

MY GHANAIAN EXPERIENCE. Molly Paton

My time with Church of Scotland was from January 1992 until July 1999.

I spent 3 months at St Colm's, preparing to go to Ghana and arrived in Accra on 3rd May 1992 and ended my time in Ghana at the end of February 1999.

What was the aim of missionary work in Ghana?

The main aim was certainly to show the people of Ghana in practical ways the love of Christ. However I feel strongly that there was an element of trying to atone for the previous involvement of the British in the slave trade in the past.

In the early days of missionary work the main aim seemed to be to preach the Gospel and try to convert people to Christianity. Local beliefs and practices were largely ignored but attempts to improve the conditions for the people were made. A great deal was achieved in the fields of health and education. However Western ways were always considered to be the best ways and to this day many areas conduct worship in the mode taught by the missionaries of old, even to mode of dress. Class differences between the missionaries and the local people persisted for many years.

At all times the missionaries led a very different life to the people they were trying to help and to this day there is tendency to treat us as if we were "Chiefs".

EXPECTATIONS.

What did I think I was going to do?

Initially I was going to fulfil a long held ambition – a desire to work in a developing country. Realistically I wanted to share the skills I had been privileged to learn with others who had not had the same opportunities. I did not go with the aim of preaching in the usual meaning of the word, i.e. delivering sermons.

I hoped that by living a Christian life and sharing my knowledge that I could be an example and at the same time help to improve the quality of life and conditions of the people that I was living and working with.

What did those who sent me tell me I was going to do?

To fulfil a need expressed by the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and the Nursing College at Agogo to assist in the teaching of Public Health to student nurses.

What did those to whom I went see me as doing?

Maintaining a close connection with the Church of Scotland and indirectly as a source of funding and resources, which were greatly needed as there was almost no Government support for Mission Hospitals and colleges at that time. P C G had also very limited resources.

How was God working in my life at that time?

The decision to work abroad came after a lot of prayer as to God's will for my life after the death of my Mother and following a visit to Malawi. On that visit I realised that I was not too old to give service in this way. After more than a year re-organisation in the Health service meant that I was offered early retirement and I therefore applied to work in Malawi. However it was not Malawi I was asked to go to but Ghana and I was doubtful about that destination. Again many signs occurred and I felt God was asking me to go to Ghana.

THE REALITY.

My first impressions were very mixed, Ghana was a very different country to Malawi and at first I wondered if I would ever really settle. My promised accommodation was not ready and I had my first encounter with Ghanaian Customs Offices when I attempted to collect my luggage 2 weeks after arrival. The practice of "dashing" in order to achieve was quite alien to me. The extreme poverty in Accra side by side with affluence, and the Smell of sewage in the streets of Accra astounded me. It really took me about 3 months to really settle down and suddenly I felt at home. I realise how lucky I was to be in a rural area where there were very few ex – patriots. This meant that I got to know all my Ghanaian colleagues very well and to this day still have links with them.

I was teaching student nurses who were desperate to achieve a professional career and in turn go back to communities all over Ghana and help them and show God's love. The students were mainly Christian although we did have the occasional Muslim. These students regarded me as a Grandmother figure and often came to me to discuss problems.

The day always started with morning prayers in the Chapel at 7am these were always lead by students themselves or a member of staff. Lectures started at 7.30 am and with short breaks continued until 6.00pm. I took part in all the activities and travelled with the students when they went on experience trips associated with Public Health. The curriculum was very similar to that of the UK

I was able to see certain projects come to fruition and actually extended my work to Bawku College of Nursing in the North of Ghana, a predominantly Muslim area.

While I was in Ghana it became possible for several of our teaching staff to go to University in Ghana and upgrade themselves to the approval of the Nurses and Midwives Council of Ghana. This meant that at the time of my contract ending, Ghanaians staffed the college.

THE OUTCOME.

While I was at Agogo I filled a vacancy and was able to see the college become more independent of Church of Scotland assistance. In recent years the Government has stepped in and now assists the college much more. The numbers of students has vastly increased. A new nurse's home is being

constructed; some of the students I originally taught are now teaching themselves.

I think God was letting me go to a place where I would learn from the people there what is really important in life and to learn to wait for his guidance at all times.