VILLAGE LIFE

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Imagine it's your third day in an isolated African village. You are expected to treat a sick child in the afternoon and to preach in church in the evening; despite having no medical training and not being able to speak the local language (at least not so as people could understand, anyway).

Category: Observations

John James has just written a nice review of Philip Saunders' bookÂ No Ordinary Book, which got me thinking. Â John writes:

> *In itâ€™s favour though, I would say that although missionaries in Africa are often stereotyped as arrogant know-it-alls, such memoirs are actually far more open-minded and humble than many journalistic accounts. Thereâ€™s very little politics, and thereâ€™s none of the Western journalistsâ€™ frequent desire to â€˜explain the Africanâ€™ or give cut-out solutions to the highlighted problems. Instead we meet real people, we learn about cultural differences and similarities, and we come away with a far more human account well removed from the â€˜otheringâ€™ frequently found in western literature on Africa, whether it be by anthropologists or journalists. In short, I found it a far truer account to the the Ivorian life than many others, even if my Abidjan-life was far removed from the village.*

This reminded me of a diary that I kept in our early days of working alongside the Saunders in the Kouya project. The extract below is of my third day in a Kouya village back in June 1988.

> *Spent most of the day trying to get the house looking less like a building site and more like a home.*
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> *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. Iâ€™m left wandering around the house like a lost soul, trailing half completed jobs around behind me.*
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> *In the afternoon I was whisked off to another house for what reason I couldnâ€™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 wouldnâ€™t have known what to give even if Iâ€™d had some.*
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> *Itâ€™s at this sort of point where you realise how little preparation youâ€™ve really had. Four years to get to this point and the first time any one in the village needs me Iâ€™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.*
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> *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.*
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> *Emileâ€™s family gave me my evening meal, rice and peanut sauce, a pleasant relief from sardine sandwiches.*

If you'd like to read the whole diary you can find it as a pdf here. It may be informative or interesting and, perhaps, amusing.