

CUT TO THE TRACE

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PROMOTING | EDUCATING | CONNECTING | INNOVATING

Feature Interview:

Baraka Shea Butter co-founders
Wayne Dunn and Gifty Serbeh-Dunn

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HSCG
HANDCRAFTED SOAP
& COSMETIC GUILD



BY SARA WAGNER

BARAKA SHEA BUTTER

Here at the HSCG, we don't often get in-office visitors. With Members all over the world, I'd comfortably say that 99.9% of our business is done over the phone and online. So, when Wayne and Gifty Dunn of Baraka Shea Butter came to HSCG Headquarters to visit, we were excited to spend a few hours with them and share their incredible story with you! We hope you enjoy this interview with them as much as we did.

Tell us a bit about Wayne and Gifty: what are your backgrounds, how did you learn about handcrafted bath and body products?

Gifty was born in northern Ghana, where the vast savannah is full of wild growing shea trees. These trees produce delicious shea fruit from April to June. The seeds, hidden at the center of the sweet fruit, have been made into Shea Butter and used for cooking, skin care and other uses for millennia.

Gifty came to Ottawa, Canada in the 1980s where she completed grade 12 and studied at Ottawa's Carleton University, completing an undergrad and a Master's degree focusing on political science and development.

This combination of growing up with shea butter and a focus on development stayed with her and blossomed with the creation of Baraka Shea Butter.

"I was always passionate about Shea Butter and it's amazing skin care qualities. When I arrived, I was totally shocked at how hard it was to find good Shea Butter in Canada and how little people knew about it." Gifty noted when asked about the beginnings of her work with Shea Butter in North America.

"When my husband started doing consulting work in Ghana in the early 2000s and was traveling there often he started to bringing Shea Butter home with him. I've always loved natural products and cooking and creating and it seemed natural to add essential oils and natural ingredients to Shea Butter and make my own skincare products" Gifty added.

Today Gifty formulates and makes a range of handcrafted bath and body products for herself and friends, for sale to select customers, and runs the private label production of Baraka Shea Butter.

Wayne was born in northern Saskatchewan, Canada, literally on the edge of the wilderness. "I grew up 5 miles north of a town of 800 people that was literally at the end of the line. The furthest north East-West road was just south of my house. There was one farm directly north of us and then it was wilderness all the way to the North Pole. The hilltop where I was raised, and where my father lives to this day, is still over 75 miles from the nearest traffic light" Wayne noted when asked about where he grew up.

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“We had a small farm and my father commercial fished and worked in the logging industry to supplement our meagre farm income. We raised, caught or grew much of what we ate,” he added.

Wayne left school after Grade 11 and worked in logging, construction, commercial fishing and related areas until in his 30s when, almost by accident, he ended up involved in development work. He started working with Indigenous Peoples and development in Northern Saskatchewan and quite rapidly became involved throughout Canada and around the world.

He lived and worked throughout Northern Canada, including time on Baffin Island and throughout the Canadian Arctic. He was invited to work with the United Nations Development Program on a strategy for the Decade of the World’s Indigenous Peoples.

This led him into work around the world, including projects with the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank and a couple of years advising the President of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples on business and economic development. During this time he was adopted into the Shipibo Tribe in the Peruvian Amazon where he was given the name “Kiss of the Wind”.

Wayne’s work, which was known for its combination of innovation and pragmatism that produced concrete results, ended up leading him to the Stanford University Graduate School of Business, where he was offered a Sloan Fellowship and earned a Master of Science in Management degree, becoming the only person in history to graduate from the business school without having completed high school or earning an undergrad degree. Stanford invited Wayne back to speak about his journey on the road less travelled for the 50th Anniversary of the Sloan Fellowship. You can see the talk at <http://youtu.be/THAnnHaX3G0>

Wayne grew up in a family that lived mostly on natural foods and canned and preserved foods, simply because there wasn’t any option. As Gifty started making handcrafted bath and body products with the Shea Butter he brought home he became increasingly interested.

What drove you to start your business, Baraka Shea Butter?

Baraka Shea Butter started almost by accident. I was bringing shea butter home from Ghana for Gifty to use to make products with. At the same time a few of her friends and others were wanting to get Shea Butter to try making products of their own.

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We had always supported women and development in northern Ghana, starting about 2000 with a project to provide income generation training and support to a Widow's group and including supporting children's school fees and other small-scale initiatives.

The women always told us that what they really wanted was a way to earn money, not to just receive charity. We realized that by combining all this we may be able to do something.

We both had a passion for development and a strong sense of justice and fairness. We both believed that Shea Butter was an amazing product that, if a business was organized right, it could have incredible impact from the people who make it all the way through the value chain to the people who use the products made from Shea Butter.

From this, Baraka Shea Butter was born. Our mission is to make high quality, unrefined and handmade shea butter available to crafters and other shea butter users in North America, do it in a way that has maximum impact for the women and families that make Baraka Shea Butter and build a company culture focused on serving both our suppliers and our customers.

We want to build a brand that is known for the quality of its product, the responsiveness of its service and the impact it has throughout the value chain, but especially in the communities and families that make Baraka Shea Butter.

Baraka has a unique Community Fair Trade Initiative. Can you explain what this means, and how it has benefited your company?

Baraka Shea Butter is fair trade by nature, it is in our DNA and is central to our founding mission. Providing income and development support to women and families in northern Ghana was one of the founding principles of our business.

We started by simply doing it, by paying more than market prices and by finding extra money from our revenues and from customers and friends to support education and development for the families and communities that make Baraka Shea Butter.

Some customers started asking us about Fair Trade Certification. We looked into it and our initial thought was that it was much more suited for large, corporate operations and didn't fit well for a small business like ours where we worked directly with the community groups.



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But, we tried it. We certified for two years through a Fair Trade certifying group out of Europe. It didn't work for us (not to say that it doesn't work well for others – just that it didn't fit for us).

Right away the rigidity of the required structure and process was noticed by us, and by the community. Some of what was required either didn't fit, or was simply much more cumbersome than necessary. And, for a small business like ours, the cost was quite high – and was taking away from money we could have used to support the women, families and development.

After two years the leaders of the women's group approached us and asked if we could go back to how we worked before. We discussed with them how many in North America wanted Certified Fair Trade, something that officially signified the type of business practices and the impact on local people and communities.

One of the women said “why don't they just ask us?”. From that question the concept of community certification emerged. Right away the women and the community grabbed onto the idea. They were adamant that they, better than anyone else, knew if we were treating them fairly and they would be happy to both formally certify our work, and to hold us accountable.

In 2017 the women's group met in a general assembly and, with the Chief and others present, the community formally certified Baraka Shea Butter as meeting the spirit and intent of Fair Trade. They set an annual certification process and we are required to meet with the women's group and the community annually so they can review our work and relationship



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over the past year and decide whether or not to grant us Community Certified Fair Trade status. You can hear the women and the community Chief discussing this in this video <https://youtu.be/GOf3-iGzhxI>

What is special about Baraka Shea Butter? What makes it stand out from other Shea Butters in the market?

We believe that what is special about Baraka Shea Butter is the way we have been able to combine and integrate the three pillars of our mission in ways that support and enhance each other. We are so fortunate in how HSCG members and other customers have embraced and supported our mission, especially the support and impact to the women and communities that make it. That simply allows us to do more and have more impact.

It starts with a quality product. Nobody wants an inferior product. The women who make Baraka Shea Butter use age-old techniques and traditions, passed down through generations. They make an amazing product and deserve full credit for the reputation for quality that Baraka has developed.

Supporting communities, families and development was part of the Genesis of Baraka and is hard-wired into the DNA of our business. Fortunately, our customers and the marketplace embraced this approach to business, encouraging us to do more and often contributing directly to support various projects. Many customers reuse our posts and material on the women and communities to support their own marketing and engage with their customers.

We have tried hard to build a culture of service at Baraka where we all focus on serving producers, customers and stakeholders. This permeates all we do, from next day shipping to immediate, no questions asked replacement or refunds.

Taken together I think these three pillars, quality, service and impact, identify Baraka and give our customers something they can use to support them as they build and grow their own businesses.

If you asked me for one thing that makes us stand out I would say it is the genuineness of our community connection and the impact that we have there. For us, coming from development backgrounds and our personal connection to the community, this was simply a natural foundation for Baraka Shea Butter.

What can the industry learn from your mission?

If there is one principle that I would stress it is to try and do business in a way that serves the entire value chain, from suppliers through to end-users. This is something that so many in the handcrafted soap and cosmetics space seem to do naturally and to naturally embrace when they see others doing it.

This is part of why we love working in this space and with HSCG. We share this principle and way of doing business.

What is the future of Baraka Shea Butter – where do you see yourselves and your company in ten years?

Hmm... We don't see our mission or founding principles changing. We will still be focused on building a business that serves and creates value across the entire value chain, from suppliers and producers through to our customers and their customers.

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We want to continue growing our volume, because that lets us have more impact at the community level, and education more shea butter users. We will be working to grow the number of handcrafted soap and cosmetic product clients by focusing on how we can serve them better and, at the same time working to get more large clients because that not only helps to grow volume but has big impacts on economies of scale.

We have been getting more and more requests to do private label products and will soon be working to grow that business area as well.

We have a small distributor in Australia and ones starting in the Philippines, Mexico and Dubai and inquiries from some other countries and areas. In ten years, we hope that Baraka Shea Butter can be available to customers and users in many areas of the world.

But, at the end of the day, our success will still be driven by our ability to serve and create value for suppliers, customers and the entire value chain.

Business the Baraka Way is not a zero sum game where we gain at the expense of others, it is about creating a system and a way of business where we all gain together.

If you could give fellow Makers any advice, what would it be?

I think it is simple. Be a business that cares and a business that serves. Focus on quality and service and make the decisions that will support your customers and suppliers. Be the sort of person your parents and children would be proud of and bring that to your business and work every day. And, above all, enjoy and embrace the good work and great products you are breathing life into and sharing with the world.

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GOOD FOR YOU, GOOD FOR THE WOMEN WHO MAKE IT, GOOD FOR THE ENVIRONMENT.

BARAKA SHEA BUTTER

Pure, Natural, & Unrefined

*...from our
hands
to yours...*



PRIVATE LABEL • DIY • WHOLESAL

Natural, unrefined and 100% handmade by the hardworking women in Northern Ghana, each container of **Baraka Shea Butter** is a labor of love. From supplying DIY home-crafters to industrial users to formulating and producing private label products ... shea butter is our business.

Baraka Shea Butter prides itself on using traditional, time-honored processes that leave behind all of the goodness nature intended. No chemicals or additives, no animal testing, no harsh industrial processes.

BARAKA SHEA BUTTER



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