



## Monique and the Mango Rains: Two Years with a Midwife in Mali

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## **Monique and the Mango Rains: Two Years with a Midwife in Mali** Kris Holloway , John Bidwell

Monique and the Mango Rains is the compelling story of a rare friendship between a young Peace Corps volunteer and a midwife who became a legend. Monique Dembele saved lives and dispensed hope in a place where childbirth is a life-and-death matter. This book tells of her unquenchable passion to better the lives of women and children in the face of poverty, unhappy marriages, and endless backbreaking work. Monique's buoyant humor and willingness to defy tradition were uniquely hers. In the course of this deeply personal narrative, as readers immerse themselves in the rhythms of West African village life, they come to know Monique as friend, mother, and inspired woman.

## **Monique and the Mango Rains: Two Years with a Midwife in Mali Details**

Date : Published September 1st 2006 by Waveland Press (first published July 1st 2006)

ISBN :

Author : Kris Holloway , John Bidwell

Format : Paperback 214 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Cultural, Africa, Autobiography, Memoir, Biography Memoir, Travel, Western Africa, Mali



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## **From Reader Review Monique and the Mango Rains: Two Years with a Midwife in Mali for online ebook**

### **Rennie Morrell says**

#### **Inspiring story.**

Monique, like the Mango Rains, lasted only a short while, but added immeasurable sweetness. This story was fascinating on so many levels. First, it makes one realize how it takes special people to be Peace Corps volunteers. God bless them all. Then, it highlights the Malian people's resilience and caring. The author humanizes their lives so we see not only the pain and struggles, but the joy they share with each other. And finally the story profiles an amazing woman who selflessly serves others, particularly other women, and dies young doing so. Definitely worth the read.

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### **Samantha says**

This book was great. I really enjoyed how I felt like I was in the culture, I was meeting the people, I was a part of the various families when I was reading it. I had felt both extreme happiness and extreme sadness from this book. I was made aware of problems that need to be addressed in Africa, but I was amazed at how these "problems" aren't really viewed as problems to the people of this region.

Genital mutilation is something I know about historically, but it definitely hit home that this still occurs and many young girls suffer and die because of the lack of medical attention and the lack of cleanliness with the materials used during these procedures. I knew that there was a lack of sterile medical facilities, but it is just hard to fathom that there is such a lack of safe medical facilities with professionally trained medical staff. I was also shocked that rape is not viewed as negatively as Americans view it. It is frustrating to think that these women do not know that they have rights... That rape is a daily occurrence and is something that happens to many of them. I felt so shocked that this is how women think.

It is amazing to compare our lifestyle to that of the people of Nampossele. In our first world countries, we really take advantage of the fact that we have running water (even though mine is out today!), doctors, clean and sterile facilities, houses without dirt, technology, and air conditioning. However, the people in the third world countries have an advantage over first world countries: they have a community. They live in a community that treasures relationships and helping others. There is one part in the book that talked about how we are locked behind doors and wish to be alone more than with others while the people of Nampossele appreciate the socialization of their neighbors. That really hit home because I became so frustrated that everyone is on their phones all of the time... we are always looking down. When is the last time that you went outside and just enjoyed the great outdoors? When is the last time that you didn't freak out because you didn't have your phone on you? When is the last time that you gave someone all of your attention and were not thinking about all of the other things that you needed to do or had technology in your hands? I, too, am guilty of this. Less so than other people, but still guilty.

I really enjoyed being able to really get to know Monique. She was a very unique woman with a big heart. I relate to her tremendously in her ability to give her everything to her job and the feeling that her job is never fully complete. I relate to the long hours, the long days, the constant repeating of information in order to try and make people healthy and understand the importance of certain needs. She was such a strong woman with

such charisma. I commend her for her talents and her caring and loving talents.

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### **Jessica says**

*I received this book for free from the publisher. All content and opinions are my own.*

Two years in the Peace Corps. A poor African village. Another memoir. Another culture story. Nope, this book was anything but warn.

Kris Holloway spent her two years in the Peace Corps in the Malian village of Nampossele. She spent two years by the side of Monique Dembele, a midwife for hundreds of women. The author's love for the African village, and especially Monique, transcended the pages. Holloway found a true friend in Monique and became part of the village rather than becoming a white savior. We get to experience the births and deaths and living of the villagers not from a removed, clinical perspective, but from a real and empathetic point of view.

Intensely readable, I would recommend Monique and the Mango Rains as a story of friendship first and a story of culture second.

This book ultimately helped me see that all humans want and need the same basic things: food, water, and shelter, but mostly love and understanding. International problems will be solved by people who truly care enough about people to understand what is needed most. As trite as it seems, one person can make a difference.

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### **Marieke says**

I have a rule that if I'm in tears at the end of a book, it gets five stars. So: five stars. I don't think this is a perfect book, but it is well-written and I was incredibly touched by the friendship of Monique and Kris. I'm very glad this book got written and published.

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### **Lauri Saplad says**

This is an amazing story about an exemplary woman. With very little support from family, culture and village, Monique Dembele became a healthcare worker in Mali. Women there are subjected to hardship and cruelty as regular, typical treatment. This woman overcame poverty, discrimination, indifference, and ignorance to go on to change and save lives. Written by Peace Corps volunteer, Kris Holloway, this story demonstrates the very real friendship she shared with Monique and village life in Mali. After reading this, you will never take Western life for granted again.

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### **Alex Hall says**

I fucking loved this book.

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### **Karin says**

This book was hands-down the best Peace Corps memoir I have yet to read. Holloway's story wasn't a glorified quarterly report, listing all the projects she initiated or completed; neither was it an enumeration of the hardships, challenges, substandard living conditions, and poverty she faced. Rather, she described the development of her friendship with her local counterpart (Monique) in terms that were accessible. Although the story *took place* in West Africa, it wasn't *about* West Africa.

Most of all, it made me miss my host family in N'Gaparou, Senegal! It was also a struggle for me to read about Mali, as I was traveling home from Christmas in Mali when I Medevac'ed... Very different to read a Peace Corps memoir as an RPCV, rather than as a current volunteer. I highly recommend this book.

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### **Bethany Zimp says**

Short memoir of a Peace Corps members memories of living in Mali with one of the busiest midwives in the nation and ultimately a memorial of her death in childbirth. There was actually much less maternity information and stories than I was expecting. The author did a better job than most of acknowledging bias and sharing her Westernized views of African culture and communities.

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### **Elicia Allen says**

An interesting view into one woman's experience in a Malian village. Holloway writes in a way that is very explanatory and clear but does not present her time in an exploitative manner.

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### **Diane says**

This was a very good book. As the blurb says, it's about Monique, a Mali midwife, and Kris, an aid worker for the U.S. Peace Corps. Kris does an excellent job of pulling us into her life in Mali. She gets to know the folks in the village very well, and so does the reader ... which is nice. Monique is a rare gem of a woman. She's working hard, under brutally trying circumstances, to improve the lives of her people. The friendship that grows between the two woman is deep, and sincere.

If you want to read about midwifing (and just living!) under primitive conditions, you'll like this book.

If you'd enjoy reading about the nitty-gritty of the daily life of the inhabitants of a village in Mali, you'll enjoy this.

4 Stars = It touched my heart, and/or gave me much food for thought.

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### **Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says**

A very quick read. This is the first Peace Corps memoir I've ever read. I know there are a lot of them floating around out there. This book gives a good idea of what a Peace Corps volunteer might do in a small African village. If you ever take simple things for granted, you need to read a book like this. No toilet paper, or substitutes for it, in this village!!

Kris Holloway spent 1989-1991 in the village of Nampossela, near the border with Burkina Faso. She forged a strong friendship and working relationship with Monique Dembele, the local midwife. Together they attempted to educate the local women about child nutrition and disease prevention, while also working to improve local birthing house conditions. Holloway also met her future husband, another Peace Corps volunteer, while in Nampossela.

The last two chapters of this book were really the best. More beautifully and lyrically written than the rest of the book; perhaps because they came so deeply from the author's heart.

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### **Emma Deplores Goodreads Censorship says**

3.5 stars

Of the Peace Corps memoirs I've read, this is by far the most positive; I get the sense that Kris Holloway enjoyed her time in Mali, in addition to being enriched by it. She seems to be an active rather than introspective person, which surely helped. And most importantly, she sees the people she meets as individuals, rather than as manifestations of a foreign culture; she treats people as people, like equals, rather than viewing them through the prism of their disadvantages.

The primary focus of this book is the author's relationship with Monique, the young health worker/midwife with whom she works. These two soon become close, building a beautiful friendship that lasts long after the author finishes her service. I enjoyed reading about Monique and the author, and it seems like they were able to make some difference in the villagers' health. The book focuses on telling stories about people and events, rather than on lengthy reflections, critique of government policy, etc. In that sense it is not as insightful as, for instance, *The Ponds of Kalambayi*, but I suspect that's because the author was busy being a part of her new community rather than sitting alone and thinking about it, and I'm glad she kept the focus on what interested her rather than conjuring banal Deep Thoughts for the book.

That said, I doubt Kris Holloway has a literary career before her; a couple of word choices in the introduction are cringeworthy, and though I didn't see this as a problem throughout the book (perhaps only when she was trying to write in a "literary" way), the prose could have been a little smoother. It isn't bad, though, and overall I liked this book. Also, it has *pictures*, which is such an obviously good choice that I don't know why they are missing from other Peace Corps memoirs. This isn't a perfect book, but I would recommend it, especially to those looking to be inspired by stories of service abroad.

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### **Bonnie says**

"I realized there was, in their stories, a sense of calm in her final minutes, a lack of urgency in the actions or the telling. That was a sharp contrast to the flurry of activity to prolong a life in our country. Hers was not seen as an emergency, but rather as the hand of God. How much of this attitude was the product of simply

not having the knowledge or resources to save the dying, I didn't know. I did know that I had to accept their stories, for they were all I had."

Amazing, beautiful, heartbreaking account of the author's two years in the Peace Corps in Mali and her friendship with Monique, the exceptional woman who was the village's midwife and only health care provider. Rather than being a book focused on the author, she paints a straightforward yet poetic picture of the small village and life in mud huts without running water or electricity; poverty, malnutrition, death, peace, joy and friendship. Monique is incredibly able to transcend her circumstances and those of most Malian women to be a leader in the village and make a difference in so many lives. I love that her deep faith is included, as it is hard to imagine how else she would find strength and peace in a life that seems to be full of endless work and tragedy. You can tell the experience was life changing for the author.

It was difficult to read at times for a women's health care provider in the USA...to see death and disease where it could be treated and saved here, where we rush to prevent every complication and cover it in technology....to there where it just isn't an option...how she cares for people with skill and dignity is truly incredible.

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### **Diane S ? says**

Kris was a young Peace Corp volunteer, straight out of college and her request for assignment was Mali. After initial training she met Monique, who was a young midwife, in this very poor village. Learned many heartbreaking facts about Mali, one of the poorest nations in the world, the amount of women dying in childbirth is heartbreaking. Monique quickly took Kris under her wing and with Monique she experienced her first birth, she was so profoundly affected by this she vowed never to have children. The birth house, one of the only places women could have privacy was in horrible shape, eventually the Peace Corp would give their approval to have the birth house rebuilt.

Another story that had heartbreaking moments, unbelievable tension and yet so much humor and love. Kris would be profoundly affected by her experience and her friendship with Monique would remain. Monique actually visited her in New York. This is a worthy story especially after seeing all we take for granted, the food we throw away, the medical system we complain about, just staggers the mind what people do without and still find the motivation to go on. Unbelievable.

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### **~Annaki~ says**

I really enjoyed this book, both as a midwife and as someone who has lived in Africa.

I was pleased for once, to read a westerners account of African life, without everything having been overly westernized and paraphrased to suit the western readers. I have seen this before and it erases all authenticity, but although it does come through every now and then, Holloway has managed to limit it and the result is a very touching and beautiful read, without all the white saviour complex that so often makes its way into these accounts.

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