

# The Bawa Health Initiative

P.O. Box 432 Wallingford CT 06492

December 2011 Newsletter

## A Christmas Story

Dear Friends:

I write this letter to send my most sincere wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

So often, I focus solely on the need for more funds for our organization, but I forget to stop to give thanks for all that has been accomplished. Let me take the time to do this now.

This has been a very exciting year for the Bawa Health Initiative. Bed nets have been replaced. Anti-helminth treatment has progressed on schedule. And, the water program in Bawa and surrounding villages is nearing completion. All of this work has been enabled by your sustained generosity. To our delight, even during these difficult economic times, donor support for BHI remains strong.

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## On the Ground, Ready for Impact

Our BHI volunteer team travelled to Bawa in June of 2010 to complete the follow-up health survey. We found that the incidence of anemia and waterborne disease decreased dramatically since the beginning of our initiatives. Your generosity has already had a huge impact. Now, we're ready for the next steps.

The villagers are eager to get the clinic up and running, and with their help, we are preparing to make this a reality. Sylvain, our field coordinator, told us that Bawa is renowned for its efforts, and the villagers are very happy and proud.

Photo: Dennis, Jeanette, Sam, Emma, Kate, Sylvain, and Maggie in Dschang

## Update



### **BAWA-NKA WATER FILTERS:**

BHI has just provided funds for materials to build enough water filters for each family compound in the village of Bawa-Nka.



### **REPLACEMENT OF BED NETS:**

Members of the village health committee (VHC) prepare for distribution of new bed nets to Bawa, Nloh, and Bawa-Nka.



### **RE-DESIGNED WEB SITE:**

We are launching our revamped Web site in January 2012. See <http://www.bawahealth.org> for our exciting new Web presence.

My family has found our work in Bawa to be one of the most transformative experiences of our lives. For me it has given new and deeper meaning to Christmas, enabling me to see the true gifts that the season. For Kristen, seeing the need of the mothers and children solidified her resolve to see this project succeed, and sparked new ideas that will have a positive impact there. Our girls compare most of their daily experiences here in the U.S. to that of their peers in Bawa. They feel thankful, discomfited, and determined, all at the same time.

In reflection, the most meaningful Christmas celebration that I have ever experienced occurred in Bawa in 2007. I was there with our president Margaret Jay just a few days before Christmas. One family in Bawa is the nearest neighbor to the BHI work site--Gilbert, his wife Marie, and their children. Over the years I have developed a particularly close relationship to this impoverished yet generous family.

The weekend before we left, we wanted to visit them to celebrate Christmas. When we arrived at their house on the night before we were to depart, the house was dark (there is no electricity), but warm and cheerful. It was lit by the small fire in the middle of the "living room" floor and by a kerosene lantern on the only table in the house. The family was gathered around the fire, quietly talking to one another. To my surprise, Gilbert had bought 2 bottles of beer to share. Marie had prepared a pot of hard-boiled eggs. This humble meal was truly a feast in my eyes. This family had probably spent every penny they owned to welcome us so lovingly.

I will never forget sitting there by the firelight in that mud-brick house with my beautiful new-found family. I thought to myself how similar this scene may have been to that in another dark, humble dwelling more than 2,000 years ago. God truly speaks to us in unique and unexpected ways. Thanks to this one evening in Bawa, Christmas will never be the same for me again.

This year we have decided to focus on giving alternative gifts for Christmas presents. For Kristen, I am sending money to support Gilbert's family with food and money for their children to attend school. For me, she is buying rice to be given to the village health committee. For Maggie, we are sending money to help support the family of a little friend that she met who is suffering from pediatric AIDS. For Kate and Emma, we are sending money to help provide food to children of the poorest families in the area. On behalf of our parents and siblings, we are making a donation to support the construction and installation of sanitary latrines in Bawa and surrounding villages. In honor of you, our BHI family, we are sending money to provide a community Christmas feast for the villagers. While the gifts that we are giving our family this year are going to be small, you can see that we are planning a most extravagant holiday!

I have two favors to ask of you, the friends of BHI, during this holiday season and the upcoming year:

★ As you sit down with your family and friends at your holiday celebration please offer a prayer of thanks for all the blessings that BHI and the people of Bawa have received over the past 6 years, and pray for our continued success and progress.

★ Please remember the people of Bawa in the course of your holiday giving and throughout the upcoming year. Your patience is being rewarded; we are beginning to see the fruits of our labor, and we are gaining momentum.

Once again, thank you for all that you have made possible. Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays, and Happy New Year.

With Love and Gratitude,

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The Bawa Health Initiative (BHI) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization founded in 2005 by Dennis Richardson, Ph.D. and Blaise Dondji, Ph.D. (a native of Bawa). Our mission is to improve the health of children and families in Bawa and surrounding villages in Cameroon, West Africa by addressing vital public health issues--safe water, malaria, HIV/AIDS, treatment of parasite infection, health and hygiene education, recruitment and training of Village Health Committees (VHCs) and socio-economic improvements--and by building, equipping, and staffing a **primary health clinic** and **health education resource center**.