

February 2019

Travels with Anzie – Mamadou Revisited

We met Mamadou in 2003, soon after we arrived in Dakar to begin our three-year stint. Mamadou was our waiter at **Lagon I**, now the No. 2 restaurant in Dakar. We just seemed to hit it off. The next thing we know we're invited to his house for dinner. Luckily son Rowan was in town, and attended this quintessential Senegalese meal with Mamadou and his beautiful wife, Satou.

Then we were invited to join the family for a visit to Mamadou's birthplace, **Mbolo Birane**, which is located way up north on the Senegal river. We provided the transportation for Mamadou, Satou and their two young boys. This, to attend the celebration of the 1000th anniversary of the village. Of course, we couldn't understand the local language. However, some of the villagers did speak French. We discovered that Mamadou was introducing us as Directors of Peace Corps. It was truly a memorable experience. You'll find a copy of my journal describing our three-day journey attached.

So, that was then. This is now. Two weeks ago we decided to have lunch at Lagon I in hopes that we might run into Mamadou. Sure enough, he was there, as he has been for over 30 years. After 14 years, it was an emotional experience. Mamadou invited us again for lunch at his house.

Yesterday he picked us up in Satou's car with a driver, a neighbor of his. Mamadou sees no necessity to learn how to drive. He now lives in **Rufisque**, which is south of Dakar, further out of town than his former residence. Although it took us the better part of an hour from our house, Mamadou insists that it only takes him 20 minutes to get to work, which is near the port in downtown Dakar. All development is happening south of town. The government is promoting **Saly**, a beach resort area, as a mecca for tourism. A year ago the airport was relocated 45 minutes south of town, near Saly. Mamadou built a brand new house in a huge development that has just a few houses completed and more being built. How he was able to build the house is a fascinating story.

A North African businessman who made frequent trips to Dakar became a regular at Lagon I. At each visit he asked for Mamadou. They became close friends over the years. One day the gentleman asked Mamadou if he owned his own home. Mamadou responded in the negative. The man then asked how much Mamadou would need to build a house. After some research Mamadou came back with an amount. A few days later Mamadou got a message that he was to meet the man at his hotel. When he arrived the man gave him an envelope. Mamadou, without opening the envelope, thanked him and asked him how he could repay him. He replied, "When you pray, please pray for me." That means that Mamadou, being a Muslim, will pray for his benefactor five times a day. Mamadou opened the envelope on his way home. Inside he found 54,000 US dollars in cash. With that sum he was able to build a beautiful three-story home in 2014.

Last year the owners of Lagon I financed a trip to Mecca for three employees, including Mamadou. The "Hajj", pilgrimage to Mecca, is required of every Muslim, so long as they

are physically able and can provide enough to support their family while they are absent. The Hajj occurs during the last month of the Islamic calendar. Now that's what I call a responsible employer.

When we arrived at the house, Mamadou took us on a tour. On the second floor he pointed to two framed photos hanging on the wall. They were photos of Anne, me and Rowan sitting on the floor sharing a traditional round platter of "thieboudienne". Anzie and I were humbled to discover that our visit back in 2003 meant so much to this family.

We then sat down to another delicious platter of thieboudienne. It consists of rice, fish and several Senegalese vegetables – cassaba, onion, carrots, cabbage. The rice is brown, cooked in spices, including garlic and Maggi bouillon. A side dish includes onions, sauce and fish balls – like small meat balls except with fish. This was the best I ever tasted! Of course, looking back at my previous journal, I said the same thing.

Without the normal burden of house payments, Mamadou is able to provide quality education for their five children, sending them to private schools. Their oldest daughter is studying for her Masters degree in Marketing and Computer Science. She speaks excellent English. They have three boys, ages 18, 15 and 7, all of them tall, handsome and lightly built. Finally, we have their "dessert" child – the cutest little 2 ½ year-old who absolutely lights up the room when she enters.

When the driver arrived, we couldn't believe that we'd been there over four hours. We all piled into the car, including Mamadou, Satou and their youngest. We took a different route back to avoid traffic. We drove along the ocean beaches for about an hour. Very peaceful!

A la prochaine,

Chuck & Anzie



Satou and her youngest now.



The 4 of us in 2003 in the village - a copy of a photo – no I am not pregnant!



Chuck and Mamadou today