

Letter from Africa

by Riley and Duncan Murdock - Summer 2006

Summer vacation! What do you like to do this time of year? Go to sports camp? Play computer games? Go swimming? Eat ice cream? Take a trip with your family? Hike? Go camping? Go canoeing? Go to the playground? Hang out with your friends? Sit around bored?! Drive your mom crazy??!

This time of year is normally a cool time of year for us, since it is rainy season. And since most people here are subsistence farmers (that means they grow and raise their own food), this is a busy time of clearing, plowing and planting fields. And guess what? Kids are expected to join in the work too! Nope, no lazy vacation for them. Early in the morning, as it starts to get light, the family rises and everyone puts on his field clothes – usually ratty, ripped and patched. They may eat some of last night's leftovers, which sat out in bowls all night, before they grab their machetes and hoes, fill up with water any jug or bottle they can find, collect a few yams or a bowl of corn flour and a pot to cook lunch in, and set off on foot for their fields. If they live in a village, their fields are usually close by. If they live in town, they may have to walk several miles to reach their fields. Some people are fortunate – they have an ox and cart to ride in and a plow to use.



Many people now rent oxen to plow their fields, but when Mom and Dad first got here 10 years ago, most people still did all the work by hand.



First, they clear out all the weeds and bushes and rocks from the field. They make piles of the plants and burn them. Then they make rows. Then they walk along the rows with a bag or bowl of seed, make a hole in the dirt with their big toe, drop a couple of seeds in, and tamp the earth down with their toe. Later on, they fertilize each plant, and have to weed several times before most of the work is done till harvest. What do people here plant? Mostly corn and cotton. They also grow yams, millet, sorghum, black eyed peas, peanuts, soybeans and sesame seeds.



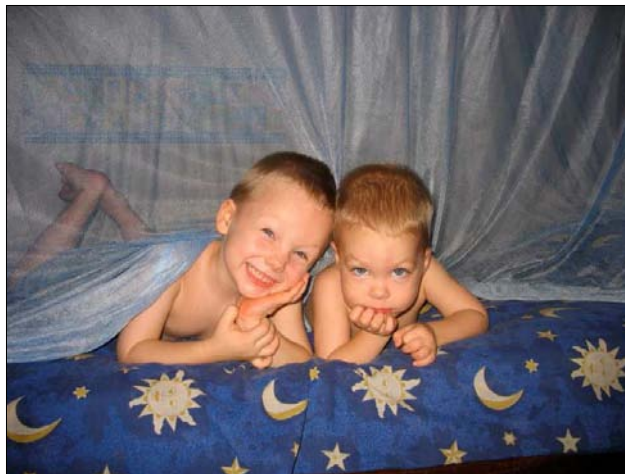
Often, people have a small shelter in their field, or a shady tree, where they can pass the hottest part of the day resting and eating the food they brought. People stay in their fields all day and come home exhausted at dusk. Still, Mom has to fetch

water, make a fire and start cooking dinner for all the hungry workers. Usually it's not ready till 10:00pm or so. By then, most of the kids have fallen asleep, and adults have to wake them up to eat. Dawn comes pretty quickly, and the work starts all over again. Sound like a fun way to spend vacation? Think about that next time you want to complain!!



As for Duncan and me, one of our favorite things to do in rainy season is to run outside when it rains and get wet and cold. We hardly ever get to feel cold here, so it's fun to be able to shiver! We like playing in the mud with our trucks, collecting bugs that are more numerous now, catching butterflies, digging in the soft dirt and planting seeds. We can be outside a lot more now that it's not quite so hot, but we have to watch out for mosquitoes at the end of the day, since they can give us malaria. We sleep under mosquito nets at

night too. That's actually kind of cool, since it's like being in a tent, only on a comfortable bed!



Please pray for people here. The rains are very late, and if we don't get a lot of rain soon, there won't be much food for people to eat. Remember that people here grow their own food, so if they can't grow it, they can't eat. Also, please pray Matthew 9:37, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." So many people here still need to hear the Good News about Jesus, and to be set free from the kingdom of darkness. Pray not just for more missionaries to join us, but for more of the Christian Beninese to be strong in their faith to share the Gospel with the people around them, and to show them how to live in the love and freedom of Christ. Thanks!

Quiz

1. What time of year is it here now?
2. What is a subsistence farmer?
3. How do kids here spend their "summer" vacation? How is it different from the way you spend yours?
4. What do people here plant? Can you imagine living off these foods?
5. How many Bible verses can you think of that have to do with planting, reaping, harvests, seeds, etc? (Hint: Think about Jesus' parables.)