

Stiftung Lotti Latrous
Rämistrasse 5
CH 8001 Zürich

Telefon +41 43 243 67 48
info@lottilatrous.ch
www.lottilatrous.ch

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Dear Sponsors,

With all my heart I hope that you are well and that you have all been spared from the virus. Everyone is doing well in Grand-Bassam. The big ones have passed their graduation or their apprenticeship exams. Eight of them will be leaving to attend universities and other higher education establishments, as well as a naval academic institute to become an officer or a sailor. Each of them has made their choice and they are looking forward to starting their studies. This means a big step into their future, and at the same time, space is created again for others who need our help. And yes, Corona is still with us, but we have learned to live with it and we protect ourselves. In addition, we were able to sponsor the enrolment of 800 children in school, as we do every year.

Today I would like to tell you about Awa. The story happened a few years ago, but ... well, read it for yourself:

One day my phone rang. "Good morning, Madame Lotti, this is the University Hospital of Treichville." Treichville is a town in the Abidjan district. I asked why they were calling me. The answer was long: "Madame Lotti, we have a problem. An old, somewhat crazy woman was brought to us by the fire brigade. She apparently has no relatives, probably lives on the street, has no money and all she seems to know is that her name is Awa. She was hit by a car and the driver just left her there. People who saw this then called the fire brigade. She probably has a broken leg, but without payment we cannot help her. Could you maybe take care of her?" An hour later I was on the spot and heard clamouring and screaming from far away. And then I was standing in front of Awa. She was lying down - dressed in rags - on a straw mat in the entrance in front of the emergency. She was very skinny. And furious. Everyone around her was making fun of her, which of course enraged her even more.

I sat down next to her on the floor and waited until she calmed down - which was quickly the case as soon as the others had left. I slipped her some biscuits I found in my bag and she devoured them with a ravenous appetite. She kept pointing at her leg. Her eyes were very sad, her fingernails ten centimetres long and her hair in a tangled state and full of lice, the reason why she scratched herself incessantly. What a misery, I thought to myself.

She obviously did not understand French, but a cleaning lady at the hospital spoke her language and was able to interpret between Awa and me. She lived on the street, Awa told me. How old was she, I asked. She just looked at me and laughed. I let her know that I would take care of her leg and take her to my place, a nice house with lots of food. She liked that. I put money on the table and she was x-rayed, her leg had a slight fissured bone and had to be casted. After I had paid for that too, we drove together to our hospice, which was still in Adjouffou at that time. We washed her, gave her clean clothes and applied a shampoo against lice to her hair. She grumbled a bit, but I think she understood that we wanted to help her. Then we put her in a bed and brought her a good meal, and I was amazed at how quickly the empty plate returned to the kitchen.

Half an hour later, I heard screams from her room. I found Awa in front of another patient's bed. Apparently she had "stolen" their food, as well as all the food that had been on the bedside table. I was horrified to see that she was standing on her cast and limping back and forth between her bed and the neighbouring beds, gathering up everything she could lay her hands on and then hiding the food under her pillow. The outrage was understandably great.



They were all shouting at each other and I had to persuade the clamouring and very angry Awa to leave the room with me so that the other women, who were shouting savagely at her, could calm down and we could clean everything. I put Awa in a wheelchair and took her for a few laps around the courtyard, which she seemed to enjoy. Then I called Maryam, who translated between Awa and me. I said, "Awa, you don't have to steal anything here, there is enough food for everyone all day long!" Then she told me about her long years on the street, that her family had put her on the street because she was a bit crazy, and she had wandered from far away to Abidjan. She didn't know her surname, didn't know where her village was, she only knew that she had no children and was alone. I felt so sorry for her, having to beg on the streets without dignity, being laughed at and ridiculed, because in

Africa, people make fun of those who are a little different from the norm. I managed to calm her down further and she promised to leave her roommates alone from now on.

After two weeks, her cast was broken and dirty. No wonder, she walked around on it all day. By now, it was no longer to get food for herself, but to help us a little everywhere. I took Awa to Treichville for a check-up, where they took off her plaster cast and said that she would probably limp a bit for the rest of her life, but that was surely no problem, she was already old! And so she lived with us from then on. She gained weight, became a radiant woman, laughed a lot, enjoyed everything. She had become a part of our life. Once I saw her limping across the yard with her pillow under her arm. "Awa, where are you going?" She pointed to our morgue and said to me, "There's often no one in there, just here and there, I want that room now, I'll have my peace there!" I explained the situation to her and she made a retreat.

A few days later, old Oumar was brought to us. He lived - dirty and undignified - in a ditch behind a bush, just like Awa had recently. And - he became her friend. They spoke the same language, and both were happy, and we were happy to see them like that. He died before her, because he was sick, but he spent some wonderful moments with us.



Lotti with Awa and Oumar

And Awa? Awa simply did not wake up one morning. Her heart - broken as it was after Oumar's death - had simply stopped beating. We missed her very much, our Awa, who had lived with us for over a year. And when I said goodbye to her, I promised that one day there would be a place for people like her. For people who suffer from chronic diseases, who are invalids, blind or ill. A village for people who have lost their dignity but still are lovable. I often explain to our children: "Lovable does not mean friendly or nice, but it means being worthy of being loved."

And now, now our village is built. It is managed by the family of the village; Hervé and Joëlle Wahi and their six children. The eldest daughter is sixteen and the youngest, twins, are three years old. I met Hervé when he brought us his very sick twins. He had no money and lived 110 kilometres from us in extreme poverty. He had studied law for two years, but then had to quit because there was no money left. To feed his family, he did many different odd jobs. But he could work as much as he wanted, they did not have enough to eat and the children were not well at all.



The Wahi Family

One of their sons suffered from a very severe malformation of the colon and needed surgery. We organised everything and Joëlle accompanied her little one to the hospital while Hervé took care of the rest of the children. He helped us a lot during this time and especially during the quarantine. The whole family has experienced abject poverty, and the fact that they are now part of our extended family is like a miracle for them. So grateful, humble, helpful and happy - I know that I have not only found new co-workers, but friends.



In the village



Dear Sponsors, I cannot tell you how grateful I am for your help and support. Thanks to you we were able to build this village and close the circle, we have babies, children, patients and now a dignified place for many old sick people. God bless you.

With my most respectful greetings,

Lotti Latrous