

**May 2, 2003**

Dear Family and Friends.

I'm sitting in Anzie's office at Peace Corps. It's Friday afternoon. We just spent the morning at the Embassy Medical Dept. Anne will be an official "direct hire" as of Monday, so things are starting to happen. Our belongings are finally shipped. Airfreight should arrive next week. Sea freight arrives around the first week in June, "In Cha'Allah" – which means "God willing".

The Muslim religion is all-pervasive in this society. Friday is the equivalent of Sabbath day. Peace Corps is located right next to the Grand Mosque. All afternoon we hear the Call to Prayer. Sounds a bit like Gregorian chant. Harks me back to my days as a choirboy.

Five times a day a vast majority of the population stops for prayer – aka Muslim aerobics. Performed on a prayer rug, the ritual consists of bowing, kneeling, prostrating, accompanied by a chant. It takes less than five minutes.

I have seen three major mosques in and around Dakar. One is under construction. They are impressive! I've yet to visit one.

When you ask someone when something will happen – when your ride will arrive, when a task will be completed – they will always follow up their estimate with the words, "In Cha'Allah". So, if it doesn't happen, it's Allah's fault, not theirs. We have now learned to retort, "Allah or no, it must happen by such and such a time." Our response is always met with a smile.

The Senegalese have an impressive amount of pride, of poise, an inner sense of self. I think that a good portion of this strength must come from their religion. It enables them to withstand the trials and tribulations that life in a very tough environment throws at them.

Speaking of tough life: I played 18 holes of golf on Thursday (Labor Day holiday here). I walked all 18! Yes, my feet were killing me for two days after, but not as extreme as before. This weather might be just the thing for arthritis.

Anne made lunch today from the large shrimp we bought at the big market downtown yesterday (\$4.00/lb.). The menu included avocado, French dressing, German bread, Sangria. Such is life in the Third World! Don't tell anybody. This is supposed to be a hardship post.

The cook is off today, Sunday. So we're making spaghetti dinner for two Peace Corps Volunteers in from Mauritania for a workshop, who are staying with us overnight.

A la prochaine! Chuck