

CHAPTER 5. 2006. TRIP WITH DALE LANDIS

In the spring of 2006, Tom got the San Luis Tribune to write a piece about his upcoming trip to Africa. Dale Landis, a local contractor, elected to come along. Dale and Tom spent a week with my Dad, revisiting some of the villages from 2005. As usual, my Dad and the driver met Dale and Tom at the airport, and they immediately went to visit us in Port Bouët. Dale really took to the children, who enjoyed being photographed.



Tom rented a car and they went to a Lebanese store to purchase tools for the cocoa farmers. On the roof are bags of boots. Inside were boxes of machetes and tools. The Ivoirian flag helps keep the peace with the police, although he learned that it's smart to put a big NGO sign on the side of the car and to wear some sort of uniform that projects power. Either military fatigues or a clerical collar are helpful, as one doesn't have to spend time gaining respect with the police that way. And it helps to reduce fines. In 2006, the police still harrassed cars that had something on the roof; during the civil war, assault rifles were moved around the country in piles of bananas on the roofs of cars and buses.

They left Port Bouët around 5 PM and arrived in Yamoussoukro, the capital of Côte d'Ivoire at around 10 PM. The next day, they drove to Daloua and then took the A5 South to Issia, arriving in Depa in the early afternoon. The villagers put together a delicious Poulet Kedjenou based on a chicken (pictured) , Alloco (plantains fried in palm oil), and African rice.



Alloco



Chicken Before Kedjenou-i-sation



Chicken Kedjenou with African Rice

A chicken was made into Poulet Kedjenou, a typical Ivorian stew made with chicken, onions, garlic, tomatoes, eggplants, and spices. Normally it's served with *attieke* or shredded, fermented cassava, but this time we had it with African rice and *alloco* or plantain fried in palm oil.

After lunch, Tom and Dale spent hours taking pictures of villagers.

Right - Three generations pose for Tom





Kitchen scene. Young lad bends over the pot of African rice his mother has made. In the lower right-hand corner, one sees the mortar and pestle used to hull the rice. Dispersed throughout are various aluminum pots. In the background, one sees a hibiscus bush. The purple hibiscus is dried and soaked to produce *bissap*, which is a very tasty beverage. Also in the background is a goat, who will eventually become the main part of a stew.



Boys with spunk. Children love to pose, and these three boys were no exception. Who knows what they were thinking?



Just like in my town, Port Bouët, Depa's citizens sensed that an event of some importance was taking place. My Dad, Evariste, who is wearing the Project Hope and Fairness t-shirt, is the hero because he's the home boy who made good in the city and then brought white men and possibly good fortune to a village that, like so many other Ivoirian villages, has until now had no hope for the future.



Above left - Jules Dalo, his wife ____, and Evariste stand in front of their latest cocoa crop. The beans are brown, which means that they are well fermented but probably not yet dry enough.



Above right - my Dad Evariste poses with his uncle, _____, who is wearing traditional clothing. Tom, Evariste, and Dale spent the night in Uncle ____'s house.



Squirrels and monkeys love to take bites out of cocoa pods. Unfortunately for them, the sugar reward lies half an inch or more inside a tasteless shell. Someone gave up on this.



Another enemy of the cocoa farmer is the mistle-toe, which secretes growth hormones and causes the cocoa tree to produce extra vegetative growth, sacrificing the energy to make cocoa pods and beans.



Wild yams dug up in the forest. They have a sweet, nutty flavor -- much more interesting than the African yam that is so important to the West African diet.



Above - This tuber is superb served just by itself. It's also very good as an accompaniment for any meat or fish stew.

Right - cocoa farmer returning from the fields shows what he ate for lunch. He is offering roasted, dried corn to the photographer.





There is a certain rugged beauty made possible by the juxtaposition of natural building materials. Looking at the textures made possible through the use of packed mud and palm fronds makes me feel a longing for my home country.

Below, there is quite a difference between city furniture and country furniture. Note how basic this chair is and yet it is quite comfortable. The structure of this reminds me of the very simple yet strong Western furniture that was popular in the 1930s.



My Dad shows off the scale--one of three--that Tom had paid for by raising money in the U.S. My Dad bought the scales and shipped them from Abidjan to the villages.



Right, Dale relaxes on Ivoirian furniture. Dad stands behind. This is one of the nicer homes in Depa, and you can tell that possessions are meaningful because the window is protected and there's a solid door as well.





One of the farmers from Depa took my Dad, Tom, and Dale to his farm where he demonstrated how a farmer collects the palm sap that ferments into palm wine and can then be distilled into palm brandy, called *koutoukou*, which my Dad refers to as “African breakfast.” Left, above, the farmer removes pieces of wood used to protect the heart of the palm. Right, above, he lights a fire to draw the juices out of the remaining heart.



Left, above, the farmer has drilled holes in the empty portion of the heart to allow the juices to flow into the jug. Right, above, the farmer enjoys the palm wine. Properly obtained, the juice ferments to about 8% alcohol. Several hours after the draw, the juice is sweet and low in alcohol. By the end of the day, the sugars have been fermented out and the juice reaches its maximum level of alcohol.



A young farmer has purchased a few young cocoa trees and is riding to his field to plant them.



Young children find a bicycle wheel to make a great toy.



Above left - “les poseurs”

Above right - The Mask Dance. Performed by a special committee, in effect a secret society. Three men would play percussion and chant while the mask pranced about, periodically falling on his back to allow heat to escape.

Right - Chief Dédé presents Dad, Tom, and Dale with a live sheep, which they drove back to Port Bouët where it was sacrificed by a Muslim and grilled. The chief’s staff is 100% wood.





Left - winnowing the rice after pounding it in the mortar. Middle - okra for making gumbo, a West African soup. Right - fetching young women.



Left - father and daughter. Right - amusement and terror.