

Week ending 10.4.10

Despite the Bank Holiday on Monday I was expected to attend a curriculum development workshop at college and arrived at the proposed start of 9am – I had a couple of breakfast sandwiches to fight the boredom of waiting, fried spam with an oily chilli onion sauce, before the proceedings were started at 11.45. The attendance sheet asked for an arrival time, when I saw a participant with an 11 o'clock arrival state she had arrived at 9.00 I changed my arrival to 7am accordingly; the irony was ignored. We were told if we worked until 5 each day we could save ourselves a day off on Sunday. So began a week that has seemed incredibly long but has actually flown past; compared to previous workshops there was only ever one newspaper floating around and phone calls weren't allowed to interrupt though the main organiser of the workshop spent least time in the room. The objectives were achieved on Friday with a day to spare, but could have been done with 2 days to spare if we had tried on Thursday, and to be perfectly honest Tuesday was a wasted day for myself so in truth had we been in the UK we'd have been done in two days. As I was supposed to be on holiday I suppose I can't really complain, the food was good and I did get paid extra for my time commitment. I did get to speak to the Dean about the sports field; he suggested I should have ignored the VSO training that had advocated a 'slowly, slowly' approach to development projects and 'slashed and burned' to get my project up and running in October/November to have delivered a fait accompli to the University when they appeared en masse in January. Now we have to discuss matters with the Vice Chancellor early next week, hopefully.

In a rare, sit down to indulge oneself, occasion we watched a pirate DVD of the recently released *Invictus* this week. The rugby involved was uninspiring (I supposed I should have expected as much with Clint Eastwood as a director) but the plot to demonstrate the unification of South Africa through the statesmanship of Nelson Mandela was inspirational, the truth of the motivation for Mandela may be fictional but it did allow me to review my situation. In the first instance it did make me realise my frustrations here are insignificant in the grand scheme of things, and while they may be worse than they could be in the UK, others have suffered more. I also realised how much I miss having a ready reference point of poetry. The film is titled after a poem; I had to get a copy to consider my situation but didn't have the luxury of an immediate fix to my interest in the motivational words. Whatever disillusion I portray in these reviews 'I am the master of my fate ...and captain of my soul'. I am still learning about Gambian culture and values but the more I think I've learnt the less I seem to know and so I should maybe not pass so many judgements that suggest a negative view.

But it is hard! On Thursday I visited the home of the head teacher of the children's school to discuss whether Bradley should be moved up a class, amend Abigail's bill and to reaffirm my offer of help for their next sports day; a 10 minute agenda I thought. Three hours later I came away. Mrs. Clarke, the Head, is the Chair of the Council for my workplace but has no faith in the teachers we educate – she would rather employ other West Africans through a lack of respect for the capabilities of her fellow nationals. I was at least able to offer advice and guidance, that could save her, and other local private schools, thousands of pounds in the long term with a bit of knowledge that I'd almost forgot.

Against that the positive. In 1983 I visited Greece while Inter-railing and loved the rustic earthy quality of life there, it had disappeared towards the end of the eighties; I hoped to discover that feeling when we holidayed in Turkey in 2007 thinking it was the 'edge' of Europe – I was disappointed. But now I travel through it every day of the week, the commute on bush taxis (too many police checkpoints now for an un-renewed driving licence) is probably more cramped, smelly and silent (apart from the 'salaam maleikum' on entry and the hawking *apprendi*) than the rush hour underground but I know where I'd rather be.