

## The sweet music of service

*The greatest adventure of my life — helping children in Ghana*

BY ERIN FRYE ('07)

I am fully addicted to and have fallen in love with the beautiful people and culture of the Republic of Ghana, Africa. After completing two volunteer trips to this African nation, I have learned that music is a language that everyone speaks and can understand.

After graduating from JMU, I worked as a consultant for CapTech Ventures. Soon, I felt a calling to leave my job and dive into a new culture. I did a little research, and in June 2008, with the help of a program called Cross Cultural Solutions, I bought a plane ticket, took my savings, grabbed my guitar and headed for Ghana.

I've always been involved in volunteer work, prison ministry, playing music at local soup kitchens, etc., but I really wanted to let go of my earthly possessions, take on a challenge and make myself *uncomfortable*.

That is when you grow the most.

It is much easier to look away from the painful reality of poverty in our own communities, let alone in Third World countries, rather than face it and do something. My first assignment in Ghana was in the deprived village of Hohoe, four hours from the capital, Accra. I used my voice and my guitar to teach the children songs. I taught them everything from Bob Marley to American folk songs and old hymns. I also brought supplies and taught the children how to make their own rhythm instruments. Most of the Hohoe children I met were innately rhythmic and musical. They often taught me new songs. What I received on this trip was incredible; the children blessed me in ways I could never imagine. They showed me what true faith, joy and love look like.

In June 2010, I returned to Ghana with my whole family and a few friends to work in the Hohoe Christian Orphanage ([www.hohoeorphanage.org](http://www.hohoeorphanage.org)). We taught art, English and music; led morning worship, and coached soccer. We brought 16 suitcases full of donations, including new soccer uniforms, cleats, toothbrushes, clothes, underwear and more. Children in Ghana have few worldly possessions, but they find joy and contentment in everything.

During our 2010 trip, South Africa was hosting the FIFA World Cup Soccer Championship. It was incredible to be in Ghana and watch their soccer team beat the U.S. team. The national pride was palpable in the streets and visible on the children's faces. I have never witnessed anything like that.

This visit was the greatest adventure of my life. I loved spending it with the children and learning about their culture. I woke

up every morning to the sound of children singing old hymns and chanting, "Wake up Sister Erin, come and play." The most impactful memory is a conversation I had with a little girl named Kafui. She was 13 and had many brothers and sisters, three of whom lived at the orphanage. One morning Kafui and I and a few other children shared a conversation during breakfast. U.S. families were adopting Kafui's three younger siblings, and she was not chosen to go. I asked her how she felt about her siblings leaving. I wondered if she was feeling pain, anxiety or loneliness.

Kafui said, "I'm sad that they are leaving, but God has watched over me so far in my life, and He isn't going to leave me now." I had no words, just tears.

Since I have been home in Virginia my wheels have been spinning non-stop with thoughts of the children. Visiting for two weeks was not nearly enough, and my desire to return is burning. I have a calling to do more than volunteer, and I'm connecting with the non-profit, Orphans' Heroes ([www.orphansheroes.com](http://www.orphansheroes.com)). This group advocates for orphans around the globe. The founder, Jennifer Millett-Barrett, has become a significant friend and mentor in my life. Orphans' Heroes assists fundraising efforts, protects and saves children from child trafficking, and promotes sponsorship opportunities for abandoned children.

I plan to return to Africa in 2012 to help Orphans' Heroes build awareness about child trafficking and the adoption process in Kenya or Ghana. I also want to help research slave labor. Orphans' Heroes is building a new school in Accra

to house young female sex trafficking victims, and I want to help. I have never felt a passion like I feel for the people of Ghana. What I experienced there will never leave my heart and mind. I feel a compelling charge to make a difference; it's worth everything. **M**



After two volunteer trips to help orphans in Ghana, Erin Frye ('07) says she is addicted to the beautiful people and culture. She is planning a third trip in 2012.



**About the Author** Erin N. Frye ('07) earned a B.A. in communications with a concentration in public relations. She is director of recruitment for Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Greater Richmond & Tri-Cities area of Virginia. She also is a Big Sister and sings and plays guitar with Richmond-based band Brave Bellwether. Frye was a team leader for the Madison Class Challenge and an officer in the JMU chapter of the Association for Women in Communication. She was a Big Sister through the Harrisonburg/Rockingham chapter and served as a JMU first year orientation guide and freshman orientation guide twice. She also was a member of the a cappella group Note-oriety.