



ReConnections

The Monthly Newsletter of the West Cascades Peace Corps Association

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June 2016



Stories From Sudan

by Denise Silfee

So much ma-tamam

Ali, my Ahfad driver, is still one of my biggest fans in Sudan even though we can hardly talk to each other. Our conversations mostly consist of complaining about traffic and commenting on things I can see and point to. He speaks no English but we have developed a kind of understanding, and we regularly swerve through traffic with me pointing to words in my Sudanese Arabic dictionary that I can't pronounce and him trying to read it out loud. He is maybe 50 years old, but I could be wrong by 10 years in either direction, we don't speak the same language, yet I consider him one of my dearest friends here.

One day I was sick and so was Ali. Being sick in other countries is frustrating—in Thailand I was treated for terrible stomach issues during training (read: can't stray more than 20 feet from a toilet) by being fed spicy-red curry, possibly with rat pieces in it that week ('rat' and 'pork' sound amazingly similar in Thai...).

Upcoming Events



Oregon Country Fair

Need three folks to staff the Information booth for WCPCA on Friday, Saturday, Sunday at the Country Fair. Shifts are two hours and you get a reduced rate on your day pass.

Contact Jeem Peterson for more information:

jeem1567@gmail.com

<http://www.oregoncountryfair.org/>

In Sudan, everyone wants to take me to the hospital all of the time, and my Syrian neighbors like to treat me with milk that has garlic and salt in it, which I dutifully choke down even though it certainly does nothing for my barf reflexes.

Ali decided to treat me with a little weird looking seed thing. He indicated that it helps your throat, even though I didn't have a sore throat, and then he put one in his mouth and handed me one. I put the seed thing in my mouth and bit it. Immediately the most dry, bitter, horrible taste filled my mouth and I spit it out on my skirt, shouting, "NO! MA-TAMAM! BAD! THAT IS BAD! MOOSH-KEE-LA! PROBLEM! MA BAHIB! I DON'T LIKE THAT!" (the limits of my Arabic). I usually would not react so violently towards something given to me by a Sudanese friend, but it was THAT terrible.

Ali thought this was hilarious. He started laughing so hard I thought he would crash the car, pointing at me, repeating what I was shouting, and slapping the steering wheel til his eyes teared up. For 20 minutes he laughed as I wiped my tongue with a tissue and chugged water and he pointed towards the pieces I had spit out and then at me and laughed some more.

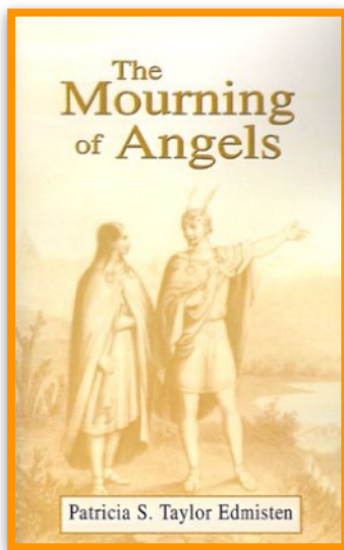
Now he occasionally produces one of the seeds from his pocket and will hold it out to me quietly until I turn and see it, to which I begin all over again: "NO! BAD! BAD BAD BAD! PROBLEM! I DON'T WANT IT!" and I push it away from him and he begins laughing all over again, just as hard as the first time, until the tears come.

I have told Ali that the last day he will take me to Ahfad is May 25 and now each time he drops me off he counts the days and shakes his head and softly says things like, "What will I do when I can't see you?" His affection for me is protective and fatherly. He seems to sense that the other professors he usually drives (who have been away from Ahfad for a month now) are not important to me and actually make me feel uncomfortable sometimes. They are nice

enough but don't care about me or respect what I'm doing here. They talk down to me sometimes, like I'm a pet. When they are in the car I don't talk. They make such a fuss over my Arabic that it isn't worth it, and in English they just talk about themselves. "Would you like a photograph of me for your home?" one asked me. Whenever we drop them off (always first), Ali immediately begins talking to me, usually by singing, "Denise, Denise, Denise!" I think their incessant talk of themselves and their accomplishments bore him as well.

Today as he dropped me off he offered me his hand (Sudanese love handshakes more than anyone I have ever met). When I take his hand his eyes are filled with liquid and he says, "Ana bahib Denise." I love Denise. Then he touches his heart and tells me that without me to drive around his job will not be good anymore. "I will miss you," he says. "It is a problem that you are leaving. Sudan will not be the same." This is the limits of what I understand. Other words he says I nod and thank him for, but I don't always know exactly what he's saying: something along the lines of me being a good American. I take this as a compliment, being a good American. I tell him I am sad and that it is "not good" to be leaving, "Ma-tamam," I always say, and I wish I could tell him just how much his quiet friendship and his patience has meant to me all these long car rides to and from Ahfad.





“Stop acting like a prostitute!”

When I have particularly difficult days, I text Bakry and tell him I need to talk. He shows up after work with “gifts” to make me feel better, usually cigarettes and chocolate. These obviously aren’t good for me or anyone, but they do make me feel better. We stand outside in the baking nighttime heat and smoke the cigarettes and then eat too much of the chocolate. I pour my worries and stresses out to him and he gets angry on my behalf and then I feel better. He’s the only person I confide in about my really difficult issues.

During one of our porch talks I somehow begin to tell him about a bad experience I had recently with a man who gave me a ride and then made some rather uncharacteristic advances. I had to angrily demand the man leave me on the side of the highway after he told me, “Don’t worry, I’m going to America, I have my name in with the visa lottery,” which was supposed to convince me to be “kind” to him (aka have sex) and to which I shouted, “If you EVER treat a woman like this in America you will go to prison! Good luck with that!” and then slammed the door in his face.

“Denise!” Bakry shouts at me. “Why are you getting into cars with people you don’t know?!”

“People give me rides all the time. I never know where I’m going. People are so nice!” I say.

Bakry puts his hands on his head then throws his arms in the air and then looks at me bewilderedly: “Denise!” he shouts again. “You cannot take rides from people! This is what prostitutes do! Stop acting like a prostitute!”

I continue trying to convince Bakry that people are nice and 99% of the time trustworthy, and Bakry continues to admonish me: “You are my sister! My sister shouldn’t act like a prostitute!” which makes us both laugh, me at him and him at my stupidity. I tell myself that Bakry and I will remain friends forever, and I know we will on some level, but it won’t be the same when we are 8000 miles apart.

WCPCA Book Club

The book club is on a summer break but be sure to join us when we resume.

On Sept. 8, 2016 we'll be discussing *The Mourning of Angels* by Patricia Taylor Edmisten (Peru 1962-64). There's plenty of time to order it from Amazon and read it in time for the meeting. A great book to add to your summer reading list. Rolly Thompson will be hosting the group that begins at 6:30 PM. Enjoy your summer.



Second to Last Day

Classes are out at the school I have been working with since December and the big 5 day teacher training/conference is over. I have two more work days there, mostly just being present for the teachers' in-service days before they head off to their vacations. The administrators want me to continue talking up the need to plan their lessons for next year, because many of the teachers are balking at the new workload. I spend one hour in a room answering questions: Do you plan every day? Do you plan the whole year ahead of time? What if you need to make changes? How can I anticipate what the whole year will look like?

Planning ahead is not a regular concept; I talk about how a plan helps you keep on track with your objectives, about how teachers need to practice adaptability and flexibility, and that plans can always be tweaked or changed to meet students' needs (and should be), but that their presence helps everyone, teachers and students, in the long run. I empathize: "This is a lot of work, to plan ahead, but in two years you won't have to plan so much and it will make everything easier. It is working hard now for a better future."

Samah, one of the administrators, smiles and nods her head. I look to her constantly, making sure I'm not saying the wrong thing. Later she tells me that the teachers have been arguing with her about the planning requirement, and some of them have said, "If Denise says this is important I will do anything she says." I get nervous and asked her, "Crap, did I say the right things?"

Samah smiles and raises her eyebrows. "Of course," she says with a smile, "you said exactly what I knew you'd say and now they are stuck—they promised!" Then she laughs and tells me we're going to eat lunch.

I follow her to the admin office, where we pull up chairs and she places a bowl of foul (pronounced "fool", sort of) in front of us. She and I dip pieces of bread into the mashed beans, oil and cheese with our fingers and eat while other admin members hang out or organize textbooks around us, joking around. We make fun of Bashir, who is perpetually late for things, and Bashir makes fun of Doha because he says I'm the only person who likes her, and I tell them how I made Doha ride a camel at the pyramids, and then Fatma makes fun of me for sleeping so much in the barely air-conditioned van during the 13 hour day trip to the pyramids. I make a crying face and exclaim that I am SO TIRED! IT'S TOO HOT! Hasina and I talk about our ice cream date this coming Thursday, and they make fun of me for sweating so profusely in this god-awful heat (I don't know how it's possible, but the temperatures keep climbing... this Thursday is supposed to be the coolest day all week at 110 F). Kids of staff members come and go in the office, giving me high-fives. Someone brings in their baby and the baby immediately cries when she looks at me and this is funny too.

At some point as I sit there I become intensely sad to be leaving this place. I will always be an outsider, but at this school I feel a part of the family. I am realizing that I don't really care what work I'm doing—I hope it's good work, and work I believe in, but ultimately this is all I really love: to get to know people and become a part of the fabric, to have a place at the stool with the mashed beans.

Before I leave Samah gifts me an Indian shirt dress and we agree to all dress in our Indian clothes on Thursday, our last day at this



school before the holiday break and my last day ever. They are planning a party for me but I don't know when it will happen. I tell them it's unnecessary and they tell me to shut up, that we're going to eat and dance. They ask me when I'm coming back to Sudan, they pull me aside and ask me if I'm sure I can't take the administrator position they've offered me. "We know the money is not great, but we want you here." I feel a true and intense sadness at saying, "No, I'm so sorry, I can't right now." Everyone who sees me hugs me as both a hello and later as a goodbye for the day, "See you Thursday!" they say. I don't know how to say goodbye.

Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Pub Night

Where:

Oakshire Brewing

207 Madison St.

Eugene OR 97402

When:

Friday, June 10th 2016

6:00 PM - 8:00 PM

Come socialize with other
RPCVs for our monthly pub
night!



Women's Journey to Senegal Trip

Submitted by Denise Silfee

Senegal, on the far west coast of Africa, is beautiful, complex, and unique. From the bustling capital city of Dakar to the small inland villages where traditional customs and languages still hold sway, Senegal is a beguiling mix of modern and ancient. Come meet these elegant Senegalese who are working with pride and dedication to improve their lives. www.createaction.org

For further questions and to reserve your space:

Contact Patricia Andersson at patricia@heartfirejourneys.net, or call 541-908-0438.

Reservation deadline July 1.

Food for Lane County

by Patty Mac Afee

Thank-you loyal RPCV volunteers, who again packaged food for needy recipients September 2015 – May 2016! We do make a difference, and FFLC is grateful for our monthly commitment. Hopefully, there are more RPCVs who would like to get involved when we start up in September. Try it out, and you'll be amazed at what many hands can accomplish. If you would like more information about WCPA's volunteer work at FFLC, you can contact Patty Mac Afee.





Save the Date for WCPCA Campout

**When: August 12-14,
2016**

**Where: Lost Prairie
Group Site (off
Highway 20)**

**Who: West Cascades
Peace Corps
Association**

**See article for more
details —>**

August 12-14 Lost Prairie Campout

by Patty Mac Afee

Reservations through WCPCA start June 11, 2016

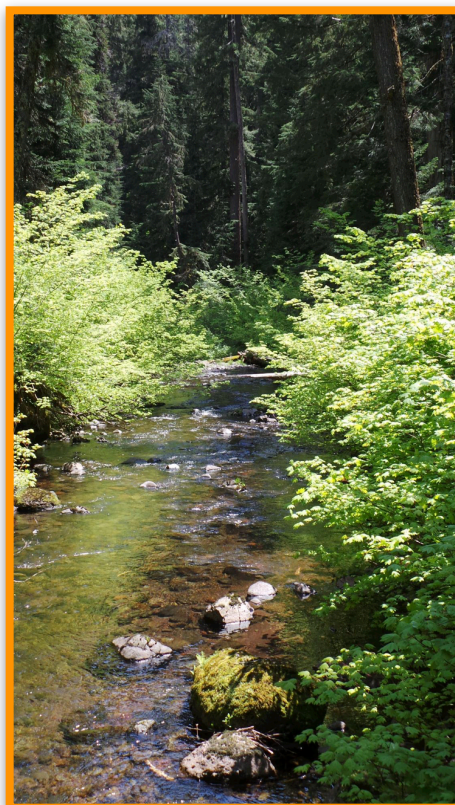
Lost Prairie Group Campground is located 37 miles east of Sweet Home on Highway 20. It has ten sites, two sites can accommodate RVs 24 feet or less. Additional motor homes may use the paved parking lot. This campground was converted from individual sites to a group campground, so the tent sites have ample space. WCPCA has the entire campground reserved for August 12-14 (arriving August 12, leaving August 14 – two nights camping). There are vault toilets and no electricity.

Things to do: the campground is located near scenic hiking trails: Santiam Wagon Road, Cone Peak, Iron Mountain, Hackman old growth trail, and several others. Clear Lake is a twenty minute drive if people prefer boating.

Meals: Campers will be responsible for their own meals, except for a Saturday evening group meal. WCPCA will provide the fixings for the main dish.

Reservations: reservations for this fun-packed campout begin JUNE 11, 2016. The first ten reservations received will secure a campsite; any reservation requests, after the first ten, will be on a wait list. Please make checks to WCPCA for the amount of \$30, mail to Patricia Mac Afee, PO Box 5022, Eugene 97405

Also, include your phone number, email address, and number of people in your group.





Know Your Board

Board President: Julia Harvey, Tonga 1990-1993

Vice President: Juliet Bender, Mexico 2009-2012

Treasurer: Dale Morse, Nepal 1969-1971

Secretary: Gary Cornelius, South Africa 2012-2013

Membership Chair: Nicolette Ulrich, Senegal 2011-2013

Members at large:

Wayne Thompson, Peru 1964-1966

James Cloutier, Kenya 1964-1966

Denise Silfee, Thailand 2011-2013

Laurette Garner,

Madagascar 2004-2006

Patty MacAfee, Cameroon 1989-1991

Please contact Board president Julia for items to be brought to the next Board Meeting:
juliaannamarieharvey@gmail.com

Mobility International USA

by Tiffany Ahn

My name is Tiffany Ahn (Kyrgyz Republic '14-'15). I work now at Mobility International USA. We are a non-profit that works to advance disability rights and leadership globally. We are going to be holding our 8th Women's Institute on Leadership and Disability (WILD) this August. We have 20 women disabled rights activists coming from all over the world and we are looking for potential host families for the duration of their program.

I thought that the RPCV community would be a great place to reach out to since we know all too well the benefits of hosting.

More information:

Mobility International USA (MIUSA) seeks host families for women activists with disabilities from around the world...

Bangladesh, Myanmar, Pakistan, Armenia, Philippines, Vanuatu, Uganda, Malawi, Tanzania, Nigeria, Burundi, South Sudan, Zimbabwe, Botswana, El Salvador, Uruguay, Panama, Colombia, Haiti and Barbados. MIUSA will bring 20 women leaders to Eugene/Springfield, Oregon July 31-August 21, 2016 for MIUSA's 8th International Women's Institute on Leadership and Disability (WILD). Partial hosting options are available. Homes do NOT need to be wheelchair accessible. Delegates will be VERY busy every day, and will be provided with a LTD bus pass and encouraged to use public transportation to/from program each day. Please contact Ruby Holmes, Exchange Program Coordinator at rholmes@miusa.org/Office: 541-343-1284 Ext. 21. Think globally act locally!

Peace Corps Logo Change



The graphic mark combined with our agency name creates the official Peace Corps logo.