A Friendship Spanning Continents and Decades Renewed

Wednesday, 03 October 2012

{audio}/images/stories/mp3/121003.preese_visitor.mp3{/audio}

Mahim Toure

Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

Twenty years ago Kodiak resident Heather Preece had a life changing experience in Mali, West Africa. For four months she worked on a nutrition surveillance program in the northern region of the country and developed close friendships that she said helped shape her into the woman she is today.

“I’ve always wanted to invite one of the friends that I made in Mali to come and see where I live and kind of complete the cross cultural friendship circle," she said. "And because I had been in touch with Mahim and continued our friendship, I saved airline miles for years and I finally had enough airline miles to buy him a ticket, and here he is.”

The man is Mahim Toure, and he and Preece have stayed in contact for the better part of two decades. Toure worked alongside Preece in Mali and has since risen through the ranks of humanitarian aide and now works for the United Nations. Toure’s trip to Kodiak is his first outside of Africa, and getting here was no easy task.

-- (Mahim Toure 2 :37 “Yes I actually bought the plane ticket on mileage last November, November of 2011. And in March 2012 there was a military coupe in his country. The military overthrew the Malian government because they felt they weren’t getting enough support to fight the rebels in the northern part of the country. Two thirds of the northern part of the country is almost in the Sahara Desert and in the aftermath of the conflict in Libya there is an influx of Islamic extremists that have taken a stronghold in the northern part of the country. So there’s a lot of political chaos in his country. And in March, after the Coupe, the U.S. embassy closed for six weeks.”)

His program with the United Nations was suspended and for five months he was out of work. Preece said she wasn’t sure if he would be able to leave the country because he needed an interview in order to obtain his visitors visa. In the end, Toure (Turray) did receive his visa, but a mere five days before his rescheduled arrival in the United States.

Toure and Preece share the common language of French, but during his time in Kodiak Toure has been studying English at the college. With the help of Preece’s translation, he was able to share some of his experiences in Kodiak.

-- (Mahim Toure 3 : 55 “ He said yes it’s the first time that he’s been outside of Africa and he said within two days of being in Kodiak hew as very surprised because what he found here was not what he expected. He thought when he was going to come that he was coming to my house and we would stay in our house and maybe go to town a few times but pretty much stay around our house. His perception was that here, in the United States, our culture was more closed and people stay in their own houses and people stay in their own houses and don’t interact much with each other. And within two days of being in Kodiak he had already met so many people and so many happy people and he found Kodiak to be a very peaceful, friendly, open community.”)

Toure said he is very pleased to find a place in our culture where people care about each other and are welcoming to outsiders. In fact, Toure said he was so pleased with his welcome here in Kodiak that he hopes to one day return the favor.

-- (Mahim Toure 4 : 22 “Speaking French…He said every person who lives in Kodiak has a room in his house in Mali and if anybody ever wants to go and visit him they’re absolutely welcome.”)

Toure will be giving a presentation about his home country of Mali (Mall-ee) at 7 p.m. on Friday at the Kodiak College. Preece will join him in discussing his work with the United Nations and the culture and living conditions of West Africa. The event is free and both Preece and Toure encourage anyone who is interested to attend. You can also listen to the full interview with Toure and Preece during Tuesday’s Talk of the Rock at 12:30 p.m. on KMXT.

###