

Kine, a Senegalese Entrepreneur and Artist

Senegal was truly a life changing experience. An American visiting Africa for the first time, I will always keep Senegal's kind and caring people in my heart. I reflect upon the vibrant personalities, the colorful outfits of women, the sacredness of family and friends, and the sights and sounds of the diverse marketplace. Despite poverty, Senegalese have a rich spirit and peaceful nature that beckons you to return. Our Old Dominion University Women's Studies group of students visited only for 3 weeks, hardly enough time to really understand the pleasures and pains of a culture struggling to take care of its own in a fast moving global world. A part of me does not want them to change - the beautiful way Senegalese live in a community of helping each other. A part of me can also see a tiny way to connect and learn with another woman thousands of miles away from my comfort zone. From this connection, I can only hope to gain a better appreciation for the collective community and how I can bring lessons from the Senegalese people into my own life.

Kine, an entrepreneur, manages a tiny beauty salon, in the frenzied city of Dakar, amidst donkey carts, fruit stands, begging children, and busses plastered with decals and good luck charms bubbling over with passengers. Sun-soaked and faded photos of women in the latest hair styles are displayed on the front windows, similar to the States. When you first look at the shop, it is covered with a fine dust and dirt typical of a city with little vegetation and water. As soon as you cross the owner's threshold, her smile is contagious and sweeps you into her world of beauty. I believe she truly sees the beauty in everyone. That is how you feel when you are around her. Her reserved presence energizes her clients and her guests. A chair user, Kine's kind and loving aura fill the room and entice you to be transformed.

Kine's shop is located in front of the Association for Disabilities, so her back door leads into a spacious and sunny courtyard, and their offices as well as other

shops. Kine's shop is buzzing with activity as her stylists are braiding wigs and cutting hair. Kine, formally educated, has a very successful business.

As the Minister in charge of People with Disabilities speaks to our Old Dominion University group, we learn about the devastation of polio in Senegal and how it is now almost eradicated. We learn how recent laws have begun to give rights to people with disabilities and improved their employment possibilities. We are delighted to hear that the newly elected President of Senegal, Macky Sall, already has increased the employment of his own staff with people with disabilities within this first week in office. These actions are indicators of a stable democratic government on the way to respecting its citizens and rising above corruption. It is a sign of a government ready to identify its strengths and capitalize on them.

Madame Marie-Pierre Myrick, born in Senegal, our hostess as well as our Professor on this Women's Studies trip from Old Dominion University, VA, shares stories of how Kine has been a friend of the family and has served to bring out the best in their beauty for many years. We are honored to share Madame Marie-Pierre's personal relationships - everyday people like Kine whom we immediately feel like we have known for many years.

At first glance, it is obvious that the salon has been accommodated for people with disabilities. Lower sinks, chairs and equipment stand ready to serve everyone, those who have physical disabilities or those who are able-bodied at this point in time. Beyond the back courtyard, another shop that employs women with disabilities produces striking scarves and accessories made of brilliant colors - deep, rich and diverse.

Kine is expanding her creativity into original jewelry and fashion undergarments. The Jewelry is particularly unique with beads woven together with joy with handmade embroidery - an example of art and culture coming together. Colors of the rainbow explode in her creations - orange with green, red with grey, or simply

royal blues, deep purples and sunshine yellows. Wearing them makes you feel special and seems to transcend her joy from the wearer to others. One of my elders once told me: give others joy, and you receive it back threefold. That is what Kine does. This is what we all hope to do for her by wearing her creations back in the States. How can we share Kine's creations even further than our University and our small town, maybe even around the globe, we ask? The U.S. Embassy representative tells us later that the trade deficit of Senegal with the U.S. needs to be lessened. Maybe it is time to take some joint action. Where might we begin? How to market a small enterprise? Could Kine's strength and courage motivate us to overcome challenges? Could women working together make a difference? Senegalese women's voices spoke to us and we listened. Kine's was just one of them. We are hopeful that the future will bring some joint ventures that both improves the status of women and brings hopes to their dreams.

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