

# BURKINA CONNECTION



NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF BURKINA FASO

2017 - NO. 2



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## 15 YEARS SUPPORTING GIRLS' EDUCATION IN BURKINA

by Suzanne Plopper, '67-'69

*There is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls.*

*-- Kofi Annon, former U.N. Secretary General*



*Seydata, orphaned at 14, was able to pursue her education due to a scholarship from FBF.*



*Risnata rose at 5am to prepare and sell street food on the side of the road to pay for evening classes before receiving an FBF scholarship.*

Friends of Burkina Faso (FBF) has supported the education of village girls in northern Burkina Faso since 2002. For anyone who is surprised at this long-term investment, education is a long term commitment.

Thanks to generous donations from our members and other partners, since 2002 we have enabled over 3,920 village girls to enter primary school through the Lambs Support Girls' Education Project. This project, with the first-year gift of a lamb which parents raise and sell to buy another lamb and their daughter's school materials each year, enables the girls' parents to cover their daughters' educational costs for 13 years of primary – secondary school.

FBF is entering our eighth year offering post-secondary scholarships to qualified village girls. To date, we have provided a total of 155 scholarships. This includes 105 scholarships for primary school teacher training, 12 for nursing training, 16 for midwifery training and 22 for university educations (in the fields of medicine, law, science and technology, geology, English and translation, and business communication). The cost of post-secondary scholarships (including school fees and living expenses) is approximately:

- primary school teacher training \$1,540
- nursing and midwifery training \$3,760
- university education \$8,800

Each year, NEEDED provides us year-end results from each student's educational/training institution. In eight years, only three FBF scholarship recipients have failed to complete their training. In each case, we have worked with NEEDED to ensure that any remaining scholarship funds be offered to another deserving young woman.

We would like to share with you the stories of two young women who are completing their primary school teacher training this year, thanks to FBF/NEEED scholarships.

*Continued on page 2*

## FUNDS FOR TERROR VICTIMS

by Aaron Buchsbaum, '08-'10

With 1845 visits, 300 Facebook shares, and 67 individual donations, we have hit our goal of \$3000 on our GoFundMe “Kick Terrorism Out of Burkina” campaign!

This effort was born following the August 2017 terror attack, funds will be donated to families of victims impacted by the attack.

We are extremely grateful for your

support and thank you for your trust in our organizations to act as a focal point. Thank you for your commitment to the wellbeing of our Burkina family.

We are working with the U.S. Embassy in Burkina, as well as a national NGO to ensure that funds are received by attack victims.



## GIRLS' EDUCATION

*Continued from page 1*

Seydata is the youngest of 11 children. Orphaned at 14, she had to provide for herself. Seydata did domestic work for a family until the head of household threatened to abuse her. In her search of training opportunities for productive employment, she was awarded one of our scholarships. Seydata expresses sincere gratitude for our having given her the opportunity to work with young children as a primary school teacher.

Risnata comes from a subsistence farming family. Her father died when she was seven and her mother had to marry one of his brothers in order to keep the family together. Following middle school, Risnata rose at 5am to prepare and sell street food on the side of the road to pay for evening classes. She is grateful to the Friends of Burkina Faso for supporting her post-secondary education in primary school teaching. Once Risnata is employed as a teacher, she promises to support the educational expenses of another indigent girl for post-secondary training. “Dear partner of Association NEEDED, you saved my life and I will never forget it. Please accept with love these small but noble words: Thank you!”

## PEACE CORPS BURKINA FASO EVACUATED AMID SECURITY CONCERNS

by Kristen Combs-Bicaba, '98-'01

Peace Corps announced on September 3, 2017 the evacuation from Burkina Faso of all 124 volunteers out of “an abundance of caution” due to security concerns.

Burkina Faso has suffered two major terrorist attacks, one in January 2016 and, again, in August 2017. In addition, attacks on military and police posts along the borders with Mali and Niger have become regular, nearly weekly, occurrences.



*Burkina Faso PCVs and staff gathered in Ghana to transition out of service.*



# 50TH ANNIVERSARY REUNION OF UV1

by John Sneed, '67-'69

In October 1967, six years after the birth of Peace Corps and seven years after the creation of the independent nation of Upper Volta, 48 volunteers, four staff and three wives launched the first Peace Corps program and began what has been a 50 year love affair between the 2,000 plus Americans who have served in this fascinating country. Upper Volta 1 (UV1) spent three months in training before arriving in country, and during that time and over the next two years developed strong bonds that have grown stronger over 50 years.

September 11-15, 2017, 35 of those original volunteers and staff met in Edmonds, Washington to celebrate half a century of friendship, share memories of the past and updates on our current lives, and reflect on how our Peace Corps experience had shaped what we have been doing over the past 50 years. Many came early or stayed late to seek further adventures together in the Pacific Northwest. The three days featured a West African Dinner, hosted by Barbara and Dan Brady, a beach cleanup in the city of Edmonds, a day trip to San Juan Island, Paella and a barn dance hosted by Bob and Deborah Coffey and Bob's cajun band, Jumble Pie. Denny FitzPatrick was honored with a designation of "Griot for Life" for his faithful work in keeping us all in touch. A central theme of the three days was sharing what is important in our lives today and how our experience in Upper Volta is reflected in what we are doing.

Upper Volta 1 held its first reunion in 1987, inspired by the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Peace Corps and the founding of Friends of Burkina Faso. Since that first gathering UV1 has held reunions periodically, meeting several times in Washington D.C., once on St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, where they trained, and once in France. Additionally, several return trips to Burkina Faso over the years have involved as many as a dozen UV1 RPCVs. Of the group, all but a few have attended at least one reunion.

The volunteers and staff of UV1 are no different than all of those who have followed over the years. All of whom have served in Upper Volta/Burkina Faso have brought back their experience to address Peace Corps third goal of increasing American understanding of other people. However UV1, because they were the first, spent such a long time building relationships before they arrived in Upper Volta and because they have worked over the past 50 years to nurture those relationships they exemplify the value of the cumulative effect of the Peace Corps experience in bringing it home.



Click here to learn about the members of Upper Volta 1 and where their Peace Corps service has taken them in the last 50 years!

# 15 VILLAGES BENEFIT FROM AG PROJECT

by Leslie Berger, '81-'83

The AIVDPL team of agricultural extension officers have worked hard this year to develop demonstration plots and to provide training to farmers to support increased crop yields on their own farms. Crop yields in Burkina are typically low as farmers have limited training in crop management and do not have access to high quality inputs such as improved seed and organic fertilizer.

This project aims to overcome these shortfalls by putting in place the organisation needed to collect local manure, and by providing improved seed and crop management training. Achieving higher yields will improve farm incomes and overall availability of food within each community.

The AIVDPL team is working with farmers in 15 villages across the regions of Binde, Manga and Gogo in the center south region of Burkina to provide crop management training to improve yields for four crops -- corn, rice, soybeans and cowpeas -- which are all important to food security in the region.

## HIGHLIGHTS

This project is helping farmers to recognize the benefits of using locally produced manure as an inexpensive and valuable source of fertiliser for soil improvement.

AIVDPL targeted more than 50% women farmers in each village, recognizing that involvement in the project benefited the entire household.

Some mayors attended the launch of the distribution of seeds, including the Mayor of Manga who called Patrice, one of our extension officers, to thank him personally.

Participants will be able to save seed produced and re-use for up to 3 years and have been encouraged to continue to use locally produced manure in subsequent years. These practices should continue to help boost yields from year-to-year.

## CHALLENGES

There is a lack of access to water to keep the manure moist and of good quality and limited means to transport the manure to the field.

The group encountered some problems due to a shortage of seed from their preferred suppliers. The team had to find alternative sources which resulted in some changes in seed prices. They decided to reduce seed rates by a small amount to manage any increased cost. The team did not anticipate that this would lead to reductions in yield.

In addition, the team did not plan for the need to store seed once purchased and before distributed.

Farmers use a range of insecticides, some of which may not be branded and could therefore be less effective.

Access to villages by AIVDPL team was difficult in the rainy season.



*Digging on-farm manure pit*



*Training session at corn demonstration field*



# AG PROJECT

*Continued from page 4*



*Training session at corn demonstration field*

Government agricultural officials were supportive of the project but would not actually visit or assist unless they were paid to do so. They suggested that it would cost between 15-40,000 FCFA per day per agent for their participation. The FBF project team is looking into ways to garner improved participation of government officials.

Not enough funding was allocated to cover the cost for gas for all the necessary visits to demonstration plots by the AIVDPL team.

## PROJECT OVERSIGHT

The project committee would like to thank Lisa Nebie who has provided excellent project oversight over the past 6 months. Lisa visited with the AIVDPL team on 4 occasions providing comprehensive project reports to FBF project committee. AIVDPL provided an interim report as required and sent detailed protocols for the establishment of the demonstration plots as well as photographs of project activities. Government officials actually visit or assist unless they were paid to do so e.g. gas, food and time. They suggested that it would cost between 15-40,000 FCFA per day per agent for their participation. FBF project team is looking into ways to garner improved participation of government officials.

## BURKINA COMPETES IN FIRST ROBOTICS COMPETITION

by Kristen Combs-Bicaba, '98-'01

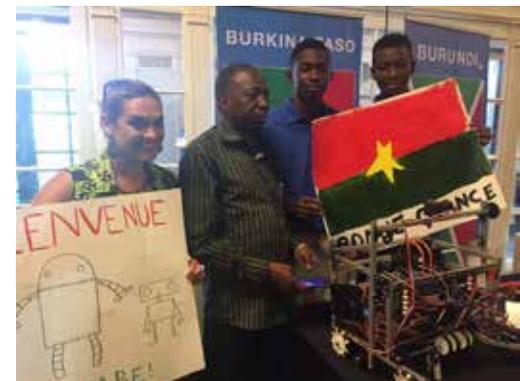
In July, representatives of Team Burkina Faso participated in the 2017 First Robotics competition in Washington, D.C.

Team Burkina Faso is comprised of two travelling students and one mentor. The mentor is Mamadou Sangare, professor of electronics and industrial informatics. Mamadou has been teaching electronics at Aube Nouvelle University since 2004.

T. Boris Martial Sawadogo, Team Captain, is a student in network technology and computer science at Aube Nouvelle University. Boris is a rapper. He loves basketball, video games, and reading.

Tegawendé Patrick Bere, Team Spokesman, is studying network technology and computer science at Aube Nouvelle University. He loves sports and programming.

A team of FBF members greeted them at their arrival and acted as hosts during their stay in the United States





Sylviane is able to attend secondary school thanks to a scholarship through the Burkina Faso Girls Scholarship Fund.

# SYLVIANE WANTS TO “BECOME SOMEONE”

by Beth Knight

Sylviane Yelkouni’s favorite class is history-geography because she likes to study the past, but her sights are set on the future. “I want to become a history-geography teacher in order to teach my little brothers and sisters to become teachers like me,” says Sylviane, now in 8<sup>th</sup> grade at LMTL high school (Lycée Municipal Toussaint Louverture) in Yako, Burkina Faso. Sylviane is one of thirty-five scholarship recipients in the Burkina Faso Girls’ Scholarship Fund program (BFGSF), which gives female students the financial support to attend secondary school in the Yako area of the Nord region.

Education is the number one goal for girls in the developing world<sup>1</sup>, yet girls’ school enrollment drops off after primary school, especially among orphans<sup>2</sup> and in rural areas<sup>3-5</sup> due to the long distances to school<sup>1,6</sup> and expense<sup>6</sup>.

In Sylviane’s school, girls make up 37.6% of students in the top three

grades, the equivalent of 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade (320 boys and 193 girls). BFGSF focuses on supporting girls, who are selected based on merit and need, many of whom are orphaned by one or both parents, through this high school drop-off point to graduation. Scholarships cover school fees, school supplies, lunches, uniforms, and bikes and are made possible by grants awarded in 2016 and 2017 by Friends of Burkina Faso and FBF’s generous members.

Sylviane, a BFGSF scholar since 2012, lives 7 km away from LMTL in Gonsin with her mother. Her father died in 2010. She voiced her thoughts about

the program to BFGSF’s third-party steward, PCV Catrina Gardner. “This scholarship is important to me, because without it I might abandon school, because my parents don’t have the money to pay for school fees, supplies, and the canteen to be able to eat every day.”

Sylviane’s days are filled with education. “I received a new bicycle [from BFGSF], and I bike every day,” she says. “If there aren’t classes in the afternoon, I study in the afternoon at school.” After school, “I go back home. If I finish doing dishes, I then study my lessons. I study at night at home with flashlights.” Ms. Gardner asked her, “What do you like to do outside of school?” Sylviane responds, “I help my mom cook. I also learn my lessons. During time off, it’s not like there really is time off.” But Sylviane doesn’t seem to mind. She says, “I like school, because if you want to become somebody, you must go to school.”

*Footnotes*

## SHEA4SHE™



BFGSF is raising money for scholarships for Sylviane and other girls by selling [Shea4She](#), shea butter skin cream. Shea butter is called “women’s gold” because it provides a livelihood for the African women who make and sell it<sup>7-9</sup>. Shea4She shea butter is sourced from [Tamneere](#), a fair trade women’s co-operative in Burkina Faso that uses eco-friendly, organic traditions and is part of the Global Shea Alliance. Sale proceeds go to the BFGSF scholarships, enabling girls to continue their education through secondary school. Orders can be placed by emailing [BurkinaGirlsSF@gmail.com](mailto:BurkinaGirlsSF@gmail.com).



# TECHNOLO-GEE-WHIZ!

by Aaron Buchsbaum, '08-'10

Please read, and get in touch with me ([webmanager@friendsofburkinafaso.org](mailto:webmanager@friendsofburkinafaso.org)) if you'd like to contribute your technology skills / learn new ones! Web and database managers especially welcome!

My name is Aaron, and I have been remiss not to write in the newsletter earlier! You deserve explanations to all the mysterious technology things we do at Friends of Burkina Faso. Let's start with where we are.

- You've seen our **website**, which was updated last year. This is old news, but we hope you like it. Not many "Friends of..." organizations boast one as nice!
- We've been using **Google Forms** more to try to organize events and gather member feedback. A few clicks, and everyone knows what's needed!
- Our emails come from **Mailchimp**, which gives us some nice layout and tracking options. Make sure you add [communications@friendsofburkinafaso.org](mailto:communications@friendsofburkinafaso.org) to your contacts list!
- We have a thriving **Facebook** page! And, for dues-paying members, we have a 'private' group where you can interact directly. These have been a hit and we love getting messages from you.
- We use **Global Giving** or **GoFundMe** to run special campaigns. These support our project partners or gather funds for very special cases such as the August 13<sup>th</sup> terrorist attack.

Hopefully the list above is no surprise to you. What is more secret and newsworthy is where we want to go!

**Automated payments and contact updates.** Right now, I find paying FBF annual dues and/or making donation in support of FBF Projects a bit clunky, and you might too! There is an email and/or a paper snail mail form at around the same time each year; You click on a link or mail something back to us; and then you hope that someone on our end updates your information (which we do).

We are exploring an option within Mailchimp where (1) we send out a request for dues, (2) you click a link and go to PayPal, (3) your payment status is logged in a database automatically, and (4) at the same time next year, you'll get an automatic request to renew. In addition, we can send out messages to make sure all your membership information is current – especially emails!

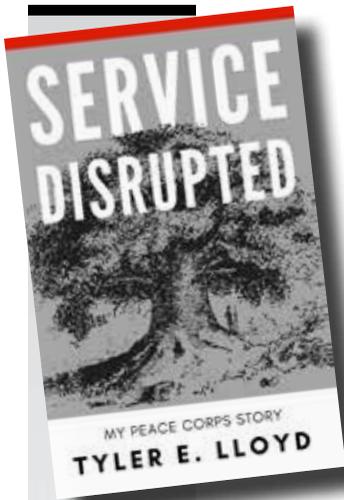
And don't worry – if you don't like email or the internet, snail mail will still be there! Our wonderful Treasurer keeps an Excel copy of our contact list on hand, which complements the one in MailChimp.

**Google Nonprofit Tools.** This is a (free!) suite of tools that gets us looking more professional, with everything from official "@friendsofburkinafaso.org" email accounts, to more fundraising options with potential donors outside our mailing list, to free advertising within Google. Truth be told, I have been meaning to get to this one *much* sooner. If anyone wants to lend a hand, I'd love it!

As the saying goes, *you can't gather flour with just one finger*, so please get in touch if you can help us with technology! [webmanager@friendsofburkinafaso.org](mailto:webmanager@friendsofburkinafaso.org)

Wend na n pas paanga!





## SERVICE DISRUPTED by Tyler Lloyd, '12-'14

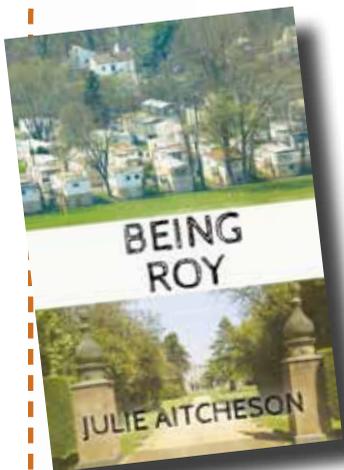
Giving over two years of your life as a Peace Corps Volunteer is admirable, but giving up his life is more than Tyler Lloyd signed up for. *Service Disrupted* is an engaging memoir in which Tyler tells of his adventures and his eagerness to share his knowledge of gardening and agriculture with the kind and quirky villagers in Burkina Faso, Africa. But when he learns that his end of service medical exam showed a positive HIV test, Tyler's mind becomes consumed with emotion, worry, and despair. The ups and downs will keep you reading to the end with a new respect for Peace Corps Volunteers and the African people. You'll be both fascinated and saddened by the Sub-Saharan people who have become much more than a village to Tyler, as he awaits the answer to what his future holds. Get ready for the emotional story of a Peace Corps Volunteer who will enlighten you with the highs of his service and imprison you with the lows.

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Interested in hearing more stories from Peace Corps Volunteers? Visit [mypeacecorpsstory.com](http://mypeacecorpsstory.com) and listen to current and returned volunteers tell their story on the My Peace Corps Story podcast and follow My Peace Corps Story on Instagram.

*Tyler Lloyd served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Burkina Faso from 2012 to 2014. Originally from Kentucky, he currently calls Washington, DC home. Tyler enjoys exploring the city on his bike, drinking strong coffee, and telling stories through photography, video, podcasts, and the written word. *Service Disrupted: My Peace Corps Story* is Tyler's first book. For more about Tyler and his other works, visit [www.tyleredwardlloyd.com](http://www.tyleredwardlloyd.com).*



## BEING ROY by Julie Aitcheson, '99-'01

The greatest trial Roy Watkins faces isn't deciding whether she's gay or straight, male or female, West Virginia country mouse or prep school artistic prodigy. It isn't even leaving behind her childhood sweetheart Oscar to attend uppity Winchester Academy in the hunt country of Virginia, or acclimating to a circle of friends that now includes privileged Imogen, her sharp but self-conscious sidekick Bugsy, and the tortured Hadley. No, the hardest thing for Roy to face is the world's expectations about who and what she should be.

  BUY NOW FROM AMAZON

*Julie Aitcheson began her pursuit of writing as a screenwriter, then realized that a little exposition never hurt anyone and switched to books. She has had articles published in *Echo Quarterly*, *Communities Magazine* (formerly *Talking Leaves Magazine*), *Isabella*, and *All Things Girl*. Most recently, she received a full fellowship to the 2013 Stowe StoryLabs and won second place in the 2014 San Miguel Writers' Conference nonfiction writing competition. For more about Julie and her other work, visit [www.julieaitcheson.com](http://www.julieaitcheson.com).*



## 3RD ANNUAL AWARD FOR PEACE WINNER

Moustapha Laabli Thiombiano, CEO of Horizon FM, was awarded the 3rd Annual Award for Peace on Saturday, November 18th, 2017 during a ceremony in Ouagadougou.

Mr. Thiombiano is well-known for his service to the development of Burkina Faso. Since 1983 he has contributed to the awareness of youth in the culture of peace. Through its program “Ça Va, Ça Va Pas,” Horizon FM has contributed greatly to the appeasement of hearts, culturing a spirit of tolerance, forgiveness, and peace in Burkina Faso.



## ANNUAL MEETING HELD IN WASHINGTON D.C.

On November 18th, 2017 D.C.-area members of Friends of Burkina Faso gathered in the home of Mead Over to participate in the Annual Members' Meeting.



# THREE NIGHTS TWO DAYS

by Rebecca Bacon Ehlers, '13-'15

## MEDITATIONS ON DEATH, GRIEF, AND RESILIENCE

Among the Gouin people of Burkina Faso, funerals are only held when an old person has died. They are, in a very real way, a celebration of the person's life and of life in general. People dance and drink millet beer and sing for three nights and two days. It is not unusual to say that you met your husband at a funeral.

I've lost count of how many of these village funerals I've attended. There have been many, and I consider it a great privilege. The music is beautiful, easy for a human body to move to. In the US people dance together in crowds, too, but there is always the feeling of being watched. A feeling of you, as an individual, on display. Here people dance to express their unity. I find a place in the crowd and try to feel only what others are also feeling. We concentrate on the places where we overlap. This is a feeling that people here know before words; women dance with babies tied to their backs and the babies sleep soundly there.

In this culture the most important musical instrument is the balafon. Visually it resembles a very large xylophone, and like a xylophone, it's played with mallets. The keys are made of wood and the sound comes out rich and hollow with a fuzzy vibration that lingers on after the note has been struck. There is no instrument from my culture that can make a comparable sound. Fueled by millet beer the balafonist can play for hours without breaks, which is an impressive feat of human endurance. When I see him around in the village I look at his forearms and think, where does all that energy come from? One would expect them to be much larger than a regular person's, but this isn't the case.

The party happens in the family's courtyard, between and around the buildings that enclose it. In this village as in many across West Africa, homes consist of many small buildings, each with one or two rooms. Each has a purpose, whether it is for cooking, for storage, for sleeping. The friendly swept-dirt courtyard in the center is both the hallway and the living room.

When a funeral descends upon a compound, it establishes an ecosystem of its own. For the length of the celebration daily life is completely disrupted. I wonder how this feels. There's a lot to see that is out of the ordinary. Women stand around enormous pots of rice uncarriable by one person, holding wooden spoons tall as a child. Usually there is somebody there to sell cigarettes, candy, shing goom, which where I'm from is called chewing gum, and shot-sized servings of liquor in plastic packets. At night there are electric lights everywhere whose glow is weak but harsh, blue in color, smokiness from cigarettes, from cooking fires visible in front of them. The whirl of the borrowed generator that powers them is unfamiliar in a village as small as this one.

During large parties like these tide pools of people form in the passageways between the building. In one place exhausted women lie on the ground asleep on mats. In another teenage girls congregate, conscious of themselves, anticipatory. Over there old men sit together without speaking much. Old women are the drunkest people there. Sometimes they make beautiful young men dance with them, but that happens more often at weddings. Their drunkenness is joyful. They wear it like a king's robes. The sound of the





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## THREE NIGHTS Continued from page 10

balafon is always present, exerting a gentle pull like gravity.

It's easy as an outsider not to see the pain at a Burkinabè funeral, but it's still there. The music and the beer are to help the deceased's family forget. To forget their grief until its weight has shrunk a little. This is why the funeral lasts three nights.

Very little about Burkinabè funerals is forced. When you want to give condolences to someone you approach them and you say, I want to give you my condolences. And then you be there with them. And you dance and you drink. There is no expectation that you would try to say something profound. Even the idea of that is alien as it so clearly would not make anyone feel better. There is no performance of grief expected. The relatives of the deceased do not perceive their own emotional responses through a filter of guilt.

I have sensed a feeling of relief at Burkinabè funerals. I don't know if this is accurate or not, but I can't shake the impression. Anyone who has lived their life in a place like Burkina knows intimately the incredible risk of suffering that attends life as a human being on this planet. When an elder dies there is almost a sense of relief that the person's life has been long, and a success, and is now encoded by its ending.

Still death is not a riddle that can be solved. There is no such cocoon of tradition for the death of a young person. Not long after my arrival in this place a middle school student drowned in the river. When I visited his family's courtyard with the other teachers to give condolences, his family seemed dazed, stranded, as though they had suddenly gone blind and were relearning how to move around in the world. There was no ceremony to ease the brutal starkness of the loss. It was just a tragedy.

By contrast I have been to very few American funerals. I know that makes me lucky. I'm back home now, fearful of losing what I learned while I was away. My grandparents have been married for 60 years. They play a few games of Yahtzee every day. They

have always done this. They keep track of who wins even though it's usually my grandmother. She told me that lately she has to play his turns for him sometimes because he gets confused. I know that I don't yet understand what it's like to live among these quiet losses.

I worry about her. I worry that she will start to feel like the person she lives with now isn't the person she lived with for all those years. Mostly I worry that feeling will be terribly lonely. One day she's complaining about his misunderstandings and I ask her, do you get lonely around here? She looks at me like I've asked her if she kept sugar in the freezer. She says, No, I don't get lonely, I have him.

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*Rebecca Bacon Ehlers is a writer, organizer, and advocate currently based in rural Oregon. She has lived and worked in Chicago, Iowa City, and southwestern Burkina Faso. In its varied forms her work honors experiences of trauma and resilience, celebrates cultural divergence, and elevates the voices of those who live or have lived a feminine identity. She is the Founder and Editor of Culturework.*

