

**June 17, 2003**

## **Dakar taxi and Fatou**

I have in mind a new video game that should really sell. We'll call it "Dakar Taxi". The challenges that confront the player won't be out of somebody's fantasy. They'll be the real ones that I've seen here in Dakar -- like:

- The black and yellow taxis that decide to turn a narrow two-lane road into a three-lane. They either come right at you and expect you to pull off the road, or else they pull out to pass you and veer into you when the oncoming lane doesn't give way.
- One rule here is supposed to be "Priority to the Right". Any car coming off a road to your right is supposed to have right of way. It just doesn't work that way in reality. In the real world of Dakar, the rule seems to be "Priority to the Biggest Car" or else "Priority to the Driver with the Biggest Balls".
- The "Car Rapides", those jitney buses with seats for 25 plus ten guys hanging off the back end. They pull out from the side of the road without so much as a glance behind them.
- Horse-drawn carts. These carts consist of 4 X 6 ft. platforms mounted on rubber tires. You take your life in your hands when you try to pass one.
- The "vendeurs" - the peddlers who create a traffic hazard at every stoplight as they try to sell you everything from toothpicks to watches to a tail light for a 1986 Peugeot (I'm not kidding!)
- Potholes on the paved roads that could house a family of five.
- Boulders and crevasses on the unpaved roads, of which there are many.
- Sand. The other day I got stuck in the middle of an unpaved road. Luckily I was able to rock my way out of the soft sand.
- Live animals: goats, cows, donkeys. Don't trust that donkey who's placidly munching grass alongside the road. As soon as you come up even with him, he'll bolt right out in front of you.
- Dead animals. We came across two dead camels in Mauritania.
- Speed bumps ranging in size from "What was that?" to "Holey Moley, I think we left our rear axle back there!" A speed bump is known here as "gendarme couchant", which translates: "sleeping policeman".
- Praying Muslims. Friday is the "Sabbath Day", if you will. Muslim men attend services at the mosque. If the mosque is full, the faithful will spill out onto the street. On our way home from Anne's office last Friday afternoon we came upon a huge traffic jam. Enough cars ahead of us began to turn around and head the other way so that we could see what the problem was. The street was filled with dozens of men kneeling on their prayer rugs. We were forced to either wait for the prayers to end or else back down the street and head in another direction. We chose the latter.

My problem is developing a scoring system. I could use some help here.

**Meet Fatou McPhee.** Hers is an interesting story.

Fatou is married to Don McPhee, a Canadian, who is the Regional Director of Plan International, formerly known as Foster Parent Plan. A year ago last April Don hired Anzie to conduct leadership training in Dakar for Plan country directors from all over West Africa. Since we moved here, we have become fast friends.

Fatou is a Puhl - one of the major tribes. This fact does not define her, of course. She is a petite, attractive woman with a high, soft voice that belies her talents as a smart, successful businesswoman. Born in Algeria she spent her first ten years as a nomad, wandering the Sahara with her clan of herdsman. " It was a wonderful life!" says she, emphatically. In her eleventh year her family decided she should get an education. So they sent her to live with an aunt in the Ivory Coast. She loved learning and excelled at it. She has a photographic memory. She completed her baccalaureate (the all-important final high school exam in France and all of her former colonies) at age 16!

Fatou continued her education and obtained more than one advanced degree. She worked for the Government in the Ivory Coast, the World Bank and other international organizations, often as a consultant.

Then she met and fell in love with Pierre Bollinger, heir to the Bollinger champagne fortune. They moved to Paris and proceeded to have three children. Pierre never did give up his playboy life. After ten years they divorced.

Somehow, Pierre left Fatou with very little money. So she had to build her professional life all over again. She worked for a commercial bank and became a successful manager.

About nine years ago she met Don. They fell in love, married, and moved to China where Don worked for Plan International. Fatou entered the banking business there, and again became a successful manager.

They moved to Dakar about 1 -1/2 years ago. Fatou, obviously not one to sit at home watching the soaps and eating bon-bons, is back in business. She acquired a super market, which she is co-managing with her daughter. She has also started a consulting firm. Recently a new bank, which is headquartered in Benin with branches in other African countries and a total of 2000 employees, has asked her to assist them in developing a Dept. of Human Resources. I feel honored that she has asked me to assist her in this endeavor.

Oops, gotta go. The man from the local freight company who's supposedly handling the shipment of our household goods called. He wants to know why our stuff is slated to ship to Cameroon.

A la prochaine Chuck