

S·V·P News 8

Sudan Volunteer Programme

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riage; they call it engagement.

In my class of mostly older, married, women it turned out that some of them had been engaged more than once. Many had been through the process of getting to know a prospective husband. They assured me that this was essential and that if either had misgivings they could call it off. I revised my impression: the better off, better travelled Sudanese had a more westernised attitude to marriage. The topic was not so alien for them after all.

So we looked at the lyric and wondered why the latticed wooden benches on Brighton sea-front would be empty on a grey November day and what this symbolised a feeling of emptiness, if not desperation, in the story line. I think they liked the lesson and understood a lot. In fact, the only phrase that seemed to mystify them was the line 'and the place is as deserted as a plaza in a heat-wave'.

from Vanessa Ansa Love at first sight

The first time I saw Shuhada is a scene etched forever in my mind, along

with the feelings it induced. That place, which unbeknown to me was to become my home, aroused wonder and amazement in me.

I couldn't fathom how Namia managed to find the flat amidst all that chaos. Un-tarred roads with more holes and bumps than level stretches, open drains sometimes precariously covered with a slab of concrete (which she quickly advised me to avoid), sights and sounds of life; people everywhere dodging cars and rickshaws that veered all over the place in vain attempts to dodge the potholes themselves, cafeterias competing with each other to play the loudest music in order, I believed, to attract the most customers, donkeys pulling

carts, their brays still piercing from a surprising distance, the periodic sounds of azzan, shops selling everything from clothes and food to mobile phones, singing beggars, buckets of water being thrown out onto the dusty road by shopkeepers, men selling sundries on the roadside, laundrymen washing and hanging clothes out to dry, packs of dogs sleeping in the shade of the simple single-storey houses, cauldrons of beans being boiled and woks of frying falafels, the odd street child...wandering, tall men in jelabiyas, a few women in hijab or (boubou), several tea ladies making and selling spiced tea seated at low tables close to the dusty ground, others just passing through on their way somewhere.

And lots of eyes - all looking in our direction. The air smelled of shisha, rotting things and incense all at the same and different times as life spilled out onto the streets from every direction.

This place (lying somewhere between a bustling market - the oldest and biggest in Omdurman - and a chaotic bus station with method in its madness) was my home for 7 months, and to this day I feel an immeasurable fondness for that corner of the world. I like to think that being there at any time in my life henceforth would be as natural as breathing.

from Mark Tanner's Sudanese Cook Book

In 2004, two kind-hearted volunteers, Katerina the Czech and Mark the Kiwi ventured to Sudan on a quest of philanthropy. What began as a mission to teach the English language in Sudan turned into a perpetual feast of Sudanese cuisine. From day 1, Katerina and Mark were overwhelmed by the hospitality and generosity of the gregarious ladies that they were teaching. The students' hunger for English and the two volunteers' hunger to learn more about the Sudanese culture lead everyone to the kitchen where the serious learning began.

The relaxed atmosphere of the kitchen provided a casual environment for the ladies to chat and further their English and share their local food with some appreciative appetites.

Sudanese gastronomic treasures celebrate a delightful combination of influences from the Middle East and Africa. So satisfied with these culinary delights, the volunteers decided to bring the informal recipes to the world, here they are some examples:

Fettat Adas

Ingredients: 500g red lentils (adis), 2 onions, 1/2 bulb garlic crushed, 6 tsp oil, 4 tsp salt, 1/2 tsp black pepper powder, 8 white bread rolls, 1 potato (optional), 2 tomatoes (optional), 1 carrot (optional), 1/2 green pepper (optional), 3 cloves cardamom (optional), 1/4 tsp cinnamon (optional)

Wash lentils. Wash and chop onions and, if included, tomatoes, potatoes, carrot and green pepper. Put altogether in pot with cardamom and cinnamon (both optional) covering with water about 10cm higher. Simmer until lentils tender, adding water if necessary. Remove cardamom and mix in blender.

Place blended mix back in pot and add salt and pepper and simmer for 2 minutes. In separate pan, fry crushed garlic in oil until golden and add to mix.

If desired, lightly bake rolls in oven until slightly crispy. Break up bread into small pieces and put into serving dish. Pour adas mix over bread so bread becomes slightly moist.

Gorrasa

500g of wheat flour, 1/2 tsp baking powder, 500ml water, tsp salt

Sift flour into bowl. Add baking powder and salt and stir in water until thick batter. Pour ladle-full of batter onto non-stick flat frying pan and flatten out until evenly spread.

Fry at medium heat and flip when golden on one side.

Recommended with dama as follows:

6 onions, 4 tbsp tomato paste, 1/3 cup oil, 3 cloves of crushed garlic, 250g beef steak, 3 cups water, 3 tomatoes, 1/2 green pepper. 1 tsp salt, 1 tsp cardamom, 1 tsp cinnamon

Chop onions and put in pot and fry in oil at medium heat. Keep covered, stirring occasionally. Add water and cover, leaving on medium heat for 5-10 minutes until water is almost evaporated. Lightly blend onions and return to pot and add chopped tomatoes.

Chop steak into small pieces and add to pot with chopped pepper, salt, cardamom and cinnamon. Cover and leave for 3 minutes. Add tomato paste and stir, adding water until smooth and runny. Cover and leave to simmer for 10 minutes adding more water occasionally. Stir in crushed garlic. Pour over gorrasa and serve warm.

more from <http://marktanner.com/sudan-recipes>



Street scene in Omdurman - photo by Craig Rowson



The school at Jenan, near Gedaref - photo by Angus Dalrymple-Smith

a note from the chairman of Sudan Volunteer Programme

This is the eighth issue of SVP News. It contains a selection of reports and stories from our volunteers in last year's programme. We hope others will be encouraged to join us in this worthwhile and necessary work. We thank all the friends, supporters and members of SVP-Sudan and SVP-UK whose donations and goodwill, ideas and skills, time and enthusiasm make our work possible.

SVP specially thanks all our volunteers - and their families - who give so much of themselves: Ken Darmanin, Ian Macaulay, Robert Vokes, Paul Fean, Vanessa Ansa, Max von Dürckheim, Katy Robinson, Donald Vassell, Angus Dalrymple-Smith, Hawa Yaseen Omer, Dave Clay, Craig Rowson, Kristen Harvey, Claire Wilson, Katerina Vosmekova, Mark Tanner, Michael Noble, Skye Wheeler, Maissa Hireika, Neil Cameron, Eleanor Bell, Tom Law, Peter Bennett.

SVP needs your help and depends on your continuing support.

Ahmed Bedri

Find out more about SVP from our website with stories and pictures by volunteers as well as our annual report and accounts

www.svp-uk.com

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from Skye Wheeler

Tired from the bus ride from Khartoum, I arrived in Dilling a week or so into Angus's lectures on Communication skills. He was wearing a very bright shirt. I looked through the window into the room where he was clearing up having just finished teaching a class.

The desks were all over the place. 'Messy!' I said to him. 'it's very important,' he said, 'to be able to move the desks around.' The teachers that were filing out looked tired but there was already a strong sense of work having been done, of achievement. There was a buzz in the air, especially unusual on a soporific Ramadan midday and it suggested that more than desk-lifting was going on.

I said, 'Can I help?' It turned out that it was not just fasting-fatigue I saw on the teachers' faces: Angus was working the teachers very hard, not only to improve their English but taking the class to a stage where they felt comfortable enough to question their own teaching methods. Some fifty people were attending and of this about forty were English teachers. Most of these were from Dilling itself but very excitingly some of the teachers had come from outlying villages in the district.

I ended up teaching the group a poetry course, trying to encourage critical thinking, for an hour a day after Angus's Communication course. Ramadan ended and everyone went home for Eid El Fitr. A week later they were back and we taught a Reading Skills course together. We had a dual objective: to improve the teachers' confidence in the use of English language and in a real and practical way, to give them the opportunity to learn and then use some new language teaching methodology.

The teachers receive less encouragement than they deserve. Pay is low and irregular. This is especially true of English teachers. English used to be considered extremely important and during the years after independence the level of English in Sudan was as good as anywhere in the developing world. With the North becoming so keen on Arabization in recent years funding has been channelled into less constructive human practices than education, and the old Nile Course textbooks replaced by the less-good SPINE series which is not only hard to learn from but also very difficult to teach. Some contemporary ideas about teaching have clearly been incorporated into the textbooks but without consistency. This just makes the books harder to understand and teach, especially as the teachers were not given any new training to go with the books.

Although Dilling is on the border between the North and the troublesome South and has received even less attention than elsewhere, we found the teachers enthusiastic and extremely keen to learn. One of the most pleasant aspects of the entire experience was how it became a celebration of teaching and a chance for people to feel the real importance of their line of work.

Angus had learnt from his experience in Gedaref that teachers will not transfer new skills into their classrooms unless they are given a systematic way of doing this. He taught a clear and simple way to teach a communication lesson in class, with the aim of getting the students to speak freely to each other in small groups or pairs as if they were in a real-life situation. For example, if students are learning about food and drink from a section in SPINE, the teacher might pre-teach vocabulary and a few key phrases and then set up the class in pairs of shopkeeper and shopper. In order to explain all this the teacher usually has to speak Arabic to the students and it was difficult to get the teachers to accept this. It was also hard to persuade them that they should not always be talking, that they can let the class have some freedom.

To complete the Communication course and receive our Course Certificate, each teacher had to do a communication lesson with their own class. This meant that at least once, they were forced to give the method a chance and to see how it worked for them. It was also a chance to celebrate the teacher's vocation and work in front of their own class with a certificate. It was extraordinary how well some of the teachers performed, how much they had picked up. I cannot describe the joy both Angus and I felt as we watched some of the teachers using this simple method successfully; the class just seemed to take off.

Most of the teachers had learnt at least some of the techniques we presented and I think we have good reason to hope that at least some of them will continue to use these methods and will become better and more confident teachers as a result. Some of the rural schools especially are in very bad repair and it was very gratifying after Angus' careful teaching to see them teach successful lessons and get a sense of achievement from it. It was great to talk to the teachers afterwards. It seemed that their instincts about teaching were being vindicated.



a village in the Nuba Mountains - photo by Peter Bennett

A large part of the courses was to try to get teachers to re-imagine themselves as learners. After Eid a three-week course was taught in Reading Skills. The first half of this was focused on giving the teachers space to practice their reading skills. The second half concentrated on teaching methods. The focus was on a few main areas. The first was to emphasise, again, that using Arabic in the classroom was not necessarily

a bad thing. The second was to get the teachers to think again about what reading actually is - ie rarely reading aloud and making the students repeat words they don't understand. The third was, using texts from SPINE, to find new ways of getting the students to read and understand the text, ways of teaching new vocabulary and better comprehension questions. We were happy to see that the teachers often questioned what Angus taught and this ignited class debate.

Angus and I both strongly believe that the course must be carried on, for its great success was in promoting the professional interest and solidarity amongst the teachers. We always tried to give space for teachers to question the way they were teaching and what SPINE as an official method seemed to require.

After the courses were finished we had a picnic organised by the teachers. All that was left of the sheep, which had come bleating with us to the garden, was a large fluffy ball which we left in the fork of a guava tree. Under the fruit trees there was an 'end of term' feeling in the air; there was much laughter that afternoon and away from the close atmosphere of the garrison town of Dilling. The farmer came and took Angus and me for a tour through the ochra and mango trees and the big green bellies of the ripe watermelons lying on the ground. We looked down into the deep well. Already a hot and dusty December, the rains already seemed long ago and the garden was a paradise. It was a day where the male teachers helped with the washing up. The sun was setting lurid red as we bounced together back to town where a special programme was performed, stories, jokes and riddles, peculiar grammar questions.

Much more is needed to get the English Language learning back up to its previous standards. But these are exciting times, the peace signing in Naivasha will hopefully mean a hundred small and big changes after the 9th of January 2005 and people are optimistic about the future. If courses are well-designed and followed through carefully the kind of impact these can have is considerable and I hope to see lots of SVP volunteers involved in the future.

from Dave Clay Gedaref

I spent 9 months working as a teacher at the University of Gedaref in Eastern Sudan. Gedaref is located about five and a half hours from Khartoum, the last town before you reach the Ethiopian border. It was rather unflatteringly described as 'a dirty semi-industrial town' in the last edition of the Lonely Planet that covered Sudan. Nevertheless, after nine months in this dismal-sounding place, my heart ached on leaving and I had to hold back the tears. I will always remember Gedaref as the friendliest, safest and most welcoming place I have ever visited, and not without its beautiful parts, whatever Lonely Planet might say.

Despite all I had heard about Sudanese hospitality before I arrived, nothing could prepare me for the reality that I found in this small town in the East of Sudan. Buying a cup of tea for myself in the market proved to be a near-impossibility; as friends and strangers alike would insist that they pay. I was invited to countless breakfasts, lunches and dinners, where I would be exhorted to eat until I burst. I remember hearing one story that neatly sums up the wonderful mix of generosity and insistence that makes up Sudanese hospitality. In the Jazira province during Ramadan, it is traditional for men to unwind their 'immas (the long turban that many Sudanese men wear around their heads) and hold it across the road if they see a vehicle approaching at the time of breaking fast (iftaar). The driver would then have to stop and join the locals to break fast. Sudanese hospitality is truly remarkable, and is something of which most Sudanese are justly proud.



Dave Clay with friends in Gedaref

One of the most memorable occasions in Gedaref was Eid al Mawlid (lit. festival of the birth), which was celebrated at the end of April. Eid al Mawlid celebrates the birth of the Prophet, and along with Eid al Adha and Eid al Fitr, is one of the most important religious festivals in Sudan. I found it the most interesting of these three festivals, and the most uniquely Sudanese. Sudan has a strong sufi tradition, and it is during Eid al Mawlid that this is most apparent. Every day during the festival, after the 'aisha prayer, celebrations took place on a disused piece of land between the souq and the town's grand mosque. Each different sufi order (tariqa) had a separate roped-off enclosure, decorated with flags on tall poles as well as lights. Whilst some orders put on expensive lights shows with big sound systems, others simply collected in their enclosure, danced and sang without any accoutrements. A number of the different orders had distinct styles of dress. These ranged from the slightly austere-looking Khatmiyya with their Saudi-style jalabiyyas to some orders that wore vibrant red and green fabrics. As most men normally wear white clothing, it was a real change to see so much colour in town!

The music and dancing was fascinating, and a welcome break from Sudanese pop music (although I must admit a fondness for Mahmoud Abdul Aziz). It was based around rhythmical, repetitive chanting, known as dhikr, and accompanied by large drums called noba and tambourines known as duf. The music often began slowly, gradually increasing in tempo. The dancers followed the music, some swaying from side to side, others thrusting backwards and forwards. Some jumped up and down, while others danced around in a circle, following a leader. As they danced more and more quickly, the dust on the floor was stirred up, with the haze it created adding to the atmosphere of the occasion. I had seen sufi dancing at a Mosque in Omdurman previously, but to me, the dancing in Gedaref seemed to have more spontaneity and appeared more natural. The music continued until 11 o'clock every night when the curfew came into effect.

For the period of Eid al Mawlid, Sudanese consume even more sugar than normal. (This is something of an achievement. I had friends in Sudan who would always add a small amount of coffee to a cup of sugar before drinking

it. I have also seen mothers feed their children spoonfuls of sugar!). The main street in Gedaref is known locally as million stupid people street or Sharia Million for short. During Eid, Sharia Million was lined with stalls selling pink sugary sweets, carefully carved into donkeys, women, lions and many other shapes. Children love Eid al Mawlid, as in addition to the dancing and the sweets, there was also a funfair in town, which was packed every day. The whole festival was so joyous and friendly, and as always, I was welcomed whole-heartedly into the celebrations.

I have so many memories of Gedaref and Sudan, that it has been difficult to select one or two. I learnt so much during my time there and would urge anyone who is thinking of going to book their flight as soon as they can.

from Peter Bennett's diary Eid Sat 13 Nov

The last few days of Ramadan in Omdurman has seen frantic buying in the market place and in the road up to our house. Our nearest market and bus station is Souk Shuhada. It is about three minutes from home. The road that connects us, though dirt, is busy throughout the day with pedestrians, donkey carts, tuk-tuks (moped rickshaws) and Toyotas. Along the road are a variety of food shops, telephone centres and barbers. It also passes a mosque, it must be our nearest, our 'parish' mosque, if you will. In the first week of Ramadan we saw a number of beggars take up positions along our road, particularly outside the mosque. Presumably their usual places are closed for the holy month? Elsewhere along the road, people sell teeth-cleaning wooden-sticks (fasting Muslims here do not use toothpaste for fear of swallowing some), shoes and tools. In this last week-or-so we have seen more and more 'nice' things: glittery shoes, fancy children's clothes, perfume, wall clocks that play tunes and toys. Toys like you would not believe: plastic guns, battery powered train-sets and imitation mobile phones.

On the night of Ramadan 29th, Omdurman Souk was incredibly busy; frantic with last minute shopping and selling. There were people not wanting to go home without gifts for everyone and sellers not wanting to be left with stock on their hands. Around 11pm we heard that Eid would begin the next day (I still haven't worked out why there is uncertainty, or who decides). It seems that the town just could not calm down. The noises of the busy street continued well into the night, firecrackers, squeaking toys, drumming and traffic. I fell asleep. The morning after, the feast day of Eid El Fitr, is like Christmas Day. The shops are shut, the streets deserted, everyone has partied-out and is now fast asleep.

Monday 6 December

For one of my classes this week I decided to use the lyrics of an obscure singer-songwriter I had admired in the 70s as our text for reading and discussion. It is a commentary about the end of a relationship. Here in Sudan, the expectation seems to be that everyone will marry when they are the right age regardless of whether they have met the 'right' person or even in some cases whether they have met the person at all. At first we talked about what it is like when it rains, the colour of the sky, how - if we are silly enough to go out - we avoid getting wet. Unfortunately, it only rains here for a few days a year. It evokes much the same emotions that greet the first hot sunny day back in the UK, and why avoid getting wet when you would rather dance in it? We talked of how we might travel from Khartoum to Atbara (air, river, vehicle, train, and pony) and whether there are any stations along the way, about chatting, sharing the journey, and at some point going separate ways. We talked about life being a journey starting at 'birth', and soon identified other 'stations' along the way like: first day at school, going to university, getting a job, getting married, having children. We zoomed in on getting married and the station before, yes they knew about the station before mar-