

WHEELCHAIRS for NIGERIA

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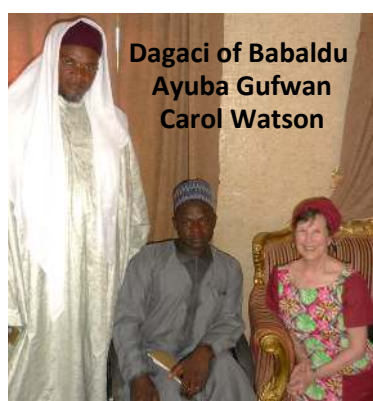
Carol Watson, CPA, Ron Rice's sister, spent 3 weeks in Nigeria in July, her 6th trip, overseeing the accounting of the wheelchair program. Here is her report of 2 wheelchair presentations she attended at Babaldu, Jigawa State.

NIGERIAN CHIEF ASTONISHED AT NEED

The Dagaci (chief) of Babaldu had told Ayuba he thought there were about 10 or 12 disabled needing wheelchairs in his "kingdom," so he was very surprised when he was handed a list of 30 recipients for the day's ceremony. That sparked a discussion among the men sitting on the carpet. Two little boys sitting right there were not on the list. A ward chief reported he had 15 disabled in his area not on the list needing wheelchairs. Then we learned there were another 15 waiting outside, hopeful, not on the list.

Well-meaning though he was, the chief had no idea. Disabled people are simply not seen. They are hidden away, either from shame, or because they have no way to go anywhere other than crawl.

The next week we came back with 80 more wheelchairs. I had the privilege of seeing—on your behalf—those 110 good people and lovely children, whose difficult lives are now made better because of your generous donations to this effort. We can't thank you enough.





The next Saturday, the 80 wheelchairs were lined up on a slope, dignitaries and recipients in front and up behind a crowd of children. It was the best show in town.

A little boy, about 10, crawled out to receive his wheelchair when his name was called, a million dollar smile spread across his face. He was wearing a school uniform. As he climbed onto his wheelchair, a loud CHEER went up from the gallery of children. A dozen little boys, all wearing the same uniform, were waving and cheering like mad. And when the little boy started pedaling through the crowd, nearing running people down in his excitement, his classmates and the other children took off after him, yelling and waving.

As I think about it now, I'm teary-eyed. Imagine that little boy, always sitting on the sidelines while his friends played soccer or ran around. Now he's got something incredibly cool and useful, something none of his class mates has: WHEELS!



50 WHEELCHAIRS PRESENTED AT THE PALACE OF THE EMIR OF KEFFI





His Royal Highness, Dr. Alhafi Shehu Chindu Yamusa Ph.D., Emir of Keffi, Nasarawa State, hosted this presentation on July 16th. He had about 12 palace guards gathered around him, dressed in traditional green and red. One of them carried a huge umbrella-parasol with long silky fringe to protect the Emir from the sun, that billowed in the breeze as they walked along. And there was a praise-singer, calling out his praises as he walked from the palace to the dais. I was interviewed by newspaper and radio before he appeared. And then I was escorted up the stairs, on a beautiful Persian carpet, to sit in honor at his side. With my sandals still on, a true honor. Elders and lesser chiefs were seated off to one side.

In Nigeria, democracy is an overlay to a population already made up of tribes. Everyone is a tribe member with a strong loyalty. Underneath the democratic system with states, voting, governors and representative assemblies, are all the tribes. The tribes have their traditions and chiefs—who technically have no political power but lots of patronage power, similar to the Queen of England. There are maybe 100 top-level chiefs in Nigeria—called Emirs in the middle-belt and north.





THANK YOU FOR YOUR GIFTS TO WHEELCHAIRS FOR NIGERIA

Over 18,000 wheelchairs have been built and donated so far, but the need is huge. A \$150 wheelchair transforms a life! Send your tax-deductible donations to 1542 Palm Ave SW, Seattle WA 98116, or give online at www.WheelchairsforNigeria.org.



One morning, we passed this woman, pedaling slowly to her workplace. Ayuba said that she used to braid hair, but now was able to travel to a new job (her two children dutifully holding on to the back of her wheelchair) where she was learning a better-paying skill.



At the deaf school, I was greeted enthusiastically – but oh! how I wished I understood more of what they were telling me. Look at those hands! We delivered more school desks – but best of all, more food. The principal said they had served the last of their rice that very day.