

Tiauna Webb, Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference

Pitt Alumni, 2017

African Studies Program Tribute to A Tribute to Dr. Joseph E.K. Adjaye

If I forget about the good

If I overlook the golden edges present in every day

If I fail to see the lining that splashes something of a silver tone on the horizon of right now

Ghana comes flooding in

And, I remember.

I'm taken back to classrooms that hug the Gulf of Guinea

And, I remember.

I'm taken back to language lessons shared over warm meals of Jollof, Fufu and Banku

And I remember.

I'm taken back to afternoons teetering on wooden benches under mahogany trees soaking up stories while time runs free

I remember.

I'm taken back to feel the winding red Ghanaian roads beneath my feet that paved my journey of discovery

And, I remember...

I remember the life learnings I collected alongside the Ghanaian women who allowed me in to trek their path

I remember gathering raw glimpses grace on the way to the family farm

I remember gaining a deeper understanding of humility on those electricity free evenings every time my hands joined in with others to prepare dinner and break bread

I remember learning empathy as we checked in on every neighbor on the way to church Sunday after Sunday

And I remember chiseling something formidable and unmovable off of the lived resilience I was able to witness in Ghana

If I forget about the good

Ghana comes rushing in

And my memories, the lessons learned inside and outside of the walls of the classroom and the growth that I departed with roots me and reminds me

If I forget what it feels like to be unashamedly myself and fully welcomed in a place

Perfectly secure in a space

Ghana comes rushing in

And, I remember

I remember the families who said yes, yes and yes again to my presence

I remember the sisters and brothers who made room for me in their homes and in their villages

I remember the mothers and aunties who clothed me on chilly nights with the warmth of their care

I remember the schools that welcomed my voice and challenged my creativity

I remember a country

That stood on tip toe anticipation

For my arrival

Because she had so much to teach me and her pedagogy was one rooted in love

If I forget about the necessity of my being

The importance of the humanity of my neighbor

And the ties that bind my heartbeat to the heartbeat of my sisters and brothers in the global community

Ghana washes over me

And I remember

I remember

Ghana taught me learning abroad is grounding

She taught me that we create deeper, stronger and more agile learning portfolios

When we let our courage take us to places where our everyday become our teachers

Where the homes, schools, the communities we abide, the market places we visit, and the festivals we are invited to

Become places where we participate in a sacred exchange

Or giving and receiving, of listening to and learning from

And years later

When the world is facing an unprecedented pandemic

And the political climate is ripe for disunity and division

Years later

When uncertainty boils over into anxiety

When towering waves of grief threaten to swallow us whole as we face multiple international travesties

Years later

When the unthinkable becomes our new normal

Years later in our quiet moments

When we thirst for something, anything, that might recalibrate, refocus and renew us

Our experiences from abroad will travel across oceans and will rest in the corners of our most troubled places to whisper lessons, and rekindle memories

Our experiences from abroad will pull up a chair in the midst of our unhinged sense of doubt and begin their transformative work

To remind us and root us

To shift us and sturdy us

To anchor us and restore us.

This is the gift of studying abroad

It is a once in a lifetime opportunity

To sign up for a reoccurring encounter

With the global community

That will etch reminders of what is possible in our hands on our heart

I am forever a student of Africa

And if I forget

Ghana, Tanzania, the DRC,

They return to me, and remind me

And for the simple reminders that mend the jagged edges of my joy in times of great challenge and greater opportunity

I am so very thankful