

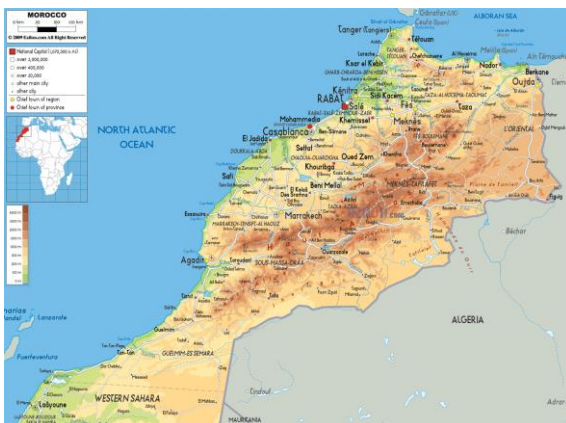
A PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER IN MOROCCO – 2000 TO 2002

When I “retired” in 2000, it was really to step away from the stress of executive life and earning income for a lifestyle that no longer interested me. I wanted to use my skills in the developing world and had been applying for various jobs I found advertised in “The Economist”. Some nibbles had resulted, but nothing concrete, when one of my daughters said “What about Peace Corps, Mom” and I said “but I’m too old” and she said, “no, you’re not, remember Miss Lillian?”. President Carter’s mother had served in India at the age of 68, and at 57 I was well below that. (Peace Corps has no upper age limit for volunteers and globally there are almost always one or more in their 80’s.)

So, I looked into it and the Mission of Peace Corps “To promote world peace and friendship by fulfilling three goals: to help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women; to help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served, and to help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.” suited me perfectly. I was very conscious of the fact that I had only experienced my life due to the accident of where I was born. The same person born in any of the 70 or so countries where Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) served would likely be poor and uneducated, or at best be marginally healthy, struggling economically, and perhaps somewhat educated if born in a city.

So, I applied, wrote my motivation essay, and was accepted. The next steps, however, what work I would do and where I would serve, would strongly influence the rest of my life (not that I knew that at the time).

The most obvious fit for my skills was some sort of micro-enterprise or community development work. Actually, the medical clearance was step 2 after acceptance. This was the most rigorous medical review I had ever had. After all, Peace Corps (PC) was about to accept responsibility for my health for 27 months (3 months of training plus two years of service) in parts of the world with mostly extremely limited medical facilities. After all the tests, the result was clearance for only 9 countries out of 70. Seven of those were in Latin America which were ruled out because I was not a Spanish speaker, a requirement for the sectors I would be qualified to work in. There were plenty of Americans who already spoke Spanish, so PC didn’t put resources toward teaching Spanish, but rather towards teaching indigenous languages.



The other two countries, The Kingdom of Morocco and Thailand, had excellent medical capabilities, including in the specialties my medical conditions required.

In those days, the volunteer applicant wasn’t given any say in their country placement, a situation which changed a few years later. However, Morocco was the obvious placement, since the new King Mohammed VI, who had

assumed the throne in 1999, was actively pursuing policies to enhance rural life in order to stem the flow of job seekers to the cities and the resultant shantytowns of jobless persons. He had asked PC to start a program to assist struggling artisans in rural areas, the first group had just arrived in country, and I was invited to join the second group, slated to head to Morocco in June, 2000, nine months hence. I accepted, with excited anticipation!

It is embarrassing to admit that I knew absolutely nothing about Morocco, and although I knew I would receive three months of rigorous training once I arrived, I set about rectifying my ignorance. I read a lot about the history, I read books by Arab, especially female, writers. I updated my French skills with a course in Business French at the Alliance Française in Chicago where I was living. I read travel books and I got lucky that 2000 was the year of Morocco in France, so when visiting Paris, my intended ultimate retirement home, I was able to attend many exhibitions including a particularly pertinent one at the Musée du Monde Arabe where a wide variety of traditional artisans were creating and displaying their products. I learned so much there, and was able to ask lots of questions. The Chicago PC recruiting staff introduced me to a Moroccan woman who was a strong friend of PC, and she became my first Arabic tutor, cultural advisor, and a friend to this day.

Finally, departure time arrived. Our group, 83 trainees, convened in Washington, DC for two days of briefings, especially regarding safety and security, and what to expect in the early days and weeks of our training. We knew that we would be living with host families and that each trainee group would spend their three months of training in a different part of the country, a practice known as community-based training. So, while we would have virtually daily contact with our fellow “small business” trainees, we would not see our colleagues headed for service in maternal and child health, youth development, university-level English support, and environment until swearing-in on September 5th. We arrived in Casablanca on June 27, 2000. We were 18 in the small business group, with at least six of us over the age of 50. Globally about 8% of PCVs are over 50 with larger concentrations in countries with stronger medical care.

What ensued was the most intense experience of my life to date. Our group remained in the capital, Rabat, and our “technical” (small business) training coordinator was a young American woman completing her doctorate at Columbia University, formerly a PCV in Morocco and married to a Moroccan. My host family lived in a small multi-level ancient house in Salé, across the river from Rabat. In the household were four unmarried sisters and their mother. The father, a highly respected Islamic scholar at the nearby historic mosque, was deceased, and I was given the only actual bedroom in the house. A “great room” on the floor above served for all daily activities plus their night time sleeping quarters. Cooking occurred on the roof using a single burner attached to a tank of buta gas, there was a



toilet on the ground floor – we had running water and electricity (typically a single bulb suspended from the ceiling of each room).

I woke early each morning to eat a yogurt and bread before taking a collective taxi across the river to be in training by 8 am. My fondest memory (and fragrance) of that time is of the donkey-pulled carts laden with fresh mint climbing the hill into town – mint tea being the staple beverage of the country. Moroccans supposedly consume more Chinese gunpowder tea and sugar per capita than anyone else on earth.

About ten hours later after at least four hours of Arabic language (I was slated to serve in an Arabic-speaking site near Tangiers in the north), plus health, safety, culture and Islamic religion as practiced in Morocco, I reversed the route to home. Our training ran on an American schedule with back-to-back sessions and a short break for lunch. By contrast, Moroccans eat their main meal in the middle of the day, usually followed by a siesta, and return to work until 7 or 8 pm.

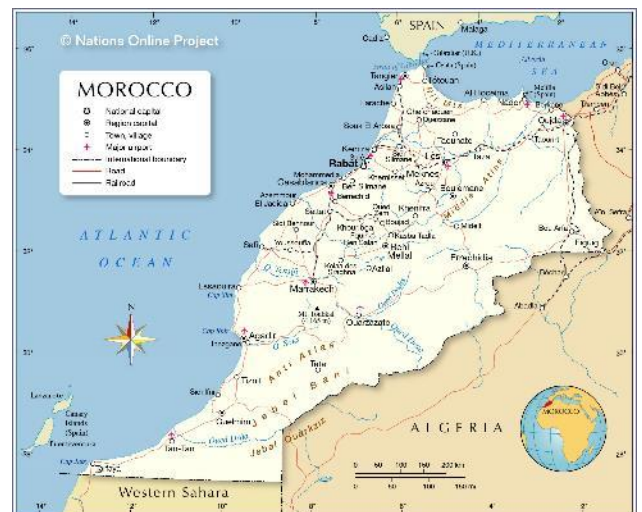


More than half of my colleagues were learning one of the three forms of Moroccan Berber language and were headed to sites dispersed across the country. We also had a practicum, for which we needed to find someone who could make use of some aspect of our skills, no money involved, and together create and complete a project in about six weeks. Here is the weaver who was my “project”. He wove fine linens – tablecloths and napkins – and his dream was to be able to market them in France.

In the evening we were expected to participate in the family’s life which included a light supper, visits from neighbors (I was the object to be viewed) and, ultimately, preparations for the marriage of the eldest at-home daughter. There was a lot of tension due to some romantic conflicts between two of the

sisters; the opportunity to encourage the very bright, studious high school student to find a way to continue her education; and Moroccan cooking to be learned. All in all, exhausting! Cultural immersion was the objective and was achieved.

Shortly before swearing-in we had to pass a language achievement test (I cried during mine, but managed the low-intermediate-level score which was required to swear in) and just days before swearing-in learned that due to the departure of one of our group, I wasn’t headed north to the site



and artisan cooperative I had visited, but south, deep into Tashelheit Berber-speaking territory. Ouch!

I would now live for three months in another household, this one much larger. The five adult sons were gone, either at University, or engaged in their professions. The father, an elementary school principal, came home only to eat so as not to be sharing a domicile with a non-family-member female.

So, illiterate, Berber-speaking mom, about my age, began the task of settling me into the



community where I would spend the next two years. Ait Baha, with a population of about 3500 people at the time, is the center of government for a large rural area, had two elementary schools and one junior high school. It is nestled in a valley in the arid foothills of the Anti-Atlas Mountains and I could walk the entire town in about 20 minutes. It is about 20 mountain-road miles from

Biougra, the capital of Province Chtouka Ait Baha, to which I was assigned, and where my counterpart lived and worked. Here is an aerial photo. The reservoir seen upstream of Ait Baha did not exist when I was there, the dam (barrage) was built shortly after my departure.

I never before realized how much I valued and needed my alone time and I was finally able to have it when six months after my arrival in country I moved into my own apartment. I had a ceiling-suspended light bulb in each of the two rooms, and running water which flowed for about two hours every other day, so I bought large plastic covered containers in which to store it. I bought a “stove” similar to our Coleman camping stoves which used a tank of Buta gas. And I had an installed “squat” toilet which you “flushed” with pails of water. Showers were with a bucket. I had way more amenities than my colleagues serving in more rural areas.

Biougra is a further 25 miles from the major coastal city, Agadir, where once a month I would travel to receive my stipend (via post office mandat, kind of like a money order) and use internet. Internet was in its infancy and Moroccans were far more adept at using cell phones than I was. I did have to acquire one, however, as text messaging was way more efficient for communicating with my counterpart than feeding coins into a pay phone.

I spent a lot of my time studying Tashelheit from the language training book PC created, and ultimately, I found a French/Tashelheit phrase book for tourists (like some of the Lonely Planet ones for various countries) and a young woman teacher at the local elementary school who

spoke French. Our evening sessions were a two-for, as I was improving my French while learning Berber! I also went to some evening women’s literacy classes where the local women were learning Arabic from their Berber-speaking teacher. This gave me the opportunity to mix with the local women and maybe improve my comprehension of one or another of the languages!

While having French language surely helped me in many aspects of life, it in truth allowed me to never become adequately fluent in either Moroccan Arabic or Tashelheit.

I was very fortunate that my counterpart, an employee of the Ministry of Artisanat responsible for supporting artisans in our very large province, was, and is, a hard-working, tri-lingual (Berber, Arabic, French) wonderful person. I became close to his family and am godmother to their third child, born shortly before I completed my service.



The PC counterparts are actually volunteers as well, because their time working with a PCV is over and above their regular duties and they receive no additional compensation from PC or their employers. In fact, Abdelhamid went out of pocket to support my work by often driving me to keep me from having to take exhausting local bus trips to work with our clients. Some counterparts were more enthusiastic about this “opportunity” than others. I was blessed.

So, what work did we find for me to do? In Biougra, where Abdelhamid supervised a training school for wood-furniture-makers among other duties, there was a settlement of families who had relocated from Taznakht, a highly-regarded rug-weaving center in the High Atlas Mountains, about 30 miles southwest of Ouarzazate. They had come for the agricultural jobs, as Biougra is a major vegetable growing center in irrigated greenhouses (made of plastic sheeting) primarily for export. However, due to a 20-year drought, the shallow wells providing irrigation had dried up and the men lost their jobs. So, the income from the women’s weaving became



essential. However, their rugs weren’t selling. My job? Help figure out why, and how to augment the women’s weaving income. The first answer turned out to be that they were creating the wrong product for their new location. But, first we had to get access to the women, which could only happen if the husbands allowed it. So, we had to engage the men in visiting the rug souks of Agadir to see what was on offer. Major differences – color, size, and pattern. In eastern Morocco bold yellow and orange play a major role in the designs of traditional rugs as shown in this photo.

These were not appreciated in our region. Secondly, the rug’s typical size – a very large and long rectangle - fit the typical rural salon but did not at all fit the urban smaller, less elongated

salons, the major public room of a Moroccan home. And, the traditional geometric patterns, while still appreciated, were being replaced by florals and softer themes. Next, of course, the men had to allow us to take the women to see this first hand – travel even 25 miles into an urban center was not normally part of their lives.

Once unleashed, the women created beautiful new designs in more subdued colors in appropriate sizes and we were ready to market them. Another negative for the urban area was that most artisan products were sold by merchants with stores as opposed to at local souks, direct from the weaver. The markups



were horrendous – basically devaluing the artisans’ labor – way beyond the actual costs of providing a showroom. And the merchants didn’t buy the rugs, everything was on consignment. This was a typical practice for all artisan products throughout the country. A structural problem beyond the role of Peace Corps, but one on which the Ministry of Artisanat needed to focus if traditional products were to continue to exist.

One way we could help with this problem was to organize artisan product fairs, especially in the expat community through our Embassy and Consulates. These produced very good sales where the artisan received 100% of the proceeds and helped out many of our PCV group’s clients. Here are photos of some typical events.



I have noticed over the years since then that there are periodic such markets in each region, particularly as more artisans are now organized into associations and cooperatives, and these markets are aimed at Moroccan buyers.

I had one other idea for how to help the women’s economics. If they would form an association, or even a cooperative, they could approach their raw

material sources (bulk raw wool, dyes) with bigger orders. With more purchasing power they could achieve lower prices. This concept was an even more difficult one to achieve as each woman had a husband or a brother, cousin, son, etc. who made the trip to Marrakech for these purchases and, although an association was formed, I don't think the men let go of their role, incurring multiple travel expenses!



These photos show the artisan process starting from a bag of raw (washed) sheep wool, then “carding” i.e. separating the strands, followed by creating thread – in this case with a drop spindle. For some reason, the spinning wheel never seems to have been widely adopted in Morocco. Dyeing happens next and then the loom is set and the long slow process begins. Most rugs from these weavers are of the type where the wool is knotted onto the vertical warp threads. You can see the short pieces of each color to be used. Make no mistake, these are not fine silk Persian rugs, but they will stand the test of multiple generations! The women weave in their homes along with cooking, cleaning and raising the children.



Over the New Year 2000-2001 I was able to organize a combination work trip/vacation to Ouarzazate and desert areas. The woman who was acting as a quasi-president of our fledgling weavers' association, my counterpart and I visited a very successful weaving cooperative started by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation to get ideas about how to structure the economics.

They had a book of patterns and a color palette that people could design their own carpet and have it custom woven.





I then traveled through the Draa Valley, one of the biggest oasis areas of Morocco, a major source of Morocco's date industry. In Zagora I connected with a fellow PCV and a teacher from the Casablanca American



School who rented a car and drove us to Mhamid, the end of the paved road, before we joined a driver guide for two nights in a Berber tent encampment about 50 miles into the Sahara at the base of the Erg Chegaga, one of the largest dune areas in the Moroccan Sahara. With no civilization nearby, at night you felt as if the stars were close enough to touch.



An advance group of the 2001 Paris-Dakar road rally was passing through the area and some motorcyclists were trying to make it up the 50 meter high dune – we were rooting for the dune to win. And it was a splendid launching point for hang gliding. Our driver sent his son up the dune with mint tea for us! We did only short camel rides, but long camel treks through the desert were available.

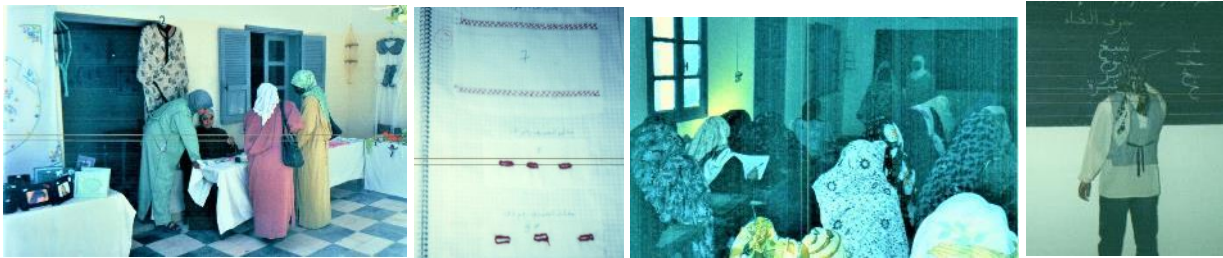
The drive back home took us through an area of black stony desert and we visited weaving associations in Taznakht, the Biougra weavers' original home area.

So, what else could I do to occupy my time? At the far southwest corner of my province was a town (also a commune center) called Massa, where the river of the same name empties into the Atlantic. The Mayor (an engineer with the Ministry of Water and Forests) realized that in the future there would be virtually no cash income coming into the families. At present there were two sources: milk cows of which many families owned one and sold the milk into a regional cooperative for cash, and the retirement payments received by the men who had

emigrated to France after WWII, and their widows. By 2000 the horizon for those future inflows was limited!

A dynamic woman, Fatima, was already teaching women the typical Moroccan handwork of cross-stitching, embroidery, crochet, etc. but every Moroccan household was awash with these products. She had a vision that the women could become a cottage industry doing piecework for the clothing manufacturers already in Morocco, Zara, Mango, etc. and those yet to come. The manufacturers would do the cutting to the patterns and then the local cottage industry women would do the sewing/assembly for an agreed-upon price, with Quality Control, of course. Additionally, the women could produce clothing for their families and the local market.

But she needed two things: sewing machines and someone to teach the women to use them. I was able to help with the former by getting a small grant (\$1000) to source ten Singer treadle machines (no electricity of course) which Fatima had sourced and negotiated the best price (so that there was no hint of foreign money involved). And then the training started. See in these photos the shift from embroidery to clothing pattern parts. Each woman had a notebook in which she placed each skill (button holes, zipper installation, finishing) before she graduated to the next one.



Although PC's role is primarily human-to-human skills transfer, they had a process for Small Project Assistance (SPA) grants. As volunteers we could prepare proposals with appropriate significant local contributions. In this case, the volunteer time of the teachers by the government allowed me to propose a skills were achieved, the next equipment, i.e. would be acquired. The SPA proposals were posted on the PC web site where contributions were solicited for specific projects.



and the building provided multi-phased grant that as sergers, zigzag, knitmasters,

The Mayor sourced from the Ministry of Education a nice multi-room facility around a courtyard that became the "Golden Hands Association" base. Literacy training was part of the program as it was a necessary skill and most girls and women in this region were still illiterate. It was only very recently that primary school had become mandatory and under King

Mohammed VI schools were rapidly being built throughout the country, but there was also a shortage of trained teachers. In 2004 adult (>15 years old) literacy was 52% and today is 74%, with still a wide disparity between men and women, although less so in the young population.

Forming an association was still a relatively new activity since the laws enabling them and cooperatives had only existed since 1993. Prior to that, assembly of non-related people in groups was prohibited – a throwback to worries over coups against a King, etc. Moroccans were still, however, reluctant to be involved economically with people who weren't blood relatives, even if the relatives lacked skills, honesty, and other desirable traits for joint economic activity.

With respect to the income from milk, the government helped there as well. Most of the rivers in Morocco are dammed to provide irrigation and potable water, sometimes electricity, leaving the downstream river beds dry. However, the Massa River in this area was allowed to retain enough flow to sustain the plants which fed the cows. All day there was the steady patter of donkeys' hooves as the women traveled to and from the river to collect paniers of the forage.



Speaking of donkey hoofbeats, one of my fondest memories of Ait Baha is the early morning hoofbeats as the merchants arrived with laden donkeys for the twice-weekly souk. Ait Baha serves an area with a roughly 15-mile radius for all hard goods supplies plus the sale and subsequent slaughter of goats, sheep and chickens for food. We also had a large number of vehicle (mostly 4-wheel drive) repair shops as this was a jumping off point for off-road travel into the Anti-Atlas Mountains.

My project closest to Ait Baha was a small village (called a douar in local language), Ait Mzal, of traditional potters, about 3 kilometers uphill from me. They created tajines for cooking (not the glazed decorated ones) and water jugs which used the principal of evaporation to keep potable water cool when ambient temperatures were 100°F. This had been a pottery village for generations, but recently they weren't making any money because close to 50% of their output was breaking during the firing process in the kiln. My job was to help figure out why and find a solution.

In retrospect, I realize how much of my work would have been unnecessary had the internet existed as a source of research then. But, such tools were in their infancy, as were literate people with access to electricity and computers.

Pottery basically consists of clay, water, lots of labor and a kiln in which to fire the product. The clay pit was the same one that had always been used, but I sent the clay out to a lab for analysis anyway – no problem with the clay. The water was being hauled uphill from the same river by the women as before. The kilns were the same ones used for generations and the children were scouring the countryside for fuel as always – except at long last there was a one room school and they were at least getting a primary school education.

I obtained a \$300 grant from a returned PCV group in Vermont, one of whose members had visited me earlier in the year. This was enough to provide transport and food for six of the potters to obtain a week of training at one of the national pottery training centers in Safi, about four hours away. My counterpart's wife is from Safi, so her relatives provided the lodging – it was most typical for traveling Moroccans to stay in homes of friends or relatives rather than hotels. During the training the potters were introduced to the system of temperature



measuring cones used to determine the temperature being achieved in the kiln. Different temperatures were required for the first versus second firings and glazed versus unglazed products. This turned out to be the source of the problem – the kilns were not reaching the required temperatures. Why? Over the years the surrounding forest areas had been depleted of hard woods and now it was mostly brush being burned as fuel. The potters also saw a slightly different chimney design

being used in the traditional kilns, became enamored with the idea of branching out into glazed pottery on which their wives could do the pattern decorating, and dreamed of gas-fired kilns. Since potable water had recently arrived in the village due to Japanese financial assistance, the women had more time available which they used to increase their poultry production, forming an association to sell the eggs and chickens at the Ait Baha souk. I don't think the men ever achieved their gas-fired kilns dream, but they did at least solve their breakage problem by sourcing hard wood fuel.

By contrast, a group of men in the Massa area were unwilling to make the drastic changes they needed. They wove floor mats from the reeds that grow in the river and a mainstay of their sales had been producing the floor coverings for mosques. However, cheap imported plastic mats were replacing their artisan product. I had noticed in my travels that in other river areas

men were making basic furniture – tables, bookshelves, stools, from the same reeds. I showed them the product and provided introductions to artisans in other regions. However, even though the younger men were enthusiastic, and some may have branched out on their own, the core group of elderly men were unwilling to try something new.

Then there is the story of the women of Ida-ou-Gndif, a rather remote mountain village whose families were mostly the descendants of Sub-Saharan slaves brought to Morocco by Arab invaders. The women did the bright patterned embroidery on the traditional Berber shoes made by the shoe-makers of Ait Baha – a major activity in my town. The women were paid a pittance, or sometimes not paid at all for their work. They saw no reason that they couldn't become shoemakers themselves, even though it was not traditionally a female profession. With the help of Catholic Relief Services (CRS) who sourced a female shoe-maker to train them, their local village "chief" who provided some start up raw materials, and me, they started out and succeeded. My role was to help them form an association, teach them about costing and pricing, including establishing a value for their labor. They were off and running! Although my Ait Baha shoemaker neighbors weren't happy with the new competition, they had brought the problem on themselves by devaluing the women's work.



Those were my major activities for two years. The most significant accomplishment, however, was that my Ait Baha host mom, after watching me spend hours and hours studying to learn Berber, finally took advantage of an adult literacy program in Ait Baha and learned to read and write Arabic! I only learned this when I was back visiting one day during my second year. A small boy tugged at my djellaba and motioned for me to stop by her house. She proceeded to sit me down and read to me. That still brings tears to my eyes. I had moved to Massa in August 2001 since a trainee from the next group was scheduled to come to Chtouka and be based in Biougra. This was a real tribute to Abdelhamid, my counterpart, who knew of many more artisans in his territory who could provide meaningful work for a second PCV.

I had been invited by one of my Chicago friends to join a group of 20 women to Sorga, a village outside of Verona, Italy, for a week-long celebration of her 50th birthday. Although we were encouraged to use our vacation time to expand our travel horizons within Morocco, my trip was approved. I flew from Casablanca to Milan, then traveled by bus onwards to Verona. My friend had rented a huge 15thC villa that could accommodate all of us, and, fortunately, there was still a place for me even though I hadn't been able to commit until almost the last minute. It was great to reunite with some close friends and also to meet friends from other periods of the hostess's life. A memorable evening was spent on the main plaza of Sorga where their rice festival was in full swing. It was Italy at its most traditional which I didn't actually believe existed! All generations were dancing to accordion music, there was fantastic food of course, and an abundance of good cheer and local wine.

A few of us took an overnight trip to Florence which I had never visited and had excellent guided tours. Returning to our hotel at 3pm to collect our luggage for the return train, we, along with the rest of the world, were shocked to see on the big screen tv an airplane crashing into World Trade Center Tower #2. It was September 11. Fortunately, none of our group lost anyone that day, but all the plans for follow-up travel were scrapped and it took a few extra days for the group to be able to cross the Atlantic to return home. I did, however, decide to proceed with a planned excursion for a first-ever visit to Venice on the Thursday and Friday. I didn't understand why all the kiosks along the canals were closing up when the woman in the 10,000 Villages store explained that there was to be a 3-minute global moment of silence. Seeing my emotions, she invited me to remain in the store for the commemoration.

I was able to return to Morocco as scheduled, although the Milan airport was heavily guarded by the Italian police and army. All along my multiple buses to return to Massa, Moroccans spoke to me, asked me if my family was affected, and expressed horror at the event. Of course, these were "strangers" to me, but they all knew I was an American PCV.

In addition to organizing the artisan fairs I have described, we had some occasions to assist in one another's work. One of my group had been transferred to Sidi Ifni, about 3 hours by bus to the south. She was asked to work with a group of women who had basic sewing skills. Coming from a region where the women all wore black, she was ecstatic to see the bright beautifully patterned melhofs worn by women in our part of the country. She came up with the idea that the fabric could be relatively easily fashioned into beach cover-ups for western women, a process that required only hand sewing due to the fragility of the fabric. The raw fabric is initially woven in India, then transported to Mauritania, where the tie-dying takes place. Each piece is 5 meters (~15 1/2') in length. From there it is transported (historically by camel) to Guelmim, about 1 1/2 hours by grand taxi from Sidi Ifni, where exists not only a major camel market, but the wholesale source for melhofs. Not all patterns were adaptable to her plan



found one consignment well. We also

which would result in two garments, one shorter, one longer, per melhof. Plus, every piece had to be opened and carefully scrutinized for flaws. She and a couple members of the women's groups whose husbands or fathers permitted them to make such a trip would source the fabrics. I had the opportunity to go with her one time, but mostly my role was to try and find a sales outlet.



Since the beach resort town of Agadir was in my territory, I approached the shops catering to European visitors and eventually that was willing to accept them on and they actually sold reasonably found a boutique in Marrakech

willing to carry them. Back home in Paris I was able to find another boutique to carry them – one that had a branch in St Tropez. Here are some examples modeled by fellow PCVs. So, the

concept was launched and the women went on to branch out into a line of summery short skirts and tops, also, of course, for a western market.

Closer to my base in Massa was another PCV assigned to the Souss Massa National Park. This 131-square mile preserve of the mouths of the Souss and Massa rivers includes extensive naturally vegetated sand dunes, the nesting grounds of the northern bald ibis, and the purported location where Jonah escaped from the whale, a pilgrimage site.



Unfortunately for the local community of Sidi R’Bat, their traditional livelihood of herding sheep and goats was now prohibited within the park. So, among other tasks, the PCV was looking for ways to replace the community’s lost income. The rocky ocean front harbored huge quantities of local mussels which the women gathered and sun-dried for their family’s consumption. Seeking a way to develop a salable product, she met Judith, a volunteer with another organization, who had food processing expertise and was working with women further down the coast on a similar project. Judith was able to lend her expertise to jump start the project and also identify other local edibles that could be marketed.

The Sidi R’Bat PCV had done some active fund-raising to obtain soccer balls and t-shirts for the local young men for whom football was their all-consuming passion. And she obtained a combination of private and public contributions to build a small building where the local women could assemble in order to attend newly-offered literacy classes and pursue their other income-generating projects. Another one of those was to create decorative wreaths from a local dried purple wildflower, which, properly packaged, could be sold in boutiques. Here they





are making wreaths and gathered in their center.

The building was nearing completion when the PCV's tour ended and I was assigned to oversee completion and closing out the final accounting for the grants. The use/maintenance of the building was to be managed by a newly-created association under the direction of the local "chief". He, however, turned out to not actually support the project, evicted the women, and

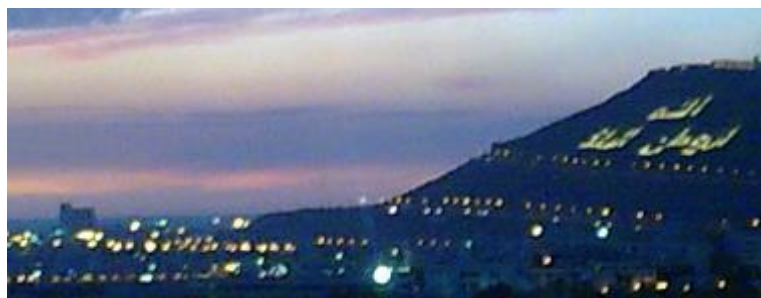
turned the space over to local men. This was a very sticky situation of the sort that PCVs are definitely not to get involved in! Fortunately, I was able to enlist the aid of the Mayor of Massa who used his influence with higher level officials to obtain court orders to return the center to women's uses since that was the purpose for which the grants were given.

During the course of our two years' service we had two additional training events and also traveled to Rabat for a mid-service medical exam. The Peace Corps medical staff had vetted medical professionals in all the major metropolitan areas so that PCVs had access to necessary treatment as close as possible to their work site. I was fortunate to be near a major medical center in Agadir and my cardiologist, dentist and laboratory, originally sourced by Peace Corps, remain my care-givers to this day.

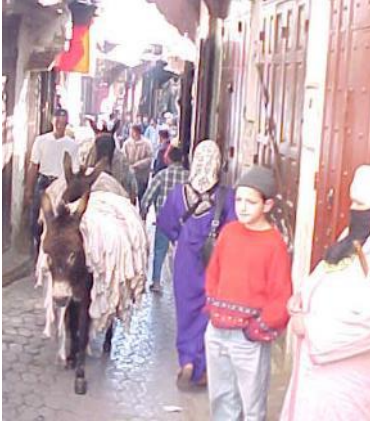
Because, yes, I fell in love with Morocco and have made it my secondary residence. About six months into my service, I realized I was very comfortable in the country, especially with the people, and after a year I decided to buy an apartment in Agadir. I have a view of the sea and the port and am about a 10-minute walk to the beach – a 3 ½ mile expanse of white sand on



the largest natural bay on the Atlantic Coast of Africa. The climate is similar to San Diego and property costs about 10% the price. At night the Arabic words for God, Nation and King are lighted on the hill north of town.



In 2003 I was invited to be the technical trainer for the incoming small business group. I was based in Fez with the trainees located in the four northern towns of Kenitra, Sefrou, Azrou and Meknes for their language and cross-cultural training. Here is a “street” in the Fez Medina and the volunteers at swearing-in overlooking Fez Medina with their language/culture trainers.



It was during this time that I was invited for a final interview with the PC Director in Washington, DC to be appointed as a Country Director. I was offered a position and moved to Pohnpei, in the Federated States of Micronesia in January, 2004. My peregrinations as a staff member with Peace Corps are chronicled on my web site <https://60after60.com> for the years 2004 to 2009 when I finally retired and began travels for pleasure.

