

The first Unification Church Missionary in Senegal -- May 2, 1975

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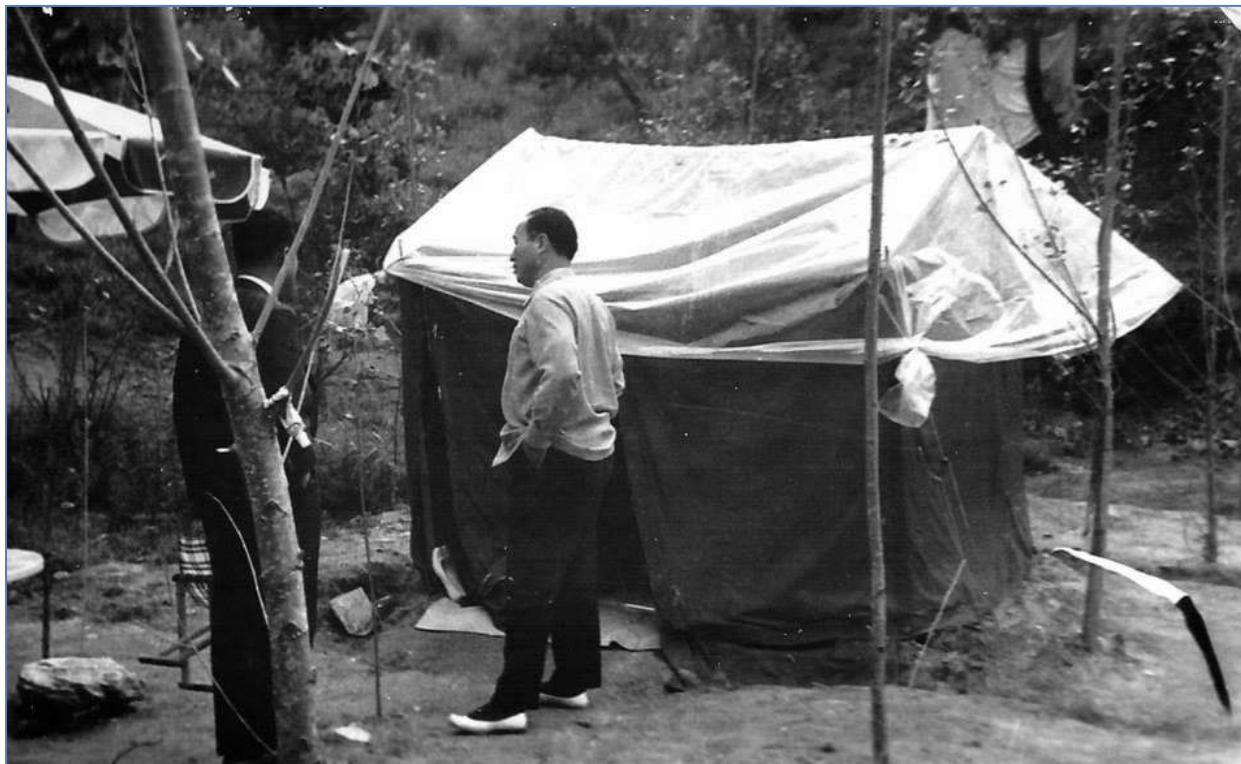


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On May 2, 1975 at 3:00 a.m., I landed at the airport in Dakar, Senegal, West Africa, as a missionary sent out by True Parents. At that time, I was 24 and I had no idea how long I would be staying and what situations I would face there. I also didn't know much about Senegal – just that it was a predominately Moslem country and that its president was a poet. I also knew that I would be joining a German and Japanese missionary whom I had never met though I knew their names. Reflecting back on that time I realize that I wasn't really thinking or analyzing things but just went totally on faith in God and True Parents. I ended up staying in Senegal 17 years thanks to God's grace and protection. I am eternally grateful to our Heavenly Parents for giving me the opportunity to go to Senegal as a missionary even though I was not qualified for such a responsibility. I feel my real life began in Senegal.

Because I had come to Senegal with only a one-way ticket, I wasn't able to enter until I bought a return ticket to Germany, which had been my last stop before arriving in Senegal. So I had to use half of the money given to me to start my mission to buy that ticket. Then I spent the rest of the night at a hotel near the airport. In the morning, knowing that the German missionary was already in Senegal, I took a taxi and went straight to the German embassy hoping to get his address. To my surprise, he was sitting there in the Embassy. That morning he had had the inspiration to go to the Embassy. He was staying in a small, very simple old hotel in the center of Dakar and had reserved a room there for me. It was a great relief to have met him in such a way that was clearly guided by God.

After a couple of weeks, we were able to find an apartment in the center of town near the French Cultural Center and a couple of weeks after that the Japanese missionary arrived. The German missionary was 21 years old and had only been a church member for about 9 months before being sent to Africa. The Japanese missionary had been a CARP member in Japan and was clearly the one who had the most spiritual training and wisdom among the three of us. The German missionary spoke English and French (the main common language in Senegal) pretty well. The Japanese only spoke Japanese so it was very difficult for him. I had studied French through high school and college so I could read it pretty well but had trouble speaking it so I borrowed books in French from the French Cultural Center library which was near our apartment and after reading many books I started thinking in French and then, could speak it. Both the German and Japanese missionaries were kind and gentle by nature. Still, because of the providential importance of our unity it wasn't easy.

The First Year

I remember the first year of our mission as being very special – very intense. I feel that we were specially guided and protected by God. We were getting to know a new country and culture that was so different from our own. We were trying to figure out how to live there; what to eat, how to live our daily lives, how to support ourselves, how to relate to the people, etc. At first, it was all so strange I missed America terribly. Whenever I saw a gas station I would get tears in my eyes because that was the one thing in

Senegal that most resembled America. Gradually, as I became more accustomed to Senegal and as we started getting to know some people and developing friendships, I began to feel such a great love for the country. I loved walking the streets and taking the old "cars rapides" -- a very old kind of minibus that held about 15 people sitting in benches in the back and that had floors that were rusted through in many places so you could see the pavement below.

Being a predominately Moslem country, there were Mosques everywhere including one just two blocks from our apartment. Five times a day the call to prayer would explode out through the loud speaker of the Mosque. Every Mosque sends out the call to prayer 5 times a day. It is a chant in Arabic saying something like "Hasten to Prayer". My bedroom in our 3rd floor apartment had a narrow balcony that faced the Mosque, so in the beginning, I found the calls to prayer disruptive but I eventually became accustomed to them and could appreciate their beauty. Senegal officially has freedom of religion, though over 90% of the population is Moslem with only a small portion of Christians and others. Because of the high percentage of Moslems, there was some social pressure to be Moslem. There is a Moslem sect native to Senegal, the Mourides, that is very popular and powerful, as well as other branches of Islam.

One day during our first few months in Dakar, we had an interesting experience. Our apartment was on the 3rd floor and had a balcony overlooking the street. It suddenly became kind of dark outside and then we heard a lot of noise in the street. We went out on the balcony to see what was going on and found there was a solar eclipse taking place. Looking down we saw that the street was full of men bowing towards the sun and praying to Allah in loud voices. We found out that they were praying to Allah to give back the sun. They continued praying until the eclipse was over.

There was also a large Catholic church not far from our apartment where many of the French people who lived in Senegal worshiped. In the first few months, the Japanese missionary and I would often go there to pray because we found it very difficult to pray in our apartment and, in general, in Senegal. Gradually we could build the strength to pray well in our center.

It was difficult at first to figure what to eat. For most of our first year we lived on bread, Laughing Cow cheese, and tomatoes or mangos or something like that. The food in the French super markets was way too expensive for us and the conditions in the open air African markets seemed so unhygienic I had a hard time buying anything but fruits and vegetables. The areas where they sold meat and fish were so different from anything I'd experienced it was a very long time before I could actually buy something there.

One day I received a large package from my mother of dried food that needed cooking so we finally bought a little burner and pot and started cooking. It felt like Christmas to receive all that food! Later, the Japanese brother from Mali came to Dakar so he could renew his visa. He bought some meat at the market and prepared it. It was delicious and we didn't get sick so I learned to overcome myself and buy meat at the African market.

Through our friends we were introduced to the Senegalese national dish, "Tiebou Dien" which means rice and fish. It is a very spicy dish that many Senegalese eat every day for the noon meal. It consists of fried fish with vegetables and rice cooked in an oily, spicy tomato sauce. It's served on a large platter with the rice on the bottom and the fish and vegetables piled up in the middle. Traditionally, the people eat with their hands and each person eats from the spot just in front of him. The host or hostess puts morsels of fish and vegetables in front of each person. People not accustomed to eating with their hands are given a spoon. It is very delicious and satisfying.

From the beginning, we were witnessing and inviting people to our apartment. Looking back, it may not have been the wisest thing to do as we knew so little about the people and the country but we were very young and naïve. After a couple of months we had two young men, Jean Pierre and Charles, coming over almost every day. They would come share our simple meals and study Principle with us. We were so happy and inspired to have them coming but it was very difficult to figure out how to raise them. Though we studied every day, they didn't seem to understand very much. We did many conditions for them and really had hope for them. Charles worked as a tour guide and one day he brought a set of beautiful travel books and asked us to keep them for him because he thought they would be safer with us. As days and weeks went by, Jean Pierre asked to borrow the books one by one.

He told us he was a student. We naively totally trusted these two brothers. Jean Pierre told us a story about knowing a good friend of President Senghor and that he would be going to Europe. In the end, he disappeared with all of the beautiful books that Charles had left with us. I took us quite a while to comprehend what had happened. We were completely shocked and realized we had been so foolish to believe his stories. Charles became discouraged and stopped coming to see us. It was a hard lesson for us. We realized that our mission wasn't going to be as easy as we hoped it would be.

The German brother got the inspiration that we should meet the president, Leopold Senghor, so he requested a meeting. To our surprise we were granted an audience. I went with the German brother and the President seemed very surprised when he saw us. I think he expected older more mature people. We

talked a little with him and gave him a Divine Principle book as we left. We believed it was a good condition for the country.

As missionaries, one of the most important aspects of our responsibility was to unite together – Japanese, German, and American. Naturally, we had to overcome many things in ourselves to be able to do this. It was fairly easy for the Japanese brother and I to get along after we got to know each other a little. When I went to Senegal I was painfully aware of how little I understood about how to live a principled life and I had never had a real experience of God's presence through prayer, etc. He seemed much wiser and more spiritual so I was often grateful to receive guidance from him though sometimes it was hard to take.

The German brother was quiet and gentle but also rather stubborn and independent. We sometimes had disagreements but most of the time we got along pretty well though we weren't completely united. The thing I remember most about the German brother is how much he loved Senegal and the people. He was so dedicated. However, after some months, the two brothers, who were both very sensitive spiritually, began to have spiritual problems that became quite serious and led to strange behaviors. That was scary for me because I needed to be able to help them and take care of them but I had never had direct experience with such things. So we just kind of endured and persevered and little by little they got better.

During that period we still had some people coming over to study but it was very awkward with what was going on so gradually they stopped coming. It was difficult to keep my spirit up when I was in the center but when I went out to do errands or just get out I felt so much love for the country and people and my spirit would be renewed.

As the two brothers got better our unity also improved and I felt so hopeful that we really could unite and work happily together. Unfortunately, another problem came up. Months earlier, without consulting the Japanese missionary or me, the German missionary had naively written a letter to the prime minister to ask for a job for the Japanese brother and himself. I guess he was just desperate to find a way to stay in Senegal permanently. When he told us what he had done we were extremely upset and I think that was our biggest argument. It turned out that that letter led to a police investigation of the three of us. We were all called to the police station but they were asking me questions about the two brothers. The German brother had also, later, applied for a visa as a businessman so the police were very confused and suspicious. So in December of 1975, just when things seemed to be going much better, the Japanese and German missionaries were told to leave the country. Many years later when I was applying for a permanent residence visa I found out that my file said I was expelled at that time though actually I hadn't been.

A new start

So January 1, 1976, my first God's Day in Senegal, I was alone. I remember how I felt that day very clearly. On one hand I felt completely overwhelmed knowing that I had absolutely no idea how to achieve the mission in front of me, or ability to do it. On the other hand I had this blind determination to stay and somehow be successful. All along since coming to Senegal, I had been praying fervently most nights on the balcony outside my bedroom, desperately trying to make a relationship with God and receive His guidance. Now, I could hardly pray or think.

I actually wasn't alone for very long. Soon a Japanese missionary from a neighboring country came to renew his visa to his own country. Senegal was a central point for the surrounding countries and often the missionaries from those countries came to Dakar to renew their visas. It was nice to have visitors but sometimes it made it more difficult for us Senegalese missionaries to unite and focus on our mission. At that time, though, I was so grateful to have someone else there.

A few weeks later Kathy Harting who had been expelled from Dahomey (later called Benin), came to Senegal. Her stay in Senegal was a wonderful vacation from unity struggles and loneliness. We became good friends and could really share our hearts with each other. I learned so much from her. One unusual thing happened during that time while we were doing the prayer condition for Yankee Stadium. At that time Gary Fleischman, my brother-in-law, was also visiting from Mali. The three of us prayed together for this prayer condition and we had the strange experience of being attacked by uncontrollable laughter during our prayer. One of us would inadvertently pray something strange like praying for the vegetables in the kitchen and that would start us laughing so that we couldn't do our prayer. It was a strange kind of spiritual attack.

After a few months a new German missionary was assigned to Senegal and shortly after, a new Japanese missionary came and Kathy was sent to Ivory Coast. This began a very difficult period in my time in Senegal, which I am not proud of. These two missionaries had strong personalities and unity became extremely difficult for us. Looking back I can't believe we spent so much time arguing about who should be central figure. It's hard to describe how intense the situation felt at the time and why it was so difficult. I can only understand it based on the pressure created by the providential importance of our unity and, and, of course, our fallen natures that rose strongly to the surface. For many months we were spiritually

paralyzed by this struggle and couldn't witness or do anything meaningful for the mission. At times, other Japanese missionaries came for visa reasons and they just kind of shook their heads at us. One of them once gave me some good advice how to handle my relationship with the Japanese missionary and things improved a bit after that. I remember us all going fishing together and actually having a good time. During that time it was so hard to pray and to feel close to God.

During that time we moved from our apartment in the center of town out to the residential area. We were still trying to overcome our difficult unity situation when a Japanese missionary who hadn't come before came for a while. He really tried to help us and things got a bit better. We moved to a new location and started doing some witnessing and people started coming to study Principle. The prospect of having new members seemed to intensify again the discussion about the central figure. There were four of us then in Senegal – two Japanese missionaries, a German missionary and myself. The original Japanese missionary had come back to Senegal around that time.

After struggling so much for what seemed like ages, all West African missionaries were called to Ivory Coast for a conference with Dr. Lady Kim. We were so excited! We had been in the mission field for almost 3 years and many people were thinking there would be changes after the three years were up. Especially since we had been struggling so much the past 2 years we were eager for something new.

The conference in Ivory Coast was such a good experience. Senegal is a very dry, desert-like country whereas Ivory Coast is green and lush. I'll never forget buying small sweet pineapples on the street. They were cut so you can hold them like a Popsicle and eat them. We didn't have pineapples in Senegal. It was so wonderful to see other missionaries and feel the deep bond that we had together because of our common experience. I spent a lot of time with my friend Kathy and felt really renewed spiritually.

Dr. Kim talked to us strongly about the importance of unity and also did a kind of ancestor liberation, which was a very new and strange experience for me. She also met with the Senegalese missionaries and spoke very strongly to us about unity. I felt so ashamed of our situation. At that time she told us we should not have any central figure and just work together as brothers and sisters.

So we went back to Senegal with a new resolve to move forward with the mission. We witnessed and started holding workshops. Because I was the only one who spoke French well enough I taught the workshops. Just working together as brothers and sisters without having to worry about the central figure issue was quite easy and pleasant.

It was amazing how well we got along. Then, one day we received a letter from headquarters saying that I should be the central figure. Suddenly everything changed. Our nice harmony was gone. The German missionary could unite with the direction pretty quickly but one Japanese missionary especially could absolutely not accept it. He would invite me out to talk somewhere and then insist that I write headquarters and tell them that I can't do it. His attitude became very extreme and he started making plans to move out and live separately with his spiritual son. Just at that moment, True Father called all the missionaries who weren't in their original countries to go to England to do Home Church. So the German and one Japanese missionary left for England. And the original Japanese missionary and I stayed in Senegal. This situation was an unforgettable lesson for me on the power and importance of the Cain and Able relationship. Without it, life seems easier because we can ignore or not be aware of our fallen nature. However, though it makes relationships very challenging, it is necessary for spiritual growth and as a foundation for God to work.

So 1978 was the time of a significant change in the focus of our mission in Senegal. Before that we were primarily focused on the issue of unity among the missionaries. But from that time we were focused on witnessing, teaching and raising members. After our first three members moved in and began witnessing, more and more people began coming, all of them young men. The original Japanese missionary worked for a Japanese company for a while but because he was nervous about his visa situation, he was sent to another country and another Japanese missionary came. I can't say that he and I were totally united in heart but we didn't fight and tried our best to work together.

Educating the new guests and members was such a big challenge for us. All we knew was the way we had been educated in the movement but the situation in Senegal was so different than in our countries. We prayed so much for Heavenly Father's guidance but still made many mistakes. I was acutely aware of lacking the heart and wisdom that was needed. But there was nowhere to turn except pray and do our best. It was so exciting when the first members moved in. They were Theodore, Joachim and Souleyman. Now, many years later, I can't remember the exact order of how we did things and when each member moved in. I do remember that I often had a hard time to really understand their hearts and that caused many misunderstandings and difficulties. But gradually a good number of wonderful and faithful members joined. They were all young men as it was difficult to bring women because of the way they were viewed and treated in the Moslem society. We did regular witnessing activities and held workshops on the weekends. Many young people came to our workshops though most of them couldn't understand the Divine Principle. I think some came because we served them food.

Following the direction given by True Parents, we initiated Home Church activities. Through Home Church I could see directly how polygamy was practiced and how it affected the people. Being predominately a Moslem country, polygamy was accepted and widely practiced in Senegal. Our members told me that a man was allowed to have four wives though I heard of cases where they had many more. One of our associate members told us that his father had had 35 wives and 107 children. In my Home Church there was a woman whose husband had 4 wives. In her case, her husband had the financial means to provide each wife with her own house. He spent two nights at a time with each wife continually going from house to house.

Though the people saw this as normal I could see that there was a sadness with this woman. I can imagine how difficult it must be, knowing that your husband is with other women when he's not with you and only being able to see him two days out of every eight. What kind of relationship could a man and woman have in this situation? Men see women as a possession and sexual object instead of an equal partner in life. And the father could not be so involved with the children or have much of a relationship with them.

There was another home where a rather young man lived with two wives. One wife put on nice clothes every day and went to work while the other wife stayed home and did the housework and cared for the children. One day I learned that the wife who stayed home had seriously hurt the baby of the other wife out of jealousy. From the many, many stories I heard about family situations in polygamy I realized that it destroys love and trust in the family and among the people in general. Sometimes, there are extreme situations where one wife will do something terrible to the child of another wife out of jealousy even to the point of trying to kill the child. But even when it is not so extreme there is a lot of distrust and jealousy among the different wives. And children of the same father but different mother can feel very competitive with each other or not have any relationship at all. I noticed, even with our members, when we taught them that we are all brothers and sisters, it didn't seem to mean much to some of them.

Jealousy is a big problem among the people. When I understood polygamy better I could understand why. Of course there are some families that somehow get along fairly well, but in general it is very evil. I came to the conclusion that one of the main causes of the suffering in Africa is polygamy.

One time, some years later, we were invited to visit a well-known marabou (Arabic for Moslem cleric) who had a ranch far out in the countryside. When we arrived we were led to a place a little distant from his compound where his men had just slaughtered a camel. He and his men were eating the liver of the camel raw, which they offered to us but we declined. They explained that they also eat the fat of the hump raw. It seemed like it was kind of a celebration. The marabou then took us into his house and gave us some time tea. Because I was a foreigner I, as a woman, was received along with the men. He showed us around his house and I could see that he had quite a few wives who took care of the house and children. Then he opened one door and proudly showed us a wife who was just lying on a mat on the floor. She was very big, didn't smile and had an empty look in her eyes. I was told that her sole purpose was to lie there and be available to her husband for conjugal relations any time of night or day whenever he wished. It was truly heartbreaking to see her.

Over the years, a number of different missionaries came to Senegal for some periods of time and then were sent to other countries. I no longer remember exactly when each one came or how long they stayed but I remember how great it was to have each person there. There were two German missionaries, Werner and his French wife, Lorette who gave birth to their first child in Senegal, and Annerose who stayed for a couple of years, I think. Kevin Winter was with us for some time and several Japanese missionaries, Kuniosan, Kanadanisan, and Mistunorisan. Though the struggle for unity was never as intense as in the first years, I remember that it still wasn't easy to be really united in heart. I attribute that especially to my own fallen nature and willfulness.

During our years in Senegal, one thing that meant so much to me was the Today's World magazine. It connected us to True Parents and what was going on around them. I remember that whenever it would arrive, I was like a starving person who was suddenly presented with food. I rushed into my room and read the whole thing in one sitting. Seeing pictures of True Parents holding celebrations in New York with members made me feel such a longing to be there. I wondered if the members who attended those gatherings knew how lucky they were to be able to see True Parents like that. I felt so envious of them – and still do today.

Foundation Internationale de Secours and d'Amitie (International Foundation for Help and Friendship)

In 1983 we decided to do a service project and started FISA. We set up a small center in a very poor area of Dakar with the intention of teaching handicapped people to sew so they could give up their life of begging and make a living for themselves. In Dakar there were so many beggars on the streets everywhere many of whom were victims of polio. Our idea was to work with such people. My husband, Justin, went to America to buy some simple sewing machines and we found some tailors who could teach.

Our members took the principle responsibilities for this center. We started with about a dozen students but after a time they all gave up and went back to the life of begging that they were used to. We had so many difficulties trying to work with those people because of their mentality so we changed our idea and decided to teach young people. We found a house in a better neighborhood that we rented and set up our teaching center. We experienced many difficulties in the process of setting up and running this center because of our lack of training and experience. It was truly "on the job training."

One day we had the great honor to be visited by the wife of the President of Senegal, Madame Diouf. It was a very exciting day for us and for the students. She spent quite a bit of time with us learning about the center and looking at the items created by the students.

After the students finished their training we gave them a sewing machine and helped them set up their own shop. The FISA continued until early 1990s. Today, one of the students from FISA is a blessed member of the Unification Church in Senegal.

Financial Activities

During our first couple of years in the mission we received a monthly allowance from our home countries of \$300 each. In the beginning we could just manage to survive by pooling our money. I remember just one time during the first 4 months that we completely ran out of money and food for a day but the next day some money arrived. After some months, I was able to get a job as a secretary at the English Language Institute of the American Cultural Center. I could barely type but I managed to do what they wanted. They had a large book there full of beautiful pictures of America and as I was still feeling very homesick, looking at that book would always bring me to tears.

Later, I was able to get a job teaching English at the center. At that time, the only criteria to be able to teach, was to be American. I had no experience or training but they had books we followed so I managed. The teaching job paid very well so it was a big source of income for our mission. I taught for many years until they instituted the policy that you had to have a college degree to teach there - which I didn't have. I was very grateful for that job which enabled me to support our mission but didn't take up huge amounts of my time.

I think it was around 1979 that we started our first fundraising activities. My husband, Justin, who was still in America, furnished us with two or three Polaroid cameras and film and the members went out offering to take pictures of people for a small fee. It took them some time to master the technique of taking the pictures and approaching people but then it was fairly successful as a way to make money for our center. The main problem was keeping a supply of film. Realizing that we needed a product that we could make or buy locally, we tried many different things including candles. The members worked very hard going out all day in the hot sun and the missionaries also went out fundraising. Missionary sisters could make a lot of money going to Lebanese shop owners with items and asking for donations.

Then the German missionary from Mali who was an artist came to Senegal. He produced beautiful artwork by spraying paint through stencils that he made. We sold his artwork very successfully for many years.

In 1986, my husband, who was then in Senegal, took a loan on a family trust and we opened an American restaurant following the model set up in Abidjan. It was called Hamburger House. It was in downtown Dakar in a nice neighborhood. Though I had no experience, I had the mission of managing the restaurant. We received a lot of help and support from Kathy Rigney and Dee Yakpore who came a little later from Ivory Coast to help. It was certainly a great adventure! Looking back, I realize my lack of experience really affected the restaurant but somehow it was pretty successful and was still running when we left in 1992. We served typical American food like hamburgers, French fries, chicken soup, tuna salad sandwiches, apple pie, etc. It was so gratifying when Peace Corps volunteers came in after spending time in the villages because they got so excited about the food. We had a TV where we played Looney Tune cartoons. Even though we had the restaurant, the income wasn't enough to completely support our mission so we also continued with fundraising activities.

My Family Life in Senegal

My husband and I were blessed in 1975 and shortly after the blessing I was sent to Senegal as a missionary. I always expected that my husband would come join me but it wasn't easy for him to make that decision. Finally, in 1982 he came to Senegal. He immediately went to a town in southern Senegal to do a 40-day pioneer condition, which was quite amazing. When he came back to Dakar he supported our mission for a while by fundraising. Though my husband couldn't speak French before he came to Senegal, he picked it up very quickly and in a year or so could speak very well.

Our first son was born on December 13, 1983. I had the good fortune to be able to go to a Lebanese clinic to give birth to our children. It wasn't as good or expensive as the French clinics but was better than the

local hospitals. At that time, I was still the central figure. The night before our son was born, I had been up late meeting with leaders. I remember waking up many times during the night with a stomachache and thinking that I better get rid of this stomachache before I go into labor. In the morning I discovered it was labor. Shortly after our son was born, Heung Jin Nim had his accident and passed into the spirit world. It was such a difficult time. We never imagined that something like that would happen to a member of True Family. It was so painful and at the same time we were feeling the joy of our first child. It was very difficult to reconcile the two kinds of feelings.

We had four sons while we were in Senegal. Our fifth son was born here in America. Compared to giving birth in America, in some ways it was nicer and more personal in Senegal. However, I had no one to look to for advice concerning childbirth and raising children so it was rather lonely. Since we had no women members I had to hire someone to take care of the children while I did the mission. After our third child I focused mainly on taking care of the children. We lived in the center all the time we were there so our children received a lot of love from the members. We left Senegal in February 1992 to return to America following the direction given to us by Rev. Kwak.

This is a brief summary of my experiences. It would take a longer time than I have now to write about everything! And I have forgotten some things and also often the time sequence of things. But what remains is the feeling of deep love for the members and for Senegal. This year, 2015, in June we had the great blessing of visiting Senegal with most of our family. It was a deeply moving and joyful experience! Though the country has changed a great deal since we left, it was still Senegal. I felt absolutely at home there and it was so wonderful to see the old members again and meet their wives and children!

When we were there all of the members were young men so having the wives there has made a huge difference. It was also so meaningful for our children to visit the country of their birth. I felt a deep bond of heart with the members – as if we had not been separated at all. They are doing so well, persevering through many difficulties with strong faith and commitment. We all experienced a kind of rebirth experience in finally being able to meet again. For me, I felt that Senegal is my true home country.