

## UNDER THE ALMOND TREE

*Treating malaria with homeopathy in Ghana*

by Katherine Jamieson

One day, during her Peace Corps service in Burkina Faso (83-86), a soothsayer paid a visit to one of Adjoa Margaret Stack's neighbors. After scattering cowry shells on the ground to see her future, he reported that the shells also had a message for a white lady who lived in the courtyard. The soothsayer told Adjoa that her destiny was to be a healer. "I had no idea what he was talking about," says Adjoa, who holds a degree in business and was teaching English at a university. Though she says his prediction was "always in the back of my mind," she wouldn't fully understand its meaning for twenty-five years.

Adjoa stayed in Burkina Faso after her service ended, living with Ghanaian women in the capital city and doing odd jobs. Complaining that her given name "put their tongue in a knot," they renamed her "Adjoa," meaning a child born on a Monday. Adjoa says the name tied her to the women, and she kept in touch with them for decades, even after they went home to Ghana.

After returning to the States, Adjoa used her background in econometrics and computers to help nonprofits in New York City develop databases to track their work with AIDS patients. As a caretaker for friends dying of AIDS, she saw very quickly the limitations of conventional medicine. "Back then, it seemed like anyone who started on AZT died quickly. In my group of friends, we were encouraging people to stay away from hospitals," she says. Adjoa sought out alternative remedies, including nutrition and herbs, as more humane treatments. "My love for getting healing going in a public health setting started in New York City," she says.

Adjoa's introduction to homeopathy didn't come until she returned home



Dosing a client at the Senya Clinic.

to San Francisco to tend to her dying father. A friend gave her a book on the practice, and she was intrigued by its promise of effective and natural treatments, with no side effects. It was only after enrolling in a four-year program at the Institute of Classical Homeopathy, though, that she realized the connections between her work in Africa and this unique branch of medicine.

Homeopathy is a holistic system of healing, which was developed by Samuel Hahnemann, a German physician who practiced in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Unimpressed with the medical science of the time, which depended on high doses of toxic drugs, bloodletting, and surgery, Hahnemann looked for alternative ways to treat his patients. After coming across an article about how Peruvian bark cures malaria, he started

ingesting the bark, and symptoms of malaria manifested in his body. This initial discovery led him to develop the central principle of homeopathy that "like cures like": substances that produce symptoms of a disease in a healthy person can also be used to treat people suffering from that disease. Hahnemann's first remedy was formulated to treat malaria.

After graduating from the Institute, Adjoa began to practice homeopathy in San Francisco, but the idea of working in the developing world stuck with her. In Burkina Faso she had seen how malaria undercuts people's lives, leading to chronic illness and limited vitality. Worldwide, malaria affects about half a billion people, killing roughly 1 million, most of whom are children under age five. Sub-Saharan Africa, where Ghana is located, is one of the most severely impacted areas.

