# ANDYBURKINA

Writing by Andy Neustaetter
Website and Book Design by Greg Neustaetter
Cover Design by Yenari Chung and Greg Neustaetter
Photos by Andrew Neustaetter, Greg Neustaetter, and Liza Neustaetter

"A Lesson in Giving" by Dorothea Hertzberg



FIRST EDITION

# ANDYBURKINA

Writing and comments from www.andyburkina.com, a site offering the accounts and experiences of Andy Neustaetter, a Peace Corps Volunteer in Burkina Faso, West Africa.

2003 - 2005

Graphics by Greg

*To Andrew*
*Merry Christmas and welcome back home…*

*- Greg*

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# 11 Days

Posted by Andy, 9/10/03 10:29pm

I now have only 11 days left at home before I leave for Philadelphia where I will have my "staging." It's an odd feeling knowing that the people I interact with every day here will be so far away for such a long period of time. I feel as if I should constantly sucking up and storing away the essence of the people in my life, but that's not something I've figured out how to do yet. Instead, I just go on doing the sames things that I would be doing otherwise, maybe with a little added melodrama, but still basically living a "normal" life. And because of this I constantly have the sense that my time here is slipping slipping slipping.

## Comments

### duude

Posted by Mookie, 9/11/03 12:08am

Wassssssuuuuuuuuhp DOG!!

### "Noish"

Posted by Earl "187" MacDougal, 9/16/03 2:34am

Andy Neustetter rules. Noish, enjoy your African mission of peace and understanding and never let the Burkina Faso get you down, mang. Just heed the call of our esteemed executive-in-chief to join meaningful causes such as yours. He's such an inspiration. Anyway, good luck, may the memories of Misty Bush inspire you along the way. (That's not meant to be a ribald remark, that is actually a person's name.) Most of all, have fun, Faso-style 187 ps. Thanks for the tip, mother%$#!

### Dir

Posted by Earl "187" MacTypo, 9/16/03 2:35am

Andy NEUSTAETTER rules too. I was talking about some other dude I met out here in Arizona. Signed, Captain Jackass

### Go get 'em

Posted by Del, 9/16/03 10:57am

We're proud of you, Andy. Have a great time! I envy you. - #141

### going native

Posted by Dan, 9/16/03 11:07am

I'm jealous, jealous, jealous...you're gonna have an a-mazing time. Best of luck and keep us posted.

### A limerick
Posted by Low-Po, 9/16/03 3:45pm

In a country that is far away For two years noishy will stay There he'll micro-lend And at two years end They'll all have real small loans to pay.

### Hi to my hommie
Posted by Rick, 11/9/04 2:30am

What's up, Andy? I hope all's well in the Faso. What Burkinations are you up to? All's well in So Fla - I'm holdin' it down. Sorry for the quick post, but I'll write you an email this weekend after all my exams are over. Keep it real. Booyakasha. -RNB

## A story
Posted by Andy, 9/17/03 5:17pm

Many people have asked me what Burkina Faso will be like. The truth is, I don't really know. I've never even been to Africa before. So I speculate about what my life in Burkina Faso. But beyond specualtion I really have no idea. Instead of wild speculation, I will offer here an account, by a former PCV (Peace Corps Volunteer) in Burkina Faso, of an afternoon bike ride. The following is an op-ed she submitted to a recent New York Times (thanks to Jim Walsh for clipping it for me).

By Dorothea Hertzberg
Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso

It was an unforgivingly hot day, and I was leaving the village where I lived in northeastern Burkina Faso, which meant an 11-mile bike ride to the nearest paved road. It was April, and I was serving as a Peace Corps volunteer in this small, land-locked country in West Africa. I set off on my Trek 800 mountain bike, dreaming of the distant town where I could eat the pizza I had been craving for a month, when I hit a bump in the road. When I landed, my pedals spun around wildly with no resistance. I pedaled furiously, but like a guinea pig in a wheel, I was going nowhere.

I stood there in disbelief. What was I going to do? I still had seven miles to bike, 115 degrees of heat beating down on me and only half a bottle of water left. "Great," I muttered in exasperation, and started pushing my bike down the deserted cow path.

Minutes later I spotted a villager coming from the opposite direction. "Yaa boe tara fo weefo?" the older gentleman asked me in Moore, the language of the Mossi people. What's wrong with your bike? I explained what had happened, and he tried to figure out my 21-speed, Peace Corps-issued Trek (probably the first he'd ever seen). He flashed me a smile that said he couldn't fix it but we'd find some other way.

Then he began to rearrange the strap on his bag that was attached to his bike rack. I had no idea what he was up to, but I had nothing but time, so I sweated and watched.

When he finished, he had about three feet of thin but durable rubber strap left over, which he proceeded to tie to my handlebars. Like many times before in my Peace Corps service, I stood

dumbfounded and awaited the all-important cultural clue that would tip me off to what was going on. He gave me one I couldn't imagine: he pointed to my seat and told me to hop on.

I smiled, thinking he was joking but somehow also knowing that he was serious. This older man was offering to tow me seven miles in this unbearable heat? I started to shake my head in refusal and disbelief. He just smiled and stood there until I finally accepted my newest adventure in Burkina Faso.

It turned out to be one of the most hysterical yet touching moments of my life. What a scene we must have been. This poor man vigorously pedaling and dripping with sweat as he towed the American princess through the barren desert. Every villager we saw along the way shrieked in surprise and called out "Ney Yibeogo!" (Good morning!). After a while, I began to feel terribly guilty, posed on my bike, waving like a Rose Parade float queen.

I thought about pedaling as well, just so he would feel I was participating in our cause, but I didn't bother because he couldn't see me anyway. At least not until we got to the hills. Because our bikes were connected by the rubber strap, I would lag behind hime on every hill we climbed, testing the rubber for all it was worth. Once we began to descend down the other side, though, I was right next to him, waving, and it became my turn to shout a slow "bonjour" as I gradually picked up speed and passed him completely. It never lasted long. Soon I would drift behind him again. We carried on this way like two horses on a carousel, rotating positions, each time with more laughter and amazement at our plight.

An hour later we arrived at my destination. He was exhausted, I was giddy and in awe of his generosity. I took a long look at his face and those kind eyes, and I told myself never to forget it, because this man is the heart of Burkina Faso. This man is not an exception in his culture. He is the very essence of it.

Two years ago, at the age of 27, I volunteered for Peace Corps service to "give back" to the world. Today, I realize I gained much more in return. I am no longer a volunteer, but I continue to work in the western part of the country. When I think back on that moment when I was stranded on that deserted cow path, there was a part of me that was calm, because I knew where I was. I was in a place where you never feel alone or abandoned because someone will always come along to help you; where a starving woman would give her last bowl of food to a stranger; where kids are elated to play with an old tire and a stick. A place where family unity is everything and the guest is paramount.

To the Burkinabe, these principles are more than just cultural values, they are a way of life. Burkina Faso means "the land of the upright and courageous people." It is one of the poorest countries in the world, but a place where I learned what giving really means.

## Comments

### Bon Voyage

Posted by Margaret Moulton, 9/18/03 9:44am

Andrew - Have a wonderful time! Very excitiing. We'll be waiting for your news, picks, and a full documentaiton of all the "admirable" deeds. We'll miss you festivities on Saturday, but thank your Mom & Dad for the invite. Love from the Moulton Clan

### the african chef

Posted by mark quandt, 9/20/03 7:58am

welcome to the motherland- my brother from the qua' to g-town -qza (from tz)

### Have a good trip
Posted by Your Favorite Thai Masseuse (or perhaps Masseur?), 9/20/03 2:59pm

I will miss you most of all, Andrew, but I hope you have a great time. I'll be looking forward to your updates.

### Ciao for now
Posted by Nui, Nasee, & David, 9/21/03 2:00am

Have a terrific and transformative time in B-F. You are missed in Thailand. We love the photo of you in the Chang Beer t-shirt. Brings back fond memories.

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# I'm off
Posted by Andy, 9/21/03 3:03am

Well, I'm off. Here's one last look at me:

## Photos

## Comments

### Punk
Posted by Mookie, 9/21/03 11:15am

Well punk, you are off.... SO good luck, be healthy, watch your back, and do your thang!

### Best of Luck!
Posted by Rick B., 9/21/03 11:26pm

Noish, sorry I missed you this weekend. I called and you had already left. I wish you the best of luck on your voyages. I will do my best to visit - I've got 2 years to save up! Remember to learn "click."

### post more
Posted by chef rae rae, 9/25/03 5:46am

yo dawg, your brother in africa wants to hear more from you. post some shiznit! get rid of the thailand picture! replace it with one from the motherland qza

### Great stuff!!
Posted by bennie, 9/25/03 12:55pm

I wish you the best in Africa. Do well, learn lots, work hard and enjoy everything there! There is much beauty there to absorb.

### Where are you now?
Posted by Mandy, 9/30/03 10:54am

Andrew: Hope you are enjoying training, and you have time (and electricity) to send us some words & pictures soon. Can't wait to see Greg's first update on your website! I've shared the site with some more Pitzer friends. Best of luck!

### I miss you.
Posted by nana, 10/5/03 9:25am

Waiting to hear from you. We all know it will be a great experience for you. We look forward to your reports. Love, love, love!

# Je suis ici!
Posted by Andy, 10/6/03 2:17pm

Hello all!

I made it here safely to Burkina Faso and I am doing great! There is really so much to say, and I don't

have loads of time right now, but I'll write what I can.

After leaving my house (it was a great send off and thanks to all who were there), I flew to Philadelphia where I met the other stagiares (French for trainee) who are in my group. There were 24 total - 15 in the new SED (small enterprise development) program that I am in, and 9 in the health program. Most are young, straight out of college. 15 women, 9 men. Everyone so far is great, and thanks to our circumstances we've become a pretty tight group in a short period of time.

After a couple days of icebreakers and rule-setting, we headed off for Burkina. It was a long trip, first a busride to NYC, then a flight to Paris, a long layover (that included a short hop into Paris proper), and then a 5 hour flight to Ouagadougou, most often simply called Ouaga (pronounced WAH-ga). We got off the plane to hot, sticky weather. But it was night, so not so hot as it would get. At this point I was exhausted and a bit overwhelmed, but happy to be there nonetheless. We were met at the airport by Peace Corps staff and a bunch of current volunteers before being herded off to a local hotel.

We spent the next couple of days starting training in Ouaga. The language trainers, medical officers, Country Director, and a bunch of volunteers were all there. The language and culture trainers are all Burkinabe, all really smart and easy to get along with. They will be the one's who instruct most of the training. It was also very reassuring in these first couple of days to have 2nd year volunteers around. With everything being so new, it was great to see a bunch of people who looked like all of us stagiares but who were clearly happy and well adapted to living in Burkina. They are also an eternal source of knowledge.

After a couple days in Ouaga we headed to the training site. Originally we had been told that it would be in Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina's second largest city where training has always been held in the past. However, for us it has been switched to Kaya, a much smaller city, about an hour and a half north of Ouaga. There are a couple of reasons for the switch: (1) Kaya is closer to the PC Bureau in Ouaga and (2) though Kaya is still pretty big (maybe 20 or 30 thousand people) it is much smaller than Bobo and thus more like the villages where we will end up.

Right when we got to Kaya we went to our "adoption" ceremony, where we met our host families. Don't worry, Mom and Dad, you are still both legally my parents. There I met my host - Ouesseni Sawadago - along with 2 of his older brothers. And then I went "home." That's when it really hit me that I was here. No more other stagiares. Just me and a bunch of Burkinabe.

Families here generally live in "compounds" or "courtyards." Families here are very very large, and extended families generally live together. Each courtyard has a central spot for cooking and a number of small buildings around the sides - some are for sleeping, some for storing food. Often there are chicken coops. And often little plots for vegetables such as peanuts. And a latrine (basically a hole in the ground). And another open air stall for bathing (taking what we call a bucket bath).

In my courtyard, there are 15 people. There is Ouesseni, who more commonly goes by one of his nicknames - Pablo and "Bill Gates" (I asked him why the latter was his nickname and he didn't seem to have any real reason. Later someone told me that here in Kaya people love to take nicknames - some I've heard of are "New York" "Washington" and my favorite "One man show"). Pablo is 25 and unmarried, and works at a telecentre, which is basically a shack with a phone that people can pay to use. His old mother lives there as well. Also he has a couple of older brothers who live there with there

wives and kids. There are 4 or 5 wives (for 2 or 3 brothers) and 6 or 7 kids (including one born this weekend). Besides Pablo, no one really speaks French - they speak Moore, the language of the Mossi.

Currently I speak a tiny bit of Moore, though mostly just greetings and things like that. My French is definitely improving rapidly. I was surprised to learn that my French is actually among the best of the stagiares. Probably about half have had absolutely no French in the past. But with about 4 hours of French lessons a day and total immersion, I think we'll all be doing really well in no time. I have no trouble at all getting by at all, and I feel myself getting better at speaking and understanding people every day.

Besides living with the family, I have class everyday from 7:30 to 4:30, with a couple of breaks only. It's fairly exhausting, and I'm usually pretty tired by the end of the day. When I come home I usually take a bucket bath, talk with my family, with Bill Gates and his friends, eat dinner, and then go to bed around 9 or 10. I wake up with the roosters around 6.

So much more to write and don't know what to say...

It's really hot here. In the day it's usually about 90 or 100. And this is the start of the cold season. And there is little cloud cover. So, basically the country shuts down from 12 to 3 - no one is open for business, and every basically rests or visits with friends.

The food here is generally pretty good. Lots of carbohydrates. Lots of oil. The staple is TO, made from millet. It's hard to explain. It's sort of a cross between cream of wheat and jello. You eat with your hands - you make a ball of it and then eat it with sauce. Not the most flavorful stuff in the world, but not bad. We'll see if I'm still saying that in 2 years though.

I also suffered my first minor illness. I'm not sure exactly what caused it, but it resulted in fever and some very nasty stomach problems. Fever in 100 degree weather is not so fun. And the stomach problems were definitely no fun. Basically I had some sort of bacteria or giardia or something like that in my system. But the nurse gave me antiobiotics which seem to have solved the problem. It wasn't the most pleasant experience I've had in my life, but as the Burkinabe say, "ca va aller" (literally "it's going to go") - which is to say "everything will be all right" or "it'll all work out eventually". It's really a nice way to look at life.

Right now I am very happy that I'm here in Burkina. The people are the most generous people I've ever met, despite there utter poverty, and everyone seems to have a positive outlook and a welcoming attitude.

Hopefully I'll have more frequent internet access in the coming weeks, but I'm not quite sure exactly. I hope everyone is doing very well, and I hope to hear from you all soon.

If anyone ever has the desire to talk to me, here's how it works. It is wildly expensive for me to call the US. However, from the US one can by phone cards to call Burkina for about 29 cents/minute. So, if anyone would like to talk to me at any point, you can get these cards online at www.click4prepaid.com - then, if you want to talk to me, send me an email telling me what good times generally are. Then I will call you from a payphone and have you call me back at a different number. Let me know of any questions about that.

Peace,

Andy

## Comments

### Red Letter Day in Durham CT
Posted by Connie Brown, 10/6/03 3:44pm

Extraordinary day for me--a letter (not even so snail: it got here in a week), an email, and your website posting! If our schoolbell were up, I'd ring it. I'm GLAD you have an adoptive family, as are all of us in your blood family. The people of Burkina sound wonderful--I'm glad you're there. Sorry about yr tummy. Love, Mom

### Great to hear from you
Posted by Greg, 10/6/03 4:35pm

Great to hear from you Andrew - and glad you're doing well and recovering from your fever. Hope you can avoid the fun stomach and fever issues and enjoy the sunny weather! P.S. I found another site that sells calling cards for Burkina that seem a bunch cheaper - they range between 15 - 23 cents per minute - not too bad. The site is: http://www.nobelcom.com/

### Ca Va Bien!
Posted by Amanda Mecke, 10/7/03 3:32pm

It's great to hear you are well! Let us know your favorite Moore phrases. I think I'll practice "ca va aller" -- good advice anywhere. Let me know if you learn of any more Burkinabe movies & books we should get. Love, Mandy

### No Subject
Posted by Leslie Ruff, 10/7/03 4:06pm

Salu, mec! Je suis fiere de toi. Marchons! Leslie

### WOW
Posted by mary kordak, 10/8/03 10:52am

Dear Andrew, you sound great...I am so totally excited for you. What you shared in your email sounds so familiar, and strangely wonderful. Although I was in Africa for such a short time, I learned to love the rythmns of a day or evening and found the environment to be energizing and alive in ways that we don't experience here. It does sound as though you are adjusting and adapting - WOW what changes you've already gone through...can't wait to hear more. Watch the water, don't get dehydrated and enjoy. Love, Mary

### No Subject
Posted by cheech, 10/12/03 11:17am

sounds like you're getting acclimated already...that's awesome. oh, and please learn how to make that cream of wheat/jello thing so you can cook it for everyone when you get back. it might challenge the popularity of the cajun burgers...or not.

**Great to have Your News**
Posted by Margaret, 10/15/03 10:34am

Andrew, Terrific news with lots of texture. Not in a rush to join you for dinner or use the facilities. Wouldn't the real Bill Gates get a kick out of his namesake. We're all thinking of you. Margaret, Peter, Alex and Sam

# The Dima

Posted by Andy, 10/13/03 8:46pm

Hello all! I hope everyone is doing well...it was great reading comments after the last post. Keep 'em coming!

Things here in BF continue to go well. Training is starting to become more of a routine, and everyday communication becomes easier with my family. And my original sickness is gone...I'm in great health right now, which really makes a difference.

I had a very interesting experience yesterday. Sunday is our only day off of work while we're in training. And yesterday, there was a "fete" or festival in a nearby village called Koursimoro. Koursimoro is about 30k south of Kaya, and 4 of the health stagiares live there with there host families. The other 4 health stagiares live in Boussouma, a village about 20k south of Kaya. So, because it was Sunday, a few of us SED stagiares decided to go check out the fete. We got up early (it's hard not to get up early here though) and hopped on our bikes at 6am - if you wait until too late it is just too hot to ride a long distance on a bike. Even waiting until 8 or 9 would have meant brutal heat. It took us about an hour to get to Boussouma, where we were going to meet up with the stagiares who live there, and go to a little "opening ceremony" for the fete that was going to take place in Boussouma. When we got to Boussouma, however, we didn't really no where to go here. Streets here all look the same (mostly dirt paths), and one courtyard looks the same as the next. So, we found the marche (market), and there was a little kiosk where a few men were hanging out. We went up to them, talked for a couple minutes, said we were going to the fete, etc. Then we asked (in French) - "Do you know where the Nasaras live here?" Nasara basically means white person. So, we had walked in to the town and randomly asked "where are the white people." The men talked for a second, and then one went off on a bicycle. 5 minutes later he came back, closed up his store, and said, "follow me." And he showed us the way to one of the stagiares houses! This guy had closed his store to show a few complete strangers the way to someone's house who he didn't even know. The people here are amazing.

So, we hung out in Boussouma for a bit. We then learned that the little opening fete wasn't really going to take place. However, the Dima, who is sort of the uber chief of a huge region, and appoints hundreds of other chiefs, who lives in Boussouma part-time, was in town that day. So the volunteer who is living in Boussouma to help out with training arranged for us to go saluer (greet) him. This guy is one of the most senior traditional chiefs in BF - there are only 5 Dima's in the whole country. It had been arranged for us to go greet him at 10. So, at 10 a couple of local guys brought us there to the Dima's huge compound. We soon found that we weren't the only one's there to greet him. There were probably about 100 other people there, waiting in the shade of various large trees. And it appeared that

the Dima wasn't there. So we waited. About 10:30, we heard some drumming and singing. And occasional big blasts as gunpowder was shot out of guns. Then we saw a long procession come in. Probably about 100 people, all dressed fairly traditionally in boubous (basically a long robe for a male) with traditional pants underneath. As the procession got closer, the gunshots got louder.

After the procession arrived, it quickly left again. It left with the Dima, we were told. So we waited a bit more. About 11:30, the procession came back. Good, we thought, we'll go in to see him now and then we'll head to Koursi for the fete. Nope. Some of the procession went under a little thatched awning. The guys with the guns (who were still occasionally firing them) remained outside, sort of near where we were sitting. Then groups of people started going and making offerings (mostly chickens) to the dima and bowing down before him. We were told that these people were mostly local chiefs and notables. All I know is the Dima must have a damn big chicken coop because he definitely has no shortage of chickens. This presentation of gifts went on for a couple hours. And meanwhile, the guns kept firing. And they would usually fire just when we didn't expect them too, thus scaring the crap out of us and causing the kids to laugh at us.

Finally, around 1:30, we were called in to see the Dima. However, we were called into his house and not the thatched structure. He was a relatively young (maybe 40, though that is relatively old for BF, where the average life span is under 50, i think, and almost half the population is under 14). He was wearing huge sunglasses and dressed in a relatively plain blue boubou. We shook his hand, basically kneeling on the floor while doing so, out of respect. Then he had us sit on couches and had his servants (who were basically crouching on the floor) bring us Fantas. We talked for a few minutes, drank the cold fantas, and then we took off.

It was interesting experience, and though it wasn't so exciting the whole time we were sitting there, it gave me a good sense of the protocal that exists in these traditional structures of Mossi life. It is also interesting that just because of our being American we were granted entrance into the Dima's house and given very special treatment. It's weird that though I'm a "volunteer" I've never been waited on, catered to, or treated with such deference before. It's definitely strange getting used to that.

After the 4 hours at the Dima's, we biked to Koursi, ate some traditional fete food "porque au four" - some sort of roast pork that was really good - drank some dolo (millet beer) - and danced a little at a local bar. Then we took a bus back to Boussouma, where we stayed the night before biking back early this morning for class. The ride back was again nice, though I got 2 flat tires on my bike today...luckily last week we had a bicycle maintenance class, so I was able to repair them.

One last tidbit. Living here is like being a little kid. One has to learn how to do everything differently and get used to things being a little backwards. One thing that I've found that symbolizes perfectly how everything here is "upside down" is the use the coasters are put to here. At most bars, the tables are cheap, semi-rusted metal tables. So coasters aren't really needed to protect the table. However, there are tons of flies all over the place. So, the coasters go on top of the glasses. It's upside down for us, but right side up for them.

More to come soon...

Peace, Andy

## Comments

### Mmmmm... porque. L'autre Nasara viande.
Posted by Amanda Reid, 10/13/03 5:44pm

Glad to hear your anti-bacterial, dima-approved, fanta-worthy, and handy at bike repair. That is one impressive resume. love, awr

### Paragraph breaks
Posted by David Freidberg, 10/13/03 6:49pm

Hi Andy, Great to read of your adventures. It would help my tired old eyes if you could insert paragraph breaks in your missives. Small fonts are hard enough to read at my advanced age.

### Andrew!
Posted by Liza, 10/13/03 8:33pm

I am happy to hear that everything is going so well! I'm so proud of you! I can't wait to come visit! Much love, Liza.

### I love reading your missives.
Posted by Janet, 10/13/03 10:14pm

Absolutely amazing! Such a short time and so much has happened to you already! Enjoy every bit of it. We're all enjoying hearing about it, and are very proud of you. Love, Janet, Bill, Sarah, Steven (Actually, the truth is that all Steven's interested in right now is seeing the Yankees get into the World Series -- right now he's throwing stuff around the room in disgust that they just lost game 4 to the Red Sox -- but the rest of us are enjoying your postings!)

### No Subject
Posted by Leslie, 10/14/03 9:16am

Wonderful! I love the fact that your bike is transportation from village to village. What a different world.

### Need contact "webmaster".
Posted by Joe Marinan, 10/14/03 10:09am

How 'bout a link and/or email address to your "webmaster" (brother ?) ?

### Webmaster!
Posted by Greg, 10/14/03 12:39pm

Yup - I'm Andy's brother and the webmaster of this site. I'm glad to see that this website is working out and that you're all enjoying it - I sure am! You can go on over to my site if you want - it can be found here: www.gregphoto.net Greg

### What do you like to read?

Posted by Del, 10/14/03 3:45pm

I remember when I was abroad reading took on a whole new significance as it was not only a good recreation, it also helped prevent vocabulary shrinkage and gave me something good to trade with other volunteers. Is sending you stuff hard to do? - Del

### So far away...
Posted by Sarah Lee, 10/15/03 8:46am

Andy, I'm glad that you are doing so well, and that you are having many adventures. Nothing new with me, really. I miss your shiny tongue.

### Lucky Africa
Posted by Alissa, 10/15/03 4:50pm

Africa is a lucky continent to get Mr. Andy Neustaetter. And I agree with Del's post -- if there are any books you'd like us to send over, request away. Lis

### Ca va Bien!
Posted by Amanda Mecke, 10/16/03 8:40am

Glad to hear you had a day off from your studies. What are your fellow stagiares like -- education, work background, etc? I'm getting a PDF file of the Oxford UP book on the Ashoka social entrepreneur foundation (which has an associate in Burkina Faso) for you. It's called HOW TO CHANGE THE WORLD. If your connection for downloading is slow, as I assume it is, I'll also send the disc via mail. Hope your battery recharger is working for your music. Let me know if you need more solar help! Mandy

### King Noish...
Posted by Ryan Ramagosa, 10/16/03 6:19pm

Good to hear that they're giving you the MBNA treatment over there. We missed you and offered up a toast to you at Homecoming last weekend. Dan played your Xbox for three days straight. Keep the terrific stories coming. Ryan

## Site Announcement
Posted by Andy, 10/18/03 12:30pm

Thursday was a big day for all of us stagiares: site announcements. Leading up to site announcements, we were interviewed a couple of times by the APCD, who is the director of the SED (small enterprise development) program here in Burkina. Since the SED program is new here, all of the sites (there are 15) are new. The APCD seemed to work really hard to get us all in sites that matched with our preferences.

In general there are 3 different sorts of "jobs" for SED volunteers here: eco-tourism,

microcredit/finance, and artisan/agribusiness (agribusiness consists of things like shea butter processing, honey production, etc.). All of them are interesting to me, and when a list of job descriptions was given to us, there weren't really any that I thought that I wouldn't enjoy doing. However, the artisan subsector is most interesting to me, so that is what I requested for the most part.

As far as regional preference, I was also relatively open. As I've studied Islam a lot and have a big interest in the religion, I said that I would be interested in being in a Muslim area, which in general is the northern part of the country.

As it turns out, I've been put in a site that fits very well with these preferences. I'll be living the next two years in Djibo, a small town and regional capital in the northern province of Soum. My host there is a group of artisans who make a variety of crafts, though I'm not exactly sure what sorts of things they make at this point.

As far as I know, Djibo is made up primarily of Peuls, who are mostly Muslim and traditionally nomadic animal herders. Thus, as many tell me, there is lots of fresh milk up there (most of the milk here is condensed or powdered). A bunch of Burkinabe have said to me that I'll be able to get lots of yogurt - as you may or may not know, yogurt, for me, is one of the most vile substances on earth. But ca va aller. And the local language is Fufulde, which I think I'll start learning in a couple of weeks.

Djibo is in the Sahel, which is the strip of dry land just south of the Sahara. It is not desert per se, but, from what I here, there is lots of sand, lots of camels, and not much rain. In the hot, dry season, the temperatures can get up to 115 or 120, I think. Should be interesting.

Overall, I am very happy with my site assignment. In two weeks I'll be going up there to spend a week checking out the town and talking with my counterparts, so I should have a lot more information then.

Take care everyone!

Peace
Andy

## Comments

### Yogurt & Camels
Posted by Mom, 10/18/03 9:47am

Sorry about the yogurt, Andrew--Greg and I share your pain (Liza is the yogurt-lovin traitor in our family) but I guess you'll get over it--ca va aller. At least it isn't cottage cheese. I'm very happy about your site assignment--it meets your interests in many ways. We lift our cold orange Fantas in a toast to you!Love, jo mama

### A little about Djibo
Posted by Greg, 10/18/03 11:57am

I did a bit of quick searching on Djibo - I couldn't find much, but I did learn that the population is around 23,000 (2002) and that there is an airport in the town (code XDJ). Oh yeah, and it's the cottage cheese capital of the world - good luck with that one Andrew. Greg

### opps.
Posted by Liza, 10/18/03 5:30pm

Glad to hear that you are happy with your site assignment--sounds great except for the 120 degree weather and all the yogurt. I sent you a letter, but forgot to enclose the last page. Luckily, it only had a few words on it: "luck and happiness in this endeavor. Love, Liza."..sorry about that..anyway, great to hear from you again.

### yogurt
Posted by cheech, 10/20/03 6:37pm

my favorite yogurt is the fruit on the bottom breyer's strawberry. cherry's tasty as well and so is strawberry-banana. i've tried other brands, but they just don't taste as natural. i'm sure breyer's will pale in comparison, however, to all that real natural yogurt you'll be able to get your hands and mouth on in djibo. btw, how do you pronounce that? oh and i forgot to mention last time that fanta (if available) will become an integral and essential foundation to your nutritional pyramid. orange is my ultimate favorite, although i tried the green and red. the yellow (pineapple) is pretty good. but probably not as good as that yogurt will be!! peace and much luv...

### contact info my foot
Posted by celestial, 10/23/03 2:10pm

That link (for contact info) don't work --- so what is your Peace Corps USPS address (37cent stamp variety)? Stay cool.

## 2 live chickens
Posted by Andy, 10/26/03 11:20am

Greetings again from the land of the upright and honest people!

First, to answer a couple of queries:

1)Most of the other stagiares are young (between 22 and 25) and recently out of college. There is a married couple in their 30s and a woman in her 30s as well. But there hasn't been any age segregation amongst us at all. Racially, I think of 23, 18 are white, 4 african american, 1 korean american, one mexican american.

2)Djibo is pronounce JEE-bo.

3)I checked the contact page and it seems to be working...maybe it was down momentarily. Peace Corps no longer has USPS addresses for volunteers. I think a letter to BF is about 80 cents.

4)Sending packages is not overly difficult, and I am certainly happy to receive books and goodies. Based on what other volunteers have said, packages almost always come through. The cost might be high - not sure what it costs per pound.

Now, onto the two live chickens...

About 1 week into stage, the stagiares split up into small groups to go spend a night with a volunteer in village, to get a clearer picture of village life. I went to a small village a few hours west of the training site. Upon arriving at the site, we were greeted by the volunteer, who is a math and english teacher at the local high school (where she is one of two teachers). After we saw her house she took us to her school (which was not in session yet). We met the director and saw the classrooms (which were really shoddy). We then continued on and walked through the village, saluering the important people in town, such as the nurse, the police chief, and the prefet - sort of like the mayor. Actually, the prefet wasn't in, unfortunately - the village has a new prefet who is a woman, which is really rare. I was dissapointed that we didn't get the chance to meet her. It was a market day, so we strolled around the market, which was bursting with energy. Markets consist of a bunch rows of outdoor stalls, with people selling fruits, vegetables, meats, shoes, toiletries, etc. Bargaining is essential.

After that we returned to the volunteer's house. Kindly her neighbor cooked us all dinner (there were 8 of us). Riz sauce. Rice with sauce. Yum. But just before we were about to eat, a group of men came to the courtyard. It was 5 members of the parent-eleves association (equivalent of PTA). They had kindly come to saluer us. So, we all shook their hands and thanked them for coming to greet us. But, they weren't finished. They had a gift for us. So, one of the men, I think the head of the group, pulled from behind his back a small bundle. And yup, you guessed it, it was 2 live chickens.

Now, this is really a generous gift in a country that is as poor as Burkina and where people are generally lacking in protein. Again, the generosity and respect shown to foreigners really astounds me here. And, also the fact that the PTA gave us 2 live chickens is quite amusing to me.

This is something that happens to volunteers relatively frequently, I think - not always from the PTA, but from a number of different sources. It's impossible to escape the irony that we, the volunteers from the "developed" world, are so often showered with gifts from Burkinabe. It is hard to come to terms with, and there is a sort of impulse to shower gifts back. However, to do so would reinforce the "cadeau" (gift) mentality that much development has brought. Often, development projects dump tons of money into big projects that aren't necessarily sustainable. Wells are built that then break down with no one to fix them; railroads are built and not maintained. Thus, in a sense, people come to expect these sorts of gifts from foreigners. If the "gifts" were sustainable and really led to development, it might not be a problem, but since often they are not, truly local development (based on local solutions) does not follow. Just my thoughts, though...if anyone disagrees, I would be happy to hear his/her opinion.

In other news, I am just ending my second bout with the demons that for some reason really enjoy living in my stomach. I must have some good stuff in there that they like to munch on. But not to worry, all is clearing up now that I have the magical antibiotics again.

Hope everyone is well!

Peace,
Andy

## Comments

### I hate to ask, but
Posted by Amanda M., 10/26/03 7:55am

I assume the chickens became the meat in your rice! Kind of the opposite of my favorite "Stone Soup" story, in which the (European) soldiers have to trick the villagers into adding real food to their water & rocks. The culture of hospitality to strangers seems to dominate so many human cultures, most often those with harsh climates. I think we forget that in our comfortable individualistic, modern world where we often take more pride in our own independence than we do in showing respect to other by letting someone help us. In many ways, symbolic and real, gift exchange is what makes the world go round. You make good points about sustainable "aid;" there was a NYT article about a foundation (established by the guy who started E-bay) to support micro-economic development and it featured a group that was making & selling cheap, simple foot pumps for irrigation in Africa. If Burkina Faso has the problems with cooking fuel other places do, then the solar stoves are also simple technology that is self-sustaining and doesn't need repair. Even though you will be working to support crafts people market their goods, the less time they have to spend on subsistence living needs the more they have for manufacturing. If resources like stoves and pumps would be of use in your village, I'd be happy to find sources and help raise some money for development. Let me know. I don't know what Burkinabe natural remedies there might be for stomach bugs, but if you can find some ginger root, it's a natural antibiotic, as is cayenne pepper, if you can stand it in your riz sauce. I can't thank you enough for sharing your experience with us, Andrew. Feel better & enjoy! Mandy

### Generosity & Stomach Microbes
Posted by Margaret, 10/26/03 7:55am

Andrew, Love your communications. What did you do with the live chickens? New pets of yours? A warm day in New England with the maple leaves hanging on. Contrasts pervail. Yesterday was below freezing and two days before there was a dusting of snow. That's New England for you. Always something to complain about. We're thinking of you here. Look forward to the Further Adventures of Andrew! Our best, Margaret, Peter, Alex and Sam

### No Subject
Posted by Mom, 10/26/03 8:44am

Always exciting to get an update. I have sent two big padded envelopes (I'm hoping you got the first one, Andrew)filled with magazines--In case anyone else plans to do the same, know that I send Rolling Stone, The New Yorker, The Sunday Times News of the Week in Review, and soon The New York Review of Books--so I've got those covered. And I've included treats. My padded envelopes are 14 x 19" (to accomodate Rolling Stone) and they cost $20 airmail to send. With your blessing, Andrew, I'm going to contact a man who sells African art in New Haven. All day long, I wonder what Andy Burkina is up to! Your website postings paint a vivid picture. I so look forward to visiting Burkina Faso. Sorry about your tummy. Love, Mom

### Great to Hear from You
Posted by Dad, 10/26/03 9:12am

It was wonderful to hear from you again. I look forward to your emails. I hope you have equally good internet access once you are in Djibo. I very much agree with your observation about development. Maintainence is critical to both physical development and human relations. The challenge will be to see how you can successfully apply the observation to your work in Burkina. Love, Dad

### No Subject
Posted by cheech, 10/27/03 8:09pm

have you gotten the chance to eat any yogurt yet? btw, you probably already know, but the yankees lost in the world series to the marlins. we lost to fish.

### 2 live chickens and a microphone
Posted by Greg, 10/28/03 11:10am

where it's at, you got two live chickens and a microphone. sounds like a party over there. i'm going to send you some music soon so that you can have some new tracks to spin at your chicken parties...

### chickens
Posted by mels, 10/30/03 8:16pm

Great to hear from you! I hope my letter made it to you by now. Speaking of uses for animals, while in Kenya, a Masai man in a village tried to give my trip leader 14 cows so he could marry a friend of mine. Anything like that going on in Burkina? Happy Halloween! mmmm....antibiotics

## Mid morning liver, fasting, and a sac o' rice
Posted by Andy, 11/9/03 10:07am

Djame wali! (that means good morning in Fulfulde)

I am just back from my one week visit to Djibo. It was an interesting week, a bit stressful at times, but a nice break from the regimented schedule of stage.

I traveled to Djibo with my Burkinabe counterpart, Abdoulaye Adama, who had been in Kaya, along with all of the other counterparts, for our "counterpart workshop." The trip from Kaya was fairly long. As the crow flies, from Kaya to Djibo it's a little under 200 kilometers. However, because roads in BF are in generally in a very bad state, we had to take a rather roundabout route. Thus instead of travelling 200 kilometers, we travelled about 400 kilometers. First we took a bus from Kaya to Ouaga, about 2 hours on a paved road. Then a bus from Ouaga to Ouahigouya, the third biggest city in BF, northwest of Ouaga. This was about 3 hours on a paved road. After waiting in Ouahigouya for about 3 more hours, we took a 3 hour busride from Ouahigouya to Djibo, unpaved and a bit bumpy, though not terrible. We got in at around 9 pm on saturday night.

After getting in to Djibo and after a quick bite to eat, we went to my house, which was literally built last week. I share a courtyard with 4 other people. There are 2 other houses in the courtyard. One is occupied by a young family - the husband is a plumber, the wife is a primary school teacher, and they have a 2 year old son. They're both super nice and were very welcoming to me during the last week, providing me with food, water, and general help all week. And the wife, Mariama, unlike many Burkinabe women I have met, is not shy about talking to me. I am really glad that they are only a small

family. Living with a large family could be very frustrating, and would mean little privacy. The other house is occupied by a 30 or 40 something year old man who works as a day guard at the local tax office. I did not interact much with him, and he seems a bit more reserved, so I don't yet have a good sense of him.

I am very happy with my house itself. It consists of 2 modest though certainly adequate sized rooms. One will be a bedroom, one a kitchen/living room. Somehow, unlike my room here in Kaya, my house in Djibo seems to stay relatively cool. Not sure why, but I am grateful for it. In front of my house I have a big hangar - a simple wood frame with a thatch covering. It provides much needed shade, as there are no trees in my courtyard. I spent countless hours during the week sitting under the hangar and chatting with neighbors and other locals.

About half of the activities of the week were various protocol steps. I went to saluer the Haut Commissaire (sort of like a governor - he actually wasn't there, though), the Prefet (next in line after the HC), the mayor, and the traditional chief (wasn't in town either, though). I spent a lot of time also with the President of the Association of Artisans. A very nice and welcoming man, he had me over for dinner once, and gave me a pair of leather sandals as a gift. Also, I had a meeting with about 20 or 30 people from the association. This was a bit stressful. At the meeting, I explained what the Peace Corps is, what my basic role is, etc. I emphasized that I am not a financier - some people, I think, still have the idea that I come with money. They have reason to think this, since, as I have said before, most development comes in the form of a cadeau.

One of the problems in describing my role is that, as of yet, my role is not clearly defined. I have been assigned this association to work with, but there is no clearly defined job description for me. It will be up to me and the association to determine exactly what I am going to do with them. I will likely be involved with helping them arrange further trainings for their various trades, helping them to construct an office, and maybe helping them with basic business skills. But these are all sort of vague things. The first 3 or 6 months will really be used for figuring out what the heck I'm going to do. Though I look forward to this challenge, I worry that I won't be able to do anything worthwhile for them. I think this is a pretty standard fear at this time, though. All I can do is say ca va aller and keep moving forward.

Since Djibo is a pretty big town, it has a large marche. And because there is lots of animal husbandry in the north of BF, on every wednesday, which is the Djibo market day, in addition to the central marche, there is a marche de betail - basically a livestock market. I went with my counterpart to check it out. It was a pretty crazy site. Hundreds and hundreds of cattle, sheep, goats, and 30 or so camels. Lots of poop too.

The central market itself is well stocked, and I will have a good supply of fresh vegetables and other basic stocks. This is a big sigh of relief for me, since, as you may or may not know, I very much enjoy cooking; in fact, Cook is my middle name. Though Djibo is fairly big, about 2/3 the size of Kaya, it seems a lot smaller than Kaya, due to there being no paved roads and a lot fewer motos. Motos in Kaya kick up a lot of dust and make a fair amount of noise. This didn't seem to be the case in Djibo, grace a Dieu.

As I have mentioned before, the dominant ethnic group in Djibo is Peul. Peul's are in general Muslim, and in Djibo they seem to be very observant. And because it is currently Ramadan, the majority of people that I came across, including my counterpart and the people I live with, were fasting throughout

the day. I can't imagine fasting (which includes no water) in 100 degree weather. Also, the men would go to the mosque every night at sundown to pray together after breaking their fast. Very interesting for me.

Fasting, however, did not get in the way of Burkinabe generosity. Despite the fact that he was fasting, Hamadou (the plumber who I live with), and his wife, would prepare me food for lunch every day. I felt bad eating in front of them and drinking water in front of them, but they insisted that it wasn't a problem.

During the week, I developed a taste for something that I would have previously dismissed without thinking. No, it's not yogurt. I haven't stooped that low. It's liver. More specifically, sheep or goat liver. Around 11 every morning, Hamadou would prepare me a plate of liver with a bit of fried onion. The first time it was offered to me my stomach turned at the thought. But, to be polite, I took a bite. And then another. And I was pleasantly surprised by the taste. Liver has certain advantages over other meat I've been served here. They are as follows. 1)It is not attached to bones or other hard pieces that can lodge in your throat and threaten to chip your teeth. 2)It is easily identifiable. With most meat that I am served here, I am not really sure what part of the animal it comes from. 3)It is not super super fatty. 4)It is a good source of protein. 5)It is not tough as leather. So there you have it: I'm a liver lover. I hope I have not offended the contingent of vegetarian readers.

Because Hamadou and Mariama provided me with so much during the week, and because they had no doubt spent a small sum of money feeding me for a week, I wanted to do something to thank them. I didn't want to give them money to contribute for the food. This would be seen as rude, I think, and it would also set a sort of business tone to our relationship. So, instead, at the end of the week, I bought them a sac of rice. My counterpart said that this would be an appropriate and nice gesture. Hama (Hamadou's nickname), was very grateful for the sac of rice.

So, to conclude this rather scattered entry, it was a good week in Djibo. I am really happy about my site, and despite my worries about my work there, I am looking forward to the end of stage (swear in is a little over a month away, Dec. 12) and the beginning of my 2 years.

Take care all, and keep in touch.

Peace,
Andy

## Comments

### rice for liver

Posted by David Chambers, 11/9/03 5:24am

Andy, Finally got time to catch up on your news and glad to hear about your adventures. One piece of advice, if I may: if your neighbors are feeding you so often, you do need to find something regular to contribute. If money is inappropriate, you should find something of equal or greater worth to the meals and put that into their kitty, food and/or otherwise. Rice sounds a lot cheaper than liver to me, so you want to ask around at embassies if Peace Corps colleagues are unavaible or unable to advise – too cheap (or expensive) a gift can do as much or more than

no reciprocation at all. Now you're getting into the fine-tuning of cultural exchange: local knowledge of prices, of daily living, of "politeness" and "kindness" in local terms – wonderful stuff. BTW, 57th annual conference went very well, with audio and text transcripts available on the new website at: http://www.mideasti.org/programs/programs_conference_transcript.html. Best - David

### liver and onions

Posted by Connie Brown, 11/9/03 6:58am

Liver sounds good. I don't eat the stuff myself but your reasons (esp. the first one--bones lodging in your throat--I had certain fears about your going so far away, but choking on a meat bone wasn't one of 'em) are compelling. I understand your anxiety about your upcoming role; I'm glad you're compelled to listen and learn for a spell before you act. You are called upon to be sensitive & discerning & resourceful all the time--in understanding and honoring people from a different (and wonderful, it sounds like) culture, in figuring out how to be helpful to people who are so generous to you...I know you're up to the challenge. Keep up your strength! Eat that liver! I'm bracing myself for the news that you're eating yogurt...it's only a matter of time. Love, Mom

### Not a Straight Road

Posted by Margaret, 11/10/03 7:48am

Andrew, If it's any comfort a lot of us supposed 'grown ups' don't know what were're supposed to be doing either. With sensitivities and creativity I'm sure all will knit together nicely. Even if it doesn't that's part of the adventure. Speaking of adventure - liver! Unless I had a stack of bacon and a mountain of onions, liver might have been my Mt. Everest. We're all looking forward to being in Durham for Thanksgiving. We might even occupy the Pony Room. Alex is knee deep in writing proposals for post docs for next year and Sam is mind mapping in varous ways. We're just back from meetings in DC. A bit on the cold side with the pansies shaking at their stems. Saw the Wright Brothers Exhibit at Air & Space, a modernist exhibit at the Phillips Gallery and a Picasso special at the East Wing. DC was glistening. The eclipse of the moon with the capitol in the background was quite something. So terrific to her about your time. Best form us all. Margaret, Peter, Alex & Sam

### Love o' Liver

Posted by Alissa, 11/10/03 11:17am

Glad my love for liver is finally catching on. Liver is the new Filet Mignon. Loving all the updates and I'm really proud of you, Alissa

### Liver

Posted by Dad, 11/11/03 10:13am

Glad to see you're getting closer to your father's gastronomic roots! The next step in your evolution is likely beef hearts! Love, Dad

## Happy Thanksgiving

Posted by Andy, 11/23/03 11:10am

A quick update:

Stage continues to wind down - we've only got a little more than 2 weeks left. Classes continue: language (both French and Fulfulde), technical training, and cultural training. Yesterday we went on a cultural sortie to a museum a bit outside of Ouaga. It was actually really interesting. We saw a bunch of masks, traditional objects, clothing, and houses. The trip also included a 2 hour stop in Ouaga for lunch. I ate at the cafe that is part of the rec center of the American embassy. I had a bacon cheeseburger with onions. It was amazing. First American food I've had since I've been here. It's funny, when I left I didn't think that it was basic food, like hamburgers, pizza, that I would miss. And I don't really actively crave American food, but just having a little variety is nice.

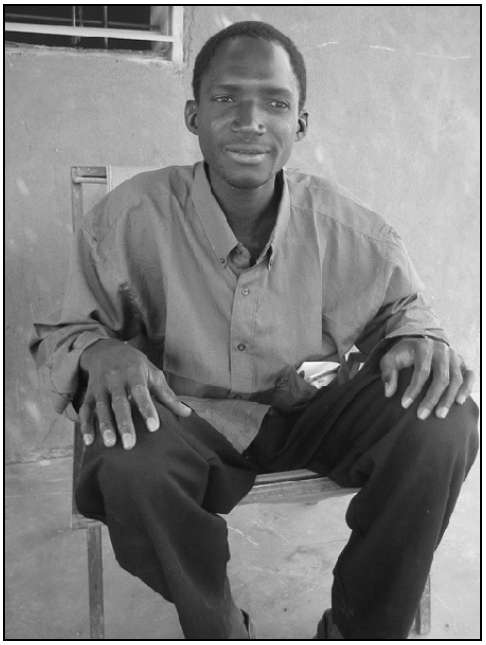
This coming week should be pretty action packed. Tuesday (or Wednesday, depending upon when the moon is first visible) is the end of Ramadan, and with that comes a big fete. We have the day off for the fete, and since my host family is Muslim, there should be a lot of partying going on. Lots of food, lots of dancing, as far as I know. And then, as you all know, Thursday is Thanksgiving. Every year for Thanksgiving the US Ambassador to BF hosts a Thanksgiving dinner at his residence in Oauga for the American community, which includes PCVs. It'll be a good chance to meet a bunch of volunteers who I haven't met yet, and also to meet the rest of the American community.

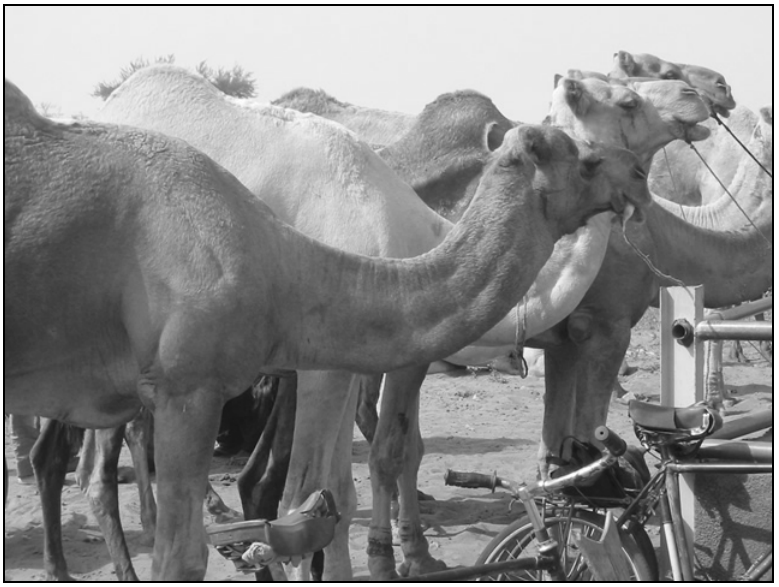
And I've finally got some pictures for your viewing pleasure. I took 8 of the pictures and the rest were taken by fellow stagiares. They are, from the top down: (1)my counterpart in Djibo (2)a guy biking wearing a traditional peul hat in Djibo (3)a singing/dancing troupe that greeted us on our arrival in Kaya (4)a guy on a moto transporting tons of chickens (5)some camels at the animal marche in Djibo (6)a typical BF marche (7)another shot of the animal marche in Djibo (8)my host family's courtyard in Kaya during a rainstorm (9)downtown Kaya with a Peace Corps van in the foreground (10)(11)(12)landscapes of BF (13)(14)self portraits.

Peace,

Andy

## Photos



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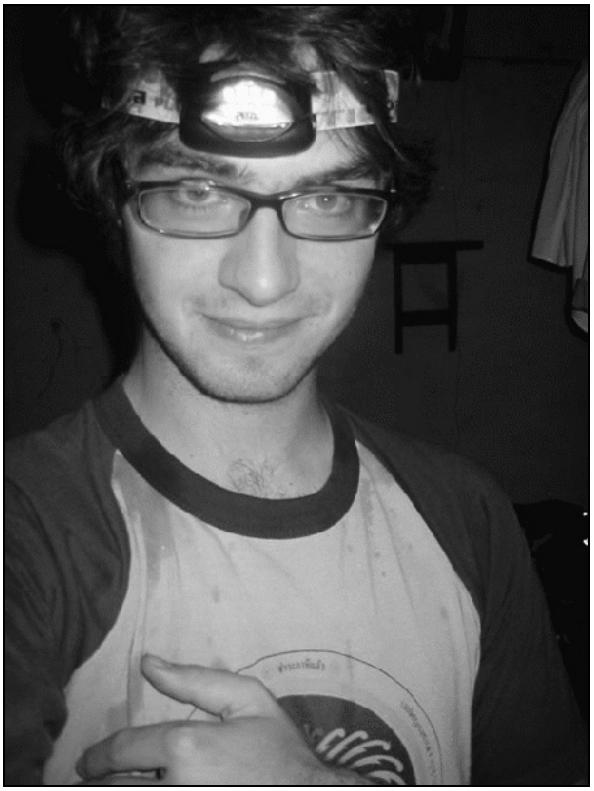


## Comments

### Great photos!
Posted by Amanda Mecke, 11/23/03 6:48am

Andy, Happy end of Ramadan! I know from Moslem friend at work that you will have a really great time celebrating, and its a good omen for your graduation from stage. I think its even more exciting to see the photos after having read your descriptions of life in BF! Abdoulaye looks like the friendliest kind of counterpart you could have in Djibo. And I think I'd buy a BF hat for gardening as a nice change from CT WASP, White Flower Farm garb. Maybe your collective can add the hats as a cheap premium to introduce their crafts to America. Funny how head gear can differ so distinctivly from culture to culture -- it's so often ecclectic, practical, and steeped in obscure traditions all at the same time! I suppose it has to do with making us more recognizable at a distance by our profile when different groups meet each other. Now to the important questions: will you have electricity to run your lap top in Djibo? How often will you have e-mail? Would you like some art or business books to help you gather ideas for your collective? Can you search Amazon.com before you leave the city and set up a wish list we could fill, or post a list? Thanks again for sharing your life in Burkina Faso. Our families will drink to your health on Thanksgiving (we're having 20!). Enjoy Turkey Day at the Ambassador's! Love, Mandy (& Mary Ann, of course, whose at a cousin's wedding in Louiville, KY -- at the Kentucky Derby museum, no less! Now there's a contrast to live in BF!)

### Cheeseburgers in ....
Posted by Diane Quandt, 11/23/03 7:07am

Hi Andy, Djame wali from Chappaqua!I just had the chance to catch up on your postings, and am so pleased to read about your adventures over there. The next few months (ha- the next 2 years!) will present many challenges. I'm sure that your work with the association will define itself with time and effort, and you will make it a meaningful experience for all. Your photos are great and I love reading about your experiences. Keep that great head of hair! Have you seen photos of Mark lately? We seem to be attracting AFrican students at the college where I teach, and this fall I've worked with one young woman from Zimbabwe and another from Tanzania. They were both so shocked when I told them that I'd recently traveled to that part of the world. Life in Chappaqua is about the same. More adolescent misbehavior from Greeley kids making the news. Everyone is getting ready for Thanksgiving, and we'll looking forward to having Gillie home for a few days. She's lately expressed some interest in eating the traditional turkey, so without Mark home, I'm not needing to serve ToFurky, that yummy turkey shaped, tofu mound. I hope you and the other PCVs enjoy your Thanksgiving together at the Embassy. I'll be thinking of you as you begin your new life at Djibo. Now, I'm running to the find the atlas to figure out where that is. Fondly, Diane Q.

### Ralph Burkina
Posted by Connie Brown, 11/23/03 9:48am

Obviously, I scrutinized yr self-portraits first--I'm a mom, n'est pas? And to my relief you look just like yourself, a little thinner and kinda crazy in the hair department, but still my very own Andy Burkina. (I'm changing my last name to Burkina, by the way, as a gesture of solidarity. I'm working on the rest of the family--so far, Ralph's the only one who's game.) Next, the camels--I didn't know there were so many SHADES of camel. Next time I see "light camel" in the J Crew catalog, I'll know it's authentic. All the photos give us a sense of your colorful and interesting surroundings. Are you feeling a little nostalgic about leaving your family in Kaya? I hope you photograph them before you leave. Enjoy all the celebrations this week. We're all greatly looking forward to talking to you on Thanksgiving. Love, Mom

### Happy Thanksgiving!

Posted by Janet Neustaetter, 11/23/03 12:02pm

Your descriptions are wonderful to read, but as they say, a picture is worth a thousand words! They were wonderful to see. I second Mandy's suggestion that you post a wish list of offerings from Amazon if you can. Enjoy the Ambassador's feast. Pretty cool! Not too many people get to celebrate Thanksgiving that way. And on top of a Ramadan fete! Take care. Continue to have a great experience. Love, Janet, Bill, Sarah and Steven

## Lovin' the photos!

Posted by Jeff Woulfin, 11/23/03 7:17pm

Hey Andy, I really appreciate the photos. As you know, I never learned to read, so the pictures were a really big help. It sounds like your having quite an amazing experience. I've really enjoyed your posts. It helps me feel like I, too, am in BF with you, except it's cooler and I can gorge myself on burgers. Thanks for taking the time to do this, and, of course, thanks to Greg for his very nice andyburkina.com site design. I hope you have a great Thanksgiving. I look forward to having your descriptions of the dinner at the ambassador's pad read to me by my amazing talking helper monkey. Thankfully, he has learned to read and write, and is currently typing this message with aplomb. Aplomb is the monkey's word. I wanted to say "good-working monkey fingers." Counting the days 'til your return, Jeff

## Gobbling

Posted by Margaret, 11/24/03 8:31pm

Andy, Great update. We'll miss you in Durham but know that you'll be enjoying all sorts of local delicacies. Tired of liver yet?! Best and thanks for the snapshots on life in a real place. The Moulton Gang

## Greek yogurt

Posted by Dina Cuomo, 11/26/03 10:00am

I spoke to your Grandma yesterday and she gave me your web address.It was fascinating to read all of your entries as well as everyone's comments. The pictures are great and since I have not seen you since your mother's wedding,the self portraits provided a picture of the now fully grown up Andrew. Can't help it that I still have those baby images of you in my head. I especially enjoyed reading about the kindness of the people in BF. Somehow it seems like those with the least give us the most. Speaking of gifts,what did you do with those chickens? Before I say au revoir, I want you to know that you haven't really lived until you have tasted Greek yogurt with meli.(honey)Someday when you have the chance to taste this unbelievably delicious treat ,you too will become a yogurt lover. Have an awesome Thanksgiving with the ambassador and send more pictures when you can.

## Happy Thanksgiving...

Posted by Greg, 11/26/03 11:25am

Nice to see these pictures. As suspected I think I may have spotted some yogurt on your chin in one of the self portraits. How quickly your convictions melt away in the blistering heat. I sent you a package two weeks ago today with 41 albums - so hopefully you'll get that soon so you can enjoy some new tunes on your trip up to Djibo. Hope you have a great Thanksgiving! Love, Greg

# Ramadan, Thanksgiving, and a Grand Boubou

Posted by Andy, 12/1/03 5:45pm

Ramadan

This last Tuesday was the last day of Ramadan, and thus it was the day of the big fête. Because Ramadan is a month of fasting (no food or water sun-up to sun-down – something that can't be easy in 100 degree weather), the emphasis of the fête is eating.

We were given the day off so that we could participate in the fête, and luckily my host family is Muslim, so I was able to see a lot. In the morning, most of the Muslims gathered in a big field on the edge of town to prayer. Bill Gate is not very religious, so he did not go to the prayer, and thus I did not go. I would have liked to have seen it, though. I'm sure I'll have plenty of chance to see prayer once I'm in Djibo, though. After the big prayer, everyone returned home to prepare for the rest of the day.

On Ramadan, most families here seem to eat chicken, which in general I haven't eaten much here. However, I am always happy for the opportunity to eat chicken here – it's less of a gamble than other types of meat. [Incidentally, chicken here is quite a bit different here, I think to a lack of hormones and genetic modification. There is a lot less meat (though that could just be because there isn't much food for the chickens) on the bones, and the meat is a little tougher, though it seems to have more of a flavor than chicken I've eaten in the US.] However, before cooking the chicken, you've got to kill it – no supermarkets with pre-packaged sliced chicken breasts. So, I witnessed my first chicken killing (three chickens, actually). I won't go into the details, though (if you want the details you can email me and I'll be happy to provide them). After the chickens were killed, the plucking commenced, and I am proud to say that I successfully plucked my first chicken – and don't worry, I've got pictures. Plucking a chicken was easier than I expected and kind of fun, I thought.

After this, the women in the courtyard went ahead preparing the meal. There are about 5 or 6 women in my courtyard – Ami, the first wife of the head of the family is definitely the boss of the courtyard. The head of the family himself is currently working in Cote d'Ivoire. Ami, along with the head of the family's second wife, Abib, and the rest of the wives, busily cleaned the courtyard, the best clothes and cooked the food while Bill Gate and I went around town to greet people and wish them a good fete – ne y taabo (sort of like happy holiday in Moore). Going around and greeting people and paying respects is a big thing in general here, but during a fete that is multiplied. And as hospitality is paramount here, friends are invited over to eat during the fete.

So, I went, with Bill Gate, to his (and now my) good friend Marius' house. Marius lives with his older brother, Souleyman, who is a teacher at the local high school, and thus is relatively well off compared to the rest of the population here. I ate my first meal there, and because I am a white stranger, I was given a place at the table. First I was given a big salad, which was great, as greens and lettuce are not so easy to find here. After that I had a mound of couscous with a good but super oily sauce, along with chicken.

After eating there we walked around a bit more, but I could barely move due to all of the food I had eaten. In addition, I had a very painful stomach ache – I may have been battling a case of giardia,

though I'm not sure – giardia is good at hiding itself. We returned to my host family's house, where I ate my second meal – this time riz gras with chicken. Riz gras is rice with the sauce sort of cooked into it, usually with vegetables and meat. It's one of my favorite dishes, and it was really good.

At this point, everyone was getting dressed in their finest clothes. And when Burkinabe dress up, they really like to dress up. Often people will get things made at the tailor weeks in advance for a big fete (more on this later). For Ramadan, the kids walk around in the afternoon, dressed in their finest, and greet all of the adults in the neighborhood. They walk around with purses and are given little bits of money by the adults.

Unfortunately, after I ate for the second time, my stomach was really hurting, so I was sort of knocked out of commission and missed the night time festivities, which consisted of more eating, dancing, and for many, drinking (most Muslims here don't seem to strictly follow Islamic prohibitions such as not drinking – however, the Muslims I came across in Djibo seemed to be a bit more devout in that respect). However, despite this it was a really interesting and good day. And the next day I was feeling much better.

Thanksgiving

As I said in my last past, recently a tradition has started whereby the American community of Burkina Faso gathers at the Ambassador's residence on Thanksgiving for a pot-luck dinner. The American community is relatively small here – I think about 400 people, including the 100 or so volunteers.

Because it is a pot-luck dinner, we left Kaya early in the morning for Ouaga to prepare for the feast. After stopping off at the new Peace Corps Bureau (which is a nice 4 story building containing offices, the infirmary, and the resource center – all air conditioned) we went to Marina Market, the western style supermarket in Ouagadougou. I was really impressed by the market – lots of candy and junk food, real cheese (the only cheese you can get in most places here is Vache qui rit – laughing cow – which is yucky to me), lots of spices, canned food, pots, pans, etc. Everything a boy could dream of. Well maybe not everything, but a good bit.

We split up in groups to cook things for the dinner, and we were able to use the houses of some of the Peace Corps staff in Ouaga to prepare. I made a veggie shepard's pie with my group. Other's made mac 'n cheese, spinach dip, and various other things. Then we got prettied up – I sported my seersucker (sp?) pants.

The ambassador's residence was really nice. Big house and lots of grass and green plants, something you don't see much in this climate. It was odd seeing so many Americans after having gone 2 months seeing mostly Burkinabe day in and day out. This was also my opportunity to glimpse for the first time most of the volunteers in the country. Burkina Faso has about 100 volunteers now, and throughout stage I've come across about 20 or 30. It was pretty evident who the volunteers were – anyone young, semi-dirty, and salivating in anticipation of the food.

And the food, when it came, was incredible. I may have eaten more than I've ever eaten in my life. Turkey, stuffing, gravy, mac 'n cheese, shepard's pie (got the last piece), green beans, cauliflower, as well as pumpkin pie, apple pie, apple crisp, and a chocolate cookie. And this time my stomach critters

didn't hold me up.

Unfortunately we had to get back to Kaya after being there only a couple of hours, so we couldn't really hang out with the rest of the volunteers, but I'll have time to do that later. And I was too full to really do anything at that point.

Grand Boubou

As I mentioned above, Burkinabe often have clothes tailored for big events. December 12th is swear-in at the Embassy – this is something of a big event for us. Often volunteers where Burkina style clothing for this event. So, last week I went to the tissue shop and the tailor to get a boubou made. A boubou is traditional West African clothing – it's basically a long robe with a long sort of v-neck and matching pants underneath the robe. There are a couple of pictures of men wearing boubous in the last post.

There is a special kind of woven fabric that is used for making good boubous. It's called "tissu basin." I bought a few meters of light blue tissu basin for my boubou – 7,000 FCFA (about 14 dollars, which is a heck of a lot here). I then went to the tailor with another stagiare and talked to him about boubous. He showed me a couple of examples and I picked one that I liked. The boubous made of tissu basin usually have intricate embroidery on them, so I picked out a design for the collar embroidery and along with the tailor made up a design for embroidery on the pocket. He then took my measurements and told me to come back 4 days later. The price was 8,000 FCFA, which is a lot here, but it's a good price for a boubou.

Yesterday I went to the tailor to pick it up. It turned out really good, and the embroidery is really beautiful. After I ate dinner I tried it on for Bill Gate and co., and he said "oh, c'est tres cool" – he was impressed with it and said that it was really nice. Then I modeled it for the rest of the family and they all clapped when they saw me. And not only is it nice looking, but it's really comfortable. It's like wearing a big pair of pajamas.

Methinks I'm going to get a few more boubous in the next couple of years…

Peace,
Andy

## Comments

### Methinks m'boy is a beau brummel
Posted by Connie, 12/1/03 12:33pm

Oh how I wish I could see you all pretty-like in your powder blue boubou! Make sure someone takes your picture at the swearing-in ceremony--full body shot, head to toe. Love, Mom

### Boubou
Posted by Timothy Vernon, 12/1/03 12:42pm

Pierre gave me a boubou several years ago in Aix--I never quite thought it appropriate for NYC or those oh so chic Westchester parties that I don't attend anyway, but perhaps I shall have to take it out for a visit to BF! Glad all the food was so successful!! As a kid, I had to help pluck a chicken several times--I'm actually glad to have butcher shops to do it these days.

### turkey livers
Posted by Alissa, 12/1/03 4:27pm

With your new love for liver, I'm surprised you didn't have Turkey livers as a thanksgiving treat! Happy holidays and jealous of what sounds like a very stylin' boubou. Liss

### boubou schmoubou
Posted by cheech, 12/1/03 8:48pm

i bet those pants can't rock the pants i got in thailand sucka!!

### Happy Holidays:)
Posted by Burcu, 12/1/03 9:56pm

Hey Andy, It sounds like you had another unforgetable memory. Actually, I have to admit that we celebrate the Ramadan fete little different in Turkey(the country:))but the general idea is almost the same...I love your website..miss you! Burcu

## Last day of stage
Posted by Andy, 12/11/03 5:45pm

Well, today is officially my last day as a Peace Corps trainee - after tomorrow morning I'll be a real live Peace Corps Volunteer.

Yesterday we all left Kaya and our host families. It was, for me, a bittersweet departure. While I am definitely drained by 3 months of training, I have grown very close to Bill Gate, his family, and friends. Though I will definitely go back to visit, and Bill Gate will likely come to Djibo for a visit himself, the level of ease that existed for me with family there will most likely not return. Now I will just have to concentrate on forming those types of relationships in Djibo itself.

As my departure approached, I was presented with many more instances of Burkinabe generosity, this time in the form of going away presents. Last Sunday I pedalled 15k to the village where Sayouba (Bill Gate's older brother, who I've also gotton very close to) is the director of a primary school. It spent a nice day there, seeing his school, drinking tea, and just hanging out. The school is new and right now only has a CP1 class - sort of the equivalent of kindergarten. There are about 80 students in the class (this is normal - classes get up to 150 students at times). However, there is currently no building for the school. Thus, Sayouba teaches the class under a thatch roof hangar. There are also no desks or chairs; students sit on mud bricks and wood benches.

After eating a great lunch and drinking some tea, it was time for me to head back. Sayabou gave me a chicken as a gift - so, I can never say that I haven't pedalled 15k en brousse (in the bush) with a chicken hanging off of my handlebars.

Two days before I left, I was presented with a couple more gifts. From Bill Gate, a traditional Mossi shirt made out of a blue and white cotton fabric, and from Ami, the head wife and de facto boss of the courtyard, a really nice hand made leather briefcase. I in turn gave them each a book of postcards, one of New York City, one of the Connecticut shore. Both of them seemed to like the gifts.

So, now I'm in Ouaga, counting down the days to Djibo. I'll get there on Monday, and then work will start. As I've said before, the first three months of work will be a needs assessment, in which I'll interview community members to discover community needs before planning a project. I'm not exactly sure what the next few months will bring, but I look forwaqrd to it.

Peace
Andy

## Comments

### No Subject
Posted by cheech, 12/11/03 11:52am

best of luck! btw, i thought you'd like to know - andy pettite is now with the houston astros. george steinbrenner screwed up in a very very big way.

### Good lunk, Andy!
Posted by Sarah Lee, 12/11/03 12:30pm

Dear Andy, Congratulations on finishing your training! Good luck in your new role as a PC volunteer. You are doing great, and we are all rooting for you. Right now, I'm in CT. Nick and I have moved from MA and I am in the process of finding a job. We'll see how it goes. I'm always thinking of you! Love, Sarah

### lunk, as in luck.
Posted by Sarah Lee, 12/11/03 12:31pm

you know... lunk, luck, you know what i meant.

### i'm so proud
Posted by Kim, 12/11/03 12:58pm

as i shed a tear of pride and think about all the wonderful things that andy is doing in the world i am reminded of all the wonderful things that andy could be doing in the states, such as hanging out with us northern california folks and giving me a foot massage...but then i have to remind myself that the people in Africa deserve foot massages too...and thus i wish you the best of luck with all your foot massaging endeavors and whatever other projects you come up with...we are all very proud of you and speak of you often....conga-rats my darling! love Kim p.s. the big pink christmas party was just not the same without you....

## The wonderful world of email
Posted by mels, 12/11/03 1:26pm

I love opening my hotmail account and finding out there is another "Andy Burkina" update. Thanks for staying in touch with this side of the globe, and congratulations on completing your training!!!

## guess i better look for another present
Posted by Greg, 12/11/03 1:26pm

So you already got a live chicken? Guess I'll return the one I got for you and try to find you another Christmas present. It probably wouldn't have enjoyed the couple weeks packed up in a box anyway. So a preemptive congratulations to you, and wishes for a safe journey up to Djibo. And hopefully you'll figure out how you're going to spend the next two years of your life... Love, Greg

## Bye Bye Bill Gate
Posted by Connie, 12/11/03 1:46pm

The thing is, all of us (your reading public) are going to miss Bill Gate and his family. I am very grateful to them for taking such good care of you, and I hope you'll stay friends. I bet you will make close friends in Djibo, too. I wish I could materialize briefly in Ouaga for your ceremony, blue boubou and all. Instead, you'll be in my thoughts, as you always are. I'm very proud of you. Love, Mom

## Happy Graduation
Posted by Mandy, 12/11/03 3:47pm

Like your Mom, we are all grateful to Bill Gates and family for such wonderful Burkinabe hospitality. Maybe Greg should send them pictures of your US friends & family so he can know how much we thank them. Did you get to see any of the UN Volunteer Day per my goole alert below? Sounds like Bill Gates' kind of gig. And how will you internet to us from Djibo? NATIONAL Workshop organised in Burkina Faso for IVD World Volunteer (press release), World OUAGADOUGOU, 08 Dec 2003--On December 5th, for the International Volunteers Day 2003, the Club OUA - Burkina Faso organised a National Workshop

## Djibo or bust!
Posted by Timothy Vernon, 12/11/03 10:36pm

Congratulations on being a full fledged PC Volunteer--I know you'll be great!

## Congratulations
Posted by Janet Neustaetter, 12/12/03 11:05am

Congratulations on making it through training, and surviving the various stomach ordeals that you've been through. I'm sure you'll make more wonderful friends, and form great relationships in Djibo. As long as you're emotionally open to them -- as you obviously are -- they will come. And with alot longer time to spend there, I'm sure it will be even more fulfilling on every level. Good luck. We will wait with anticipation for your next report. Have a very happy holiday season. Will there be any observance of Christmas there? New Year's? Love, Janet, Bill, Sarah and Steven P.S. Do you wear the Mossi shirt with the boubou? We'd love to see pictures.

# Merry Christmas!

Posted by Andy, 12/24/03 4:15pm
Greetings from Burkina Faso!

I've now spent a full week in Djibo. It hasn't been the most action packed week of my life, but things are slowly coming together. It's really odd going from stage, which is basically three months of being told what to do, to going to site, where there is no schedule, no explicit work plan, and for me, no office or any actual "workplace." It's weird waking up in the morning and not really having any clue what you're going to do during the day, day after day. I've done a lot of reading (right now I'm reading *The Three Musketeers*), a lot of sitting at home, and a lot of thinking. It's not that I want to sit at home all the time – it's more the case that I just don't really know where to go. Because I still don't know a ton of people, and I don't really have a good sense of other people's daily routines, I worry that I will be bothering people by taking up their time. But each day this sort of nervousness crumbles a bit, and I'm feeling more and more settled.

Because sitting at home makes one a bit stir crazy, when I start feeling too penned in I force myself out into Djibo, usually towards the marché, with the goal of just trying to strike up conversations. So far it's been a relatively successful technique. I walk around, buy vegetables or something for my house, and try to greet people in Fulfulde. It's not always so easy for me, since I tend to be a bit shy, but if I greet enough people it usually doesn't take long for a conversation to start. And now when I go into the market or walk around, I usually run into someone who I've had some sort of exchange with before, which is a good feeling.

I'm still getting along really well with my homologue, with the family I share a compound with, and with the president of the association of artisans. I see most of them on a daily basis, and they now seem to be on the same page more or less about my work with the association. They all seem to think that my three month "etude de milieu" is a necessary step – the "etude de milieu" will consist of interviewing most of the people in my association and with them then coming up with different projects. The etude will start in earnest after New Years (which I'll be spending in Djibo) last until about March. As the etude picks up I'll have a lot more to occupy my time, which will be nice.

Right now I'm in Ouahigouya for Christmas – 5 or 6 other volunteers from my group have come here for Christmas. It's good to see them – even though I feel very comfortable with the people I come in contact with in Djibo, since I don't know them so well and since there is a cultural gap, it's harder for me to gauge my footing vis-à-vis them. Christmas is weird though in 90 degree weather, and the onset of Christmas is making me miss home a bit. But it's not really a homesickness – I'm still very happy here and looking forward to getting work underway in Djibo. It's more that in the last couple days I've just been thinking about all y'all a bit more.

Since Djibo is a pretty big town, there is electricity there. I don't have an electrical current in my house, but in my courtyard there is electricity. So, my plan is to get an extension cord so that I can occasionally charge my laptop, which I can then use mostly for word processing. That way I can write stuff for the website at home and then just copy and paste and not pay while writing. Since I'll probably be able to get to the internet less than once a month, this makes much more sense.

And now, a bit about the weather, in case you're wondering.

Burkina Faso has 2 basic seasons. The dry season (la saison seche) and the rainy season (la saison des pluies). The rainy season usually starts in June or July and lasts until October. Once the dry season starts, it really is dry, with no rain at all for about 7 or 8 months.

The seasonal pattern here dictates life in a way it doesn't in the US. Activities, work, and recreation are determined in large part by the time of year. During the rainy season almost everyone is involved in agriculture, first planting the seeds and then harvesting the crops. Though Burkina Faso has terrible soil and little rainfall, about 90 percent of the population are farmers. This is, for the most part, subsistence agriculture. The main crop here is millet ("mil" in French) – this is what the famous "to" is made out of. Millet is also made into a host of other things (including a local beer called "dolo"). Other crops include corn, sesame, and various vegetables. There is a little bit of cash crop agriculture in the south, mostly consisting of cotton. However, it is very hard for West African cotton farmers to compete on the world cotton market, largely due to the high subsidies given to cotton farmers in the US and Europe.

During the dry season, when there is no rain, crops that require lots of water, such as millet and other cereals, cannot be grown. Thus, agriculture is limited to vegetables, and is done on a small local level by various irrigation techniques. Thus, during the dry season, people engage more in small business (petit commerce) activities, animal herding, and artisan type activities. For example, when the dry season came this year, all of a sudden my host family in Kaya had set up a little boutique just outside of their courtyard. And because people generally have a bit more money and food just after the rainy season, there is more demand for local trade and there are more means to augment small businesses. At least that's the case in theory, and if there was a sufficient amount of rain. Incidentally, this last rainy season here was one of the best in recent memory. There was lots of rain, and therefore now there is a relative plenty as far as food goes.

The dry season has a couple of different parts to it. Just after the rainy season, it is still relatively humid, and still very hot and sticky at night. When I got here in late September it was like that. However, come November, the weather starts cooling off. The Harmattan winds, which blow down from the Sahara, cause the nights to be fairly cold. Right now, we're in the heart of the cold – it'll last until around February, or so I'm told. However, it still is above 90 in the daytime, I believe, though very dry. At night it actually does get chilly, and I often wake up in the middle of the night very cold. The Burkinabe reaction is very amusing to me. To them, this is the extreme of cold. The first time I saw someone wearing a big winter parka I couldn't stop laughing. But I guess eskimos would probably laugh at us if they saw us wearing parkas in 20 degree weather.

After February, the winds die down, and the heat returns. I'm a bit scared of that. April is supposed to be the really hot month – temperatures often hit 45 celsius, which I think is about 115 farenheit. Eh gads. And the climate gets a little stickier until the rains come in June or July, causing a relative cooling off. All I know is, there won't be snow here tomorrow!

So, a Merry Christmas to all (and hopefully a white Christmas), and Happy New Year. Bonne fete!

Hope everyone is well, and hope to hear from you in the new year!

Peace,
Andy

My new address – Greg, could you update this?

Andy Neustaetter
B.P. 182
Djibo
Burkina Faso

## Comments

### The Three Musketeers
Posted by Connie, 12/24/03 11:37am

It's a great pleasure to have two of my three musketeers at home, but we all miss you very much and think about you a lot. I admire your trips to the marche in order to strike up conversations--that takes a lot of courage, I think. Love, Mom

### Merry Christmas
Posted by Janet Neustaetter, 12/24/03 1:28pm

We will miss you on Christmas, but will be thinking of you with pleasure and pride -- and hoping you don't melt. It sounds like you are dealing with the new location and job resoucefully and thoughtfully. It is awfully hard to create a job from scratch. I am delighted that you sent your new address since I haven't yet been organized enough to send a package -- you can expect one in the fairly near future (hopefully nearer rather than further). Take care. Have a very happy, healthy, and successful new year. Love, Janet, Bill, Sarah and Steven

### yogurt
Posted by jim walsh, 12/30/03 3:41pm

It struck me recently that, though from your comments I gather that you disdain yogurt, you have eaten frozen yogurt in the Jesuit Community thinking it was ice cream. Ha ha [Nelson laughter]! Happy Christmastide, Happy New Year, and don't forget, Epiphany marks the beginning of Mardi Gras season. CXIX

### Happy New Year
Posted by Mandy, 12/31/03 10:36am

Embarassingly neither Mary Ann nor I can think of how to say Happy New Year in French! What do the Burkinabe in Djibo say? Is Jan 1 a holiday? I am preparing your packet for your new address and am relieved to think you will be able to juice up your laptop and write ahead for your trips to the internet connection. Your reporting is fascinating, and I'm sure your interview technique will become as good as your story telling has been. One tip from my experience on the big Random House computer project which was my introduction to "systems design," its always a good question to ask people what they would like to do -- or not do -- in their jobs that the current "system" doesn't let them. I found that just showing people that a change could save them from a hated task -- like getting rid of duplicate filing because two departments can share one file cabinet, even though that means sharing physical space that people aren't used to doing -- can help people accept change they might

otherwise exist. If you ask every one what they want to do and can't find time for; and what they want to stop doing and can't, shouldn't have trouble getting them to talk. It's not that you have the answers, but as a new face, you give them a chance to find their own best fix. Good luck. I know you'll be great! P.S. When we were in the Negev, the hottest place I've ever been, putting rubbing alcohol on a pad on the back of my neck cooled me faster than water.

### Happy New Years
Posted by Greg, 12/31/03 12:09pm

Hope you have rockin' New Years plans ahead of you. I'm sure the chickens are lined up in a row for you. It was great talking to you on Christmas. I updated the contact page with your new address, so hopefully you'll be receiving some packages and mail a bit quicker! Love, Greg

### Happy New Year
Posted by Dina Cuomo, 1/1/04 10:12pm

I visit your website often and love to read yor updates. I am gald that things will be picking up for you once the etude begins in the new year. You'll be interested to know that Alex(my idea) did a paper on Burkina Faso for one of his politics courses. Your website provided a wealth of information for this paper and I believe he got an A on the paper. Stay well and happy.

### bonne annee
Posted by bill casey, 1/8/04 1:13pm

Andy, Your postings are great. I look forward to learning more about life in Djibo. No schedule, no workplace, no work plan: I am VERY surprised that you are the first Chime to apply for this position! Stay well and enjoy your great adventure. We're thinking of you. Best, Bill

## 304 Pictures!
Posted by Greg, 1/13/04 11:35pm

Hi Everybody - This is Greg, Andy's brother. I have a bit of a treat for all of you who enjoyed the pictures that Andy posted on Thanksgiving - I have 304 more pictures for you!

A friend of Andy's who left the Peace Corps was kind enough to send me a CD full of pictures that Andy and other PCVs had taken. I got the CD a couple hours ago, uploaded them to my website, and now I'd like to share them with all of you.

So head on over to:

http://www.gregphoto.net/gallery2/

And click on the 'Andy Burkina' gallery at the top to check out his pictures. Once you're inside the gallery you can click on the pictures to see bigger images, click the page numbers at the top and bottom

for navigation, or click the slideshow button in the top right to save yourself some clicks....

For the feint of heart - beware, there are a bunch of graphic pictures of chickens being killed for a Christmas dinner. In case you want to avoid these pictures, you might want to skip pages 11-14 and 18-19

Enjoy!
Greg

## Comments

### Pics
Posted by Margaret Moulton, 1/14/04 6:49am

Thanks Greg. Heading to the picture gallery now! Then to write Andrew. Fun to be traveling alongside him without having to do the hard work or kill any chickens.

### Thanks for the Pics
Posted by Mandy, 1/14/04 5:11pm

Greg -- I've been meaning to write you a note (since I missed seeing you at Christmas)to tell you how much I appreciate the work you've done to keep Andrew close to us in words & pictures. 304 is just enough to wet my appetite for more from Djibo soon! Andrew -- your turkey jerkey is in the mail with a few books and magazines. Hope they arrive with the 10 days promised. The Litchfield PO was surprised the address was so simple but they found Burkina Faso on the cash register.

### looks like Africa!
Posted by Diane Quandt, 1/15/04 4:55pm

Hi Andy and Greg, Thanks for the great slideshow! I enjoyed seeing Andy's wonderful smile again. I'm off now to prepare a meatless dinner. Happy new year!

### pix
Posted by qza, 1/18/04 8:29am

pix look great. but you should stop killing innocent chickens!

### hot chicks
Posted by vic, 1/20/04 1:25pm

Nevice, you look money in your new boubou. I'm sure the ladies and the chickens are flocking to you. Btw, who's the guy who was holding a twig with a chicken head attached to the end on like half of the pictures?

### Apeman
Posted by Sparky the Sun Devil, 1/26/04 9:44pm

I'm rocking out to the Noish masterpiece "Apeman" here in Tempe, AZ...big ups to the true APE-MON

### Hey
Posted by Christine, 5/25/04 9:15pm

I used to live in Djibo and I love the pictures...but more about the town and natives please.Keep up the good work!

### birthdays for volunteers
Posted by jake, 8/16/04 5:47am

andy it's jake in Mene, thats right your neighbor in BF. i cant find your email address... GAD needs the birthdates of all the volunteers and i know you wrote them all down during stage for our group, can you email them to me ASAP? j_robyn@yahoo.com thanks, your local GAD committee

## Silly me
Posted by Andy, 2/27/04 5:14am
Greetings once again from Burkina Faso!

So, last time I was here computer problems kept me from putting up the post I had prepared. This time, the problem lies in me being kind of a dumbass. I stayed up late last night writing on my laptop so that I could bring another disk to post today (I'm in Ouahigouya for a volunteer meeting). It was all ready, and still is ready, sitting on my floor 112 kilometers away in Djibo where I left it this morning. No one said Peace Corps volunteers are smart.

In brief, things continue to go well in Djibo. My etude marches on, and I've now conducted interviews with basically all of the "groupements" in the association. I'm starting to have a better idea of how things work, though I still have a long long way to go.

I now feel very comfortable in Djibo - I am starting to develop relationships that are more than superficial, and I'm starting to know Djibo more and more. Communication in French is no problem, though communication in Fulfulde is very difficult. The last few weeks I've started going to a language tutor, which is helping a lot.

There's loads more to report, but the clock is ticking and I've got to run. However, I still have at home a many page entry that somehow will get posted. I think I might be able to work out some way to get it onto the internet in the week or two. But don't hold your breath.

I'll hopefully be checking my email again tomorrow, so if you need to get a message to me you can send something today - otherwise it'll probably be another month or so.

Oh yeah - my address is now B.P. 204 Djibo instead of B.P. 182 - by mistake the post office gave us a box that already belonged to someone. Thanks to all who have sent letters and packages - mail keeps me going.

I hope everyone is well - next time there will be more (probably more than you want).

Peace,
Andy

## Comments

### africa is awake
Posted by the qza chef chef, 2/27/04 5:36am

we are the only ones up at this hour!

### firstmilesolutions.com
Posted by Mandy, 2/27/04 5:57am

Andy, if you still have an internet, check out this MIT solution to getting e-mail in remote areas. Maybe Tom could help you get funding for them. The NYT's article about their "modern Pony Express" for e-mail is very impressive. Glad your etude ca va bien. Enjoy.

### news at last
Posted by Connie, 2/27/04 7:56am

YOu come by absentmindedness honestly; you're maintaining a family tradition here. If the bell were in the tower, I'd ring it this morning in honor of your communique.

### No Subject
Posted by Greg, 2/27/04 11:39am

welcome back to the connected world for a few days! i updated the contact page so people should be sending you stuff at the right address now. i bought you a bunch of stuff that i'm hoping to send you this weekend...

### Great to Have Your Update
Posted by Margaret, 2/29/04 4:51pm

Andy, Great to have your update. Impressed by your managment of more than a handful of languages. Mother Nature has given slight hints of spring. Today we broke the 50 degree mark. Our backyard still looks like the Actic ice cap. Dunc is working on a study for me so we'll get to see and your Mom in a couple of weeks. We think of you! Margaret, Peter, Alex & Sam

### Thanks
Posted by Mook, 3/1/04 10:54pm

Nevis, got your letter in the mail, good looking bro, sounds like you are becoming more African every time your write in this. Peace

### Thank you do such good and useful thing..

Posted by Supat Sutti, 6/16/04 11:55am

Recently I have download Gcards program of Greg and try to set it up successfully and I can send cards to many friend.. I wish the Gcards can make the people happy.. Supat Sutti www.changthai.com info@changthai.com Ps. I saw you on the top of the page drink Elephant Beer that is made in Thailand where I am right now.. I like to drink beer as well, I want to know where you get the beer from how much does it cost you to buy beer.. In Thailand I have a lot of beer and cheap on.. It costs you only 120 Baht for 3 bottles of beer.. Be lucky...

# Finally

Posted by Andy, 4/28/04 7:35am

I finally got a disk to work!

By now I've written quite a bit - I hope it's not overwhelming to read. Most of this stuff was written a couple of months of go, so recent developments are not much reported here. It's almost May and you're just receiving my report of Christmas/New Years. The "Work" section is a bit out of date - I'm not starting to design projects. More will come on that later.

In general things are really good here - I've been here more than 7 months now, and Djibo feels like home now.

I hope everyone is doing well and I'm sorry if I've been out of touch. I miss you all at home, and hope to hear from you soon. On to the post:

**Christmas**

Just before Christmas I was feeling particularly nostalgic, and thinking a lot about home. Christmas is a holiday that has always consisted of a fairly unchanging and very comfortable set of events/conditions/states of mind for me. Some of these have to do with a mass gearing up of almost the whole American public for the holiday season, some have to do with specific family rituals, some have to do with food, some with climate and location. I could list about a thousand things that make up what I would define as the “ingredients of Christmas.”

However, being in Burkina, of those thousand things on that list, very few were there for me. This is, I think, why, upon waking up in Ouahigouya, Burkina Faso, on Christmas morning, I was a bit bummed out. Don’t get me wrong, I was not unhappy about the people I would be spending Christmas with, nor was I unhappy about being in Burkina. It just didn’t seem like “Christmas.”

However, I am happy to say that despite this, my Christmas turned out to be really great. I spent Christmas with 5 other volunteers who are all very good friends after 3 months of training and shared cultural adaptation. We had decided to cook a big Christmas dinner – everyone had ideas about dishes they were going to make, though there was no overall plan, and we were just sort of winging it. In the equation were 2 “pintade”s (guinea fowl, basically chicken), a leg of mouton (sheep) and a bunch of

boxed wine (what would Christmas be without boxed wine, after all?).

So, Christmas morning, we all started slowly preparing for our feast, and, to collective surprise, it all worked out. We were able to successfully, um, prepare the chickens for cooking (see photos), make a marinade whose secret ingredient was molasses, cook a whole bunch of veggies, including mashed potatoes, sweet potatoes, and stuffing, grill the chicken over a fire, and cook the leg of lamb buried under the ground based on a fellow volunteer's remembrances of how grandpa used to cook things in the ground.

These achievements may not seem so special. However, living here it is often the little achievements that are the most rewarding. I think what made the Christmas so good was that, after having been just been cut off from "Peace Corps: The Summer Camp" (i.e. training), we got our act together and we all worked to do Christmas, Burkina-style, and we pulled it off. That sounds really cheesy, and in truth it is really cheesy, but sometimes cheesy is good - especially when it's Christmas and 100 degrees outside.

**New Years**

New Years Eve was markedly different from my Christmas. Instead of spending New Years with other volunteers, I spent it in Djibo, with the family I live with, my counterpart, and the president of the association of artisans that I am working with. As with Christmas, waking up on New Years I felt a bit nostalgic. At this point I had been in Djibo for 2 weeks, and though I felt relatively comfortable around people, I am used to spending New Years with people I've known for years, not for weeks.

Again, I was very surprised and happy with how things turned out. It was unlike any New Years I've ever had. Leading up to the fete, however, I didn't really know what it would consist of. Throughout the last week of December, a number of people mentioned New Years to me, saying how we were going to "feter" (party) and how much fun it was going to be, but I had know idea what this meant really. I would ask people how people celebrate New Years and the only consist answer I got was that there would be lots of "dynamiques" (fireworks). And until the afternoon of New Year's Eve itself, I did not know who I would be spending New Year's with, or where. Then, around 4 that afternoon, Abdoulaye, my counterpart and the secretary of the associaton, Hama (the head honcho of the small family I share a courtyard with), and le president (the president of the association) were over in my courtyard and we organized to have the fete chez moi.

As the night wore on, Mariam (Hama's wife), with the help of a few local boys, busily prepared the food. Around 9:30, Abdoulaye and the president showed up with their wives. For the occasion, Hama set up a big fluorescent light on my stoop with the help of an extension cord (at this point I didn't have electricity in my house – now I do). He also set up his boom box and brought over all of his tapes. The party started slowly, with cards (I play tons of cards here – a game called Aztec), peanuts (peanuts are in abundance here and very very cheap), and tea (tea is a cornerstone of life here – describing it in passing wouldn't do it justice – soon I'll dedicate an entry to tea). Soon, the first round of food came out. The four of us men (me, the president, Hama, and Abdoulaye) sat around a table in front of my house and started eating (men and women always eat separately here – the women ate inside Hama's house). It was dark, so I couldn't tell exactly what the food was, though I knew it was a plate of chicken. What I soon realized was that it was a plate of all the chicken parts we don't eat in the US – innards, feet, heads, etc. So I nibbled a bit. I'm getting more used to this sort of food, and some of it ain't so bad, but it's still not my food of choice.

After round one of eating was over, the dancing started. Burkinabe love to dance and they're not shy about dancing in front of large or small groups of people. Also, it seems to me that people don't really judge people on the dance floor here. Dancing in the US, I often feel self-conscious. However, here I don't worry about it – in fact, it seems sometimes the weirder one dances, the more people around you will cheer you on [I tested this theory once at a bar in Ouaga by pulling my shirt over my head on the dance floor and sort of bouncing around – I was the only one on the dance floor at the time – the response I got from the Burkinabe there was very positive]. Anyway, the point of all this is that, here I was on New Years, on the stoop in front of my house, with 3 men that I knew fairly well, their wives, and a handful of kids, a boombox, a pile of cassettes (some Burkinabe music, some crappy American rap), a fluorescent bulb, and not a drop of alcohol – and we were all dancing up a storm. I couldn't help but laughing at the scene – not in a mocking way, but in a I-can't-believe-this-I-never-would-have-imagined-this-and-my-only-response-is-to-laugh-with-wonder kind of way. I guess you kind of had to be there.

The dancing went on until right up to the strike of midnight. There was no standard countdown, just a collection of watches, but midnight was well marked by hundreds of firecrackers going off throughout Djibo. Most were small little firecrackers that just popped a few times (we had some of this), but there were also a few bigger fireworks seen in the skies. Midnight was not brought in by husbands and wives kissing – public displays of affection are essentially non-existent in that respect. Instead, there was lot's of saying of "bonne annee" as well as people wishing others good health, wishes, and luck in the coming year.

After the immediate New Year excitement was over (i.e. around 12:05), we sat down to eat. Again, the men, women, and children all ate separately. This time, we ate the chicken meat, as well as bread, and some crunchy little "gateaux." We also each had a soda – Fanta Orange. It seems fitting to me that big fetes here often center around eating – in a country where just finding enough to eat is a daily struggle for a large percentage of the population, people celebrate with food. Kicking off the New Year with a feast is thus a way to set things off on the right foot.

The big feast was followed by a bit more dancing, and then gradually the guests left. By 1 am or so everyone had left, and I went to bed shortly thereafter. It was a great night, and I was really glad that I had stayed in Djibo for New Years. It's certainly a New Year's Eve that I'll never forget.

**Play Doh**

Living in Burkina Faso, one hears about and comes across a lot of development projects, NGOs, and the like. Some of these are big, long-lasting projects. Some are one-time good-will sort of things. Recently one of these little good will projects came through Djibo. The project, which I think was put together by a group of American churches, was designed to get Christmas presents to children in poor countries. Churchgoers in the US volunteered to put together boxes of presents which were then distributed in poor countries. Somehow Djibo got on the list for this project.

The Christmas presents were a bit late – they arrived on Feb. 23rd. I don't think many people noticed they were late though, considering that the overwhelming majority of Djibo residents are Muslim. These gifts were given out to students at local primary schools in what I here was a fairly elaborate ceremony. The kids who got the gifts were very excited, though many kids in Djibo (anyone not in

school or anyone who hadn't payed the 300 franc (about 50 cents) transport cost) didn't get any presents. And I heard that many kids had presents taken from them by other kids. Anyway, because these presents all came from the US, and many of them were American toys or items with names/instructions in English, often accompanied by letters from the donors in English, there was some confusion. The day after the gifts were handed out, I translated a couple letters – one of them said that in the US though the language is English, there are many people from other countries and that it was amazing that some people in the US spoke more than one language. This struck me as funny because it seems that even cows here in Djibo speak French, Moore, Fulfulde, as well as Modern Standard Moo.

Mariam, the schoolteacher and the Mom in my courtyard, brought back a couple items her students had received so that I could explain them to her for the kids. She brought 3 things – one was a game of "jacks" – I explained how one plays, by bouncing the ball and picking up the metal pieces. Another was a packet of disinfectant wipes. And last, was a can of Play Doh. Mariam told me that they couldn't figure this one out. There had been a lot of candy in some of the packages, so Mariam asked "Est-ce qu'on mange ça?" ("Does one eat that?") So now I can't get the image out of my head of poor Muslim children waking up on Christmas in the middle of February, running to the tree to eat a can of Play Doh.

Epilogue: I had recounted the Play Doh incident to an English missionary in Djibo, who had also found the whole thing fairly ridiculous. About a week later I ran into him and he told me that the day after I had told him the story, someone had come to him with a can of Play Doh asking if it was meant to be eaten.

**Work**

February and March were relatively busy for me as far as work is concerned. Emphasis on the word relatively here. After three weeks of basically sitting around and doing a whole lot of nothing, in the beginning of January I started working. As I've said before, one of the hardest things for me here is that my role is not defined at all. This is good in some ways – I have a lot of authorship over what I'm doing. However, this also means that for work I have no real benchmarks or ways to solidly evaluate myself on the fly. Though things such as grades or feedback from a boss can be stressful and irritating at times, I've learned that the absence of these sorts of things leaves one feeling a bit disconnected.

On January 4th there was a General Assembly of the Association Naffa des Artisans de Djibo in which I was reintroduced (I had already been introduced at a meeting in November when I came for my site visit). At this meeting, decked out in my boubou, I gave a short speech in French, which was translated by Minta (my counterpart, who's real name is Abdoulaye but is known to his friends as Minta) into Fulfulde. In this speech I explained the basic function of a SED (Small Enterprise Development) Peace Corps Volunteer – I again said that I didn't come with money, and that I was there to work along with the community for the next 2 years. I think people sort of understood – however, given that my role is rather fuzzy by nature, it would be impossible for anyone to totally grasp it. I hope that in time, both my understanding of my work and the community's understanding of my work evolve along somewhat parallel lines.

One of the main points I made at this meeting was that before jumping into any specific projects, I would be performing an "etude de milieu" which I think would be translated as "area study" or "needs

assessment." The goal of this study is for me to gain an understanding of the community – in my case the "community" is for the most part the artisans in the association (there are over 200 members), but extends out to related organizations, people, and places. The main method of the etude is a series of interviews that I am conducting – first with the various groups of artisans that make up the association, and after that with a sample of individuals in the association (to interview every individual would take too much time). I will also try to arrange meetings with NGOs, associations, and development projects in the area. Because language is a big barrier for these interviews, I have five people from the association who are helping me translate at the interviews – it is also good to have someone from the community with me so that I am not seen as someone acting alone.

The association is made up of "groupements." These groupements are groups of artisans doing the same work. There are about 30 groupements – some trades have more than one groupement, and I think in total there are about 15 different "metiers" – mechanics, masons, tailors (men and women), carpenters, metal workers, soap makers, potters, well makers (well as in water), architects, butchers, restaurant owners, peanut oil extractors, photographers, embroiderers, jewelry makers, shoemakers, fabric weavers, colleurs (people who fix tires), and painters. I might be forgetting some. Most groups have between 5 and 10 members – the association as a whole consists of a little over 200 members, about half men and half women. Each groupement functions as a semi-independent unit, and sends people to meetings of the association, which has a "bureau" consisting of a President, Secretary, Treasurer, and a bunch of other positions that don't really seem to do much. This is the Djibo association of artisans – each "Departement" (a departement is a "large" village – this being relative) within the Province of Soum has a similar association and all of these together make up the Association of Artisans of Soum.

By now, I've seen all of the groupements. The first few meetings were stressful and a bit disorganized. I had come up with a long list of questions along with my counterpart and my other helpers, but I found out that some of these questions were not very well understood, some of them were so obvious that they confused the people I was asking, and many of them did not go far enough into the topic. Also, since I have five different people translating, each with a different style and comprehension of the questions, I quickly realized that the very nature of the etude was far from scientific or neutral. But I think that goes for most development work. Also, at first I was very timid and overcareful – often for fear of offending people I would abstain from probing as deep as I should or could have and thus came out with incomplete information. However, in time I picked up a little steam, and while there is definitely much still to learn, the interviews have given me an introduction to all of the different trades, the methods of working and organizing, the problems as perceived by the people themselves, and the dynamics of the groups. Also, these interviews have allowed me to meet a bunch of people who now know that I'm here. Everyone has been very welcoming so far.

I've also started doing one-on-one interviews with artisans. Compared with the group interviews, these are a lot more interesting and I learn much more. People are more willing to talk when they're not in front of a group, and it is much easier for me to probe a bit deeper. I really enjoy these meetings, because I can get down into the details of the daily work of the artisans, what their problems are, and their methods for solving those problems. Though my first three months is up and though my official "etude" is some ways over, I'm going to keep doing these interviews, hopefully a few a week. This way I can continue to learn more about the artisans, and hopefully this way I won't get blinded by any particular project and thus lose sight of the artisans themselves.

There are many problems that the artisans seem to have – I won't go into a super-detailed description of them right now, but here is a quick run-down. First, some of them are in need of technical training for their specific trades. Second, many do not know how to manage resources and business – accounting and such things. Underlying this problem is also illiteracy – "alphabetisation" is important for most management type activities. Third, there is often a real lack of materials – either the resources don't exist in Djibo and have to be gotten in Ouahigouya or Ouaga, or they exist here but can't be bought in at wholesale prices and thus are very expensive. And buying in bulk is difficult in general here due to a lack of money – most artisans can only afford the materials for the project at hand, and even this often involves borrowing money. Fourth, finding clients for some artisans is a real problem. There are a bunch of other things that I know I'm forgetting – as I start designing projects (starting April/May) I'll go more into detail about this.

**Tea and cards**

Life in Burkina Faso, as I have said before, involves a fair amount of sitting around. Extreme heat, unemployment, and culture all contribute to this. People tend to work starting early in the morning and then work until about noon, at which time people most people pause for a few hours, then work from about three until five. However, work after the siesta, at least for the people I spend time with, is much less intense than work in the morning. This is partly because people are tired and also, at least here in Djibo, because the afternoon is broken up by prayers – there is a prayer at 2 pm, one at 4 pm, and one around 6 pm.

So, most afternoons, from about 4 to 6 pm, I spend in sitting in my courtyard, under my "hangar" (shade plays a huge role in life here) with Hamare (the plumber I live with), Minta (my counterpart aka Abdoulaye), Mahama, Lucman, Toubaku (3 teenagers who hang out in the courtyard), and usually a couple others, playing cards and drinking tea. The game of cards we play is called "Aztec" – I think there's a card game in the states that's sort of similar to it, though I forget the game. It's played with a double deck of cards, though with all of the cards under 7 removed. 2 to 4 people can play, and it's played fairly quickly. It can actually be kind of stressful for me sometimes, especially if I'm playing and someone comes to my courtyard that I want to talk to – if I stop to long to greet the person or to say something I hear "joues, Andy, joues!" (play, Andy, play!). Despite the occasional stress it's a good way to pass the time.

Tea is an integral part of life here. Most people I know drink tea on a daily basis, often multiple times a day. And it is not just the act of drinking the tea; the preparation of the tea is also significant. The method of preparation, I believe, originally came to Burkina from the Arabs and the nomads coming in from the north, and only really became widespread within the last 50 years or so. I'm not totally sure about that. In any case, the tea is prepared as such: first, you put little pieces of charcoal ("charbon" in French) in a little wire or metal stove called a "fourneau." Once the charcoal is hot, you put the teapot – small, metal, and usually blue, though sometimes red – directly on the coals. The size of the body of the teapot is probably about the size of the average clenched fist. Two to three shot glasses of water are put in the teapot, along with about a shot glass full of the tea leaves. The tea leaves are "thé vert de Chine" (China green tea – whether the leaves are the same as green tea that is drank in the US, I'm not sure – the end product tastes totally different, but the method of preparation is also totally different). Thus, the ratio of water to tea leaves is very low. The pot then stays on the coals for a significant period of time – at the least, about 10 minutes, but up to half an hour or so. Next, the sugar (a little less than a shot glass full) is added in, and the tea is put back in the coals for another stretch of time. After

it has steeped a good while, the foam is prepared by quickly passing the tea back and forth, either between the shot glasses or sometimes between a second little teapot and a larger glass. However it is done, the tea is passed back and forth enough so that a bunch of foam ("mousse") is created, and a little bit of foam is placed in each shot glass. The tea is then placed back on the coals to heat up (it usually cools a bit while the foam is being prepared) before it is served. The tea is served in small portions - the size of which depends upon the number of people around – whoever prepares has to make sure that there is enough for everyone to have a little. At most one drinks a whole shot glass full, though usually it's half or less. This first round of tea, called the "première," is very strong and very sugary – it's like espresso, but instead of coffee it's tea. When drinking it, most people make loud sipping noises.

This whole process is then done over, with the same tea leaves, two more times – the "deuxième" and "troisième." In Kaya, Bill Gates and Co. only made two rounds, but here in Djibo people eek out as much as they can get from the tea. Each round gets a little weaker. Because each round takes on average about 45 minutes, the whole process takes a couple hours, during which people hang out, talk "de tout et de rien," play cards, etc.

Since I've gotten to Djibo (a little over 2 months ago), the only days that I've gone without tea are the few days that I've been in Ouahigouya. Most days I'll at least have tea in the late afternoon, as I mentioned above. Often I'll also have a round of tea in the late morning at the artisan's small savings and credit association. My record for tea consumption was 3 full rounds (each consisting of première, deuxième, and troisième) in one day. Most people say that can't go a day without drinking tea – methinks these days I can't go without my tea fix as well.

**Gorko Bobo**

For the last three or four weeks, I've been seeing a Fulfulde tutor a few hours a week. Just living in Djibo and trying to pick it without any lessons was not really working. Because I can get along with no problem in French here, if I don't make an effort to learn Fulfulde I'll go two years with only a handful of words. After a month I was barely past greetings. There are a number of English speaking missionaries in Djibo, most of whom have been here quite a while and speak Fulfulde very well. One of these missionaries who I've gotten to know fairly well introduced me to a guy who has taught Fulfulde before – he goes by "Gorko Bobo." Gorko means man in Fulfulde, and Bobo refers to Bobo Dioulasso, the second biggest city of Burkina, located in the southwest of the country. So, my language tutor is "Man Bobo" but I prefer to translate it as "Bobo dude."

Gorko Bobo is probably somewhere around 40 years old (though I'm really bad at guessing the age of Burkinabe). He works at night as a "guardien" at an NGO or some sort of government project. He is fairly soft spoken, smiles a lot, and is very easy going. Everyone in Djibo seems to know him, and everyone seems to be related to him. If I mention to someone that I'm taking Fulfulde lessons with Bobo-Dude, they'll usually reply, "Oh, he's my uncle/cousin/brother." He has a number of kids and grandchildren.

About twice a week I go over to his courtyard, usually around 2pm, and we sit for an hour or an hour and a half in the shade with a little table, each with a small notebook. The lessons are not highly structured. Usually I come prepared with a list of things I would like to learn – whether it be specific vocabulary, a grammar point or something else. When we get going one topic generally opens up a

bunch of other topics, and we just sort of float around. It was weird for me to get used to this style of learning after having studied language in high school, college, and even Peace Corps training, in a very structured and systematic manner. However, I am now enjoying the lessons – because it's just me and Bobo-Dude, there is no problem with just bouncing around, and in addition to learning language I am able to learn a bit about Peul culture and Djibo.

After about a month of these classes, I have seen a steady (though certainly not drastic) improvement. I can now say basic things – I'm going to the market, it's hot, I'm going on a trip to Ouahigouya and I'll be back in two days, etc. And I'm now not quite as lost when I'm sitting amongst people speaking in Fulfulde (which is most of the time) – I'm more able to figure out what people are talking about, and hopefully soon I'll be able to know what people are saying about me right in front of my face. Pronunciation is still difficult. There are a number of "implosive" letters, that I think I may have mentioned before. These letters are spoken softly with a sort of guttural stop. And, as in any language, a slight mispronunciation leads to totally different meanings. Once, instead of asking someone how his work was, I asked him how his cheeks were. But, as the Peul proverb goes, "Heese heese, nyamata nyiiri jolooru" or "Little by little one can eat the tô out of a gourd."

**Micro-size It**

In the US, it's all about the Supersize and getting more for your money. The idea is also to buy a bunch of things for a lower price and keep the extra stocked away. Thus, a special at Safeway on soup inevitably translates into 40 or so cans of chunky beef soup in the closet.

Here in Burkina, and I suspect most of the developing world, the opposite is true. Even things that come in fairly small serving sizes in the states are further broken down here. Some examples: cigarettes are most often sold one by one (the only people I know who buy whole packs are volunteers); cough drops/hard candies are by the piece; squash is often sold pre-cut into small pieces; cold drinks are sold in tiny clear plastic bags which are tied off (and then drank by biting a hole in the corner and sucking down the drink); oil is also sold in small quantities of less than a cup; I could go on much longer.

There are a number of reasons for this. First and foremost is that people really live "paycheck to paycheck." Or, since basically no one receives paychecks here besides teachers, nurses, and other functionnaires (civil service workers), they live on whatever than can scrape up. Thus, even if someone has enough money to buy a huge bag of rice today or a bag of candy, he might not have that money tomorrow, so even the per-candy/cigarette cost may be higher, it is a risk to buy more than you need for the moment. And often that is all one can afford anyway. The second reason is due to a lack of refrigeration/storage. Without refrigeration, it is really hard to keep food for more than a couple of days. And even things that can be kept without refrigeration can be eaten by various critters. Finally, I think in general here people just don't plan much for the future, just because the future is in many ways so out of one's control.

A couple of weeks after I wrote this, I read an article in an American magazine (can't remember the magazine) that said that McDonalds is putting a stop to the "Supersize." What's the world coming to?

Well, that's it for now - again, sorry to post nothing for months and then so much at a time. Did anyone make it to the end?

Peace,
Andy

## Comments

### never too much
Posted by Amanda, 4/28/04 5:28pm

You give us such a wonderful window on your world, it could never be too much. I owe you a long snail mail letter; yours was wonderful. I am trying to find some simple supply chain textbooks for you. Macro orders make more sense for the co-op than soda! The Burkinabe seem to make sugar McDonald's would put in one drink last a whole afternoon for the whole neighborhood. If only you can find a way to sequence raw material orders as efficiently. We're seeing your Mom & Duncan this weekend, and can't wait to hear Connie and Liza report in person after they see you. Ca Va!

### Wow!
Posted by Janet Neustaetter, 4/28/04 6:53pm

Your posting is amazing. It gives such a good picture of how you are living and what you're doing! I'm very impressed and am eager to hear more. It also makes you wonder why we think we need so much of everything. Love, Janet

### Finally!
Posted by Connie, 4/28/04 8:44pm

Durham dude (that's how we call our men) and I were happy to read your posting--Liza and I can't wait to see your life first-hand in three weeks. Love, Mom

### No Subject
Posted by Janet Brown, 4/29/04 6:37pm

Great update! We've been thinking of you and now we know what you've been up to. I'm excited to hear from Liza and your mom upon their return. By the way, I know I ate play doh when I was a kid and I'm sure it did no harm, but then we'll never really know, will we? Everyone says hi! Love, Janet

### Christmas on Mook's Birthday
Posted by Mook, 5/3/04 6:00pm

The people in Burkina celebrated christmas on my birthday!! WOOOOO... Sounds like you are having fun, good stuff Crack.

### disabled US artist seeks help re: Burkina
Posted by Fred Siwak, 5/13/04 8:37pm

Hello Andy, a former BF Corp volunteer referred me to you and I hope you can help me. I am an artist disabled with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis ALS "Lou Gehrig's disease" also called motor neuron disease MND. This progressive, fatal neuromuscular disease has left me paralyzed in a wheelchair unable to care for myself. To raise awareness of ALS/MND I have started a project attempting to get a piece of my art photographed in every country in the world. I am looking for a way to get a piece my artwork photographed in Burkina Faso. I can e-

mail a JPEG image of the art to you, then you can print it, photograph the printout of my art on location and e-mail the image back to me. I ask that the picture be taken outside with some distinguishable features to tell me where the photograph was taken. I also ask that you tell me the place/ town it is photographed in and any other interesting information you might wish to include. This is strictly a noncommercial project. Despite my severe disability, I have done a considerable amount of work for the ALS Association and the Muscular Dystrophy Association in the United States, appeared on television several times, featured in national and local publications, testified at government hearings in support of the disabled, etc. This project seems impossible sitting at home every day in my wheelchair. But it can come true with a little help from the kindness of strangers. I ask you kindly to give it serious consideration. A small amount of your time will make a world of difference to me! I hope you can help me with this important request or refer me to someone that could. Thanks for your time and I look forward to your response, sincerely, Fred Siwak, Ipswich, Massachusetts, United States of America. E-mail: seaweed@gis.net I'm trying so hard to reach every country. Won't you take a bit of time to help me with Burkina? Thanks!

# Office project

Posted by Andy, 5/18/04 11:25pm

I write this on the eve of a visit from my mom and little sister. I am really excited about seeing them and having the opportunity to show them what Burkina Faso and Djibo are all about. It's now been about 8 months without seeing any family.

I've had another couple of busy weeks, which included a week up in Nassoumbou, a village about 55 km north of Djibo. I was there with 5 other PCVs, working with local health workers and volunteers from the villages to distribute water filters and educate about the prevention of Guinea Worm. It was a great week (though really really hot) – in my next entry I'll include a more detailed description of what the week entailed.

A number of people have asked me at various times if there is any way that they can help. Well, I may have found a way. The association of artisans in Djibo is currently without an office or meeting place. They see this as their biggest need at the time. They are looking to build a small building, consisting of a moderately sized meeting/training room (where association meetings as well as technical and business trainings can be held), a small office from which the association can be managed, and a small storage space. The association already has a plot of land, and the association is willing to supply all of the labor and some of the materials. However, they do not have the means to pay for most of the materials – the total project cost is estimated at around $3000.

In order to get funding for this, we are submitting a proposal for a "Peace Corps Partnership." This is a program that allows donors in the US to provide funding for Peace Corps projects. Once the proposal is completed and approved, it is then "marketed" to potential donors, and if funding is found, the project can proceed. This process of finding funding can take a long time. One way for the process to be sped up is for the volunteer to submit "referrals" along with the proposal – these are names and addresses of individuals/associations willing to give some funding for the project.

I am currently in the process of writing up the proposal. If you might be interested in assisting with the funding of this project, please email me (aneustaetter@yahoo.com) to express interest or to ask further

questions. As I said, funding is solicited from other sources as well, so do not feel that if you do not make a donation the project will be doomed – I'm certainly not trying to guilt people into giving money!

I will keep you all updated on the status of this project. Below is a preliminary draft of the proposal summary. Hope everyone is well, and enjoying the start of summer. I was informed that the temperature reached 46.6 degrees celsius in Djibo the other day – above 115 F I think.

Peace,
Andy

Proposal Summary

The Association Naffa des Artisans de Djibo (ANAD), was created in June of 2002, and is a member of the Association Dewral des Artisans de Soum (ADAS). The association, which comprises more than 200 members in over 20 different trades, was formed to increase the professionalism, skills, and business practices of artisans in the township of Djibo. The members are split up into "groupements" which consist of 5 to 15 members, each of which groups together artisans of the same trade.

The association has brought a number of trainings to its members, and has also helped members to secure loans for buying equipment and materials. Currently the association has no center or meeting place. The artisans work separately, for the most part, in their own workshops. However, the organization has no space of it's own in which it can conduct meetings, organize its affairs, hold technical and business trainings, or stock goods. Each time the association holds a meeting it must rent the space from a local NGO. The groupements also have to find space for their meetings; these meetings often take place at the residence of one of the members. In addition, the association has no central office from which to manage it's activities. Because of this, the files of the association are spread out between the members of the executive board, and are not readily accessible or easily located. The association also has no place to store materials, sell goods, or hold public functions. Finally, the association has no physical public face; if a person, whether a member or non-member, wants to find out information about the association or contact one of its members, he or she must go searching around Djibo in the hopes of finding one of the members of the board.

The association received, in 2003, a parcel of land from the Mayor. This plot is meant to be the site of the office. The association envisions a small building (10 x 7 meters) comprising of 3 rooms: a large meeting/training room, a small office, and a small storage space. The realization of this project will help the association in a number of ways. It will cut down on the operational costs of the association, and will at the same time help the association to become independent and manage itself. The center will also act as a location for sales expositions, and will help the artisans generate business by acting as an additional liaison with the public.

For the successful completion of this project, the association requests Partner assistance for the purchase of building materials. The plot of land is already in the possession of the association, and all labor, as well as some of the raw materials, will be provided by the community.

## Comments

### We'll fund raise!
Posted by Mandy, 5/18/04 7:27pm

We'll take on the Pitzer Alumni contingent and help raise the meeting room. It's like the Geodesic (sp?) Dome that was built at Pitzer. (Ask your Mom when she arrives.) We can't wait to hear all about your project in person when Liza and Connie return, and I still owe you a real letter, which I'll save for after your family visit. Look for news of lots of successful fundraising! Public space is a wonderful thing in all places and for all times, and I think it's wonderful you came up with this idea. What better way to cooperate than to "barn raise"! Love, Mandy, Mary Ann & George & Gracie too!

### Fund raising
Posted by Timothy Vernon, 5/19/04 9:56am

I'll happily help with raising funds for this! What a great project! Tim

### Fundraising for Artisan Building
Posted by Sue Keevers, 5/19/04 11:49am

You can count on me to make a donation to this terrific project Andy, in honor of Frank, who is definitely smiling on your excellent adventure and good work from beyond - he always expressed such pride in the great "doings" of the younger Chimes.

### former djibo pcv
Posted by matthew richard, 5/20/05 10:18am

andy, i was just wondering if you are still there, or if your stint has expired. (i write this note in may of 2005). if so, drop me a line. i was in a pcv in djibo in 1985. a war broke out in dec. of '86 and i was reassigned to deou. i loved djibo, but the heat was very hard to take in the summer. one of my students was dicko amadou abdoulaye, one of the organizers of the dewral group.

# Thank you
Posted by Andy, 5/28/04 10:51am

Thank you all for the support I received for my project. Right now the process is moving forward, and in about a week the proposal will be officially submitted. If those who said they would be willing to help out could send me an email (aneustaetter@yahoo.com) with your address, telephone, and email address I would much appreciate it. Once the proposal is submitted, I believe someone from Peace Corps Washington will contact you to discuss your participation.

Thanks again, and have a great memorial day.

Peace,
Andy

## Comments

### Your project
Posted by Joan & Charlie, 5/31/04 1:05pm

We are both with you on this. Look fwd to hearing from Washington office. Best wishes on project and much love to you.

# ANDY BURKINA: MATERNAL FEEDBACK

Posted by Connie, 6/21/04 10:23pm
Recently, Andy's sister Liza and I—Connie Brown, his mom—visited Andy in Burkina Faso. I'm here not so much to blather on about our travels, but instead to tell you how—from my dispassionate perspective—Andy's doing. But if I'm going to do that authentically, I'll have to refer to him as Andrew, because that's what we call him in the family.
You may recall photos from December showing a young looking, clean-shaven Andrew in a big baby blue boubou. All gone. Now he has shoulder length hair (with really nice blond highlights, thanks to the blistering Sahelian sun) and a full beard. And though he looks a little like Jesus (Jesus with horn-rimmed glasses), he is the same silly, irreverent Andrew—well, he isn't exactly the same (and probably the rest of you aren't the same as you were last September): he's a little more serious and more reflective, in part because he's got lots of time to read and think.
The boubou isn't gone; that's misleading. But he only wears it for special occasions. For the most part, he wears jeans, t-shirts, and Birkenstocks—though one day he sported a fine pair of glen plaid trousers made for him by a tailor in Djibo. That's all the fashion news: the Africans are the ones with the amazing clothes.
Liza has a little schoolgirl French, I have next to none. For the two weeks we were in Burkina Faso, Andrew arranged everything. He met us at the airport in Ouagadougou and bundled us into taxis, onto buses, shepherded us across busy streets, ordered for us in restaurants, translated conversations, fended off fauxtips (the fairly harmless but really annoying city hustlers). "Now I know what it's like to be a Dad," he said at one point.
From Ouaga we traveled by bus to Kaya, where Andrew trained and lived with Bill Gate (aka Pablo) and his family. They had a happy and affectionate reunion, with lots of laughter (mostly about Andrew's long hair and beard—"Le New Look!" exclaimed Bill Gate) and enthusiastic handshaking. We met everyone in the family—the moms, all the kids whose faces we knew from photographs, all Bill Gate's friends; we ate dinner with them one night and lunch the next day. Liza and I sat mutely, beaming and nodding like bobbleheads at the very gracious and hospitable Burkinabe. Andrew was busy translating back and forth.
From Kaya we returned to Ouaga and took a five-hour bus trip (maybe Andrew will devote a few upcoming paragraphs to transport in Burkina Faso: it's colorful and interesting, but it ain't easy) to Djibo, where we spent most of our time. We stayed with Andrew in his little mud-brick hut, spending

most of the time on his hanger, a porch with a rush roof and bamboo blinds around the sides. It was, you see, about 115 degrees in the middle of the day, and not necessarily much cooler at night. We slept on the porch—I, as the Elder, on Andrew's bed, Liza and Andrew on thermarests on the floor.

We got to know the family in the courtyard—Mariam, Hama, and their fetching two-year old, Baba—and all the family friends. You might see some photos of Liza's feet, colored with two coats of henna by Mariam: it's a form of adornment reserved for special fetes, but Mariam thought Liza might be interested. We also met most of Andrew's colleagues in the artisan association, many of whom are his friends. All were friendly and welcoming to us, and extended many invitations—our dance cards were full. Full, that is, except for the middle of the day, when it's too hot to move. That's when Andrew, Liza and I had a lot of quiet time together. I had the pleasure of hearing Liza and Andrew sing not only the Westorchard School song, but also The Fifty Nifty United States.

Andrew seems comfortable with all the people in his world, and his French is excellent—wherever we went, there was lots of conversation and good humor, and many shots of the strong Arabian tea he's described in these pages. It was a little frustrating not to be able to talk, but I was happy enough—I people-watched while the sounds of African French and Fulfulde washed over me. Various people told me—via Andrew—that Andrew (Andee, accent on the second syllable) is an African now, accepted and welcomed by all. One man told me that when Andrew's two years are up, they're going to write to the Peace Corps and say they want him to stay. Another said, in English, "Andy is Burkina boy now." He is able to speak some Fulfulde, thanks in part to his lessons with Gorko Bobo (Bobo Dude to you), whom we met.

Andrew is humble about his job, but it looked to us like he's a good diplomat. He's working diligently on projects the association has proposed.

In the course of our two weeks, we met lots of other volunteers. If any of you twentysomethings find your social lives deficient, consider joining the Peace Corps, where you have a built-in set of interesting, intelligent, and intrepid peers. (Sorry about all the alliteration—must be sunstroke). Though volunteers are fairly far-flung (see? I can't help it!) , they visit each other often and the Peace Corps brings them together for various events.

Andrew is still passionately interested in food and cooking. Every day, we went to Djibo's open market to buy ingredients for lunch and dinner; he's got a little propane stove, lots of spices, and he cooked us some great meals. In Ouaga, we hit all his favorite restaurants. He's already planning what he's going to eat—in restaurants and at home—when he comes back to the States in late 2005. Some things never change.

Though he has written very interestingly about Burkina Faso and the people around him, I feel that Andrew has given other species short shrift. In his little courtyard, aside from the homo sapiens, are four sheep, one goat, a guinea fowl, and a bull. The human inmates pay no attention to the animals (except that they all hate the goat), but Liza and I were fascinated. At the end of the day, the bull trots in, unaccompanied, after a day in the pasture, and he heads out again in the morning. A 9 to 5 schedule. The sheep and the goat take themselves off for Djibo-wide perambulations, as a group. You see pigs trotting briskly down the road by themselves. We actually thought the goat was adorable until we heard his bloodcurdling nocturnal screams—then we loathed him, too.

I never thought two weeks without plumbing could fly by so quickly. Too soon we were back at the airport, me crying my head off. Andrew misses friends and family, but he is flourishing and healthy—as I hope all of you are, too!

Peace,
Connie

To see photos from Connie and Liza's visit (and a bunch of new ones from Andrew), head on over to http://www.gregphoto.net/gallery2

## Comments

**awesome!**
Posted by andy no. 2, 6/22/04 7:37pm

i'm glad you guys were able to see the neut! and i'm also glad you guys were able to appreciate everything that is west africa as well as return back to the states safely. hope all is well in CT and at school...

**No Subject**
Posted by mark q, 7/7/04 4:04am

sounds like the parents visit was great. much love from tanzania, mq

# Minta, Bank Robbery, and Work

Posted by Andy, 7/5/04 8:07am
Happy (late) 4th of July from Burkina Faso. It's been a long while since I've posted anything substantial. Life here continues to fly by, and everything is still going very well. I've passed the ¼ mark of my service (6 months) – and in a little over 2 months I will have been in Burkina for a full year.
First a brief summary of my recent activities. For the last week I've been travelling a little bit for work. I went up to Gorom Gorom, another town in northern Burkina Faso, to talk to a couple of associations of artisans who are interested in having a Peace Corps Volunteer work with them. It was interesting to see Gorom, which is a very ethnically mixed town – Bella, Peul, Hausa, and Songhai are just a few of the ethnic groups there. I am now in Dori, and headed back to Djibo. I've also seen a couple of NGOs here in Dori that work with artisans in an attempt to find more contacts and partners for the association in Djibo.
The rainy season is now upon us, though it is coming slowly. Last year Burkina had one of the better rainy seasons in recent memory, and most people planted their seeds in the beginning of June. This year, it only rained twice in the beginning of June, and after that we had over 3 weeks without rain. There have been a couple little rains since, but not much, and people are really starting to worry. A bad rainy season means a bad crop, and thus lowered incomes and food availability. Everyone really hopes that the rain will pick up so that the crops aren't totally ruined. As everyone says, "c'est un peu grave."
Onto todays topics:
Local Yokel
This is a new feature for Andy Burkina – from time to time I'll write a description of one of my friends/acquaintances/colleagues here in Djibo. This way you can come to know a little about the cast of characters in my life here. (If this is really boring for you all, please let me know and I won't continue with it).

For the first installment I present Abdoulaye Adama, my counterpart. He is known to his friends as "Minta." Minta actually translates to something like "soldier." This was a nickname that he was given as a young child; I'm not exactly sure why he was dubbed this. Nowadays, however, he is nothing like a soldier – in fact, he has quite a disdain for the army, war, and military officers. Minta is somewhere around 27 years old, was born in a village 7 km outside of Djibo, and has lived in Djibo basically all of his life. He is married with two daughters – one a baby, the other 3 or 4 years old.

Minta is fairly well educated by Burkina standards. He didn't finish high school, but he made it almost to the end before he left to start working. He passed the first big "concours" (taken after the equivalent of 9th or 10th grade, I think). This test, called the BEPC (people call it the "bay-pay-say"), qualifies people for lower level civil service jobs, such as primary school teacher (to be a secondary school teacher you have to have finished University), nurse, tax agent, among others. To actually get the civil service job you must pass the test for that job – these tests are held yearly, and are very competitive. Often thousands will take the test for 30 or 40 spots. People try again year after year. Even Minta, who has been practicing his trade for many years now, takes the civil service tests every year, in the hope that he can land a more steady, salaried job.

His trade is "dessin en batiment" – basically architecture. He works mostly as an underling for a more professional architect and civil engineer who works at an NGO in Djibo. He draws plans of houses, conference rooms, and the like, and also things like water towers and reservoirs. Though this is his main job, he occasionally does short contract work for NGOs or the government, doing things such as surveys and doing interviews for feasibility studies (he just worked as an agent for a recent census taken here in BF). He also has a small plot of land where he farms in the rainy season (practically everyone farms during the rainy season) and he raises some animals – sheeps, goats, a couple cows.

Minta is one of the most religious people that I know here. He goes to the mosque five times a day, and, as many people here do, he often references God in casual conversation. If we have a rendez-vous set for the next day, for example, and I say "See you tomorrow," his response will always be, "In sha'allah" (If God wills it, in Arabic). I don't think he has ever had a drop of alcohol in his life, and I'm sure he's never eaten pork.

At first when I got here, Minta overwhelmed me in many ways. He has an ebullient personality, and even listening to him speak a language which you don't understand, you can tell that he is not shy or inactive. In the first few weeks Minta almost babysat me; he would come by all the time and he would take me everywhere. This was nice in some ways, but it got annoying after a while. And he also always called me "patron" which was really frustrating to me because I was already fighting an uphill battle trying to prove that I wasn't just a bag of money. Thankfully, after I got settled in, he slowly eased off. His work also picked up around February, so he just didn't have time to babysit me anymore. Also, I realized that he calls everyone "patron," even the kids that hang around my courtyard and don't have a dime to their names.

Minta is definitely one of my best friends here in Djibo. I see him every day, at least for an hour or so during the afternoon card playing sessions. In addition to this, a lot of the work that I do is with him, and even work that is not directly with him passes through him at some point, since he's my counterpart.

Bank Robbery

A few months ago, I had my first encounter with crime here in Burkina. It was not something that effected me directly, but it affected basically every artisan in the association. Thanks to the association, 2 years ago a branch of "caisse" for artisans was opened up in Djibo. A "caisse" is a small savings and credit association. There are a few such microfinance associations in Djibo.

At the artisans' caisse, members can deposit money in savings accounts and can apply for loans. The average loan size is about $200, and the biggest ever was a little over $1500. The total amount of

money in all of the savings accounts is around $30,000. There are over 700 clients. Though the caisse is not run directly by the association, all the members of the committee that approves loans are in the association, and a large number of the members of the caisse are also members of the association. There are two tellers who work there, and I am good friends with them. Because they are not incredibly busy, I usually spend about an hour sitting at the caisse and talking with the tellers and others every day.

In the beginning of march, the "cold" season was just coming to an end, and we had really hot weather. However, after about a week of this, we were surprised one afternoon by an incredibly strong wind. The wind kept picking up strength (it ended our card game – the cards wouldn't stay on the table), and by that night things were flying around and doors were slamming open and shut. It was really loud, and going outside was difficult due to the dust and debris flying around. Because of this, basically everyone shut themselves in their houses that night.

The next morning, March 4th, I stepped outside early in the morning and found that the wind was still blowing, and it was incredibly cold outside – this was one of the 2 or 3 times that I actually wore the sweater I brought. I went back inside, and at 9am I left and went to the shop of the president of the association. When I got there, the president himself wasn't there, but his partners and apprentices gave me a startling piece of news – the caisse had been robbed in the night. Normally, someone would have gone by and seen them, or someone would have heard them, but because they did the deed on this particular night, they were able to get in and out unseen.

At this point I wasn't exactly sure about the details. There is a lot of gossip here in Burkina, and stories often get blown out of proportion, especially when money is concerned. Also, I couldn't really couldn't get much information because everyone at the shop was speaking rapidly in Moore. It was clear, however, that everyone was stunned that this had happened, and worried about the money in the caisse's savings accounts.

I went over to the caisse and found 10 or 15 people standing around. The iron bar that locks over the door had been broken by the robbers. Once inside, they had jumped over the counter (there are bars inside, but they don't go all the way to the ceiling) and cracked open the small safe. They weren't able to get into the big safe. The scene at the caisse was very dismal – it was almost like I was at a funeral. I still didn't know how much had been stolen, but my original guess was somewhere around 500,000 FCFA ($1,000). Later I found out that over 4 million FCFA had been stolen – about $8,000, and ¼ of the whole deposits of the caisse. The previous day had been a marche day, so there had been a large number of transactions. Also, at the end of that day, the tellers had neglected to transfer the money to the big safe.

One of my biggest worries was that this would cause a panic, and everyone would pull out there money and stop trusting the caisse. This would be a tragedy, because the caisse and the availability of credit is a powerful tool that the community has at its disposal. I was happy to see that no such panic occurred – by the end of the same day the caisse was up and running again, and there was no rush on the bank.

The stunned silence that was the first reaction for most soon turned to anger. I was very surprised when most of my friends said that the thieves should be killed. I'm not sure if they were just caught up in the moment, or if they were really serious. I do know that thieves are not treated lightly here. I have heard of cases in which robbers are caught and basically beaten to death by mobs. In a country that is so poor, stealing from someone, especially from someone who also has next to nothing, is unthinkable. I told my friends that I didn't agree that a robber should be killed outright.

I was very surprised when one or two days later the thieves were found. They were two young men, neither of them older than twenty. Both had previously done short stints in prison for stealing. They had come to Djibo with the sole purpose of burglarizing, and they just happened to come on the same night as the wind, which effectively shielded their actions. They were caught in Ouahigouya, by the

military police. I'm not exactly sure how they were caught, but they were found with a little under 4 million fcfa plus a number of pairs of shoes they had bought with the rest of the money. A few people from the caisse in Djibo went to reclaim the money and testify at the trial. They both ended up with time in prison, I think less than a year each. The money was returned to the caisse, along with the shoes, which I thought was quite funny. So, I think to this day, behind the window of the caisse there are a few pairs of shoes. The caisse will probably sell the shoes to try to make the money back.

Work

After I finished my etude de milieu at the end of March, I started the process of planning projects and activities with my association. Though my knowledge of Djibo and the association and the broader context were (and still are) in no way complete, one can't put of work until perfect understanding comes, because there will always be things that are misunderstood or unknown. So, in April I sat down with a few of the leaders of the association, and we devised a list of goals to work towards in the next year. We chose four things: the construction of an office, the execution of trainings (both technical and in business skills), strengthing the organizational capacities of the association and each member group, and increasing the available credit at the caisse.

I have already written about the work that we have done for the construction of the center. So far everything seems to be going smoothly, and I would like to thank everyone who has donated money. I will keep you all updated on progress. For trainings, we have set up a committee made up of three members of the association to tackle the problem. We are applying for funding with an NGO that has a new partnership with Peace Corps that might be able to finance a training or two. We are also looking into how we can organize trainings ourselves with local artisans acting as the trainers, in order to diminish costs and minimize logistical complications. Increasing the efficiency and organizational capacities is one of the goals that I see as most important, though one that will be hardest to achieve. It is hard to get people excited and motivated about the structure of the association, but the way things are now I can easily foresee little management problems becoming huge problems in the future. Finally, as far as the caisse is concerned, I've looked into finding loans for the caisse, and have come to a number of dead ends. The best way to increase the credit without having to take out loans is to increase the total savings in the caisse. This is also much safer and simpler. So, I hope to be able to do some local awareness campaigns with the caisse in order to convince people to save more – however, it will be difficult to get this off the ground, and it seems less sure that that will work.

With the coming of the rainy season, association work is slowing significantly. As far as activities and projects are concerned, much will have to go on hold until September or October. In the meantime I hope to do a bunch of planning and have a lot of discussions with people in the association to get their ideas of how to tackle problems and start showing them how improving things like management will benefit them. All I know is that it won't be easy, and a lot of it is completely out of my hands.

I hope everyone is well – keep in touch and take care.

Peace,

Andy

## Comments

### I love your website

Posted by Triny, 7/5/04 1:25pm

I'm heading to Burkina on july 27th and I am really glad you put the effort of keeping your site going. The

hardest part of peacecorps is not knowing where, what and with whom your going to be working. but your site gave great insight to life in burkina. your positive outlook and experiences have helped with my nevers so I'll be eager to meet your when I get to BF

### Local Yokel
Posted by Connie, 7/9/04 8:11pm

Reading your description of Minta was a walk down Recent Memory Lane (Short Term Memory Lane?)--say hello to him for me. I can testify to my fellow Andy Burkina subscribers that this seems like a fair and accurate description! Love, yr Mom

### A fine edition
Posted by Greg, 7/10/04 11:41am

...and I can testify that the local yokel is a fine edition for andy burkina boy... Greg

### Great Update
Posted by The Moultons, 7/18/04 1:29pm

Andy, Your missives are terrific. We feel as if we're by your sign. Particularly liked the sketch of Minta. As you head in to your rainy season, we're trying to squeeze the most out of summer. Good week in Maine despite the fog. Lots of card and board games. A bat named Beatrice kept us company - hanging out above the fireplace! Great to be in touch! Margaret, Peter, Alexander & Sam

### Thank You
Posted by Angelique, 7/24/04 2:54am

Thank you for the detailed information available on your site. And for sharing your correspondents. It has helped prepare me for coming to Burkina next week. I now have a better idea of what to expect as a SED Volunteer.

### e-mail address
Posted by Zanna, 7/24/04 8:44am

Hi Andy, I sent you an e-mail (as I lived in Djibo 11 years ago), but it was undeliverable. You e-mail link looks funny and maybe has a problem? In the mean time, could you send me your address? zannadruk@yahoo.com Thanks

### Congrats
Posted by Vic, 8/26/04 8:03am

Andy, congrats on your quarter-term service thus far in Peace Corps. It's wonderful that you've been there nearly a year now and have accomplished so much. Keep up the good work, and say whatup to Minta for me.

### Thanx
Posted by ZM Yaduma, 2/3/05 8:41am

Thank you very much for the tremendous work in the farming sector i realy appreciate your work. best regerd Yaduma ZM

# Local Yokel #2, Public Transport, and the Rainy Season

Posted by Andy, 8/29/04 1:02pm

As I send this post August is coming to an end. That means I've almost been here a year, which seems pretty crazy. But I've still got a lot of time left here – 15 or 16 months. All is well in Djibo. Currently I'm in Ouaga, heading to Kaya tomorrow to help out for a week with the training of a new group of volunteers (they've been in training a month now).

Last week I got a great bit of news – the artisans center/office construction project has received full funding. I am really grateful to all of you who helped make that possible. Hopefully we'll be able to start cocnstructing at the end of September, though the schedule is not fixed yet. I'll keep you all posted.

But in the meantime...

**Local Yokel #2: Mariam**

As I'm sure I've written before, I share my courtyard with a family. The family is very small by Burkina standards, and consists of a husband, wife, and a 2½-year-old child. For this second installment of "local yokel" I will focus on Mariam.

Mariam is my age – she was born in 1980, though I don't know the date, and she probably doesn't know the date either. Birthdays are not really celebrated here, and most people don't even know their own birthdays. Mariam is from Djibo, though I know she grew up partly in Gorom-Gorom, a town in northeast Burkina. Her father was some sort of "fonctionnaire" (civil service worker) – maybe a teacher – and he was sent there to work for a number of years. Her first language is Fulfulde, and she speaks French and possibly Moore.

Mariam is a primary school teacher – though there are a fair number of women primary school teachers, this still puts her in a relatively small group of educated women. To become a primary school teacher, one must have completed the equivalent of at least 9th grade and have passed the BEPC and then the primary school concours (civil service exam – I described this a bit in my last entry). I'm not exactly sure how much school Mariam finished, though the fact that she is so young and already a teacher suggests that she did not go much past troisieme (approximately 9th grade – often the students at this level are 20 years old or older). I'm not sure how long Mariam has been teaching for, but it can't be more than a couple of years.

Mariam married Hama 3 or 4 years ago, and since then they have had only one child. Marrying at 19 or 20 is actually relatively late for a woman here; in a large town such as Djibo, the average marrying age is a bit higher. In small villages, I believe most girls marry and start having children at around 16 years of age (some as young as 13). Often the husband is 10, 15, 20, even 30 years older than the girl, especially if she is not his first wife. Mariam is Hama's first wife, and I would be very surprised if he took a second wife. Hama is about 6 or 7 years older than Mariam.

Mariam and Hama do not have a very intimate relationship. This is partly cultural, and partly personality, I think. In general husbands and wives do not interact very much publicly. Men and women eat separately, hang out separately, sleep separately. The wife cooks, cleans, and in general does what the husband asks. This all is to varying degrees, depending on the husband and wife in question. In the case of Mariam and Hama, there are other factors thrown in – most importantly that Mariam is educated, has a salaried job and thus cannot be home all the time. This sometimes brings strain on their marriage. Only a couple weeks after I had arrived in Djibo, Mariam left the courtyard one evening with a number of bags. The next day she still hadn't come back, and I learned that she had returned to her family (who also live in Djibo). Whether she left on her own or whether he told her to leave is still not clear to me. The next day she had still not come back, and that afternoon I learned that she had gone back to her family. Minta talked to Hama and told me that we were going to go to Mariam's family's courtyard that evening to "bring her back." So, that night we went there, along with a few other friends of Hama's. At this point I barely spoke any Fulfulde, so I did not really understand everything that was going on – Minta explained some of it to me afterwards. The men spoke first with Mariam's father, then Mariam came out and they all spoke together. Mariam's father said that he could not speak for her, and that it was her decision. The men that I had come with asked pardon, and said that Hama was at fault – apparently he had been making demands on Mariam which interfered with her work, along with a few other grievances. They said that they would talk to Hama about it, and that they would try to get him to mend his ways. After a long while, they convinced Mariam to come back with them. When we arrived back in the courtyard, we all (the friends who had gone, Mariam, and Hama) sat for a while and explained to Hama what had been discussed. The friends told Hama what he had to do, and Mariam also spoke. The mood lightened a little at the end, and everyone sat around talking before heading home. It's now been 8 months since that happened – it's hard for me to say if there has been any change in their relationship, since I was not really here before the intervention, and since I am not privy to their private interactions. Publicly, married couples don't really ever show any signs of intimacy.

During the school year (roughly mid-October to June), Mariam leaves for school between 7 and 7:30, dropping Baba off at her family's house, where he spends the day. She comes home at noon to prepare lunch and rest, then goes back to school at 3pm for another couple of hours. Then she picks Baba back up, comes home, cleans, prepares dinner, goes to bed. Thursdays and Sundays there is no school – I think Saturday is a half day. On these days off Mariam stays mostly in the courtyard, doing laundry and various chores around the house. One thing that I think must be difficult for Mariam is that she is the only woman in our courtyard. Because men and women do not really spend time together socially, this means that Mariam is often left to herself. This is not to say that no one talks to her, or that this is a strict separation. I talk to Mariam every day, and she has friends who come over, and her sisters and brothers come over relatively often.

Mariam is one of the few Burkinabe I know who reads books often, and definitely the only Burkinabe woman I know who does so. Even those who can read generally don't read for pleasure (though I do know some people who read the Quran fairly regularly). As I mentioned, Mariam often has time to herself, and she is educated and generally curious. I'm not sure what she reads, though I think it is often either short spy novels or romance novels – everytime I see people reading it is books like this.

Mariam has been very helpful to me, and at times she is sort of like a local mother (though we are the same age). When I first came and had no idea the best way to go about basic things – doing dishes (it's a bit trickier without running water), finding someone to wash my clothes, lighting and refilling a

kerosene lamp. Also I didn't know where to buy various objects household objects, cooking supplies. For these sorts of things it was often Mariam who guided me in the right direction. She never laughed at me for not knowing things that any 10 year old would know here. A few times a week she'll bring me a plate of food – usually rice or to (I reciprocate and bring Mariam and Hama a plate of food at least once a week). And when I invited a few people over to celebrate Easter, it was Mariam who prepared the chickens I had bought.

Mariam is very easy for me to talk to. Many women are incredibly shy about talking to me, which makes conversation difficult. However, with Mariam, because she is educated, married, and interacts with me in the safety of her own courtyard, there is no problem – she is generally friendly, inquisitive, and informative. All in all she is a great neighbor.

**Public Transport**

Public transport in Burkina Faso is often a big pain in the ass. Even getting somewhere like Djibo, a major town that is served by official bus companies, often becomes a big ordeal. Every volunteer has his or her story of "transport gone wrong."

Burkina has basically no train system. There is a rail line that runs from Ouagadougou through Bobo-Dioulasso (Burkina's second city) and then all the way through Cote d'Ivoire to its capital, Abidjan. However, when the war in Cote d'Ivoire started a few years ago, this line basically shut down. Even when it was running, I believe the price was prohibitively expensive for most people, at least for in-country travel, and it was used mostly for trips down to Abidjan. It might be back up and running now, though I'm not sure. Thus, travel is done almost uniquely on roads, and mostly unpaved roads at that. The roads between Ouaga and some big towns are paved, though even many large towns do not have paved access.

The non-paved roads come in many forms. Some are real dirt roads, wide enough for cars and buses to pass easily. One annoying thing about these roads is that because big trucks drive down them at fast speeds, the dirt gets moved around, and the roads come to resemble ridged potato chips. And since the shocks on most vehicles are pretty much shot, most rides are bumpy. Another interesting feature of roads here are the reverse bridges, usually called "Canadians." When it rains, the roads often flood. However, drainage systems with bridges are expensive to build and maintain. So instead, at various points on the bigger dirt roads there are short concrete sections that consist of a ramp going down, a short flat section (25 yards maybe) and then a ramp going back up. This helps to keep the road from flooding. The problem is that when a big rain comes these reverse bridges become little rivers. But I guess it's better than the whole road flooding. I've been told they're called "Canadians" because some sort of Canadian development project designed or built most of them.

Dirt roads that serve many small villages are just glorified paths, often badly marked, and easy to get lost on. These paths can become totally impassable at times during the rainy season.

The most organized form of mass transit is the "transport society" – private bus companies. There are a number of these companies, some which operate throughout the country, some in certain regions only. These "cars" (though there is a word in French "autobus" or just "bus," these buses are always called "cars") serve the big towns and administrative centers. The buses are in various states of disrepair. The nicer buses are used on the paved roads – there are even a couple of air-conditioned

buses that go from Ouaga to Bobo. So, the worse the road you are on, the worse the condition of the bus. Double whammy. Most of the buses are school-bus sized, though some are smaller. Often much of the foam is ripped out of the seats, which are fairly narrow. The buses are generally fairly packed, and people often bring bags and place them on the ground, thus limiting the already tight space. The aisles are often filled with people standing.

Because the buses are in such disrepair, they break down frequently. When a bus breaks down, you either wait until it is repaired or hope that something comes by that has room for a couple passengers. I know a couple volunteers who have had to sleep on the side of the road after bus breakdowns. So far I haven't experienced any real breakdowns; a bus I was on once died but was push started within 15 minutes.

The next level of transport is the "bush taxi" ("taxi brousse" in French). These come in different forms, and are usually vans or pickup trucks. They are privately owned. Sometimes they have specific schedules, and sometimes they just go once enough passengers are found (or some combination of the two). Often bush taxis operate to certain villages on market days only. Bush taxis are generally stuffed with people, more than you could imagine fitting. Then, on top of the people is baggage, goods being brought to villages, and animals – goats, sheep, and chickens. Bush taxis are usually in worse shape than buses, and sometimes the one bush taxi that goes to a village will break down, and stay in that state for a long while, thus making coming and going even more difficult.

Next come trucks. Not pickup trucks but big trucks carrying merchandise to be sold in villages. These trucks are often regularly scheduled on market days. The goods – 50 kg rice sacks, bags filled with rubber flip-flops, construction materials, animals – are loaded in first, and then the people jump on top. These trucks too become filled with people – it is a common site to see a truck with 30 or 40 heads sticking out the top. If you're a foreigner, or rich, or old and respected, it's possible to get a seat in the cab, though this is often more uncomfortable than sitting on top. On top you might get lucky and find a seat on a bunch of mattresses; if you're unlucky you'll get a seat on top of a bunch of steel tubes.

Finally, there are "occassions" – these are random rides that you can sometime find with NGOs, government development projects, or people with cars who happen to be going the same way as you. You need to keep your ear to the ground to find out about these. These are often the best rides – free, not very crowded, and generally faster. However, it is very rare to find someone who is going where you want to go when you went to go there.

That's about it for public transport (this doesn't include people's personal means of transport, which consists mostly of bicycles, feet, and for those with a little money, mopeds). Getting places can sometimes be a bit tricky, and often requires combining a few of the means described above. Also, getting somewhere often requires a circuitous route. For example, once I had to get from Dori to Djibo – a direct route of about 200k. However, in order to get to Djibo I ended up travelling about 500k on three different buses. For me, though transport is not always fun and is always a relatively tedious process, it is at least not in general difficult for me to get out of Djibo to Ouaga or Ouahigouya. For volunteers in smaller villages, transport is sometimes only available a couple of times a week, or only available after biking 10 or 20k. So I try not to complain so much.

**Rainy Season**

As I have mentioned in previous postings (and if you've received a letter recently I'm sure I've written about it as well), this year the rainy season was slow in coming. Everyone says that last year was one of the best rainy seasons – this meant that there was plenty of food, the price of millet and other staples was lower, and people thus had a little bit more money. Last year the rain started coming at the end of May or the beginning of June, and continued coming fairly regularly through September and into October. By the time I got to Burkina last September, the millet stalks were tall, and the harvest was just around the corner.

This year, after a couple really early rains in April, the rain was slow in coming. Last year, I was told, most people planted their seeds on or about June 2nd. This year that date came and went and still it had not rained. There were a couple small rains in the second week of June, but not enough to start planting. And then the rain stopped – for 2 or 3 weeks, there was no rain throughout most of the country (I'm not sure about the south). July came and still people had not planted. Finally, in that first week of July a few good rains came and everyone headed out to the fields to start the cultivating season. Rain came sporadically, about once a week. Towards the end of the month the rain picked up more, and it was raining 2 or 3 times a week – sometimes short rains of 10 or 15 minutes, sometimes long – the longest was about 4 hours. Everything seemed to be going fine until there was a 2 week period in the beginning of August with not a drop of rain. This was a crucial time for crops, as they were still growing. Just when people were really starting to worry, the rains came back, and in the last 2 weeks it has rained a number of times.

Since this is the only rainy season I've experienced here, it is hard for me to judge how good or bad the season has been. The millet seems to be growing, though I'm not sure if it's lower than usual. After the initial worry, despite the occasional dry spells, people have generally said that as long as the rain doesn't totally stop, everything should be ok. I'm not sure if people are just trying to be positive or if this is what they actually believe. After all, there is nothing they can do besides go to the fields and work with the little rain that they have. Actually, the government has tried to do something about the rain – it's called "Operation Saaga" (Saaga means rain in Moore). This involves somehow bombarding the clouds with sonar or something like that – I don't really understand the science behind it. However it's supposed to work, it does not seem like there is much correlation between those activities and the actual rainfall.

The coming of the rainy season has really transformed the country, in a number of ways. First, there has been a big change in climate and surroundings. Whereas from October to June everything was sand, dirt, and dust, there is now a fair amount of green – grasses, weeds, and crops in the fields. This change is evident everywhere – even in my courtyard there are large patches of green. Also, the ponds and lakes (both manmade and natural) are now filled with water. The big lake in Djibo was very low in June, and small ponds were all dried up. In addition, every time it rains there is minor flooding, and Djibo becomes filled with huge puddles – getting around town can become very difficult. Second, the rainy season has caused a big change in daily activities. Most people (especially in villages, but even in big towns like Djibo) go out to the fields, if not on a daily basis at least a few times a week. Cultivating is very labor intensive here – there are few plows or tractors, so most of the work is done with hoes. Walking around Djibo I can feel the difference, especially in the number of teenagers. For even if the adults stay in town to work, they send their kids out to the fields in their place. Also, market day is significantly smaller than during the dry season. All of this means that some aspects of my work are put on hold. I have actually done a decent amount of work in the last couple of weeks, but it is mostly planning and preparation work.

Last week I went with a couple of friends out to the fields for a morning. I learned firsthand that farming here is no easy task. The field I went to had been planted, and the millet was starting to grow – in some places it was a few feet off the ground, but most of it was no higher than a foot. There were about 10 of us there, performing two tasks. First there was the job of making each bunch of millet smaller – the millet is placed in rows. At each point where seeds were placed, there is a big bunch of stalks. If there are too many stalks, however, there is not enough water and nutrients in the soil to go around, and the millet won't grow properly. So we went around to each plant and pulled all but 2 or 3 of the bigger stalks out. Lots of bending over doing this, but otherwise not incredibly strenuous. The next step was going through with hoes, pulling up the dirt and weeds around each bunch of millet. This was extremely tiring – not only did it require bending over, but it involved swinging around a fairly heavy hoe over and over. I barely did any of this work, but the little that I did tired me out. The guy whose field it was had his wife prepare a huge dish of rice with sauce that she sent with someone on a bicycle to the field. We all ate together, and then a few people finished the little bit that was left.

Finally, the rainy season does not only bring life in the form of plants. It also has brought with it a host of insects that weren't around before, or at least weren't as visible. There are crickets, spiders, ants, mosquitoes, flies, termites, and a bunch of other insects I don't know the name of. But it's not only mosquitoes; animals seem to be giving birth left and right. Yesterday one of Hama's sheep had a baby – it's really amusing to see the baby hop around the courtyard on its wobbly legs. There are more frogs and lizards about as well – baby lizards less than an inch long. It's nice, after having gone through basically have a year of dust and heat to see all of this life springing up.

That's it for now. Take care and keep in touch.

Peace,

Andy

## Comments

### Mariam
Posted by Connie, 8/30/04 9:14am

Liza and I saw another side of Mariam: a delightful girlishness, evidenced in her interest in Liza and US female culture--clothes and hair and such. About Mariam and Minta and many others we met: locals, but not yokels!

### Ca va bien
Posted by Amanda, 9/8/04 10:02am

Great to hear from you, even though it makes me feel more guilty I haven't written that snail mail letter I owe you. We just came back from 3 days in Montreal, and we got you several French language books on basic construction. I'll ship them out this week. I know the plumbing info may be more than Djibo can handle now but if you are going to have a headquarters you may as well have a library for future trainees! Included will be a Sue Grafton mystery in French for Mariam -- as realistic but entertaining view of American as I could think of. Love, Mandy & Mary Ann

# Photos

Posted by Andy, 10/17/04 7:12pm
I don't have time to write much this time. Things are still going very well, and I am still feeling at home in Djibo. Work on the project is moving along - the bricks are made, and the masons will lay the foundation in the coming days. I am also working on some smaller projects, mostly working towards the better organization of the association.

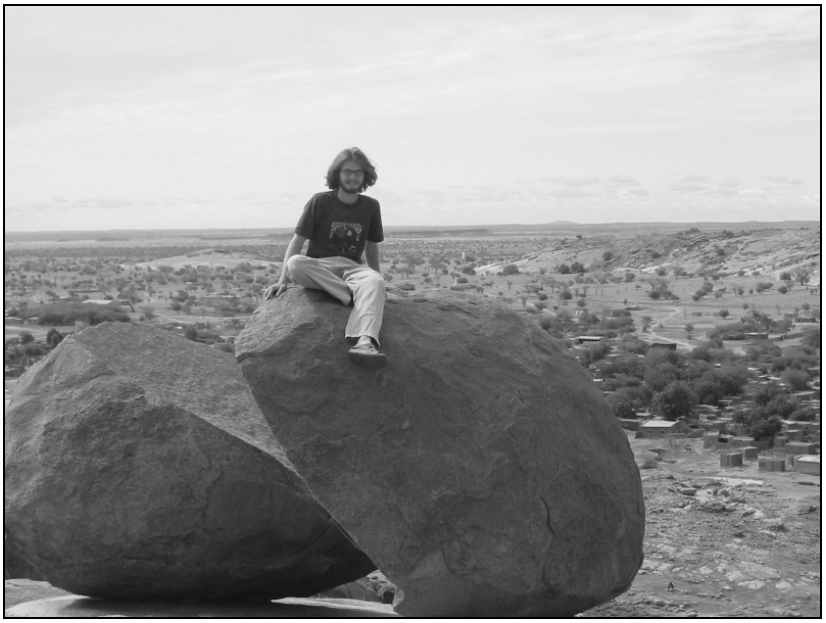
Recently, I met with an association of disabled persons. There is a possibility that I will help their association with some of their projects, which include animal husbandry, agriculture, literacy, and artisanal activities (obviously I am not an expert in animal husbandry or agriculture - my help would be more in the realm of organization, community mobilization, etc.). Their primary goal is to become completely self-sufficient. One thing they asked was whether I knew of any associations of disabled persons in the United States with which they could correspond. This could give them a chance to learn from the experiences of others. One problem is that they speak only French (and Fulfulde and Moore, probably more). However, if anyone has any ideas, please let me know by email (aneustaetter@yahoo.com).

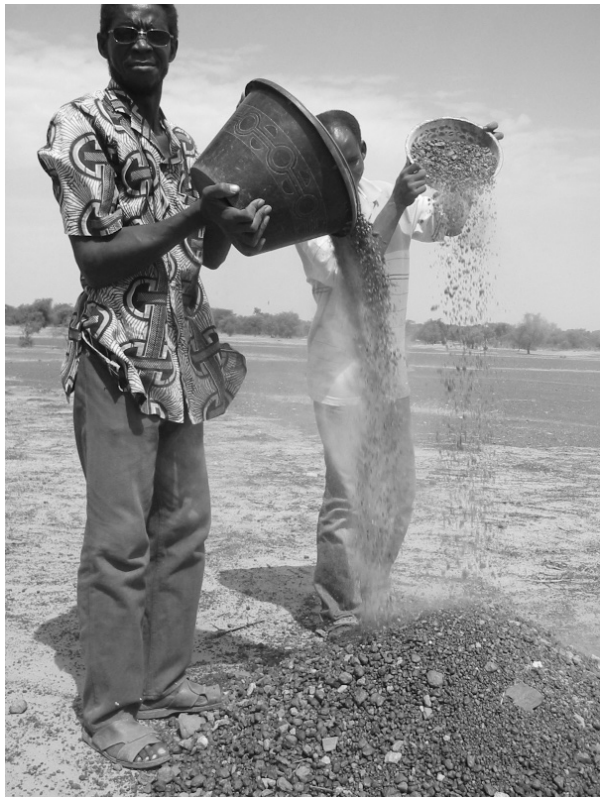
I leave you a number of pictures from the last few months here in Burkina Faso.

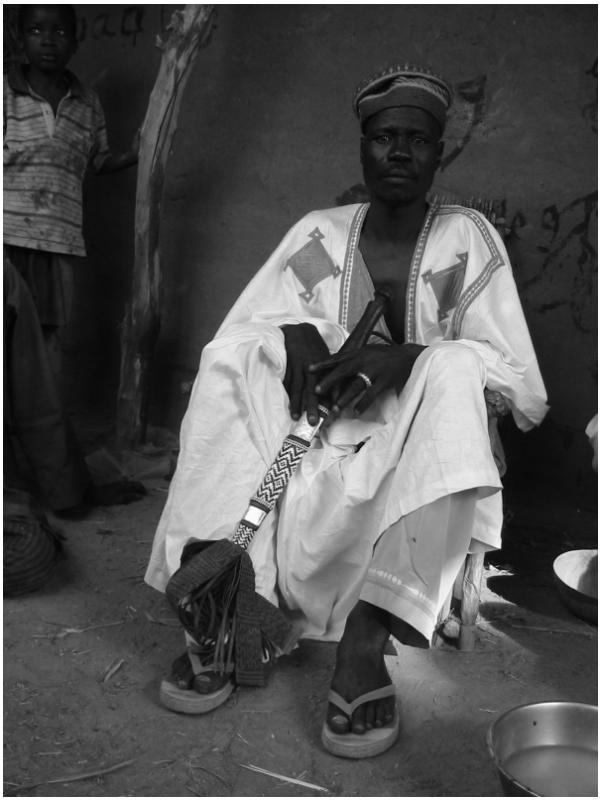
Happy Halloween.

Peace,
Andy

## Photos







## Comments

### Rights for the Disabled
Posted by Amanda Mecke, 10/18/04 4:11pm

It should come as no surprise that I have a suggestion on sources for you. Andrew Potok wrote a book, A Matter of Dignity, profiling many different kinds of advocacy for the disabled in the US which we published at Bantam last year. He went blind as an adult and wrote his first book about adjusting. It is possible that his books are in French, but even if they aren't, I will ask his editor if he might have some suggestions of contacts for your group in Djibo. One of the things Potok talked about which impressed me very much was that the "able-bodied" -- especially in rich countries -- always seem to focus on cure, but the emotional work of the disabled person herself is often to understand that you are still a complete person just the way you are and living to live in the moment the way you best can, not according to someone else's idea of "normal." Because he doesn't take the common American approach that you must approach all disabilities as if they are things that were broken and must be fixed -- he doesn't believe you can fix anything if you throw enough money & hard work at it anyway -- I think Potok might have some worthwhile examples for Djibo. His point is sometimes its not you that needs fixing but the world that makes you seem broken; help yourself to go anywhere you can in a simple wheelchair; don't let people have you sit still while others search for a way to make a wheelchair climb stairs or the paralyzed walk. I hope the Quebecoise construction books arrive and are of some use. Real letter to come too, I promise! Love, Mandy

### great website
Posted by Leia Isanhart, 10/22/04 10:32pm

Andy, As an RPCV from Burkina ('00-'03), I'm excited to have stumbled upon your website! Thanks for sharing your experiences with all of us at home. Sounds like you're having a fabulous time! Make the most of every day---it only flies by faster from here on out. As for the disabled artisans you're working with, I remember there being some established similar groups in Ouaga. Check out at SIAO and at the Art Center across from Verdoyant. It's not the American "correspondence" they're looking for, but it's a possibility for them to learn from others in a similar situation. Du courage! -Leia Isanhart RPCV, Bondigui, BF Une commission--say hi to Armande at the bureau next time you're in Ouaga. Merci!

# Visiting Andrew...
Posted by Greg, 12/11/04 7:38pm
Hello everyone - this is Greg, Andrew's brother. Last week Andrew tried to put up a new posting here, but he couldn't get the disk to work so he asked me to write a little bit and to put up a couple pictures for him. I was with him at an internet cafe in Ouagadougou, just finishing up a two week trip to see him in Burkina Faso.
I showed up in Ouaga the night before Thanksgiving on a crowded flight full of people heading to the Francophone Summit. Luckily Andrew was there to meet me so he could help me navigate through customs - my lack of French didn't go over too well when then had questions about my trip. We headed into the city with Andrew's friend Andrea, got a drink, and then crashed at a hotel.

Thanksgiving was an interesting day. The Peace Corps Small Economic Development (SED) group that Andrew is working with organized an Artisans fair at the US Embassy. One of the artisans from Andrew's association, a jeweler, was there to sell various crafts made by the Djibo association. Upon being introduced to him as Andrew's older brother, he immediately offered me a silver ring. I very quickly learned how unbelievably generous the people of Burkina Faso are. I'm sure that much of this is also attributed to the respect that Andrew has among the people he works with, but they all were incredibly kind and welcoming to me. Thanksgiving dinner was at the US Ambassador's house in the embassy compound. It was certainly entertaining to watch all the PCVs stuff themselves until they couldn't eat anymore.

The next morning we headed up to Djibo where we stayed for most of my visit. Over the next several days Andrew and I walked just about every square inch of Djibo - meeting many of the members of the association, climbed up the hills overlooking Djibo, went on a long walk around the lake with Gorko Bobo, walked through the oldest section of Djibo, and pushed our way through the busy animal market. On market day we hopped on board a tractor-trailer sized truck - right on top with all the bags of rice, grains, t-shirts, and flip flops - and made our way to Aribinda, a town 90 km from Djibo where Andrew's friend Andrea lives. The 6 hour ride wasn't the most comfortable transportation I've ever been on, so it was quite exciting to finally get to Aribinda.

Aribinda is a smaller village that Djibo, with only a couple thousand people living there. The village is very beautiful - surrounded by rocky hills on each side. We spent two full days there - climbing the rocks, attending one of the math classes that Andrea taught, checking out the market, and watching Andrew and Andrea agonize over way too many crossword puzzles. The people of Aribinda were incredibly welcoming and they all chided me for not spending more time in their village. Since Aribinda is slightly off the beaten path, it was a bit of a struggle to find transportation back to Djibo - we went around the town talking to people asking if they knew of any cars going through - everyone said they'd send someone by if they heard of anything. Luckily this paid off, as Andrea's counterpart heard about a ride and came by at 6 in the morning to let us know about a church car that was heading to Djibo. We were able to get a spot in the car, and what took 6 hours by truck took about an hour and a quarter in the church car.

In the last few days we made some final tours through Djibo - saying goodbye to all of Andrew's friends, drinking tea, playing cards, and eating the food people had prepared for us. But finally, all vacations must come to an end...so we caught a bus to Ouagadougou and found ourselves a hotel. My last day in the country was spent shopping for souvenirs, treating Andrew to a couple nice meals at a Chinese restaurant and an Italian restaurant, and checking out the Peace Corps office. All in all it was a great trip and I am really glad that I was fortunate enough to be able to go visit Andrew.

Andrew is doing incredibly well - he seems very happy, his is very well respected by all of the people he works and lives with in Djibo, and he has been able to fit in really well - walking the walk, and talking the talk - the French, Fulfulde, and Moore talk. He definitely misses all his friends and family and was eager to hear any news I had heard....and if you miss him too, then send him a letter - he appreciates letters quite a bit!

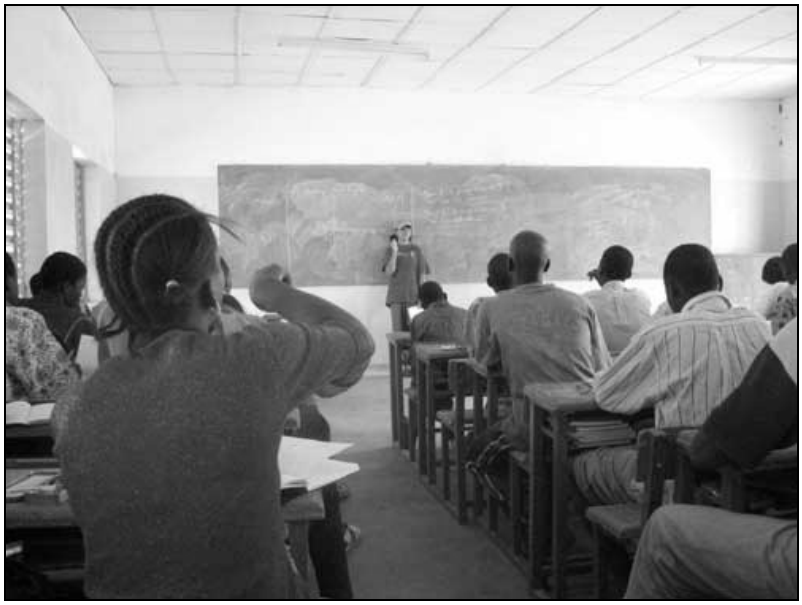
I've posted a selection of the photos I took during my trip on my website - you can check them out at:

http://www.gregphoto.net/gallery2

The photos are in "Greg's Gallery". Also, I came back with a bunch of Andrew's photos which I've put up there as well - you can see those in the "Andy Burkina" gallery. I'll copy a couple of these below so the lazier people in the bunch can see them without clicking through to the gallery!

Enjoy!

## Photos



## Comments

### Jack White
Posted by Connie, 12/12/04 8:49am

I would point out (correct me if I'm wrong, Greg) that the sheep posed fetchingly with one leg out and one

tucked under is Jack White, Andrew's very own mouton, named for his White Stripe. It's maternal manna to see photos of my two fellers.

### Merry Christmas
Posted by Melanie R., 12/24/04 7:22am

Great to hear about Andy from your perspective, Greg. It must have been a thrill for both of you to hang out there, and have Thanksgiving together. Merry Christmas! Keep up the great work and the descriptive updates Newt!!!

### Greetings
Posted by Keith Smith, 1/15/05 11:04am

Hi Andy. My colleague Steve pointed me to your site. It's good to see your perspective and photos. My site is at www.undertheacacias.org.uk Have a great time, and keep posting!

### Hello!
Posted by Anna Brown, 3/21/05 1:19pm

Hi! My name is Anna and I was in Djibo last year on a gap year with SIM. I never met you I don't think but heard of you! Like the site! Anna

## Ghana, Local Yokel #3, and Ramadan
Posted by Andy, 1/15/05 2:45am

Once again I've not placed a real update on the site in a long while. I tried to post an entry at the beginning of December – however, a floppy disk failure prevented me from successfully doing so.

As is clear from the last entry, posted by Greg himself, I had the pleasure of a visit from my brother. His description is fairly exhaustive, so I won't add anything there, except to say that it was really great to see him after over a year apart. And despite the long period in which we had not seen each other, and despite significant changes in both of our lives, everything was the same as always between us. I was honored (as were all of my friends in Djibo) to have him as a guest.

After a busy (relatively) couple weeks of work following Greg's visit I took my first vacation since arriving in Burkina Faso. I traveled for two weeks in Ghana, with Andrea, a PCV who lives in a neighboring village. The vacation was much needed, and we had a great time. We spent Christmas on one of the nicest beaches I've ever been to, walked in rainforests and cocoa plantations, walked above the rainforest on rope bridges, ate lots of delicious food (octopus, barracuda, hot dogs!, fried chicken, ice cream, a pizza delivered to the door, shrimp, fried rice, fresh coconut, pineapple, etc.), took a short canoe trip in the Pra River, saw a colonial "slave fort" in Cape Coast, travelled in many bush taxis, waited in many bus stations, walked around for hours in what is claimed to be the biggest market in West Africa (in Kumasi), spent New Years with a bunch of other Burkina PCVs and bac! kpackers at Big Milly's, and much more.

So now I'm back in Djibo, where I've now been living for 13 months. That means I have less than a year left. It's hard to believe that I am more than halfway done with my service (including training I've been here about 16 out of a total 27 months), though 11 months still seems like a long time left. But I'm sure it'll fly by.

I leave you now with another edition of local yokel as well as a description of Ramadan (which is now months in the past).

**Local Yokel #3: Loukman and Mahama**

Besides the people that live in my courtyard (including me there are only 4 of us), there are a few teenage boys who spend hours a day there, treating it as a second home. Two of these boys are brothers: Loukman (pronounced Luke-mon) and Mahama Sana.

I am not exactly sure of their ages – but neither are they. Loukman is probably between 20 and 22 years old, and I believe Mahama is somewhere around 17 or 18. They do not come from Djibo, but from a village called Seguenega, about 100 kilometers from Djibo as the crow flies. They are Mossi – this is the dominant ethnic group in Burkina Faso. Djibo is a Peul (otherwise known as Fulani) town, though there is a very large Mossi population, and around town one hears almost as much Moore (the Mossi language) as Fulfulde.

Mahama and Loukman have been in Djibo for 4 or 5 years now. They are here to attend the "Madrasa" – the Muslim high school. Djibo has many "Qur'anic schools," many of which consist of a teacher or master who teaches the Qur'an to young children, who go around and beg for food at meal times. These kids are called "garibous," and they come door to door around meal times and call out for food. Most people give at least a small plate of food to the garibous – it is part of one's obligation as a good Muslim to do so. I think it is a good system - food is never wasted, ever. In addition to these informal Qur'anic schools, there is also the Madrasa, which is a school organized along similar lines as the public schools, just with a different emphasis. The languages of instruction are French and Arabic (the school is also called "l'école Franco-Arabe"), though I believe there is more of an em! phasis on Arabic. The subjects they cover include French, Arabic, geography, math, philosophy, and the Qur'an. As with the public schools, in order to continue on to the next year students must have the "moyen" – average.

The brothers, though a few years apart in age, are in the same class at school - roughly the equivalent of 10th grade. It is very common for kids to go to school away from home. Sometimes this is because there are no schools in the village. Sometimes this is because the student has failed out of the local schools; once you fail a year of school a certain number of times (maybe twice?) you are no longer allowed to go back to that school. But you are allowed to try your luck at a school in a different village or at a private school if you are in a bigger town. And sometimes parents send one or two of their children off to go to a Madrasa.

Most often, kids are sent off to live with an uncle, older brother, or other family member in a village or town that has an appropriate school. Families are generally large and familial obligations are such that an older brother cannot really refuse to take in a nephew or younger brother (nephews are usually just called sons, uncles called fathers; those who are referred to as uncles are generally not related directly). Mahama and Loukman, however, have no family in Djibo. Instead, they live in a courtyard with other

students of the Madrasa, with some sort "patron." I'm not exactly sure if it is someone connected to the school, if they pay separately, or if it is part of tuition. For that matter, I have no idea what the tuition costs are at the Madrasa. Public schools, I believe, cost between 20 and 80 dollars a term, depending on the town, year, and other factors.

At some point in there first couple years here, Mahama and Loukman got to know Hama (my neighbor). They occasionally worked as day labor for a builder who is friends with Hama, and Hama started hiring them as day laborers as well (for his work as a plumber). They started coming over to the courtyard to hang out, at the same time helping to do errands. Eventually they became more or less permanent fixtures here, spending time between classes and after school here, eating here (not every meal but at least a few times a week). This all happened in the years before I got here.

So, I've known the two of them basically since the day I moved to Djibo. As with most people, it took me a long while to figure out their story, or even the fact that they are brothers; but piece by piece it all started making sense. When I first got here, Mahama often helped me to go to the marché and buy the basics for my house – I remember going with him, on my second day here, on a shopping trip. As I have become more and more acclimated to life here, my independence has grown. But Mahama and Loukman still help me with many things – getting water (from a nearby public faucet – though lately it is more often "Tubaku," another regular kid in my courtyard, who fetches me water), fixing my thatch overhang, making tea, and, most recently, accompanying me to the animal market and helping me to buy a sheep (which I bought for Tabaski, the "fête de mouton" which is coming up in January).! In exchange, I often provide the funds for tea, I feed them lunch if they're around (they actually like the food I cook and Mahama once side I should open a restaurant – however, the other day I gave him a bit of vegetarian chili and he took only a few bites, saying that it was definitely "white people food"), or give them a bit of money if they've done work for me.

Mahama and Loukman are two of my best friends in Djibo. I feel very comfortable with them, and because they are still "kids" (even though they're not that much younger than me) I never have to worry about protocol, I can ask them questions I might not feel comfortable asking an adult. Mahama especially is something of a comedian, and we always joke around, and make fun of each other. Mahama gets teased often by other kids because his French is not excellent (though it's pretty damn good considering that it's his 4th language). One of his friends told me that once in class the teacher asked what was the fifth largest town in Burkina – Mahama, either not paying attention, or just not understanding, was called on to answer, and said that the correct answer was Spain. But he rolls with the punches and jokes right back.

Because they do not come from Djibo, both of them left at the end of the school year (mid-June) to go back to their family's village to help out in the fields during the rainy season. It was weird when they left, as I had grown so accustomed to their daily presence in my courtyard. And then I got used to them not being here, and as the next school year approached (school started up in mid-October) I was curious as to whether things would be the same as the last year – I thought that with them getting older, they might separate themselves a bit. But when they did come back, things fell back into the same routine, though since their return my relationship with them has gotten even stronger, and more natural. I think the fact of them leaving and coming back again, with me here at both ends, established me as more of a permanent presence instead of a visitor.

**Ramadan**

The Muslim holy month of Ramadan came to an end here in Burkina on Nov. 17. During the month, Muslims are supposed to fast all day (from sunup to sundown) everyday. Last year Ramadan occurred while I was still in training, so even though I was well aware that it was going on, I was separated from the daily patterns associated with the many days of fasting. Also, Kaya is not as uniformly Muslim as Djibo, and even though I knew many Muslims there (including Bill Gates and my whole host family), I only knew a couple people who fasted at all, much less for 30 days.

Here in Djibo, almost everyone I know is Muslim (the only Christian I really know is a guy who works for a development project and comes from eastern Burkina Faso), and most of these people are fairly observant. None of my good friends drink alcohol or eat pork. And all of them fasted all day, everyday: no food and no water for 13 hours. I was in Ouaga when Ramadan started, and came back to find things much changed. Everyone was getting up to eat at 4 in the morning. Everyone was spitting all day long – you are not even allowed to swallow your own saliva (luckily spitting in public, even a big wad of phlegm, is not considered rude at all in this culture). Our daily afternoon tea and card sessions were suspended – by that time in the day, no one had enough energy to play cards. The call to prayer at sundown became a daily event, something looked forward to. As sunset approached, cold water (in "sachets," little clear plastic bags) would be sent for, and as soon as the call from the local mosque was heard everyone would eagerly drink.

I had said a number of times in the weeks leading up to Ramadan that I would at least try to fast for one day. But since I wasn't there at the beginning, when I did come back I put it off for the first few days. And then Mahama told me that he didn't think I was capable of making it the whole day. With the challenge there, I told him that I would prove him wrong the very next day. So, the next morning I woke up at 4 am, prepared a big bowl of oatmeal (which I packed with extra powdered milk and peanut butter to give me a little more energy), stuffed it down, and drank as much water as I could. This meant that I was extremely bloated and uncomfortable when I lay back down in my bed. And for the next 5 hours I had to go to the latrine every 20 or 30 minutes to relieve my inflated bladder.

After a slow start to the day, I made my usual rounds, greeted various people, sat and talked with various sets of people (my mornings usually consist of going from one place to another, sitting around and talking for 20 or 30 minutes at each stop). The typical response when I told people that I was fasting was surprised, though happy and amused – people told me that I couldn't do it, or that with the sun here in Africa fasting was harder than over there "in Europe." But almost everyone was very encouraging, and gave me advice and their personal techniques for making it to sundown.

I came back home before noon – normally at this time I would prepare lunch. Instead I sat and read for a while. I was already thirsty, and getting nervous, as there were still 6 hours left to sundown. I took a nap around 1 PM, as I often do, though at 2:30 I woke up incredibly parched and somewhat incredibly thirsty. Luckily this extreme dryness in my throat passed to some extent. The rest of the afternoon I did not leave my courtyard. The thirst stabilized, and I got used to it, but my energy was very low, and standing up made me lightheaded. But the hours slowly went by, and went slower as 6pm approached, the last half-hour being the worst. A few minutes before sunset, someone sent one of the kids off to get a bag full of sachets of ice water. As soon as the call to prayer was heard, everyone bit into his sachet and drank. I found that I had to drink rather slowly at first, because! the water, though very refreshing, was something of a shock to my system. I drained two sachets and then it was time to eat.

That morning, as I was walking around town, I ran into a friend of mine who told me that he had heard that the butcher had camel meat. This is a somewhat rare occurrence; I had never tried camel meat, but had always wanted to. I had told a number of people that if they ever heard of camel meat available in Djibo they should let me know. When he told me there was camel meat, I told him that I had had the bad luck to decide to fast on the one day that camel meat had come. Luckily, I was able to go to the butcher and reserve a piece of grilled meat for 6 PM. So after I drank water, I pulled out the piece of grilled meat, and shared it with Mariam, Hama, and the boys in my courtyard. I'm not sure how much of my impression of it was changed by the fact that I hadn't eaten all day, but let me say that the camel meat I had was amazing – flavorful, not to fatty, not super tough.

I did not continue fasting every single day, but over the following weeks I managed to fast six times in total. It got a little easier as I got used to it, and I was able to be a little more active than on that first day. Even though it was still always a countdown to sundown, at least I knew that I could do it, so the element of fear was removed. Everyone seemed really happy that I had done six days. Even though six is nothing compared to 29 days in a row, people saw that I was at least making an effort and trying to take part in their customs.

At the end of the month was the big fête. It was very similar to Tabaski, the "fête de mouton" that had taken place back in February. The emphasis was eating, and the day was spent going from one friend's house to another, eating vast quantities of food, drinking zoomkoom (water mixed with millet flour, sugar, and tamarind), sodas, and tea. I had five large meals throughout the day, including goat meat, lamb, fish, spaghetti, rice, couscous, popcorn, peanuts, watermelon, and fried "gateaux." And I paid for it the next morning with a severe meat hangover.

Before the eating, however, was the prayer. Most of the men, plus the older women, all gathered in a large field in town in the morning. They all lined up in rows – there were easily over one thousand people there. Little children were interspersed among the adults. Everyone sat chatting until the imams arrived and started the prayer, at which point they all stood up, listening as the imams called out. Watching all of the people pray together – holding their hands to their heads, then bending down, then kneeling and touching heads to the ground, then repeating it all, with their children trying as much as possible to copy the motions of their parents – was truly beautiful.

I hope everyone is doing well and had a great Thanksgiving, a Happy Chanukah, a Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year. Keep in touch and take care.

Peace,
Andy

## Comments

### Good to hear from you
Posted by Mandy, 1/15/05 3:13pm

Andy, your portrait of your two young friends reveals how much you've become more and more integrated in the community and culture. I suspect you may not even notice the lovely echo of your comments about Greg in your story about Lucsan and Mahama Sana. You're becoming quite a writer -- no surprise given your family! Love from Mary Ann too.

### Great site, Andy

Posted by Steve, 1/16/05 3:05pm

Your description of Ghana makes me want to visit there straightaway - but perhaps I'll wait until hot season. It'll give me a good excuse to escape Djibo when the temperature hits 115! Keep up the good work. Steve http://www.voiceinthedesert.org.uk

## Locusts, some photos

Posted by Andy, 1/26/05 10:40am

Another entry - this might be the shortest interval between two postings yet. I hope it's not an overload. I'm in Ouaga for my mid-service medical exams. The exams are basically done, and I seem to be in good health. After much pre-dentist anxiety, I ended up without having a single cavity. I head back to Djibo tomorrow morning.

This posting is about something that happened months ago, but I haven't gotten around to writing about it until now. I've also posted some photos below - some are from Ghana, some from Burkina.

**Locusts**

I'm sure many have read or heard reports of the locusts that swarmed through much of West Africa last year. Actually, the first that I heard of them was in the western press, on BBC radio. They originated in Mauritania, I believe, and fairly quickly their numbers grew exponentially and they moved into Senegal and Mali, devastating crops and continuing to reproduce at alarming rates wherever they went. As they made their way east through the Sahel, there were reports that Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad were in their path. A number of family members and friends asked in letters or emails if the locusts had shown up in the Djibo region. For a long while the answer was "no" and it looked like the forward charge of the locusts might be stopped or diverted before reaching Burkina. Occasionally I heard reports from Burkinabè of locusts in not-too-distant parts of Mali, but, as no one seemed particularly worried about it, I didn't give much thought to it.

Everything changed on the afternoon of Sunday, September 24th. As usual, I was sitting just outside my courtyard drinking tea and playing cards with Hama and Mami. All of a sudden, Hama, who was sitting across from me, pointed behind me and something to the effect of "Jumpin' jackrabbits! Look at that!" I looked around and saw a growing swarm of insects. The swarm of insects grew and spread, and was soon everywhere. It was already late in the afternoon, and soon the sun went down. Since I live in the middle of town, not very close to any fields or much plant life in general, when night came I didn't see the locusts. However, I later learned that in areas further out in the bush and closer to fields, the locusts descended on the fields and plants at night, at spent the night "eating."

When I woke up the next morning, the locusts were there, and in much higher concentration than the day before. It was an amazing site. From a distance it looked like specks of snow, though darker and instead of falling straight to the ground they were flying around more or less horizontally. Closer up they looked sort of like a miniature air force. There were many layers of them, going up at least 3 or 4 stories. They swarmed on certain types of trees, and left others completely untouched. The ones that they did land they covered in a thick layer. The locusts themselves are about 2 or 3 inches long and are a sort of peach/pink color. The tops of the trees that they infested looked to be colored in pink snow. All in all it had the feel of an alien invasion.

That morning everyone was in a heightened state. It is important to note that the rainy season was near it's end at this point, but nothing had been harvested. Though the rainy season had not been good (the rains came late and there were a number of 2 or 3 week periods without any rain), most people would have been able to harvest a little. That morning, there was a rush to the fields. Everyone wanted to salvage whatever they could. Almost everyone that I talked to had bad news, and what I heard was that the locusts ("babatti" in fulfulde) had eaten *everything*, not leaving a single grain. I did not go out to the fields to see what had happened, so I have no confirmation of this - however, the way in which people consistently said this led me to believe that they weren't exaggerating.

That day, the locusts stuck around until midday or so, and then they were gone. The next day they did not enter Djibo itself, though I heard reports that they were still in the area, still ravaging fields. The day after that they once again entered Djibo and swarmed around for a few hours. After that they disappeared, continuing east, and did not come back. Some people were able to scrounge a little of their crops, but most people got close to nothing - all that was left were the millet stalks (which were still harvested, as they are used for other purposes).

The days that the locusts were there, there was a very charged atmosphere in the air. It was a combination of awe, fear, and resignation. There was really nothing that anyone could do about it at this point. Everyone was worried - they didn't know how they would feed themselves, how they would make it to the next rainy season. A number of people asked me to "write to America" to tell them to send food. But for the most part, people did not overly pity themselves. Since getting by in any year is difficult here, I think that people are desensitized to crises such as these - it's just another problem that has to be overcome, though an unusual and particularly difficult one. With the help of God, people say, they will make it through. This is not to say that people were not incredibly worried - for two weeks or so, the locusts were all anyone talked about. I can't count the number of times I heard people say things like, "the locusts have messed everything up," "you see how strong God is - he can even ruin us with little insects," or "this year…we don't know what's going to happen." It was strange though - for a few weeks, people only talked about the locusts, but then all of a sudden I heard very little about them. People would still mention them in passing, usually in talking about how hard the year was going to be. But I think people had resigned themselves to the reality, and talking about it all the time would just be painful and take too much energy.

It is really hard for me to judge the effects of the locusts, for a number of reasons. First of all, as I have never seen a "normal" rainy season and harvest, I have little to compare it to. Second, since I live in a town, I cannot judge what is happening in the villages, where things are much more difficult. Whereas in the town most people have at least a little income, in the villages most people rely solely on the food that they grow. So if the food that they go is all destroyed, they have nothing. I know that a lot of

people have left villages and gone to towns. Finally, people don't flaunt their problems here, for that would create shame.

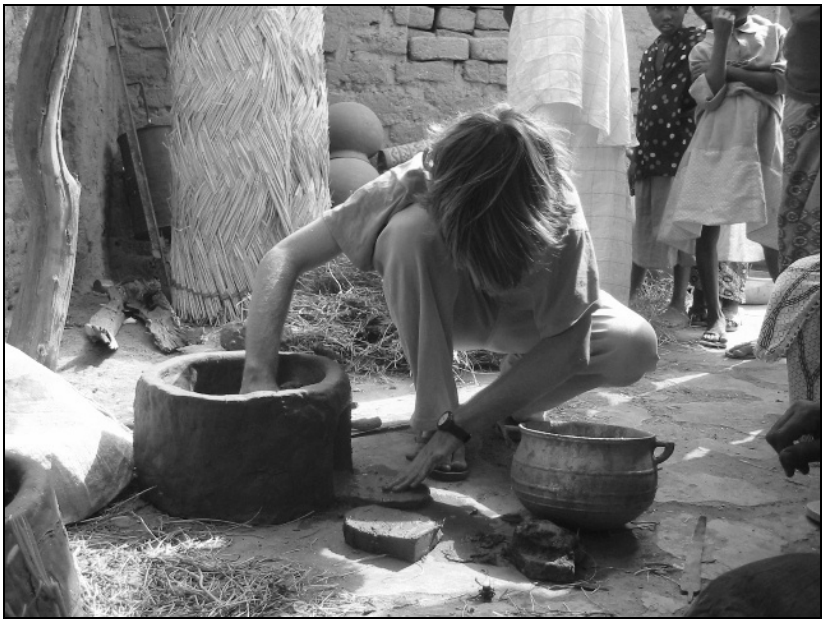
I know there has been some amount of aid that has come to Northern Burkina Faso, though I can't say exactly what form it is taking. There is some food that has been directly given, I believe some food has or will be sold at subsidized prices (in the couple weeks after the locusts came the price of a sac of millet doubled, then continued to fluctuate), and I know that there will be an effort to provide or subsidize seeds for planting this year.

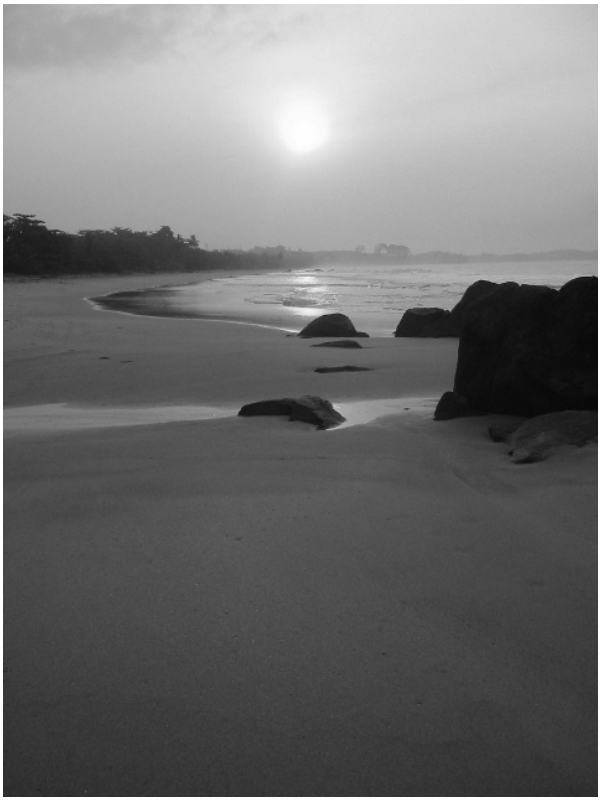
The locust invasion has really given me a chance to reflect upon my relationship to the people here, and has highlighted the ambiguities and the contradictions in that relationship. Because as much as Peace Corps volunteers try to integrate themselves into their communities - by speaking local languages, eating local food, living in houses similar to the rest of the community, etc. - one aspect of life in Burkina Faso that I will never partake in is the suffering and the struggle to get by. While I can sympathize, try to help, and try to raise awareness by reporting what I see, I know that a crisis like this will have no direct effect on me. I will still be able to eat as much as I want, I won't have to worry about feeding a family, or about making ends meet. It has not been easy to come to terms with this contradiction. The best I can do is to recognize this contradiction, and to check myself when I start thinking too much that I am one with the community. Because I will never really know what it is to suffer as the people here do.

Okay, sorry if I ended this posting on something of a somber note. Take care everyone, and keep in touch.

Peace,
Andy

## Photos






Coca-Cola
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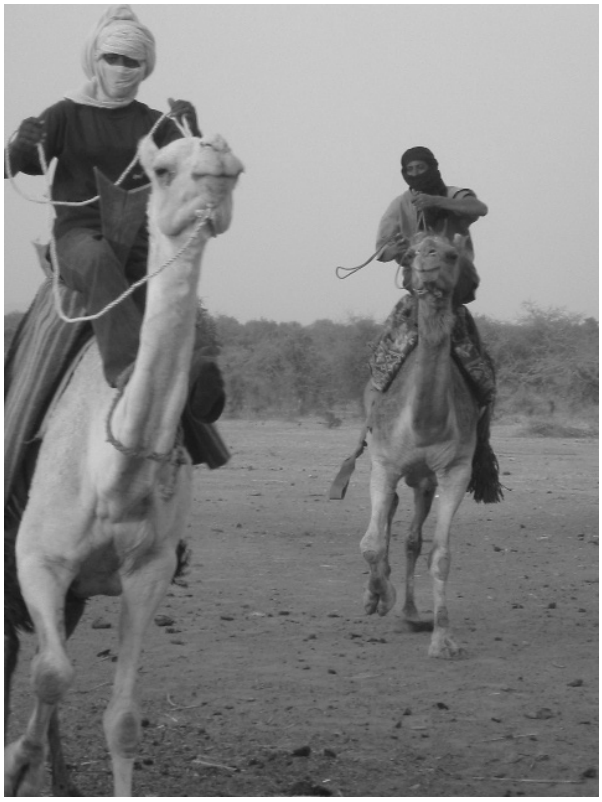
2



## Comments

### Locusts
Posted by Margaret, 1/26/05 7:28am

What an experience, Andy! All that we didn't know about locusts. Snowing here in New England. We have two feet on the ground from the last blizzard and 8 more expect today. Makes your warm temps seem divine. Best from all the Moultons

### Locusts
Posted by Mandy, 1/26/05 7:35am

When I was substituting in an English class in a local High School, the story we read was one by Doris Lessing about a locust attack on a South African farm. The next time I happened to have the same students, I mentioned that although literature may seem remote from their reality, I had just heard from a friend in the Peace Corps that his friends had lost their crops to locusts. I could tell they found it sobering that such devastation could jump off the page of a textbook and become real in their own time. The next time I am there, I will take your description, and I think they will understand all you say about empathy and hard some people have to work to just stay alive. The Tsunami was a vivid, dramatic lesson to the world, but the most important lesson is to know such natural disasters happen to someone everyday. That's when the idea of a "social saftey net" gets real. Andrew, I urge you to think about publishing this account more widely, perhaps on behalf of an agency which is trying to help the farmers. Love, Mandy

### the locusts
Posted by Connie, 1/26/05 7:41am

I agree with Mandy, Andrew. Yours is an insightful and humble (humbling, as well) account. Love, Mom

### aid for the locust famine
Posted by Keith, 1/27/05 1:25am

Hi Andy. Thanks for writing about this - official statistics put loss in the north BF harvest at 90%. My colleague Steve in Djibo is liaising with the World Food Programme for food aid. If people are interested in more details, they can read more at his website, under the "famine relief" section: http://www.voiceinthedesert.org.uk/weblog/archives/famine_relief/index.html More details also at my site: http://voiceinthedesert.netfirms.com/keith/archives/2004/12/the_locust_swar.html Say hi to Andrea from me. cheers Keith

### Locusts
Posted by Penny Robiner, 1/27/05 3:46pm

Hi Andy - Your mom told me about your website. It is amazing to read about your experiences and see the photos from such a distance - making it more palpable to those of us who are so fortunate to be unencumbered by such devastation. Your observations about being part of the community yet apart as well are an important aspect of the Peace Corps experience. I look forward to reading more. And I hope that members of your community are able to get enough food. Take care- Penny

### oh to be back in burkina
Posted by Erin Ostrander, 1/29/05 5:37am

Andy, Just stumbled across your website as I was looking for images of Burkina to supplement those I took when I was there in September 04 visiting Anna Campbell. We stayed in Ouaga, her village-La Toden, and in Ouahigouya (wow, I just spelled that from memory!). What fun to scroll through your photos and see those places (the hostel in Ouaga and peace corps house in Ouahigouya) and to even see a picture of her! Say hi to her for me if you see her sometime soon. Best for the rest of your time there- sounds like you are loving it. I was only there 10 days but what a wonderful place and wonderful people. -Erin Ostrander erinost@hotmail.com

### No Subject
Posted by Emily, 2/16/05 3:13pm

Hey Andy, It's amazing how out-of-touch I've gotten in the relatively short time I've been back in the States. I hadn't heard about the locust invasion, or maybe I did, but brushed it off as I do with so many distant and intangible events. It's great to read your stories. I think I'll share this one with the students in the school where I work. I have mixed feelings about giving aid, although in disaster scenarios it becomes a different matter. At the very least, it's so important that (American) people know about this kind of event so that, maybe, they'll start to think about their own lives with some sort of humility. I hope you're doing great and think about you often! Emily

### Are you a far relative of mine?
Posted by Dr. Reuven Steinhardt, 7/27/05 3:37pm

I wonder if you belong to the Neustaetter of Obernbreit and later Munic. One of them was my grand-grand-grand mother Fanny (Neustaetter)Sternfeld. Yours, Reuven Israel miru@013.net

## Local Yokel #4
Posted by Andy, 2/22/05 12:03pm
Greetings from a very dusty Burkina Faso. We are now through six months of the dry season, with about three left. It is getting hotter and hotter now, and I am preparing myself for continual sweating and discomfort.

I am in Ouaga for an "In-Service Training," which lasted two days. I head back to Djibo tomorrow. After 14 months there, things are still going well - there are still occasional frustrations and difficult days, but I think that's just the nature of the beast.

The food security situation is still a big question, and food seems to be more and more scarce. Anyone who is interested in donating to help relieve this emergency situation can contact me by email and I will find an appropriate outlet.

Onto the posting…

**Local Yokel #4**

In a number of my descriptions, I have mentioned the "caisse des artisans" (this is the place that got robbed about a year ago). A "caisse" is basically a local small-scale savings and credit union - the official name of this one is the "Mutuelle d'Epargne et de Credit du Nord-Ouest Burkina Faso" (Savings and credit mutual of northwest Burkina Faso). The caisse is based in Ouahigouya, and there are currently 7 branches of it in the region, though it is currently expanding to the Bobo-Dioulasso region, in the south of the country. The Djibo branch has been open for about 2 years now, and has over 700 members. Members can make deposits and withdrawals in their savings accounts, and can apply for credit - most of the loans are in the $50 to $200 range. There are two people who work at the caisse as "caissiers" (cashier): Hamidou and Absatou. Hamidou is one of my best friends in Djibo. Hopefully I will come back to him in a future posting. Today I will focus on Absatou.

Absatou comes from the largest ethnic group found in Djibo, the Rimaybe (Hama, Minta, Mariam are all part of this same group). This is the former slave class to the Peuls (aka Fulani). Though these days Rimaybe are often lumped together with Peuls (probably mostly due to the fact that they speak Fulfulde), the culture and history of the two groups is actually quite different. I won't go into a detailed discussion of the differences and interactions between the two groups now. The point, for now, is that Absatou is in the main ethnic group of Djibo, and with the relatively small number of families and constant intermarriages, she seems to be the cousin, in-law, sister, or niece of just about everyone in Djibo.

Absatou completed school through "quatrième," the equivalent of 8th or 9th grade. This puts her at a comparatively high level of education, especially for a woman. Her first language is Fulfulde, but she speaks French (reads and writes as well) and Moore. Absatou has been working at the caisse, along with Hamidou, since it opened in 2002. Currently, they receive only one salary, which they split between them. It is not a high salary, but in an economy of uncertainty, any monthly salary is a good thing. I'm not sure exactly how much they earn, but I'm guessing they each get something like 20.000 cfa a month (about $40 a month). Though it could be more or less than this.

Absatou has a 20-month year old son, whose name is either Adama or Amadoum, but is called "Daicko" by most people - I am told that this is the name of a West African comedian. Daicko lives up to his name - he's a funny, well-behaved child. He's always laughing, playing around, giving people half-chewed candy, shaking his finger in mock-anger at people. He talks a little bit (he calls me "anny"), and since I have come to Djibo he has grown incredibly. Since Absatou works everyday, he spends the day with her mother in their courtyard. Before, when he was still breastfeeding, Absatou's mother would bring him by a couple times a day so that Absatou could nurse him - there is absolutely no shame in breastfeeding in public here. However, as of a couple months ago he has graduated onto eating solid foods, so his visits to the caisse are not as frequent.

Daicko definitely gets his playful nature from Absatou. She is incredibly friendly, and she jokes around constantly. There is a certain kind of humor here that is called in French "pleasanteries" - it consists of people making fun of or insulting others, though always in a joking manner. These sorts of jokes do not translate well into English. Everytime I come into the caisse, after greeting Hamidou and Absatou, we soon start joking around, making fun of each other or just being kind of goofy. I love going to the caisse, because I know that they're always happy to see me there, and they are friends with me in a totally genuine manner - they don't expect to get anything from me, and there is never any spoken or unspoken expectation of me being a "grand patron." At the end of a bad day there is nothing better for

me than to go spend an hour at the caisse - upon hearing Absatou announce "Monsieur Andy" and hearing her chuckle I can't help but smile.

Absatou is 23 years old. Having a 20 month year old baby at this age is the norm. If she did not have a child I would be surprised. I was surprised, however, when after about a year of knowing her, I found out that she has a 7 year old son. This son comes from a previous marriage, to a much older man as far as I understand. I have never met this son (as far as I know); in this culture, after a divorce the children almost always go with the father. I was not so much surprised that she had been divorced already, or that she had had a child at the age of 16 - both of these are very common occurrences. What surprised me was that I had known her for about a year, seeing her basically every single day, and I had never once heard of this. In general, my understanding of people's lives has unfolded in this manner - slowly, with occasional revelations. The best method for finding out other people's stories is just to ask someone else. I find that people are often fairly guarded about their past and their private lives (for example, it is incredibly rude to ask someone how many children they have). Also, if you don't ask someone something, they won't necessarily tell - because I never thought to ask Absatou if she had been divorced or had other children, she didn't feel the need to explain.

An interesting aspect of my relationship with Absatou, I think, is that is totally based in one specific place: the caisse. That is the only place where we interact, and because she is at work there, the relationship can be a little less formal than relationships that I have with most women. Because our interactions are so context based, however, the rare times that I bump into her at the market or on the street, it often takes me a second to recognize her. But she still greets me with the same smile and laugh, asks me what I'm doing, asks me what I'll buy for her (joking), and then continues on her way.

That's all for today. Thanks to all for the letters, packages, and continuing support. Knowing that I have that support has been a constant reassurance.

Peace,
Andy

## Comments

### No Subject
Posted by Connie, 2/22/05 12:23pm

Tell us how we can donate money to help ease the food scarcity. Yr lovin' mom

### No Subject
Posted by Nana & Charlie, 2/23/05 1:06pm

Want to help with food, too. We can get it from re lovin' mom.

### books and food
Posted by Mandy, 2/25/05 7:10am

I assume cash for food and French books themselves are needed. Let us know how to help. I think South Africa

made a lot of progress fighting locusts in the 60s, so are you could getting from that government? I will try to put together a list of books that Djibo can pick from. I know I can also get current American bestsellers in translation, but I'll also see about more practical non-fiction in French. Send instructions for shipments!

### No Subject
Posted by Richard (#205), 3/10/05 4:47pm

Heya Andy, nice website! I was talking to Father Walsh at the funeral for Don Haspel's wife today, and he was telling me that you were doing work for a kind of credit union. I actually chose as a paper topic for my History of SE Asia course the "History of Organized Microcredit in the Phillipines" and was working on my paper just now when your URL that Fr. Walsh gave me popped into my head. Very cool and admirable stuff that you're doing over there. It's amazing to imagine the miracles that people can perform with the monetary equivalent of a fancy dinner over here. Anyhow, glad to see that you're doing well and hope to see you at a reunion sometime in the near future. Richard Matsui

### French books for Djibo library
Posted by Mandy, 3/30/05 9:52am

Books are on the way. I have the first shipment of several translations of scholarship from my friends at the University of California Press. If they are too specialized for Djibo, maybe your librarian can swap with bigger cities like Ouaga where they might want the scholarship.

### you need
Posted by linsey, 4/20/05 4:42pm

YOU NEED MORE PICTURES!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

### Newbie!
Posted by Chandra Paradis, 5/24/05 1:10pm

Hi Andy - I'm a Newbie volunteer headed your way in August, I love your site! Any advice other than to run in the other direction? :) Ha ha... good luck finishing up.

### chandra paradis
Posted by kea byerly, 8/9/05 10:07pm

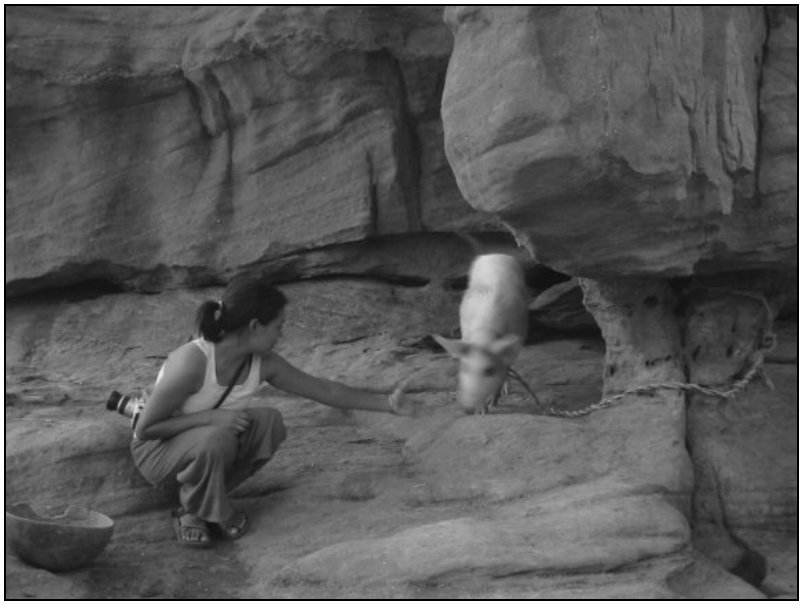
Are you the Chandra Paradis from Prescott High '94? e-mail me if so, kea byerly here, kea_pop@hotmail.com

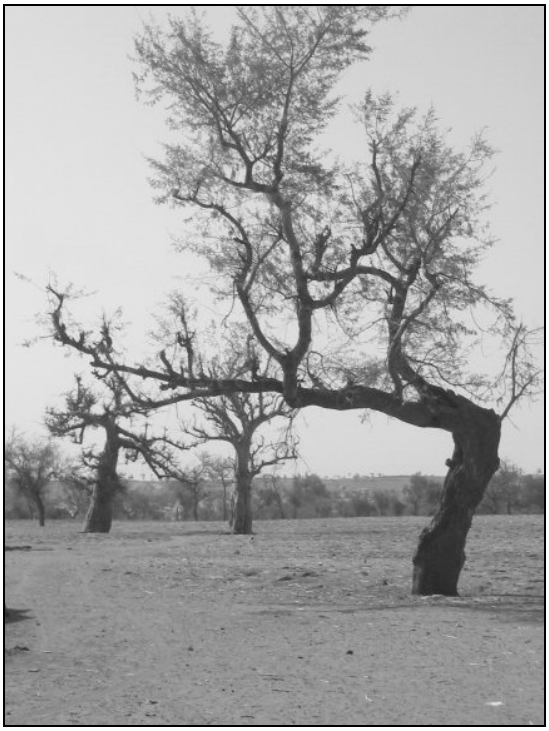
## some photos
Posted by Andy, 4/13/05 1:27pm
Greetings from a hot hot Djibo. It has been a long while since I posted. Things are still very well: work is moving along at a somewhat steady pace, my comprehension of Fulfulde continues to increase, and recently I took a short trip to Dogon Country in Mali. It's an amazing place to say the least. And now time is starting to wind down here; I only have 7 or 8 months left. The remaining months will fly by, I'm sure.

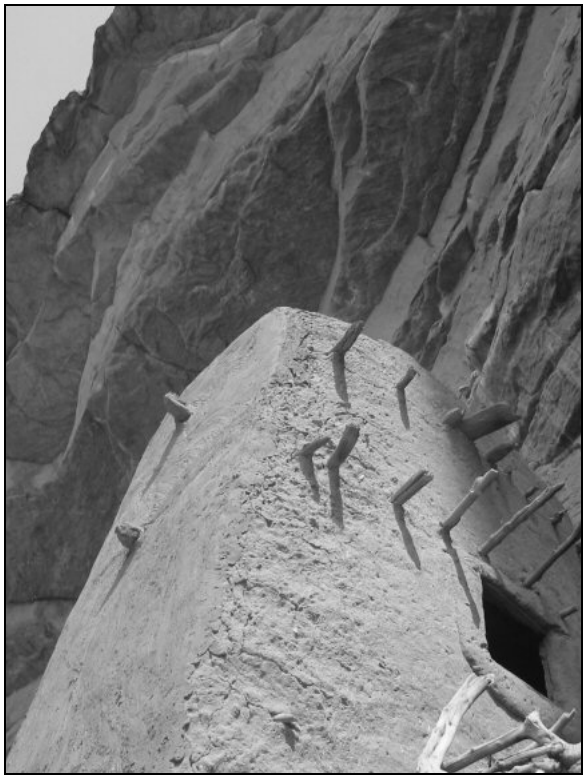
I don't have time to write a real posting right now, but I'm going to try to post some photos. Hopefully I'll write something more substantial in the coming month.

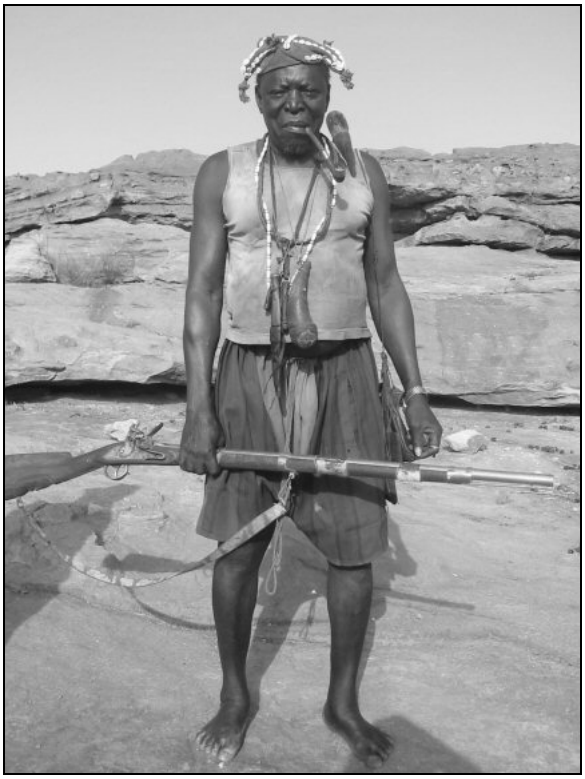
Peace,
Andy

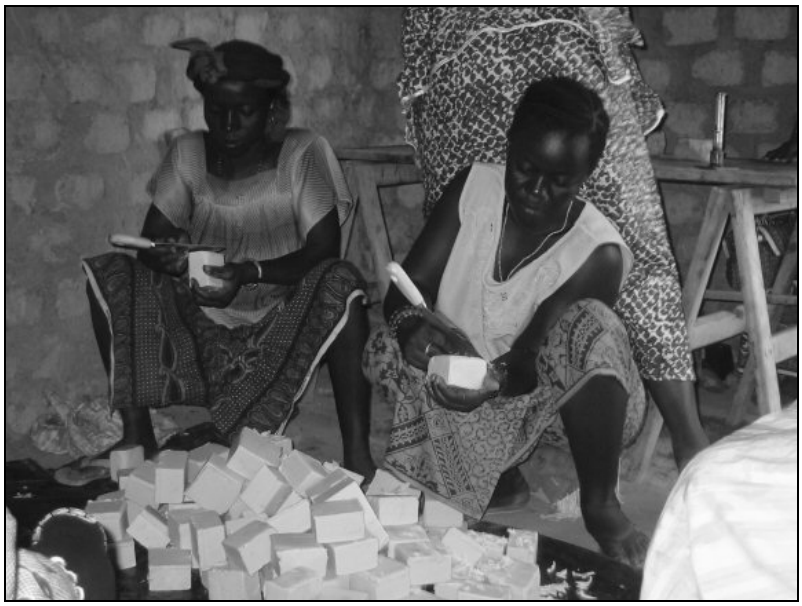
## Photos

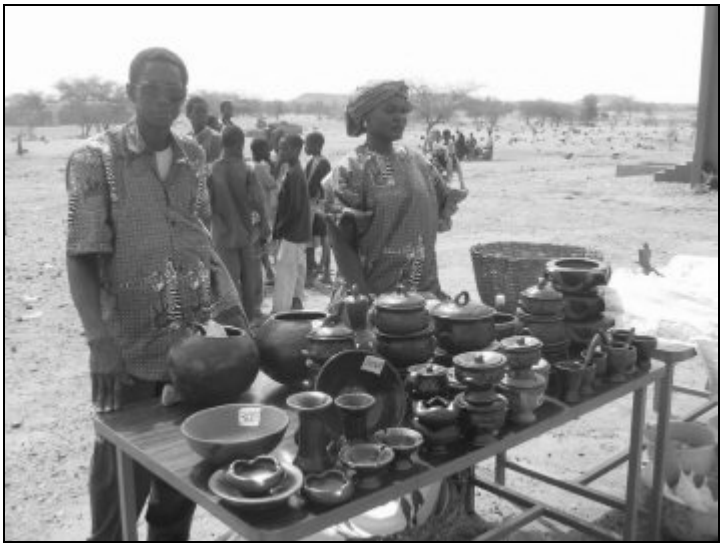


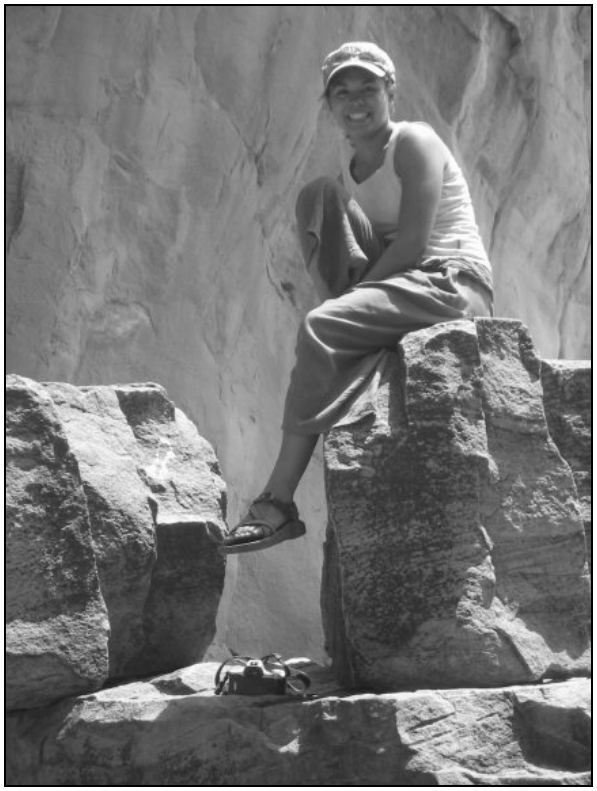












## Comments

**Hi!**

Posted by Meg Moulton, 4/13/05 9:35pm

Andy. It is always terrific to hear from you and to get a visual sense of where you are/what you're doing! I'm traveling Durham way tomorrow to see your Mom and Dunc. We're all having lunch in New Haven with Alexander. We'll miss you the end of this month in LA for his wedding! Pics will be forthcoming. Have a wonderful time in Morocco with family! Our very best. Margaret, Peter, Alex & Sam

### Gun Guy

Posted by yoni, 5/6/05 1:22am

Oh hi. I just wanted to say that the "gun guy" picture up there is the most amazing thing. Did you ask him to pose, or is that how that guy always stands? Nice one. -yoni

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# Local Yokel #5, Credit Club, and a baby

Posted by Andy, 5/25/05 9:40am

A long overdue hello from Djibo…it has been months since I have sat down and written. This is partly due to a fair bit of moving around on my part (including a recent trip to France, where I met my Dad), a busier work schedule, and also a bit of laziness. In addition, as I continue on in my service, I find it harder and harder to write concise postings – I think that as I start to understand the subtleties of life, and as I start to see deeper into people's personalities, I feel it is very difficult to encapsulate a person or event in 500 words or so. To write more would simply make it boring, but I feel dishonest cutting certain things out and leaving other things out. Even reading some of my old entries I cringe at the impressions (now changed in my mind) that they represent. But I'll bite the bullet and try to write a bit anyway…

### Local Yokel #5: Le President

One of the first people I met in Djibo was Zorom Zoubeirou, the President of the Association des Artisans. He is 42 years old, though he seems a bit older, partially due to a stiffness in his movements and speech. He is a Mossi, and is not originally from Djibo, but from Ouahigouya, 112 km to the southwest. He has been in Djibo since the early 90s, as far as I understand. I'm not sure exactly what led him to come specifically to Djibo, but as far as I understand, he came because he thought he could get more work here – Ouahigouya is a bigger town, and there would be more competition back there.

Zoubeirou – whom I usually refer to simply as "le President" or "Presi" (pronounced "Prezzy") – is one of the nicest people I know. He is very laid-back, and he laughs a lot. He is fairly passive in general, though on rare occasions his temper will flare up. He is smart, though uneducated; he did not go to school, and is thus illiterate, though he can write numbers and do basic math. He is fairly successful by Burkinabe standards.

The President is a multi-trade artisan – he started out as a upholsterer and over the years he has become skilled as both a welder and carpenter. My house contains a lot of furniture made in his shop –

a desk, two chairs, a table/counter, and wall shelves. In addition, my screen door and the screens on my windows were made in his shop; though it was before I arrived here, I'm pretty sure that he made the metal windows and door of my house as well.

The president established his *atelier* (workshop) many years ago with a couple of nephews/cousins. Over the years it has gotten bigger, first becoming one of the first welding shops in Djibo, then eventually adding carpentry. He has acquired these skills through trainings, financed by various NGOs over the years. These days he does not seem to participate in any trainings himself, but he often sends his apprentices. Shortly after I came to Djibo, the President moved to a different shop, leaving the old shop in the hands of two of his cousins, who had long since graduated from apprenticeship into junior partners. The old shop is now welding only; the president's new shop has, in addition to welding, upholstery and carpentry. Each shop has 4 or 5 apprentices. These apprentices are probably not paid much at all, if anything. However, they are fed, and they learn skills, with the hope of establishing their own shops in the future.

The President seems to have a good relationship with his wife (her name is Touré Naforé, but she is known to all as Loburu). In their courtyard they joke around with each other, and even outside of their courtyard they interact more than most married couples (in public married usually do not even really acknowledge each other). Loburu is also a member of the association – she weaves cotton fabric with a small loom. They have two young girls together, both somewhere around 10 years old. The President also has a teenage son, probably about 17 or 18 years old, who is an apprentice in the old shop. I always knew that this son was from a different mother, but it was only recently that I learned that the President had two wives before the one that I know, and has at least a couple of other children in Ouahigouya. I knew the President well over a year before I learned this, and even then it was not he himself who told me, but Minta.

The reason it came up was because we were talking about the President's upcoming marriage. A few months ago I learned that Zoubeirou would be marrying a second wife. Polygamy is very common here, and men with the means often marry many wives. The limit, according to Islam, is four. Neighbors on two sides of me have four wives. I have heard cases of village chiefs, however, who have 10 or 20 wives. As with most things, the news of this came up suddenly. After a meeting one day someone told me that the President's *mariage* was the next week. This really surprised me, as the President had not said anything to me about it. He confirmed the news, and when I asked him what was prompting him to marry a second wife, he answered somewhat vaguely, saying that his older brother had arranged the whole thing. Before the wedding he had only met her once. Unfortunately, I was not able to attend the wedding, as it took place not in Djibo but in Ouahigouya. For a week after that wedding, the new wife must stay inside a house in the husband's family's courtyard. The only time she is allowed to leave is to go to the bathroom, and even then someone must accompany her. Zoubeirou's new wife thus stayed with his family in Ouahigouya for a week, and only after this did she come to Djibo.

Andrea and I went over to the President's courtyard a few days after her arrival to welcome her. I was not surprised at her young age - Andrea said that she couldn't be older than 17 (remember, the President is 42). This is not so unusual. It can't be easy for the woman, though. She does not speak French or Fulfulde (she is Mossi), so I was not really able to communicate with her at all. The president showed us photos of the wedding and we drank zoomkoom (a sweet drink made with millet flour, sugar, and tamarind). Before we went I had been expecting Loburu (wife #1) to be somewhat resentful

of the new wife. However, I was surprised to find her even more relaxed than usual, sitting back, and bossing the new wife around.

I see the President every day, often two or three times. I usually stop by his shop mid-morning to say hello, and often once again in the afternoon. My visit's to his shop generally follow the same pattern - I pull up on my bike, put it in the shade, greet his apprentices, then greet Zoubeirou. At this point he tells one of the apprentices to pull out a couple of chairs, and the two of us sit and talk, or I sit while he keeps on working. I usually don't stay more than 30 minutes or so. But days that I have passed without this routine visit (and over a year and a half, of the days that I've been in Djibo, there have been probably only 2 or 3 in which I haven't seen the Pres) seem incomplete.

**Credit Club**

At the beginning of 2005, I helped a group of women to establish a *club d'epargne et de credit* - a savings and credit club. I had gathered together all of the women in the association and the end of a meeting and I proposed the idea of setting up credit clubs based on a model I had learned in training. It is something that a number of volunteers have had success with, it is fairly straightforward, and it shows results relatively quickly. The basic idea is that a group of people meet each week and each person puts in the same amount of money - usually somewhere between 100 and 500 francs (i.e. between 20 cents and a dollar). After the group has saved up enough money, they can give the saved money out as a credit to one of the members, who then pays it back with interest after a set number of weeks. Meanwhile, the group keeps bringing savings every week. Thus, the money increases both by savings and by interest payments.

The biggest problem I encountered was in establishing the group. After the original meeting I had with the women, there followed a number of meetings to explain the idea and see if there was interest. These all took place in December 2004. It seemed at first as if a lot of women wanted to join - at one meeting over 15 women showed up. However, at each meeting the attendance changed, there were huge lateness problems, and there were disagreements between rival factions among the women. I saw that if things continued this way the credit group would just descend into chaos and fall apart. Because the meetings are every week, if people come late all the time, or don't show up, nothing can get done, confidence is lost, and the group dissolves. In order to avoid this, at a final meeting with the women I told them that things weren't working out in a big group of all the women, and that the only way it would work would be if the women formed small groups on their own, preferably of women who lived near each other (to facilitate logistics). This meeting took place just before I left for Ghana. In order to make sure that the groups were really interested in forming, and not just jumping on the bandwagon, I told them that it was up to them to take the initiative and come to me.

When I returned from Ghana, I was approached by a group of five women who wanted to form a group. I already knew these five women fairly well, as they are generally very active in the association. They all live in the same neighborhood, so meetings would not be hard for them to get to. The next step was to set up the rules of the group - how much money would be put in the pot each week, the number of weeks the loans would be given out for, the interest rate, the logistics of the meetings, the selection of the president, secretary, and treasurer, the process for joining or leaving the group, and the penalties for lateness and absence. The women decided all of the details; I acted as a facilitator, making sure that every member agreed with each point, and making sure that the group thought things out.

The basic decisions made were as follows: each woman puts in 100 francs a week; lateness of 10 to 15 minutes is a 50 franc penalty; more than 15 minutes late is a 100 franc penalty; absence with no reason or without informing the group is a 200 franc penalty; loans are returned after 5 weeks, with 10% interest (this may seem high, but it is pretty standard for microcredit).

The first couple of meetings were very crucial to the success of the groups. Lateness and absence are a huge problem in almost all groups and associations here. Often there are penalties in theory, but mostly they go un-enforced, or the culprit will ask pardon. The meeting time for the group is at 9am. At the first meeting, 3 or 4 of the women were there by 9am. The rest came about ten minutes late. When they showed up late, as expected, they asked pardon, saying that since it was the first time, "just this once could the penalty be forgotten?" I told the women that it was not my choice, but that pardon once became pardon twice, and if they didn't enforce it now they would have problems enforcing it later. Thankfully, the president of the group, who was one of the culprits, insisted that everyone paid, and they all anted up. This set a good precedent - the next weekend when I showed up at five to nine, I found all of the women there. I was told that one of the women who had paid a penalty the previous week had shown up 2 hours early!

Since then, things have gone relatively smoothly. The group has had new members, and is now up to 10 women. Attendance is still good, and late penalties are still enforced, though most weeks there are no latecomers. The group is now heading into its 18th week, and the total amount of money from savings, penalties, and interest, is about 20,000 francs (about $40 dollars); this is a significant amount of money for a group of relatively poor women. Two loans have been given out and reimbursed, and last week a 10,000 franc loan was given out.

There is now another group that has been talking to me about starting up. In the long term, if a number of groups are set up and continue to function, they can create a larger union between themselves, and even become a sort of bank themselves (this is all very long term, though). For the moment, if they just keep doing as they are doing, they will really be able to accomplish a lot.

**Baby!**

There is now a new little baby girl in our courtyard. After walking around with a huge belly for many months (I had been thinking she was going to have the baby since March), Mariam gave birth on Friday, April 29th. The naming ceremony was a week later. Unfortunately, I missed the actual ceremony (though I've been to many, and they're not that exciting) - I had been coming back to Djibo from Ouaga the day before, and the bus broke down in a village about 30k from Djibo. We had to spend the night there, and didn't get back to Djibo until the next morning. I was still able to participate in the day of festivities: lots of card playing, tea drinking, and eating.

The baby was named Fatoumata, and she seems to be in excellent health, as is Mariam. Baba (the 2 year old boy) is getting used to her. Right after she was born he asked Mariam where she had bought the baby.

Below is a photo of Mariam and Fatoumata at 8 days old.

Well, that's all for now. Sorry for the length. Hope everyone is well in the US, and hope the summer is off to a good start.

Peace,
Andy

## Photos

## Comments

### How you're learning is part of the story
Posted by Mandy, 5/25/05 6:54am

I know you'll be on your way soon to meet your Mom, Liza and Duncan (if you haven't already. We saw them for dinner last week, and we will be very glad to hear about the family reunion when they get back. You are very brave to share your experience as it happens with us, and if you hadn't learned a lot since you started, then you could really worry!

### No Subject
Posted by Janet, 5/26/05 9:50pm

I agree with Mandy. It's wonderful to hear all that you've learned and how much you've grown over the past year +. This is a life changing experience well beyond what most people ever get to experience. It sounds like the credit club is a terrific initiative, and one that is really sustainable even after you, or other volunteers, have left. Congratulations!

### remember me?

Posted by Cathy Parsons, 6/17/05 5:15pm

Hi Andy, I used to live in Djibo with the Gibsons and teach their kids. This is bit random, sorry - I just found your site linked to Steve's, and it's really taken me back. Thanks for posting. When I got back to England after just 7 months, it felt like I'd never fit in here again, and I'll definitely never be the same. But you, you've been out there for ages! I saw a photo of you and Andrea on Steve's site - it made me laugh to think that to me, you two are as much part of Burkina as... Blaise Campaore!! Are you ever going back to the States?! Well, I had a pretty tough time of it out in Djibo, for lots of reasons, so apologies for never speaking to you! Just trying to deal with too much at once. Take care, cathy

## Photos from Andrew

Posted by Greg, 7/30/05 5:24pm

I got a bunch of photos from Andrew and I've put many of them up on my website - enjoy!

http://www.gregphoto.net/gallery2/album31

- Greg

### Comments

### Thanks for the photos

Posted by Amanda, 7/30/05 6:25pm

Wonderful vistas and shots of friends. Thanks for sending them. I hope Djibo will get some of the food aid they are now talking about getting to Niger, Mali, and BF. Keep us posted on any way we can help. Love, Mandy

## Local Yokel #6 and The Building

Posted by Andy, 9/3/05 2:07pm

Greetings from Djibo! Things are well here: the rains have been very good this year, and so far I have heard no reports of locusts in the area. That said, this is the hardest time of year for most people – the harvest has not started yet, and food is thus very short.

Once again I've gone a long while without writing. But this time I cannot use travel as an excuse, because I'm currently at the tail end of my longest uninterrupted stay in Djibo – nine weeks and a couple of days. In a couple of days I head to Ouaga for my Close of Service Conference – and as the name implies, that means I'm almost done with my service here. I don't know the details yet, but it is likely that I'll be finishing up here in mid-November, then heading back to the states. I should know more in about a week – I'll post info when I get it.

And now, onto the posting…

**Local Yokel #6: Ada**

Tamboura Ada is a soapmaker and the newly elected vice president of the Association of Artisans. She is also the President of the savings club that I wrote about in my last posting. She is probably somewhere around 40 years old (though it is really hard to tell sometimes), very short and petite, and is married with four children. She comes from a village 30 or 40 kilometers from Djibo, but has lived in Djibo for many years now.

Her husband is a short, hyperactive mason who was somehow connected to the local government during the time of the former President of Burkina Faso in the 1980s. However, when the current President came into power, he was swept out along with many other local officials, and since than has worked as a mason. He and Ada seem to have a relationship that is a little more interactive than most here, and they seem to coexist on more of an even footing.

Ada, as far as I know, did not go to school at all. But despite the fact that she is totally illiterate, she is very intelligent and fairly savvy. As with most people, she speaks several languages: Fulfulde (her first language), Moore (her husband's native language), and a bit of French. However, since she did not go to school, and since she grew up in a village (where very few people speak French), she has picked up her French in bits and pieces. My communication with her is half in French and half in Fulfulde, though as my Fulfulde improves, the balance of our communication is tipping in that direction. But it must be very amusing for someone who speaks both Fulfulde and French to listen to a conversation between Ada and me – on one side is this white guy, speaking understandable yet mangled Fulfulde, and on the other side is a tiny uneducated woman throwing out bits of understandable yet mangled French. At the credit club meetings, where only a couple of women speak French (though most probably understand a fair amount), the women are always laughing at the amusing French constructions that Ada comes up with. I respect her for blazing ahead and just speaking, faults and all – many women here understand but are too shy to attempt speaking in French.

Ada has been making artisanal soap for the last few years – it is possible that before that she made local "village soap" before that, but I'm not sure. The soap is made by boiling and mixing various ingredients – lye, shay butter, cottonseed or palm oil, and various perfumes. The mixture is then placed in a mold and set to dry overnight. The next day the almost-dried block of soap is cut using a specially made "table de coupage," The square soap pieces are then stamped with a metal stamp.

Ada does not do all of this work by herself. There are eight women in total in her group. She and one of the other women have had trainings, and thus they are in charge. The rest have picked it up along the way. It is clearly Ada, however, who is in charge, and who is usually the one to take the initiative.

Their group has been helped out a lot by an NGO – not only has the NGO subsidized their training, but it has given them many fairly expensive materials – the metal cutting table and molds, a foot powered mechanical stamping machine, an oil press (with which they extract oil from the nuts of various local trees, including Neem trees), and more. Technically, this equipment is on loan to them, and they will either have to pay back the cost of the machines or return them.

About a month ago, an unfortunate incident occurred in Ada's courtyard. Before the rainy season, Ada's husband had built a small mud brick house which Ada her her soap-making group were going to use as a workshop and storage space. The roof was not made of corrugated tin, but was made in the traditional style: a couple of large pieces of wood (not planks, but medium sized trunks) are placed across as support beams, and then a few layers of smaller branches and straw are laid across that. It turns out that one of the support beams was rotten. One morning, right after a fairly heavy rain, the rotten piece of wood broke, and caused half of the roof to fall down. Because it had just rained, a few people were in the house keeping dry. The support beam and the rest of the wood, along with some of the mud bricks, fell down upon them. Three people were trapped under the fallen roof – a woman (one of the soapmakers), a 7 or 8 year old girl, and a baby. Ada's husband got them out and they were taken to the medical center. Thankfully, none of them were very badly hurt. The woman was in the worst shape of the three, as she had taken the brunt of the big support beam - if that beam had fallen on the baby, it probably would have killed him. As Ada's husband said to me, "beaucoup de peur, mais rien de grave" [lots of fear, but nothing serious]. The house has been partially repaired.

I am grateful that I've had the opportunity to really get to know people like Ada. I have had the time to earn her trust and to attain a certain level of familiarity. It makes me happy that nowadays when I drop by her courtyard there is no big fuss – I am still treated with much respect, given the comfortable chair to sit in – but for them I'm not just a nameless white guy – instead, I'm "Enn-dee."

**The Building**

After just about a year of work, construction of the siege – i.e. the "seat" or "center" – of the Association of Artisans is finished. It looks great, and has already been put to good use – a few days after construction was finished, an NGO that works with the Association delivered many tons of grain to be sold to members at a subsidized price (since the harvest is still a month or so away, food is now incredibly short and the market prices are more than double what they usually are) – the association stocked the grain and managed the distribution from the newly constructed building. The distribution is now finished, and the building will now be put to a more regular use. Tables, benches, and other equipment are now being acquired for use in the building.

The siege is a building of about 10 by 7 meters, made of cement bricks, which are covered by a cement/sand mixture, painted white on the inside and ochre on the outside. The doors and windows are metal (as are almost all doors and windows here), painted blue. It is split up into three different rooms, each with a separate entrance: a large meeting/training room; a small office; and a boutique artisanale that will be stocked with products of the members of the association. Thus, the building will serve many purposes. It will help the association members to organize the affairs of the association, to have meetings and trainings, and also to sell their products. Though it will probably be a while before the building is used to its full capacity, I am confident that it will really change the association and bring things to a new level. The boutique will probably take the longest to set up and will be the hardest to manage – most likely it will not be fully functioning by the time I leave. Hopefully the volunteer who

replaces me will be able to help the association to get it up and running.

According to the original estimates, the building was supposed to be done in February or March of this year. For a number of reasons, however, the date kept getting pushed back. Almost every project here takes longer than was planned – this is partially due to overly optimistic projections, partially to obstacles encountered along the way, and partially due to a mentality that does not really see deadlines and finishing things quickly as a priority. In this case, the main factor in the delay was related to the severe grain shortage caused by the locust swarms of last year. Less than a month after the association received the funding for the building, the locusts came and destroyed all of the crops. Ever since then, the price of millet has steadily risen. Most people have trouble getting enough grain anyway, but with the inflated prices and lack of reserves, it was harder this year than any year in recent history. This affected the progress of the construction, because it was up to the association to pay the costs of labor; all of the materials were provided by the grant, but the cost of labor was all under the contribution of the association. The plan was for the groups in the association to each contribute in order to pay the masons. A building of this size is not cheap to construct – the labor cost was approximately $800, a very high sum of money here. When the locusts came, the groups had just started paying their contributions. In my inexperience, I did not insist that all of the contribution be collected before ground was broken. Had I done this, the members would have paid their contributions more quickly, and many of the problems could have been avoided. But I too was eager to get things started, so I gave the go ahead once only a bit of the contributions had come in. Thus, the crop devastation created an unexpected drain on people's resources, and the contributions slowed down to a trickle.

In spite of this, the mason worked beyond what he had been paid to do, up to a certain point. But he had to feed his family as well, so there were frequent stoppages in the work. At times, work would stop for 3 or 4 weeks, then a bit of money would come in and push forward the work for a week or two until the money ran out. So the building was constructed in bursts. And when they did work, the progress was fairly rapid. I did not keep track of how many days they actually worked, but I'm sure that if they had worked straight through it could have been done in three months.

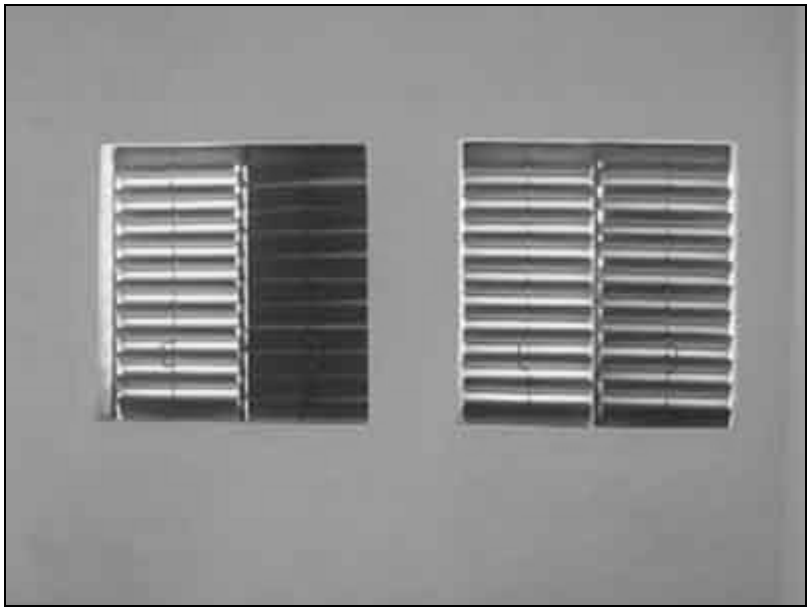
The important thing, however, is that it is done, and that the association is no longer homeless. I realize that just constructing the center is not the end – rather, the center is a means by which they can advance their work. This being the case, it is clear that a lot of work is left, and the building now has to be well managed. Many months before the siege was finished, the association, at my prodding, established a comité de gestion (management committee) for the building, and over the last few months I've been meeting with this committee to help set up the norms of use, the schedule, the accounting books, and all of the other details that will go in to the smooth running and maintenance of the building. I hope that my replacement will be able to pick up where I left off.

A HUGE thanks to all who contributed to the funding of this project – the Djibo artisans are truly grateful for your support.

That's all for today – hope everyone is well and hope to see many of you in a few months!

Peace,
Andy

## Photos



## Comments

**Office Building**
Posted by Amanda Mecke, 9/23/05 4:41pm

Andrew, the office looks great. Is blue a traditional color for doors or decor or was that just the paint you had? I love the contrast of the mud interruped the bright color. I have a friend in town who just finished his 2 years in the Ukraine. He and his wife were TEFL teachers. (They are about our age, a lawyer and nurse in civilian life.) We must all get together when you come home. Speaking of which, please let us know how we can continue to support the efforts of your successor in Djibo. I'd like to think I can manage to send your librarian more books every year. Your Mom and Liza were explaining how TV has come to Djibo, and you watch in the courtyard like Cinema Paridiso. I hope that soon my author Professor Gadjigo will be able to get distribution for African films on African TV. Best, Amanda

# Winding down

Posted by Andy, 9/24/05 7:20am

It's now official. My official "Close of Service" (COS) date is Nov. 2, and I'll be flying home on Nov. 7. That means just over 6 weeks left! It's crazy - for so long the end of my service was just a vague, distant idea, connected to visions of sushi and peach sorbet. And even as it approached it remained hazy, something more theoretical than real. And then all of a sudden, at the time of COS conference (a couple weeks ago) it became a concrete thing, and I had to start making real decisions about what date I would COS, had to start writing up a zillion final reports, and had to start thinking about things like resumes, job searches, and "what next." Instead of thinking what my next project is going to be, I'm now thinking about how to best wrap things up, and how to leave things off so that my replacement can be as effective as possible. My replacement, Ami, came last week for her site visit - she seems really excited about coming to live and work in Djibo, and she seems ready to jump in and take things to the next level. She seems like a very hard worker, and I feel confident leaving things in her hands. But it's weird knowing that I'll be replaced - it's not like in the US, where someone simply replaces you in your job - in this case it's someone coming to do your work, live in your house, and likely have many of the same friends. It's an odd feeling, and there is pressure on both sides of the fence - the new volunteer who is coming in feels pressure to "live up to" the old volunteer who has had much time to get settled and figure things out. But leaving and being replaced has its own pressures too - knowing that decisions that I made and the ways in which I behaved will be seen in comparison to the way my replacement does things, and I don't want her to be negatively affected by any of that.

Going about the process of leaving is often confusing, and it brings with it many conflicting emotions. There is the excitement about seeing family and friends, contrasted with the thought of leaving people I've lived with for 2 years, and who it is very possible I will never see again. Almost every conversation that I have in Djibo nowadays ends with some mention of my leaving Djibo, and with a plea that I should extend for another two years, or stay in Djibo indefinitely, marry a Peul woman, and never go home. There is also the eagerness to move on to the next step in my life, but along with it the fear and worry that I don't really know what that next step is. It's probably a good thing that I have so many reports to fill out and various logistical things to arrange, because these help to distract me from some of these difficult and conflicting emotions.

I'm currently in Ouaga at the tail end of my COS medical exams. It appears I've got a clean bill of health, and I also managed to go 2 years in Burkina without any cavities! Knock on wood (don't want to jinx myself with so little time left). Today I'm headed up to Kaya to see my host family - "Bill Gates" & co. It's been over a year since I've seen them, and this will be my last real chance to go up, since Bill Gates passed the civil service exam last year to become a teacher, and in the beginning of October he's being sent to his first post. After a day or two in Kaya, I'll head back home to Djibo, stopping in a town called Gourcy, where the training of new volunteers is taking place. I'm going there to take language tests in French and Fulfulde - I'm curious to see what level I'm at after two years. And then back to Djibo, where I'll stay for about a month before I head back down to Ouaga to officially close out my service. And after that...who knows. Anyone with hot job leads or ideas, I'd be very thankful for any advice or words of wisdom.

So, to sum up: leaving Burkina in 6 weeks; wrapping things up and moving on is a strange process in many ways; I have no idea what's next. Sorry if the above description was a bit rambling and disjointed at points.

Hopefully I'll see many of you soon!

Peace,
Andy

## Comments

### No Subject
Posted by cha, 9/24/05 2:29am

dude, as much as the peace corps needs people like you, the friends and family you've got back in the states can't wait to have you back home. best of luck with the remaining time you have left - make the most of it...

### good luck!
Posted by sarah lee, 9/24/05 7:15am

dear andy, good luck with everything... can't wait to have you back! love, sarah

### well done
Posted by Max, 9/26/05 1:40am

Noish, will keep my eyes open for jobs that require fluent Fulfulde. So hard to believe it's been two years - we've all definitely missed your Noish-ness. Congratulations on everything, and hope to see you soon. Max

### No Subject
Posted by Vic, 9/26/05 4:50pm

Happy to hear you'll be joining us soon buddy. We'll be gorging you with so much sushi and sorbet when you get back that you'll be sick of it in no time! Good luck passing on your Neustaetter wisdom to your successor.

## No Subject
Posted by ami, 10/6/05 6:04am

it's the second time i've read your site and i noticed a familiar mention in there. thanks for your kind words - speaking to other PCVs in the north, i am coming to realize what large shoes i have to fill. you have really done well for yourself after two years in djibo and it was evident during site visit how much you will be missed. don't fret too much about wrapping things up perfectly - you've gotten the ball rolling with the association pretty well and rose said you surpassed her expectations of everyone in the first group. congratz! on an off topic subject - any word on housing for after swear-in? it's my biggest desire to not be homeless in africa on my birthday.

## No Subject
Posted by sean han, 10/9/05 5:58pm

yo kid - sorry to have been out of touch. best of luck with finishing everything up... looking forward to having you back dood. much love - sean

## Almost No Subject
Posted by Ryan, 11/5/05 6:37am

amuse toi bien aux states. j'ai hâte moi aussi de vous voir (toi et ta petite amie) là-bas. Pour l'instant je vais "hold it down" au Burkina pour toi jusqu'en decembre. et après tu dois me suivre au senegal à ryanenafrique.blogspot.com a+