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The nine weeks I spent in Putubiw, Ghana were far too short. Before departing, I thought, after nine weeks of teaching at the Putubiw Junior Secondary School (JSS), I would be ready to come home. But this proved to be far from the truth.

Through the international organization United Planet, I was placed in the village of Putubiw to work with the Putubiw Students' Union (PUSU) and teach at the local JSS. I was originally attracted to United Planet (UP) because of their mission of fostering cross-cultural understanding and respect. On my first day in Ghana, my UP country coordinator, Raj, bluntly told me that I was not in Ghana to "make a difference" or impact significant changes in Putubiw. Rather, my mission was to foster a greater understanding in my students of the world outside of Putubiw and outside of Ghana. And my students would do the same for my understanding of the world outside of Notre Dame and outside of the United States. My mission was to learn about another culture by stepping outside my comfort zone and being open to every experience.

And so I traveled to Putubiw prepared to do my best as a teacher and learn as much as possible about Ghanaian culture along the way. My first few days in Putubiw, a small village in the Central Region near Cape Coast, were expectedly overwhelming. Adjusting to how the village looked, how people lived, and how I was treated as an exotic foreigner proved to be my biggest challenges early on. Thankfully, my host family and the members of PUSU were wonderful at helping me adjust and get settled in Putubiw. I soon came to consider my home stay as a home in Ghana, and my host brothers and sisters became family.

My first few days at the Putubiw Junior Secondary School were also challenging. While my formal orientation and introduction at the school were not very comprehensive, I enjoyed the

challenge of diving in. It took me some time to adjust to the relaxed school schedule at the Putubiw JSS. I was expected to arrive at the school around 8am each morning, with classes starting officially at 8:10am. However, we rarely started on time and the teachers would come and go throughout the day. I would leave the school around 1pm each day to go home and eat lunch, but school did not officially end until around 2:30. In general, the relaxed pace of life in Ghana tested my patience at times, but I enjoyed the opportunity to slow down.

The headmaster taught English classes, but I was responsible for teaching English during free periods that the students had throughout the day. I was given two English textbooks, one for each level, and a day or two of observation. I soon learned that, although the Ghanaian education system is English-based, it was very challenging for my students to understand me. Over time, they adjusted to my accent, I adjusted my communication skills, and we got by. After a week or two of teaching English, I was given an ICT (Information, Communication, Technology) textbook and asked to teach the ICT classes as well. Until my arrival, the Putubiw JSS had no ICT teacher, although the class was mandated by the government. Additionally, there were no ICT resources at the school. The kids did not have textbooks, and more importantly, there were no computers at the school. So I found it quite challenging, and often a bit depressing, to teach ICT to my students by drawing a computer on the chalk board and labeling the parts.

In general, my experience teaching at the school provided me with many insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the Ghanaian education system. Overall, the lack of resources at the school was astounding. And so I worked with Greg, the other ND volunteer, and Ben, the president of PUSU, to write some proposals for the school and the village. We wrote a proposal to get internet access cards for the village and a proposal for library books and a library building. We also worked with our United Planet contacts, Raj and Ian, to create some proposals to submit

directly to UP. We wrote proposals to obtain computers for the JSS and the PUSU Office, as well as a used car for PUSU. Although I was unable to see any of the proposals implemented before I left, I enjoyed contributing my skills to PUSU and United Planet, and learning a bit more about the workings of an NGO and proposal writing along the way.

Outside of school hours, I had a lot of free time to spend with my host family. Some of my favorite memories are of spending time with my host brothers, playing scrabble, listening to music, walking to their farm, and walking around Putubiw. Often, we would just sit in the living room and talk. I learned the most about Ghanaian culture from my host family. They even had the patience to teach me some Fantse, the local language. When we walked around Putubiw together, visiting family and friends of my host brothers, I would test out my Fantse, to the amusement and surprise of the villagers. I found that speaking Fantse was a gesture of goodwill that took my cultural immersion to a new level.

On the weekends, Greg and I traveled. We went all over Ghana, traveling north, east, and west. It was often nice to get out of the village for a couple days, to see other parts of Ghana, access the internet, and meet new people. I found that in all my travels, I never felt unsafe. People were always willing to extend a friendly welcome and provide advice, or even assistance, when needed.

By the time my nine weeks in Ghana came to an end, I did not want to leave. I knew that I would miss the kindness of my host family, and the friendliness of everyone I met. It took a few weeks to adjust and find my footing in Putubiw. I was just realizing what teaching methods were most effective, what greetings to use to passersby on the road, how to find my way around Putubiw, and how to travel throughout Ghana independently. I felt that if my stay was longer, I could have done more for PUSU. I know that my time at the Putubiw JSS was successful. My

goal was to immerse myself in a new culture, and to raise awareness in my students of a way of life other than their own. I believe my assistance to PUSU writing the proposals was beneficial although I would have liked to see the proposals implemented before my departure.

Overall, my experience in Putubiw cannot be summed up in a single description, no matter how in depth. I cannot fully convey everything that I learned, partly because I am still processing the experience. But one thing I can convey is the truth, often acknowledged by international volunteers, that you get out of each experience as much as you put in. If you make the effort to immerse yourself in a new culture, step outside your comfort zone, and jump into the unknown, you will never be disappointed. The opportunity provided by United Planet for me to jump into a new culture and expand my world view was phenomenal. I would do it again in an instant.