

Saturday May 9, 1987

Lots of catching up to do.

Still we've had no rain, and every day it seems to get hotter & drier. Today it hit  $42^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $108^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) in the shade, and  $50^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $122^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) in the sun. I washed clothes, hung them up, and 10 minutes later, literally, they were dry.

Luckily a wind is blowing ~~ing~~, which dries the sweat before it has time to dribble down your skin, itching & soaking your clothes. Water is now a big problem. The marigot is basically dry, and women line up for hours at the few pumps (of which Bogou has none).

Animals are keeling over regularly, and <sup>vegetation</sup> <sup>has</sup> - ceased to exist. The shrubs in our yard are holding on stoutly - how I don't know. Yet women now prepare more boisson than ever - an extremely water-intensive process. People drink tchakbala by the gallon, and almost

no water. Some argue that as tchakbalo is boiled, it's safer to drink. But I wonder if alcohol is the best rehydrating fluid in this heat. The heat already leaves my temples throbbing, and alcohol would make it worse. Maybe the alcohol cancels this out though, instead of multiplying it; or maybe being drunk allows you to forget about the heat!

This afternoon there are clouds building to the south & east, tall castles of bright white whipping cream puffs. But before they ever reach us, they dissipate into wisps of vapor, teasing forerunners of rain that doesn't come. People are wondering if this will be a bad year for crops.

My bladder infection of 2 weeks ago didn't go away with ampicillin, so I called Sheila, the P.C. nurse in Lomé. She said if I couldn't get a hold of a drug called Bactrim I'd have to come to Lomé. Well,

the main pharmacy didn't have it, and the missionaries said they'd been looking for it as well -

unsuccessfully. I'd pretty much reconciled myself to a very unwanted trip to Lomé, when I found some children's dosage Bactrim. I have to take 8 tablets to equal 1 adult dosage! So far the symptoms are gone.

Wednesday I drove mama Ojayuri to the hospital. She's been suffering from intense earaches for some time, but has been avoiding the hospital up till now.

They say she has very high blood pressure, which is causing the earaches. She's now on medication, and is supposed to cut down on alcohol, salt & red meat, three of her favorite things!

We're pretty pissed off at Adia these days. In the end, he has turned out to be incredibly lazy & fickle. Getting him to lift a finger around here is like pulling teeth. Mike is building a cistern at their house at our expense, and he slinks away every time

Mike asks him to help. Mike needs to finish quickly, as he's due in Kara to build yet another cistern on Tuesday. He's incredibly busy right now, as cistern demands are pouring in almost daily (this dry weather is a big motivating factor).

I watched another baby get born today! Our friend Pango's first wife had her 4<sup>th</sup> child, and at last, after 3 girls, she had a boy! When I got to the clinic, she was laying on the cement floor, moaning profusely. In the states, a woman in labor is studiously attended to - her back massaged, her every need minutely catered to.

Here, a woman's suffering is alone. The many other women basically ignored her, until the cramps got very intense. Then they started laughing! It was a weird sensation, as we would never, in our western world, laugh at someone in pain. But here it seemed somehow appropriate. It lightened the atmosphere from one of

suffering to one of excited expectancy. As this is the woman's 4<sup>th</sup> child, she's a real pro. After one

very intense ~~con~~ contraction, she stood up matter-of-factly and climbed up onto the metal birthing table.

After one or two more contractions, she gave a mighty push and plop, out came the baby! It was quite a thing to see such an "easy", quick and uncomplicated birth.

The little boy is a chub by local standards - 3.34 kilos!

### Sunday May 10

This afternoon Mike & Pang & I drove out to Lambimong, a village about 30 kms from here, right on the Ghana border. A man living out there had heard about Mike's prowess as a cistern builder, and came here one day to beg Mike to help him build one. He has 15 wives, 30-some children, lots of money, and no water!

The road is good all the way there, most of it recently

constructed. It first climbs  
onto the backside of our cliffs,  
then heads due west, climbing

at one point over a ridge of  
hills without bothering to switch-  
back. One section was so steep  
they had actually cemented it in  
place. The landscape is lovely:

piles of slabbed, grey rock, &  
lots of shrubby growth. Then  
farther on, a sea of low,  
scrub forest stretched away  
toward Ghana. But next to  
the road huge patches of forest  
had recently been cleared, to  
make fields & homes for the  
many people that are pouring  
in here: refugees from Ghana,  
and "lowlanders" whose families  
have no more land to give them.

It feels like a new subdivision  
out here; raw, new earth,  
charred stumps & piles of large  
"old growth" logs (here 10-15" in  
diameter), and scattered about  
between pockets of forest, brand  
new round huts, with bright  
yellow straw roofs, all freshly  
crepissaged and untouched by  
any rain. Soon, even the

pockets of forest will disappear I suppose, and more concessions and fields spring up in their place.

It's very, very sad to see the trees disappearing, and to think of all the problems that will soon occur: erosion, loss of ground water, less rain, shortage of firewood, ad infinitum. The overwhelming task of teaching these people about trees & their importance is just that - overwhelming. They can't be blamed for doing what they've always done, and it takes time to learn & accept new ideas.

Almost no one this far out speaks French or has much education. They have very little contact with Papaong. ~~But~~ We noticed the homes were all beautifully decorated with colored muds & designs.

Thursday May 14

A day off. Yesterday was relatively cool, with a uniform cover of clouds moving in early in the day. It's been

windy enough at night, that sleeping outside is uncomfortable. It's cool enough in the house

by early morning to allow ~~a~~ delightful, un-sweaty sleeping.

Saturday last was the hottest we've recorded so far, with  $42^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the shade ( $108^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) and  $50^{\circ}\text{C}$  in the sun ( $122^{\circ}\text{F}$ ).

Mike has been in Kara since Monday, and is due back Saturday. It's lovely to have a day off. I'd sure love to have a job back home where I could have 1 or 2 days off a week, plus weekends! I will dearly miss that aspect of life here.

Yesterday I visited Kitty's house in Nadjoum. She lives in a traditional concession, consisting of 2 round, straw-roofed huts and a courtyard, attached to the side of a family compound. There are predominantly little girls in the smallish (by village standards) family. Almost no one speaks French, and her Moba is thus coming along well.



She carries her own water, making trips to the village well every night, and can now

manage a full cuvette on her head! She also grinds millet by hand (there is no moulin in the village), washes her own clothes, and spends a lot of time here in her village, immersing herself in the life there. She told me that Lucy, living in Barkoissi, has been selling cornbread in the market on market day - what a marvelous idea!

All this has gotten me to thinking about how relatively little I've integrated myself with the life here. Maybe if I were here alone, without Mike, I'd have integrated more. I would have liked to live with a family, cook pâte & sauce with them, and experience the rhythm of their life. I suppose part of it is a matter of luck; we live "with" a family we don't like especially. If say we'd moved in next door to

Assibi's, we'd probably spend a lot more time "en famille".

Peace Corps Togo is getting away from volunteers living in isolated mini-villas, and more & more volunteers are living in traditional concessions with families. I think it's wonderful.

~~The~~ Our dog, Toi-lä, ~~has~~ is now a year and a half old, and has grown large & chunky & solid. He's one of the fattest Togo dogs I've seen, yet it's the family that feeds him, not us.

He's a very attractive dog. He's lying here parting in utter misery, yet it's only 97°F now. Unfortunately he is developing a propensity for noisy, smelly farts, much like our dog Max's, leading me to draw a relationship between canine obesity and farting.

Yesterday, Kittie & I built a sand oven at her house, and in the process I got pretty sun-burned. Assibi was fascinated by the color changes our white skin goes through. To black people, no white folk must seem

like chameleons. When I told her our skin turns bluish when we're very cold, she finally conceded that

after all, she doesn't want white skin.

I just finished a really wonderful book: Contact, by Carl Sagan. I was really impressed by the sense of wonder & awe he was able to create. I don't see how anyone could read this and not be moved by his universal visions, and his eloquent pleas for a planet living in harmony with itself.

It's also a delight to read a book packed with scholarly tidbits, and have your mind stretched a little. It almost made me wish I'd given physics a better chance.

I also recently read a book by Gerula Murphy: In Ethiopia with a Mule. I ~~have~~ <sup>found</sup> her writing style unappealing, but there is one quote which sums up some of the conflicting feelings I have about leaving here:

"A traveller who does not speak their language cannot

presume<sup>not</sup> to claim any deep understanding of the [Moba people]. But it is the gradual growth of affection for another race, rather than the walking of a thousand miles or the climbing of a hundred mountains [or ~~the~~ two years' of daily living] that is the real achievement and the richest reward for such a journey".

The temperature just hit 100°F, and I'm starting to sweat.

As for leaving here, in theory that is but 3 or 4 months away. For so long I've looked forward to this, but now I find myself with very mixed feelings about leaving here. I'm for one thing apprehensive about going back home, & reintegrating. Won't it all seem so mundane, & usual, & cut off from the rest of the world? Won't it in many ways be a big let down, filled with nostalgia & memories of our

time here in Togo? It's only now, as we prepare to leave, that I begin to appreciate many aspects of life here. Yet how much of this is just a resurgence of tolerance since the end is in sight? If I still had a year to go, would I feel this? In other words, ~~has~~ it taken 2 years to reach a sense of equilibrium here, or is that sense only because I know I'm leaving.

Part of me feels a traitor. Here I've spent 2 years giving my all, developing projects and relationships and trying to know this culture, & I now feel I'm abandoning all of it.

It's quite likely I'll never see Assibi or Banano, or Parg or D'wog ever ~~again~~ again! And the stores & cisterns projects we've built up so painfully, from scratch. These things are important here, needed, and yet there may be none to carry on the work!

I also realize that once we're home our time here will

be perceived by others as tourism, not as a long-term experience in the world of development.

The whole concept of overseas development is so little understood back home. Thus all of this will be forced out of our limelight, into some hidden mental recesses, and will quickly come to seem unreal. It's more than disconcerting to spend over 2 years of your life somewhere, caring deeply for what you're involved in, and then to leave it behind so completely. There seems so little we can actually take back with us, to build on.

Usually <sup>work</sup> experiences build upon each other, with one job leading to another, related one. But I foresee entirely new directions beyond the blank slate of getting home.

Friday May 15

\* It rained! \* Yesterday evening we watched beautiful lightning to the west of us,

and delighted in a cool breeze from the moist turbulence. The children told me the Moba word for lightning - it means "rain fire". That would make a perfect name for a book about my experiences here: "Rain Fire" by K. Story. We shall see!

Usually rains to the ~~the~~ west of us don't hit us, only ones from the NE & E. I went out to brush my teeth about 8:30 and saw a swirling wall of dust scuttling toward me, visible in the darkness. It slammed into the house about the same time I did, and as is usual with rains here, all hell broke loose: noise & drips & dust & wind & rattling, popping tin. Rains here raise my blood pressure and adrenalin levels til I'm ashamed of myself. The plafond in the bedroom is a real blessing, as it reduces the noise considerably. Little O'wog must be going on 4 now. She has adopted me as her substitute mom, as life ~~is~~ with grandma & her siblings can be a little too traumatic for her sensitive nature. She is

remaining a beautiful child. She is almost overly sensitive, cries easily, and has tendencies to

~~set~~ hypochondria. She's also delightfully curious & creative & very intelligent. She delighted me yesterday with an impersonation of me drinking coffee! Her command of language is excellent for her age. She is a perfect mimic and has great retention.

Her Mova has been impressive, according to our proprietaire, since she learned to talk at about 2. She astounds me with her grasp already of basic French. A precocious child.

I ~~is~~ am worried & saddened to think she will quite likely never go to school, at least not for more than a few years.

Sunday May 17

We just had another rainstorm, preceded by the strongest winds we've ever seen here. I don't doubt they reached 100 MPH. Thank god it died down quickly,



or I'm pretty sure we would have lost our roof. Rain was pouring in everywhere, and

the house was a giant puddle. Luckily a few corners stayed dry, and we stacked stuff there. We were lucky - many people lost houses and roofs. Yet Mike took a walking tour of the village and said everyone was in high spirits, like children after a snowstorm.

Just read another great book by an English writer, L.P. Hartley, called "The Go-Between", about a young boy who unwittingly becomes the go-between in an illicit love affair between a wealthy young woman (beautiful of course) and a tenant farmer on her father's estate (handsome of course).

Although the thread of this romance runs through the book, the more suggestive & sensual because it's not explicit, it's really

a book about a young boy's loss of innocence, as well as a delightful glimpse into the life & thoughts of a young boy. It was made into a movie about 1970 starring Julie Christie & Alan Bates. I'd love to see it.

Wednesday May 20

Kara. Got a ride down here with Marco & Arnel. In the faune we saw an enormous stork of some kind standing in the road. It was over a meter tall, with 3/4 of it long spindly legs, a long, thick bill, and black & white plumage. We drove right up to it and it never moved! It was practically looking in the car window. Unfortunately there were 2 cars behind us, so we couldn't stop & watch. It eventually flew off as we drove by.

Kara is delightfully free of volunteers, as ~~at~~ most of them are headed north to Ouagadougou for the annual

softball tournament. Went to see the propriétaire, who invited me for dinner. He filled me in a

bit on the Adia rent money business. It seems Adia really did steal the money, and tried to lie about it.

The Director basically told him to get lost, and he didn't care if he ever saw him again. So we had a good rag session about Adia and what a lazy, inconsiderate twerp he's turning out to be.

Kevin Novotny, a new construction volunteer, would like to move into our house when we leave. I'm wondering if it's such a good idea, with Adia degenerating practically day by day.

Thursday May 21

Spent the night at the propriétaire's, getting munched by mosquitoes. There were 6 of us at dinner, incl. their daughter Libman, the Director of Radio Kara, and a woman from Lomé.

As usual we ate well: homemade mayonnaise & peas on bread, barbecued pintard, then couscous with a delicious fresh fish sauce, all accompanied with numerous glasses of chilled rosé wine.

The conversation turned at one point to a discussion of the TV show "Dynasty", now being shown once a week, dubbed in French, on prime-time Togolese T.V. It's a huge hit.

Once the subject came up, it was never let drop, and for an hour or so everyone declaimed animatedly about the ~~to~~ ~~char~~ personalities of the various characters, and how they couldn't wait for the next episode. Honoré, the Dir. of Radio Kara, admitted to being unfamiliar with the show, and was chided mercilessly until he promised he'd give it a try! What impressions does a show like this give the Togolese about life in America? I couldn't get a word in edgewise to ask.

These Togolese, like my

proprietaire, are the up & coming set, the Togolese middle class.

They seem to have bought the American dream, lock, stock & barrel. It was fascinating to listen to them talk about their lives. They all have a car, television, fan & air conditioner, "stand-up" kitchens, electricity & running water. Almost w/o exception, none of them grew up w/ any of these. They also have 1 spouse, 1 or 2 kids, 4 to 5 jobs, and many of the same stresses that characterize

"modern" life. The woman from some lamented the stresses of life in "the big city"; the traffic, noise, hustle & bustle. "I get home at night so tired", she said, "I don't even have the energy to watch TV"! "So I go to bed, then get up & do it all over again." I think humans do enjoy these stresses to some extent; to feel needed, and important, and to be able to complain about how hard they work.

Otherwise this inexorable striving toward more money, more possessions, and more stress, would seem pointless beyond belief.

Our proprietaire and his wife have 1 child, a girl named Sibman. She turned 12 in early May, and was given a grand party in true middle-class style; a sit-down meal for 10 or 12, with cake, and various presents, incl. a BMX bicycle from Mom & Dad! Dad took a whole roll of color film, which they proudly displayed in a plastic-sleeved photo album. This also contained photos of Sibman's previous birthday parties. I found it refreshing to be in a family that really cares about their child. Children here are so often treated as part of the furniture.

Forgot to mention Asabi's confirmation on Sunday. To make her mom happy, and just for something to do,

she attended a 3-day retreat at the mission in Bogou, then was confirmed at a mass on Sunday.

Haven't yet had a chance to ask her about what this meant to her. After church she prepared a big meal of rice & chicken & sauce and Mike & I came down. It was fun sitting around yakking & eating.