

Kim's Journal, 12/29/05

The year is almost over and what a way to bring it to a close! Right now I am listening to the surf crashing on my left, the birds chirping away in the trees up above and my friend, Deb Kern, typing away on my right. We are sitting at a beautifully tiled table, where our "group lunch" will be served soon. The food comes from the kitchen on one very large platter to share. It is like everyone is eating off of one big plate. We like how it brings us closer together, both physically and psychologically.

I've been watching some of the women preparing it in the outdoor kitchen and I can't wait. Everything has been so deliciously spiced and I have felt incredibly satisfied after each meal. My mouth has had FUN tasting so many different new things! Eating together, slowly, is a richly rewarding experience that I forget to do back at home. I hope to carry home the custom of taking an hour for each meal, and napping, if I can, afterwards. It makes so much sense to close your eyes and rest awhile, so you can be fully refreshed!

My eyes have been feasting on everything as well. This whole place, with its gorgeous sculptures, colorful stonework, blooming bougainvillea flowers, ("Happy flowers" is what Massamba calls them) and the blue green Atlantic ocean as a backdrop, has me pinching myself to see if I am awake or dreaming. Actually, I DON'T THINK I COULD DREAM UP A PLACE LIKE THIS. I'VE NEVER BEEN ANYWHERE SO BEAUTIFUL.

This morning we had a fantastic **Sabar** drumming class with Ndongo Diop, Ousmane N'Diaye, and Massamba. The Sabar drums are from this area of Senegal. They are taller and sound real punchy when you play them with a wooden stick. I had a blast once my hands learned to follow the rhythms. The exciting part of learning to drum together is how the whole group has to come TOGETHER to make it work. We learned by **call and response**...no books or sheet music here. Ndongo, with his stick slapping his drum, was conducting us. We had to follow his face and his repeated patterns to know what to do. We don't speak the same language, but there was a LOT of communication going on. Our hands lifted the voice out of each animal skinned drum, and we were driven by the beat to stay together. If you didn't get it right away, you just kept on trying, and we all had fun playing

the patterns again and again. I am amazed at what we learned to do together in a short period of time. It reminded me of when Tony Vacca and Massamba Diop came to our school last year and in one short morning had the entire school playing and calling out rhythms together. We came away energized and happy and more connected as a school. Well, imagine drumming together with your friends everyday with passion AND lightness and joy. I'm having a blast!

We also had two African **dance** lessons and they were fantastic. The only hard thing that I am experiencing is that I now have burned and blistered feet. I wish I had listened better to my body. We had our first dance class in the open air amphitheater in the late morning, and the black flat vinyl overlay on the floor was burning hot. I started stretching before class. Moses, a dancer from the previous class, was grooving to Tony's drumming. He invited me to follow him and learn some of the moves. I was so revved up that I ignored the burning sensation in my feet when we danced together. Tony was smart. He heard me say afterwards how hot the mat was and rolled it away before our class began. But the damage was done and I now have blistered soles and toes that sting like mad when I swim in the salty ocean. The good thing is that it is slowing me down to be on African time and I can be more aware of all the beauty around me. Au Revior.