

## How Things Bring Us to Change for the Better

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Written in Côte d'Ivoire more than thirty years ago



*1978: The original three missionaries to Dahomey (Benin) with early members. Kathy is in the middle*

In America it is almost considered impolite to eat at a stranger's house on the first visit. In Africa, however, if someone visits you, you must always invite them to eat; and if you visit them and refuse their invitation, it is a gross insult. Everything is so different. For example, one should never receive anything with the left hand. And if you make mistakes, even though it is in complete ignorance or innocence, the people are highly insulted and don't even try to understand that you just did not know.

The only answer was to try to become sensitive, to ask questions, to realize that they also have a tradition, a culture, and a way of doing things which was different from mine, but just as valuable and to be respected. You begin to open up. You're forced to open up if you want to communicate with the people. And you discover that another world exists, quite different from your own. You discover how God has also been guiding these people, teaching them, loving them. And you begin to change.

I must admit, in the beginning I really wished that I could return to America one day. I longed for the people I loved, the language and culture and tradition that I understood. But once I began to open up, once I began to discover this new world of Africans -- not to mention the new world of Japanese and Germans

-- I also found that I never wanted to return to America for good. To go on to another new world, yes. That I could imagine one day. But to return to my old ways of thinking, of acting, of loving -- no. I never wanted to go back to that again.



*1987: Kathy with other missionary families and an increasing number of church members*

It took a long time to understand African tradition and culture and an even longer time to respect it. But I do respect it today, and more than respect, I can honestly say I love it. I love the people -- their languages, their culture, their tradition, their heart. The world is full of wonderful people, and I never knew it. How lucky we missionaries are to have had these experiences. If I think of it, my eyes fill with tears of gratitude to Heavenly Father and True Parents. I made so many mistakes and, believe me, I suffered from them. But each pain, each tear, each suffering is golden, really golden.

To change a person is not an easy thing. How well True Father must know that. He tries and tries to teach and train us. But we are so immovable. Yet in a foreign mission something wonderful happens. You are forced to change, just to survive. You are forced to open up, discover new people, learn how to love, even to be accused and then overcome your fallen nature. It's hard, really hard, but it's so very wonderful! It is a long road to walk, so much more to change, to restore. But the march has begun and even though we're so tiny in stature compared to what we should be, one day we'll make it. Of that I am really sure.