

Letter from Africa

by Riley & Duncan Murdock

October 2008

Do you like school? Are you glad you get to go, or would you rather stay home most days (assuming you are not home schooled!) This time I thought I would let some of my friends share with you about their school. Their names are Santia and Sandoga, and they are our neighbors here on the farm. Sandoga just started school this year and he can't write yet, so Santia did the writing.

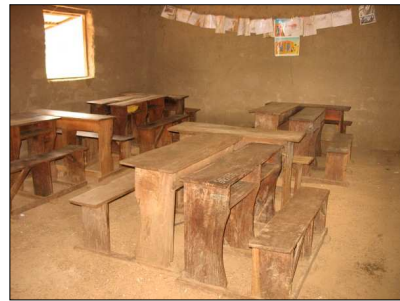


La sam! That means hello in my language. I am happy to be writing to you and telling you about what

school is like for us here in rural Benin. Let me tell you about a typical school day. We wake up at 6:30 and put on our school uniforms, what we all call our khakis. I wear a dress, and Sandoga wears shorts and a shirt. We leave our house at 7:00 and walk about two and a half miles to the nearest school, which takes about an hour. We have to watch out for snakes on the way! The week before classes start, we all have to bring machetes, hoes and brooms to school, because the students have to clear all the grass that has been growing during the rains (June-



September), and clean up the school yard. The area around the school has to be tidy, which means swept dirt. It is pretty tiring, but if you don't participate, you get in trouble! Our school is a typical village school. There are 6 classes and 4 teachers this year. There are supposed to be 6 teachers, but one was sent to another school and one was fired. There are 300 students.



The main classroom is a cement brick building with a tin roof, which gets pretty hot. Since there are

so many students, some kids sit outside under a shelter with grass mats for a roof. We sit together on benches but we don't have



enough, so instead of 2 students for one bench, we have to squeeze 4. But this is still better than the skinny logs we used to sit on – not too comfortable, if you know what I mean! Outside in the middle of all the classrooms is the school yard, just a dirt area. This is where we



do exercises and some sports – but with no equipment. There is a Benin flag in the center. We have two latrines, which are mainly used by the teachers, so the rest of us just use the scraggly bushes when we have to.

We have no textbooks or workbooks. We copy down what the teacher writes on the blackboard into our little notebooks or on slates. There is no science equipment; there are no computers, no videos, no displays, no books to read, no arts and crafts stuff – all these things Riley and Duncan tell us they have in your schools. There is just a blackboard, with a teacher lecturing.

We go home at noon to eat lunch and take a little rest, during the hottest part of the day. We are back at school at 3:00. Since it takes us an hour to walk each way, we get an hour's rest. School is out at 5:00, and then we walk home.

What do these things have in common:

- Bike and car parts
- Pieces of dried long, wide grass
- A log
- A goat hide
- A gourd
- Pebbles
- An old metal bowl
- A corn stalk

They are all used to make musical instruments here!

I feel very blessed. My mother never got to go to school, and many village girls stay home to help their moms out with the other children, cooking, laundry, collecting firewood, fetching water, and so on. I am so glad my parents are sending me to school, even though I am the oldest child and my mom could really use my help. It is nice that my little brother is starting school this year, since that means I don't have to walk alone anymore. But the best thing about going to school is that we get to learn French. That means that some day I will be able to read the Bible. It's not as good as reading it in my own language, Biali, but much better than nothing. Maybe some day soon, the Bible will be translated into my language, but for now, I am going to work hard on learning French!

I hope that gives you an idea of what a village school here is like. De te sant! (Good bye in Biali.)



Bridget playing with Santia

Look at these
tasty mushrooms!

