

Visit to the Village of Toubab Dialaw

By Burchie Green

One morning Tony, Elizabeth, Kim, and I went for a walk around the village of Toubab Dialaw. Siomara, our fifteen month-old baby, rode along happily in the carrier. Though the village can be reached by car on one very bumpy road, most of the village consists of narrow dirt footpaths that wind around simple undecorated concrete buildings.

Children ran around happily and women could be seen carrying buckets of water on their heads from the nearby well. We saw men busily working on the construction of a new mosque. People were very friendly, especially when I made a point of greeting them in the traditional four or five Wolof phrases I'd learned before coming to Senegal. They seemed to enjoy my efforts to speak in their language.

Being a village on the sea, many people live on what they make selling fish or crafts. Most people don't own cars and have barely enough money to feed and clothe their families. I didn't see a lot of extra stuff like store bought toys, walkmans, or home decorations. People's homes appeared to have little inside them as well.

As in much of Africa, people cook on little wood-fueled burners on the ground and most have no refrigerators. Going to the market to get fish or chicken and rice for the day's meal is just part of the daily routine.

Though there was little greenery, beauty was not lacking. Besides the ocean and beach, which were spectacular, the beauty was in the people. In addition to being stunning to look at with exquisite features and beautiful African clothing, they also radiate an inner beauty and spirit that shines when you speak with them.

An older woman wearing a lovely traditional dress and headscarf, sat behind a small crate with a platter on it containing oranges and little packages of peanuts for sale. She sat there peacefully, her family frolicking about. As we got close to her, Tony and I recognized her as the same woman we had purchased oranges from four years ago in that very spot! There's a picture of her with me and Siomara on this site. I wondered how she could get by selling only oranges and peanuts on this little path.

As we rounded a corner, an old woman was sitting on the ground with her hand out asking for money. I reached into my fanny pack, and finding only pistachio nuts, I offered her a handful. Soon, children surrounded us with hands extended hoping for some, too. I passed one out to each child till I was out.

On our way back from the village we could smell yummy odors coming from people's homes and knew lunchtime was approaching. We headed back to our hotel and I felt, in some little ways, we were forever changed. Seeing people thriving on family, community, hard work and resourcefulness reminds us that it's not how much you have that's important, it's how you live your life.