa, and bottling mango juice at the height of the season. He is also building a chicken house for our 10 chickens, all of whom have now hatched chicks that need protection from passing raptors. Soon we will have plenty of eggs and manure for the fields to grow our organic vegetables.

Guillaume excitedly told me that he is planning to exhibit his beer at the *Foire Commerciale d'Indépendance*, the Commercial Festival that marks the independence of Benin from France on August 1 (1960). Through this, he hopes to gain attention from the government, which is trying to encourage entrepreneurs, and from commercial clients. His will be the first successful microbrewery in Benin.

On the casualty side, the well we dug is proving insufficient to provide enough water for irrigation, so we must dig a new one on the seven acres we now own. High winds also ripped a solar panel from its moorings, so that, too, must be repaired or replaced. This is Africa and we must accept both the joys and difficulties.

Another difficulty, fish in the stream running through our property are poisoned by villagers each April to be harvested and eaten, neither very appetizing, nor safe, but perhaps understandable when you have no other food. Unfortunately, we can't currently draw water from the stream either for irrigation or personal hygiene. Such are the complications of life in Benin.

The entire country has only three ventilators to cope with the corona virus. I am not encouraged to go back until the worst is over, possibly September, maybe later when the weather starts getting really hot. I feel guilty, wanting to be in Benin helping make things happen, but try to do what I can from a distance.

The good news is that we have launched our website. Please check it out at www.bio-benin.org. We are eternally hopeful for the future and hope you will consider making a donation to help us through this difficult period. We'd also love to hear from you what you think of the website.

As most of you know, our aim is to train young Beninese to grow organic vegetables, raise fish, chickens and rabbits organically and help graduating students make a living doing all this. At the same time, we train apprentice cooks, using the farm-to-table produce from our farm at the restaurant, *Chez Guillaume*.

In this time of global suffering, many people who realize their good fortune are apparently reaching out in unprecedented numbers to help others in need. I hope we can count on your help as we try to make a difference.

Thanks to the new website, you can now donate through PayPal or send a cheque to BIO-BENIN, 7483 Pinebrook Road, Park City, UT 84098. Our tax-deductible number is 84-2747245.

Thank you for thinking of BIO-BENIN. We look forward to hearing from many of you. Stay safe.

Julie and Guillaume

Since I added many new names to my mailing list over the past few months, please let me know if you would like yours removed. Thanks.