

April 26, 2006

Chuck's first impressions of Dakar

Arrived safely at 5:30Am Tues. after a flight of only 6 ½ hours – wow. Had some problems with Snooty. Ran into an anti-cat policy on C&J Trailways and on Amtrak. Suggest the Pro – Feline Groups take up arms. South African Airways had no problem with Snooty. I just had to pay \$125.00 for her. “You just won yourself a cat!”, said I, pushing the cat carrier towards the hapless ticket person. I finally paid it after envisioning Anzie's reaction to my catless arrival.

I am absolutely bowled over by Dakar. All six senses have been accosted from all sides ever since I arrived.

The house is marvelous: adobe colored exterior, tiled floors. There are four bedrooms each with its own bath, air-conditioner, and balcony or terrace. A huge beautiful garden – in the French style with sculptured hedges and bushes. There are bananas, papaya, a lime tree and an avocado tree. The previous resident left in August and it wasn't very well maintained, so we have hired a gardener for 1 and ½ days a week to bring it back. The cook, Amadou, is a distinguished 56 year old who has worked for Peace Corps staff for 17 years. He's a wonderful, soft man, at peace with himself. A Muslim, he chants his prayers several times a day. He's from Guinea, and sends his wife and family money every month.

I went to market with him in downtown Dakar. Wonderful sights and sounds. What a mélange of aromas! Unfortunately U.S. markets don't have those smells anymore. In the covered market one buys vegetables, fruits, fish and other seafood and meat. All prices are negotiable, and Amadou appears to be the master negotiator. I can learn a lot from him! He negotiated hardest with his relatives, who finally sold us some avocados.

Dakar is a city of street vendors. On one street they sell wood carvings and leather goods. On another they all sell men's clothing. Imagine, one fella had this orange plaid sport coat he tried to sell me. It was three sizes too small, but it was the only piece of clothing he had to offer – a real niche marketeer.

Everyone cautions you to watch your step in certain areas. Everyone has a story about some theft. We have a guard at the front gate day and night. The day guard also helps with gardening, etc. All windows are protected by decorative wrought iron. I'm doing quite a bit of walking since I arrived. I find that my smiles and greetings are returned.

Anne is doing a nice job of carving a niche for herself in the world of Peace Corps. She has run two major conferences - one in the desert of Mauritania in a huge colorful tent, one here in Dakar. I spent a day at her office meeting her co-workers – a sharp, positive bunch. Makes me feel good about the Peace Corps and what they're trying to accomplish.

Had three new friends over for dinner last night. Usually quite a task, unless you order in pizza, right? Not so any more. We just entertain and enjoy our guests, and leave the rest to Amadou. Served a glorious paella. I'm having a problem not getting up to clear dishes. I feel like I'm in a family sitcom from the '50's -- "Life With Father" or something. I expect I'll get over it soon.

More later from the Third World

Chuck

April 28

Now from me --

For those of you who are worried about our happiness and health, I thought I'd tell you about our week-end. On Fridays, we only work officially until 12:30 so that the Muslim staff can pray (Friday is the holy day). So to celebrate my security clearance, Chuck and I went downtown and had lunch at a lovely restaurant on a pier over the harbor. He had Fish Yassa (a traditional dish here made with lemons and onions) and I had a brochette with fish and HUGE shrimps called Gambas. We sat and drank white wine while the waves crashed below us -- tough huh?

Then we rented a taxi and driver for the afternoon and drove around exploring our area. Chuck wanted to check out the fitness club and golf course at the hotel Meridian about 2 miles away. We also went by the Club Med and out to the point Almadies -- the furthest point west in Africa. All this is within 5 miles of our house. We then had the driver drop us off at the American club for happy hour. We spent a couple of hours there, meeting really nice people and drinking Flag -- one of the local beers,

The next day we sleep late and then worked with the gardener to plan out plantings for the garden. At noon a fellow staff, the APCD for Small enterprise -- Thomas and American -- came over for lunch (prepared by Amadou). He has a car we might buy, so after a great long talk we went out with Chuck driving. Everything is standard shift here. We drove up to the top of a small mountain -- big hill -- with a light house on top. From there, you can see the whole peninsula of Dakar -- about 10 miles in each direction. (see the attached photos) Then after that exhausting excursion, we came home and napped (maybe it was the rose at lunch!)

That night a couple came for dinner (again prepared, served and cleaned up by Amadou), Don McPhee and his wife, Fatou. He is a Canadian who works for PLAN International who hired me last April when I came here. She is Senegalese (Pular) and was nomadic for the first 12 years of her life until she went to live with an aunt in Abidjan -- she now has several masters degrees from French universities! She is beginning to work as a business consultant -- her background is sociology and Human Resources. I am hoping that she and Chuck can work together -- it would be a very dynamic team. We're seeing them again tonight and will talk more about it.

Then on Sunday we went out to Goree Island. There is a small village on it which was a very early French settlement, and looks like southern France or the French Quarter in New Orleans - narrow streets and balconies with flowers. We had grilled fish at a little restaurant by the sea. Goree is most famous - or really infamous - for the slave prison that was there. For thousands of slaves Goree was the last African soil they touched before being shipped to the "New " World.

Well, I have to dash. As you can see we are not suffering here. The only question is: when are you buying a ticket to come and see us?!!

Lots of love - Anne (Anzie!)