

Race against time

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Greetings — After being away, Monica (left) and Krystal are greeted warmly by their friends in the Senufo Supyire village near Sikasso where they serve with OneStory in Mali. (IMB PHOTO)

The work will be too hard. There won't be enough time to complete it. It's a God-sized task under harsh conditions.

That's what veteran missionaries told me they said as they sent young OneStory teams out to create recorded Bible stories for unreached people groups in Mali, West Africa, the country fifth from the bottom on the U.N. Human Development index.

OneStory teams of two to three journeymen learn the language and culture of an unreached people group by living in their village and building relationships. Journeymen, usually recent college graduates, serve two to three years with the International Mission Board. Once the team has a basic understanding of the language and culture, they work with a story crafter to translate a set of 30 to 60 Bible stories into the heart language of that people group.

I learned that 80 percent of unreached people are oral learners. Even if they had a Bible translated into

their language, they couldn't read it. Using a laptop and simple digital recording equipment, OneStory teams record the stories and share them with their village, air them on the radio and distribute them on cassette.

Could these young adults actually survive being thrown into a new culture and achieve this "God-sized" task in two or three years, I wondered.

What I saw visiting the One Story team across West Africa said yes. Come along with me to visit one of the teams.

Monica and Krystal: The old man tree

We drive for a few hours to meet Monica and Krystal, working with the Senufo Supyire people in Sikasso. Sitting on some large rocks under the shade of the "old man tree" we meet Anson. Not only is he the team's tribal brother, he's the first believer among this people group. Anson asked to



be baptized after hearing the story of the Ethiopian eunuch. “When [Monica and Krystal] told me, spoke God’s words to me, I knew that those words were true, that they were God’s words,” Anson says. “It’s important to know God and to know God’s words because Jesus is God’s Son.”

The chief asks us to pray for rain for his village because the well is nearly dry. As Judy begins to pray, a slight breeze blows across our faces, and thunder rumbles in the distance. It’s confirmation that God is with us in this place and that He cares for these people. At the end of the prayer the men smile and we see they’ve felt God’s power through the thunder.

That evening we experience an answer to the prayer. A huge rain moves across the whole area. At Monica and Krystal’s town house, we rush to close the metal shades and to bring in tents from the yard. The rain wets the concrete floor and nearly blows down the index cards representing Bible Stories hanging on yarn from the ceiling, charting the team’s progress. We talk about the village and how they are getting this blessing of rain from God, and I know I’m witnessing God at work.

Solar panels on the roof, hooked to car batteries, provide electricity to power Monica’s and Krystal’s computer equipment and lights. They don’t have running water in their town home, so I take my first bucket bath in the dark bathroom. I must flush the toilet by adding cups of water to the bowl. This isn’t a problem for one night, but I wonder if I could do this every day.

The next morning we talk to Monica and Krystal about their experiences when they first came to Mali. “It was like being thrown into a place where everything that you knew all of the sudden was gone. I got really good at playing charades and acting things out because we couldn’t communicate, couldn’t understand each other,” Monica, a former engineer explains. “But the village, the people here were



Friends — Krystal (right) poses for a photo with one of her best friends in the Senufo Supyire village. She helps with the work of the village as part of her OneStory cultural immersion. (IMB PHOTO)

amazing. They just took us in, and they showed us the ropes. And they started teaching us the language, and they fed us every meal.”

What’s it like to have the first believer? “Well it means the Senafo Supyire are coming, and they will be around the throne. And it breaks my heart when I think that some of the ones I love most might not be there. But they are going to be there, and the Lord is going to use the Supyire here, He’s going to use them much more, far better than He could have used us. ... [Anson] has told us I don’t know how many times that when he’s the old man, that his family will be Christian,” says Krystal.

It’s hard to leave these girls because being with them is being where God is working. They will soon be done with their work and go home. I know they’ll complete the race against time to translate a set of stories and leave them behind for their people to hear. Their lives and the lives of the people they have met will never be the same. Neither will mine. I wish I could stay and run the race with them to the end.

For a fuller account of Susan’s visit with the OneStory teams in Mali, click on Menu in the window above.

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Building relationships — Reaiah (right) and Kacy talk with their Maninka translator in a village in Mali. The OneStory team visits with the women and children to build relationships and learn the language in order to select appropriate Bible stories for the people group. (IMB PHOTO)