



# BURKINA CONNECTION

A NEWSLETTER BY AND FOR THE MEMBERS OF FRIENDS OF BURKINA FASO



2020 Vol. 1

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## FALL FUNDRAISER FUELS PROJECTS IN FASO

by Caroline Chambre Hammock, '02-'04



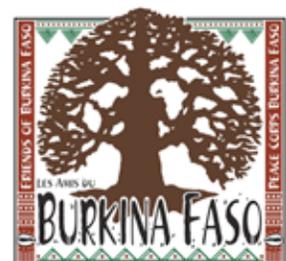
FBF's Fall 2019 Fundraiser raised nearly \$28,000 in donations!

FBF's fall fundraising campaign for 2019 was met with generous support from members and friends. In addition to membership dues, the campaign received nearly \$28,000 in donations, of which \$15,000 was designated by donors for general projects. As a result, the Projects Committee reviewed two requests for funding from existing community development partners to continue or expand their efforts. Projects were funded as follows:

### Appui aux Initiatives pour la Valorisation Durable du Potentiel Local (AIVDPL)

continues to work in the Zoundwéogo province of the Centre Sud region on improving crop management techniques through training and setting up on-farm demonstration plots. Over a three-year period, the project team has trained farmers from 900 households in 39 villages within the communes of Binde, Gogo and Manga. Approximately 6,300 people have been impacted by the project; each household has benefitted by growing more crops which can either be sold to generate income or be stored to improve food security. The project continues to show positive impact with strong management on the ground, including leadership by Patrice Yameogo and on-going support and guidance by Dr. Delwendé Kiba, a leading Burkinabé agricultural expert. AIVDPL seeks to train farmers in all villages within these three communes, and FBF support will allow them to target 15 of the remaining 41 villages. \$10,000 was granted to AIVDPL to support this initiative.

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**FRIENDS OF BURKINA FASO**  
LES AMIS DU BURKINA FASO

April 1, 2020

Dear Friends of Burkina Faso,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Friends of Burkina Faso, I would like to extend to you and your loved ones our warmest greetings and thank you for your ongoing support of FBF!

Life surely isn't so clear - there are challenging times. While all fighting out what to do with schools, businesses, and families closed around the world due to the coronavirus pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic is not sparing any country or group, and its impact is far felt. As a Organization recently said to a FBF Board member: "If the coronavirus pandemic is shutting our foreign friends who usually help us, and our own leaders, can you imagine how we regular folks here feel about all? People is all we have left." Like him, we hope that the pandemic will be over.

**CLICK HERE for a copy of your 2020 Membership Letter**

committed to the long tradition of supporting community development projects in Burkina Faso, we feel these are groups and those providing critical emergency assistance on a government level to respond to the growing humanitarian crisis. FBF is issuing a call for proposals from these groups on the frontlines doing this important work. We are asking our members (and their friends - please spread the word!) to contribute to this emergency humanitarian fund. In order to move fast, we need to both raise funds and collect proposals at the same time. We are asking for your contributions now while we simultaneously receive and vet proposals. We are committed to providing close communication with all donors about how the funds will be disbursed. Your contribution in any amount will provide a share of solidarity with the Burkinabe people during this challenging time.

5. For annual membership dues of \$25.

Please note:  
The date on the upper left corner of your mailing label is the date when your membership dues expired.  
Your continued support is vital to FBF so it allows us to sustain our volunteer-run, member-driven organization.  
Since Peace Corps suspended the program in Burkina Faso in 2017, there is no active volunteer presence.

## FALL FUNDRAISER

Continued from P. 1

### Service d'Édition en Langues Nationales du Burkina Faso (SEDELEN) and Association Bretonne d'Aide Directe à l'Afrique Sub-Saharienne (ABADAS)

remain resolutely committed to building a 5-classroom bilingual primary school in the Fulani commune of Singoghin, near Bittou in the Boulgou province in the Est region. The founder of SEDELEN, Father Maurice Oudet, has resided in Burkina Faso since 1980 and has dedicated his life to improving understanding and communication among ethnic groups, especially in rural areas. Opened in 2018, the Fulani bilingual school saw 86% of students pass final exams last year and go on to the next grade level; the school now serves 84 students enrolled in two grades. The government has provided two bilingual teachers to the school, and, at the urging of the FBF project managers, the organizers of the school have now established a parent-teacher association. SEDELEN and ABADAS now seek to complete construction of an additional classroom and an office for teachers. \$6,000 was granted to support this effort.

The remaining donations were designated for postsecondary education/training for girls via FBF's long-standing partnership with Association NEEDED and for school lunches at the Lycée Moderne de l'Amitié in Tangaye. These funds will be disbursed to the partners at the beginning of the next academic year.

The Projects Committee extends a hearty THANK YOU to all those who responded so generously to support these important community development initiatives!



## PRESIDENT'S YIRI



Dear FBF

Is it really a "new normal" we're entering? If I may speak freely with you: "new normal" gives me the same eye-rolling feeling as does "It is more important than ever to do <fill in the blank>!"

We're part of the world we create together each day, so keep supporting each other and yourselves (not new, but I hope normal). Burkina Faso is full of amazing people and places, so keep them all in your thoughts (important 3 years ago, important today, and important 3 years from now). And, finally, I'd like to add: this newsletter is FULL of riches (and so are you)!

Aaron Buchsbaum  
FBF President, RPCV '08-'10

P.S. I'd like to acknowledge the hard work done by the Board, our members, the Upper Volta 1 crew and even some generous strangers to get our Humanitarian Relief fundraiser up to over \$56,000 in a little over a month.



We are looking for content for our newsletter and blog. Send your submissions to [newsletter@friendsofburkinafaso.org](mailto:newsletter@friendsofburkinafaso.org).



### Recent headlines about Burkina Faso:

- Fin de mission de l'Ambassadeur Andrew R. Young
- Burkina Faso comedians combat COVID-19 anxiety with humour
- Coronavirus in crisis-hit Burkina Faso: Healthcare centres close as cases rise
- Voices from the violence: How Burkina Faso's crisis is changing society – and how to fix it
- Rights group accuses Burkina security forces of killing 31 unarmed detainees



## FBF LAUNCHES EMERGENCY HUMANITARIAN RELIEF FUND

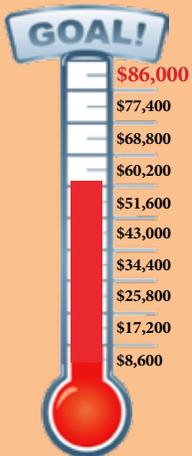
FBF remains committed to its long tradition of supporting community development projects in Burkina Faso. However, we feel there are groups providing critical emergency assistance on a grassroots level to respond to the growing humanitarian crisis.

We are asking our members (and their friends - please spread the word!) to contribute to this emergency humanitarian fund. We are committed to providing close communication with all donors about how the

funds will be disbursed. Your contribution in any amount will provide a show of solidarity with the Burkinabe people during this challenging time.

**As of the printing of this newsletter, we have received over \$56,000 in donations -**

**WOW! Thank you for your generosity!**



**Donate Now**



# FACEBOOK FUNDRAISER BOOSTS HUMANITARIAN FUND

by Brad McKim

My wife, Kay, and I were living in London in 2012 when a friend invited us to join her in Burkina Faso to attend the African Film Festival the next year. After locating Burkina Faso on a map, we decided that it looked like a fun adventure and said we were in.

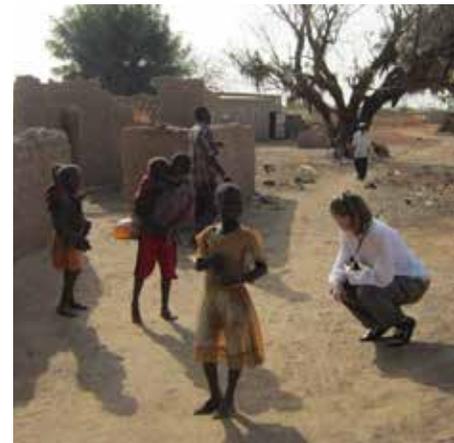
As our departure date approached in February 2013, terrorists descended on the neighboring country of Mali and started to create trouble along Burkina Faso's northern border. The United States' Department of State issued warnings to stay out of the northern regions and our Air France flight was routed to avoid Mali's airspace. This all made us a bit nervous, but we persevered.

We spent a week touring the southern half of Burkina Faso. We found the level of poverty both jarring and humbling, particularly when contrasted with the bright smiles and warmth of the people we met. We saw beautiful waterfalls and geologic formations, abundant wildlife including crocodiles and hippos, and stumbled into mesmerizing cultural events like the local market and the dedication of a new road in a remote part of the country that was attended by the Prime Minister and U.S. Ambassador. We returned home with our perspective broadened, to say the least.

Kay and I retired in the State of Wyoming a few years ago. We reflect often on our many travels, but Burkina Faso has always been one of our most memorable and meaningful trips. It immediately came to mind when I read an article in the March 26 edition of the Wall Street Journal. It offered fairly dire predictions regarding the COVID-19 virus once it reached Africa in force. Not surprisingly, Burkina Faso was specifically mentioned in the article.

For the next few days the specter of the pandemic mingled with the terrorist threat that was already in Burkina Faso haunted me. I did some research and found a [humanitarian aid project](#) that Friends of Burkina Faso was launching and decided that the project was probably our best available means of making a difference. I decided to do my first ever Facebook

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## FACEBOOK FUNDRAISER

*Continued from p. 3*

fundraiser to not only increase the size of our contribution but to raise awareness of Burkina Faso's plight. Sadly, very few U.S. citizens have heard of Burkina Faso.

Years ago, I recorded an album of original songs that I wrote. I had no illusions about my talents, I just enjoy playing and wanted to capture some of my songs for my children, grandchildren, etc. While the album is available digitally on Amazon, Spotify, iTunes and other online sources, I had recently come across a leftover box of CDs of the album and decided to give away the CDs as an incentive for people to contribute to the Burkina Faso fundraiser.

I originally set the goal for the 10-day fundraiser at \$1000 which I said Kay and I would match. When we were almost to \$1000 in the first hour, I changed the goal and the match to \$2000. Within about 3 more days, we made the goal of \$2000 in contributions. Over the remaining seven days, contributions reached almost \$3000. At the end of the fundraiser, Kay and I contributed our match plus a few extra dollars to make an even \$5000 for the Friends of Burkina Faso Project.

Kay and I realize that \$5000 cannot come close to addressing all the problems that Burkina Faso faces, but we know that 100 or 200 more people know about Burkina Faso now than before the fundraiser. Hopefully, this awareness will cause them to support the country in the future and to appreciate just how much worse their own personal situation could be. Burkina Faso's government cannot pass a "stimulus package" so it is left to each of us who live in places that can.

By the way, we never made it to the Film Festival. Part of the charm of places like Burkina Faso is that nothing ever goes as planned.

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*Photos accompanying this article were taken by Brad and Kay McKim during their time in Burkina Faso. To learn more about hosting a Facebook Fundraiser, visit <https://www.facebook.com/fundraisers/>*



**Claire Ouedraogo**  
Burkina Faso



### INTERNATIONAL WOMEN OF COURAGE

**Claire Ouedraogo** of Burkina Faso is the president of the Songmanegre Association for Women's Development. Claire is being honored for her visionary efforts and leadership to promote positive solutions to eliminate female genital mutilation and cutting and her role in empowering women in rural areas, even as Burkina Faso has descended into a state of ongoing insecurity.

**#WomenofCourage**

# 2019 AWARD FOR PEACE CEREMONY HELD IN BURKINA

by Kristin Lavoie, Communications Chair

It was an honor and a privilege to be present at the ceremony for the 4th Award for Peace and to accept the FBF Lifetime Achievement Award for my dear husband, Michael Lavoie, former President of FBF. Thank you to FBF, the wonderful artisans and caterers of Tigoung Nonma, Christophe Sandouidi, the MC, and especially, Faissal Ouedraogo, who did so much to make the day special for all! The ceremony was a joyful reminder of what Tigoung Nonma (TN) means in Moore: "strength through unity." As the 2019 Awardee, Mrs. Zoenabou Sawadogo's vision and courage empowers those living with disabilities to become positive forces for change in Burkina.



Mrs. Zoenabou Sawadogo receives the 2019 Award for Peace donation check from FBF Vice-President, Faissal Ouedraogo. Mrs. Sawadogo chose Tigoung Nonma as the recipient. She serves as President for this association of artisans living with disabilities in Burkina.



Current FBF Communications Chair, Kristin Lavoie receives FBF's Lifetime Achievement Award in honor of her husband, the late Michael Lavoie.

Mrs. Zoenabou Sawadogo is the 4th recipient of FBF's Award for Peace. She was chosen for her example, leadership and vision in establishing this cooperative of local artisans living with disabilities. TN was started in 2005 to train and support its members to make a successful living as artisans and create a better life for themselves. In Burkina, those living with disabilities face many barriers as a result of entrenched superstitions. Such beliefs make it extremely difficult to attend school, learn a trade, find employment or support a family.

At TN, the artisans make beautiful handicrafts, including leatherwork, jewelry, woodwork, pottery, metalwork, bronze, printing and crochet. The Award for Peace statue presented to the recipients of the Award for Peace are original works made of bronze by TN artisan, Issouf Sebgo. This year, for the first time, the statue is of a woman, in honor of Mrs. Sawadogo. Moving forward, the Award for Peace Committee will alternate years in commissioning a female and male statue for the Award for Peace recipient.

The statue Mr. Sebgo made for Mike's Lifetime Achievement award is a baobab tree with a pair of doves of peace, their nest and chick. The baobab was chosen because it represents eternal life and the birds were chosen to represent the continuation and growth of Mike's love and enthusiastic support for Burkina through our own actions

The 2019 Award for Peace ceremony was held Saturday,

February 29th, 2020 at the new home of Tigoung Nonma in the artistic area of Gounghin. The new facility has enough space for artisans to create and display their products, host meetings and run the very successful catering service which provided a wonderful lunch to the guests after the ceremony. The catering service, established in 2009 in response to a decreasing market for artisanal goods, is a popular and successful enterprise which employs 19 women. It is unique in Burkina because it is the only caterer staffed by a team of physically disabled women. The delicious meal we had explains their popularity at marriages, baptisms and events for NGO's and the Ministry of Social Action.

In attendance at the ceremony to honor Mme. Sawadogo were her husband, parents, family, supporters of TN and many of the artisans and friends of FBF. It was wonderful to catch up with Aicha Pitroipa, a former Peace Corps office employee of 12 years. Many RPCVs will remember her kindness to them and her unwavering support of FBF. As it was at the first ceremony for the Award for Peace, bestowed upon his Majesty the Mogho Naba Baongho, this ceremony was again MC'd by Christophe Sandouidi, married to Noelie Baguian, the daughter of the family who took Mike Lavoie in when he was a young well-digger in Namtenga in 1975. Also in attendance were Noelie, Simeon Baguian, Noelie's brother, his wife Micheline, daughters from both

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# 2019 AWARD FOR PEACE CEREMONY HELD IN BURKINA

Continued from p. 5



From Left to Right: Mrs. Sawadogo and Mrs. Lavoie present their awards; Mrs. Lavoie and her family; Mrs. Sawadogo and her family.

families and friends of Mike's from his many activities over the years in Burkina.

Faisal Ouedraogo, FBF Vice-President did a spectacular job organizing the ceremony! His attention to detail and thoughtfulness were evident in so many ways. He gave a beautiful tribute to Mike and was an invaluable interpreter for me!

My sincere thanks to FBF, Faissal Ouedraogo, Kristen Combs-Bicaba, Kati McDonald and all who made the ceremony possible. Even more so is my profound thanks to the wonderful and upright people of Burkina Faso for

the love and welcome they offered a young well-digger in 1975. These friendships, memories and experiences formed and sustained Mike for the rest of his life. He carried them in his heart for the next 41 years and they made him the man who I am so greatly blessed to have loved and been loved by. Thank you for remembering and honoring him. One of Mike's favorite Moore sayings was: Ned sen wabd yiou pa segd n yiim yibeog saag yelle ye. "The one who savors the mayfly should not forget the rain of the morning which made it possible." Mike never forgot the Burkinabe people who are truly the rain of the morning to him. Barka wusego!

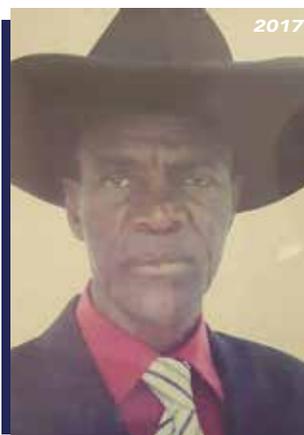
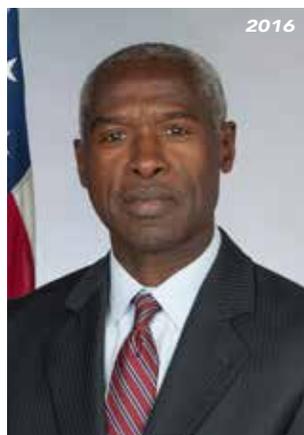
The Friends of Burkina Faso Award for Peace was established in 2015 to recognize the contributions of individuals at all levels, to provide support and motivation to those individuals, and to raise powerful examples of good works for others to see and from which to be inspired.

The FBF Award for Peace is funded through individual donations. FBF provides the winner with a \$2,000 prize donated directly to a non-profit of their choice, and hosts a ceremony with the press. Former recipients (pictured below) include: His Majesty Mogho Naba Baongo, His Excellency the Ambassador Tulinabo S. Mushingi, and the late Moustapha Thiombiano.

For more information on the Award for Peace, visit <https://www.friendsofburkinafaso.org/award-for-peace>.



The Award for Peace statue was created by Issouf Sebgo, a member of the Tigoung Nonma artisan center. The statue was designed to portray the intent of the Award for Peace through the dove, the upheld hand symbolizes the stopping of conflicts, and the raised left heel demonstrates the advancement of peace. The man's age designates wisdom, his cane and clothing symbolize diversity.



## IN MEMORY...

FBF was saddened to learn of the passing of 2017 Award for Peace laureate, Moustapha Laabli Thiombiano, on April 6, 2020.

Mr. Thiombiano used radio broadcasts to alleviate tension during 2015 and continued these efforts both on and off air, stressing that Burkina cannot grow without acceptance of others.

# SPEAKING JULA ON YOUTUBE

by Coleman Donaldson, '09-'11

“You need to speak in French. That way, the person knows that you are educated.”

This off-hand comment—expressed by one school girl in a recent conversation in Bobo-Dioulasso—illuminates a fact: African languages, do not play the role that they should in Burkina or anywhere else on the Continent.

This issue was at the center of my Peace Corps service in Burkina's Jula-speaking southwest and has been the motivation behind much of my career as a linguistic anthropologist ever since.

Still, I have often felt as if my work about language activism and Manding (the broader group of which Jula is a part) has not led to outsiders actually learning to read, write and speak African languages—something that fundamentally altered my life (and that of many Peace Corps volunteers) for the better.

Frustrated by this fact, I have been increasingly dedicated to a number of projects of An ka taa—my initiative to create media and resources so that learning Manding is as accessible as learning Western languages like French or Spanish.

Here's an overview of some of the major ones:

## Na baro kè

On YouTube, [Na baro kè](#) is a free video series—for Manding speakers and learners—of transcribed and translated street-side “chats” with everyday people in cities and towns in Mali and Burkina Faso. Each 10-minute episode revolves around a single topic—greetings, small change, important words such as sabari, etc.

## Jula/Bambara Dictionary

One of the major complaints for learning African languages is that



Coleman's An Ka Taa YouTube channel provides a series of streetside chats in Mali and Burkina. Not only can you refresh your Jula, but you can visit the familiar sights and sounds!

there aren't convenient and content-rich dictionaries. With this in mind, I developed a dictionary web app for Jula that is searchable, mobile-friendly and available anytime at [dictionary.ankataa.com](http://dictionary.ankataa.com).

## Basic Bambara—the podcast!

Some people prefer learning a bit of a language while commuting, cooking or doing chores around the house. That's why, I produced the Basic Bambara podcast in a short six-episode single season so that anyone can pick up just enough to sound like a Peace Corps volunteer who might not speak a local language, but knows enough to be polite and make their way through the market.

## Conclusion

For a long time, I hesitated to produce such resources. It's not “my” language. And why should a white guy be promoting and teaching an African language online?

My conversations with friends and language activists in West Africa in recent years eventually led me to put aside my reservations. I not only love language teaching and opening

West African society to students, but I'm in the privileged position of having time to dedicate myself to the labor-intensive production of a video series, a podcast or a dictionary web app.

It is my hope that these resources can not only help learners, but also spur Manding-speakers, governments and better-resourced companies into producing African language content by demonstrating that there are audiences interested in aspects of life in West Africa not seen in the headlines.

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*Coleman Donaldson was Girls' Education and Empowerment volunteer in the village of Soubakaniédougou. When he's not speaking Manding or working on “An ka taa” projects, he's a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Hamburg in Germany. Got ideas or wanna help? You can reach him at [coleman@ankataa.com](mailto:coleman@ankataa.com)*



## The Rhythm of Rain

By Bethany Woodson, '15-'16

It's the middle of the night,  
something wakes you, you  
process your surroundings and  
realize it's a distinct smell.

Before you know it,  
it's drawing you outside.

The air is still, calm,  
the world is quiet.

The sky lights up,  
it's endless.

Thunder rumbles,  
it seems to roll on forever,  
nothing to stand in its way.

Palm tree silhouettes outline  
the horizon.

A couple of bicycles roll past,  
trying to outrun the  
inevitable.

The sky is alive,  
you inhale deeply.

The air has thickened all day  
and it finally cracks.

A cool breeze, you shiver,  
another stampede of thunder,  
sprinkles on tin roofs, the  
anticipation builds.

The light is blinding but you  
can't look away.

The thunder is so close you can  
feel it in your chest.

Crickets scream; frogs sing.

The light goes on forever and  
passes in an instant.

The clouds burst open, water  
washes over everything.

You return to bed and the  
soothing pulse of the rain  
lulls you into a blissful  
sleep.

There's nothing quite like the  
rhythm of a thunderstorm.

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*Bethany Woodson served in Moussodougou in the Cascades region as a Community Economic Development Volunteer. Originally from Wisconsin, she attended UMKC in Kansas City, and, after Peace Corps, returned to Milwaukee to get her Master's in International Affairs from Marquette University. She graduated in 2019 and moved to Washington, D.C., where she works as a budget analyst for the US government.*

## PATRICE YAMEOGO APPOINTED CHEF

by Leslie Berger, '81-'83

Patrice Yameogo was recently appointed Chef de Kabega (near Koupela). Patrice is well-known to the Friends of Burkina Faso Board as he has been the driving force behind the Manga-based project training farmers to improve productivity.

Patrice inherited this honor from his late father who served as Chef from 1984 to his death in 2005. In earlier times, the person in this role was responsible for the Chef de Canton's cavalry. Today there are no more horses, so the main responsibility of this post is to act as special advisor to the Chef de Canton. Patrice will preside over 16 villages near Koupela working alongside the Chef de Canton and will have responsibility for appointing the Chefs of the other villages.

This is not the first honor Patrice has received over the years as he has spent his 36-year career supporting farmers in the development and management of agricultural land, and providing training to farmers to improve productivity and reduce food insecurity in the region. In 2006, Patrice received the prestigious Knight of National Order for his work in the community.

The ceremony to congratulate Patrice for this appointment as Chef included joyful dancing, feasting, and speeches by local authorities. During this ceremony Patrice was carried through the village accompanied by lots of singing, dancing and drumming. Friends and relatives came from far and wide to congratulate him on this great honor.

The people of Manga have benefited greatly from Patrice's work over the years. His efforts have been complemented by those of his wife Rose, who works with village women to improve family health, nutrition and livelihoods. Rose was given the title of Princess by the people of Manga indicating the level of respect they have for her work.

When congratulated on his and Rose's honors Patrice said, "We have done our best so that those for whom we are called to help in Kabega as in Manga can find comfort and satisfaction of their essential needs." Patrice and Rose have continued to work well past the typical retirement age.

The Board of FBF collectively would like to congratulate them and thank them for their service to the people of Burkina Faso.



When the COVID-19 pandemic forced the evacuation of Peace Corps worldwide, many of those that had re-applied after their Burkina evacuation were about to finish their second year of service in their new host country. Here are two of their stories.

## THE CHIMEKI RETURNS HOME...AGAIN

by Jacob Johnston, '16-'17

I'm happy to know the places I've known as home. It seems that the motion of the world takes a backseat to the places you seek in this world, whether that be making the best of being at home or being the best to return the neighborly feel.

The landscape and the shape of bodies have changed, but the soul remains the same, whether religion or dharma. But that grasp never lasts, even if you grasp with the tightest groups. Some immediacy, some a slow fade.

Leaving Burkina was a fast, speeding haze of uncertainty, powerlessness, and fear, but it was always an impeding thought. Things could not be "si bon" from one day to the next day. I didn't realize my last time playing soccer at the mosque with the kids, the last tea under moonlight with the neighbors, the last bead of sweat under that intense sun I cursed. And then, all the missed opportunities, chances, and goals to be a part of a greater vision. But I wouldn't be able to receive that in the next place either.

Even the amount of time I spent in Nepal, the amount of time I had to give a farewell didn't weigh down the pain of letting go all over again. But I always faced the issue of staying a hold of it all. I realized through the love and compassion I received; I knew my presence alone will never pay for that.

I think what my communities shared with me the most was their means of hope and getting past everyday: A Sense of Celebration. My Burkinabé and Nepali neighbors were gracious to share their holidays and prayer with me. Eid fell on the day I was told we were being evacuated in Burkina. It was a restless 13 hours of preparing. I remember walking with my neighbor Amidou, who granted me the name Issaka a year before. "God is watching over us and you," Amidou said. I shared in prayer, and soon tea and goat.

I can never truly say that I've made the greatest difference in my actions, but my existence there meant something greatly to me, and I hope, in return, to those folks who recognized me. I was thankful to plan my goodbyes to my village in Nepal, as we were given a few days warning before the final goodbyes would take place.

I came back to a very changed world, for everyone across the world. And where once I was a chimeki (neighbor), I am now lost in the wake of a great separation. I feel lost, and I feel that I have lost things as well. But throughout these times, of the loving and irritating, the cherished and the revered, I've come to know Maya (love), and I've come to know Wende. I'm doing my best to keep this in mind, and act upon it. I will know how to make it home.

*Jacob Johnston is from Waterford, MI. He has served in two separate stints in the Peace Corps (Burkina Faso, '16-'17, and Nepal, '18-'20). Jacob is now focusing on participating in grant writing and a future master's degree program focused on development.*



# BREATHING TOGETHER

by Jessie Hughes, '17

## My Nepali “aamaa” and Burkinabé “mère” could not have looked more different, but they shared the same loves, stresses, and stories in life.

One of my earliest memories is of snuggling next to my mother, listening to her breath and trying to match it. That memory floats to the surface of my mind whenever I think of my love for her. When she called recently to tell me she had tested positive for COVID-19, I felt the air catch in my throat. These days, the pandemic has the whole world holding its breath, unsure of anything. The uncertainty has been enough for the Peace Corps to enact a worldwide evacuation of all posts. So, I’m home three months earlier than expected, in quarantine like everyone else, and unable to see my mother. To pass the time my thoughts turn to my two services in the Peace Corps, and the mothers that found me there.

Burkina Faso is rural and centered on agriculture. The people there work hard, often starting before the sun rises and continuing after it sets. I was there as an economic development volunteer, and my time was spent learning how it felt to be an outsider accepted by the community. Everywhere I went, “tannies” would offer me sugary tea and bowls of peanuts. I had a host mother to teach me how to survive, tell me stories, and also confide in me her hardships. Mère Alizeta often worried that, despite all of her hard work, she would never be satisfied in life. When she got into this vein, I would sip my tea and breathe, listen, and try to be there for her. When Peace Corps Burkina Faso announced an evacuation due to security concerns, I didn’t have a chance to say goodbye. I wrote her

a letter in mediocre French, trying to explain what had happened. It never felt like enough.

In my small Nepali village, the people’s lives revolve around their fields. I would wake at 6 to find my family had been up for hours, and they continued working long after I’d fallen asleep. I felt like a duck amongst chickens; a little odd but nevertheless accepted. The village “didis” would always insist on a glass of sweet tea, along with, you guessed it, peanuts. My Nepali “aamaa” and Burkinabe “mère” could not have looked more different, but they shared the same loves, stresses, and stories in life.

Aamaa Bhamati would talk with me about everything, and often shared her own worries of family and fortune. I found, again, that simply sitting and breathing with her could put her at ease. Later, I received word we were evacuating again, this time due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But this time I could say goodbye. I tried to explain that the Peace Corps was sending me home, to keep both her and I safe. It wasn’t fun, but I was grateful to be able to hold her hand, and just sit and breathe with her. And after three years, it felt like I could say goodbye to Alizeta too.

We’re all breathing together on this planet, and we always have been. For me, the magic of the Peace Corps was discovering the connections we all hold to each other. This pandemic is stressful for all of us, but as long as I can take a breath, I can remember my many



mothers and the connections I have to them. I’ll be able to see my American mother soon, following her recovery from this virus, and I know that as I hold her hand and breathe with her, Alizeta and Bhamati will be there as well.

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*Jessie Hughes is a 28-year-old Returned Peace Corps Volunteer from the Finger Lake Region of New York. She served in Burkina Faso in 2017 and, after her evacuation, decided to serve a second time in Nepal. She is currently working in the winemaking industry and plans to pursue a master’s degree in Global Development this coming fall.*



# A HIKER'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LAND

by Renee Patrick, '99-'01

It was after completing the triple crown and a bunch of other trails; after about 10,000 miles hiked and at least 500 days sleeping outside, that I started working for a conservation organization and began paying attention to the land and the people that make our long trails possible. Ok, those things were written into my job description, that's true, but I was a bit embarrassed that it took a job description to get me thinking about



these issues. I had the great fortune to start working to establish the 750-mile [Oregon Desert Trail \(ODT\)](#) for the [Oregon Natural Desert Association](#). My role would be to engage the long-distance hiker in knowing the eastern Oregon landscape in a deeper way during and after their hike through the sagebrush sea; to create opportunities for them to see value in the land and intact habitats enough to join the organization in our work to protect, defend and restore the land they were walking on.

And that's when I realized I already had a relationship with the land, I felt like the out-of-doors was an extension of the indoors, I knew that the health of the landscape that I walked directly supported the life I wanted to live, but I hadn't spent any energy thinking about our system of public lands, the land managers out there who are charged with the health and vitality of those places, and the countless organizations and people who live and breathe trying to defend our trails and landscapes from degradation, exploitation, destruction and more.

That's when I got excited to help other hikers engage with our trails, routes, and landscapes in a deeper way. Just who are the local, state, and federal agencies that say what can and can't happen in these places? Just what do these designations mean when I see a sign on

the tree that says "Wilderness Study Area" or "Area of Critical Environmental Concern?" What makes these places special, and how are they different from the next area I will hike through tomorrow? What are the threats to these places, the animals, water, and even the views? And what can I do if I want to get involved?

There is so much to it all. And in Oregon where I'm working on the Oregon Desert Trail, most of the land east of the Cascade Mountains (and Pacific Crest Trail) are public, that means those lands are owned by you and me.

It's time to start paying attention because as it turns out, there are threats, very real threats to our ability to hike on a long trail and trust that the water in the creek is clean enough to drink. That the animals we enjoy watching along the trail have the habitat they need to survive and thrive. That the people whose job it is to make decisions about what's best for these places have the money, resources, and our support to do so.

Ask yourself: What is your relationship to the land? Let's just start with the land underneath your favorite local trail. Who owns it, who manages it, what is it managed for, who are the animals and plants that live there; are any endangered? From what? Is there something you can do if you want to have a say in how this place makes it into the next decade? I bet there is. And then try it out on the next long trail you want to hike. What are the issues there? It's enlightening, and I'll admit a bit frightening, to look underneath the hood of your next long-distance trail, but I bet the trail organizations who are tasked with its management and development would be happy to engage you in some of the issues.

Whether we like it or not our chosen life (yes, I'll say life, because it's a life-long goal of mine and many of my friends to hike ALL THE TRAILS), is not guaranteed, and if we don't get involved in what makes these trails possible, who will?

My relationship with the land is evolving; it excites and scares me, but thru-hiking has ruined me for normal life. I want to keep hiking, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

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*To learn more about Renee and follow her adventures, visit her website at <https://sherahikes.com>.*

## ABOUT US

Friends of Burkina Faso is a 501(c)3 nonprofit affiliated with the National Peace Corps Association. We maintain a **network** of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) and friends of Burkina Faso. We provide funding and assistance to **support projects** in Burkina Faso. We strive to **improve social interaction**, communication and information exchange. We **educate** others about the country and culture of Burkina Faso.

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# RE-EVALUATING POLITICAL TRUST: THE IMPACT OF SURVEY NONRESPONSE IN RURAL CHINA

Co-Author Dr. Leah Rabin, '00-'02

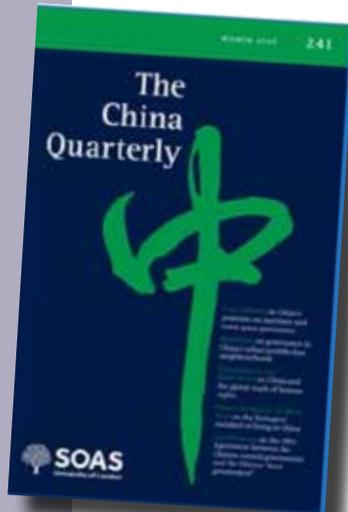
[**ABSTRACT**] Has survey nonresponse caused scholars to overestimate political trust in China? We analyze item nonresponse for sensitive questions on trust in government

from our original survey of villagers conducted in China in 2012. We also analyze nonresponse in four other comparable surveys conducted in China between 1993 and 2014. We examine the association between nonresponse to politically sensitive questions and individual characteristics such as sex, level of education, Party

membership and cosmopolitanism. We find that less privileged groups may be underrepresented in survey data generally. We find mixed results regarding the association between cosmopolitanism and nonresponse. We conclude that our understanding of political trust in China has been compromised by high rates of item nonresponse, leading to artificially high estimates of trust in the centre and exaggerated accounts of the gap between trust in central and local leaders.

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*Leah served as a Public Health Volunteer in the villages of Gbonblora and Niou. She currently manages programs for the China portfolio at an international foundation funding grassroots organizations focused on human rights, democratic institutions, and civil society. She earned her M.I.P.A./J.D. and Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.*



## NPCA LAUNCHES GLOBAL RE-ENTRY PROGRAM FOR EVACUATED RPCVs

Shortly after the evacuation of all Peace Corps Volunteers due to COVID-19, the National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) launched the Global Re-Entry Program to assist Volunteers transition to life after service, providing resources to overcome challenges and take the next steps toward healthy lives and successful careers.



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