

8-year-old's Passion Emerges on the Mission Field*

Written by Emily Peters

SENEGAL, West Africa (BP)--Meredith Queen's favorite dress is splattered with red and pink splotches, but she doesn't mind.

That doesn't keep the lively 8-year-old from wearing the dress again as she and her parents visit a village to share Jesus with Sereer-Palor people.

Sitting on a mat in the shade of a tree, Meredith bites her tongue and crinkles her nose in great concentration. She pumps the brush into the polish bottle and dabs a bit of color onto the toenails of a young girl with dark, dusty feet.

"We girls just like to be pretty," Meredith said, explaining her toenail-painting ministry in her thick Carolina accent. "The village girls never had anything like that done to them before. God made them, and they need to feel loved and needed."

There is a crowd of girls waiting, each eager to choose their perfect shade from a whole sack of options: Pink Lady. Sheer Moon Berry. Shimmering Lilac Frost. They each get painted, and when Meredith accidentally smears a bit on her dress, they share a giggle with the only fair-haired playmate they've probably ever had.

While they gather for the primping treat, the girls listen intently to the Bible stories being told by Meredith's parents and volunteers from the United States.

"Meredith really brings something to our team that we can't," said Meredith's mother, Angela Queen. "She bonds with the children in a special way, faster than we ever could."

Meredith has lived in Senegal since she was 5 years old with her parents, missionaries Greg and Angela Queen, but she had a hard time moving away from family and the life she knew.

"We told her we had been called by God to Africa, but she didn't really understand," her mother explained, laughing in retrospect. "She said she didn't get that phone call from God. She didn't even hear the phone ring. If it had been ringing, she said she wouldn't have answered it."

Meredith's parents research small, unreached people groups throughout West Africa. At least monthly, they take American volunteer teams to the villages to share the Gospel. Meredith used to just stick closely by her mother's side, but she's learned how to feel comfortable in the villages and become a part of the ministry.

She knows the proper way to eat rice and fish with her hands out of a common bowl on the dirt floor of a mud hut. She teaches the village children how to play “Duck, Duck, Goose.” She loves to dance with the women and cuddle their African babies.

“The women have to hold these babies all the time,” Meredith explained, noting they even tie the babies to their backs while they work. “They never get rest, so I just like to hold them for a while.”

She can also greet people in about five different languages.

“It is really special to have her as part of our ministry,” Meredith’s father said. “I’m not sure what it is, but people are much more eager to welcome us into their village when we have a child with us.”

But Meredith also enjoys some of the same things as American kids her age. She totes her favorite baby doll, Mary Grace, wherever she goes. She watches Andy Griffith DVDs with her parents, often quoting Opie’s quips. She cranks up her vivid imagination to instantly become an orchestra conductor, a ballroom dancer or the ringleader of a circus.

Meredith knows when the village children gather all around her, curious about the petite foreigner, they are very impressionable.

“Sometimes I just start running, because I know they will follow,” she said. “They just do whatever I do.”

She’s learning that influence comes with responsibility.

This is one reason she works to be an example as a disciple of Jesus. She studies her Bible every morning and prays during homeschooling with her mother for people groups and missionaries across West Africa.

And recently, in the Sereer-Palor village one sun-scorched afternoon, she decided to share the story of Jonah through an interpreter. The children sat quietly, realizing these stories aren’t just for adults since they are coming from the mouth of someone their age.

“The kids in America know about Jesus,” Meredith said, “but the kids here don’t have anyone to tell them. They don’t have a church to go to. That’s why we have to tell them.”

To learn more about West Africa, visit GoWestAfrica.org. To find out more about missions service, visit going.imb.org.

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