

Greetings! Salaam Alaikum! Tanaali! Bonjour mes amie!

As I am writing this update, I am watching the snow fall steadily outside the window, and I can't help but wish for the hot, Africa sun to rise in its place. Although, just a few weeks ago, I remember wishing for the very thing that's falling outside my window now!



On December 17th, after a rather trying time of praying, fundraising and frantic ticket-shopping, myself, two other leaders, and seven students were finally on our way to West Africa for, what never fails to be, another great adventure with God!

Senegal

After landing in Dakar early in the morning, after a terribly unsmooth flight and several hours after our scheduled landing time, we were not at all surprised to discover that none of our bags had arrived with us. We couldn't help but think that with such difficulty, there must be great things in store for us there...MOST of our bags eventually arrived.

Our month in Senegal was spent in the tiny village of Niakhar, on the local YWAM base there. Our main role during this time, was serving the local Christian leaders the best way that we could in what they had already established. Much of our time was spent with the children of the village, teaching them games and songs, and teaching them Bible stories through dramas.



One of the challenges we faced, was the heavy spiritual atmosphere that was so evident there. This village has the reputation of being a central location for witch-doctors (or 'marabou', as they are known there) and a lot of other demonic practices. For many of our team, we were exposed to spiritual warfare on a brand new level, as well as deliverance ministry, for the first time. By the end of our time, however challenging it may have been, we had formed close and meaningful relationships, especially with the Christians, and it was harder than expected to leave behind our brothers and sisters there. This month was especially fun for us Canadians, embarrassing ourselves with our feeble attempts at elementary French. 😊

The Gambia

After our long day of over-cramped vans, broken down taxis and a ferry ride or two, we landed ourselves in the tiny, English-speaking country of Gambia. Our time here took on a whole different format than our previous month in Senegal. Here, we were connected with a Nigerian missionary family in village of Mansanjang. This family runs a school for families who cannot afford the government schools that most children go to. The unique part about this school, is that in this heavily Muslim area, they are able to teach a Christian curriculum to the children! The four female students on our team taught full-time at this school, which is very short-staffed, and the guys were able to help out

with the construction of the new school building. Ironically, their first week was spent digging a 4-metre hole a.k.a. a toilet! In Gambia, we experienced what ‘hot-season’ in Africa meant ☺ which also means that, in the afternoons, when the sun is too hot to work, one spends their day drinking Attaya (tea) with the fellow villagers. The students were great at adapting to this unique part of African culture, and jumped on the opportunity to befriend pretty much the entire village in the span of four weeks! It was really awesome to see the students at a new hut every night for dinner, attending the local events, and even at village weddings! As a leader, to see that, is really what it’s all about.



Up Next...

Of all the outreaches I’ve been apart of in the last three years, this last one, for myself, was definitely the most challenging, not only just adapting to life in Africa, but also spiritually and as well as navigating the team dynamics as a leader. However, as much as it was challenging, it was rewarding, and I can say at the end of it that I’ve come out of it with a heart for the whole continent of Africa, its people, and its enormous struggles of injustice throughout. Another thing I also came out of this trip with was a souvenir called Hepatitis A, which is, very thankfully, not as long lasting.☺ Thank you to all of you again that held me up in prayer during that time.

Shortly, I’ll be heading back to Mississauga where we are preparing for the next group of students for our Justice, Arts and Media (JAM) DTS. We are very excited about this school, which will prove to be our most international school yet (including even an ex-Buddhist monk from Singapore!). I’ll be pulling together the justice-facet of this school, with exciting prospects of an outreach/long-term partnership in Pakistan, with the help of a recent Pakistani graduate of ours who was with me in Africa. As well, as a leadership team, we have been dreaming up a downtown Toronto off-shoot of our community to be involved with our existing downtown initiatives, as well as the safehome project, and other partnerships. Much more to come on that front....

Again, a big THANK YOU to all of my family, friends and church community who have been an amazing support throughout this last season, and especially in this last season. May God Bless you and your families ten-fold for the blessing you have been to me! As always, feel free to connect anytime, I love getting together and sharing on a personal level!

In Christ,
Sue VanDaalen