

Monique and the Mango Rains: Two Years with a Midwife in Mali. Kris Holloway. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press. 2007. 212 pages, black and white photographs, bibliography/recommended reading. \$17.95. Paper. (ISBN: 1-57766-435-3).

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Kris Holloway joins the Peace Corps out of college and finds herself, at twenty-one, the assistant to a midwife in a Minianka village in southeastern Mali. She witnesses her first birth in a mud-earth birthing house. "Oh, my, this is simply not going to work," she thinks. "Really big peg, really small hole. I will never, never have children."

In Mali, which has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, a woman has a one in twelve lifetime risk of dying in pregnancy and childbirth. (In the United States, the risk is one in three thousand.) The village of Nampossela is fortunate to have a trained midwife, Monique Dembele. Monique attends the women without electricity, running water, medical backup, or any means of transporting them to a hospital when complications arise. She has a sixth grade education and nine months of medical training, is twenty-four years old and the mother of two young children. She also runs the village clinic, providing the only health care for 1400 villagers.

Monique is devoted to her patients. She opens the clinic early each morning and sits with women in labor late into the night. After work, she collects firewood and cooks for her unappreciative in-laws, all of this of course with her own baby tied to her back. Trailing after her, Kris Holloway absorbs village customs and learns about village-level health care. As they work together, the two young women become close friends.

This remarkable friendship pulls Kris Holloway into the private world of rural Malian women. Kris witnesses the strains of Monique's arranged marriage to an uneducated villager who resents her status and is self-absorbed and unfaithful. Later, on a visit to Monique's family in town, Kris meets the childhood friend Monique cares for deeply but could not marry.

Monique and Kris share a deep commitment to improving the lives of women, and their intimacy and trust enable them to discuss sensitive