



Andrew Webb

Papa Ngagne Gaye

January - March Newsletter

Young Adults in Global Mission - Senegal

Equip SSP (Team SSP)

My supervisors/coworkers at the primary healthcare center SSP from left to right: Mariame, Rose, and Gallo.



Mr. Racine Couta

Mr. Couta is Maddie and I's Wolof and French tutor. A retired principal who worked at several primary schools across the country, we love him for how intentional and genuine he is with us. Many of his Wolof and French lessons turn into life lessons, eventually connecting to his favorite song that he loves to sing for us, "You Can Get It If You Really Want" by Jimmy Cliff. He also loves to joke with us that the only state in the US that he would be okay going to would be Arizona, since he would freeze to death in all the others.

Quick and Cool talk in Wolof

Having a 22 year old brother, I've come to learn some slang

Naka la/moo/war?
Nice
Yangi cool?
Sant rekk
Lip jamm?
Numu deme?
Luy deal bi?

What's up?
Everything is nice/cool
Are you cool?
Thanks only
Everything peace?
How's it going?
What's the deal? (**Favorite**)

Noor "Winter"

The past two months here are considered by the Senegalese here to be the coldest months out of the year. I know this not because I asked, but because I heard several people say "tey sedd na!" over the past several weeks. That means "today is cold!" to which I would respond "Waaw, beugg naa ko," meaning "Yeah, I like it" since what they considered cold, (75 degrees F) I consider comfortable weather.

The "winter" here has given me some of my most productive and interesting months here in Senegal so far. I've been busy, doing everything from reading, to studying language, to taking intentional time to be with my family, coworkers and students..

My Wolof skills are reaching the point where I can say almost everything I want to say. I've picked up learning French as well, and have officially developed a giant love for languages in general. I've found it gives me energy and excitement to describe and hear the world through another language. The language here especially has also given me better insight into the culture. With each Wolof word comes a cultural story with it. The way they say things coincides with the way life works here. For instance, the word "peace" is used tens of times in a conversation, which agrees with the Senegalese culture and lifestyle of keeping the peace. The more I've learned the language, the more interesting my time here has become.

I've continued to develop relationships here, ones more rewarding and deeper than I thought they would be. The primary healthcare center where I work's manager Mariame was gone for the majority of December and January traveling, and upon her arrival back at the office, she greeted me with a hug screaming "Hey look who it is!" Something I wouldn't imagine receiving from coworkers back in the US. My supervisor Rose has also now left on maternity leave, leaving the office much more quiet with not as much joking and laughter as before. I've come to love and appreciate our language learning lessons with our tutor Mr. Racine Couta not for the language, but for our relationship with Mr. Couta and the wisdom he shares. And my little host brothers Papa and Mangane have proven to be one of the biggest sources of laughter I've had in awhile.

My American parents came to visit me for a week in February, which proved to be a difficult yet amazing experience. It left both them and I with experiences and lessons we are still trying to understand. Being the only 3 white people in sight, as well as being completely responsible for my parents and their safety with their lack of Wolof knowledge as we travelled throughout Senegal was something I never imagined myself doing.

Months 5, 6 and 7 here have been eventful. Here are some details.

Waa Jur Nyungi Seeti

Parents Visiting

Mom and Dad arrived on January 31st in Dakar, the country's capital. There, we stayed at the SLDS Dakar guest house for 4 nights, then travelled to my host community of Linguere, staying there for another 4 before they went back to Dakar and took their flight back home. Over their visit, there were several things that happened that I didn't expect, some easy and enjoyable, and others hard and exhausting.

We talked a ton, about my life here and how things are back home, but also about things like toxic charity, healthy intercultural relationships, white privilege, and other deep topics such as those. As my parents can attest, once I'm back in the United States, I will be a different person because of all the things I've experienced and learned during this program, and will probably want to talk about questions and topics that will be hard to talk about.

During our time in Dakar, we first took a ferry to Goree Island, an island well known for its transatlantic slave trade history. There we toured the House of Slaves, and other parts of the island with a native Goree Island resident tour guide. The House of Slaves is home to a door named "The Door of No Return," named so because once you exited that door to get on a ship to be brought to the Americas as a slave, you would never see Africa again. This being my second visit to the island, the first with my fellow YAGMs and country coordinator, I shared with my parents what I had already learned and have processed about this experience, and more importantly brought them into my world of considering deep subjects and problems we as privileged white people could easily overlook and ignore.

Why They Came

As my parents left Senegal and in the days following their departure, I came to realize several things. My renewed passion for family and relationships, what it will be like when I come home, and how my worlds of Senegal and the United States will soon clash. Being here, focusing on relationships, understanding, patience, solidarity and assimilation have affected me tremendously. I now know two very different cultures, some differences between them very hard to explain. Communicating some things about being here to even my own parents was hard.

Since then, I've found and realized that you have two options when going back to US from this journey. Assimilating back into the US cultural norms, or carrying this experience with you throughout the rest of your life. I recently had a YAGM alumni tell me that when I get back "it shouldn't get easier, or else that's you forgetting your experience," something I plan to abide by upon my return.



That night we had dinner with my country coordinator Kristin, and on Sunday I brought them to witness one of my favorite parts of Senegal, the choir music at church in Dakar. Full of energy, dancing, and smiling, the whole church fills with what I can only describe as the presence of God whenever they sing, something I see as one of the most defining experiences of my year here.

Upon our arrival to Linguere, my two families got along well. We played games with my little brothers, and had many talks between our two families. I did a lot of translating.

I brought my parents to SSP, the garden, other SLDS offices around town, and to Ecole Aime to watch me teach English to my first graders. Both Mariame and Rose invited us to meals in their homes and were eager to meet and talk with my parents. I got to walk them through a normal day in Linguere, eating the breakfast I eat every day, walking to work, greeting people on the street, eat lunch and dinner around the bowl on the floor, sitting around and talking with my Senegalese host family at night, most of the time not understanding what anyone is saying around you.

By the end of the week, there had been several challenging travel situations and the exhaustion had definitely set in. However, I still without a doubt think how lucky I was to have them visit, and how lucky I am to have such a loving community that welcomed them here.



Fête de l'Église

National Church Day

On February 16th, almost all the members of the Senegalese Lutheran Church (ELS) from across Senegal headed to Fatick, the Lutheran capital of Senegal, for the February 17th Fête de l'Église.

Living so far away from the central hub of Lutheranism in Senegal, my congregation in Linguere's trip to Fatick included only our pastor, his wife, Maddie and I. So when Maddie and I were told that during the giant worship service on Sunday that each congregation by themselves had to dance down the aisle to the front alter with their offering for the holiday, we weren't exactly excited. But I got to see and catch up with friends from the capital Dakar, have great conversations on race with Rev. Dr. Andrea Walker and Rev. Lamont Wells, experienced ELCA Global Mission pastors visiting from the United States, and witness the largest Lutheran celebration Senegal has to offer.

The singing, dancing and joy was unlike anything I've ever seen. As the choir sung beautifully in rhythm to drums and guitars, congregations would dance down the aisle to their pastor at the altar, throwing their arms and legs around, while smiling and laughing. Even some of the most serious people I've met here in Senegal stopped and danced at the altar, in front of the entire church, like it was the happiest moment of their life.

Picture Above: Gamou Nguith

Another religious holiday I got to attend was the Muslim pilgrimage to the village of Nguith just outside of Linguere, where my host father's family is from. "Gamou" is what the Senegalese call the celebration of Muhammad's birth, taking place once a year. Not just in one place though. Each Muslim brotherhood in Senegal as well as each village throughout the entire country has their own Gamou, as different times throughout the year. For example, the Gamou Nguith took place in February, but the entire Muslim brotherhood that my family is a part of's Gamou was back in November, at the Tijaniyyah brotherhood capital, Kaolack. Much of my family here went to both. And, next month, I plan to go to the Gamou Dagana, which is north of Saint Louis, the village where my host mother grew up. Imagine if you went to the city where you grew up once a year, with your whole family, along with all the people you grew up with, for a giant party. That's Gamou.

Cultural Reminder

This culture heavily stresses hospitality and keeping the peace. People start every human interaction with "Peace be with you." They will take up to five minutes of greeting people alone before bringing up what they actually wanted to bring up in the first place, just to drive home the fact that their relationship with that person is peaceful. They sometimes ask "How are you?" 4 or 5 times, and you're expected to answer each and every time. And after every good answer, each person says "Thanks be to God", or "Alhamdulilaay." Imagine saying all of that with the next person you see on the street, and meaning it. On February 24th, Senegal had its presidential election. All the other YAGMs and I tried to stay inside that weekend, and get family escorts to walk places just to be safe. Every time we asked for an escort, they would agree to do it, but they would laugh and say "There's nothing to worry about. Here, there is only peace," and they were right. During the election, there were no problems. No feelings of being unsafe, no anger, no fighting. Peace only.



Above: Our place of worship during the Fête de l'Église - a huge tent set up outside the ELS Women's Center in Fatick.



Above: The church choir during the Fête de l'Église. They played drums, guitar, and danced as a group to every song, swaying and clapping their hands.



Jeexagul

It's Not Over Yet

The year is going by fast. This “cold” weather is starting to disappear again, and the hot 120 degree F weather is on its way, arriving officially I’ve heard in April. Then there will be May, which will be just as hot, and will be the month of Ramadan, in which my Muslim family and I will fast everyday from sunrise to sunset. Although this sounds difficult, I’ve heard from other volunteers that this is one of the most important times of the year, in which I live in solidarity with my community here and walk with them through this important Muslim holiday.

And Ramadan is just one of many things left to do in these remaining months. Rose had her fourth child last week, who I will get to meet soon. Our second YAGM retreat is coming up in two weeks. There, we will have conversations on the book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paolo Freire and the ELCA Guide and Study to Accompaniment. I will soon host all of the SLDS Linguere staff at my house for a celebratory monthly meeting, where I’ll have to prepare Senegalese food for everyone. We’ll see how that goes. After that, my host mother and I will head northwest to her home town of Dagana, where I will meet her family and my host grandmother, who’s husband I’m named after.

These are the months where I use the Wolof I’ve learned to really connect with my community, especially as we approach Ramadan. I’ll learn the traditions, the struggles, the relief of breaking the fast. Now is also when I use my multiculturalism lessons and training to refine my friendships to be deep and genuine, prompting them to last long past the time I leave.

Reading

Something I hated for years has now become one of favorite things to do. The books available to us in our “YAGM Library” have become some of my biggest providers of knowledge here. I think while reading almost every book I pick up here that the things that I’m learning in them are so important and deep that I can’t take it all in at once. I’ll have to read the book again, and again after that. I’m currently reading *Waking Up White* by Debby Irving, a book about white privilege and what it means to be white. Coming to Senegal has opened the floodgates for me in terms of what matters in this world and all the resources available to learn more about them. It’s ironic, however, that I had to come all the way to Africa just to pick up a book.

Papa Thiam

A coworker of mine at Ecole Aime, Papa has been one of the most welcoming and fun people to be around here. We invite each other over for lunch and talk and just hangout. He takes a lot of the stress out of not being able to speak his language.

Even though it's my 7th month here, day 200 passing by this past Monday, things are still challenging and rewarding. There is plenty left to learn and do here in the coming months. If anything, I'm worried I won't have enough time here to learn everything here that's available to be learned. So don't be surprised if you hear I'm heading out of the country again this fall. Lows and highs both come and go, but as you may be able to tell from some of these pictures, I'm ultimately having an amazing time.

In these last few months, I will continue to work through discomfort, expand my perspectives, and stay open, learning everything I can. Thank you all for your many thoughts, prayers and support. I have a better sending community than I could have ever asked for. You are all in my thoughts and prayers as well. Take care, and I'll see you again in May.

(Picture on right: Pastor Andrea Walker and the Senegal country cohort at the Fete de l'Eglise)



Stay In Touch

Check out my blog and YAGM info here:

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