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The Real Reason We Are Here

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When asked for a favorite inspirational saying, Renee Farwell cites author/artist and fellow lowan Brian Andreas: "There are things you do because they feel right and they may make no sense and they may make no money and it may be the real reason we are here: to love each other..." A statement like that, for many, evokes a warm smile and a nod. We relate to it because it touches that part of our brain which yearns to be carefree, spontaneous, impractical.

Perhaps we might **tweet** it. But it's only once you know the life path which Renee Farwell chose for herself that you can fully appreciate how profound and auto-biographical that saying truly is.

"... they may make no sense and they may make no money ..."

I wonder what Renee's parents said when she first told them that she would be returning to Ghana, the West-African nation where she took her semester abroad while attending Chicago's Roosevelt University. Did they think her decision was misguided? Were they supportive? Perhaps better than anyone, Renee's parents recognized their daughter's propensity for doing good and foresaw the seismic impact she would have in a community halfway around the world.

A few years earlier at the University of Ghana, Renee had met a young man named Eric Kwame Agoe. Kwame, a native Ghanaian,



lost his father at a young age and was forced to drop out of public school due to his inability to pay the required fees. As he grew, Kwame saw other young children in his **Kissemah Village** also suffer from an inability to afford schooling. After talking for a while with Renee at the copier, Kwame invited her to visit his village and help with the seven children being home schooled at Kwame's mother's house. She accepted his invitation. The experience changed her life.

Within a year, Kwame and Renee together established a free education and care facility in Kissemah Village. By January 2010, Mawuvio's (God's Children) outreach program became a registered non-governmental and social welfare organization in Ghana. In November 2011 **Mawuvio's outreach program** (MOP) became a registered 501(c)(3) organization in the United States. MOP provides educational and

development services to **orphans and disadvantaged sons and daughters** on the streets who cannot afford the required fees to attend government schools in Ghana. Mawuvio's outreach operates under the Ghana Education Service. They provide nursery through primary six basic education. Classes offered include English, math, science, religious moral education (RME), information communication technology (ICT), citizenship education and creative arts to children free of charge.

"... and it may be the real reason we are here: to love each other..."

According to MOP board member Elena Arosemena, "Renee embodies the spirit, courage, and conviction of following your heart! She is an example to the world and what can be accomplished if you stick with your dreams and goals. She has overcome cultural, language, age, gender barriers, and is providing hope, opportunity, and education to amazing children who otherwise would not have a chance."

This coming September, after a multi-year fundraising and construction effort, Renee, Kwame, and team will finally open the Mawuvio's outreach program school building (classes are currently held outside). With the new facilities in place, their student population will grow appreciably. Now, their top priority will be to **secure ongoing funding** to keep the new school open and operating. Renee elaborates on these efforts in **this video**.

What began with just seven children on the porch of Kwame's Mother's home, has grown into a major operation that provides education, opportunities, and purpose to so many people; no one more so than Renee. As she says below, "I cannot imagine any other life than the one I am currently living." Thanks for speaking with us Renee!

1. In just one sentence, what is your purpose in life?

To inspire youth to use education as a means to excel themselves, their families, and their communities out of the impoverished situations they come from and help them become successful, contributing members of society.

2. How has this work changed you?

Because of this work, I have found my purpose in life. Now, I cannot imagine any other life than the one I am currently living. It has made me more appreciative of everyday luxuries -- from running water to having access to education. Most importantly, I am single handedly assisting in, and witnessing, the development of the next generation of leaders in Ghana and the world at large.

3. What do you get from giving?

Seeing my students make steps in their education, making sense of letters and numbers -- putting them into words, sentences, math problems and being able to understand what they have just learned -- is a huge reward for me. Listening to students, who once had no dreams or purpose, as they talk about becoming a doctor, a teacher, president gives me hope for the future -- both for these children and the children Mawuvio's outreach program has yet to reach out to.

4. Who is a living hero and what would you ask them if given the chance?

Any individual working to provide a means for youth to rise up out of poverty and lead successful lives; I would ask them how they do their work, what has worked well, what has not worked well, and can we keep in touch if I have more questions in the future?

5. What everyday resources could help you achieve your philanthropic goals?

Ghana is a country with an immense amount of natural resources that can help our school become self-sufficient. We can utilize our land to farm food to feed our students three meals a day and sell remaining crops to generate income to support our monthly expenses. If we had program vehicles, we could operate them as public transportation when the program does not need them. A simple plot of farming land and a few buses would dramatically help us achieve our philanthropic goal of being a self-sustaining entity that does not rely on foreign funding.

6. What is your favorite inspirational saying?

"There are things you do because they feel right and they may make no sense and they may make no money and it may be the real

reason we are here: to love each other." ~**Brian Andreas**

7. What would the title of your book be?

Stories From the Bench: Creating a One-Room School Under a Tree

8. Tell us something you rarely share in public

My father recently suddenly passed away. I was in Ghana when it happened and had to quickly travel home to the states. A lot of family and friends felt very bad that I was so far away at such a difficult time however I feel differently. The community I work in in Ghana has become a second family to me, they have met both my parents and care for me in the same way I am cared for by the family that raised me. I am blessed to have had the opportunity to grieve with both of my families during such a difficult time in my life.

9. What advice do you have for others who aspire to be citizen philanthropists?

Follow your instincts and do not over-think things. Everyone has a purpose in this life and if you are patient and open to things, your purpose will find you.

10. What question do you wish I had asked, and what is the answer?

QUESTION: At what point did you know this was the work for you?

ANSWER: The first day I visited Kissemah Village and met our initial group of 15 children. One little girl, Mary, held my hand asking me question upon question for the entire four hours I was there. Although I left with an extremely sweaty hand I knew that I would return and continue returning to Kissemah to answer as many questions as I could.

Web sites: **Mawuvio's outreach program** (Facebook, Twitter)

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