

Mark's Trip to The Gambia – February 2016
2/12/2016 Arrival:

Mom's work makes her as important to these people as the president. People greet in the best way they can, dancing, and mostly singing. You must always greet everyone, even strangers. The locals all were very warm and kind, all because mom has done so much for them. Everyone seems to work together very well, very tight community.



Traditional masquerades, dancers and singers met us just outside the airport doors.





We were entertained by the performers for several hours on the day we arrived. Many of the performers came from Senegal's Casamance region to perform for the travelers from the United States.

2/13:

Even in the blazing heat people go out. The streets are dirty and packed with garbage and people. No one seems to care for the mess around them. It seems they have gotten used to the amount of garbage around their homes even if the amount is dangerously high. Essa is family which makes buying things easier. Having somebody who knows everybody helps a lot. Many kind, yet suspicious looking people around. Everyone has ratty like clothing; showing that everyone who works hard still gets paid low wages. Always moving around from one place to another, like a colony of ants.

2/14:

Visiting the public schools shows almost too much about their society and their wills. Even with a very worn down school and classrooms, they still try to educate the kids. The schools funding has been cut down and now they are forced to find sponsors, it's almost like every man for himself in a way. The kids still seem very happy even if they have to walk miles in the heat to get to school. People all try to pitch in to help each other even if it means not paying the teachers. Everyone needs help it seems but no one wants to give it.

2/15:

Essa's office is very lively! Unfortunately, with him being the manager of his department, people are always asking for his help. But unlike what people in the states do, he does not get angry or irritated with the requests or even seem to get tired of working. He was given a chance to move higher up but even with a higher payment he wouldn't be able to be with his family as much. Money might not come easy but it seems like they do not cherish it as much as us in the states.



Me and Essa in the supplies area at Gambia Printing & Publishing Corp



Me with the Resident Cat while waiting for Essa at the Gambia Printing & Publishing Corporation.

2/16:

The city, before the ferry to take us across the lake, was very, very packed. This reminds me of Chiang Mai, Thailand - the amount of people, the shops, the cars, the spacing. There's so much talking and sounds everywhere. Screaming, honking, kids, laughter, all just outside the car window. Honking is how the cars communicate I have learned, kinda reckless, but it seems like everywhere is like that. Safety almost seems to be the last thing on everyone's minds. The ferry was loaded all the way, people would hug the cars or vehicles and people with donkey carts also got on. No life vests or

anything, safety really is the last thing on their mind. Once off the ferry, lots of driving out into what seems like the desert. Every so often we'd have to stop at a police stop, the easy way to get by was just to give them money. They carry large guns, about as big as their torso or bigger. Showing force might be what they want and if they don't get money.... Hopefully, nothing horrible. Arriving in Kerewan there was one "creature" who was literally an entertainment "creature" for children and to scare off dark spirits. Lots of dancing and drums again but this time much, much more people.

2/17:

Visiting schools was very tiring. They need a lot of help, they lack in many areas. But the children are very lively, innocent, and aware of what their situation is. They crowded me and we took selfies and videos. Their way of education might look low but what they teach is very important for living in their world. People seem to understand their place but know that it doesn't limit them to how well they can learn or grow. After we got lunch at the lodge and rested we went to the health center. I feel like people who go to Africa need to see the difference between the city life and the back country life. The health center is run down, electricity is rare, resources are low, staff is low, they just need a lot of help. Tammy gave them her stethoscope which gave them so much hope. There are some who say they have it bad or they've seen bad but if they haven't seen something like this then they don't know bad.