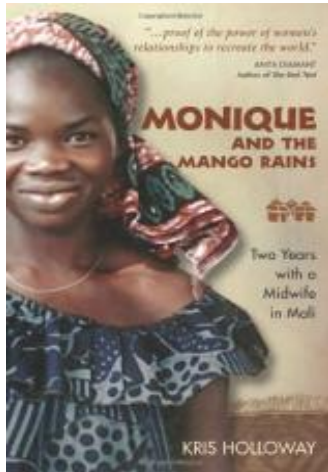


# Monique and the Mango Rains: Two Years with a Midwife in Mali

by Kris Holloway

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## About the Book

**Monique and the Mango Rains** is the true story of the life and death of a remarkable West African midwife, seen through the eyes of a young Peace Corps Volunteer who worked side-by-side with her, birthing babies and caring for mothers, in a remote, impoverished village. It is a rare tale of friendship that reaches beyond borders to vividly and irrevocably unite another woman's world with our own.

## Discussion Guide

1. Monique and Kris grew to be very close friends, yet they came from radically different background and faced many cultural barriers. What makes these rare connections possible?
2. Is Kris' experience as a Peace Corps volunteer what you thought it would be what would have been the hard parts to adapt to in village life? What do you think you would miss when you came back to the U.S.?
3. How does your culture affect how you think about childbirth? What do you think we could learn from working with Monique? Where would you rather give birth? Why?
4. How do you think Kris' presence in the village affected Monique? How was Kris' life changed by having known Monique? Have you ever known someone that well from another culture?
5. The title of the book is **Monique and the Mango Rains**. Why is weather so important in this book? What are the 'mango rains' and how do they relate to Monique's life?
6. In many places in the text, there are references to the connections between the land and the people. People are

described with adjectives / words pertaining to the earth and vice versa. For example, "the moon showed only a fingernail of light," "the earth had gone five months without a drink," and "I longed for her to lie fallow..." What does this say about the culture? About how the society constructs our relationship with the earth?

7. "Every act of development necessarily involves an act of destruction." Do you agree or disagree? Explain. (Quote by George Appell, from *Cultural Anthropology*, Daniel G. Bates, Elliot M. Fratkin, 1999.) Do Americans and other foreigners have the right to intrude in another culture?

8. Do you feel that certain values are universal and that all peoples should be encouraged to adopt them? Name some of these values. What did both Monique and Kris share as values that they worked hard to implement? Are some human rights inalienable? If so, what are these rights? (See the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on [www.un.org/rights](http://www.un.org/rights))

9. How can North Americans be involved in transforming the health care and poverty situations in places like West Africa? It's wonderful that Oprah has made a \$40 million gift to girls' education in South Africa, but most of us aren't in this league. Monique's story is an example of how large amounts of money are not always needed to make life better for people with few resources. How do you think we can best help the Moniques of the world?

10. The news is riddled with stories of war, disease, and famine in Africa. Yet Kris has said "I'm immensely hopeful when it comes to Africa because I knew Monique." After reading the book, what is your perspective?

## Author Bio

Kris Holloway served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Mali, West Africa from 1989-1991, where she met her husband John Bidwell. She holds a MPH from the University of Michigan and works for the Center for International Studies. She lives in Northampton, MA with John and their two children.

## Critical Praise

"Despite Holloway's anger over wrongs seemingly imbedded in the culture, she avoids the trap of cultural superiority. Instead, she simply seeks to help those she has come to love."

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

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