

Emmanuel Ofosu Yeboah

If you are born disabled in Ghana, West Africa, you are likely to be poisoned or left to die. If you are not poisoned or left for dead, you're likely to be hidden away. If you're not hidden, you will most likely spend your lifetime begging on the streets. Of the twenty million people in Ghana, two million are disabled. One of them, Emmanuel Ofosu Yeboah, born with a severely deformed right leg, has a mission to change the destiny of the disabled in Ghana forever.

Emmanuel is the subject of the documentary film *Emmanuel's Gift* (narrated by Oprah Winfrey), a Lookalike Productions film directed by Lisa Lax and Nancy Stern. Emmanuel has dedicated his life to changing the perception and treatment of the disabled in his homeland. To focus the attention of his countrymen on this issue, Emmanuel decided to ride a bike across Ghana. Though he'd mastered pedaling with only one leg, there was another obstacle: he didn't own a bike. He sought out the Challenged Athletes Foundation in the United States. In July 2002, with a bicycle provided by the CAF, Emmanuel embarked on his journey, which was documented in newspapers and on the radio. By the time he reached his destination, Emmanuel was a national hero. He was 25.

One year later, the CAF flew Emmanuel to San Diego to compete in a triathlon. Arriving with two crutches under his arms and three dollars in his pocket, he rode a 56-mile bike segment as part of a relay team. Doctors at Loma Linda Medical Center evaluated Emmanuel and determined that his leg could be partially amputated and fit for a prosthetic that would free him of his crutches. In April 2003, Emmanuel was given a brand new life.

Emmanuel has since turned his focus toward improving the lives of Ghana's many disabled citizens. In April 2004, at an unprecedented ceremony at the King's Palace in Kibi, Ghana, Emmanuel awarded educational scholarships to fifteen disabled children and presented five disabled athletes with sports wheelchairs. Today, his goal is to build a state-of-the-art sports academy for both able-bodied and challenged athletes, which will employ only the disabled. He is also organizing a team of disabled athletes to represent Ghana in the 2008 Paralympic Games in Beijing. With the Free Wheelchair Mission, Emmanuel has distributed over eight hundred wheelchairs to fellow disabled Ghanaians. Eventually, he aims to run for Parliament.

In 2003, he received the Casey Martin Award from Nike, which honors an individual who has excelled in athletic pursuit while overcoming significant physical, mental, societal or cultural challenges, and/or who proudly serves as an advocate for fellow athletes with disabilities. In 2005, Emmanuel received the prestigious Arthur Ashe Courage Award at the ESPY's with his friend Jim MacLaren, who inspired the creation of the Challenged Athletes Foundation. The two men received an emotional five-minute standing ovation. Previous winners include Muhammad Ali, Jim Valvano, and Billie Jean King. In October 2005 Emmanuel and Jim appeared together on "Oprah." His story has also been featured on "Nightline" and "The Today Show" Emmanuel has met with President Bush and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan.

Emmanuel's lecture appearances are raising awareness about disability in the Third World and raising funds for the Challenged Athletes Foundation and his scholarship initiative. The directors of *Emmanuel's Gift*, Lisa Lax and Nancy Stern, are also available to talk about Emmanuel's remarkable story in conjunction with footage from the film.



Photographs courtesy of Lookalike Productions

For scheduling information call toll-free 800.743.9182

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