

Cheryl Cousins from the One World Centre talks to people about travel experiences with a difference...

Dave McLean is a well known figure in Peel through his work at the Centenary Centre and Cowley's Chemist. Dave retired from Cowleys in 2005... but, it seems that retirement from the world of medicine is not going to be that easy for him.

His love is music.

His dream in retirement was to discover and record world music, "I went to Africa to hear the music" he said, "... but most of the music I heard was in funerals" in Ghana life expectancy is 54 years.

Dave's trip to Ghana began with a meeting in 2006 when Father Andy Campbell came to visit Father Brian O Marey at St. Patricks in Peel. Father Andy has worked in Ghana for 30 years and offered Dave an invitation to visit him for 2 weeks to see the "real" Ghana away from the tourist eye. "I thought it would give me the time and introductions I needed to make contacts with people in the recording industry" he says "but I hadn't bargained for the fact that Andy may have had his own agenda!"

Dave stayed in the major port of Tema, living within the priests compound, and discovered the breadth of Andy's working day and his outreach into the local community. "Andy was like dynamite" Dave recalls "from first thing in the morning he was out and about, constantly on his mobile constantly organising, arranging, networking. He starts his day at 3.45am praying for 2 hours and then works until midnight, and he's been doing this out here for 30 years."

Among many other things, Andy's parish runs two schools, where a new computer lab is being built. A new rural medical centre has just opened, and Andy is the main fundraiser for two leprosaria and chairman of the Marie Lousie childrens hospital in Accra. Dave asked Andy how he raised all the money he needs and his answer was "I beg". Andy is presently "begging" for money to build an operating theatre in the hospital.

Dave found himself back in a world of medicine, but one quite unlike anything he had previously experienced.

"I found myself increasingly reflecting upon the distribution of wealth in this world;" says Dave "I thought of the value of the drugs that are returned each month at Chemists in our country, to be destroyed... and the lack of availability of drugs in places like Ghana. There are the drugs available for both Leprosy and HIV and AIDS, but it seems they are not available for the poor. "Due to a rigorous government education programme Ghana has a lower percentage of Aids patients than other African countries. World wide there are 14, 000 new infections of Aids every day, and Africa has approximately 11.6 million AIDS orphans. At the last year's G8 summit world leaders pledged to provide funds needed to provide the health services that would help prevent babies being born with HIV, an estimated £700 million. To date, not one penny of this money has been forth coming and babies are born daily with the virus.

Leprosy is a disease that needs access to one year of medication for a complete cure. In Ghana there are 2000 uncured lepers. The World Health Organisation has committed to free health care for leprosy patients anywhere in the world, but because leprosy still carries such social stigma those with the disease are constantly overlooked on any government's priority list. Lepers are still marginalised and, like other marginalised people, it is only the support of pressure groups that will help them raise their status in their society.

For Dave one personal incident spoke more than pages of facts and figures; on entering the LEPROSARIUM he came face to face with PHILOMENA, who had a large tumour in her mouth. The look of pain in her eyes was the same that Dave had seen in his mothers eyes seven years before, when she

was fighting oral cancer. The difference was that Philomena had no chance of finding the £400 she needed for an operation which is more than a years wages for many people.

I can't walk away from it "says Dave" I have developed a huge attachment for this part of Africa, my time there has made me evaluate who I am... it puts life into a different perspective., I met the poorest of the poor and yet received more genuine hospitality in my two weeks there than I experienced in years in the UK. The song "I started out with nothing and I've got most of it left", seemed to keep returning to my mind.

"My fascination for Africa was originally through its music, as a young boy Hendrix and John Mayall introduced me to the blues; at University I began questioning where it had come from, and, as I stood at the Cape Coast where the slaves had been carolled before they were sent off to work in the colonies, and filled with the awareness of what I had experienced in my brief glimpse of this country, I came to understand the soul in their music."

Dave's dream and vision have grown; he still hopes to set up a recording studio, and is now working in partnership with Edusei from Ghana in developing something that will be commercially operable; but, he is also involved in helping to raise the funds that will bring the much needed medication to the people who don't have access to a National Health system. Since February this year St. Patricks in Peel have already raised over £5000 to help in the continuation of the work that is helping others who are literally dying for access to the right drugs.

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