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The African Oyster Trust at work in The Gambia

Dee Bixley
Edited by Bryan Holden

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OYSTER
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by

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Foreword

I am sitting writing this foreword to Happy! Happy! Happy! a book that charts the visit of Mel and Dee Bixley to The Gambia, on the verandah of my room at the Gunjur Project, a small lodge that lies in the far south of Africa's smallest mainland nation. It has been an exciting couple of days. We have officially opened a new clinic in the village of Kajabang, which is literally a stone's throw over the compound wall, and yesterday we went north for me to lay the first stone of a new classroom at Stepping Stones Nursery School in Serekunda which is where The African Oyster Trust began its work back in 2005. Hence this 10th anniversary book.

'I smirked... that by climbing a mountain we could change anything.'

For me personally the inspiration that led to founding the AOT began when I climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro back in 2001. When our trek leader said a little prayer at the top of Uhuru peak I had smirked inwardly at the thought that by climbing a mountain we could change anything. Coming down the mountain I had bumped into a young man who begged me to help him. I had only three things I could offer: two one hundred dollar bills or half a toilet roll. He declined my generous offer of a loo roll and promptly disappeared back into the bush, carrying a large log of firewood upon his head.

To be honest I didn't think about the encounter again for several weeks, nor the prayer that I'd smirked at. They only came to mind again when I had a dream the night after the Twin Towers fell flat; 9/11 changed me as it did so many. I also woke up in a cold sweat. In my mind's eye I could see a group of men trying to recruit a young lad to their cause against the West. The conversation was animated, but their subject refused to take up arms with them until they asked him the very simple question: "Tell us, what has the West ever done for you?" At which point, in my dream, the young lad turned to face me and replied: "A man once offered me half a toilet roll."

On that note I recognized the young mendicant, but instead of leaving with a log of firewood, he held a Kalashnikov above his head.

It was one of those moments when you suddenly realise that you need to respond in some way; and my response was to begin to look for a way to do something to help in Africa, to get off my backside and do something more than offer half a loo roll. The opportunity took quite a while to emerge. I was concerned that I should be involved with something small,

something working in a grass roots way, it had to be in Africa and it needed someone on the ground who could be trusted to deliver on whatever we actually decided to do.

These might seem simple things to put into place but actually they're not – the big one was finding someone on the ground that I could really trust operationally. There are lots of good-hearted, honest people but very few that I knew that were based in Africa. On top of that I knew that to be effective the person had to be more than a little special; they had to care but not be overwhelmed by caring; they had, I suppose, to have that rare quality of tough love: metaphorically a skin like leather and a heart of gold.

The very person was to cross my path in the most unlikely of places – the Leamington Tennis Court Club. At that time, the oldest real tennis club in the world was a place where you had to be male to play. Even so one of the other members had persuaded the powers that be to permit his wife to put on a series of talks on Leamington's history at the Club with all proceeds going towards a school she had adopted in The Gambia. I went down one evening and at the end of that evening's illustrated talk I introduced myself to Kira Dalton to find out more.

She told me about her school in Niumi Lamin on the north bank of the great River Gambia, not so very far from the alleged birthplace of Alex Hayley's ancestor Kunta Kinteh the enslaved hero of Hayley's best selling epic *Roots*. I was much taken by Kira's command of her subject and also by her remarkably penetrating pale blue eyes. She was clearly a woman of intent and before the evening was finished she had challenged me to visit.

I made my first visit to The Gambia in November 2004 and I took with me a goodly sum of cash that had been raised by my church, St Michael's and All Angels in Claverdon. It was money raised at a pre-Christmas charity night, a night featuring a group of African drummers and the opportunity to buy a wide range of African products from Pula, a Fair Trade shop I had come across in North Oxford whilst I was studying part-time at Wycliffe Hall.

'I shall never forget playing badminton on the red dust.'

Here is not the place fully to tell of my experiences in The Gambia other than to admit that I found it very challenging. Kira and her late husband, the eminent scientist Sir Howard Dalton FRS, escorted me to Niumi Lamin with great care (and not a little forbearance) and I shall never forget playing badminton on the red dust (it really was the colour of Roland Garros) of the school yard before handing over to a young Gambian to take on Sir Howard and his cunning backhand flick. We handed over a large quantity of medicines too, but I felt stangely flat and exhausted by the time we'd bumped along an appalling road back to the ferry port of Barra.

Kira and Howard left me in the car to take a stroll round the market whilst we waited for the last ferry. I can remember feeling glum as I melted in the late afternoon heat.

I snapped open an unpleasantly warm Coke and thought to myself: 'I don't reckon much to this philanthropy lark, it's too much like hard work and it doesn't even make me feel good. There's such a bottomless pit of need. What difference can I really make?' At that point a little girl approached the car. I had the window half down trying to benefit from the breeze that blew up the estuary; but since the breeze was stiflingly hot it didn't really help. "Toubab," she said (Toubab being the ubiquitous salutation to a white person in The Gambia), "you give me minty, you give me bottle, you give me pen."

"No!" I replied, with a disappointingly strong sense of certainty, "you give me a sweetie." At that she extended her little hand into the oven like heat of the car and dropped three sweets into my lap.

So there you have the reasons why I decided to start The African Oyster Trust when I got back to Warwickshire - a distinct lack of faith in the power of prayer, a young man whom I failed to help and a young girl who showed me what it was to be charitable. For all that though, I had a ready confidence in the ability of Kira Dalton to make things happen on the ground and a dogged stubbornness to persevere in trying to make a more positive impact on the world in the light of my dream following 9/11.

Dee Bixley has, I believe, produced a most remarkable account of her visit to The Gambia in February 2014 accompanied by her husband Mel and guided by Kira herself. In many ways I believe that Dee's story is the very best account of how the AOT works – certainly much better than a dry history of our first decade. It is of course an intensely personal account, one that comes directly from the heart of her experience.

The Health Centre at Kajabang.

It is hard to believe that there is still so much need in the country. It looks for all the world as though we have never had to leave the paradise of Eden. The sky is aqua blue (to quote Bob Dylan in Mozambique), the trees are full of tropical fruits and brightly coloured birds are flitting through the trees. Appearances are however, deceptive and The Gambia falls well short of paradise. Outside our compound walls ordinary Gambians, Christians and Muslims, are going about the task of scratching a living from what is a hard country even though it is at times intensely beautiful.

'Christians and Muslims scratching a living from what is a hard country.'

We are all delighted to have played a small part in helping to bridge the gulf between appearance and reality; to try and help the Gambians (or at least some of them) to escape from the trap of poverty. In ten years, Kira and her team of Gambians have achieved so much in building and running a hospital, two clinics and four nursery schools. And we have been helped by so many people in the UK and elsewhere who for all sorts of reasons have helped the AOT's work.

It is my sincere hope that you will enjoy Dee's account, it is also my hope that you might wish to support our work now and into the future, but more than this, I hope it might inspire you to do something (or continue in doing something) that whilst it might not look like it's going to save the world will make a huge and practical difference to others.

One thing's for sure, the act of trying almost certainly helps the doer. It does exasperate me when my late mother proves to have been right all along when she told me: "It's better to give than to receive." How could she possibly have anticipated the lessons I'd receive from the little lad in Tanzania and the little girl in The Gambia?

James Holden
African Oyster Trust Founder
Gunjur Project
27th March 2015.

Introduction

Three years ago my husband Mel funded an ambulance for The African Oyster Trust's community health centre at Jarra Jappineh, Lower River Region.

Even Gambia's President Jammeh became involved in the quest for an ambulance and it has been heart-warming to hear about how it is saving lives. Now we have come to The Gambia to see it for ourselves, and have been invited by Lady Kira Dalton to stay with her for the majority of our visit.


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Happy! Happy! Happy!

DIARY OF A JOURNEY

FIRST AWAKENING

Monday 3rd February

Inside the Banjul airport building a large electronic message gives a stark indication of just one of this country's challenges:

The Gambia has zero tolerance for child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Outside we are greeted not only by Faraday from Hibiscus House, where we will stay for 3 nights, but by Kira too.

As we travel to the hotel, Faraday gives us an introductory talk about The Gambia. It is humbling to be reminded that the slave trade was a key factor in its relationship with Britain.

Lady Kira Dalton.

Mel at rest in the luxury of Hibiscus House. The contrast between this and how the Gambians live was and is not lost on us.

A red dirt road strewn with enormous potholes is the unpromising approach to Hibiscus, a small boutique-style hotel surrounded by mature gardens, which attracts rich birdlife and a green vervet monkey called John.

After admiring our room, we join Kira at the bar to review her plans for the days ahead. Later, our 3am start sees us dine early and retire for the night. Beyond the hotel's walls, the villagers' rhythm of life is evoked by calls to prayer, donkeys braying, Mandinka chatter, and cockerels crowing at dawn.

During our time here Kira is going to show us some of the charity's many projects. Today, she and Fanding (her second in command) are taking us to see a nursery and adjoining school in Serekunda, near Banjul.

LEARNING = HOPE

Tuesday 4th February

The Stepping Stones Nursery, formally opened in March 2013, has three classrooms and was built on land donated by Kunkujang Keitayah Lower Basic School, next door. We meet enthusiastic teachers and children, and witness the Jolly Phonics teaching method in action. The secret of its success seems to lie in the fun of it, the way it captures the imagination of young minds. But fun or not, one thing is already abundantly clear: Gambian children WANT to learn.

To me, this photo is more than just a school girl ringing the end of break bell. It says: "Come on, this is our chance to learn, our way out of poverty".

At Kunkujang Keitayah, we meet the Headmaster, Edrissa Bojang. An impressive man, his roles include Chairmanship of the Gambia Teachers Union Cooperative Credit Union (GTUCCU). A chart on the wall shows that the school has just under 2,000 pupils.

The toilets might be basic but they're far better than many.

WILDLIFE & GREEN TEA

Wednesday 5th February

Kira collects us and our first stop is to meet pharmacist Dembo Njie. Kira introduces Mel - "You know the ambulance, Mel 1? Well this is Mel!" Dembo is not only very knowledgeable about medication, he treats customers too, stitching them up, applying bandages, whatever's needed.

We visit Bijilo Forest, where Kira has arranged a guided tour with a birdman. While we wait for him, I sit near a local who shows me how to make green tea (attaya). For twenty minutes I watch this painstaking ritual, involving dried leaves, heaps of sugar, a teapot, a charcoal burner and infinite patience.

Repeatedly, he pours the mixture in and out of a teapot, pouring from height to increase its frothiness. I never do get to see him actually drink it. Kira says afterwards that teeth are ruined by the frequent consumption of this concoction.

The birdman can spot birds even when looking the other way. We see some beauties during a very short time, as well as many green vervet monkeys.

Pharmacist Dembo Njie with his cashier.

Our birdman with a termite mound.

NEGOTIATING POTHOLES

Thursday 6th February

Kira picks us up at 10am and we go to her compound to drop off our cases before starting the journey up country. Our final destination tomorrow will be Jappineh Health Centre. We collect Fanding en route and he and Kira debate whether this will be a goat, cow or donkey day. In fact, the leisureliness with which all these creatures wander into the road makes it a 'mixed' day.

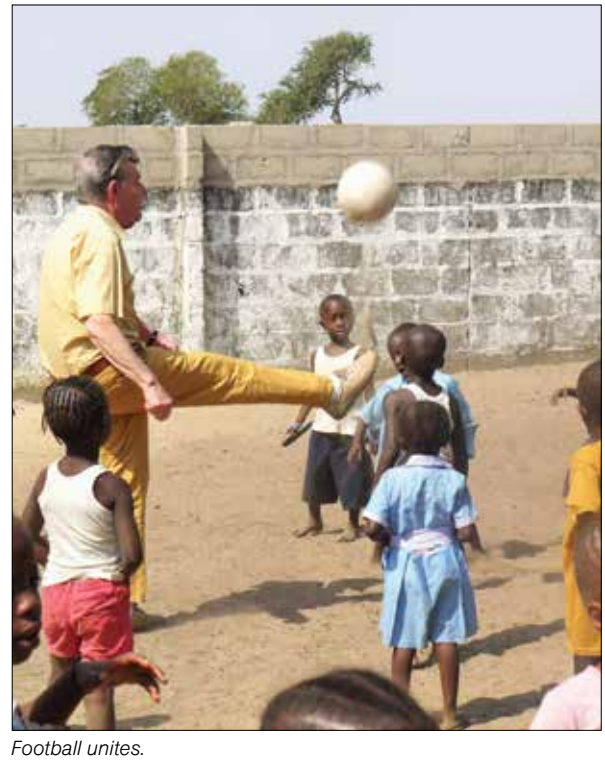
Driving in The Gambia is challenging. In the local dirt roads there are the potholes to negotiate and areas where sand accumulates, and the need to accelerate and go with the 'skid' is imperative if you don't want to get stuck. Once we understand that Kira knows exactly what she's doing we relax!

As for the major roads, there are regular checkpoints where you must stop for the police, military or immigration authorities. However, as soon as they realise it's Kira, their stern attitudes soften and they salute with alacrity. The fact that a gun is pointing at us from a camouflaged hut nearby is of no consequence - Kira has clearly earned their respect and affection.

A visit to the Big Tree Nursery takes our breath away. The welcome for Kira and Fanding is ecstatic and pretty good for us too! And when they realise that Mel is happy to kick a football around the children are overjoyed!

Cows crossing.

Huge excitement at seeing Kira and Fanding.



Football unites.

Lunch is at Bintang Bolong Lodge, in the middle of a mangrove forest. Known for its exceptional flora and fauna, the first creatures we see are countless crabs, intent on multitudinous sideways missions. As the daily floods retreat, the receding waterline exposes them, together with mudskippers and goodness knows what else.

An American lady, quietly reading a book when we arrive, insists on taking us to see a colony of fruit bats and is bitterly disappointed to discover that they've moved on. We're told that in the evenings at this wondrous place, apes and vultures inhabit the baobob trees.

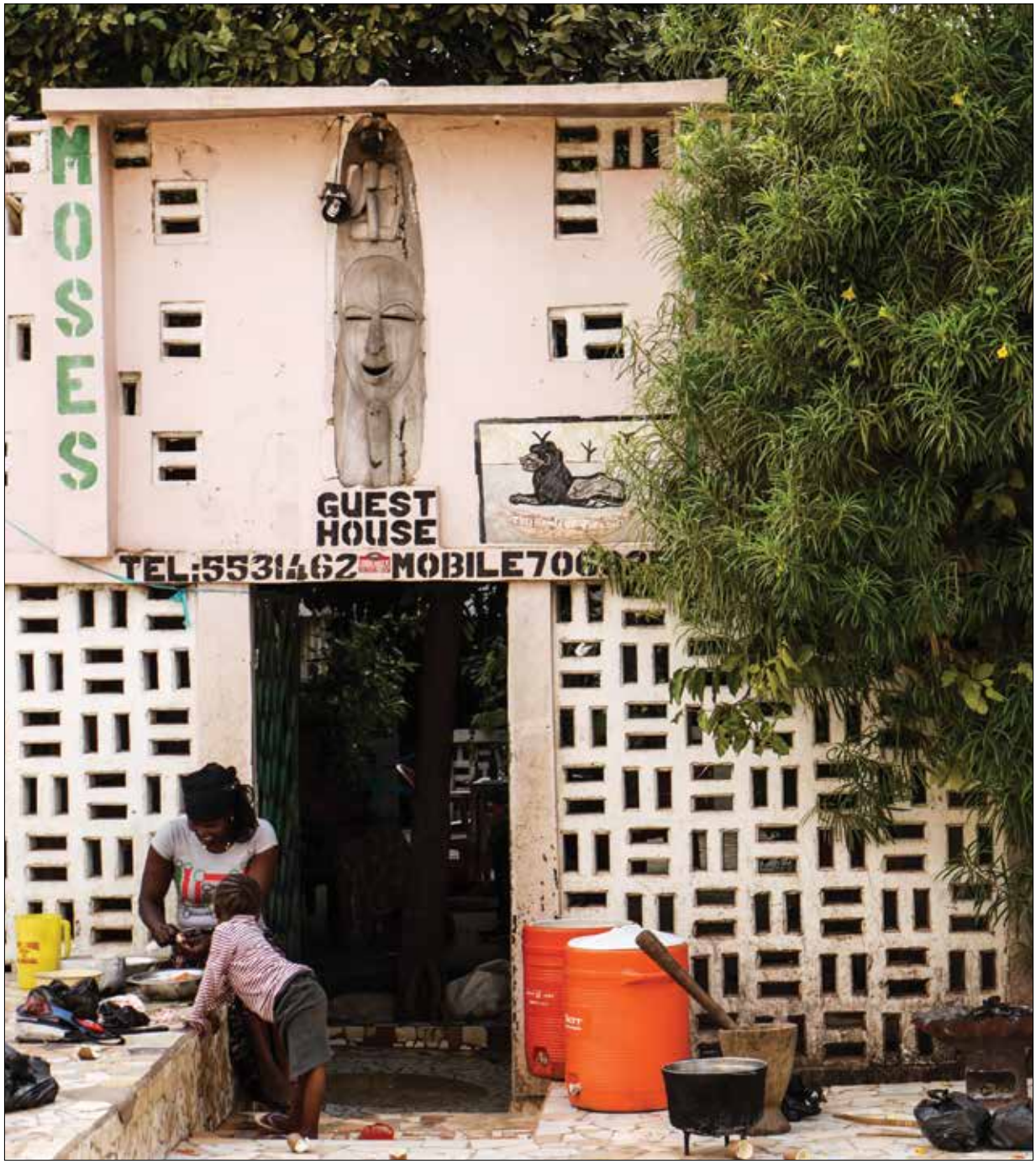
Kira has taken us the scenic way up country and we go through some stunning and amazingly lush countryside.

We arrive at the Moses Guest House in Soma, the best place to stay near Jappineh. It is a small establishment, five or six rooms situated around a courtyard, where we drink tea from pint mugs.

Kira must read something in my face - "How's your comfort zone, Dee?!" she teases. She is right to do so. After all as 'esteemed guests' we have a flush loo, a tap in the wall for cleaning our teeth, and Kira has thoughtfully supplied a travel kit of essentials. What's more, our host has been out and purchased toilet paper. When people are this keen to please, to hell with my OCD tendencies!

Our evening meal being prepared.

A sneaky pic of Mel in our esteemed bathroom.


MOSES
GUEST
HOUSE
TEL:553462 MOBILE706

HAPPY! HAPPY! HAPPY!

Friday 7th February

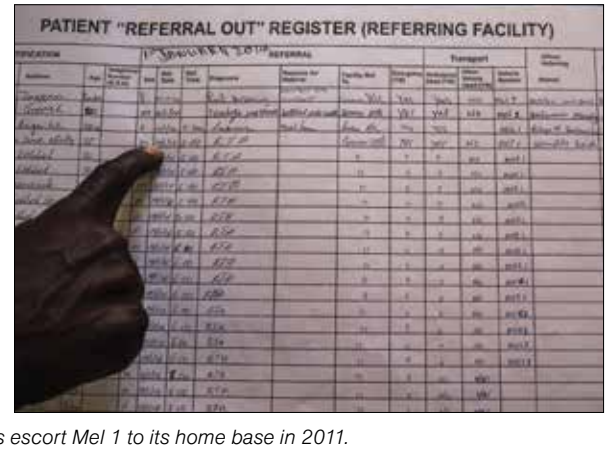
Following a visit to the Jappineh Nursery School, we arrive at the health centre and the Mel 1 ambulance is the first thing we spot outside. Chalo, the driver, proudly demonstrates how everything works.

I'm sure Mel would want me to make it clear that it was The African Oyster Trust that chose the number plate!

We tour the Trust's health centre – the Sir Howard Dalton Clinic, named after Kira's husband - and meet some of the dedicated staff.

Our review includes the laboratory, the wards, the supply of second-hand eyeglasses and even a store cupboard!

The number of patients treated here is huge. An extreme example was in October 2013, when the incidence of malaria was at an all time high. They treated an astonishing 896 patients. This was almost double the usual number and was due to drug shortages elsewhere. So patients were coming from far and wide seeking treatment AND the clinic was able to meet their needs! Chalo was rushed off his feet and on standby well into the evenings.



Two of these photos show the celebrations and excitement as villagers escort Mel 1 to its home base in 2011.

There were huge celebrations at the time the ambulance was brought to the village in 2011, so we had not expected any ceremony now. But through a translator, Fanding tells the story of the ambulance. Then the Chief and two Imams speak. Their thanks are effusive but they also encourage us to Extend Our Efforts! Indeed, the second Imam has a curious request. Mel whispers: "Has he just requested a trolley for fat people?" Yes he has. What an irony in a country where so many are hungry.

We have the opportunity to present Chalo with a personal card and gift, having sought Kira's advice in advance. Her suggestion was the equivalent of a month's salary: £30. This made Chalo very 'Happy, Happy, Happy!'

One little chap decides that the proceedings will be more interesting upside down and backwards.

By now it's late morning and aware of my interest in mental health, Kira has arranged a visit to the nearby psychiatric unit. She has told us that in the whole of The Gambia there is only one fully trained psychiatric nurse, and not one psychiatrist! I'm a little wary of what we will find and suspect that we'll be shown very little.

We are met by the man in charge, Alhagie Karamo Njie, who greets us warmly. He is a 'traditional' doctor, known as a maribout (witch doctor). The word is described in the Encyclopaedia Britannica as: 'a healer or benevolent worker of magic in a non-literate society'. Mr Njie is tall, flamboyantly dressed and almost flirtatious with Kira. He sweeps ahead to show us some wards at this unit, which relatively recently became the Herman Beeling Psychiatric and Rehabilitation Health Centre (backed by a Netherlands charity).

We see one woman (psychotic when admitted, following the birth of her baby) who now lies quietly on the floor, shielding her face but eyeing us through her fingers. On the floor nearby her baby is completely covered by a shawl to keep away mosquitoes.

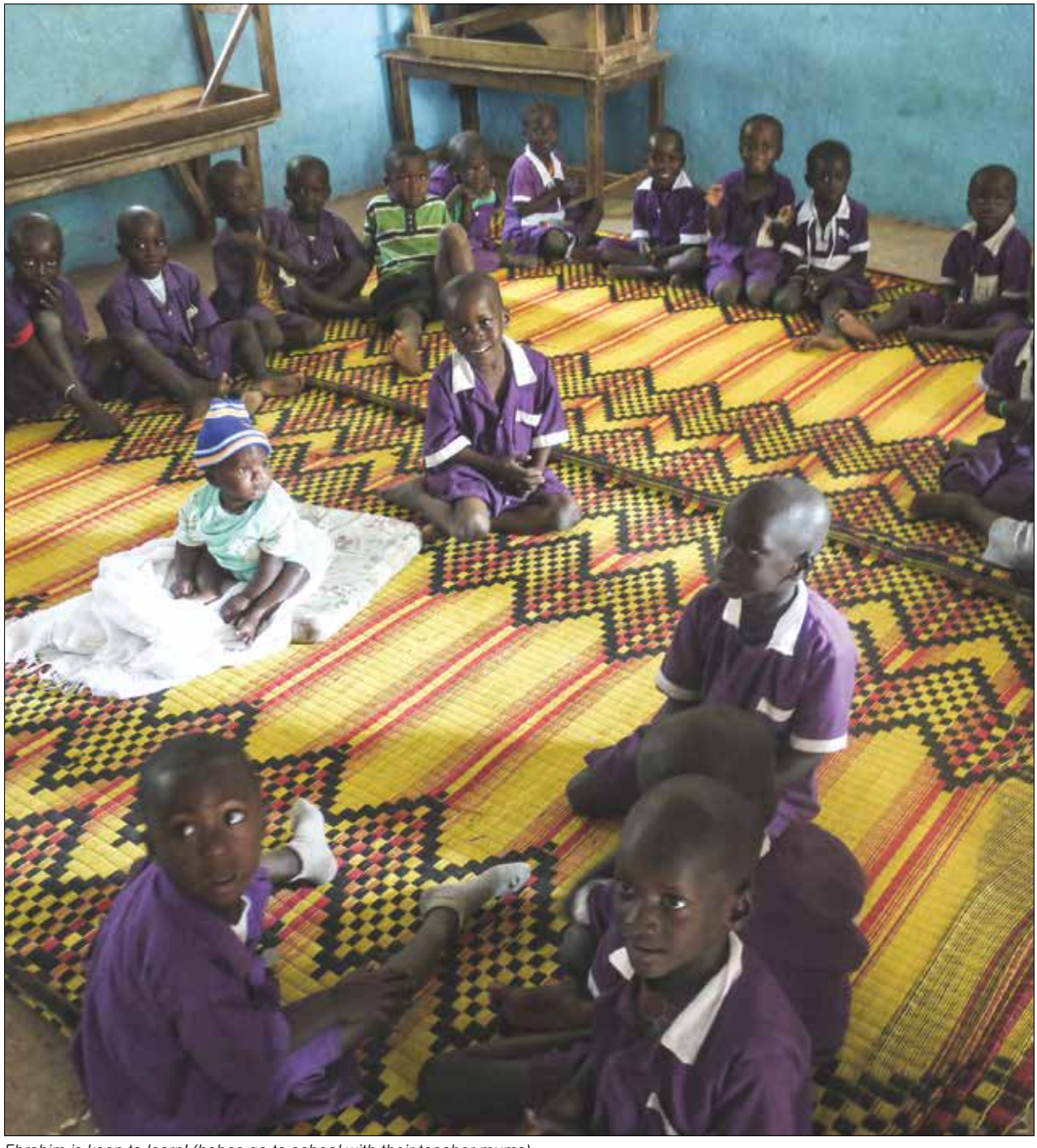
The maribout ushers us into his office and Kira and he discuss how they could work together in obtaining psychiatric medication, never an easy task in The Gambia. We learn afterwards that this is the first time the doctor has accepted the idea that his herbs do not help every condition. Now he is actually asking for help. We feel that we might just have witnessed a significant breakthrough in what had seemed an intransigent situation.

Kira demonstrates how to use a charcoal-heated iron!

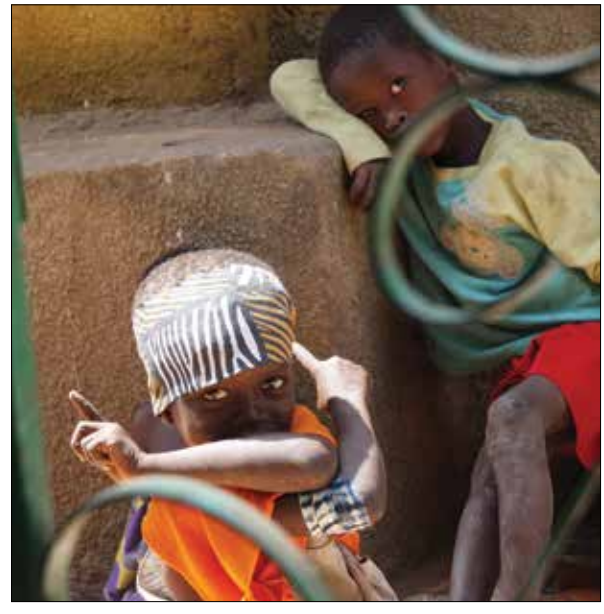
Fanding has invited us for lunch at his compound. His wife Fatou, whom we saw teaching earlier at the Jappineh Nursery School situated in the grounds of the Basic Cycle School, has come back to complete the lunch preparations. We eat in the customary way from one shared bowl and it is a delicious meal. The tradition is that men and guests eat first, women and children have what's left. This perturbs us and we ask Fatou to join us but she is clearly apprehensive.

Back at the health centre, a committee meeting is held outside and we are invited to sit in. Following prayers, the proceedings are translated, perhaps for our benefit more than for Kira. I suspect Kira understands rather more than she admits!

Fanding's village well.



Ebrahim is keen to learn! (babes go to school with their teacher mums).



Fanding's stepdaughter Aje and Ebrahim, his son.

Other family members in the compound.

As they move on to next year's budget, the committee resorts to further praying. Afterwards, Kira states that although she is grateful for their prayers, they must also remember that it is their own hard work which has enabled them to make the clinic successful, both medically and financially. She says this in such a way that I feel mighty proud to be sitting next to her.

My mind wanders as the meeting continues and villagers begin to arrive for the celebrations to follow. One or two ladies come through the gate and sit on their water carriers (later used as drums), waiting patiently. The celebrations underway, the women sing about village life, an oral history handed down through the generations.

Once there was no ambulance (they chant) and sick people travelled to hospital in donkey carts. And every time the drumming reaches a crescendo, more women and children are inspired to perform short bursts of an exquisitely rhythmic pounding of the ground.

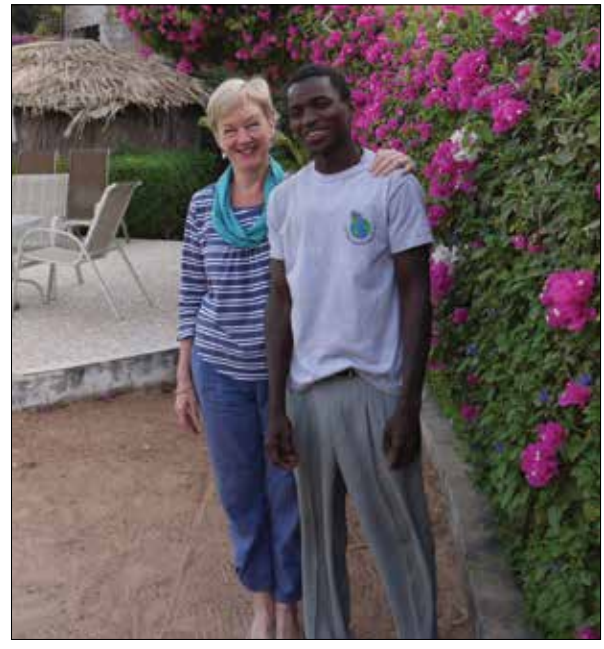
Fanding pulls me from my chair to show how you reward the ladies' efforts. The game is to give them notes of small worth but lots of them, which they duly tuck into their costumes. The money they raise will go towards village projects, such as the women's garden, loudspeaker batteries, even pocket money for themselves. I hope so.

Mel is sitting next to the ambulance driver, Chalo, who has received some much deserved attention. His quiet mantra throughout the day - 'Happy! Happy! Happy!' - will be a treasured and abiding memory for us.

Saturday 8th February

Today we travel back, giving a lift to two male nurses from the clinic. Never one to miss an opportunity, Kira discusses medical supplies with them.

Arriving back at Kira's place is wonderful - showers all round! Then we treat ourselves to dinner at Coco Ocean, Gambia's swankiest hotel.



With Celberr, Kira's watchman.

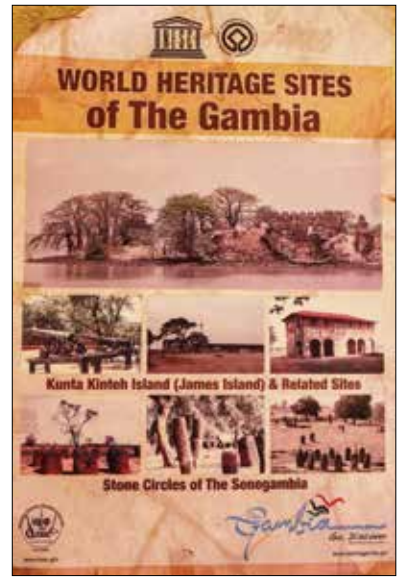
ROOTS

Sunday 9th February

We took a boat trip to James Island (also known as Kunta Kinteh Island). Just 36 passengers and by chance, friends of Kira's are also aboard. The boat is owned and managed by an elderly English couple, employing local staff.

We visit the slavery museum at Juffureh, receive an audience with the Chief, Mrs Tako Taal, meet relatives of Kunta Kinteh and Alex Haley, whose book *Roots* has brought a lot of attention to this village but not, seemingly, much wealth. After lunch on board we take small boats to Kunta Kinteh Island.

Plan for stowing slaves on board ship.



The Chief of Juffureh.

Samba, a friend of Kira's. 'He looks like a Rodin sculpture!' said Mel.

A descendent of Kunta Kinteh.

HEALTHY MINDS

Monday 10th February

We head for Tanka Tanka, a nearby psychiatric hospital founded by Anna Bouman and the Tanka Tanka Foundation. Unsure of the way, we call out 'Tanka Tanka?' to a lady walking along the gritty track. She points straight ahead but the next thing we know she has climbed in the car next to Mel, not a word spoken. Further on, we see a sign to Tanka, take a right and pause to drop off our passenger. Then as we arrive, waiting for the main gate to open, who should slip in a side door but our friend!

Large modern buildings surround an enormous courtyard, where patients sit, pace, or come up to inspect us as we wait for a staff meeting to end. A male nurse introduces himself and escorts us to the women's wards, occupational therapy department, kitchen, laundry, and vegetable garden.

During our tour we chat with a curly-haired Dutch volunteer, who explains that he has volunteered here for six weeks every year, since retiring from a career in psychiatry. He has just installed a volleyball net for the patients and when he finishes talking to us, he goes off to kick a ball about with a patient. As he encourages the boy in the heat of the noonday sun, I wonder at this elderly man, giving of himself in this way.

After talking with the Occupational Therapist, we amble across to the male wards and note how the hospital walls have been heightened due to patients regularly absconding. A girl slips in beside me and links her fingers through mine. We continue this way until she loses interest and veers off elsewhere. Another patient howls her misery, eventually collapsing into the arms of a kitchen lady.

CROCODILE SPRING

Tuesday 11th February

So that we can see how carefully Mel 1 is looked after, Kira takes us to Riders for Health, a not-for-profit organisation which maintains all The Gambia's health service vehicles, including 90 motorbikes, 36 ambulances and 27 off-road vehicles.

Tea is served in the office of Therese Drammeh, the RFH Country Director (pictured on page 40 in the middle, her husband on the right), and previously the government's Permanent Secretary for Health. Her innovations include the introduction of female mechanics, and even a female ambulance driver. To Therese, Mel is 'Mel 1' and I am 'Mel 2'!

Calypso, an open-air restaurant in Bakau at Cape Point beach, is the venue for lunch. Each table has its own thatched area. One of us suggests that we should go and see if we can find any crocodiles in the pool but we don't summon the energy. Indeed, we linger on for tea and then look for a croc, which emerges as if on cue.

Later, Kira drives us around some of the highlights of Cape Point. There is a colonial feel about the place, with elegant homes and official buildings.

We stop off at a craft market and within minutes Kira is chatted-up and becomes 'engaged' to one of the locals! This sort of thing happens to her all the time. Then we go to a wonderful bookshop called Timbooktoo. We get excited by their stock of children's books and buy nursery books for the schools, and two dictionaries, which Kira says will be useful for the teachers too. Such small things make me feel inordinately perky.

Tanji Fishing Village.

We collect Tania from her home nearby. An American, she recently spent two years in Jappineh, volunteering with the Peace Corps. She lived with a host family in their compound, and helped at the school. Instead of returning to the States at the end of her assignment, she married a Gambian and now works at a school nearby. On the way to the restaurant she tells us a little about the Peace Corps, which helps in the areas of education, health, agriculture and community economic development. We're also joined by Susan, who runs an animal rescue charity. Conversation is lively and the food at Koko Curry is yummy.

CAPTURING THE SCENE

Wednesday 12th February

A lazy morning until we leave for Tanje fishing village, where the watchman of a friend of Kira's, Mustapha, takes us to see the action. It is a richly bustling scene. Mel gets cross because I keep disappearing but I'm in photographic heaven and love the urgency and variety, everyone immersed in their own little part of the bigger picture. There is an understanding that the young scavengers on the beach are allowed to keep what drops from the fishermen's loads.

Walking back from the beach we are invited in to one of the smoking houses, where thousands of herring and other fish are smoking over charcoal. The owner of the smoking house introduces himself as Mr Humanrightsandjustice!

At Tanje Village Museum we learn how traditional villages were laid out. The Headman (Chief) of a village was allowed 50 wives. He would live in one hut and his wives in another.


Fly
Emirates

AFTERMATH

Musings

The Gambian way of life has so many fascinating elements. Take the matter of Muslim men having up to four wives. Perhaps I should limit myself to quoting Mel when he took one of them aside for a quiet word: "You men certainly know how to make your lives complicated!" We met Fanding's two wives and many of his children. How complex his life must be, such responsibility on his shoulders.

The Pearl

Spending time with Kira we begin to know the pearl at the centre of the oyster, this small charity with the big heart. We understand why, whenever we leave her compound, and all the way along the red sandy roads, we hear "Kira! Kira!" as we pass. Smiling, waving children, barefoot and covered in dust. They know, and their parents, aunts, uncles and grannies know, that if any of them are injured or sick, this lady will do all she can to help.

We have witnessed how, in the evenings chatting in her garden bantaba, Kira's watchman will suddenly be at her side, clasping the blue cards we now recognized as health charts. The patient will have been prescribed medication, they aren't able to obtain or afford it, so they bring the problem to Kira.

Wherever our travels have taken us in the day, Kira stops off at a pharmacy on the way home to pick up her latest medication requests. One night, when all electricity has been turned off in the area, we watch from the car as she carries out her business by torchlight.

Therese Drammeh referred to Kira as the 'ultimate philanthropist' and I have seen her described as the Mother Theresa of The Gambia. Yes and yes again. But when you include her background as a successful businesswoman, her prodigious knowledge of The Gambia and how it works, her diplomatic skills and (when required) sheer cussed perseverance, you have a pearl indeed.

Thank You

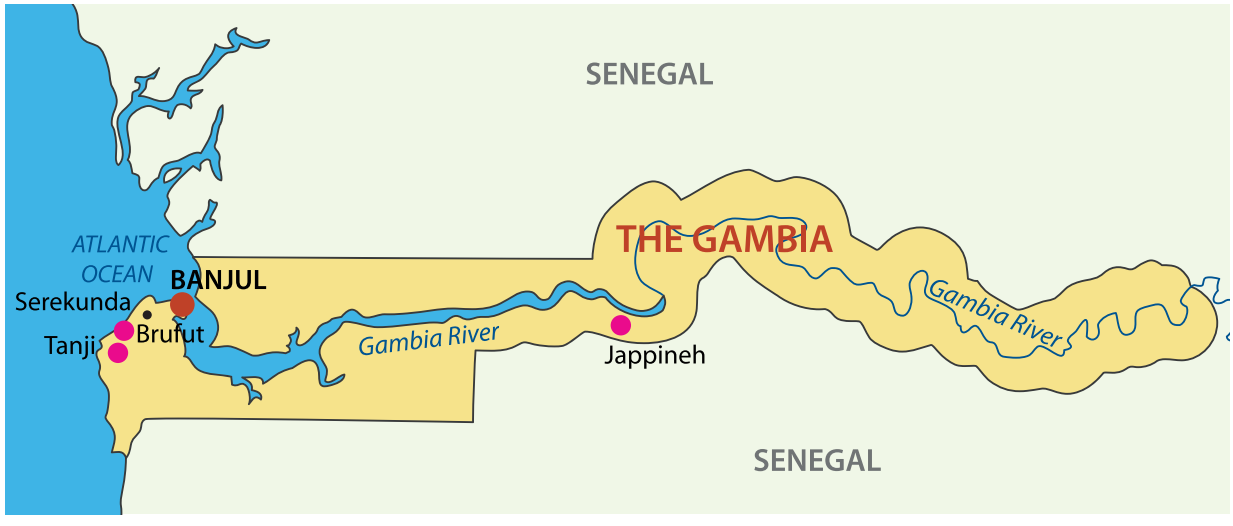
This record of our trip can't possibly capture all our impressions and stories but it was a huge privilege to have access to people and places that the average tourist does not encounter - all thanks to Kira and The African Oyster Trust.

Dee Bixley, February 2014.


THE AFRICAN
OYSTER
TRUST

THE GAMBIA

Situated in West Africa, The Gambia is the smallest country on mainland Africa, with a population of 1.7 million. The Gambia River flows through the country's centre and empties into the Atlantic Ocean. The slave trade was a key factor in its relationship with the British, but in 1965, The Gambia gained independence from the United Kingdom and joined the Commonwealth of Nations. President Jammeh withdrew the country from the Commonwealth in 2013.



ABOUT THE AFRICAN OYSTER TRUST

This book describes some of the work of the African Oyster Trust, a small charity set up in 2005 to fund educational and health projects in The Gambia, and improve lives in one of Africa's smallest and poorest countries.

The charity currently provides nursery education to more than 500 children every year and has helped establish 2 health centres and a clinic which treat 250 patients a month.

The Trust focuses on education and healthcare as the two most important ways to break the cycle of poverty and sickness as a route to better life.

Currently the Trust is proud to be involved in the following projects:-

HEALTH

- Greggs Clinic and Gunjur Lower Basic School
- Jappineh Health Centre
- Kajabang Health Centre

NURSERY SCHOOLS

- Stepping Stones Nursery School
- Hilary Emery Nursery School
- Jappineh Nursery School
- Mariama Mae Nursery School

The African Oyster Trust is proud that all its directors and trustees receive no payment whatsoever for their work. Ninety-eight percent of donations go directly to the Gambian projects and peoples.

To find out more about the work of the charity or to get involved:

Web: www.africanoystertrust.co.uk

Post: c/o The Old Stables, Units 3 & 4,
Newhouse Farm Business Centre,
Langley Road, Edstone, Henley-in-Arden,
B95 6DL.

Happy! Happy! Happy!

Giving to charity is a generous and
worthwhile act but do we really know where
our money is going and whether
it is truly doing some good?

This book is about the
importance of the guardianship of a
charitable legacy and the
work of The African Oyster Trust.

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