

w/e 17.10.09

Now the work has started the week has flown by with a blur. We spent Saturday afternoon on the beach and dragged our neighbour, John, along for good measure to show him another part of his Gambian experience, he even had a swim in the ocean (he's been here 6 months so far and hadn't tried it). On Sunday we had to attend a School Founder's Day church thanksgiving service; the poor kids had to sit through a 2 ½ hour Communion Service, I picked a seat by the window so I could look out to the ocean (the windows are at a decent height for such indiscretion here) but the experience was not as 'evangelical' as some other Christian churches in the area. After the service the children had to march behind a Police brass band, Abi was supplied with a school boater and coped but Bradley didn't really enjoy the experience in the heat. A lazy afternoon was then required.

The kids were given the Monday off after their experience so I went to college later after a brief bird-spotting walk around the golf course. On attending college I learnt that my boss had become a father so I was asked to cover one of his classes (it ended up being 2!) as his wife had given birth, he had learnt on the previous Friday, 24 hours after the actual event so prior warning unavoidable!

My gelleh journey to and from Brikama was less traumatic than the previous week except for the actions of a fellow passenger. I was brought up to never read over the shoulder of another, large A2 spread newspaper or otherwise, but found my values challenged when I pulled out an A5 history of the *Ethnic groups of the Senegambia* to read. As I turned the page to read the next a hand held it down so that my neighbour could finish reading the page; she then took it from me and checked the author, title, etc. I made small talk about her interest in History, the age of the text and library facilities before being allowed to continue reading. I reached a point at which I wished to clarify what I had read by re-reading; I was not allowed to, the book was taken from me again so that my fellow could satisfy her thirst for knowledge.

My existence as a mere outsider was further proven on Wednesday morning when returning from the VSO office. I saw a monkey running across a main road we have walked many a time unperturbed by wildlife (the kids had marched there on Sunday!). As I approached its area of escape I looked up to the Baobab tree nearby but was amazed to see it astride the fence of the MRC compound. I was able to get within 3 feet of it and could have touched it(didn't for fear of rabies) but it looked through me as no threat – very humbling- I am still an observer in this world.

At this point I should return to Tuesday evening, my third game of beach touch rugby. On this occasion with 'veteran' Aussie husband of volunteer, Danny, to add some experience to the field – I was part of a losing team for the first time. I feel I should spend some time explaining the intricacies of this game. One touchline is a vague strip of sloping soft sand, the other about thigh depth (depending on waves) of the Atlantic ocean. In my first game I kept my training shoes on and kept to the sand, second game the shoes were off (so I could enter the water zone without fear of rotting the shoes) third game likewise but drenched within minutes after attempting to outflank an athletic Gambian on the 'wet' wing. I have learnt most of the attacking play happens in the water where the ground is easier to run upon than the soft sand.

On Wednesday I had a superb 'feel good' moment in teaching; having spent two hours demonstrating an interactive place value lesson I had a teacher with classroom experience (returned for a professional qualification/CPD) thank me for showing him how to teach a topic that had previously been tedious board work. My journey home was completed on a moped taxi – a 3 wheeled vehicle with a bench akin to a rickshaw pulled by moped styled vehicle with open sides(great when its not raining, otherwise you're a pillion passenger!). Tom & Lynn, bereaved couple from week 3, had also dropped in for a cup of tea before departure 'up-country'; they had entertained the kids in a grandparent fashion and ensured Denise was not forgotten.

On Thursday driving to college we met the policeman of the previous Friday, whilst I was fearing the worst he was very amenable to myself and the same student, Langley, shaking both of our hands. I continued thinking that maybe these policemen aren't so bad after all. I dropped the head of PE in brown smelly stuff when I enthusiastically pushed a copy of a VSO book in front of the School's Principal(that I had borrowed from her desk 3 days previously) to support him in his convincing her that he was doing things to improve PE; she challenged him that she had showed him the same book before but he had ignored it- oops. I am worried that my enthusiasm for improving college sports facilities will alienate myself –I must wait for the crops to be harvested from the redundant part of the sports field before wholesale clearance- while I am pursuing a dream I have for the promotion/expansion of sport in The Gambia.

Friday seemed to arrive so quickly after Monday; the first full week in the job seemed to happen so quickly. I was hit with another expectation on Friday morning as one of my co-lecturers announced he was going on observation tour next week so my workload increased by 50% next week. Brikama had no internet access for a week and I survived ,with an hour long justified visit to the VSO office. In that time I collected an email that requested more information about our transition of lifestyle, for inclusion in the *Evening Gazette* our local newspaper in Middlesbrough. I had also been given an invitation to attend a Diwali celebration at a restaurant on the Senegambia tourist strip; we attended and for once, out here, I felt privileged that I was being treated as something other than a tourist. The tourist season has now, officially, begun so bumsters are now official guides with identity cards; I was approached by one on Saturday afternoon when I was walking along the beach. He persisted against my "head down and keep walking" attitude claiming he had a right to speak to me; I denied this as I wasn't a tourist. The conversation ended when he had offered bar facilities of drinks, food and ... around the back were some girls who could give you a massage! So much for the policing of the hustle, they've legalised pimps!