

Making *Zrig*

When I read Don's reflection on the shared fruit bun and cheese, it sparked a memory from the late 1980's. I remembered a wooden bowl filled with a milky, sugary liquid...a gourd dipper floating on top...*zrig*.

When stopping to visit a Mauritanian family on a hot, dusty afternoon, we were invited to recline on cushions and given first sip from the communal gourd dipper floating in a bowl of this refreshing drink.

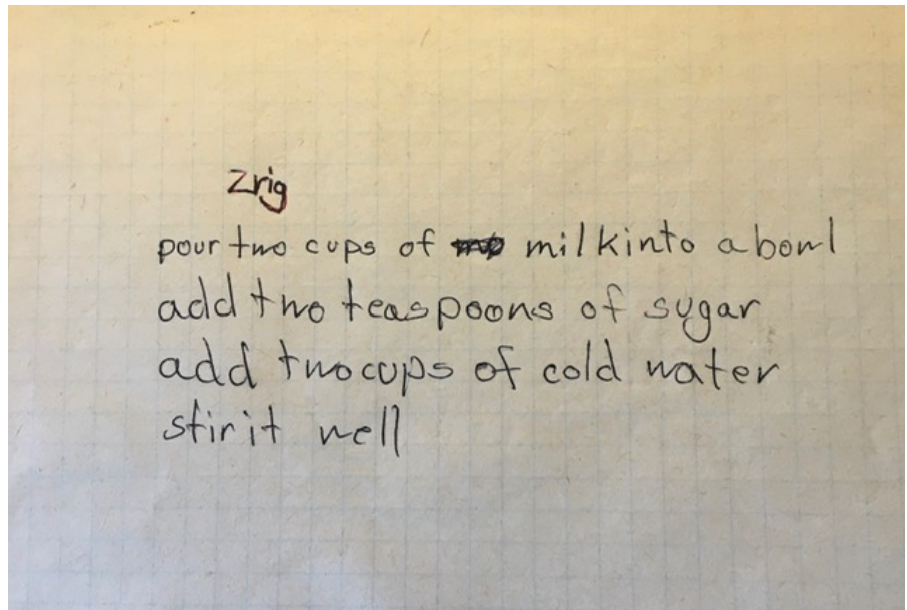
But what I remember most is our children, Anje and Hans, playing out in the sandy garden and street. Neighbor girls stayed in their compounds to help their mothers do laundry and cooking, but the boys came to play. Before they had played very long, Hamadi or Abdrahaman would ask Anje to make *zrig* because they were hungry and thirsty.



She would run into the house, grab milk or yogurt, dump it into the bowl, add some sugar, then dilute it with water and stir it up. A few ice cubes would really ratchet up the treat. It disappeared fast when she carried it out to share it under our Arab tent. With temperatures in that sun-baked desert town well above a hundred degrees,

the extra water in the diluted drink was important.

What gives this memory an added dimension is that years later, Anje's little hand-printed recipe for *zrig* was photo-copied and shared year after year with third-graders at Warwick River Christian School. Stephanie Neighbors, the Art teacher, invited me every spring to bring my Mauritanian clothing and artifacts and most important of all, my wooden bowl and gourd dipper, to present to her art class as they were studying West Africa.



The gourd dipper was the crucial link to modern day, as the art students were making papier

mache calabash bowls on blown-up balloons. After they dried, they would take out the balloons, cut the sculpture into a bowl shape, and paint them beautiful colors. The little gourd dipper I had brought from Africa was there as the real-life inspiration for making something useful out of something you grew in your garden.

Believing that shared food makes every lesson better, Mrs. Neighbors would bring the ingredients to make *zrig* there in her art room. We would put some into my wooden bowl and float the gourd dipper to show how it was done in Africa. The children were aghast to hear that the same gourd was passed around for everyone to drink from. However, for classroom tasting, they got to try it in individual paper cups.

"It's delicious!" Mrs. Neighbors would say to the reluctant. "It tastes like the milk in the bottom of your bowl after eating sugary cereal!" (Pretty sure she put more than two teaspoons into her *zrig*!)

After the *zrig*-tasting, the children spent the rest of the hour trying on the armloads of African clothing and fabrics I had brought back from Africa. That was so much fun! To give you an idea, here is a picture of my grandchildren Nina and Simon Dula in Mrs. Neighbors' classroom the year they were visiting and joined us for the event.



This year the emotion of nostalgia is more complex than before. Now both memories of drinking *zrig* are solidly in the past – both that of the children under the Arab tent and the children in the colorful Warwick River Art room. My prayers now are of deep gratitude to God for these rich experiences and for the privilege of sharing *zrig* with so many WRCS children, thanks to Stephanie Neighbors. Prayers that she may thrive and be well in the days to come.