

The First Five Weeks

The account of our arrival and installation in our village location

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The First Five Weeks is an article I wrote back in 1988 when we first moved into the Kouya village of Déma. It all seems a long time ago now, but it is still funny - at least bits of it are!

Monday June 27

The day started rather inauspiciously, good for parasites but not too good for Homo sapiens, I had been bitten badly by mosquitoes overnight, including a good few bites in a part of my anatomy that made the thought of sitting down for a seven hour bus ride rather unpleasant.

I came out to on my own so as to get the house comfortable, Sue and David will follow in a day or two. For the time being we will be staying in our co-workers, Phil and Heather Saunders, house. Sometime in the next few months we will need to start thinking about our long term housing situation.

The coach journey was no problem; I sat next to the window just behind the driver and was comforted to see that despite the impression of high speed the speedo never left the zero mark. I had an open window right next to me which meant that I was sitting in a force ten gale all of the way, sleep did not come easily.

I found that the chap next to me was a Kouya: Hudson Taylor would no doubt have struck up a conversation with him, but what with a gale in one ear and loud reggae music on the PA. in the other I somehow never got beyond, "hi, how are you".

As is the case with all journeys here, we were stopped numerous times by police check points as well as having regular halts for food and calls of nature. Every time the coach pulled up a huge crowd would appear, as if by magic trying to sell hard boiled eggs, plastic bags full of cold water and other delicacies to the passengers. At Adjame, in Abidjan one of these ladies became the first African I have seen slip up while carrying a load on her head. With a huge tray of something balanced precariously, she misjudged the height of a roof, which surgically removed the tray from her head without her faltering in her stride.

My taxi driver from Vavoua to Déma turned out to be a Kouya, being very keen I got him to teach me the evening greeting, which I was subsequently too embarrassed to use. Emile, the Saunders language informant, wasn't expecting me, so I went off to find him, when I finally tracked him down he looked different to my recollection of him, it took me a good five minutes to realise that in fact I was talking to Gilbert, the house help, and not Emile. I wouldn't go so far as to say that all Africans look alike, but to an uncultured European eye, many of them are remarkably similar.

Tea of spiced sardine sandwiches, a bit of conversation and so to bed, for the record, two paraffin lamps throw out enough light to allow you to use a Toshiba 1100+ and almost see what you are typing.

Tuesday June 28

I was cold in bed last night, a new experience for me in Africa, made me quite homesick. A note for future reference, rechargeable batteries are a waste of time and energy, I put a fully charged set into my torch last night and the thing went and died on me in less than half an hour, I'll have to buy some ordinary ones if I am to read in bed tonight.

Talking to Gilbert and Emile, apparently Phil and Sue had told them that we would be coming out here on the tenth of July, that accounts for the garden looking like a rain forest and the house like a building site. Where the date the tenth of July came from I have no idea, certainly I never mentioned it nor was it ever suggested to me, ah well I'm here now.

WEC have a school for missionaries kids a couple of kilometres from Vavoua, as I walked out there from time a lot of kids started following me and calling out "toubabou" which I guess is the Kouya word for "white man". Being here and sticking out like a sore thumb certainly gives you a new insight into racism at home.

On the way back from the school I met the "village idiot", not an acceptable anthropological term, but what else can I use? She greeted me like a long lost son which was disconcerting to say the least.

The folks at the school seemed pleased to see me, and they will come around tomorrow with the cooker and kerosene fridge for the house. The afternoon consisted of trying to get the house into some sort of decent shape.

As Emile wasn't expecting us he is still sleeping and working in the house, we can't just chuck him out, can we? so it looks as if we will have a live in lodger for a while. That would be no problem but for the fact that it means David sharing our room (yet again).

Wednesday June 29

Spent most of the day trying to get the house looking less like a building site and more like a home. Emile and Gilbert are both convinced that I am incapable of doing anything,

every time I put my hand to a job, they come and take it over from me. I'm left wandering around the house like a lost soul, trailing half completed jobs around behind me.

In the afternoon I was whisked off to another house for what reason I couldn't tell. When we got there, rather breathless, we found a baby, who was obviously not well, and her worried parents. What to do? I had no medicine with me and wouldn't have known what to give even if I'd had some. It's at this sort of point where you realise how little preparation you've really had. Four years to get to this point and the first time any one in the village needs me I'm stuck. I suggested that we pray for the baby, and then I held her for a while, and told her parents how to keep her fever down. As I left they were squirting some foul vegetable preparation into her eyes, the poor little thing was in agony.

Church; lots of singing, none of which I could understand, I reintroduced myself and spoke about the fatherhood of God, with Emile translating. It was rather discouraging to have him translate the one word of Kouya that I used, (hello) because no one understood it.

Emile's family gave me my evening meal, rice and peanut sauce, a pleasant relief from sardine sandwiches.

Thursday June 30

Into Vavoua this morning to get some gas and paraffin. While I was lugging two dirty great canisters around my sandal decided to fall apart, terrific! I got to the place where they sell gas and left my stuff there and limped off to find a cobbler. The job was done very quickly, for the price of 50 francs, or 10p in sterling. You need to divide everything by 500 to convert local prices to sterling, you very quickly get adept at that.

I went to see about getting the electricity connected, but the boss wasn't around, I waited an hour and then gave up as I still had a lot to do at home, perhaps tomorrow. In the meantime we need lots of sunshine to keep all our batteries charged

Spent the afternoon getting the house more in order, I began to get very distracted as time went on and Sue and David were due to arrive. I expected to see them by about 4.30. By 7.00 I had given up hope of their arrival and resigned myself to another lonely evening. Happily just as I was settling down to listen to the World Service, (praise the Lord for the BBC) a taxi drew up with the family inside. Sue seemed pleased to see me, but David was too intent on playing with the steering wheel while the driver unloaded the bags, even to notice my presence.

Friday July 1

At least when you are on your own, you don't have a little boy waking you up in the morning demanding milk! What do you have for breakfast in the absence of corn flakes? Porridge! What else? Quaker oats can be bought anywhere here, Americans eat them cold

with milk and raisins, we however have kept some dignity and have it with hot milk and sugar, (not salt, we aren't real purists)

I felt really nervous about visiting people in the village, but having put it off a few days, now is the time to get stuck in. So we wandered off around the top end of the village, trailing a huge number of kids behind us, so that's how the Pied Piper felt.

Heather came round this afternoon (she was up at the school for the end of term), hoping to sort through some of the stuff that they have left in the house, most of which I'd already buried out of sight in a large cupboard.

Emile took us off to greet the chief, a rather consumptive, but very dignified elderly man, much to the delight of the assembled multitudes David ran all over the shop, behaving in a most rude fashion (by our standards)

Pierre, one of the Christians, came round later in the evening to greet us, problem: how do we get these folks to speak to us in Kouya and not take the easy way out and speak French?

Saturday July 2

Went into Vavoua with Emile and Sue, we ordered some kitchen chairs so that we can both sit up at the table at the same time. The cost is not too bad, five pounds a chair (2,500 francs). so they won't be Chippendale, but we only want to sit on them after all. Picked up our mail at the post office, one letter, containing a floppy disc, wonderful, another adventure game to play, now all I need is power so that I dare use the computer for such frivolous pursuits. At the moment I am trying to keep it charged up with one small solar cell. We also called in to see the pastor at the big church in town.

David ate an unbelievable amount at lunch time, but was not too keen on sleeping at siesta; I need a nap even if he doesn't.

Dan and Liz Durben who we know from our SIL days in Britain called around this afternoon, they are in the area for the WEC annual conference at the school. 'Twas wonderful to see them after almost two years.

Sunday July 3

Church at nine o'clock scheduled to last till eleven thirty, two and a half hours of solid Kouya is a daunting prospect. In the end things turned out somewhat differently, half way through the service a terrific rainstorm began and water came straight in through the walls of the building, which resembles a garden shed. Sue and I, who had been given seats at the front as a mark of honour, found ourselves in the wettest part of the building. A good half of the congregation, including all of the children left at this point. When the storm died down things recommenced, with Emile preaching and Williams translating for

our benefit. We both felt encouraged and challenged by the message and were really glad that we had heard it.

I spent a lot of today, as well as two boxes of matches, trying to get the fridge to work; I remain sceptical as to whether I have succeeded. It doesn't hum like an electric fridge so your first clue that all is not well is the smell of putrefying meat filling the kitchen.

We went up to the school for the afternoon to see Dan and Liz, Dan and I solved most of the world's problems while the kids played on the swings. We got to meet a lot of the WEC folks, including one lady who said that she had been praying for us for years, isn't the Lord good, where would we be without the army of folks, many of whom we don't even know, who are faithfully bearing us up in prayer?

We also met Jackie, a WEC girl who I had taught language learning to last summer at Horsley's Green.

Monday July 4

Phil arrived this afternoon with a pick up truck with our stuff in it. He also brought some mail, including a new theological dictionary (will be good for insomnia) and a whole load of fruit, water melons, limes and apples. We won't go short of vitamin C for the next week or so anyway.

Tuesday July 5

First thing this morning Phil acted as middle man between ourselves and Gilbert and Emile. In this society, where everything is done orally, all agreements must be conducted in the presence of a third party, who ensures fair play and sees that terms are adhered to. It was funny really, Phil talking to us in English, then to Emile in French who spoke to Gilbert in Kouya. All the while Gilbert and ourselves pretending not to understand the French. We have agreed on a trial period for Gilbert, he will work in the house for us for a couple of months when we will review the situation. If Sue is to get any language work done at all, we will need someone to work for us, but whether we need someone full time is unsure (as is our ability to pay full time; wages are ridiculously low here, but fifty pounds a month is a sizeable chunk out of our support).

Emile will carry on working for Phil and Heather until he goes to Bible School in September but we will also get him to help us whenever we need him.

We think that for the next few months, we will use these two as language helpers, while being on the lookout for more permanent help. Had our first formal language learning session with Gilbert in the afternoon. After all our training and teaching language acquisition, this first session is almost automatic, but we have to keep reminding ourselves that this is for real now, we won't just learn a few phrases and then go home.

Got the toilet flush working, it recycles washing water and unfortunately keeps getting bunged up with stuff from the washing up. Ah well; a toilet that flushes 50% of the time is an advance. You really need to be a jack of all trades, and a master of one or two, if you are to cope out here.

Wednesday July 6

For the record it is six months to the day since we left England. Gatwick Airport seems an awful long way away.

Phil left for Abidjan this morning, when will we next see someone we know from outside the village? He had hoped to have one last flush of his toilet but I couldn't get it working again.

The house is more or less in good shape now, although most of the windows are still boarded up. I don't want to take the boards down until we get either screening or curtains up. None of them have glass and a bare hole in the wall leaves you feeling very exposed. Screening is badly needed at the moment, I keep getting bitten by mosquitoes or some such beast. Mind you, until we get ceilings installed the insects can just fly in over the walls and get us.

Worked with Emile for an hour, progress at this stage is so slow, it can get discouraging very quickly. We still have all sorts of trouble trying to say "hello". Going out for a walk into the village is a necessity for language practice but with hundreds of kids following us the thing rapidly turns into some sort of procession. As we get more confident we will need to split up and go out separately at times when we are likely to find folk in the village. For me, the evening is likely to be the best as the men are in the fields all day. The women's working patterns are not quite so easy to discern.

I went to church alone tonight (the eight o'clock meeting got under way at half past), David is just getting into a routine and we did not want to spoil things by giving him a late night. Half way through I was asked to pray and then a little before the end I was asked to preach. I've been told that our home church is an intimidating place to preach in, it can't be half as bad as preaching in a small wooden building where it is too dark to see the congregation. On top of this preaching in French and having it translated sentence by sentence into Kouya, all at the drop of a hat! This sort of thing really throws you on the Lord, at home I am a confident (perhaps too confident) preacher, here I am right out of my depth, prayer is the only answer. I think that in future I will prepare one or two talks to be used as and when needed. I'm still not sure of the best way to structure things for the Kouya to follow; I want any teaching that I do to prepare people for reading and studying the word for themselves.

It was cold this evening, so much so that I wore long trousers and a sweat shirt, helped to keep the mossies off as well.

Thursday July 7

Into Vavoua this morning for market, we found a few luxuries, lettuce and cabbage. It's funny to think that after hating the things for school dinners I now view cabbage as a luxury. Picked up our mail at the post office, only one letter, and that's it for a week, at least we don't have to worry about replying. At the Electricity Office they said that they could do nothing till their vehicle is repaired, perhaps tomorrow, perhaps in a month.

Tonight, Sue went to the ladies meeting, unfortunately she was the only lady to turn up, so she got home rather earlier than expected. Emile explained that, there hasn't been a women's meeting for a while and people have got out of the habit, also the groundnut harvest is in progress, this is mainly women's work, leaving them tired out.

Friday July 8

Went into the fields with Emile this morning, he showed us how to plant cocoa and bananas. Given the pleasure that the end products have given me, it is rather nice to see their production. So far we haven't been able to find chocolate in Vavoua, this could be a major problem if it continues. As befits the world's largest cocoa producer, Ivorian chocolate is very good. If that were not enough, many shops sell Cadbury's, but at a price!

The paraffin fridge gave up on us again today, it took a good half box of matches to get it going. At this rate it will cost us more in matches than in paraffin.

Working with Emile we elicited the question, "where are you going?". Both "where are you going?" and "where am I going" could be written, "moh-na-mun-ay-uh". the only difference between the two is the tone on "na", a low tone means "you", a higher tone means "I". I found I could hear the tones when Emile said them, but reproducing them is another thing altogether.

The afternoons are a real trial at the moment, David keeps waking up in a foul mood, which can last for hours. He also has become very strong minded on the subject of biscuits.

I went and sat in Emile's family's courtyard after dark, nice and peaceful.

Saturday July 9

You know that you are in for a hard day when your first thought on getting out of bed is "how long until siesta?" The cold that has been threatening Sue for a few days came on with a vengeance. I didn't realise that you could catch colds in Africa! My stomach is playing up again, leaving me feeling awfully tired.

Went into Vavoua with Emile, we had to wait about forty minutes to get a taxi (a twenty seater minibus). Once in town we found a cobbler to fix my sandals, which had given up the ghost again. The chap turned out to be a Christian and did the job for nothing, which was rather nice. At the carpenters, where we had ordered the chairs last week, the boss

had not heard of us. It turns out that one of his employees is doing work in secret around the corner and pocketing the money. We eventually tracked the guy down and were not in the least bit surprised to find that the chairs weren't ready as promised. Heavy as lead, they still need gluing together and a coat or two of varnish. He says they will be ready on Monday, being a trusting sort, I almost believe him.

Normally, my siesta consists of an hour lying on the bed reading pulp fiction, the Guardian Weekly, which we subscribe to, or magazines, sent from home (hint). It is a measure of how tired I feel that today I slept for three hours straight. I felt vaguely human afterwards.

We spent some time praying and thinking through our language learning. We have a basic problem in finding people to talk to. We were told that as soon as we got to the village we would have an endless stream of folks coming to see us. Far from it, apart from the village folle, who comes round regularly and frightens David, we have only had two or three visitors in the last week.

It is a measure of the faithfulness of God, that having prayed both Sue and I had really good language learning sessions afterwards. I went out for a walk and came back fifty minutes later, head spinning, having learned to count to ten, and numerous parts of the body. In a sense what I learned is unimportant, 24 hours later I have forgotten the majority anyway, although it will be relatively easy to relearn the stuff and this time it should stick. What is important is the contact with people in the village who are willing to talk and spend time with ignorant and tongue tied foreigners. One of the tricks in language learning is to take it a little at a time. It is very frustrating to have someone tell you in detail the name for each division of the finger, when you still don't know the word finger itself.

I was right I should have a stock of sermons handy, I preached on Psalm 46 at about five minutes warning this evening. I hope it made sense to someone. The temptation is to think that it doesn't matter, this is only a small congregation out in the bush. But it does matter, in God's eyes this place is as precious as any of our big evangelical congregations at home. I must put as much care into what I say here as I would if I were preaching at Spring Harvest (I can dream, can't I?), more so in effect, in Britain the people could go home and check what I say in their Bibles, here, only the few who read French can do that.

Sunday July 10

Sue's cold was worse today.

The visiting preacher didn't turn up at church. Guess who was called upon to do the job? I was standing outside watching David, the crèche facilities not being too well developed, when Pierre came out of the service to get me and tell me that I was to preach in a couple of minutes. I started by singing a song based on Jn.3:16 in French. The look of surprise on Sue's face was a wonder to behold! The idea was to introduce the idea of singing

Scripture; perhaps they do already, I can't tell, however it's a good idea anyway and the song served as an introduction to the talk/sermon which was an ad hoc exposition of the said verse. I asked Emile about the amount of notice I was being given, apparently there are a number of folk around who can and do preach, but they will only do so if they are given time to prepare, I being a mug, or a missionary, (the two terms may well be synonymous), am expected to produce a message at the drop of a hat.

Bokassa the guy I spoke to yesterday, came round to talk to us this afternoon. He obviously fancies his chances of working with us as a language helper, not that he is a philanthropist, far from it, he wants the money.

Monday July 11

Finally got the new chairs today, boy are they heavy. Sue reckons that they may well be teak, which is after all very common around here. Williams managed to get all four chairs into the boot of his taxi, I reckoned that there wasn't even room for one.

One advantage of our long training is that we know what we are in for. Today, for instance, I was able to diagnose the symptoms of culture shock in myself. Feeling very negative about the situation and feeling very antagonistic to all and sundry. For no real rational reason I found myself blaming the Saunders for everything that is going wrong for us. The only remedy open to me is to pull myself together and stop being so silly, easy to say, not always easy to do.

Tuesday July 12

Sue and I spent the morning trying to sort out the data we have gathered so far. We have made some progress, not much, but some nonetheless. Tried to shoot a couple of hornbills with Emile's air gun, I'd do better throwing rocks at them!

We are reaching a crisis over batteries, the computer is down and there isn't enough sun to recharge it or the hoards of batteries we use in our tape recorders. If we had a car we could run everything off the 12v battery, even better we could get the mains rigged up.

Both Sue and I had good walks in the village. My Kouya may not be up to much but the local kids think my animal noises are the best thing since sliced manioc!

Sat and sang choruses on the balcony after dark, I'm not sure whether or not I was just using this as an excuse not to go out and visit people.

Sue's cold seems to be getting better, David slaps her on the back every time she coughs.

Wednesday July 13

Many more days like this one and I'm going home, actually everything worked out fine in the end, but it was fairly hard going. The day started well enough, we set the morning

aside for a monthly time of prayer. Praying for our supporters gets harder as time goes on, do they find the same thing I wonder? We listened to an excellent cassette by John Blanchard, English ministry is so precious to us.

Emile and Gilbert started work on a fence around the garden to keep David from running off. They both appeared to be in bad moods, you could cut the air with a knife.

David fell asleep before lunch and so stayed awake all through siesta. An hour and a half spent telling him to lie down was hardly the rest that we were hoping for. He had already woken us both up at 3am and come into our bed where he tossed and turned till five when he got up and insisted that we do likewise.

The rotten paraffin fridge gave up again, spent 1 1/2 hours and the best part of two boxes of matches fighting with it, I think I've got it cracked.

Sue had a cookery lesson in the village, learning to prepare foutou, manioc and banana paste (not much nicer than it sounds). I meanwhile worked with Gilbert on the verb system. Walking round the village I managed to say such gems as "the two baby goats are walking in the village", I remain totally unable to say "hello" however.

The lead I'm using to charge the computer came apart in my hand this afternoon, this will make things even more complicated

Feeling tired, and being worried that I would be asked to preach, I decided to stay in this evening, Sue's cold is staging a comeback. David, the little horror, is still wide awake.

Thursday July 14

David slept well, Praise the Lord. We went into Vavoua for the market, there were six or seven letters, must be a record. Sue bought a fresh chicken, you could tell it was fresh, it was still breathing. Of course David was please

d as anything to have a live doodle-doo in the courtyard. He unfortunately thought that it was there to give him something to play football with.

Reading matter is a problem, I've brought enough books to give me one a week till we go back to Abidjan, I read the week after next's book today. I'm going to be reading the computer manual for relaxation in a few days.

Did the Saunders lend us their fridge as a way of stopping us learning too much Kouya? I spent well over an hour fighting it again today. If Gilbert tells me once more that electric fridges are better, I'll scream.

Having fought the fridge, I had little time for language learning but I joined the local card school for half an hour. Didn't have a clue what was going on.

While Sue was at the Ladies' meeting I sat on the balcony with a large mug of cocoa, listening to some jazz on the walkman, it's the first time I've really wound down for a while.

Friday July 15

A mixed day, mostly bad but some good. Rather inauspiciously, Sue woke up with a headache and a slight fever, both of which point to malaria. A Nivaquine treatment seemed to do the trick, it seems that she needs to recognise the symptoms early on, so as to knock it on the head. Moving out to the village, coupled with being tired out from the cold have left her wide open to it. Fortunately I haven't been at all prone to it so far.

The morning was more or less evenly divided between listening to our Kouya recordings and working on the fridge. Perhaps I should just give up on it, at the moment it is only a little cooler than room temperature and our meat is slowly going off.

The doodle-doo bit the dust this afternoon (and very nice it was too). Unlike her, I had a very good afternoon walking round the village. I spent a good while talking to a friend of Sue's, Colette, who speaks very little French. It's amazing how much you can communicate with a few gestures, lots of smiles and a tiny spattering of Kouya. Later on I joined a couple of guys who were roasting peanuts, very pleasant! Bokassa turned up obviously the worse for wear, I refused the proffered beer (although it would have gone well with the peanuts) in deference to the local church view on alcohol.

Around seven the electricity people came round to see about hooking us up to the mains (imagine British electricity board men turning up at seven on a Friday evening). Apparently much of the wiring will have to be redone if it is to meet Ivorian safety standards. Just the sort of news we were hoping to have! We are sitting on an awful lot of equipment that we can't use at the moment, expecting to have power, we didn't invest heavily in solar panels or what have you. I feel like I'm up a gum tree without a panel.

Saturday July 16

Thirty minutes after writing out yesterday's diary, saying I was not prone to malaria, I wanted to die. Chills, headache and an intense lethargy. Took buckets of nivaquine and tons of paracetamol, wrote a few letters and moaned a lot.

Sunday July 17

Felt awful this morning, but we thought we'd better go to church anyway, not having been during the week. Fortunately, I wasn't asked to preach, but we were asked to sing; good grief. The sermon went on for over an hour, taking the whole proceedings to something like three and a quarter hours, I was torn between encouragement at their devotion and the desire to go home to bed.

A very long siesta, and two more nivaquine had me feeling much better but still very washed out.

The village boys 5-a-side final was held this afternoon, Brazil beat Monaco on penalties. The whole thing was accompanied with much singing, shouting, drumming and dancing, great fun.

Monday July 18

Sue's turn to feel down today, strangely enough I feel really cheerful.

Sue went off to Vavoua to try and get hold of Phil on the phone, to sort out what to do about the wiring, everything takes so much longer out here where the nearest phone is over half an hour away on a good day, (more if you have to wait for a taxi). They weren't really able to resolve anything, which was no surprise.

Tuesday July 19

Another bad start, we had been saving our good tape recorder till the mains current was connected, however as that event seems as far off as ever, we decided to get it out and run it on batteries. Would you believe it? the stupid thing would not work. I took it apart and found the problem; it needs a new switch circuit. I wrote a begging letter to Philips asking them to send out the part under the guarantee. I can hardly take it back to the dealers like I'm supposed to, can I?

It rained all night and most of the morning, turning the village into a swamp. David did not appreciate being kept in.

While I was chatting to someone in the village a couple of guys came up. They made a few derogatory remarks about me not being able to understand French, I really wanted to say that I understand French well enough to get by in France, but that their accents were so bad that I couldn't understand them. But what's the point? When things get you down it is easy to indulge in point scoring, but it's hardly a servant-like attitude. Life here is so different, I can drive a car, read Sartre in the original or programme a computer, so what, I speak Kouya like a one year old and I don't even know how to plant manioc!

Friday July 22

We solved the computer problem, for a while at least, by buying a car battery, (all we need now is the car!) which will keep it charged up until the power situation gets seen to. Emile picked the battery up for us in Vavoua, and brought back lots of letters (well four to be exact). My brother and two other friends are in the process of moving to take up pastorates in new towns. While being pleased for them, it hurts that we won't be able to go to valedictory and farewell services.

Had an encouraging time practicing my Kouya, I am learning something, it's just that there is so much to learn that it seems we are getting nowhere.

Saturday July 23

Today was the first sunny, warm day in ages. Sunshine makes a lot of difference to your state of mind, it also helps get some batteries charged up for the cassette recorders.

The morning was spent preparing my sermon for tomorrow, preparing in French is a nightmare. I almost wish that I had to preach off the cuff. Generally, I enjoy preparing, seeing thoughts and ideas come together to bring out the meaning of the Word. In French though I'm so busy trying to work out how to express the simplest things clearly that I can't seem to make the whole sermon flow as a unit. Having very few reference books in French adds to the problem, I have to continually swap from language to language, which does not make for clarity of thought.

Having got the computer back into action I spent this afternoon typing up my diary for the last two weeks. I indulged myself in the meanwhile by listening to the cricket on the BBC. Why, when I give myself time to relax, does the weather have to be rotten in Leeds, meaning that the game has to stop for bad light.

The sunlight was so attractive that I went out to take a few pictures, I wanted just to get a few candid shots of village life. Impossible with about twenty kids following me and calling out to all and sundry that I had a camera. I hope there are some worthwhile shots in among them anyway, I hope that I can put together a slide sound sequence in the next month or so.

At church I felt really out of things, I believe in Bible translation because I am sure that people can only really respond to God if they hear of Him in their own language. I now know this to be practically true in my own experience, I feel desperate to worship with others in English and to hear an exposition of scripture. In Abidjan there is the International Church, but even there we are not at home, the church is mainly American and there are enough subtle differences to make us feel a bit lost.

Sunday July 24

What a morning. I preached, in French, of course, this time we had a running translation into two languages, Kouya and Gouro. It was a nightmare for me, but Sue said that the message still came across clearly. One real encouragement came from Jules, the guy whose baby I prayed over the first day or so after I got here. At the time I felt a right fraud, but Jules got up in the service today and said that since that time the baby has been fine. It's great to know that God does work through our weakness, (just as well it's all we've got to offer).

Had a few visitors this afternoon, which is encouraging, otherwise a quiet day.

Monday July 25

We got a good mornings work done, organizing ourselves for the next week or so. However we both spent the afternoon suffering for something we had eaten, the fridge got it's revenge for my disparaging comments.

The highlight of the day was an invasion of army ants, we stopped them getting into the house by spreading paraffin on the step, but the garden was swarming with them. Both David and I got some nasty nips. As an expert in this field I consider mosquito bites worse than army ants!

Tuesday July 26

A good day, I went into Vavoua to get the stuff for the electricity. While I was in the shop, Sue came and found me, one of the teachers from the WEC school had arrived at Déma to take us to the school for a day off.

Purchases concluded, we drove up to VIS (Vavoua International School) where we were royally entertained. Sitting chatting in English, Cornish pasties for lunch with potatoes, what luxury! Someone even gave us a bar of chocolate, is it really only a month since we last saw that.

You don't realise how much you need a break until you get one.

Wednesday July 27

The electricians came today, as a result could not get much done.

We were asked to look at a boy who has a huge swelling on his leg, judging by the book, it's an abscess. Prayed with him and gave him antibiotics. Hope he gets better, he's twelve, and looks very weak. His name is Eddie.

Thursday July 28

Lots more letters!

Late this evening I went with Emile to pray with a Christian lady who felt unwell. It seemed like it was only wind, and indeed she recovered overnight, but when there is no medical Help or knowledge around the littlest thing is an emergency.

Friday July 29

Sue got malaria again. She spent most of the day in bed, but seems in good spirits nonetheless.

I recorded a Kouya folk tale with Emile, a charming little story about a cat scratching a dog's nostril, the significance of which escapes me completely.

The boy's abscess shows no sign of improving, what do we do?

Colette was cooking anteater while I was round there this evening. She insisted that I share the meal. Plantain foutou (a sort of a cross between mashed potato and glue) with anteater in a hot pepper sauce. Sitting under a mango tree dipping my hands into the pot I was really happy. Colette speaks very little French so conversation is limited but both Sue and I feel an affinity for her.

Played "Trivial Pursuit" this evening.

Saturday July 30

We had lots of visitors this morning, a good opportunity to practice my Kouya. One young lad started arguing about Christianity, he said that it was alright for whites but it could not help Africans. Rather than argue the point I called for Emile, who was more than happy to explain his faith. The best people to evangelize the Kouya are other Kouya. Our role is really that of catalysts.

Sue spent this morning in bed but was well enough to go for a walk this afternoon.

Praise the Lord, the lad's abscess has burst, now as long as we can keep it clean, he should be okay. His mother is so grateful for our concern.

Finding it very difficult to pray and read my Bible, the complete absence of any sort of routine makes it very difficult.

Sunday July 31

This morning we went to church in Bahoulifla, a village about six miles away. Despite sleeping in when our alarm didn't go off we were still the first there. Being a visitor I was asked to preach. I hadn't really prepared anything and was more unhappy with what I said than I have ever been before. A combination of personal dryness and not really knowing what the people need to hear, make preaching very hard.

Most of the rest of the day was swallowed up by writing letters.

So that's it a calendar month gone by, what have we achieved? Not a lot really, we can speak some Kouya, although it really is very little. We have got to know a few people, again though it is very few. Slowly but surely though we are beginning to see the barriers between us and the villagers be broken down. It will be months, if not years before we really have anything to contribute to life here, in the meantime we have to accept our role as learners and stick with it.

Please pray for us, we really do need it.