

the chief holds his "hearings".

Life here for children is in some way very different from the life

of most Western kids, at least the middle class ones. Here children are rarely planned. They just appear, one after another, regularly (about every 2 years). Which means mom ~~may~~ often has one by the hand, one ~~on~~ nursing, and one on the way. She also works 20 hours a day hauling water & firewood, cooking, and looking after her family. Thus, junior is often left to look after himself, and by the age of 3 or 4, children are expected to help out in any way they can. 10 year olds babysit 4 year olds, and 4 year olds watch over 2 year olds, often carrying them around piggy back style, in imitation of mom. Children here more or less raise themselves, and the parents who plan their children's upbringing or future ~~are~~ a real rarity. No Dr. Spock here. Thus, a child's personality and potential can be said to be a matter of luck. Mothers love their children dearly, but simply don't have

time to lavish them with affection. Kids get beat, yelled at, and treated like shit a lot, but also know they're loved. They thus grow up with an undying devotion to mom & dad, as well as a inferiority complexes & lack of self esteem. Laura, in a fit of exasperation, called it a nation of snivelling wimps. At times I'm afraid I'm tempted to agree. The odds against growing up to be a "together" person are pretty slim. If you do, your opportunities for "success" are even slimmer. Getting educated is a battle of huge proportions. Getting a job is even harder. In villages, people are jealous of success, and enterprising people are often afraid to do well in their village, for fear others will "tear them down".

Fri. March 21

These journal entries are becoming weekly - and if I don't keep a list of things to write about, there's much I leave out.

Last week Mike & I saw a large group of elephants right next to the road in the Forêt aux Lions. I thought of stopping the bike to watch them quietly, but instead, I drove past them a ways, left the bike idling, and walked back to watch them. Mike was watching from his bike. Hearing a noise behind us, we both turned & saw an enormous male elephant lumbering towards us from the other side of the road. His steps were slow, but his strides so long that he moved fast. I ran for my bike, hopped on, and stalled it. He had turned & was coming towards us - rather too quickly I thought. Got the bike started quickly, and we zoomed down the road a ways to watch from a safer distance! He was huge - perhaps 4 meters tall at the top of his head - and long enough to straddle the road side to side. A group of cattle egrets perched on his shoulders. They looked like lanky, white growths, anchored by their feet, bobbing like jacks-in-the-box on springs.

Elephants, whales, hippos, rhinos: there aren't too many huge animals around anymore. There aren't too many wild places big enough to support them. Even the ocean seems too small to protect the whales. Togo's Fosse aux Lions is minute, yet somehow supports 30 or 40 elephants. That's amazing to me.

Saturday night we went to the funeral of the propriétaire of Mr. Atonkou. He was one of the "kondi" chiefs, thus very important. We didn't stay long, but while there we met a little old man who'd lived & taught in Ghana for years & spoke very good English. Atonkou understands English well, and one of the CEG profs. speaks it fluently - so we had a conversation in English - very strange feeling!

Mme. Dimbranbig, one of the responsables in Sandjoaré, had a sick 2-month old little girl. After not seeing her for several weeks, I saw Mme. at the marché & she told me her baby had

died! How very sad! I didn't know what to say - what was appropriate, or how to express it

in words. Here, babies die frequently, and most women lose at least one. I'm sure it's hard - yet it's almost a blessing in disguise - one less child to care for. I really wonder how these women perceive their lives. Do they accept, assuming that's the way it is? Do they resent their lives, but accept because they have no choice? Maybe they're happy. In some ways, they live good lives - in other ways they are oppressed, overworked, often poorly treated by husbands. (I'm finding expressing myself in English more & more difficult).

Sunday, Banana took us to the mangrove to see the sacred catfish that live there! Sure enough, in a muddy, nearly waterless depression, <sup>it</sup> covered with a network of palm branches to shade it from the sun, flopped several dozen catfish!

It's said that there are actually 100 or so. During the rainy season they live in the marigot, and as

it dries out, the fish ~~that~~ are stranded in holes. It seems that this particular hole is sacred, and any fish in it can not be caught & eaten (all other fish are free game). These sacred fish are used (alive) for fetishes, and the village is responsible for making sure they don't die. In effect, they comprise a breeding stock, and otherwise the fish population would die out.

Saturday after the funeral we walked back & found a bunch of the chief's kids in his courtyard, playing games & telling each other stories. They were Moba folk tales, and the children sat enraptured as they took turns recounting the tales. I ached to understand the words, but was fascinated by the setting: the darkness, the voices, the enraptured children.

The other day I went out with my shirt on inside out. Just as I realized it, someone commented that a Moba saying says that if you put your shirt on inside out, it means you'll have a lucky day! I did have a good day that day.

I've always heard that boy babies are more vulnerable to disease, and die more often than girls. Thus, there's supposedly more girls than boys, which is a possible explanation for polygamy. However, I sure see a lot more young boys around than girls. The chief, for example, has perhaps 20 little boys & 2 or 3 little girls. Very strange.

Work is going well, and we're getting real busy again. I'm finding myself more & more comfortable giving & setting up formations, and feel I'm getting much better at it.

Today did a formation in Sandjoaré - big success. Mike's been having trouble getting work set up. I'm