

THE WITNESS TREE INSTITUTE *of Ghana*

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



Afrihyia Pa, Happy Holidays! **From Tete Cobblah, Director of WTIG**

Dear friends,

I write to you with an eye towards the sun, and its undimmed promise of tomorrow. The world seems to be in crisis, and yet we know that every challenge opens a road to opportunities and hope. Suddenly we are tested into clarity, the weak find answers in unexpected places, and the student teaches the teacher, and life and gratitude are reborn and renewed. It is in this spirit that I say "Akwaaba". This Akan word of greeting emphasizes the importance of Presence and Absence. "Welcome" to all of us who have been in dark places during this pandemic, who have

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IN THE NEWS

[https://www.bbc.com/
pidgin/live/
world-55127337](https://www.bbc.com/pidgin/live/world-55127337)



THE COUNTRY WHERE EVERYONE IS EXPECTED TO BE LATE

[https://
www.graphic.com.gh/
features/elizabeth-ohene/
elizabeth-ohene-writes-the-
country-where-everyone-is-
expected-to-be-late.html](https://www.graphic.com.gh/features/elizabeth-ohene/elizabeth-ohene-writes-the-country-where-everyone-is-expected-to-be-late.html)



ART & LIFE IN AFRICA

[https://
africa.uima.uiowa.edu
/media/videos/show/
35](https://africa.uima.uiowa.edu/media/videos/show/35)

been interrupted by loss, pain and fear. Your absence was felt and your return makes us whole again.

As we come to the end of another year, I say Afihya Pa to you! Happy Holidays! We are grateful for our blessings, including the many words of support and encouragement since the pandemic sidelined our summer 2020 trip. As we embark on plans to restart our educational program in Ghana, we continue to be encouraged by you.

WTIG is set to run in the summer of 2021! Even as cases go up in all parts of the world, the covid infection rate in Ghana has remained relatively low. We are hopeful that as we plan for reopening our institute, things will get even better for the world by summer.

Out of challenges sometimes better ideas and practices are birthed. Our engaging workshops have been further tailored to address current affairs and the theme of belonging.

As we embrace Africa's wisdom, we also rely on the qualities that sustain Ghanaians during difficulties. The Ghanaian educator, Kofi Asare Opoku wrote, "The humor found in African proverbs is not merely intended to induce laughter or amusement. Rather, it is the water with which the pill of wisdom is swallowed." For us at the Witness Tree Institute of Ghana, mindfulness and identity inform our goals and mission, and as we embark on reopening the program, we experience the sustaining presence of our ancestors, history, proverbs, humor which we share with you here. (For more, visit: www.witnesstreeinstitute.org/tete)



Elmina, Cape Coast, & Black Lives Matter

By David Duane

The past has something to say, and we need to listen.

Sitting on a white washed wall of Elmina's St. Georges Castle above the crashing Atlantic screams for reflection, tears, emotion, and peace. This colonial era fortress on the coast of Ghana is a crime scene. Crimes against humanity were perpetrated here. Elmina and

the near-by Cape Coast Fortress served as a portal for the middle passage for which more than 12 million souls perished. They were epicenters of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and the sentence for the crimes against humanity perpetrated here are still being served by our society today.

The weight of places such as Elmina or the Cape Coast fortress is crushing. *(continued)*

When we arrived at the airport, I felt like a celebrity. There was a crowd of smiling men and women who were cheering for us. They welcomed us with open arms and hugged us. These were bear hugs that enveloped my sleep deprived body, not the kind that pat you on the back to reassure you. I have travelled to a lot of different places, but I have never arrived in a country and felt so immediately accepted and loved. Welcome to Ghana. Whatever your story, we love you already, even if you're still working on loving yourself.

ARRIVING by Elise Mott



On the road to Kumasi
Red clay,
Dusty road
Warm tonal words spoken in Twi and Ga.
Easy, beautiful smiles.
Traffic is snarled and poking along
Patient cars move forward an inch at time
A man crosses the road with ripe pineapples on his head.
Mangoes perched in a basket.
Pineapples, plantains, bananas.
Water in puffed up balloon bags
Homemade dough in clear boxes
Ice cream in blue coolers.
The things people carry
Under the equatorial sun.



Shuffling through dank pitch black dungeons coated with the centuries-worth of accrued

“It is in this cauldron that humanity made a definitive statement”

human excrement, you feel that weight. You feel that burden. You can smell it. You're forced to breathe it. You can hear the muted cries of the innocent souls that suffered and passed through. Unlike the spectacular white of the forts that contrasts the deep blue sea, you're not allowed to white wash the history you confront. It is in your face. It is real, and it is brutal.

It is in this cauldron that humanity made a definitive statement. Black lives do not matter. It's been hundreds of years of struggle to counter those sentiments and elevate black lives to the status of mattering. As that struggle gains strength, recent events suggest that societal structures and systemic racism still impede that progress, and the elevation to “mattering”. (To continue reading more, visit www.witnesstreeinstitute.org/david)

AKWAABA! by Elizabeth Cobblah



Akwaaba!

Among the spiritual gifts I received while in Ghana are the Ashanti Adinkra Designs and the word Akwaaba. I fell in love with the people, their customs, proverbs and the welcome that is extended.

The above Adinkra symbol *Funtunfunefu Denkyemfunefu*, depicts two crocodiles that share one stomach. It seems a fitting symbol for the divided and polarized America of these days. This Adinkra design illustrates the absurdity of two crocodiles fighting with each other over food destined for a common stomach. Who benefits from Americans' infighting, its walls, lack of equity and fierce competition for political power and control of resources?

Arrivals to and throughout Ghana are acknowledged by a greeting engrained in the customs of Ghanaians and genuine to the heart of the country. Akwaaba tells the visitor “You are welcome here. You will be cared for here. You belong.” Similarly, in neighborhoods across the United States, yard signs are communicating a version of Akwaaba by saying:

“In this house Black Lives Matter
No human is illegal
Women's rights are human rights
Science is real
Water is life
Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

More about Adinkra designs, visit
<https://www.adinkrasymbols.org/>



WAYS TO DONATE

The Witness Tree Institute offers assistance to teachers who need it for our program. Please help a teacher by donating to WTIG. Please visit: www.witnesstreeinstitute.org/donate and click on the Donate button at the bottom of the first



These are some of my favorite memories of Ghana. They are photos which I took of dancers in Aburi and Kumasi. The people of Ghana are joyful, friendly and welcoming. My trip to Ghana was memorable because of the people I met. These photos showcase the fundamental treasure of Ghana - the people. They express joy, appreciation of elders and their wisdom, as well as the beauty of expression through movement. Most Ghanaians take life at a relaxed pace, and in each smile, there is an understanding that living life in the moment also has its place.

-Jennifer Youk See

