

## Weeks ending 24.7.10 & 31.7.10

A lazyish Sunday ended with embarrassing applause on the beach. After touch rugby I usually cool off in the sea; whilst still in shin deep water an African youth asked me if I could get his ball back ( I had done a ball 'sea rescue' before so I don't think the request was random). "No, 10 minutes ago maybe, but now it's too far," I answered honestly. Anyway, as the sea had a gentle swell, and not the usual crashing foam, I swam the 4-500 m to retrieve it (I nearly left it when I saw it was a *Real Madrid* ball – that decision would have been so much harder if it had been one of the English 'big 3'). Well I was clapped by some bathers, thanked and blessed by the owner on the beach and then complimented when I went to pick up my flip-flops and shirt from the bar veranda above the beach. I tried to divert the salutation saying "Africans can run well-I can't"; one of the spectators was a Ugandan VSO who has demanded I teach him to swim, I've told him he'll have to wait until Dale has left.

Monday started with the anticipation that I would get a new timetable to plan my time around Dale's visit. The proposed meeting time was missed by 2 ½ hours before I went and stood by the printer to collect a copy of the timetable; an effective meeting with the one co-worker who knows how the summer school works was not possible as he had been called into a workshop at the last minute to 'make up the numbers' leaving me with two new temporary recruits to brief (they'd also been waiting with less purpose than myself). I went to find Andrew (the experienced one) thinking his absence from the workshop won't make a blind bit of difference based on my own experience of attendance and delivery. I was told by the Dean that I would have to wait an hour ... despite my explanations and the needs of the other 2 newcomers. I didn't do the VSO 'tolerate and be patient bit,' I quietly extricated Andrew from the room, to be accused of being very unprofessional by the Dean – my answer "this is the Gambia." If I face any further comeback I shall highlight the Dean's personal behaviour at workshop he was 'involved' in at Easter where for 5 days he rarely spent more than 45 minutes in the room; I might also suggest he asks VSO not to recruit anymore professionals as we obviously are too concerned about keeping to previously made commitments, and not rearrangements made at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour. We were at least able to sort the new recruits out with their timetable; mine is awaiting another departmental decision- which means 'will I be teaching at 9 on Monday or will it be when I can be bothered to get there to then decide who I will be prepared to teach when?' Now that is unprofessional.

Monday evening was spent with final farewells to the last 3 volunteers who had arrived with us. Of the eight new volunteers who started our training, and bonded, in August last, only Denise and I remain.

As there was little for me to do at college I was resolved to wait for the phone call about the time table at home. I couldn't make much of the rest of the week anyway. On Monday night I was hit with the most awful bout of diarrhoea I have endured in my life – you can't be sure though here, such symptoms can be malarial and in consideration of not giving 'too much information' I had contemplated dysentery. I hope next time I suffer in such a fashion I am in Redcar with an en suite toilet, instead of having to extricate myself from the mosquito net and then still 20 metres away from safety! I recovered sufficiently to sort out 3<sup>rd</sup> party insurance on the car by the middle of the week and I've found a 'western' service that is cheap here (which in turn implies life!) – the year's cover =£11.60.

Friday eventually came and the arrival of Dale. The excitement was dampened when the car wouldn't start so we had to use a taxi to collect him; using the car would have meant we could have lessened the shock of his introduction to the squalor, instead the taxi driver brought us back on the less scenic route as he was low on fuel. Dale suffered the 'baptism of fire' of Serrekumda that we had endured on our arrival.

The intended acclimatisation for Dale was supposed to be at a southern beach resort, away from the hustle, to allow time to catch up in a relaxed environment. We waited until noon on Saturday for the car to get 'fixed' then set off for Sanyang – 10kms down the road the car started backfiring, cut out and wouldn't restart. We spent 3 hours sat at the roadside awaiting repairs to the starter motor before abandoning the planned retreat. Denise took Dale and the kids directly home in a bush taxi, I took the mechanic for a test drive; neither of which went smoothly as the President was using the road. So Dale did get to see the President in his glory and Abi even managed to taste some of the biscuits he throws to the people on such tours. The car made it within 100metres of home, but needed pushing the rest of the way. I discussed with the mechanic options of selling the car, he thinks he might be able to arrange a buyer from Guinea Bisseau. We took the rest of the weekend easy at home.

I expected too much organisation for the college summer schooling by trying to start at 9; different messages were floating about and I eventually got started just after 10.15. Arriving as I did I managed to secure the timetable I wanted – I never received the call I'd been waiting for – which meant teaching Monday to Wednesday only; a 3 day week is good for Dale's stay. Dale has been introduced to the more routine parts of our lives which in turn are a real eye opener to him.

He encountered some typically African officialdom when we went to sort Denise's biometric residential permit/id card. We were asked to sit in one area to wait by an immigration officer; an elderly woman came in so Dale courteously gave up his seat and went to sit on the floor. Another officer arrived and told him to move back to the seat area, officer 1 had to justify himself by saying that he had already been told to sit in the chair but he hadn't done so. I explained that in our culture that was considered the best way to behave.

We did manage to get to Sanyang on Friday for the night using gelleh transport - so let him experience the top rated beach on the Gambia. He also experienced the 'fun' of crowded local transports and got to see some more rural Gambia. My time has been spent catching upon the year we have been separated, which accounts also for the lack of separate reviews these last weeks. I have cancelled all rugby commitments through his stay so have likewise taken a lighter view of writing this review also. It may be a similar story for the coming weeks as my focus is on him; I'm sure you may well be holidaying also, I hope you enjoy.