
2016-17 Postcards

Postcards from Abroad

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Being a Student

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Myrna Najera Perez

Dakar, Senegal

February 6, 2017

Being a Student

I have finally memorized the path to school and I am finally adjusting to the time difference. It has been about two weeks since I arrived and I have already experienced so much! One of the most exciting trips I have taken has been to L'île de Ngor, a small island about fifteen minutes from Mermoz. An American friend and I were invited to visit the island by two Senegalese friends. They purchased fresh fish in the morning, we prepped some onions with numerous spices, we grilled the fish in hot ambers, and we enjoyed it communal style with everyone sharing the onions and fish. Afterwards, we swam in the clearest, most blue ocean water I have ever seen. I can still picture the swaying palm trees, the stone buildings, and the mesmerizing sky paralleling the deep blue ocean water.

That same evening, I headed to the French Institute to watch an African interpretive dance. The dance was performed outside so we were able to enjoy the evening breeze and the moonlight. In addition, the sky was covered in large birds and bats. It was truly a unique experience to have an evening sky covered in nocturnal animals and to witness an intricately fascinating dance.

As a traveler and as a student, being here has widened my understanding of my own community in the United States, of my presence here, and of the reactions the locals have of me. I miss my home, I miss the people I hold dear in my heart, and I miss the comfort of knowing how to get around and what I am eating. However, being here has made me notice the things my community lacks. For example, Senegalese people highly value family time, and they really enjoy relaxing and conversing with one another. While I am not claiming that this is not present in the United States, it is definitely not as integrated into our culture. People tend to be more preoccupied with their personal well-being, they are more private and independent, and they only tend to spend time with the extended family during holidays.

It is important to note that I am not claiming Senegal is better than the United States. There are definitely some things that I am not in accord with and that I personally do not understand. As a young female foreigner, I do not appreciate the way in which men behave around me. Males often think it is appropriate to approach us and to pour their hearts out. They do not regard females as potential individuals, and often, they insist to follow us around. Due to this cultural belief that women are inferior to men, it is difficult to go out at night, one can only exercise in the evenings when the sun is still out, and clothes have to be a certain length.

I truly believe that remaining respectful of the culture is highly important. I want to learn why it is that women are limited, I want to remind myself that being open to learning is far superior to challenging the cultural norms, and I want to strengthen my understanding of the country as a whole. I have a little less than two months left so I will take the opportunity to view all my experiences as a learning opportunity.

Myrna Najera