

TUAREG JEWELRY SALE IN SAN FRANCISCO DECEMBER 6 AND 7

This is a reminder that we will be selling the jewelry on December 6 and 7 at 100 Pine Street in the financial district of San Francisco. See the November newsletter for details.

CHRISTMAS WITH THE TUAREGS

Since the Tuaregs are nominally Muslim they don't celebrate Christmas. There is a "Christmas" break in the schools, to the extent that they function at all, which is a holdover from the time Niger was a French colony. The three "alibaba" shops, those that carry items favored by the few European residents, have a tiny selection of holiday decorations. When tourists were in town some hotels and Le Pillier, the only sort of fancy restaurant in Agadez, offered Christmas dinner.

In 2004 I hosted a Christmas dinner for the Koumamas and a European couple I had just met in Agadez. The entrée was chicken, a rare treat for the Tuaregs. On Christmas Eve day Elhadji drove me and a car full of friends who were along for the adventure out to the bush to buy

the birds. We wandered from one encampment to another until we found a woman who kept chickens. While we had tea she sent her children to round up several of them. Each scrawny specimen cost about \$5. We returned to town with the birds squawking in the back of the "cat cat" (four wheel drive vehicle). Elhadji's nephew, Teggia, volunteered to dress them.

My courtyard was decorated with the few Christmas decorations I could find. A blue and silver tinsel garland festooned the neem tree in front of the kitchen building. Blue paper stars that looked like a kindergartener's handiwork and small gift wrapped presents were tied to the branches.

On Christmas day I had several surprises. First, my new oven had two temperatures, off and flames shooting out the back of it. Roast chicken became cut-up sautéed chicken. Second, the generator which provided the only light kept running out of "essence" (gasoline). Electricity has not been extended to my neighborhood. Third, twice as many people showed up as I had been told would be coming.

IN THIS ISSUE

Inquiring Minds Want to Know. . .

What kind of clothes do the Tuareg women wear?

...continued from page 1

Fortunately I had prepared extra food but only had little presents for the expected guests. I scrambled through the things in my house to find other quasi-suitable gifts.

The meal was served, as all Tuareg meals are, from communal dishes set on mats on the sand. Appetizers were the usual peanuts and a large jar of olives which were devoured in the few seconds it took me to set them on the mat outside the kitchen and walk back to the stove. Potatoes are common in stews but mashed potatoes were new to them and quite a hit. The rest of the meal was more familiar to them: lettuce and tomato salad in oil and mayonnaise; beet, carrot and potato salad; French bread from the bakery; orange and pomegranate salad. For dessert I tried to bake chocolate brownies from a mix I had brought with me. With the oven problem they ended up burned on the outside and gooey inside but nobody cared. They were eaten nearly as fast as the olives.

The adults seemed to be

almost as excited as the children with their presents—hand lotion and shampoo for the women, shirts for some of the young men. And of course toys for the kids. I cried when the children sang to me the Christmas song Elhadji had taught them.

EFFES BELLA—FROM GARDENER TO “DOCTOR”

In 1997 Larry met Effes



Effes Bella

Bella, then a gardener in Timia, an oasis in the Air Mountains. We kept in touch with him via the occasional letter Effes wrote with the help of someone who writes a little English and later on our annual visits there. In 2004 he enrolled in a two year nursing program in Zinder, a city far to the south of his homeland. In Niger nurses act as general practitioners as there are very few doctors and most of them are in hospitals in the cities. Effes completed his course in the summer of 2005 and was assigned to a clinic near the

village of Tafedek, about two hours drive from Agadez. He lives in a one room mud brick house next door to the clinic.



Clinic hospital

Effes is the only medical person in a spotless three room clinic. When I last visited him in the fall of 2006 he had a reasonably good supply of medicines that he got by racing to Agadez on his motorbike once a month when the shipment arrived at the hospital and before it got sold out the back door to the local pharmacies. There is no electricity which made it difficult for him to do examinations inside the building. The headlamp powered by AA batteries we took to him helps a lot. His biggest frustration was that he has no refrigeration to store vaccines and therefore the local people aren't immunized against the common diseases.

INQUIRING MINDS

Like the rest of the people in the area he is suffering because of the rebellion. Recently he was able to get to Agadez and then on to Timia for a few days to visit his family and his fiancé. If all goes as planned he will marry next August. His bride to be is finishing the equivalent of her high school education this year and hopes to also train as a nurse and midwife so that they can work together.



A Tuareg Bride



Effes' mother in traditional clothes.

WHAT KIND OF CLOTHES DO THE TUAREG WOMEN WEAR?

Nomadic Tuareg women traditionally dress in dark blue or black cotton clothes. They wear an ankle length piece of cloth wrapped around them and tucked in at the waist and a loose poncho-like blouse trimmed in simple white embroidery. A length of fabric is thrown over their heads that is both a scarf and a light wrap which provides protection from the blazing sun and a little warmth during the chilly desert nights. They wear large heavy hoop earrings with the tsabit knob on one end, simple bracelets made either of metal or woven plastic strands and variations on the "chachat" necklace. (See the styles in the product sections of the website.)



Effes Bella's sister in African print outfit

Some Tuareg women who live in towns have adopted the styles of the Hausa women.

While the shapes of the

garments are the same as the nomads they are often made of colorful wax dyed African prints. They may have a length of matching fabric tied around their heads with a scarf over that. In Agadez the favorite style to wear for festivals and marriages is made of gauzy white or black machine embroidered cloth with bright red embroidered trim. Tuaregs formerly wore only silver jewelry. A few more fashionable ladies who can afford it are now wearing gold filigree earrings and necklaces on special occasions. Some of the younger women wear tee shirts rather than the loose blouses.

Tuaregs women never cover their faces. Their scarves are thrown loosely over their heads with no attempt to cover their hair. Rather it is the Tuareg men who are veiled.

If you have an "Inquiring Minds" question that you would like for us to answer in a future newsletter, please send us an email at the address below:

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