

GHANA

SUFFIELD TAKES 10 STUDENTS TO GHANA IN SUMMER OF 2013

BY ELISE RIEGEL '87



PERHAPS TRAVEL CANNOT PREVENT BIGOTRY, BUT BY DEMONSTRATING THAT ALL PEOPLES CRY, LAUGH, EAT, WORRY, AND DIE, IT CAN INTRODUCE THE IDEA THAT IF WE TRY AND UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER, WE MAY EVEN BECOME FRIENDS. -Maya Angelou

When Kim Wiggin and I began our journey to Ghana with 10 adventurous Suffield students, we never anticipated how much we would be impacted by this trip. Ours was a service mission—we travelled to Old Ningo to spend time with the orphaned children of the JoshKrisDan Home of Refuge, the flagship program of Hearts of the Father Outreach (HFO). What we found was an extraordinary place run by extraordinary people who provide for, cherish, and inspire close to 30 children who have suffered the heartbreaking loss of family. These children are being raised as members of a new loving family, one that cultivates optimism, industry, a profound appreciation for education, and a deep, collective sense of belonging.

HFO was founded by John Moritz '74 and his wife Libby in the wake of their own incomprehensible personal tragedy, the loss of their three children: Joshua, Kristen, and Daniel. With astonishing courage and a remarkable clarity of vision, John and Libby dedicated themselves to changing the lives of thousands of children around the world through their Christian-based outreach programs, which are currently in India, Uganda, Mexico, and Ghana. The Moritzes—which happily includes daughter Lily whom they adopted from China and is now a senior in high school—have worked tirelessly on behalf of these children, building networks of local support to provide homes for orphans in some of the most impoverished and hopeless places in the world. A few years ago, John's work was recognized by Suffield Academy with the Alumni Leadership Award, an honor bestowed on alumni who have shown an exceptional ability to lead and inspire others.

John, a soft-spoken man with a terrific sense of humor and infinite patience, accompanied us on most of our trip and became a beloved figure to the Suffield students. They found John's gentle presence and deep sense of purpose not only soothing but also emboldening, as they processed daily what they were seeing and feeling throughout the trip with both courage and honesty. It is quite fitting that Suffield has recently been exploring the school-wide themes of resilience and identity, complex concepts that our young Suffield contingent rigorously examined over the course of our stay.

One of Kim Wiggin's roles at Suffield is to lead the school's overseas trips in March. For over a decade, she has travelled with hundreds of Suffield students, and invariably returns each year with testimonials from others about how well behaved and respectful Suffield students are abroad. True to fashion, our students in Ghana were remarkable with respect to their graciousness in dealing without the creature comforts of Western living, their curiosity about an unfamiliar world, and their humility in the presence of those who have far less than they.

Perhaps most refreshing to Kim and me was to see that once all the accessories that define the sophisticated lives of American teenagers (technology, media, etc.) were removed, our students were excited to be kids just like other kids—playing soccer, dancing, making bracelets, blowing bubbles, and simply looking for friendship. We are extremely proud that our students were so willing to dig in, appreciate, enjoy, laugh, and help.

THE TRIP TO GHANA WAS THE TRIP OF A LIFETIME. WHEN I SIGNED UP FOR IT I REALLY HAD NO IDEA WHAT I WAS IN FOR. I LOVE TO TRAVEL, SO I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE A GOOD EXPERIENCE BUT NEVER REALIZED THE TRIP WOULD HAVE SUCH A PROFOUND IMPACT ON ME. THE CONNECTIONS WE MADE WITH THE CHILDREN AT THE JOSHKRISDAN HOME IN SUCH A SHORT TIME WERE AMAZING AND INDESCRIBABLE. I PLAN TO GO BACK TO GHANA THIS JUNE TO CONTINUE THE CONNECTION I HAVE MADE. THERE IS NOT ONE DAY THAT PASSES IN WHICH I DON'T THINK ABOUT OUR TRIP AND THE CHILDREN OF THE HOME. -Sarah Apkin '15



OUR TRIP CHANGED MY MINDSET AND MADE ME REALIZE WHAT INCREDIBLE OPPORTUNITIES I HAVE BEEN GIVEN. I NO LONGER THINK ABOUT WHAT I HAVE TO DO, BUT RATHER WHAT I GET TO DO. -Zach McCormick '14



THE CHILDREN OF THE HOME SHOWED US UNCONDITIONAL LOVE, AND THAT IS A FEELING THAT NOTHING CAN REPLACE. RIGHT AWAY WE WENT FROM BEING SO FAR FROM HOME TO HITTING A SPOT SO CLOSE TO HOME, SOMETHING SO HEARTFELT. WE FELT LIKE WE HAD KNOWN THEM FOR MUCH LONGER THAN WE HAD. THE EXPERIENCE I HAD ON OUR TRIP IS SOMETHING THAT I WOULD NEVER GIVE UP FOR ANYTHING. -Livvie Calligiuri '15

AN EXCERPT BY JOHN MORITZ '74 FROM THE HFO NEWSLETTER

Many years ago, I was fortunate enough to attend an excellent prep school named Suffield Academy. I was a day student from a middle class family, but my parents valued education, and so they sacrificed to send my brothers and me there. It was a rich experience that helped form my present worldview and brought me into contact with many people from diverse backgrounds. Students from Gambia and Japan visited our home on weekends. I skied the best mountains in Colorado, rubbed elbows (on wrestling mats) with descendants of American legends, and had friends from Venezuela and inner city Philadelphia. I will always be grateful for my experience at Suffield. Writing this now reminds me of how fortunate I have been in my life. Years after graduation, I was honored to receive a leadership award from Suffield for the work we do to help orphaned children in Ghana, India, and other places. In my acceptance speech, I focused on the importance of “giving back.” I used some quotations from the Bible where Jesus said, “I came to serve, not to be served,” and “it is more valuable to give than to receive.” I invited the students to choose a path of service as a career, and to consider helping the orphaned and less fortunate children of the world.

This summer, I was invited to help lead a team of students and faculty from Suffield on a trip to Ghana. It was my opportunity to “give back.” Many people had given to my life at Suffield, and now was my chance. I did not have money to give, but I had my heart and soul as well as principles that Suffield and God helped me form, such as respect, compassion, service, and the foundation principle of a love for all.

The day for the trip finally arrived and we all assembled in London. Students came from Norway, Bermuda, and the U.S. It was the start of an adventure that words cannot accurately describe. It was a life-changing experience where destiny and opportunity came together. I am grateful for the team from Suffield Academy and so proud of them. They opened their hearts to everyone they met and showed a depth of compassion and a sensitive respect that was beyond their years. They have left a lasting impression on our children in Ghana, and I am sure they have received much from them that they will carry with themselves for life. Well done, team, and well done, Suffield Academy. Let's do it again next year!

DAY 1 JOURNAL ENTRY: I HAVE NEVER FELT SO MUCH UNCONDITIONAL LOVE IN MY LIFE. THE EXCITEMENT AND HAPPINESS I HAVE RECEIVED IN RETURN FOR GIVING JUST ONE WAVE HELLO HAS BEEN THE BEST GIFT I HAVE EVER GOTTEN. THINKING ABOUT THE EXPERIENCES THAT I HAVE HAD FROM JUST ONE DAY, IT IS SURREAL. -Carly Drew '16

More significantly, these students did not forget what they learned and saw. Upon their return to school, they managed to convince the Suffield community to select HFO as the recipient of this year's fundraising efforts. Under the guidance of Suffield's Dean of Students Greg Lynch, the student body will be hosting three different fundraising events—a Color Course in the fall, a telethon in the winter, and a game-a-thon in the spring.

The proceeds of these events will be directed to two projects at the JoshKrisDan Home in Ghana: building a well to provide drinking water to the home and starting a primary school for the children of the home and local community. As John explains, "At present, drinking water is trucked in and stored in poly tanks, and rainwater is collected in a cistern. The municipal water line into Old Ningo broke many years ago, and despite many promises, the line has never been repaired, and so the whole area suffers. Bathing and toilet usage is very limited because of this, and plans for crop irrigation or future expansion are not possible. Furthermore, with a good well for water, we would be able to start a primary school where children from the home and the local community can receive an excellent education, as well as one nutritious meal per day. We have adequate land and electricity, and our school plan is complete. Our goal is to educate and impart leadership qualities to children so they cannot only succeed but also help their country have a better future. We believe a school will also give opportunities for international participation in the educational process both in a physical classroom and through an online internet portal."

It is John's hope and ours that this year marks just the beginning of a long and meaningful relationship between Suffield and the JoshKrisDan Home. In particular, John is delighted that his alma mater will play a central role in the creation of a primary school and is hopeful that many more students—and faculty and alumni will want to visit one of the HFO homes. He has already hosted a few Suffield classmates of his, and planning for the student trip in June 2014 is well underway.

There is certainly a great deal to be proud of at Suffield these days, and the people involved in this Ghana project are a perfect example of this. The committed, ambitious students who mobilized themselves after their return from Ghana; the encouraging leadership of the school who supported this trip; the selfless, conscientious, and enthusiastic Suffield community who will fundraise all year; and the compassionate alumnus with an extraordinary vision and mission. These are the wonderful people of Suffield Academy. 🌸



MOST OF MY JOURNAL ENTRIES REPEATEDLY USE WORDS LIKE 'INCREDIBLE,' 'ASTONISHING,' AND 'INEXPLICABLE' TO DESCRIBE THE TRIP TO GHANA. THESE WORDS ARE THE ONLY THINGS I CAN SAY TO CAPTURE WHAT I FELT INTENSELY, BECAUSE THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE TRIP I HAD A FEELING THAT WAS TRULY INDESCRIBABLE. I HOPE EVERYONE IS ABLE TO FEEL THAT WARMTH AND AFFECTION THAT I FELT ON THE FIRST DAY. THEY UNINTENTIONALLY LEFT US WITH THE PASSION AND AMBITION TO HELP AND STAY CONNECTED WITH THEM, MAKING AN IMPACT ON OUR LIVES THAT WE WILL TREASURE FOREVER. -Rhiannon Fletcher '15

