

Reflections on a Visit to Kadiogne by Josh Skinner

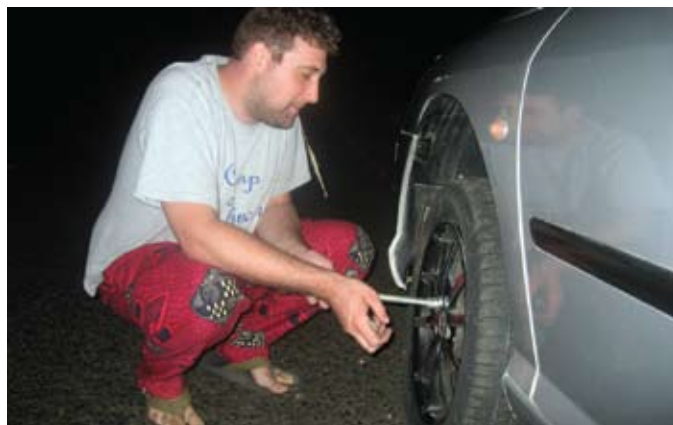


At 4:30 AM on October 15th, we landed in Dakar, Senegal and groggily stepped out into the muggy morning air. Matar, one of our employees, who would serve as our chauffeur, negotiator, and traveling companion for the next ten days, warmly greeted us. He ushered us to the car, and we made our way into the sleeping city of sand-covered streets and concrete high rises. The smells of the polluted downtown, a mix of burning refuse and raw sewage, immediately overwhelmed me and momentarily brought my senses to life. Twenty minutes later, we reached the hotel, where fatigue set in, and I drifted off to the sounds of life starting outside.

The next morning, I awoke to a bustling urban environment. The street below the hotel had been transformed into a sea of people making their way through the busy market. Cars, buses, bikes, and horse-drawn

carriages jammed every intersection, where traffic somehow made itself work even without the aid of stoplights. The sounds of horns, shouting, and hip-hop music echoed through the landscape of merchants, beggars, and businessmen and made its way up to our terrace, where my excitement was building.

Two days later, we left the noisy, dirty heat of Dakar to make our way out to the quiet country of the Fouta. After a grueling drive, we reached Kadiogne, where people had been waiting hours to greet Luke and Mamadou. The regal greeting was truly heartwarming, and as we pulled into the village, children circled the car chanting "Luke! Luke!" and begging for "Photo! Photo!" Next thing I knew, we were led to a courtyard, where a homecoming party had been prepared. Numerous speakers sang warm praises of Mamadou, their native son, and of Luke, welcoming



him back not as a returning visitor but as a family member who had been missed in his absence. Many thanks were given to the organization for its dedication to the health and education of the youth, the building of the school, as well as the distribution of school supplies and mosquito nets. We were informed that, since the deliveries of nets, malaria had close to disappeared in the village, and a general improvement of health had been seen. Following the reception, we were fed a hearty meal of meat and potatoes—a delicacy—and shown to our beds on Oumar's porch.

I was soon to realize that this reaction would be typical for the next week. Kids of Kadiogne is affiliated with eighteen villages, and I was on hand to distribute in six of them. Each time, I encountered the most sincere, gracious thanks anyone would want to receive. In many instances, entire villages would have waited five, six hours for our arrival,



with everyone going out of their way to make us feel at home. People waved signs, danced, sang, and presented us with gifts, and always gave us a seat at a place of honor to listen to a parade of thanks spoken by elders, teachers, and religious leaders. We were always offered the finest of what people had: the best seat, the best food, and the softest pillows. In one village, where I had lost a flip-flop, people searched with unbridled urgency until it was recovered. By the end of our stay, I felt much more on the receiving side of the line than on the giving side. Any sacrifices that we had made to bring school supplies, mosquito nets, or even to build a school seemed insignificant compared to the sacrifices that had been made to embrace us. So while the people of Kadiogne gratefully accepted our donations, they offered me gifts far more significant: nourishment for my soul and joy for my heart.



Josh Skinner serves on the Board of Directors of Kids of Kadiogne and assisted with the distribution of school supplies in Senegal in October 2008. Kids of Kadiogne supports the education and health of children in northern Senegal. If you are interested in learning more about our work, please visit our web site: www.kidsofkadiogne.org