



Bucket Showers & Baby Goats: Volunteering in West Africa

Christine Brown

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Christine Brown's memoir *Bucket Showers & Baby Goats* is about volunteering in a West African farming village.

Brown, dissatisfied with her corporate job, yearned for a more purposeful existence. Inspired by a college course, she turned her focus to helping vulnerable communities and applied to graduate programs in international development. A month-long volunteer opportunity in a rural village in Ghana brought her face to face with extreme poverty.

The community that Brown met had limited access to healthcare and education; the goals of the volunteers centered on building a library, conducting computer training, and implementing a health education program with the village's young people.

Told in journal format, the book is divided into two parts. The first covers Brown's initial volunteer experiences, and the second focuses on how she continued to assist the village from home and on her follow-up trip. An appendix with interview transcripts is insightful regarding health and sex education efforts in the village; within it, the community members' voices are clear and their own.

Accounts from the first trip are dominated by descriptions of daily life in Ghana; they find Brown acclimating to the culture, learning to communicate past language barriers, and adjusting to different accommodations. She gets used to communal village life, her lack of privacy, and a slower pace. Her memories are lively and warm, capturing the culture, daily life, and personalities of the people living in the village. Stories about harrowing rides on the bus into town, bonds formed with children, and encounters with goats and chickens who have free range over the village dominate the journal entries in this first section, while repeat trips to the market and descriptions of meals slow its pace.

The second part of the book tackles the time in between Brown's two trips to Ghana and includes journal entries from her second visit to the same village; this part of the book is sharper in its focus on the inner workings of volunteer efforts. Here, journal entries are honest about the disappointments and setbacks of Brown's volunteer work: raised money is not used as intended; there's not enough time to make the life-altering changes desired.

The intimate format leads to immediate immersion. Brown's journal entries are uninhibited and easy to follow. Anecdotes about interactions between the volunteers and Ghanaian people are charismatic and warm, but also highlight the frustrations and successes of the volunteers' efforts in Ghana. The sections work together and keep the text in balance, resulting in a comprehensive picture of Brown's growth. The prose is down to earth, humble, and honest.

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EMILY WEBBER (February 4, 2020)

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