

Sunday May 24 Pagala gare

Being married is an adjustment process, much like being in the Peace Corps. At first it's exciting, because it's new & different. But the adventure wears off and a sense of boredom & disillusionment & doubt ^{sets in} ~~But~~ a very trying period. But I'm finding that is passing. I'm getting used to being married, adapting to the changes it brings, and enjoying it more. I'm feeling more proud of being married.

Came to Pagala for our COS (Close of Service) conference. Am staying on an extra half day to supervise preparations for a cistern conference Mike will be doing in June. Mike didn't come to the conference - he went to Ouagadougou to play in a Peace Corps softball tournament! The conference has been extremely helpful to get me thinking about jobs and preparing to go home. There's lots to do! It's a bit

overwhelming, but I'm sure it will all go smoothly. (Hubertine, termites, rain, lightning.) Walked into town for dinner. Realized how comfortable I feel here now, compared to when I lived here 2 years ago! Dinner of rice & wagasi cheese wasn't bad, but sat in the bistro for a soda, and the place was crawling with slimy, drunk men & fols. Ugh. Stopped on the way back to visit Hubertine, the young Kabylé woman whose family we lived with during stage. She's married now, to an older man with a first wife, and just gave birth to her first child 3 weeks ago: an adorable baby boy. She seems more grown up now, and is plumper. ~~But~~ she reminded me overwhelmingly of Celie, the star of the film A Color Purple. It was fun to see her. Her husband is well-to-do, and they live in a very nice house with nice furniture & knick-knacks. ~~It~~ They shared their meal of millet p^âte, 3 kinds of sauce, and chicken & fish!

Clouds of winged termites are hatching now, rising up out of the grass like dandelion seed in a wind, as it has rained hard ~~but~~

the last 2 mornings. (It almost never rains in the morning up north). It's been delightfully cool & smells wonderful - clean & fresh. Lots of 'squitoes though. Tonight there is spectacular lightning east of us, beyond a dark, starry sky, and bright flashes illuminate mountains of thick thunderclouds.

~~Monday~~ Sunday May 31

Left Pagala last Monday morning. Stopped to say bye to the family, and Hubertine was there with her baby. They had just put ~~the~~ scars on his cheeks - two tiny slashes. They smear these with an ashy mixture to prevent the cuts from closing up. There was almost no blood, and he didn't cry. Mom then served me some fufu and p-nut sauce. It was delicious! What a far cry from 2 years ago, when Mike & I dreaded being served fufu. Have been feeling fat lately. Now that the hot

weather is over I'll try to do exercises again.

Visited the propriétaire at the hospital to see about building stoves for the kitchen. There's a team of 10 Chinese doctors working there, none of whom speaks French. So they have a team interpreter. But as it turns out, he doesn't speak much French either!

I witnessed a 20-minute charade during which he tried to explain something to the director, who was completely lost. It finally turned out to be something trivial - but what if it had been a matter of life & death?

Friday was Tabaski, the muslim fête marking the end of Ramadan. There's had set up a boisson stove formation in Kantindi, not realizing it was a holiday, so we went anyway. As we were finishing up a thick ^{wall} path of red dust appeared on the horizon. We just had

time to cover the stove and move inside before the dust storm hit. About 20 of us

packed into a mud hut to drink boisson and wait it out. As the dust passed the temperature dropped sharply and it rained.

The steady drizzle lasted over 2 hours, during which we basically sat, & I slept some. It was very cold driving back to Qapaong.

We haven't had much rain but lots of overcast, clouds & wind. The thermometer says it's 78°F but it feels colder to me!

2 big funerals in Bogou Friday night. I promised I'd go, but got home & keeled over. Once I get home after being gone all day, it's real hard for me to get going again.

Noone in Bogou has started to plow yet. They say they need another good rain or two. People say you never plant alone - you wait for a sort of group consensus

and plant together. This avoids many problems. If you plant too early, the neighbors' animals

aren't tied up yet, and will trample your fields and eat the young shoots. Birds will eat the seeds as well.

Monday June 1 Arbor Day

Mike's out planting trees, but no one else is. No water yet, they say.

Yesterday we had a going away party for Mike & Karen Barnes at Sonubé. We got together and bought them a pagne from the weaving center.

On the way home we saw a group of 15 elephants - half of them brown & half a light gray.

This would have been the best opportunity we've ever had for photos - great lighting, visibility, distance, but we didn't bring the camera!

At the COS conference we brainstormed about what we will & won't miss when we leave here. One of the things

It won't really miss is Tchakbalo. The stuff is insidious. It leaves you in a stupor after a few slurps, and is probably responsible for much of the lethargy & denseness of people here.

Thursday June 4

Mom's birthday today: 49!

We had a good rain last night, so the farmers should be able to plant now. Yesterday Assibi & I went to Dapaong, and I jokingly said it would start raining 15 mins. after we got home. But sure enough it did. It rained from 6 PM most of the night and on into the morning, but a light rain with almost no wind.

Yesterday Mike killed a snake on the front porch. It was a puff adder about two feet long and 2" around, with a triangular ^{head} and a pattern of colored splotches. According to our medical book, it's fatal if you can't get

anti-venom. It's snake season again.

Things are turning green.

Today I'll plant some trees and seed the garden. Mike has gone to Pagala for a cistern workshop, and I'll meet him in a week for a trip to Lomé.

Saturday June 6

An overcast, grey, drippy day, and a line full of freshly washed clothes - just like home! I can't seem to get going today. I'll leave Monday mid-day for Dapaong, then head to Kara on Tuesday. So I have the whole weekend home to myself, with enough to do, but not so much that I ~~do~~ need to be motivated. Have several letters to write, and as much as I enjoy it usually, I've been procrastinating for days.

The day has been punctuated by a series of hard & soft rains from all corners of

the sky. It's no longer the time of year where you can plan outdoor activities ahead.

Had planned to seed the garden & plant a few trees this morning, but instead have been putting & reading. Another brief rain shower just blew over, this one from the NW, a strange corner for rains. Daylight rains are nice in that you can see ~~what~~ where the roof is leaking easily. This varies with the direction of the rain. Happily for home-alone me, there have been no heavy winds lately.

The farmers are of course happy, as they can at last plow & plant. The annual cycle of seasons & rains is really a miracle. Needless to say our work is slowing down considerably now, with everyone's thoughts centered on growing food. I'm feeling a sense of winding down, that leaving may be a very comfortable & peaceful

experience after all.

Martha sent me "Out on a Limb" by Shirley McLaine.

It's come at a lovely time (as all things do) when I've neglected my spiritual self for oh so long. She writes about her experiences with spiritual metaphysics, and it brings memories back of those blissful days my last year or two of high school, and my first in college, when I thought about & explored spiritual ideas & my spiritual self as a matter of course, an integral part of my existence. It's wonderful how our personal energies ebb & flow, and how we change, but not really. Mike has never seemed to acknowledge a spiritual dimension, his or any other, and I've just sort of accepted this. But it means I've sublimated my own needs in this. I think I'll ask him to give the book a try. I wasn't going to, thinking he'd dismiss it.

without interest. But who am I to judge him on that? Maybe it's just something he's never had the opportunity to think about before. The book so far has made me feel a bit like a bird or shoot pecking hesitantly out from the cold ground, or a bear, sluggish after hibernation, taking a few first easy stretches, to get the kinks out.

Don't judge, it says, just be open to learn & think & experience. We all come around in our ^{own} personal way & time. There is no right or wrong way.

Monday June 8

Woke up last night with the worst headache I ever remember having. I felt my brain was going to explode, and I felt scared I might have a brain hemorrhage.

All I was really scared of was the pain I imagined a blinding flash of searing pain,

then peace & calm & release, and I'd leave my body and float up into the ether, supremely happy. But of course the headache wasn't that bad. I've never had a migraine, but I'm sure it's much worse. I tried some mind over matter relaxation, deep breathing & trying to think of other things. Eventually I fell asleep, and woke up with no headache, but feeling kind of emotionally & physically spent.

Yesterday I planted the garden and more trees.

Assibi stopped by on one of her rare visits, the ulterior motive being bread & mayonnaise! In the afternoon I drove down just to say hi (and recharge the moto battery). A lovely afternoon of warm, humid sun, cool breeze, and a blue sky filled with a mosaic of different kinds of clouds. We didn't talk much, but I felt peaceful sitting there and staring out at a portion of the world. A local "fox" came by,

a tiny, middle-aged woman.
She has 9 children, but one
day she just went nuts.

Now she wanders around, half-
dressed but clean, doesn't bother
anybody, and just sort of
does her own thing. Assibi had
a tape in, and she wandered
by & stopped to dance a few
songs. She seemed so at peace
and happy. I found myself
fascinated with the idea of
"crazy" people. What happens
that people just go nuts one day?
Should we feel sorry for them,
or are they the happy ones
who'll have the last laugh?

I've really enjoyed this
weekend, all to myself to read
& write & think & putter. I've
been exercising every night for
a week or so now, and it
feels great.

Tuesday June 9 Kara

Poolside once again, but today
it's cool & overcast, threatening
to rain. So I read & drink
iced tea. Everyone / volunteers

that is) is out of town, so I'm on my own. The French community is having a ^{children's} birthday party here at the pool,

and to my amazement there are 8 or 10 couples and at least 25 kids under the age of 10. I had no idea there were so many. While black nannies watch the kids, the folks consume huge slabs of chocolate cake & apple tart. Yet they, the women especially, are all skinny as rails.

Dave G. told a story yesterday about a murder in Atakpame.

A young man from Ghana went around asking for field work. He was taken out ~~to~~ by the local Moba chief to his fields. The man then beheaded the chief with a coup-coup, hid the head and body, and took off with the thumbs & testicles wrapped up in his pocket! He was picked up on suspicion, for having blood all over his shirt. Supposedly this type of head-hunting murder is not uncommon, as human heads can bring very high prices. They're used for certain ceremonies

in some cultures in Nigeria, etc. You never know with these stories how much is true & how much embellished. But I did read in a major newspaper recently (the Wash. Post I think) about ritual murders in Siberia.

Marco told a story about getting his résumé censored by the Togolese government. Yet another example of the paranoia that reigns in this country. As he is a freelance photographer, his résumé contains samples of his work. One of which is a photo of a boy standing next to a billboard boasting a giant picture of Steve. Weirdly enough the shop printed it, but then apparently freaked out that they might get in trouble for printing it. After Marco had already paid & picked up the order, they called him back on false pretexts (saying they had an urgent package for Dapaong) and demanded that he return the résumés - no explanation. They didn't even intend to refund his money!

He ended up getting called in to the Minister of the Interior's office to explain, and was almost

kicked out of country. Eric Reed had a similar run-in. It seems he had made some inadvertent remarks to one of his colleagues which were construed as slightly disparaging to the regime. The colleague, paranoid that he might get in trouble for not reporting this, did so.

Eric, in the end, after much public humiliation, had to write a letter of apology to the same Minister of the Interior.

This regime is definitely repressive, but as long as you don't break any of the rules you pretty much get left alone.

Marco has a book about military rule in Africa. The chapter on Togo is called "The Benevolent General", and talks about how the gov't. here has been rigging demonstrations of overwhelming popular support since its inception. But it concludes by saying that despite

the repression, Togo's military rule is an exception to all others in Africa in its relative benevolence & liveableness.

Sat. June 13 Loméghé

Loméghé is a village on the Akposso plateau, where Nancy Landreth lives. She's a fisheries volunteer who came in with us 2 ~~days~~ years ago. We drove up here today from Amlané, where we came Thurs. to stay with Amy & Larry, a volunteer couple from Oregon. We arrived in Amlané Thurs. night, and Friday we drove up to visit Janet Tucker on the Daye Plateau. The plateau ~~is~~ region is really a series of scarps & ~~of~~ high forested hills separated by deep, stream cut gullies. It's lush & rainy & characterized by waterfalls plummeting from the heights.

Here in Loméghé there is an especially beautiful & well-known falls. We hiked up to it, perhaps 2 miles, managing to avoid ~~the~~ ~~the~~ the 500 CFA per

person tariff often charged, as well as being hassled by hordes of young kids. The trail climbs steadily

through lush forest reminiscent of the rainforests of the Olympic Peninsula. But instead of centuries-old hemlock & cedar, we hiked through towering ^{tropical} hardwoods and a thick undergrowth of ferns, vines, shrubs, and ~~the~~ stands of coffee & cocoa bushes, the lucrative regional cash crops. The waterfall itself cascades perhaps 300 feet down a sheer cirque of shrub-covered rock, into a sparkling pool ideal for swimming.

Driving back to Amlamé we got lucky & dodged most of the thick grey clouds that hang perpetually over this rainy region. The roads on the plateaux are narrow & extremely windy & steep. Thick grasses on the insides of hairpin turns hide oncoming traffic.

19 June 1987 Kara

Back from 2 days in Tomé. Met the new volunteers, of whom 7 are for the stores program. All seem very nice,