

A young girl with dark skin and short, dark hair is looking slightly to her left. She is wearing a brown, off-the-shoulder top. She is surrounded by long, green, blade-like leaves that frame her face and head. The background is a dark, textured brown, suggesting a forest floor or a cave wall.

In The Big Forest

A Story About Dreams Coming True



by Susan Norwood and Bradley Striebig

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Susan Norwood
and
Bradley Striebig

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www.inthebigforest.org

For more information about the WATER foundation, visit: www.water-dr.org

For information about the photography used to illustrate this book, visit: www.yovophoto.com

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United Nations Millennium Development Goals:

Adopted by world leaders in the year 2000 and set to be achieved by 2015, the Millennium Development Goals are both global and local, tailored by each country to suit specific development needs. They provide a framework for the entire international community to work together towards a common end – making sure that human development reaches everyone, everywhere.

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education.

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women.

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality.

Goal 5: Improve maternal health.

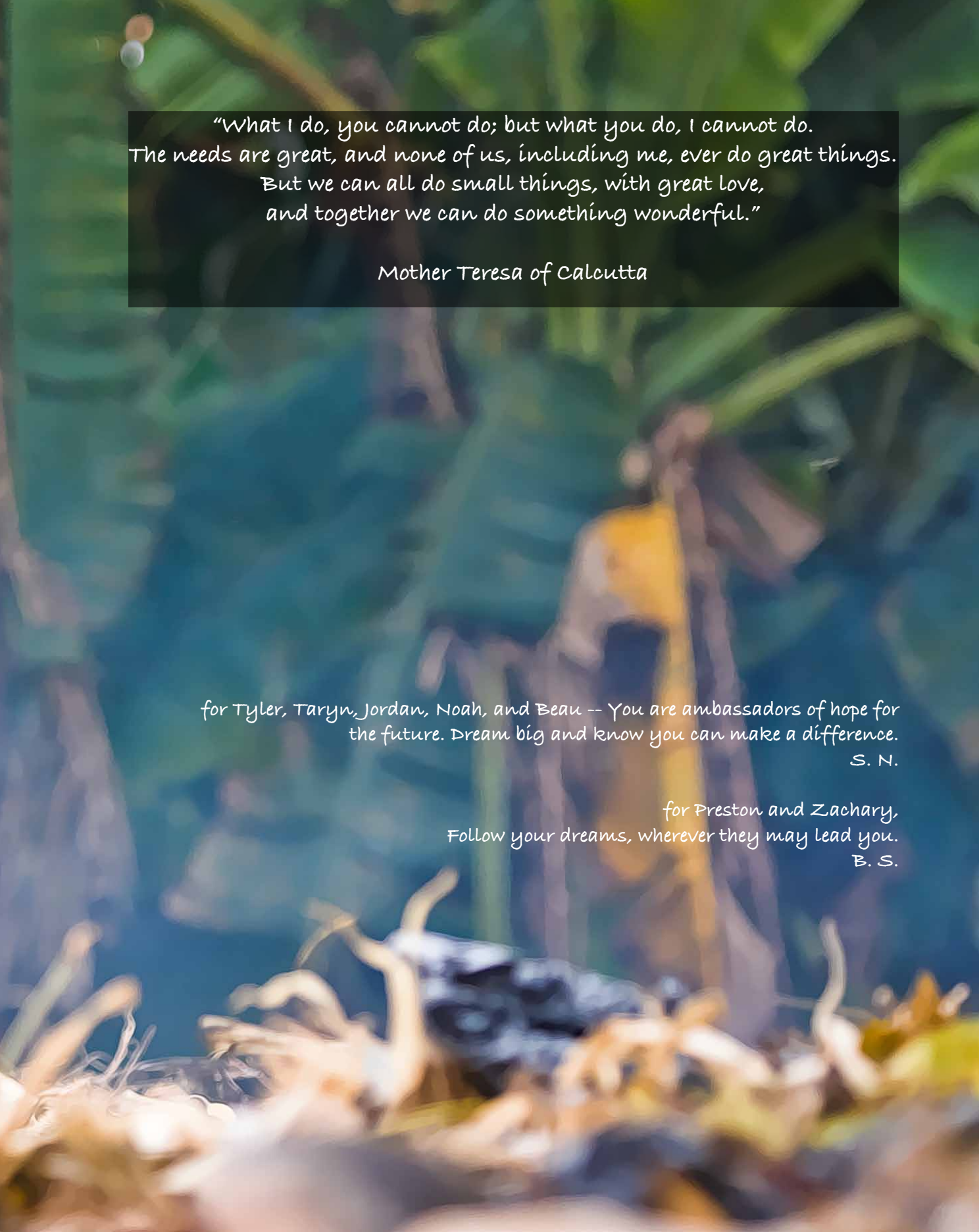
Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases.

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability.

Goal 8: Develop global partnerships for development.







"What I do, you cannot do; but what you do, I cannot do.
The needs are great, and none of us, including me, ever do great things.
But we can all do small things, with great love,
and together we can do something wonderful."

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

for Tyler, Taryn, Jordan, Noah, and Beau -- You are ambassadors of hope for
the future. Dream big and know you can make a difference.
S. N.

for Preston and Zachary,
Follow your dreams, wherever they may lead you.
B. S.



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A vibrant photograph of a tropical forest. In the center, a tall palm tree with a thick trunk and dense, green fronds stands out. It is surrounded by other tropical plants, including smaller palm trees and dense foliage. The ground is covered in green grass and low-lying plants. The sky is visible at the top, showing a mix of blue and white clouds.

In the Big Forest

A Story About Dreams Coming True



Chapter 1: Dreaming Alone

Across the ocean in West Africa is a small country called Benin. In Benin there is a village called Zoungbomey (that sounds like Zong-BOW-may), which means "in the big forest."

Zoungbomey is a very small village. In fact, the village is so small that the road to get there is really more like a bicycle path. There is no electricity in Zoungbomey, and the people live in houses made of dried mud.

The people who live in Zoungbomey are very beautiful and quite happy. They also are very poor and must work very hard just to be able to have food to eat.





The women in Zoungbomey work together to make palm oil. Making palm oil is hard work. Clusters of palm berries grow in palm trees in the big forest. The bunch of berries start off a dark purple or black color, and turn red as they ripen for harvest. The women cut the bunch of the palm berries from the trees, collect the bunches, and carry them back to the village. Then the women must pull the palm berries from each bunch. Each palm berry needs to be cracked open, one by one, so that the bright red berry can be removed and the hard brown seed inside taken out. Then, the women crush the berries by stomping on them with their feet. This takes a whole day and the brown mash that is made has germs in it from their feet. Next, the mash is cooked so that it turns into oil.

People in Benin use palm oil for cooking, for making soap, and for making candles. Because making palm oil is hard work and takes a long time, the women don't have much to sell. And because the palm oil the village makes has germs in it, it spoils easily. The women in Zoungbomey must walk several miles carrying the heavy containers of palm oil to the local market. At the market, the women sell the palm oil, but cannot get much money for it because it spoils easily. So sometimes the people in Zoungbomey don't have enough money to buy healthy food, or send their children to school, or see a doctor when they are sick.



Photo by Susan Norwood



The people who live in Zoungbomey had a dream: They dreamed that one day they would be able to buy a machine to crush the palm berries, so that the women would not have to stomp on them with their feet. They could buy other machines, a huller and separator, later. They would make palm oil faster and the palm oil would not have germs in it.

The women would sell the palm oil for more money at the market. Then the women could pay for the food and medicine they need. They hoped to earn enough money to send the children in the village to school. But saving enough money to buy the palm oil machines was going to take a long, long time. The people in the village needed some help to make their dream come true.





Chapter 2: A Partner - Someone to Dance With

A group of people in Benin learned about the village of Zoungbomey and its dream. The name of this group is Centre Afrika Obota, or "CAO." CAO is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), kind of like a club of people who live in Benin who work hard to help other people in Benin. Three men from CAO, Galeb, Landry, and Marino, visited the villagers in Zoungbomey to learn about their dream of buying palm oil machines. Galeb, Landry, and Marino wanted to find out how they could help the people of Zoungbomey. They became very important friends and partners to the village. They taught the people how to keep track of the money they earned and the money they spent. They helped them learn how to spend their money wisely so that they would have money to save for the palm oil machine.



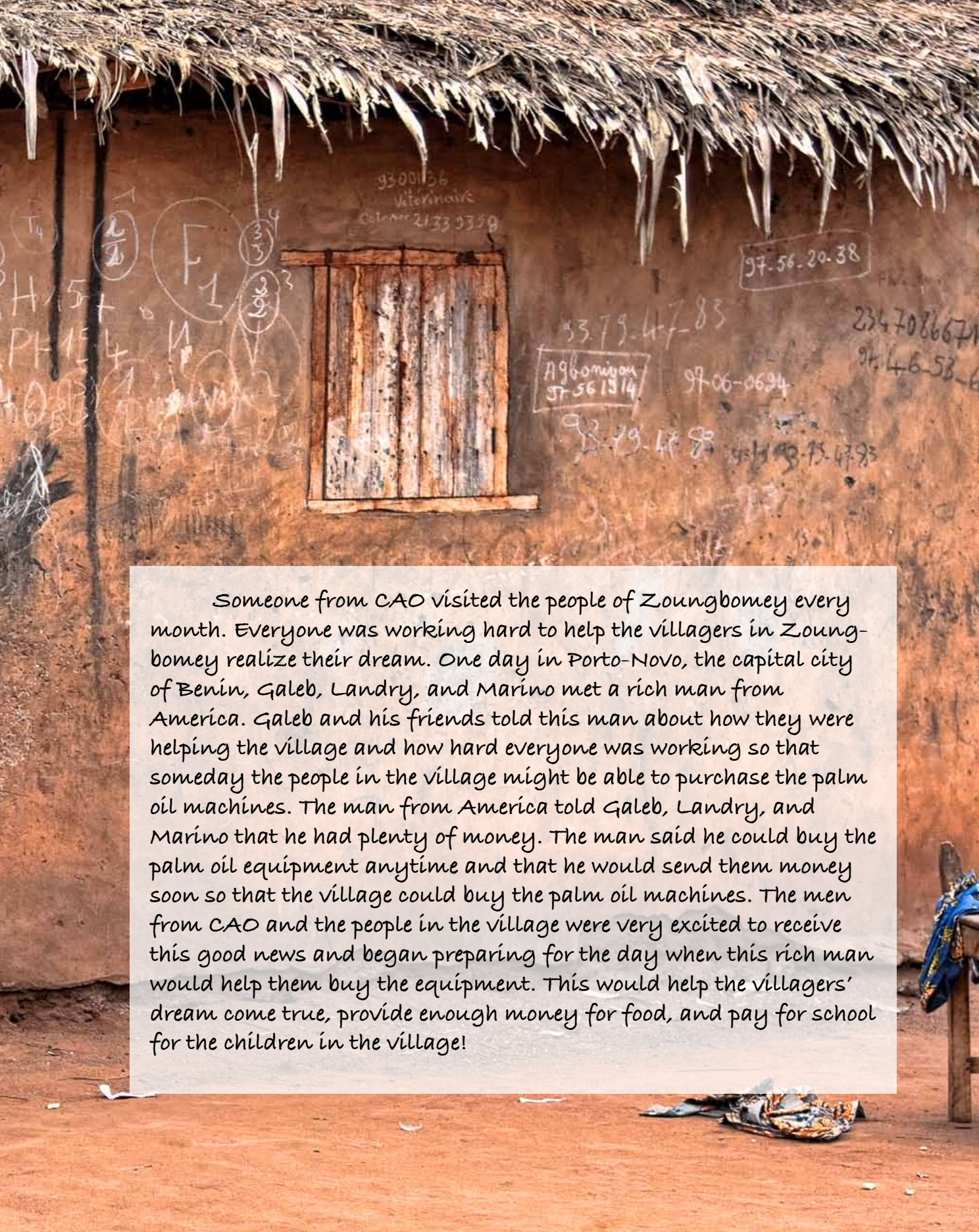
Photo by Susan Norwood



Dieu fera
Dieu merci
Je la salue
Chaque jour
10000

Je vous salue Marie
de grace le seigneur
sur vous, vous êtes
entre tous les saints
je vous le prout de
obéir
Marie Marie Marie
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

V1
T3
R1
R2
R3
R4
R5
R6
R7
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R10
R11
R12



Someone from CAO visited the people of Zoungbomey every month. Everyone was working hard to help the villagers in Zoungbomey realize their dream. One day in Porto-Novo, the capital city of Benin, Galeb, Landry, and Marino met a rich man from America. Galeb and his friends told this man about how they were helping the village and how hard everyone was working so that someday the people in the village might be able to purchase the palm oil machines. The man from America told Galeb, Landry, and Marino that he had plenty of money. The man said he could buy the palm oil equipment anytime and that he would send them money soon so that the village could buy the palm oil machines. The men from CAO and the people in the village were very excited to receive this good news and began preparing for the day when this rich man would help them buy the equipment. This would help the villagers' dream come true, provide enough money for food, and pay for school for the children in the village!


Unfortunately, in this story, (just like in real life – well, this is real life!) some people do not keep their promises. The rich man went away from Africa and forgot about the people he met in the village. The man spent his money visiting many other places in the world, but Galeb, Landry, and Marino never heard from him again. The people in the village who were so excited now felt as if their dream might take forever to come true. They were also confused and sad. Why would someone offer to help them, but never return to the village to help?

They wished someone would take the time to learn about and help their brothers and sisters in Zoungbomey. Sadly this is the way many stories end, but our story has a different ending...



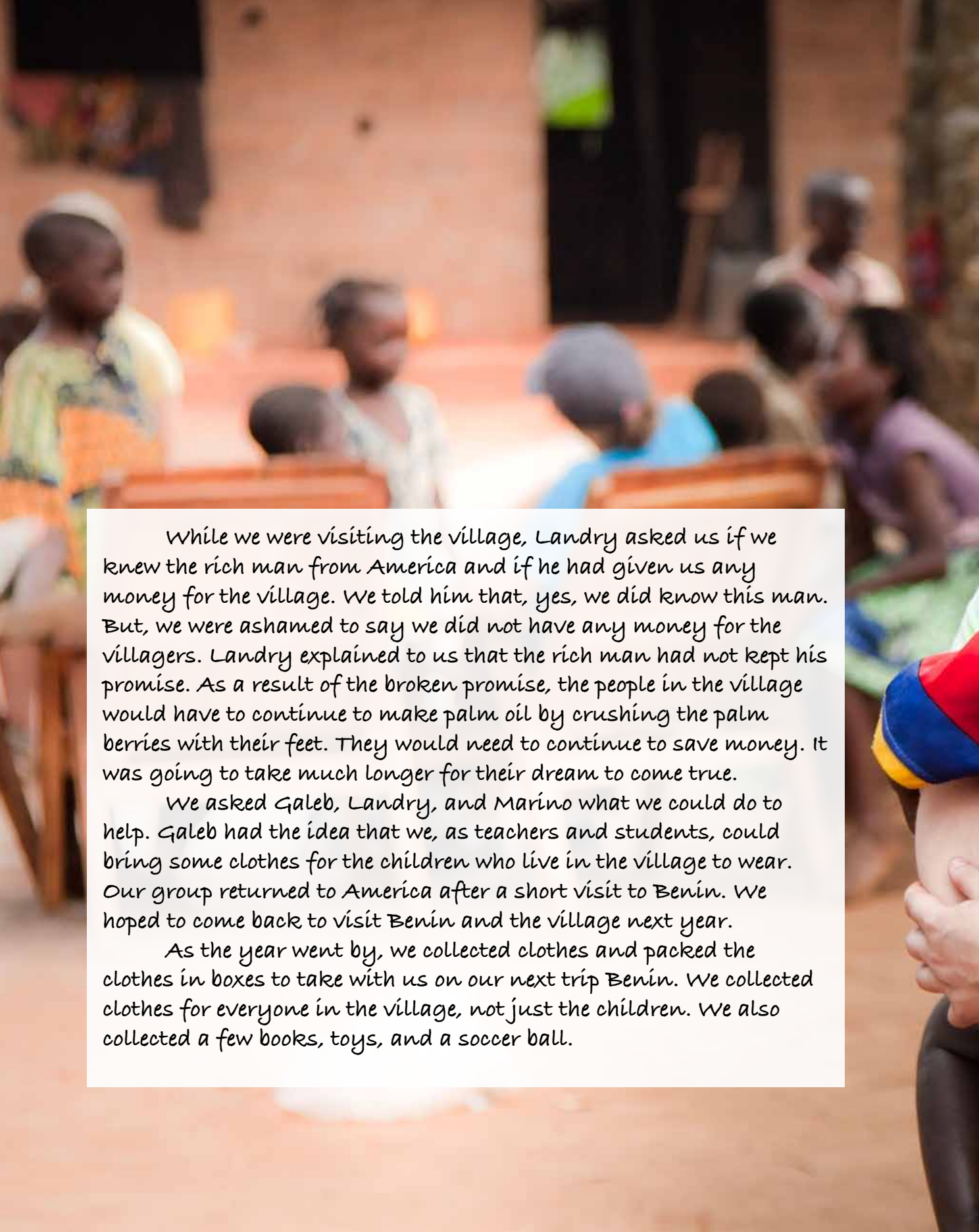






Chapter 3: A Partner – Someone Who Shares With Another

We are teachers who bring students to Benin every year. We come to learn about Benin, to teach first aid classes, and to teach about the importance of clean water. One day a friend introduced us to Galeb, Landry, and Marino. Galeb told us about the people who lived in the village in Zoungbomey. We were very interested in Galeb's story, so we visited Zoungbomey to learn more about the people and how they made palm oil. We learned about the village's dream to buy a palm oil machine and talked about ways we might be able to help.



While we were visiting the village, Landry asked us if we knew the rich man from America and if he had given us any money for the village. We told him that, yes, we did know this man. But, we were ashamed to say we did not have any money for the villagers. Landry explained to us that the rich man had not kept his promise. As a result of the broken promise, the people in the village would have to continue to make palm oil by crushing the palm berries with their feet. They would need to continue to save money. It was going to take much longer for their dream to come true.

We asked Galeb, Landry, and Marino what we could do to help. Galeb had the idea that we, as teachers and students, could bring some clothes for the children who live in the village to wear. Our group returned to America after a short visit to Benin. We hoped to come back to visit Benin and the village next year.

As the year went by, we collected clothes and packed the clothes in boxes to take with us on our next trip Benin. We collected clothes for everyone in the village, not just the children. We also collected a few books, toys, and a soccer ball.





Chapter 4: A Partner - Someone to Play With

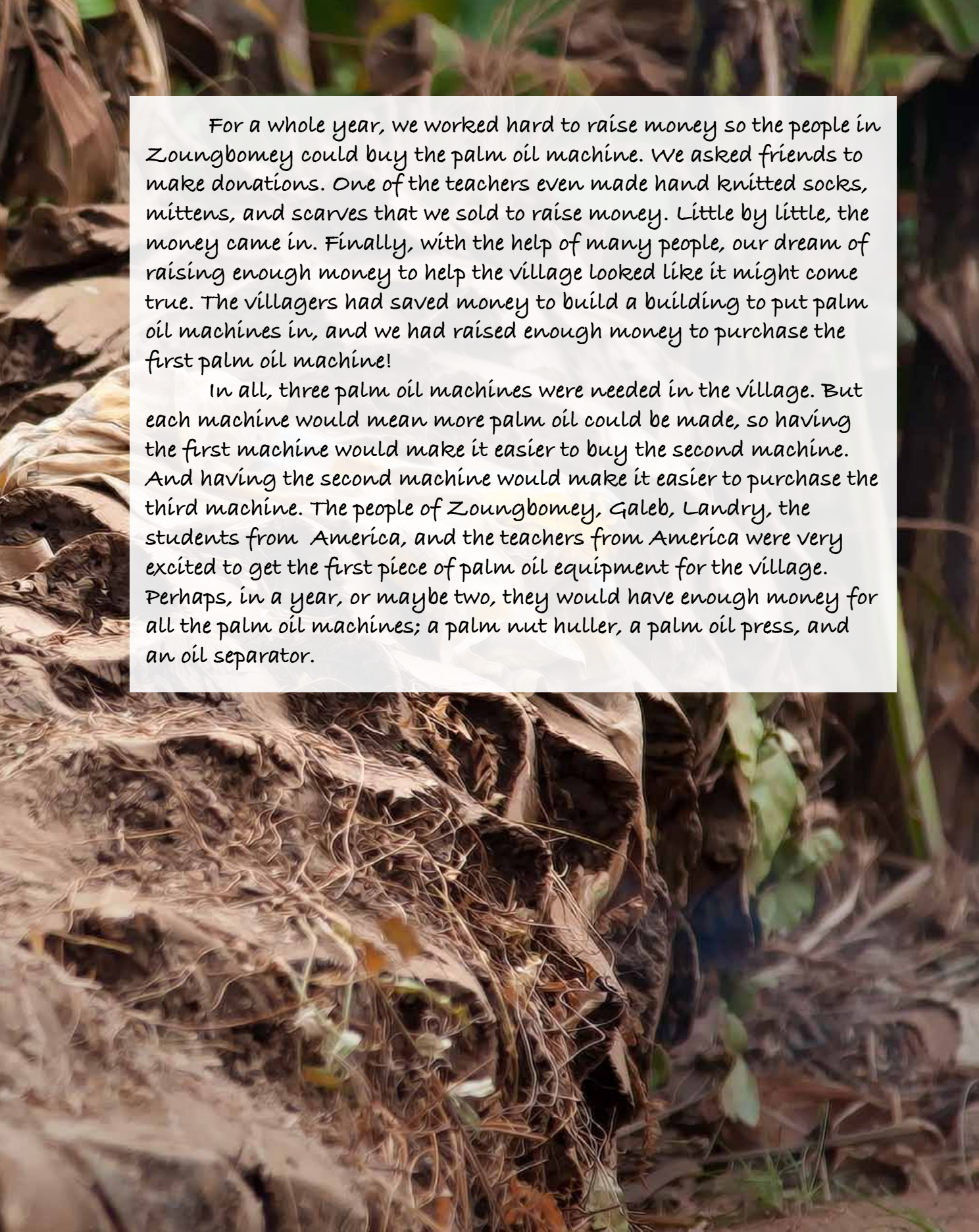
The following year we returned to Benin with another group of teachers and students. Not much had changed in Zoungbomey since our first trip to the village. The village women were still making palm oil by crushing the berries with their feet. But this time, we did bring something for our friends. As Galeb suggested, we brought the clothes for the children, and even clothes for the adults. Everyone in the village was thankful for the clothes and other gifts.

One of the American teachers took photographs of the babies and children and gave these photographs to their mothers. Most of the mothers had never had a picture of their children before. The mothers were grateful for this small gift. The teacher who took the photographs explained why it was important to give the pictures to the women. He said, "I want them to know that they can trust us. It's very important that they know that we aren't just here to take things from them."

As our group was leaving Zoungbomey the second year, Landry again asked if the rich man we knew from America had given us any money for the village. Once again, we had to say no. We felt sad and angry this time, because now the people of Zoungbomey were our friends, and our friends needed more help to save money. The people of Zoungbomey were going to have to keep working and keep dreaming.

When we returned home again, we kept thinking about our friends in Benin and Zoungbomey. We thought about how hard the people in the village were working to make palm oil and to save money. We thought about how poor the people were and how important it was for the children to go to school. We knew that a palm oil machine would help the people of the village have a better life. One day, we had an idea. Perhaps our group, the teachers and students who had visited Zoungbomey, could become partners in the palm oil project? We would try to raise money to help the village buy the machine. We asked Galeb if this would be OK, and he said YES!





For a whole year, we worked hard to raise money so the people in Zoungbomey could buy the palm oil machine. We asked friends to make donations. One of the teachers even made hand knitted socks, mittens, and scarves that we sold to raise money. Little by little, the money came in. Finally, with the help of many people, our dream of raising enough money to help the village looked like it might come true. The villagers had saved money to build a building to put palm oil machines in, and we had raised enough money to purchase the first palm oil machine!

In all, three palm oil machines were needed in the village. But each machine would mean more palm oil could be made, so having the first machine would make it easier to buy the second machine. And having the second machine would make it easier to purchase the third machine. The people of Zoungbomey, Galeb, Landry, the students from America, and the teachers from America were very excited to get the first piece of palm oil equipment for the village. Perhaps, in a year, or maybe two, they would have enough money for all the palm oil machines; a palm nut huller, a palm oil press, and an oil separator.

Chapter 5: A Partner - Someone With Whom You Share a Relationship

Our group began planning the next trip to Benin. This time we wanted to do much more to help the people in Zoungbomey. We told Galeb we thought there was enough money to buy the first palm oil machine. But then we found out that the price of the machine had increased, so we had to work a little harder and raise more money.

There was more bad news before we left for Benin. Just as we were getting ready to go to Benin, Galeb told us that heavy rains had destroyed the building for the machine the villagers had built! For a while, it looked like the village would have to wait another year to get the palm oil machine. But Galeb, Landry, and Marino decided that the people of Zoungbomey might be able to work quickly and to rebuild the building. Everyone, the villagers, the members of CAO, and us had worked long and hard to make the villagers' dreams almost a reality. It was so close to coming true!









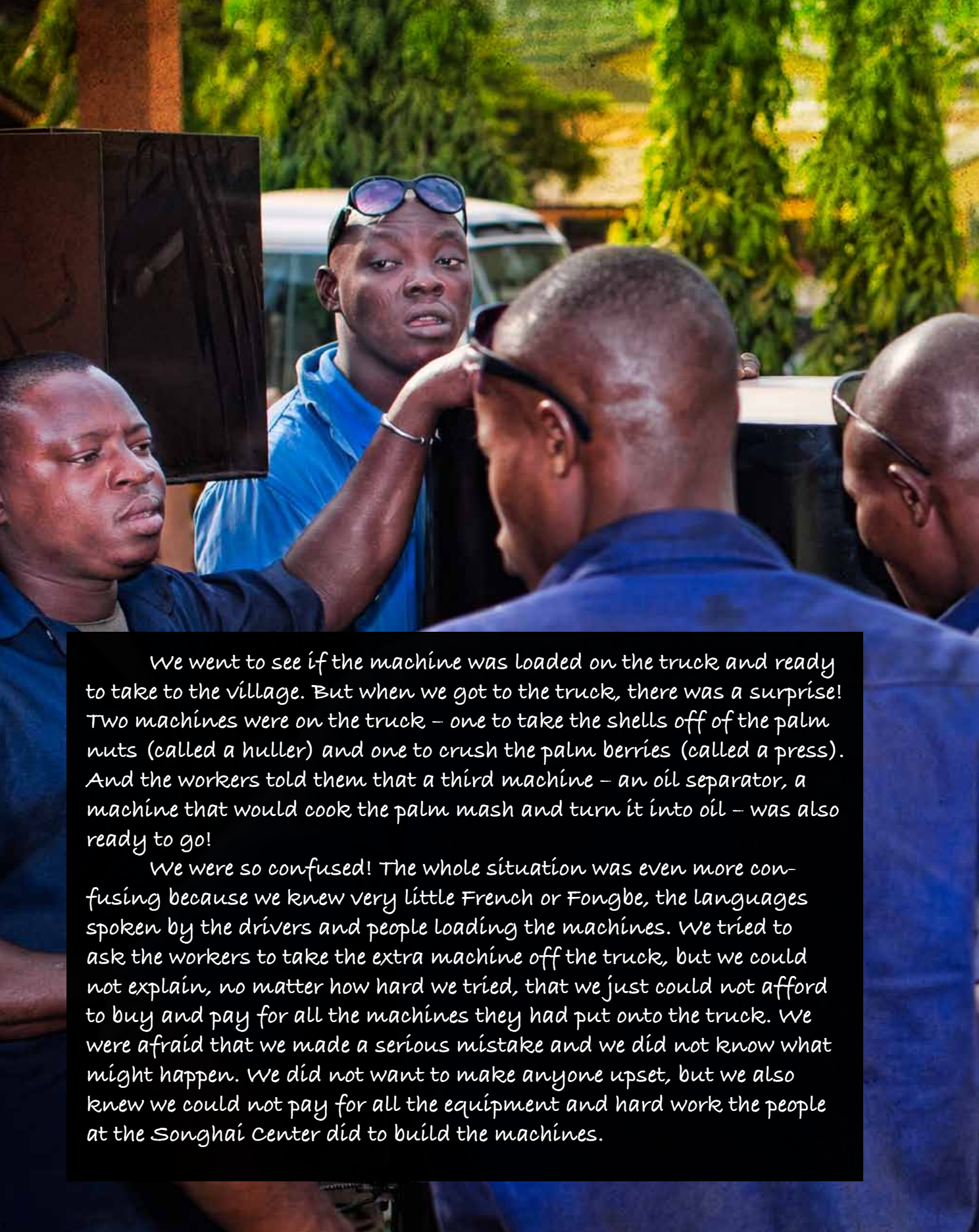
Finally, in 2010, the group of teachers and students returned to Benin. It had now been more than two years since we first met Galeb, Landry, Marino, and the people of Zoungbomey. It had been more than two years since the people of Zoungbomey shared their dream of having the machines to help make palm oil. But finally, it looked like a part of the villagers' dream was going to come true!

Galeb, Landry, and Marino went with us to visit Zoungbomey. When we got there, the men in the village were busy making the building for the palm oil machine. We were able to help them for a while. When we left that day, the walls of the building were about half-way done. The walls needed to be finished and the building still needed a floor and a roof before it would be ready for the machine. The people of Zoungbomey only had two days to finish making the building...



Chapter 6: The Secret Partner

Finally, the day came to take the palm oil machine to the village. Everyone was excited and ready to go!



We went to see if the machine was loaded on the truck and ready to take to the village. But when we got to the truck, there was a surprise! Two machines were on the truck – one to take the shells off of the palm nuts (called a huller) and one to crush the palm berries (called a press). And the workers told them that a third machine – an oil separator, a machine that would cook the palm mash and turn it into oil – was also ready to go!

We were so confused! The whole situation was even more confusing because we knew very little French or Fongbe, the languages spoken by the drivers and people loading the machines. We tried to ask the workers to take the extra machine off the truck, but we could not explain, no matter how hard we tried, that we just could not afford to buy and pay for all the machines they had put onto the truck. We were afraid that we made a serious mistake and we did not know what might happen. We did not want to make anyone upset, but we also knew we could not pay for all the equipment and hard work the people at the Songhai Center did to build the machines.



After a great deal of confusion, Blandine, who worked at the Songhai Center as a translator, came to speak with our group. Blandine told us that she had checked everything with the accountant yesterday and that all was in order for all of the equipment, the huller, the press, and a boiler/separator, to be taken to the village. The magic of kindness, the kindness and hard work of our friends at the Songhai Center, had made it possible for us to deliver all three pieces of palm oil processing equipment the village would need!

We found out that another special secret partner wanted to help with the palm oil project. This new partner was Father Nzamujo Godfrey, the man who was in charge of Songhai Center where the palm oil machines were made. There was no mistake! This secret partner had arranged for us to be able to buy all three machines. We were VERY happy because we knew the people of Zoungbomey would be VERY happy, too!



When Galeb, Landry, and Marino came to see the truck that would take the machine to the village, they were sure a mistake had been made. When they saw the palm huller machine on the truck and heard about the secret partner, they could not believe it. They each wore a smile that went from ear to ear!

The American teachers and students, the three men from CAO, and the drivers from the Songhai Center, drove the truck with the first two machines to the village. This took a long time because the roads in Benin are unbelievably bumpy. Some of the holes in the road could have swallowed a hippopotamus! The road to the village became narrower and narrower until it was no wider than a bicycle path. The machines were very big and very heavy so the truck had to go slower and slower as we approached Zoungbomey.





When we got to Zoungbomey, all of the people from the village were dressed in their brightest white shirts, which were the shirts we had given them on our visit the previous year. Remarkably, in two days they had finished the building for the machines! Just imagine how surprised the people of Zoungbomey were when they found out they were getting three machines! It was just like 1000 birthdays and Christmases all at once! Everyone from the village was singing, dancing, and clapping their hands. It was like a huge party for the whole village! Now their work would be easier. They could make more palm oil and the oil would not spoil. They would have money to buy healthy food, see a doctor if they got sick, and, finally, the children could go to school!







Several of the women in the village had tears in their eyes, they were so happy to see their dream finally come true. We also had tears in our eyes, for the very same reason. We had all shared the same dream for a long time. Even now, it feels better than we can possibly tell you in this story.



The men began moving the machines into the new building. It took most of the day to set up the machines.





All the people in the village had been preparing for this day! Since they had not expected to receive all three machines, they had already collected several buckets of palm berries and taken the shells off of the bright red berries by hand. We're sure they are looking forward to using the nut huller to take the shells off the palm berries the next time they make palm oil. Even so, everyone was excited to see what would happen when the palm oil press was turned on for the very first time!





The palm berries were poured into the palm oil press. When the press was turned on, it crushed the berries into mash so that the women wouldn't have to stomp on them with their feet. In just thirty minutes, this machine crushed as many berries as it took the women a whole day to crush with their feet! What came out of the palm oil press was a buttery mix of oil and berry skin. This mixture had to be poured into the third machine to finally make the palm oil. The workday was still a long way from finished.



Photo courtesy of Carolyn Herrity





After making the palm berry mash, the buttery mixture was dumped into a big black container to separate out the oil from all the other stuff. But the container had to be filled with lots of water. While we played soccer and danced with the children, the women in the village walked to the well, almost a half-mile away, to get the water. Each woman in the village took about ten trips carrying large containers of water from the well to fill up the separator. Did they complain about this hard work? No, they did all that work while smiling and singing!



All the berry mash was poured into the separator. Then the water was added. We learned just how strong the women in the village really were that afternoon!

A fire was started under the separator to heat the oil and make it rise to the top of the machine. After many years of waiting, the wait was just about over - soon the women in the village would have their first palm oil from the new machines our friends at the Songhai Center had made for them.







More laughter, dancing, and amazement followed as the beautiful golden palm oil poured out of the separator. When all of the machines worked together, in just one day they had done the work that used to take a whole week! The people of Zoungbomey were amazed! We felt extremely lucky to be in Benin with our friends and partners on this very special day.



Chapter 7: Dreams Can Come True

It soon came time for us to say good-bye to the people of the village. As our group was leaving to return to America, we gave the children of Zoungbomey pencils for school and another soccer ball. This soccer ball had on it the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. These are goals for the world to meet by the year 2015 to end poverty and help people like our friends in Zoungbomey. It had been such an amazing and special day that it was hard for us to leave. We hope to visit the village again soon. To end this story, we want to share with you what we've learned about Benin and Zoungbomey. And we want to share lessons we learned about how to help make other peoples' dreams come true:





A person is shown from the chest up, wearing a blue shirt with a yellow and white pattern. They are holding a long, light-colored wooden staff vertically. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Lesson #1

It's important to keep promises. The people of the village spent their savings on a building for the equipment. When the promises were broken, the building fell down, in part because there was no reason to take care of it. The people in the village were reluctant to build another building until they were certain some of the equipment would arrive.

Keeping your promise, no matter how hard or how long it takes, is part of being a good friend and partner.

Lesson #2

It's easier for dreams to come true when you have partners. Think of all of the partners that helped with the palm oil project. CAO helped the people of Zoungbomey learn how to save their money. The teachers, students, and all of the people who gave donations worked together to raise the money to help buy the machines. The men of the village made the building for the machines. The special secret partner made it possible for Zoungbomey to get three machines instead of just one.

This special day in Zoungbomey happened because all of us worked together to help realize one dream.







Lesson #3

Helping in little ways adds up. Sometime it's easy to think that what we are doing is so small that it doesn't matter. Some of the people who gave donations to the palm oil project felt this way. But this is never true. If lots of people do little things, all of these little things add up and help make big dreams come true.

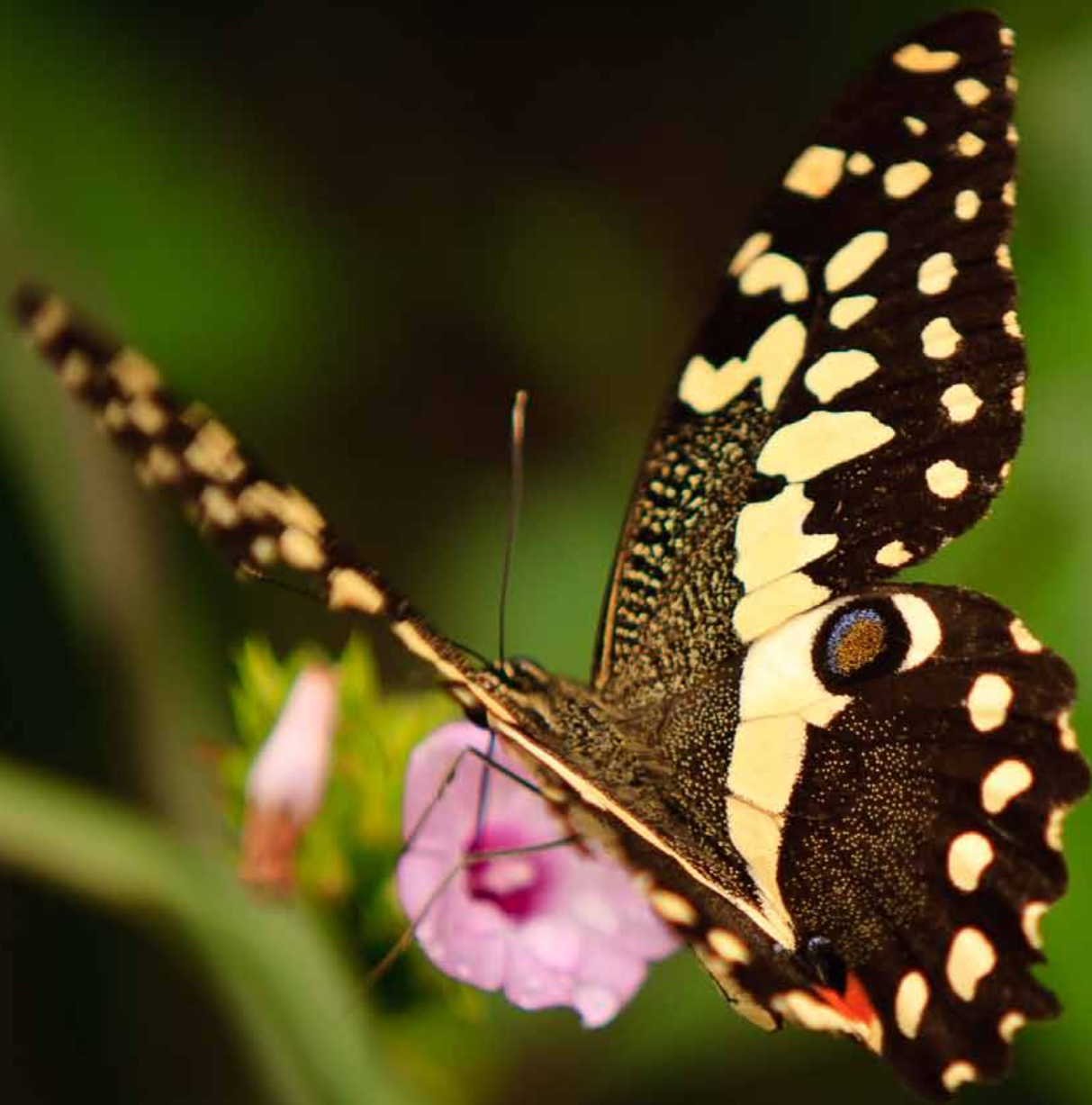
It is so important to help in whatever way you can - everything makes a difference!



It had been a day that none of us will ever forget. As we were saying good-bye to our friends, one of the women in the village told us about their new dream. The village's new dream is to save enough money from selling palm oil so that in two years they will be able to buy electricity for the village.

Do you think this dream will come true?

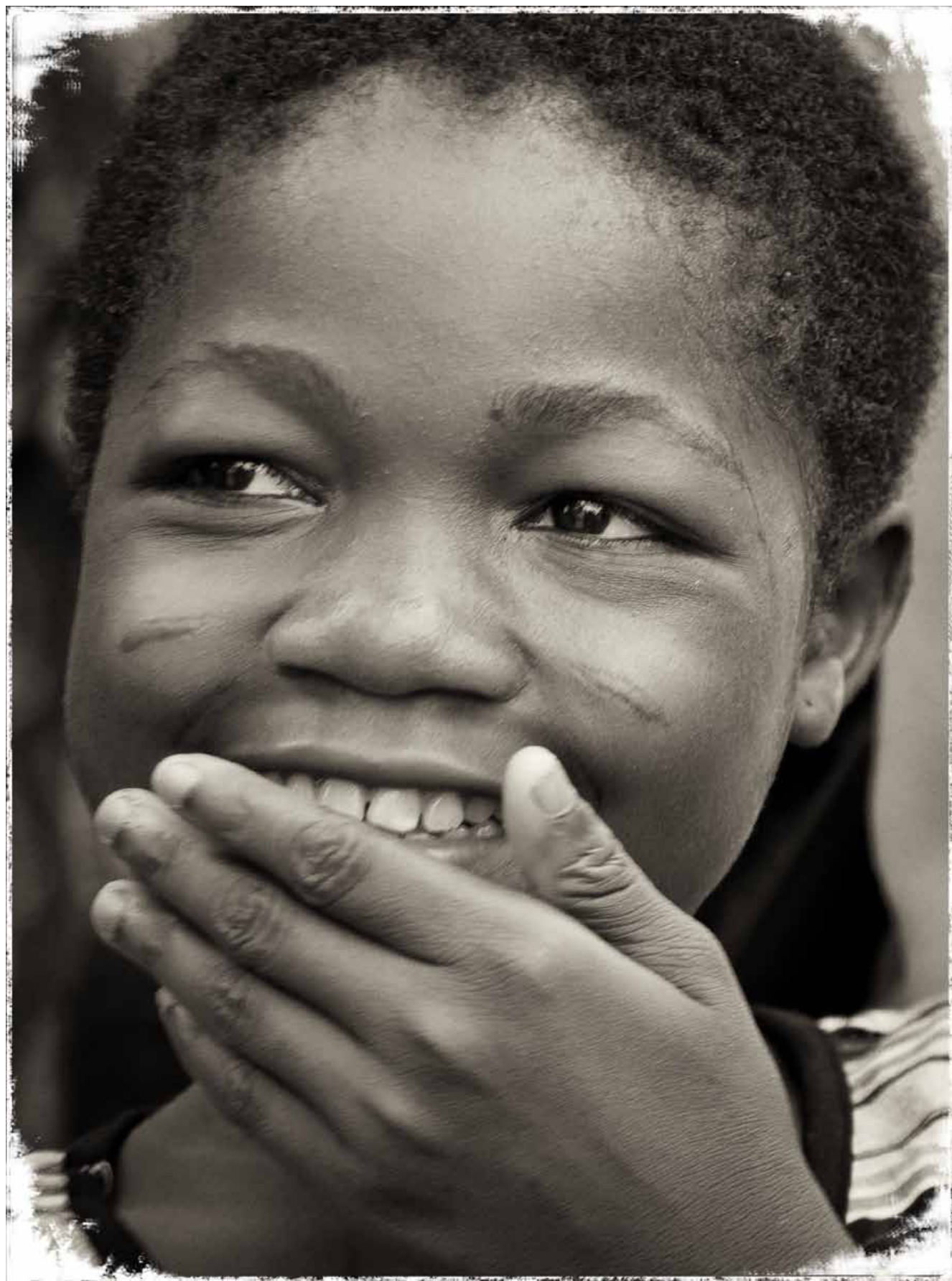
We do!



Chapter 8: What Will Your Dreams Be?

This has been a story about how dreams can come true. Now it's time to think about *your* dreams.

1. Think about a dream you had that came true. Did you make it come true on your own – or did you have a partner?
2. What kinds of dreams have made you happiest? Have your best dreams been just for you, or have they included other people?
3. Did you ever do anything to help someone's dream come true?
4. Did sharing dreams with friends and partners help the dream come true?
5. Although this is about the dream of the people in the village of Zoungbomey, there really are other dreams in the story, too. What dreams did the different partners in this story have?
6. When we were invited to share the dreams of the people in the village of Zoungbomey, how did we make sure they were happy to have us help?
7. In this story, partners are described as someone to dance with, someone who shares with others, someone to play with, and someone with whom to share a relationship. Do you think these are good descriptions of being a partner?
8. What is the most important dream you have right now? What things do you need to learn for this dream to come true?
9. In this story, lots of people worked together to fulfill these dreams. The people in this story were artists, business people, engineers, nurses, social workers, and even a judge. Everyone used his or her talents to help realize a shared dream. What talents can you use tomorrow to help someone's dream come true?
10. What skills would you like to learn about that you could use to address the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and your dreams?



Afterword

This is the real life story of the events in Zoungbomey. The following is an excerpt from Dr. Norwood's journal after that day:

August 5, 2010

I am still not quite certain what I have been a part of and witnessed today. It is going to take me a while to sort it all out. It was like 1000 birthdays and Christmases all at once. It was one of the best days of my life. Amazement. Joy. Gratitude. A miracle. Perhaps even some Voudoun magic!

I am so glad I was able to say thank you to Father Nzamujo when I took a walk this evening:

"How's my favorite girl friend today?"

"Fine, Father. I had a very good day."

"What did you do today?"

"We went to the village with the machines today."

"Ahh, yes."

"They were very happy. And very surprised."

"Ahh, yes."

"So were we. We were very surprised too."

"Okay." (Wink)

"Thank you very much!"

I am not sure our students completely grasp what happened today. I am not sure I do either. During our discussions after dinner tonight, we reflected on how many of the UN Millennium Development Goals were addressed by this one small act.

An amazing day. But this story really began more than two years before. And it is, I think, an important story to tell...

You can learn about the Women's Cooperative Palm Oil Project, by visiting the WATER program website:
<http://www.water-dr.org>



You can learn more about the United Nation's Millenium Development Goals by visiting their website at:
<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>



You can learn more about Centre
Afrika Obota by visiting their website:
<http://www.afrikaobota.org>.



You can learn more about the Songhai
Centre by visiting their website at:
<http://www.songhai.org>.



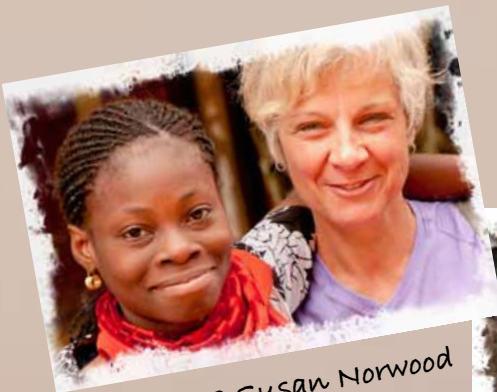
Growing up, we had lots of dreams and lots of heroes. Over time some of our dreams and some of our heroes have changed. We've been really lucky, we met and spent time with some of our heroes! We'd like to introduce them to you here:



Abd Galeb Chabi Mama,
Susan Norwood, &
Landry Loubeignon



Father Nzamujo Godfrey & Bradley Striebig



Blandine Araba & Susan Norwood

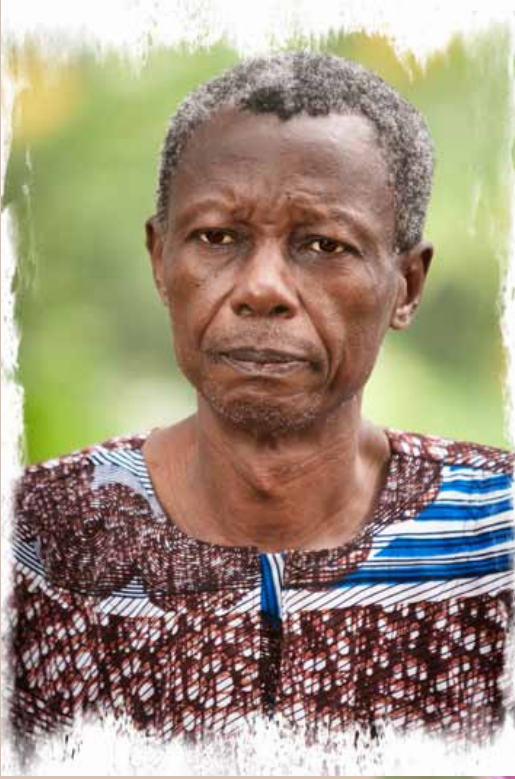


Marino de Souza



Bradley Striebig, Child & Roland Adoukonou

Photo courtesy of Carolyn Herity



In memory of our dear friend and
colleague, Mr. Elliot Wilson

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful,
committed citizens can change the world.
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

- Margaret Mead

Dr. Susan Norwood is a Professor of Nursing at Gonzaga University, where she has taught for the past 20 years. She currently teaches courses in health care policy, research, public health nursing, and environmental health. She is a member of her local Board of Health and active in a variety of nursing education professional organizations. She consults nationally on curriculum development and program evaluation and has published four nursing textbooks. At Gonzaga, she has been the recipient of two awards for excellence in teaching.

"I simply can't imagine a better job than teaching. To me, there is nothing more exciting than helping students to develop new insights and understandings, and new visions of the contributions they can make to our world. I have participated in WATER since its inception and am so grateful for what it has taught me about myself and about the responsibility we all have for promoting healthy conditions so that we can have healthy people and healthy communities. Benin has made me a better person and a better teacher. Introducing students to Benin is a way of helping students see that we are all in this together and little efforts on the part of many add up.

I am fortunate to have grown up in a loving family where I had everything I needed and a good bit of what I thought I wanted. I continue to enjoy the support and enthusiasm of my parents, siblings, nieces, and nephews for my participation in WATER. They think I am crazy when I head off to Benin each summer and when I talk about relocating to Africa when I retire – but they support me nonetheless!"



Dr. Bradley Striebig is a father of two boys and a husband. He thanks his wife, children and extended family for supporting his work in Africa. He's lucky to be friends with colleagues in Africa, particularly Father Nzamujo Godfrey. It was Nzamujo's vision and endurance in creating the Songhai Center that has inspired and served as a role model for Brad. Brad feels blessed to have had students interested in international development work whose determination provided the incentive to work with Engineers Without Borders.

Through his work with Engineers Without Borders, Brad has found new role models, like Bernard Amadei, Cathy Leslie, Kurt Paterson, and Peter Bosscher. Brad has learned how to be a better teacher and person with their help and assistance. With the help of his colleagues and students, Brad has worked on sustainable development projects in Benin, Kenya, Malta, Rwanda, and in the United States. Brad is particularly proud of his students' work in Benin, where he and his students have helped to develop a water filter manufacturing center, water quality laboratory, and health clinic. International development work has also reignited Brad's interest in photography, as a means of storytelling and helping people understand why the struggle to achieve the UN Millennium development Goals by 2015 is so vital. Brad is particularly interested in developing undergraduate engineering research projects that span the human-environment interface at James Madison University, where he is an associate professor of engineering.



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Where will your dreams
take you?

I thought Africa needed charity.
I thought people in Africa had lost hope.
I now know Benin is a strong country,
with enough hope for all of Africa.
I know Benin doesn't need charity,
but instead needs partners.

- from the journal of a student visiting Zoungbomey

