

# Second Glance

By Viva Richmond Graham

## OPERATION CROSSROADS AFRICA (First of Three Parts)

"I'm very happy! Everything is different here, but I love it!" — Julie Bradford.

Did you know that one of our Belleville girls spent this summer in Africa? To bridge the gap between us and remote peoples was none other than Julie, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. G. A. Bradford, 298 Albert Street.

She was moved by "the appearance of concrete possibilities" for real action, when Dr. James H. Robinson, the founder of Operation Crossroads Africa spoke at Western University (where Julie was majoring in French, and recently graduated) to explain:

"It is a work-camp-study seminar, friendship and aid program (privately and voluntarily organized) which takes students, teachers, professors and other specialists to countries in Africa for short-term programs during the summer."

"This group and this effort really were the progenitors of the Peace Corps..." President John F. Kennedy admitted, and to date, over 1,000 persons have participated from all parts of North and South America, since its inception in 1957, when just 60 students and a staff of 12 teachers who directed the groups, made a very large and significant impact upon the African continent."

Julie sought and successfully met the high selective standards required to become a participant in this project and went to the African French-speaking country — Dahomey, with a group from the United States and Canada.

These facts, as well as many more detailed ones, are the roots from which Julie's experience flowered and we are privileged to share glimpses of it through letters to her family, with the kind permission of all concerned:

June 26, 1965: "We arrived in Lagos, after a smooth flight from New York. Stopped for an hour in Dakar, Senegal and Abidjam, Ivory Coast, but weren't out of the Air Terminal.

Our first view of Africa was one of an arid, flat country with miles and miles of sand. As we travelled east, we saw more greenery and at Abidjam the aerial view revealed thick, green forest with the occasional clearing here and there where villages were established. The few roads could be easily detected, as they appeared as long snakes winding their way through the forests.

Also we were able to see a distinct system of lagoons which extend from a few miles in off the coast to the edge of the woodlands. This area is similar to Dahomey."

### FORM OF TRANSPORTATION

June 28: "We drove from Lagos to Porto Novo yesterday on a "Mammy Wagon" a bus-type vehicle, and we were met by a member of the United States Information Service, who took us to our residence in a Girls' Secondary School in Porto Novo. We are delighted with our accommodations. We have a large "dorm" for the girls. On the opposite side of the building, another one for the boys is located. We have our own washrooms; sheets are supplied and we don't even need to use sleeping bags.

There is someone at the school who will wash and iron for us, and we can hire a cook if we so desire and our leader seems to think that it would be a good idea. So we are most comfortable.

Our project — (we are building a maternity clinic) — is located at the village of Avrankou, five miles away. We'll go to the work site in an army truck. Five African students will be working full time with us. At least five other young people will come each day from one of the surrounding towns — (there are 60 or more of them) and each wants to be represented. Many whom we met are trying to get the time off work so that they can come and help us. We start on Thursday. Everything is so different here, but I love it.

July 4: "We have not yet started working. On Thursday we went to Avrankou, where we'll be building the clinic, and in typical Dahomian tradition, the materials had been delayed and we were unable to start.

However, we were warmly welcomed. All the villagers came to the sub-prefect's office and, after being told who we were and why we had come, they led us into the centre of town, chanting and dancing all the time. We passed the site of our project and at this place the sub-prefect explained to his people that "they were to help us and not to be lazy; that we were counting on them as much

as they were counting on us." They clapped and cheered and seemed satisfied. We were then taken on a tour of a palm-oil factory which was most interesting, for they obtain many products from this tree, which is the wealth of the country.

Following this we were taken to the home of the wealthiest and most important chief in Avrankou. He received us in a large room and we sat in a big circle around him and drank youki soda, the local soft drink.

The highlight of this visit was his presentation of two live turkeys which we brought back with us and which our cook killed, plucked, cleaned and cooked.

I have been acting as translator and so the chief, who speaks no French, spoke his dialect, which was translated into French by one of his sons, I then translated this into English for our group. When we thanked him the procedure was reversed: English - French - dialect.

### ENJOYS SIGHT-SEEING

We have done much sight-seeing. We visited an Agricultural School which is organized by the Scouts. Young boys are trained here for a year and then sent to work on farms. Scouting is well developed here, but unlike Canadian groups, their main purpose seems to be to train young boys in Animal Husbandry and Farming.

Saturday we were invited to a play presented by a local group and following this, there was a dance. The play was the story of the dethroning of an ancient king and it was interpreted by folk-songs and dances.

I am doing as much as I can. I try to take advantage of every opportunity to talk with people, to walk in the streets, to be doing something. I feel I am accomplishing something. What? — in little ways it is easy to bring joy to the people here — a smile, and "bonjour" is worth a million dollars. I think teaching here would be most rewarding.

We visited the father of the Dahomian Attache to Washington. We had met this boy at orientation in New Jersey before coming here and it was hard to imagine him living in the mud hut which had been his home