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United States – Paradise?

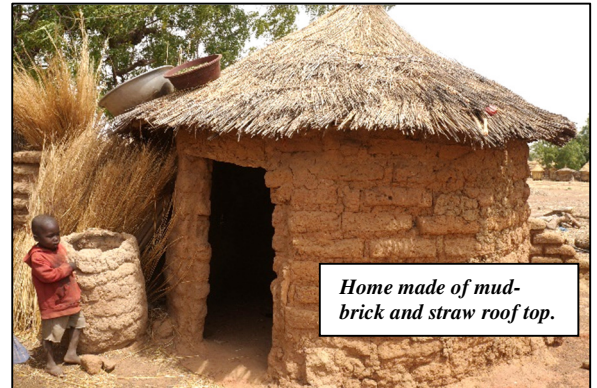
I've lived in Burkina Faso, W. Africa, for 12 years now. Burkina is one of the poorest countries in Africa, ranking 183 out of 186 countries on UNDP's Human Development Index (2013). 44.6 percent of the population live below the poverty level on less than 1.25 US per day (Human Development Report 2013).

I often get into conversations with the Burkinabe who refer to the U.S. as paradise. In my early years, surprised by their naiveté, I would attempt to explain the many reasons the US is NOT paradise. I may as well have been talking to the hand as there was no convincing a Burkinabe that the U.S. was not paradise.

However, after 12 years in this 3rd World Country, my perspective is shifting. I'm beginning to see the United States through their eyes. Each year, I return to the U.S. with this *bizarre emotion of naive awe* at what a *blessed* country the U.S. really is. I hesitated to put this in a newsletter because I suspect I know how you may react – much like I did in those early years with a roll of the eyes and sarcastic “Are you kidding me? You have no idea.... Paradise?” If you've never visited a 3rd world, it may be hard to consider the U.S. from a 3rd world perspective, but let's give it a shot.



Third world, first world – life is often hard and heartbreaking. Life in this world can never truly be paradise. However, recently returning to the U.S. that overwhelmed *bizarre emotion of naive awe* hit me again before I even made it out of the airport... in the ladies restroom! Think about it: 1) It's spotless (relatively speaking) and yet I often find a woman there with her cleaning cart.



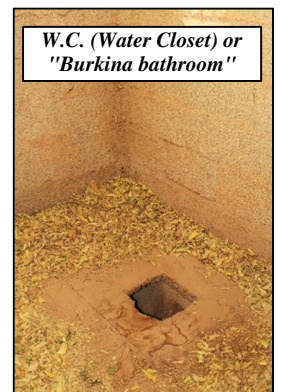
Home made of mud-brick and straw roof top.

Overwhelmed with the shocking contrast from Burkina to the U.S., I want to hug her and cry “thank you for what you do to keep America clean”, but I'm afraid she'd beat me with her mop and call security, so sanity prevails. 2) Once in the privacy of a cozy stall, my heart skips a beat at the jumbo roll of toilet paper (possibly not the right ply for some of you☺). 3) I marvel at the automatic flush (I'm not sure why we can't use a handle to flush, but I'm sure we have a good reason). 4) I grin at the numerous water faucets that function properly. 5) My heart does summersaults when I see the liquid soap so readily available, and not watered down 6) Full length mirrors (Okay, I could do without those). 7) Light fixtures that work (no flashlight necessary); 8) and best of all: I've yet to find a large rodent in any American bathroom (that leads to another story I save for the kids which involves personal bathroom experiences with bush babies, frogs and shrews).

I think it's safe to say, our country spends far more on *one* bathroom stall than the average Burkinabe spends on his entire mud-brick home with a roof of straw or corrugated metal! *We are so blessed.*



Typical mud-brick home with corrugated metal roof and often a make-shift door and window.



W.C. (Water Closet) or "Burkina bathroom"

I'm not complaining about Burkina toilets and neither are they. In fact, I'm quite certain they laugh at our extravagance for toileting, and if you think about it, you will too. In Burkina, outside of my home, most often a toilet is the nearest bush. The “luxurious” bathrooms (W.C. or water closet) are just a hole in the ground with a maze wall for privacy. Tap your hands to announce yourself, and enter – who needs a door! And, any American knows to bring their own toilet paper. Running water will never be

available, and soap – not a chance; but us prissy Americans also come armed with hand sanitizer, so it's okay. *We're truly so blessed.*



Hauling water – that’s how it’s done!

Then there’s water. And drinking fountains? A never ending supply of water, and it’s FREE?! I just can’t make myself buy bottled water in the U.S. when it’s everywhere - FREE and COLD, and PLENTIFUL! You may have heard, the majority of Burkinabe have to walk (sometimes miles) to a well to draw or pump water and carry it home in a bucket on their heads. They’re not complaining. That’s just the way it is. In fact, there are many places in Africa that don’t even have this basic commodity. BFO recently tried drilling for water in one of our villages and was unsuccessful. We do not take clean water for granted!



Millet

Lest you think I’ve lost my mind dwelling on toilets and drinking water, let’s move on to another basic human need: food. Did you know the staple in Burkina is millet? Looks like birdseed. Imagine eating birdseed for breakfast, lunch and dinner! The women pound the millet into flour with a mortar and pestle or send it to the mill if one is nearby. Next, they beat the flour with water over a hot fire until it forms into a play dough consistency, called “tô”. Of course, they won’t get far if they didn’t chop the wood and haul it on their heads to start that hot fire (along with the water that someone had to carry in). While they’re out, they gather leaves from the trees to make a sauce for the play dough. For the typical bush Burkinabe, that’s breakfast, lunch and dinner....if you have enough in the grain bins....if not, that’s just dinner.

So, in one paragraph, I’ve described what most people eat every single day in Burkina. Yet, there are volumes of books written about what we eat in the U.S. Each year, I find new restaurants and grocery stores. Dining out, I can hardly decide what to order. Friends laugh and tell the waitress, “She’s from Africa. She’s not used to having choices”. It’s true! But as long as I order a glass of tea or water, the waitress will keep filling it up for me while I decide. There’s always more tea and water, and there’s always plenty of ice! I love that. *We are so blessed.*



"To" with sauce

The next time you’re in the grocery store, try to imagine a Burkinabe standing there with you in the dog food aisle. So many choices – for the dog!?! Don’t dogs just eat the leftover scraps or scrounge in the streets for whatever they can find? Don’t worry - my dog is blessed. Every night my “guard”, Jean, or I walk into town



to buy a plate of “tô” just for him. I was so embarrassed the day the lady I buy it from found out the meal she’d worked so hard to prepare each day was for my dog. Oops.

I love cereal and am certain I will find bins full of my favorites in paradise – Froot loops, Cap’n crunch....what an assortment we have. So many choices for so many things – what kind of toilet paper (I don’t think the Burkinabe know we’re that particular about our toilet paper – embarrassing.); what kind of Kleenex (yes, also embarrassing); what kind of bread (is it possible to list them all), potatoes and butter and....all



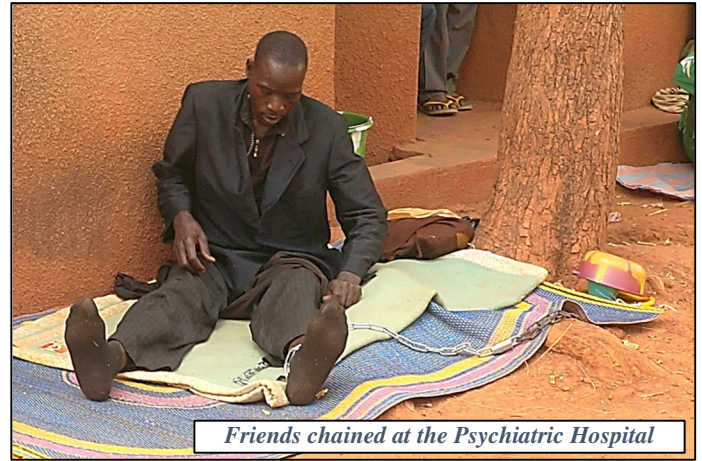
Local bakery!

overwhelming! Coffee? Oh how I love visiting the variety of coffee shops in the U.S.; but no risk of me becoming a coffee snob - I still love joining my Burkina neighbors for a cup of instant Nescafe with a tsp of sweetened condensed milk and local bread at the picnic table on the corner in Yako. However, after a couple weeks in the U.S., I too forget as some of that initial



bizarre emotion of naïve awe diminishes. I can’t say I’ve ever cared at all about my toilet paper and Kleenexes; but I do get frustrated when the caffeine-free diet coke isn’t working at QT! Geez – *we are so blessed.* Next time you’re at your local quick stop, count the number of drink choices – I did. That was after I made the decision about Styrofoam or plastic, and what kind of ice I wanted – cubed or crushed – incredible! I so appreciate my little freezer in Burkina so I can pamper myself with the luxury of ice. And, *I am so blessed* because I can buy a Coke or Fanta any time; but that’s because I can afford the .80 – most people can’t begin to imagine such an extravagance. I love splurging on our sponsored kids and students in Burkina – an eighty cent coke and a fifty cent apple – priceless!

I know medical care is a hot topic in the U.S., so I'm insane for even bringing it up; but may I say, *we are still blessed*. We still have more doctors and better trained, experienced and educated doctors than Burkina will ever see. I don't want you to feel sorry for Burkina – I'm just saying, *we are so blessed*. I remember being hospitalized in my little town of Yako with Typhoid and Malaria. Having previously visited the hospital on many occasions with our sick children, I'd always desperately avoided a hospital stay. However, I made the mistake of passing out in front of the doctor one day and had no choice. They carried me to my room, shooed the chickens and the goats away, found a sheet to put on the greasy mattress from the last patient, and the line of visitors began. Hooked up to an IV, I put off having to walk to the field outside to use one of those lovely W.C.s as long as possible. I had my Kleenexes and hand sanitizer, so it wasn't so bad. I'm not a "Survivor candidate" by any means; but God really does come through with His grace and I remember laughing during moments of that hospital stay. It's not so bad; but wow – when I visit a hospital room here with TVs and beds that go up and down and nurses that come around with a smile to see if you're comfortable, and food is delivered on a hot plate, and I push a button for pain meds - I have a whole new appreciation.



Friends chained at the Psychiatric Hospital

This next thought is morbid, I know; but one day I got to thinking - if my family and I were born in Burkina, most of us would have already passed away. My rheumatic fever, my sister's Meningitis, my parent's heart attacks – Burkina just doesn't have the means for the training or materials to treat these things with much success. My brother, Dave is bi-polar among other things. Do you know in Burkina, he would literally be chained to a tree in order to keep him from wandering off? Instead he is in such good hands in the U.S. in a beautiful home with loving medical personnel and three meals/day and activities and medications which can be adjusted as needed. Wow – *we are blessed*.



A few more things I take for granted: 1) The mailman who brings my mail right to my



My unpaved road after a rain

door; 2) Electricity and gas which not only provide consistent light, but hot water and heat when I'm cold, cold water and AC when I'm hot!; 3) The garbage man who has a fancy truck that comes to my house to pick up my garbage; 4) The machines that wash and dry laundry and dishes for me; 5) Free education and classrooms LOADED with materials; 6) Libraries full of thousands of books and videos that I can check out for FREE; 7) Beautiful beaches, snow-capped mountains, groomed biking and hiking trails, *paved roads (HUGE blessing in my eyes)*.....can you begin to

see where the people of Burkina are coming from? In their eyes, America may well be paradise. If you squint a bit, you may see it as well. If not, come on over for a visit. You will love your visit; but returning home, you will likely find yourself in the airport bathroom hugging the cleaning lady!



Laundry day

As a final note, can I just share – I think we all know that nowhere in "this" world can truly be paradise; but life on this earth is so very short compared to the true PARADISE which Jesus Christ has promised to those who believe, even the criminal on the cross beside him. I can only imagine what sort this criminal must have been, and yet he simply recognized Christ for who He was and for that he was promised, "You will be with me in Paradise". Surely I am no worse, no better than that criminal. I do recognize Christ as my Lord and Savior; therefore I can live on this earth with joy, looking forward to what lies ahead - eternity with HIM in paradise. Now *that* Paradise, I can't even begin to write about. In fact, it is written, aside from what God reveals that "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him." I can't even imagine it. God promised "He will wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain...." Now *that sounds like Paradise!*

A FEW UPDATES FROM BURKINA FASO OUTREACH

- You may have heard there was a “popular uprising” in November 2014, where the people quite convincingly “stormed the castle” and insisted the President of 27 years step down. Since then, Burkina is operating under an interim government as we await elections in October 2015. I like to say as far as “popular uprisings” go, this had to be the smoothest Africa has ever seen! Please pray that peace will continue. At the same time I continue to pray for peace to continue in our city of St. Louis.
- We have begun building the shelter on our ministry center property, which will allow for a variety of activities, as we wait for a government signature which is required before we can begin construction of the main building. We are so thankful for this property and the vision of its development; and ask for prayers for wisdom as we move forward.
- If I can brag on our BFO teachers, we had an incredible year. They are becoming so creative; they are learning to work with all levels of children in their classrooms; their students adore them, and are so well-behaved to the point that visiting teachers comment, “Your students are so well-behaved. What’s your secret?” Please pray they will continue to grow into the exceptional leaders and examples of great teaching which I know they are capable of becoming.
- We are filling a 40-ft shipping container to send to Burkina, full of school supplies and teaching materials; tables and chairs, shelving units and much more for the Ministry Center; children’s clothes; games, gifts, probably some of that fancy toilet paper (☺), food items (of course, lots of cereal).....just send me an email if you’re interested in seeing the list of materials we are collecting – lynn@bfoafrica.org.
- We are recreating our website – stay tuned for the new creation! Please pray for creativity and a professional, yet inspiring look which will draw new visitors to take a stroll.



Thank you for listening, and know that I am so very grateful for each and every one of you and all that you do for this ministry and the people of Burkina Faso. *I am truly blessed!* I pray the Lord will abundantly bless you in return,

Lynn