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Peace Corps Writers



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Mr. Akoho and Mr. Akanga Say Goodbye

Although the Malagasy people have a wonderful gift for expressing themselves verbally, I heard very few folk tales while I was in Madagascar. I heard this particular story from a farmer and friend of mine in the arid region of the southwest, after he asked me if I knew why the akoho (chicken) was a domesticated animal. Besides explaining the different fortunes of the akoho and the akanga (pheasant), this tale teaches a strong moral lesson about thievery and greed. I like to believe that there are many more stories of Malagasy lore. Maybe it was just my fault for not listening
— Rob Roberts (Madagascar 1999–01)

ONE DAY TWO FRIENDS MET on a path in the forest. “Well, hello, Mr. Akoho!” said the first. “Hello, Mr. Akanga!” replied the other. They were both very excited for they had not seen each other in quite some time.

Mr. Akoho and Mr. Akanga sat down to reminisce. They had grown up together and shared many childhood adventures. “Do you remember the

time we snuck into the farmer's hut and took some of his corn?" laughed Mr. Akanga. "He nearly hit you with his slingshot!"

"I sure do," chuckled Mr. Akoho, who thought of all the more dangerous adventures he'd had since then. "Hey, I've been traveling all morning without breakfast," he said. "Shall we go and pay the farmer another visit?"

Mr. Akoho and Mr. Akanga walked to the edge of the forest and peered through the bushes on the edge of the farmer's land. No one was there.

"Maybe the farmer and his family have gone to work in the fields," said Mr. Akoho. "Let's go."

They tiptoed towards the farmer's hut and carefully peeked inside. No one was there either. "Quickly," whispered Mr. Akanga, afraid that the farmer might be nearby.

They looked on the table, searched the floor, and poked their heads under the bed but found nothing. "I'm starving," said Mr. Akoho. "Let's check that other hut as well."

They raced across the yard to the door of the other dwelling. "Look!" cried Mr. Akanga, who spotted a mound of sweet potatoes piled high in the corner. "What should we do?" he asked, knowing that sweet potatoes were very heavy to carry but also very delicious.

"I'm going to take two of those big ones home and eat until I'm full as the farmer's pig," said Mr. Akoho. He inspected each of the sweet potatoes, arranging them in a line from biggest to smallest. "I'm not leaving until I find the two biggest ones," he bragged.

"Not me," replied Mr. Akanga, "I'm going to take some of those little ones and get out of here." He flew away, carrying a few small sweet potatoes from the end of the line. He landed near the edge of the forest and hid, waiting for Mr. Akoho to follow.

Meanwhile, the farmer returned. He was moving slowly, tired after a long day tending to his fields of beans and corn. Suddenly, he dropped his shovel and started running towards the hut after seeing the thieves' tracks in the sand.

Mr. Akanga saw the farmer from his hideout deep in the bushes. "Run, Mr. Akoho!" he pleaded.

“The farmer is coming!”

Mr. Akoho heard his friend’s warning and started to leave. He was dragging two giant sweet potatoes behind him when the farmer caught him coming out of the hut. The farmer grabbed him by the neck before he could fly away. “Help!” screamed Mr. Akoho, as the farmer carried him away. No one was there to hear his cry. Mr. Akanga had already retreated to safety far in the forest.

There are days when Mr. Akanga misses his friend, and he will venture down to the edge of the forest to see him. Mr. Akoho is still there, but he is now old and lazy. The farmer feeds him a handful of rice or corn everyday and lets him roam free around the yard, because Mr. Akoho no longer tries to escape.

From his old hideout, Mr. Akanga always thinks of his happy childhood with Mr. Akoho and regrets their last adventure together. He still waves to his friend every time he visits, although he knows that Mr. Akoho has stopped waving back.

Rob Roberts was a beekeeper, a farmer, an environmental education teacher and a World Wildlife Fund technician in St. Augustin, Madagascar. He wrote a monthly column about his Peace Corps service in North Penn Life and has been published by Southern Cross Magazine. He recently returned to the east coast after five months spent traveling in the Rocky Mountains and now resides in Arlington, Virginia.

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