

LIFE IN GHAHA by Sara Hein

I spent the semester of Spring 2010 studying abroad in Ghana, West Africa. I took courses from the University of Ghana, lived with a host family, worked at an internship with a children's home for former street kids and orphans, and traveled the Ghana and Burkina Faso.

One of my courses included a cultural drumming class, which consisted of learning traditional ethnic drumming patterns on handmade drums under a group of trees outside the music department. Our drumming professor also took our class on a four-day field trip to his village over Easter weekend, where we got to meet the village chief, attend a funeral, and stay, eat, and worship with our professor's family.

My host family consisted of an elderly couple I called "Grandpa" and "Grandma" and their second-niece, who I considered my sister. I learned to help clean "the Ghanaian way," but was never allowed to cook much. I don't think Grandma trusted me in her kitchen. I had my own room with a small alcove for a bathroom, which included a leaky toilet, a spigot, and a bucket for bathing. I smashed cockroaches in my bathroom and in my wardrobe, where they liked to hide in my clothes, and once woke up with one in my hair.

My internship at the children's home was entirely rewarding. About two-dozen boys live at the home with four female staff members and two male pastor directors. I worked with the younger half of the children, ages 6 to 13. My internship partner, another U.S. American student on my program, worked with me to register all of the children and staff members for the National Health Insurance Scheme by the end of the semester. It took a lot of trips to various government offices and letters of intent from our program and the orphanage, but we accomplished it in the end. We raised enough support to cover all of their fees, plus an additional \$300 that went to purchasing food for the home. In my daily activities with the children, we taught math and English lessons, played games, colored, sang, and danced.

On weekends my program provider, CIEE, took us all on cultural excursions to all of the main destinations around Ghana. Once the semester finished, another WSU student and I stayed for two extra weeks and backpacked Burkina Faso, one of the poorest countries in the world with the ninth lowest GDP per capita on the globe (CIA World Factbook.) I fell in love with the country and the people even more than I had in Ghana, using my language skills from high school and French 204 to get around. While touring we walked through waterfalls, rode mopeds through sugarcane fields, rode camels, slept in sand dunes under the stars, lashed our backpacks to tops of buses with goats and other cargo, witnessed tribal sacrifices to catfish gods, climbed ancient rock domes, and visited a little girl I sponsor through an NGO. It was truly the most exciting, adventurous experience of a lifetime.