



# **A DEDICATION TO DELEGATIONS**

*Stories, reports, and journals about AWIU's  
delegations in the twenty-first century*

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Sue Devick, Editor

Chicago Chapter, October, 2017

## A Dedication to Delegations

The 50th anniversary of the founding of AWIU is cause for celebration for all of our organization's members, whether they are currently active, retired, or simply with us in spirit. The idea of creating a book of stories about the various delegations came forth during a planning meeting in Chicago on a cold January day in 2017, while we debated how we could best extend a warm welcome to members traveling to our city for our anniversary event in October, 2017. We gathered diaries, logs, reports, photo albums, and other material, and began this project as a humble gesture of thanks to the delegates who have traveled the world on behalf of AWIU.

Our research clearly revealed the deep dedication of our members to achieve the goals that were recognized when AWIU was created, which include the promotion of woman to woman interaction through meaningful visits abroad. While the documentation of numerous acts of generosity attributed to our members was impressive, another important quality emerged from their work: *the women of AWIU were breaking new ground both politically and historically on a regular basis*. Our spirited organization was the first (or among the first) American women's group to visit Russia (1968), China (1973), Saudi Arabia (2002), and Libya (2009); furthermore, the delegation to Cuba (2009) occurred when there was very little communication between the U.S. and Cuba. The early history of AWIU is being preserved by members Donna Pinckney (San Diego) and Julie Pantiskas (L.A.); Julie's mother (Margaret Casey Power) was a charter member of AWIU.

The recording of firsthand historical impressions is "primary source" information to historians, who highly value this knowledge. The documentation of delegation experiences helps to provide better foreign relations while also improving the living conditions for countless individuals and families on faraway continents. An added benefit is that a historical record is created by AWIU of people and places that exist in the world during fragile times; we can comprehend this more fully if we examine the photographs belonging to Carole Lewis from her delegation to Syria in 1998. Carole's album holds beautiful, clear images of the ancient ruins of Palmyra, many of which which are no longer in existence due to their purposeful destruction.

As we recognize our accomplishments on this festive 50th anniversary of the founding of AWIU, we can also comprehend that our well-deserved celebration is an opportunity to act as an organization on a very needy world stage. We can look to the future and seek direction as we appreciate not only our past successes, but the endless opportunities that are waiting for us in distant lands. Our ideals and our principles shall continue to be reflected as we reach out to those who are waiting for our arrival and desperately needing our presence.

Sue Devick, M.A. History, Editor

Presidents of American Women for International Understanding

Bernice M. Hemphill  
Lee Kimche McGrath  
Marcia Wilson Hobbs  
Fran Harding Williams  
Joanne Kumamoto  
Martha Atherton  
Judith Hill  
Carole J. Lewis  
Anne Tonks  
Jane Mursener Wetzel  
Kathleen Hunt  
Diane M. McGlinchey  
Carol Robertson Lopez  
Maria Emmi Schory



Year	Country	Leader
2017	Nicaragua	Gayle Morin
2016	Ethiopia	Judith Jakaitis, Gayle Morin
2015	Chiapas, Mexico	Colleen Berk
2014	Myanmar (Burma)	Gayle Morin
2012	Balkans (Bosnia, Croatia, Herzegovina, Hungary, Montenegro, Slovenia, Yugoslavia)	Gayle Morin, Barbara Rubio
2010	Japan	Roxi Goin
	Russia	Gayle Morin, Anne Tonks
2009	Libya	Gayle Morin, Anne Tonks
2008	Argentina	Gayle Morin, Anne Tonks
2006	India	Joan Poulos
2005	Iceland	Martha Atherton
2002	Cuba	Helen Free
2002	Saudi Arabia	Marianne Alireza
2001	Mongolia	
	China	
2000	Israel	
	England	
	Germany	
1999	United States - the All China Women's Federation	Return Visit of
	France	Diane Dalton, Betty Thomas
	Mexico	Betty Thomas
1998	Italy	Martha Atherton
	Syria	Mimi Idriss, Helen Free
	China	Fran Harding Williams
1996	South Africa	Ellen Linsley, Aimee Walker
1994	Eastern Europe and the Baltic States	Nancy Peterson
1993	Ireland	Bernice Hemphill
1991	China	Betty Thomas
1990	Russia	Lee McGrath
	Eastern Europe (Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Austria)	Hungary, Nancy Peterson, Marilyn Hartwell
1989	Russia	Edith Wyle
1988	Greece	Bernice Hemphill
	Turkey	Bernice Hemphill
1986	Far East	
1984	China	
	Israel	
	Egypt	
	Colombia	
	Costa Rica	
	Guatemala	
1983	Argentina	
	Chile	
	USSR	
1981	USSR	
	China	
1979	Japan	

	Korea
1978	Tunisia
	Egypt
	Jordan
	Turkey
	China
	Cuba
	Mexico
1977	Australia
	New Zealand
	Colombia
	Brazil
	Argentina
	Chile
	Peru
1975	Mexico
	Greece
	Turkey
	Iran
	China
1974	Kenya
	Nigeria
	Ghana
	USSR
	Iran
	China
	Afghanistan
	India
	Nepal
	Thailand
1973	Hong Kong
1971	Israel
	Egypt
	USSR
1969	USSR
	Romania
	Yugoslavia
1968	USSR
	Hungary
	Czechoslovakia

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# **CHINA**

## **2001**





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## Chinese Connection 1973 to 2010



### AWIU/Chinese Connection 1973 to 2010

AWIU has a long history of connection to China. Back in 1973 just one year after President Nixon made the first Presidential visit to China, AWIU members flew to China and were hosted by the Chinese Women's Federation. This delegation was the first delegation of American Women to visit China and is thought to be among the earliest delegation of women to China.

Later in the 90's the AWIU hosted Chinese Women visiting the United States.

Archives from Harvard have two pictures of the 1973 delegation. In February. In both pictures delegates are shown on the Great Wall of China.

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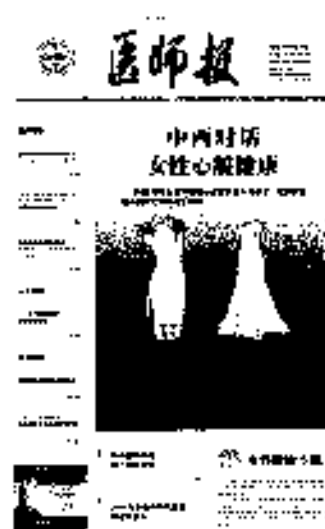
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AWIU has had a total of 8 delegations to China. In addition to 1973 they were delegations in 1975, 1978, 1981, 1984, 1991, 1998 and 2001.

In 2010 AWIU partnered with the Sister to Sister Foundation to bring two Chinese Cardiologists to the United States.

Yundai Chen and Meilin Lui both practicing cardiologists in China came to the US to study the latest in cardiology. They visited outstanding hospitals in Chicago, Washington, DC, Boston and Los Angeles. In Chicago and Washington, DC they were hosted by AWIU members. Read more about these grantees [here](#)

AWIU IN PRINT IN CHINA:



Upon their return to China they wrote an article on their experiences in the US with the grant program. And in that article they included a picture of themselves with President, Anne Tonks and Irana Pollin, Founder Sister to Sister Foundation and member AWIU.

12 Share this post

## China 2001-Audrey Rothstein

Good morning from Shanghai. Marty, Joanne, Donna, and I have had a wonderful experience the last 10 days. We have traveled far and wide, met many wonderful people, and seen tremendous growth and prospects for more growth everywhere we have been.

Our meetings with various organizations within the All China Women's Federation have provided us with tremendous insights into the work of the federation at all levels, and we look forward to sharing what we have learned through our report as well as when we see the group members in California.

There are memories that we will leave with that will stay with us forever: a visit to a small village where we were the first foreign visitors is at the top of my list, the travel along country roads, meetings with women in leadership positions in the village, township and municipal levels, our visit to a health care facility for women and children, and so much more. We will have so much to share!

The warmth of our hosts will also always be remembered. They have taken good care of us and ensured that we made the most of this opportunity. I think we each feel the need to make sure that the visit of the Chinese delegation to the US is as successful.

We look forward to sharing pictures, memories, of new experiences in Chinese cuisine, laughs (and there were many), and much more.

China-8\* Delegation-Martha Atherton 2001  
(Prior delegations-1973, 1975, 1978, 1981, 1984, 1991,  
1998)

In continuing a tradition, AWIU in 2001 accepted its eighth invitation to visit the All China Women's Federation. The ACWF, an arm of the Chinese government since the People Revolution in 1949, acts as a bridge linking the government and the masses of women (a loosely given number of 350,000,000 was mentioned). American Women for International Understanding, founded and organized in 1968 by Bernice Behrens is a non-governmental, non-profit organization of volunteers whose stated vision includes the following:

To associate together selected women leaders throughout the United States, representing a cross section of professions and occupations, to engage in and to encourage people-to-people contacts throughout the world.

To participate in planned visits to other countries to meet women leaders therein and to participate in planning for exchange visits to this country of women leaders from other countries.

The ACWF's basic functions are to protect women's legal rights and interests, to promote gender equality, and develop undertakings benefiting women and children. The functions embodied are those of creating solidarity, education, representation, service and association.

The membership of AWIU has varied between 125 and 175 over the years, and is presently in the mid-mark of those numbers. Although it may seem incongruous that a gigantic



organization stemming from its Communist founding, and a small organization sprung from the roots of volunteerism can find a symbiosis, that is what has happened and there is a strong appreciation for one another. 6

In April 2002 the return delegation from ACWF will visit the members and friends of AWIU at gatherings in Washington D.C., Chicago, and Los Angeles. In preparation for the celebration of the relationship which is now into its 28<sup>th</sup> year, there will be a review and recognition of the massive changes, in both China and the U.S., that have taken place during the course of a generation. Some of the American women who participated in the early exchanges will recount their experiences and impressions at a festive occasion in Chicago.

The women who returned from China at the end of November are eager to relate what they saw and encountered. Two or three months before they left the U.S., they were asked to advise the ACWF about their varied interests which encompassed health care issues (traditional and western), elder care, education, use of technology by Chinese women, marketing, tourism, environmental issues, arts and cuisine.

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AWIU Invitees:

- Martha Atherton, President and Delegation Leader, Chicago
- Joanne Kumamoto, Past President and Chairman, Los Angeles
- Donna Pinckney, Santa Barbara/San Diego
- Audrey Rothstein, Vice President-Information Technology, Washington, D.C.

### ACWF Hosts

- Madame Zou Xiaoqiao, Dep. Director, Intl. Liaison Dept., Beijing
- Madame Shen Shuji, V.P. and Member of the Secretariat, ACWF, Member of Peoples National Congress, and Past Vice-Governor of Inner Mongolia, Beijing
- Cui Linlin, Deputy Director, Intl. Liaison Dept., Beijing
- Zhao Lirong, Division Dir. Intl Liaison, Dept., U.S. Latin America, and Oceania, Beijing
- Yu Jia, Interpreter, Intl. Liaison Dept., Beijing
- Cao Lili, Chairperson, Shanxi Women's Federation, Xian City
- Chen Xiaojiang, Deputy Dir. Dev. Dept., Shanxi Xian City
- Yan Yinxian, Urban & Rural Women's Work
- Wang Ming Ying, Pres. Volunteer Mother's Assn. for Environmental Protection, Shanxi, Xian City
- Shan Cunzhen, Dept. Head, Intl. Liaison Dept, Shanxi Xian City
- Madame Xu Pei Li, Vice President Shanghai Women's Federation
- Du Xi Jing, Dep. Chief Liaison Dept., Shanghai Women's Fed.
- Sun Mei E Shanghai Women's Federation Shanghai

In response to the indicated areas of interest of the AWIU women, and in the interest of providing enhancements such as sight-seeing, entertainment, shopping, surprises, and to ass to the delight of the visitors the ACWF set up an itinerary interspersed with the generous breakfasts, and lunches and dinners that typically consisted of 15 to 20 dishes excellently prepared and representing the cuisine of the three areas visited.

During our travels spanning 10 days, our delegation was accompanied by our two guide-interpreters, Cui Linlin and Yu Jia, at all times and experienced the total distance and

hours with the Americans. From early mornings until late evenings the hosts and invitees were totally engaged, with no illnesses or other lost moments. In some instances, however, the delegates found the various presentations so fascinating, we were reluctant to depart.

We were housed in multiple-star hotels, and we traveled great distances between Beijing, Xian, and Shanghai by Air China Boeings, etc. Local travel was by chartered medium-sized buses, and most often, local ACWF leader-guides accompanied us, explaining their projects and sharing insights into the lives of Chinese women.

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The All China Women's Federation has a full time staff of 80,000, and 1,000,000 volunteers, to cover the needs of the 350,000,000 women whom they represent. There are no membership fees for the 5,800 group members, and there are no individual memberships.

At the national level there are no groups representing women judges, journalists, entrepreneurs, etc. Most of the groups are those that represent the political entities, from the village level on up.

Memberships are obtained by application, following registration with the Ministry of Civil Affairs. The National Women's Congress is convened every five years. The next one is scheduled for 2003. Two main thrusts, issues, of the ACWF are to represent and safeguard women's rights and interests and promote equality between women and men, and to aid women in their participation in economic development and social well being.

The ACWF is actively assisting in re-employment training for women during this period of transformation from the socialist (state-run) enterprises to the supply/market

economy. Many people have been laid off from state-run organizations. 45% of the laid off workers are women. Women represent 46% of the working people. In 2001 the unemployment rate in China was 3.5%(35%?)

The majority of women who were laid off are around 40 years old, and is inadequately educated. The ACWF is working on 31 projects, one in each province. The government labor department also offers courses for these women.

By the end of 2,000 the ACWF had reached a goal of assisting 1,000,000 women, in one way or another. It is acknowledged that it is difficult for people in the 40's and 50's to adjust to the new economy. The requests for light work, good pay, close to home, have a familiar ring. A second income in the family is necessary.

The economic independence is recognized as giving women status. Women begin working by age 20, on an average, and they work until they are 45 and up to 60. There are not many part-time jobs. Many are becoming self-employed. Interpreters are among those who can earn a good income.

The ACWF is funded by its economic entities, newspapers, magazines, travel services, college, and government budget allocations, and domestic and foreign donations. Small enterprises are financed by revolving micro-credits. Attention needs to be paid to the 11 western provinces in China that are underdeveloped.

While the stated compulsory education is 9 years, realistically the 1<sup>st</sup> step is to offer 6 years of education, in many areas. There are also many drop-outs after the third year. It is difficult for many to afford \$50 a year for education costs (particularly when the income per capita may be only \$100).



Madame Zou was happy to mention that a Chicago based group named American Women for International Peace was sponsoring 150 girls. (Their donation is therefore assisting 150 girls in China vs. the cost of a single student in most of the Chicago area.) 10

# **MONGOLIA**

## **2001**

### Mongolia-Kathleen Foerster-2001

The Mongolian women who had arranged for our visit welcomed us most enthusiastically. We stayed in Ulaanbaatar except for a few nights when we were sightseeing in the countryside and slept in gers (Mongolian word for "yurts"). While the majority of our meetings took place in the capital, we also traveled to meet up with a group some distance from the city who had developed a traveling library, and that visit was so successful they invited us back for a farewell party.

The weather that day turned out to be unusually chilly and windy and we ended up wearing quite an assortment of layers. An outdoor area had been prepared for us and included camels and horses for riding, beautiful folk dancing and singing, large amounts of food and hand sewn blouses for each of. There were several different colors and the group had decided which color each of us would receive, making them especially thoughtful gifts. Mine was black, but I recall others in red, purple, pink and grey. We eagerly put them on.

After we had eaten they started playing U.S. country/western music on a boom box and expected us to line dance with them. Of course they were incredulous when it turned that none of us in the delegation knew how, but that did not stop the party: they taught us! It was just hilarious as we tried to follow along to the steps. I recall the beautiful setting in the woods, the bright blue sky and the blended laughter of Mongolian and American women.



## Mongolia Delegation July 2001 Kathleen Huston

When dynamic AWIU member Mary Ripley leaned over to me at a meeting in San Francisco and said she was going to propose a delegation to Mongolia, I was so excited! At 84, Mary still had characteristic AWIU sense of what country was in the in the midst of dynamic change, a quality that is considered before an AWIU delegation goes abroad. The next year I was on my way!

Mongolia's history was written on the face of its capital, the faces of its people, and across the landscape. As the plane descended over the softly rolling green hills surrounding the capital Ulaanbaatar, shapes of round, loosely clustered white tents slowly emerged, nestled close to the runway. Billboards, fences, utility poles, and roads were not immediately visible, as were the famed felt "yurts," or as the Mongolians call them "gers." The nomadic people had been living in such tents for thousands of years, even before the powerful rule of Genghis Khan in the thirteenth century.

Our tour through Ulaanbaatar showed a different history. Street signs were in Cyrillic. The driver pulled up to our grand scale hotel with wide front steps, but their uneven heights and crumbling cement were quickly apparent. Mongolia had been controlled by Communist Russia from 1921 until 1990, when it gained independence. The people quickly reverted to speaking Mongolian, leaving only Cyrillic signs and crumbling Soviet-style buildings as indications of the former Russian occupation.

Our main focus was to meet with women's groups there. The energy of change was palpable in our meetings with them. Many non-government organizations (NGO's) had sprung up to address social problems as the country sought a path into the modern world. I was reminded of the energy I felt in women's groups in the United States during the 1970s as we began to find our voices. These earnest young women were dedicated to improving health, education, and the welfare of women and children. Astonishingly, seventy percent of university students were women, while boys stayed in the countryside as herders.

Women were also active in promoting change in the countryside, however. To reach them, we traveled on dirt roads suitable for horses, but very rough for auto travel. We hit our heads on the car ceiling more than once. On the way we noticed enormous piles of stones, or "ovos," with large, multi-branched poles draped with filmy blue cloth blowing in the breeze. Horsemen dismounted and circumnavigated these three times throwing pebbles on the pile as they walked. Our guide explained that in the wake of the Soviet departure, the ancient Bon religion, nature-based beliefs, came alive again, and the men were honoring the nearby mountain. History awakened. The relatively recent Buddhism (which Genghis Kahn had allowed to enter the region) had begun its revival, as well.

When we arrived at a countryside meeting, the women graciously hosted us for lunch in a large ger. The day was stifling, but inside the ger it was wonderfully comfortable, as the top of authentic gers are traditionally open. One side was raised to let the breezes flow through, moving the heat out - natural air conditioning. They proudly showed us their gorgeous "mobile library" that was trimmed in traditional orange wood and moved from village to village to aid countryside literacy.

Inside the ger, a man prepared our lunch, ancient style, stewed by placing hot stones in a pot. It simmered as we met, making us hungry. The women dressed western style (for us?) and gave an articulate presentation on steps they were taking to move more agricultural products to market and to help women earn more money. Meanwhile, since we were seeing life as they know it, lamb chops swung gently over their heads, a traditional way of storing meat safely. With our meal, we were served a selection of horse and other cheeses which had been sun-cured on the top of the tent. During the Soviet occupation, East Germans had come to Mongolia to work, bringing beer, which had endured; we had beer and tea with lunch.

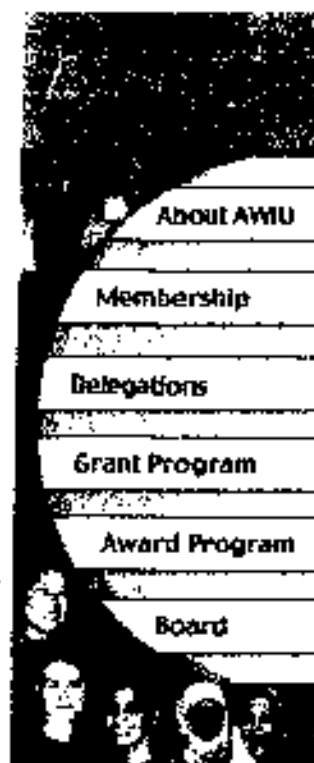
Later in the countryside we enjoyed the fabulous day at a fashion and cultural event. We also visited a reactivated Buddhist monastery and Karakorum, the ancient capitol of the Genghis Khan dynasty. That was a wide open plain, the four principal corners marked by large stone turtles. Minimal ruins remain, as they lived in movable gers.

The Naadam festival gave us another view of old Mongolia mixed with change. Traditional shamans paraded beside military men and horse carts mixed with an occasional limo or motorcycle. The drumming during opening ceremonies struck us as startlingly similar to Native American drumming, as did the Eagle dance of victorious wrestlers. The festival celebrates three traditional sports: archery, wrestling, and horse racing. Only children race the horses to allow for greater speeds. Both men and women are archers. One stylish, skilled woman competed in Mongolian del, a robe-like garment, but added high heels and had a cell phone clipped to her side! Only men wrestle on the open field, dressed in elaborate high boots, tiny pants, and a half jacket. Their similarly garbed male trainers watched them like hawks. The victorious wrestlers become national celebrities.

In summarizing my trip to Mongolia, I left with an awareness of the tremendous energy possessed by the women. They were eager to create their own enterprises rather than to accept solutions conceptualized by male leaders who had dominated in the past. The women parliament members we met were thoughtful and dedicated. I came away with hope mixed with apprehension. What a task to retain the knowledge and wisdom of the past while trying to navigate the twenty-first century, with significant pressure from outside countries eager to exploit the potential possibilities imagined within Mongolia.

# **SAUDI ARABIA**

## **2002**



**American Women for International Understanding**

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**Delegation to Saudi Arabia**  
October 29–November 09, 2002

**Chairwoman's Report:**  
**Awakening Understanding**  
*by Martha Atherton*

As the Chairman of A.W.I.U. (American Women For International Understanding) I have the privilege of giving the over-arching, embracing report on the delegation to Saudi Arabia and its import to our organization. Following my report are ten others submitted by other delegates. Before giving my report, it is good to review what we deem as other very significant delegations, which have had a long-lasting impression upon our membership.

AWIU was founded in 1968 by Bernice Behrens who as the wife of the political editor from the San Francisco Chronicle and she, as the representative of the U.S. Department Of State in San Francisco, handled over 3,000 visiting dignitaries (including Queen Elizabeth and Prince Charles, and the Emperor of Japan). She was asked by The Women's Commission of The United Nations to make contact with women leaders of the then Soviet Union. When she met with Soviet women leaders in Moscow she found that there had been virtually no American women visitors other than a few from what would have been then described as a "commie" organization. Following her investigative visit, she set about to gather a representative group of high-profile

**Delegation to Saudi Arabia**  
October 29–November 09, 2002

Photos from Saudi Arabia by  
Roger Harrison/*Arab News*

Home: from Mother to Matriarch--an interview with delegation leader, Marianne Allreza  
TBA

I Felt I was Among my Own Family  
*Bea Cornelissen*

Kindness, Faith, Culture, and Respect  
*Nahid Farazian*

A Lantern to Light the Way  
*Kathleen Foerster*

Impressions of Muslim Culture and Religion  
*Katherine Hejferon*

A Whirling Planet We All Call Home  
*Martha Hertelendy*

My Impressions from This Unique Kingdom  
*Judith Hill*

Cultural Heritage, Capable Women, International Perspectives  
*Carole Lewis*

The Same Hopes and Dreams



women for the next visit. With a "cold war" in progress, it was not an easy sell. Her diligent efforts paid off and 30 women landed in Moscow, followed by visits to Hungary and Czechoslovakia. In the following year AWIU members again met with women in leadership in the U.S.S.R., plus Romania and Yugoslavia. Before they added the People's Republic Of China in 1973, they had been to Israel, and Egypt, and another revisit with the women in the

*Joan McEachern*

We Hope to  
Return...Inshallah  
*Mini O'Hagan*

My Magic Carpet Journey  
*Donna Pinckney*

One Woman's View,  
Forever Changed  
*Jane Wetzel*

U.S.S.R. Forging friendships with the women in the U.S.S.R. and the People's Republic Of China was indeed most significant and under circumstances that gave these privileged women some challenges. Knowledge of one another's cultures, and the ability to share a common language were more limited than in "today's world."

Since those earlier years, AWIU delegation members have set foot upon forty other countries, as well as making repeated visits to several nations. They have also hosted grantees, professional women from sixteen countries, plus delegations from the People's Republic of China and the U.S.S.R. Generally speaking, AWIU members are well-traveled, and have an on-going willingness to learn, to see for themselves, to interpret for themselves, and to make their own assessments of international relationships, with particular emphasis on matters of most concern to women and children.

The recent delegation to Saudi Arabia has occurred at another of those watersheds in history, and the delegation members are most grateful to have been given the opportunity to witness for the countless humanitarian efforts of which women are capable when given the chance. For the first time in the century following the beginning of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (with the capture of the fort at Riyadh by Abdul-Aziz in 1902), a group of foreign women were invited to visit The Kingdom where the relatively recent progress of women in a number of fields was "unveiled".

While we had read and studied in preparation for this unique experience we were continually surprised at how easy it was to converse with well-educated Saudi women since they have surmounted the initial barriers with their excellent language capabilities. We Americans are learning that although the cultural gaps may still be wide, we all draw upon some common aquifers, enabling us to feel the underlying kinship. It is these women, and their supportive families, who are pioneering the way for the greater



numbers that will eventually fully participate.

Our delegation of 16 women would not have been possible without the leadership of Marianne Alireza, one of our members, and author of "AT THE DROP OF A VEIL." Her experiences, beginning in 1943 when she, as a linguistics student at Berkeley, met the first Saudi student in the U.S.A. This led to her marriage into one of the most prestigious, non-royal families, where she was accepted and continues to be accepted to this day, despite the dissolution of the marriage in 1958. Diplomacy, as practiced by Marianne and the Alirezaz, many members of the royal family, and other forward-looking Saudis is one of the keys to the opening of the doors of peace and understanding.

Marianne was also a close friend of King Faisal and Queen Ifat both of whom should be given much credit for steering considerable royal wealth into the areas of social services and education.

To Marianne, her family, and to other numerous, generous Saudi hosts, we wish to express our gratitude. We also want to give our encouragement to all those whom we met, who are working and studying diligently to solve the usual social problems of life.

The progress in Saudi Arabia has been phenomenal. In a matter of less than six decades following the ability to export significant amounts of oil after World War II, the life-styles have largely been converted from a nomadic Bedouin culture into the present with its material amenities and with its retention of the traditional in religion.

As a visiting group, we remained very healthy, finding the array of foods and fruit juices and teas very much to our liking. We managed to adapt more or less to the heat and humidity of the outdoors, but were glad to find that the buildings are 100% air-conditioned. The term "AC" is of tremendous importance.

We were a relatively "senior" group of women, as old as the mothers and grandmothers of the hundreds of women we engaged in conversation. Since education for women had its beginnings in the 1950s, there would be few senior women with whom we could have communicated.

One of the storybook women we listened to was Fatima Amin Shakir, who, as a bright young student from Jeddah, applied to the ministry of education for a grant to study abroad. She was denied, but then had her father petition King Faisal who urged the Ministry to "think again". She was able to obtain her PhD, did a lot of traveling, and

wrote her thesis on the modernization of third world countries.

There are those at work who are urging others to "think again". We Americans are not the only ones who have been told to do this. We have had an earlier start on many issues because of the diversity in our population. As we continue to exchange information with more rapidity and understanding perhaps we will be able to unlock the solutions to behaviors that destroy life, much as we are unlocking the potentials for creating better life-sustaining foods and medicines.

The messages that the Saudi women we met wanted conveyed thru us were that they were not suffering and that they are making progress and enjoying their family life and work. Their appeals to the United States were twofold--one, to not invade Iraq which didn't seem to be a big threat in their estimation, and secondly, to again grant visas enabling them to continue their education and to enjoy the country to which they look for respite in many ways.

Our message to them is to "keep up the good work and your spirits". From our end we will try to do our part in awakening greater understanding and tolerance, and to separate the wheat from the chaff that is found in much of our present day communication.

Last, but not least, we welcome these good people to the United States. They will be embraced and together we of the United States, Saudi Arabia, and the rest of the world continue to labor at those endless projects, that "multi-tasking", an almost code-word amongst women. "Inshallah"

Martha Atherton, Chairman, AWIU

[HOME](#)

Saudi Arabia 2002 Jane Wetzel (edited by Sue Devick)

"What comes from the lips reaches the ears. What comes from the heart reaches the heart." Arab proverb

I have long held the notion, certainly not a unique one, that there are in life a handful of defining moments. There are experiences, coupled with emotions, which significantly alter the course of a person's thinking, and in fact alter a life. My recent trip to Saudi Arabia with AWIU became, for me, one of those defining moments. I have become, at the risk of sounding melodramatic, a woman with a view, and perhaps a life, forever changed.

I should begin by saying that this trip was rich in so many ways. AWIU delegates were exposed to a culture and a people, a landscape and a nation, a government and a society from which there was much to learn. And the actual timeframe of the trip provided sixteen American women with an uncommon moment in a lifetime, and perhaps in the history of AWIU. It was many months before the tragedy of September 11, 2001 that the notion of a delegation to Saudi Arabia had been conceived, but as time and fate would dictate, that September moment in America greatly impacted, shaped, and molded this trip.

A visit that might earlier have been considered an adventure to a mysterious and somewhat unknown country took on an entirely different dimension. This AWIU delegation found itself thrust into a role of representing America in a most unprecedented manner. While the mission of AWIU has always been to build bridges of understanding, goodwill, and cooperation, and thus to share, however small, in the building of international goodwill and reduce friction by means of non-political, non-governmental voluntary citizen action, this delegation's role was to be like none of those that had gone before.

The women of this Saudi delegation, who had in the beginning chosen to participate in people-to-people contacts, found themselves not so much by choice, but by fate, in far more complex roles. While the delegates repeatedly emphasized that each American woman had funded her own visit and represented no political or governmental group, it became obvious that, to our hosts, the delegation of 16 women was, in fact, their window into American world, and our comments and observations were solicited, and measured as such. Our exchanges, many of them documented, were going to

leave lasting impressions. Our interrelationships were going to be remembered long after our departure.

This trip was, from the day the AWIU group arrived as the first such group of American women to be hosted in Arabia, both an incredible opportunity and the most daunting challenge! I must say, for me, the increasing recognition of the importance of our delegates' individual and collective comments and actions kept me awake more than one night. What do you say to people in a country and culture that is just unfolding for you? What don't you say? How do your cross cultural boundaries, promote international understanding and tolerance, all the while creating a positive impression for one's own country? How does one try to put the aftermath, the accusations and hurts of a tragic September 11, 2001 into a context for conversation? It seemed an overwhelming scenario, and one I felt ill prepared to manage!

I had much to assess. Every delegate did. For me, the facts were these: I was a small town girl raised in the Midwest who had learned much of Saudi Arabia from the movies of her youth and an occasional National Geographic. I was a Protestant with casual prayer habits whose exposure and knowledge of religions of the world (particularly Islam) left much to be desired—especially when visiting a country literally shaped by religion and the ritual of prayer. I was a woman from the smallest families now in a country where large extended families are the cornerstones to the culture. I was registered Independent with the love of America and skepticism of American politics. I was a feminist, of sorts, now covered by an abaya!

Could I truly hope to rely on the simple things: earnest, heart to heart, honest and direct dialogue, eye to eye contact, humor, and respectful but spirited conversation to guide through this journey in a country that seemed so far away and foreign? Would simply being genuine be enough? Every day and into many nights the questions kept coming. And answers came, too. This AWIU delegation was really never off duty. It acclimated to the culture and found its voice. In the offices of royalty and ambassadors, in the halls of hospitals and research centers, in charitable centers and in Saudi malls, at dinner parties and breakfasts, before newspaper reporters and CNN cameras, even in the opening days of Ramadan, this delegation went about the business that fate had dictated.

### Saudi Arabia 2002-Bea Cornelissen

I felt I was among my own family. The meals are a smorgasbord of meats, vegetables, drinks and desserts. A beautiful, exciting mystery was unfurled when one tasted each new dish. The same can be said for the people I met each day in Jeddah. Arabs are a proud people, very knowledgeable in the history, culture and religion. However, they also seem mysterious as they look at you with the deep penetrating eyes from beneath their veils and kaffiyeh. But when you began to talk to the Saudi men and women as we did at the Mersal Village, touring the Safeya Binzagr Museum and the Arab News, their sense of humor was delightful.

Sitting in the circle on the ground, eating fish, smoking the waterpipe, and conversing about family stories made me feel as if I was among my own family. I came here cautious about my own safety, I think because of biased stories from the media. I found that we both want peace and friendship. We don't want war and the problems it might bring.

I think if Saudis open themselves up to the world and let us meet them on their own territory, we will respect the culture, religion and customs. After visiting this country I am not fearful, because I now know the Saudis and their beautiful customs, religion, and culture a bit better.

## Saudi Arabia 2002-Kathleen Foerster

Our delegation of 16 women met twice with Dr. Sami Angawi, historian and protector of the Kingdom's ancient sights and buildings. Initially we toured his restored home in Jeddah and had a typical dinner, which was delightful. The next evening he took us to the oldest home in Jeddah at dusk and explained that the very wide stairway in the center of the house was able to accommodate the horses and camels that delivered the food and other provisions to the outdoor kitchen on the roof in earlier times.

The house was a museum-type building and not occupied, though there were photos and some furniture. It had no electricity and perhaps it never did. As the sun began to set and our group started up the stairs to the roof, about every third one of us was given a lantern to light the way. We climbed slowly up four stories, and the darkness had the effect of calming and quieting our thoughts as though we were on a pilgrimage. We eventually arrived on the rooftop where we had magnificent views all around of the modern city and could hear the noise and laughter as families were breaking their fast for the day, as we were visiting during the month of Ramadan. We were served tea and snacks and enjoyed the balmy air and listening to Dr. Sami who was so eloquent and knowledgeable but also so very kind to us. We felt we were sharing a singular experience and were simply grateful.

## Saudi Arabia 2002-Carole Lewis

It was exciting to be there in the beginning! Saudi women find themselves on the verge of participating in the new millennium in ways unimagined by their mothers. The women leaders of Saudi Arabia that we met are the cutting edge of modernity as it is emerging in their country. They are engaged in nation building and passionate about it. They are well educated and widely traveled. Many speak English with an American accent. When they use American slang you can get a false sense of more closeness and understanding with them than exists.

Arabian society is based on familialism which is a system of inclusion and exclusion within their family and other designated groups that affect their every behavior. Their political structure can be described as a series of ever-larger circles. The first circle is the king, next the royal family, then tribal leaders, wealthy merchants without tribal lineage, ordinary Saudis and finally foreign workers. Everything comes from God, Allah. The whole society is genuinely religious. They do not understand how we can separate church and state. All rights, including human rights, are granted by Allah. Allah gives these rights, not the state. And, the rights and duties of men and women are different. This will not be easily changed in many minds because the differences in rights and duties are regarded as having been ordained by Allah.

However, this has not kept Saudi women from being very independent and in many cases very wealthy. Forty percent of the wealth of Jeddah is in their hands. Seven percent of Saudi women are employed. Although they must go out covered in black, accompanied by a man, and are forbidden to drive a car, they have a great number of accomplishments to their credit.

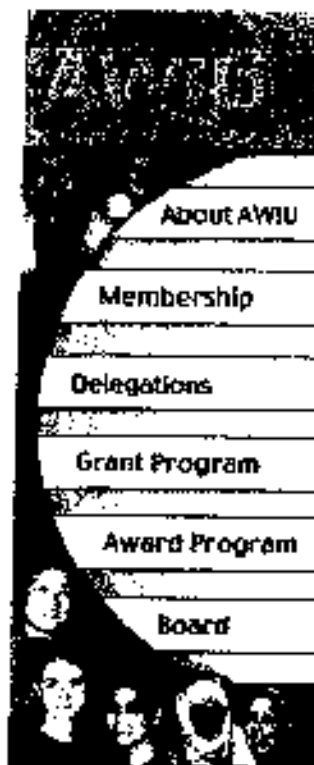
Many of the endeavors the delegation were able to see are the very beginnings of help for the mentally retarded, otherwise disabled children, education for women, employment of mentally handicapped women, employment of Ph.D., educated women in research centers, and others. This is how many educational and charitable institutions began in our country. Saudi women are starting to see the fruits of their efforts, but they are still at the beginning of a long process.

Saudi Arabia 2002 Joan McEachern

This was my first delegation, and it was so different than any other one I was to later experience, including how we were able to interact with local women. How I wished that we had been able to meet with the shop girls from the “women’s floor” of the multi-level shopping center in Riyadh—they wanted to talk to us, to learn more about women in America, and to share information about their lives.

We met with local women from the upper level of society; even the British Ambassador’s wife hosted a reception for us in her home, inviting interesting women that she knew in Riyadh. I enjoyed talking to a woman who was on Radio Riyadh—surprising me with her views on women’s rights, such as driving and being able to go outside the home without a male relative. I wondered if she shared those views with her listening audience.





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Delegation to Saudi Arabia  
October 29–November 09, 2002

## Kindness, Faith, Culture, and Respect *by Nahid Farazian*

I would like to thank AWIU for giving its members the opportunity to visit other countries in order to establish an open dialogue with leading women in those countries in an effort to further our understanding of their religions and cultures in order to create a bridge of respect and cooperation. I especially thank Ms. Marianne Alireza for making this wonderful trip possible and her lovely and hospitable family who made our trip so pleasant. I would also like to thank all of the ladies who traveled to Saudi Arabia for being so kind and for making the experience a delightful memory which I will always cherish.

As a practicing Muslim, I spend a lot of time studying the world of Islam and I have read about many Islamic women leaders. For example, fourteen centuries ago, Khadijah, the first wife of the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), was the wealthiest female trader in Mecca. She was well known throughout the land and was a role model for the young women of that time. Presently, I am always shocked and disappointed to find that the women in the modern day Islamic world are deprived of the rights which they had had from the beginnings of Islam. In contrast, I was thrilled to witness many capable,

Delegation to Saudi Arabia  
October 29–November 09, 2002

Photos from Saudi Arabia by  
Roger Harrison/*Arab News*

Chairman's Report:  
Awakening Understanding  
*Martha Atherton*

Home: from Mother to  
Matriarch—an interview  
with delegation leader,  
Marianne Alireza  
TBA

I Felt I was Among my  
Own Family  
*Bea Cornelissen*

A Lantern to Light the  
Way  
*Kathleen Foerster*

Impressions of Muslim  
Culture and Religion  
*Katherine Heffernan*

A Whirling Planet We All  
Call Home  
*Martha Hertelendy*

My Impressions from This  
Unique Kingdom  
*Judith Hill*

Cultural Heritage, Capable  
Women, International  
Perspectives  
*Carole Lewis*

The Same Hopes and  
Dreams

professional women leaders in Saudi Arabia bringing about a new era in their country.

*Joan McEachern*

We Hope to  
Return...Inshallah  
*Mini O'Hagan*

The Saudi Arabian women with whom we met had a very positive impact on me. Not only were they well educated but they were also very knowledgeable and aware of the current state of affairs around the world. In addition, they were a very cultured people who were very dedicated to their families

My Magic Carpet Journey  
*Donna Pluckney*

One Woman's View,  
Forever Changed  
*Jane Wetzel*

and to their country. Furthermore, they were devout Muslims who practiced their faith on a daily basis. Their understanding of world affairs was apparent because they made a real effort to watch broadcasts like CNN and 60 Minutes; they were especially aware of the goings-on of our country. However, one serious problem which I perceived was their unwillingness to criticize and disclose the problems in Saudi Arabia; they seemed to only be interested in observing and denigrating the Western world, especially the United States of America.

I was very impressed when we visited the Help Center. God bless Sheik Ahmed Al-Juffali's family for their philanthropic efforts in helping physically and mentally challenged children. The center was very well constructed, the atmosphere was very lively, and above all, the children seemed very jubilant and hopeful; it seemed as though they were given proper care, love, and attention. I felt lots of love and respect toward Ms. Al-Juffali after she told me that she spends five days a week helping the children in the center; this shows that she has more than a monetary interest in the center; she genuinely felt the need to spend the time to help the needy children. Families like the Al-Juffali's are excellent examples of people who truly care about their country and fellow countrymen in that they are constantly providing for the needs of others.

Furthermore, the Jeddah Institute of Speech and Hearing, which was founded by Sultana Alireza, is dedicated to helping children who have speech and hearing impediments. Three of Sultana Alireza's four children are hearing impaired. Since she has the means, she could have simply taken her children to a developed country to obtain the highest caliber of medical care; however, she chose to establish the institute to not only help her own children but to also help others. She informed the group that her belief is that God gave her three disabled children so that she would become more aware of the needs of other human beings; this is what inspired her to establish the

institute. Another important point to note is that Sultana Alireza expressed that she believes in their religion, their culture, and the Saudi Arabian men; she feels that the men in her country are very supportive and that the women of Saudi Arabia could not accomplish nearly as much without the support and help of the men.

HRH Princess Lolowah Al-Faisal was also a very impressive lady. She continued her mother's (Queen Effatis) role in helping to educate the women of Saudi Arabia; she is currently in charge of the administration of the advanced Effat College. I was very impressed by the college, the faculty, and the students and I was delighted to see so many young women interested in learning and in higher education.

Dr. Sami Angawi's lecture and dinner was another memorable event. His interesting lecture on historic, Muslim architecture was quite intriguing. He was a very well educated, high-spirited Muslim who was also a fabulous host. His house was his own creation; he used techniques specific to the Arab culture and architecture in building his house. His family was very warm and his wife prepared a scrumptious meal. She was an artist who had created a boutique in her home &Mac226; some of us found some interesting items to purchase as a souvenir. Once again, I admired the fact that they had so much respect for their religion, their culture, and their country.

The Safeya Binzagr Museum was an interesting place indeed. The museum's architecture was astounding and the paintings, which covered three decades of Saudi Arabian history, were uniquely artistic and colorful. Ms. Safeya Binzagr was a lovely woman who presented a lecture on her own works; it was interesting to see such a talented artist give a presentation on her own work since I'm accustomed to seeing a docent present the works of others. I am so pleased that I purchased her autographed book and I will treasure it forever.

Visiting the Arab News was my first experience in seeing a newsroom. I was very impressed with the capabilities of Mr. Khaled A. Al-Maena, their editor in chief, and with the fact that so many female reporters were working for the Arab News. Although Mr. Al-Maena was quite informed about worldly affairs, I was amazed to discover that his views were quite subjective. Since the Arab News is owned and controlled by the royal families of Saudi Arabia, the news broadcasts are skewed through royal censorship &Mac226; this does not provide for a freedom of press. In a true Islamic society, the people should have full freedom of speech and full freedom of press.

Our visit to the Durrat Al Arous development by the Red Sea was a

very relaxing experience. The resort was very beautiful and the buildings were very well constructed; however, I felt that the architecture was out of place since it was too modernized; this was a recurring theme throughout all of the regions we visited. It was awkward to see such a mix of old Arabic, modern Arabic, and modern Western designs and architectures all within a few blocks of one another. One striking example of their awkward choice in mixing architectures was that of Mersal Village where it was not clear why the choice of designs were so varied and mismatched. Instead, more emphasis should have been placed on preserving the cultural unity like new developments which I have seen in Morocco. In addition, most houses that we saw (while traveling by bus) were beautiful mansions. It appeared as though the Saudis did not have a social life outside of their homes; thus, the need for mansions to entertain family, friends, and business associates.

The hospitals we visited had many professional doctors and nurses and, much to my surprise, many of them were women. In addition to appearing very well trained in the medical field, many of them were quite fluent in English because they had studied abroad from a very early age. Another place where we saw many professionals who were well educated and fluent in English was the King Faisal Research Center. I felt very content and at ease in the scientific atmosphere of these places. Spirituality and the sciences are intimately linked and one should have growth in both fields simultaneously; not just in one or the other. I am reminded of a famous quote by Albert Einstein: Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind.

I would like to thank Lady Plumley, the wife of the British ambassador to Saudi Arabia, for being such a gracious hostess in inviting us to her beautiful house and for giving us the opportunity to meet many talented Saudi Arabian ladies. The guests she had invited were all very amiable and quite talented in their own fields. Every gathering we had included royalty whom I found to be quite humble in both their mannerism and their speech. I found that I easily got along with most of them and that I could easily communicate with them. Specifically, our afternoon engagement at the Al Manahil Club at the Diplomatic Quarter was a very cheerful and delightful experience. I received several personal invitations from the ladies to go to their homes for dinner; however, I explained that since I was part of the AWTU group, I could not accept their invitation but that they are welcome to visit me if they ever travel to the San Francisco area. As an aside: in all of the gatherings, I found that the Princesses were very humble, knowledgeable, and pleasant individuals.

Visiting the Al Nahda centers was a very enlightening and enriching experience. I felt very proud of the work which was being done in the centers to help all of the children who had Down's syndrome. The art objects, which they were selling in these centers to supplement the budget, were very advanced and ornate.

The shopping malls we visited were very clean and well designed. I was happy to learn that many of these malls were owned by women and that forty percent of Jeddah's wealth is owned and operated by women. The shops were full of merchandise but we did not have enough time to do any shopping. Inside of various clubs and malls, we saw spas that employed skin-care professionals who had clearly undergone intensive training in their field. During our trip, we were served the best foods, drinks (it was very interesting to taste such a variety of refreshing, non-alcoholic drinks), and desserts. Their hotels were very classy and well managed and we received excellent service. It became clear that the Saudis had hired the top professionals in all fields to operate their various businesses.

Our visit to Jeddah's National Museum was very educational. The museum was a large, modern, state-of-the-art facility where we had the chance to watch a video about the unification of the present day Saudi Arabia in the King Abdulaziz Photo Center.

The Supreme Commission for Tourism, which is located in a beautiful building in the Diplomatic Quarter of Riyadh, invited us to visit their offices. We were informed about the new developments regarding "local tourism" as opposed to the standard notion of the institute of tourism. I suggested that they consider allowing tourists to visit their country as long as the tourists respect and adhere to the Saudi Arabian rules, customs, and regulations. I believe that they should seriously consider hosting Islamic events (music festivals, theater plays, dance festivals, art festivals, and the like) near tourist resorts developed with Islamic standards so that tourists have the opportunity to enjoy and appreciate the Islamic religion and the Saudi Arabian culture. Instead, they are secluding themselves from the rest of the world &Mac226; this is not fair to Islam.

Our visit with Mr. Robert W. Jordan, the U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, was a delightful one. Mr. Ambassador gave his point of view regarding Islamic countries and the misunderstandings and conflicts which arise from different cultural and religious backgrounds. He declared that the United States of America was not given credit for its attack on Afghanistan.

The Islamic world questions such a concern since their understanding is that it was the governments of the developed countries who put the Taliban in power in the first place. Furthermore, the acts of the Taliban are an embarrassment to Islam because they do not follow the teachings of the Islamic holy book, the Koran. Even the Afghani people detested the Taliban regime.

On a different point, I asked the ambassador why the U.S. government does not treat the Israelis and the Palestinians equally; his response was that the American Jews are part of the American culture and that they donate to various charity organizations. Mr. Jordan failed to recognize that Muslims all over the world are living in their own countries and the ones who have emigrated to the United States are not, on average, as wealthy as the Jewish people; however, this does not mean that those immigrants do not love the United States of America as much as the Jewish people.

The United States of America should not favor one religion or lifestyle over another even if one group has more wealth than the other. Justice should prevail for all people and all people should be treated equally, regardless of their background, religious beliefs, net worth, or position in society. If the Western societies were to bring back family values and practice the teachings of the Bible in their daily lives, the differences in the values and beliefs between the Christian and Islamic world would certainly diminish &Mac226; this would lead to a more just, peaceful, and unified world order. In effect, more and more people around the world would have respect for each other's religion and lifestyle.

Ms. Marianne Alirezais family showed the utmost hospitality towards us. They were so wonderful to schedule the entire event and to invite us to so many different functions. Their kindness, faith, culture, and respect for others really came through during the trip. I will cherish the good memories forever!

Nahid Farazian

December 03, 2002

HOME

# **CUBA**

## **2002**



Cuba 2002 Robin Odem (edited by Sue Devick)

Havana is a city that provokes powerful reactions. If you fall under its spell, you are struck by the city's vibrant atmosphere, friendly people, and centuries-old architecture lining the streets. One must look beyond the decaying infrastructure to the hidden city, as a first impression is that the area appears somewhat like a war zone. This is not a place for those who seek luxury, but simple pleasures such as walking the streets, driving along the Malecon, visiting the bars and markets, listening to the music, and touring the museums and colonial architectural sites, particularly in the Old Quarter.

For Cubans, life is currently a struggle. If you ask someone how they are doing, they may reply, "I'm struggling." This is due to consumer shortages in food, medicine, clothing, and fuel, while sugar is readily available. Phrases often expressed are that "it's not easy," "you've got to be inventive," and "you've got to find a solution." Wages are frozen in pesos, and the average salary a month is about 200 pesos, or about \$10! (Most professionals left in 1959, leaving somewhat of a "brain drain" in the country; for example, a policeman can be paid more than a neurosurgeon.) Hardships became more difficult in the early 1990's, and in 1994, 30,000 Cubans left the island in a mass exodus. A sense now prevails that the people are fed up with politics and longing for change.

Cubans seem to be obsessed by food (which they talk about all the time), probably because they feel deprived. Their tastes run to meat and fried foods, but both meat and oil are very expensive. They do not grow vegetables or herbs, but buy food at dollar shops, at market, or on the "black market." Cubans have a ration book; they can get 6 lbs. of rice, 3 lbs. of split peas, and 6 eggs per month. The ration books are tied to the address where one lives instead of the individual, so Cubans cannot move easily.

Housing is in an appalling state in Havana, as it is subsidized and based on Cuban peso salaries. Large mansions have been turned in to multiple dwellings for families. Cubans cannot purchase homes or officially rent apartments or houses. There is a recognized form of "property" that involves one selling it back to the State if one wants to sell; this is the legal means, but black market transactions occur. People usually trade houses or apartments according to the necessities and conditions that both parties require; the Cuban term for this is "permutar." The tight housing situation has created real suffering for many families; for example, it is common for divorced couples to continue living together. Pressure on human relations is enormous, as there is no escape from unbearable spouses or in-laws, so the people find escape through other means.

The music in Havana is very entertaining—at times too loud, but certainly lively and fun. We found that blonde American women attract a little attention, as we were approached by several friendly young men. In a second floor cafe it was announced that we were from the U.S., and immediately the entertainer started playing an American song. While there, we spoke to



young women who were from the Field Museum in Chicago as well as a young female attorney from Australia who was attending the University in Havana to learn Spanish.

Transportation is a nightmare in Havana. Gas and vehicle maintenance are expensive. Buses are scarce, and lines enormous. Camellos (camel shaped trucks) carry 200-300 people, but they are not considered safe. There are many taxis, cocotaxis, and bikes; some Cubans hitchhike, but the tourists are not normally allowed to do so. Cubans have an aversion to walking and getting wet in the rain so they tend to just wait for public transportation.

Education is problematic in Cuba, although theoretically available for everyone. Primary school is reportedly adequate except for a lack of supplies and new schoolbooks. We saw schools from the outside and the children were typically cheerful and noisy. Secondary schools present problems, at least from the point of view from a social worker. Children are separated from their families and sent to boarding schools to work in the sugar cane fields. They attend classes for half the day. The separation is emotionally difficult for the children. Our guide indicated that there is a program of peer helpers who are trained to help with emotional adjustment. This is a time when many of the children become sexually active.

After high school, student may apply to the University of Havana, which requires strict admission exams. Male students that pass the admission tests must fulfill a military obligation of one year before entering the university. Other students may choose to work, enter into a technological field, or study to take the exams again. If males fail again, they must spend additional time in the military and/or attend a military high school to prepare them for the exams. The University of Havana has 3 million students in attendance, with branches all over Havana.

Our guide also spoke about a social service commitment after finishing at the university. When students are in their fifth year of college, professors meet to analyze each student's marks, aptitudes, etc..., and then match them up with employment requests from different institutions, ministries, enterprises, or factories. Two years of service are required of the students. Motivation is a problem among the young people, as they still make a low salary after getting higher education.

Racial discrimination is present in Cuba, as was discussed at a luncheon hosted by AWIU that focused on the changing roles of Cuban women. Three white and four black women offered viewpoints that described racism in Cuba; the darker one's skin, the less opportunities were apparently available. Cubans hear negative things about racial discrimination in the U.S., as well; however, one of the black women described her experience on a train in the U.S. when she had a coughing spell on a train, and a white woman she had never met offered her a cough drop, which impressed her.

Cuba is also a sexist society, although the Revolution presented women with legal equality. A "Family Code" obligates men to help with housework. Women have a year long maternity leave, yet a "machista" environment exists. For example, the beauty business is thriving,

as there is a lot of interest in personal appearances. While women may appear to be sexually liberated, promiscuity is the social norm. (Abortion is used as a means of contraception.) A girl's 15th birthday is usually celebrated with a large party about her "coming out."

Leisure time revolves around home and the street, which becomes an extension of the living room. Men often play dominos, and children play baseball. Music is always heard, and neighbors gossip to obtain news. The only news in the press appears to be bad news about "imperialist" countries. Local crimes such as murders are not reported.

Although the first impression of Havana can be that of shock due to the run-down condition of the buildings, one must look beyond the borders in to see the real Cuba. The vibrant spirit of the people is the true story of this country. America looms large to the Cuban people; change is inevitable. Cuba is in the closing years of a vast social experiment, and whether it has been a success or a failure will be determined by time.

Robin Winter Odem  
3/15/12







Cuba- Katherine Heffernan 2002 (edited by Sue Devick)

When AWIU is on a delegation in a foreign country, often the delegation will have contact with the Ambassador or other members in the Foreign Office. At the time that AWIU went to Cuba, the U.S. had cut diplomatic relations with Cuba; there was only an envoy who maintained necessary communication with the U.S. In March, 2002, the envoy was a female, and she invited us to her official residence for lunch. She also invited all of the other female ambassadors, and there were quite a few. I remember sitting with the Ambassador from the Netherlands, as we had a great deal to talk about. She could identify the founding fathers of New York, and I knew enough about cheese, tulips, and cold wind blowing off the water.

The lunch, the envoy, the female ambassadors, and the U.S. residence were all impressive. This official government building was large and lovely, with a huge swimming pool and gym facilities; the grounds were extensive. Our envoy explained that the property was more expansive than most because Franklin D. Roosevelt had planned on retiring there.

When I think of Cuba I think of rhythms and music! The music! The drums! The rhythm of the waves pounding the sea walls around Havana! The lapping of the waves on the beaches! We would just stand quietly on the sea wall in the warm breeze and feel the rhythm of this lovely island. And the island had continuous rhythms —everywhere! The music, the drums, even the flags flapped rhythmically.

We attended the Tropicana Club, which was a huge outdoor, evening musical extravaganza. There were lots of drums and numerous showgirls, who were so tall! Their height was enhanced by large, feathered, fan-like head dresses and high platform shoes. They strutted and swayed to the rhythms and beats, and totally captivated us. I thought I was moderately sophisticated (coming from Chicago), but I had never seen anything like that show, before or after traveling to Cuba.

And then there were the hotels (pre-Castro style) when the U.S. mob was enjoying the proximity of this "garden Paradise." These hotels were large, ornately decorated, and still advertising the great bands that entertained there such as Harry James, Tommy Dorsey, and Glen Miller. Betty Grable's picture was very prominent. Their slogan was, "Too much is not enough." The rhythms continued.

But the music and rhythms that were the very best were the small groups that we found in the evening at the bars. After the day's program ended, some of us went out to the bars to listen to the sounds of the night. We could stand out in the street and listen to the sounds, and then climb the stairs until we found the group we wanted to hear. We would drink mojitos because that was what Ernest Hemingway drank while he was living in Havana. We learned which bars he enjoyed, how many mojitos he drank, and where he went next. Havana has many shrines to Ernest, and they are mostly in the form of bars and bar stools. I would like to go back to Cuba and do it all again.

# **ICELAND**

## **2005**



## ***EIGHT DAYS IN ICELAND – LAND OF FIRE AND ICE***

### **AWIU DELEGATION TO ICELAND JUNE 16 TO 23, 2005**



Iceland – a land of contrasts, of magnificent natural splendor. Where else could one stand on a desert, looking up at surrounding glaciers, walk on one, view unusual rock formations and miles of sea coast or swim in the Blue Lagoon, created from blue/white glacial water, heated to a perfect temperature by geo-thermal energy? This was to be the experience of seventeen AWIU members as they participated in the delegation to Iceland in June, 2005, covering 2000 miles of natural wonders. The utterly pristine landscape, free from the visual pollution of run down buildings, urban sprawl, and signs everywhere allowed us to see the earth as it has existed for innumerable previous centuries. The land and water were so pure that water could be drunk directly from the streams without risk. Steam vents billowed steam across the landscape, geysers popped up in otherwise pastoral looking areas and fields of lava covered the land in some areas. The summer light contributed to the enchanted feeling – it never got dark and the sun could still be seen in the sky after midnight. In winter, daylight only lasts five hours.



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS BY AWIU PRESIDENT, JUDITH HILL**

Thank you to Delegations Chair, Donna Pinckney for organizing AWIU members for this Delegation and for coordinating with Iceland Delegation Leader, Martha Atherton, who arranged the itinerary with our Tour Leader Gudrun Bergmann so that the Delegation met the criteria for AWIU Delegations. It was a most memorable experience, and as President, I want to add my deep appreciation for all the efforts made to make this trip so successful.



AWIU President Judith Hill and Delegation Leader Martha Atherton

## **ACKNOWLEDGING OUR DELEGATION LEADER, MARTHA ATHERTON**

Martha Atherton graciously accepted leadership of the Iceland delegation based upon the gratifications she experienced on her vacation to this country in the summer of 2003 and acceptance to the pivotal position of tour guide by Gudrun Bergmann. Through their combined efforts, we were the beneficiaries of an itinerary that would compliment the goals of AWIU to gain a greater understanding of the country and its people with a concentration on opportunities for women.

### **GUDRUN BERGMANN**

Gudrun Bergmann and her late husband, Guilli, established the Brekkebaer Guesthouse in Hellnar on the Snaefellsness peninsula at the base of the mountain celebrated in Jules Verne's *"Journey to the Center of the Earth."* Gudrun and Gulli had founded an international community some years earlier. While their original goal, spiritually oriented, was ahead of the demand for sustaining meetings and seminars, they were able to tap into the growing need for specialized tourism. They built a widespread following with their interest in sustainable development and expanded their guesthouse to becoming Hotel Hellnar, attracting the attention of the tourism industry. So respected in his country, Gulli received tribute from the President of Iceland and 1100 mourners at his funeral last year.



Protecting the environment is important to Icelanders and Gudrun has been recognized for her energetic and influential leadership in this field, receiving Green Glove certification for her hotel in 2002. Another coveted award for Gudrun was the "Tourism Entrepreneur Award for 2004" by Iceland Review's publisher, Heimur. Gudrun, also a metaphysical teacher, is the creator of Viking Cards, the first Icelandic divination cards similar to Tarot Cards. Our time spent with Gudrun was informative and fun; she balanced our itinerary in a thoughtful and fascinating manner to expose us to many aspects of Icelandic life.



Driver and Tour Guide Gudrun Bergmann

## HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY AND ENVIRONMENT

Iceland is a young country in the global sense, entering into the global community in 1945 with independence from Denmark which happened peacefully since Denmark was then occupied by Germany. Their earlier struggles to be free of European entanglements are deeply etched in a very long history and a history in which a large part of the population can relate through genealogies that are well documented. The people have preserved their language and culture, have endured and flourished, yet are progressive in their thinking and competitive in the world. English is commonly spoken. The Icelanders are often strikingly handsome people, blond, high cheek bones, and blue eyes. The men's DNA is 80% Norse, the women's, 60% Celtic.





While we in the U.S. can count for one of every 22 people on earth, an Icelandic represents approximately one of 22,000 with a general population of about 280,000. They are highly independent people, as brought out in the 1955 Nobel Award for Literature by Halldor Laxness whose writing, "Independent People," describes in an early 20<sup>th</sup> century setting, the peoples' anguish over the difficulties of a population coping with the harsher elements in a remote land. Our delegation, truly blessed to have so many sunny and mild days, was struck with amazement that anyone could have survived in such a harsh environment years ago and continuing with weather often so inhospitable that one must be very hardy to enjoy it most of the year. It gives one pause to wonder if the geography actually sets the tone of contrasts which the people carry out in their daily lives.

Possibly the greatest contrast of Iceland is that it straddles two continents, the American tectonic plate and the European/Asian plate. There is a great rift valley running down the middle, and the land within that valley is technically a separate continent, being new land on neither plate. We were able to get a bit of perspective on "time" when we gathered across the width of a museum hall that represented how far the plates would spread in 1,000 years and then look to the actual spread represented by ridges which were many miles apart. Did that represent 1 million, 2 million years or more?



Pingvellir and the Great Rift

Iceland has a fragile Arctic environment, sensitive to the effects of global warming. Icelanders can see their glaciers, an important source of water, melting before their eyes. And yet in contrast, they are just beginning to reforest the land which was denuded of trees earlier in their history.

## ECONOMY

Fishing and sheep raising have been of primary importance in the economy of this country and are being supplemented by tourism and high tech fields. In the past we have heard about the hydrogen-power initiative proposed for Iceland. It was thought that they could become the first economy based on hydrogen power. During our visit we witnessed growth – new buildings being erected, focus on attracting high tech firms and a standard of living very close to ours. The country is dependent on imports. They have very little in



the way of industrial complexes other than a few aluminum plants which draw upon the low-cost hydro-electric power. Their costs were decidedly higher than in the U.S, which was reflected also in the money exchange rate of 1 krona 65 to one US dollar. Gasoline was about \$7.00/gallon, restaurant meals were priced higher - \$23.00 for a salad, \$45.00 for a halibut entrée, \$23.00 for dessert and \$4.00 for a cup of coffee.

A challenge that apparently faces Iceland is the self-satisfaction born of the subsidy system. Industrial progress will be facilitated, for example, when farmers learn the advantages of selling their excess milk to entrepreneurs who may wish to start a cheese industry rather than to trash their excess milk supply.



Outflow, Thermal Energy Plant

## WOMEN OF ICELAND

Women are certainly leaders in the society. Whether it is a remnant of the Viking heritage or of the fishing industry, the running of the country is heavily influenced by feminine hands. Women have had to take responsibility from the beginning to care for their families, provide education and govern the community because their men had to go to sea to make a living and were gone for long periods.

Women achieved suffrage in 1915, but only women 40 and over could vote. In 1920 the minimum age for all voters was changed to 25. Iceland can take pride in being the first country in the world to elect a woman as head of state: Vigdis Finnbogadóttir – elected president of Iceland 1980-1996.

There is still a problem with equal pay for equal work. In 2000 there was a wage differential of 10-16% between men and women. In April, 2000, a two-year agreement had been signed in order to strengthen the position of women in the labor market, increase female leadership in economic life and encourage women to choose male-dominated fields of study in higher education. In May, 2000 a new act on the Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men (The Gender Equality Act), was passed. The Act created a new special institution, the Center for Gender Equality, administered by the Ministry of Social Affairs and entrusted with monitoring the Act's implementation. The Act provided that institutions and enterprises with more than 25 employees should have a gender equality policy or create special provisions regarding gender equality in their employment policies. A Maternity/Paternity Leave and Parental Leave Act was implemented in 2003, constituting a fundamental reform in that it promoted sharing of



parental responsibilities and gender equality in the labor market. In 1998, a committee was appointed for a five-year period, to seek to increase women's participation in politics through education and information campaigns. The Committee's initial task was to increase the number of women participating in the 1999 parliamentary elections. Thirty-five percent of members elected to Parliament in 1999 were women in comparison with twenty-five percent in 1995. The Committee also worked to increase the proportion in local government, which in 1998 stood at 28.5%



Women's Assoc. in Skagafjordur



Drifla Hjartardottir



Helga Guojonsdottir, Banker

Of great concern in Iceland are problems related to the high level of alcohol consumption among women and the level of alcohol and drug consumption among young people, including girls. There is growing concern about the trafficking of women in prostitution, possibly associated with the strip clubs legalized in 1990.

While women may be currently holding only 20% of the executive positions in large corporations, the women we met are confident that they will see advancement in their country's political and corporate world. One of our delegates likened Iceland today as having the pioneering spirit reminiscent of early American colonial days. The people, in particular women, appear to be seizing the opportunity to make things happen, to make things better, to have an impact. These women seemed to reflect the energy of their environment in their demeanors and were described by our delegates as bright, hard working, very engaging, forward thinking, energetic, confident, creative, talented, often dramatic and individualistic. They all spoke English, so conversing was easy. Education for women is emphasized with advancement into fields traditionally held in the purview of men. In a society which seemed as male dominated as most Christian (Muslim and Jewish) societies in the past, women do make a difference now. Iceland uses the old system of patronymics, where a child takes his father's first name, to which is added son or dottir. Women carry their father's name throughout their life even when married. Thus, a woman whose father's name is Olaf will carry the name Olafsdottir.

Acalheiour  
Heounsদottir  
Coffee Import  
Entrepreneur





## NATURE SPIRITS

Icelanders have a deep confidence in the presence of nature spirits. One might feel that at least part of this affinity to the natural world came from the Celtic women the Vikings enslaved (and subsequently impregnated) on the way over to Iceland. One hotel manager shared some stories with us about the mysterious beings that are a part of Icelandic lore. When she indicated that they might come through one particular door during the night, to be sure the door was checked out the next morning and found to be locked. Could these beings have entered? Nevertheless parts of the charm of Iceland are the stories of these elves and trolls who are vital in the country's history to the point of altering the course of a highway or two, with appropriate signage.



## ITINERARY HIGHLIGHTS

### *Day 1*

On our first stop we met Aoalheiour Heounsottir, a young woman who owns the Kaffitar Coffee enterprise (See photo above). She became enamored with coffee cafes while living in Madison, Wisconsin where her husband attended graduate school. Coffee is central to Icelandic hospitality and a centerpiece to social gatherings. She told us of her dynamic strategies to build and expand her business including visits to coffee plantations all over the world to educate growers on the adoption of more earth-friendly, tastier coffee growing techniques. We toured her factory, and observed coffee bean selection, roasting and quality control. She demonstrated the art of coffee tasting, comparable to wine tasting, opening our senses to the elegant possibilities of the bean.

Then to the Blue Lagoon to soak in its thermal waters. We met with the Lagoon's manager, Anna Sverrisdottir, who provided us background information about this truly rare and extraordinary lagoon that provides relaxation, spa and medical treatments. and to which some refer as Iceland's Eiffel Tower.

Blue Lagoon  
amid Lava Fields



Our day ended at Hotel Glymur in Whale-Fjord (Hvalfjord) where we met and enjoyed the company of hotel owner and labor negotiator, Hansina Einarsdottir. She invited women from the Association of Women Entrepreneurs in Iceland to share a delightful meal and to enlighten us with their backgrounds and business endeavors. The history of the fjord area and the church nestled below the hotel on the shore were captivating.



Church on the shore of Hvalfjord at Glymur

## Day 2

We traveled to Reykholt where some of the famous sagas of Norse mythology were written. The medieval Icelandic sagas tell of early settlers, their lives, families and struggles. Classified under the term "sagas" – which simply means "story" – are countless historical chronicles, romances, legends and lives of kings and holy men. Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century they were taken as undisputed fact, but more recent scholarship holds that they are basically works of fiction. We learned of Snorri Sturluson, the famous saga writer who may well have written Eglis Saga in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. We enjoyed a guided tour of the church, museum and bookstore. As we wandered through this historic church, we became aware of hoofs pounding in the distance and proceeded outside to view a procession of riders on horseback with the Icelandic flag borne by the first horseman - congregants riding to the church in commemoration of Iceland's 61<sup>st</sup> National Day of Independence. We watched them ride in a curved path winding in and out of trees, appearing, disappearing then appearing again and finally arriving at the church where they dismounted, removed their shoes and entered the church for prayer services.

Dog waiting  
outside Church  
on Independence  
Day  
(see boots at left)





We arrived at Gudrun's Hotel Hellnar located on a peninsula a large part of which has been declared a national park, including the glacier area. While there, we visited the Snaefellsness National Park Museum and learned from the woman manager how difficult life had been for the fishermen in earlier times. We observed a display of old-time leather shoes worn to walk over the sharp volcanic stones with only the thinnest of leather soles to protect the feet. We were impressed by Iceland's huge undertaking to preserve and protect such a large geographical area.



Snaefellsness National Park Manager

### *Day 3*

We spent a magnificent morning on top of a Snaefellsjokull Glacier near Gudrun's Hotel Hellnar. Bundled in snowsuits provided by the glacier staff, all seventeen of us rode up and down the glacier in our "Snowcat." It was a sparkling and sunny morning with glorious vistas in every direction. Gudrun spoke to us of the confluence of ley lines which create energy fields on the glacier, to which Icelanders have been historically attuned. We felt the "vortex energy."



Atop Snaefellsjokull Glacier

We had lunch with Helga Gudjousdottier, manager of the local bank of Olafsvik who regaled us with stories of her background and experiences in the banking business. Helga was accompanied by a townswoman of unusual origin by Icelandic demographics. Her story of coming to Iceland to escape South Africa's apartheid was one of courage and determination. She married a fisherman in this fishing town, had two children and spoke of the hazards that face fishermen and their families and of raising children in a rural environment where a third of the children are born out of wedlock.

We traveled to Grundarfjordur where we enjoyed a presentation by Bjorg Agustsdottier. This attractive 34 year-old lawyer, told us of how she had combined her profession, public office and family for the past 10 years. She explained the responsibilities of her non-elected position in providing oversight of slightly over 100 people on the public payroll in a town of 1500.



Bjorg Agustsdottier greeting AWIU Delegate Robin Winter Odem

#### *Day 4*

We departed the enchanting Snaefellsjokull Peninsula and headed north. This was Women's Rights Day in Iceland and we were the guests of the Women's Association in Skagafjordur, in the Glaumbaer area where we toured the restored long-house, were served a buffet lunch and enjoyed the women dressed in their authentic historic dresses (see previous photo). Hospitality in their long-time tradition would mean a spread of 14-17 different dishes. Among the women we met was a Lutheran minister whose mother was the first ordained Lutheran woman minister in Iceland. Many of these Association women were farm-owners in an area where the land appeared to be that of a fertile valley. We visited the adjacent fascinating museum including rooms of its ancient, extensive sod house (see below).



We arrived in Hofsas and a visit arranged by our AWIU member, Peggy Olsen, with her cousin, Valgeir Thorvaldsson in Hofsas to tour the Icelandic Emigration Center. The community museum consists of a large number of engaging photographs and beautiful displays of family stories featuring those who departed Iceland in 1870 following a series of bad weather and poor harvests and settled by the tens of thousands in North America, including Canada, north-east and mid-west United States.



Hofsas-Icelandic Emigration Center

### *Day 5*

In the second largest city of Iceland, Akureyri, we met with faculty at the University of Akureyri. Described was the University's program of long distance learning to reach those who live in the smallest of communities. We were impressed with the country's emphasis on education and of the large number of students receiving advanced degrees from abroad. We heard a report from representatives from the Center for Gender Equality and learned that this Center prepares their country's report on how Iceland is meeting international goals to eliminate discrimination against women.

We enjoyed luncheon at the Hotel Kea, hosted by the women of the Akureyri City Council who reported on their participation in local government. We visited the Community Services Center and learned of programs for local residents.



Akureyri City Council and Business Women

### *Day 6*



A highlight, especially for the lawyers in the group, was the trip to Þingvellir, at the summer solstice, where the oldest parliament in the Western Hemisphere was formed in 970. Þingvellir looked like the rocky canyons in old Western movies. Gudrun has us imagining families with their sheep and belongings, many on horseback, traveling from far and wide to the annual gathering held at this site specifically to settle disputes and attend to diverse community matters. Þingvellir was a “grand experiment in republicanism which lasted despite odd lapses into chaos for over three centuries. We ended our day at the Hotel Geysir and witnessed one of Iceland’s famous geyser formations.



Strokur, the “Old Faithful” of Iceland erupts every five minutes

### *Day 7*

Our delegation member, Joan McEachern knew one of Iceland’s prominent members of Parliament, Drífa Hjartardóttir (see center photo under Women of Iceland), and arranged for our visit to meet with her at her family farm located at the base of Mt. Hekla, the largest land area in Iceland (25,000 acres) and among the oldest with its 11<sup>th</sup> century long-house now in historic preservation ownership by the government. We were served luncheon and enjoyed an enlightening presentation by our hostess politician who has served as a member of Parliament for 16 years. . She explained to us that although Iceland is not a member of the European Community, she travels to Brussels, Belgium to represent Iceland for some of their activities including negotiations of international agreements.



Sheep Huts on Drífa’s farm

We proceeded on to Reykjavik for our final destination where we enjoyed dining at Soggi Hall's restaurant – Iceland's famous chef, arranged by Donna Pinckney – a meal to remember in a country with little culinary tradition. One of our group ordered reindeer carpaccio.

Just a word about the food which was heavy on wonderful fish, predominately salmon, and also lamb. We discovered Skyr, their national dairy food which is like a cross between cottage cheese and yogurt in texture, with the sourness and without the calories. Fortunately it wasn't the season for eating rotten shark they still eat in January.

### *Day 8*

Our final meeting was at the American Embassy in Reykjavik where we were received by the Deputy Chief of Mission, Philip Kosnett and members of his staff, including Helga Elin Briem, Public Affairs Assistant. We feel assured that our representation in Iceland is excellent and that the relations between our countries will be carried out to the benefit of both.



AWIU Delegates with Ambassador Representatives (far left)

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### CLOSING COMMENTS:

"My first impression of Iceland was of being on a moon crater, surrounded by black lava rock with no grass or trees. What a surreal experience! We saw farm houses and small churches out in the middle of nowhere. The isolation of people and communities was

unbelievable. I wondered what it would be like to be miles from a grocery store, gas station or a movie.' Robin Winter Odem

"The country is a ripe target for extensive immigration which is being encouraged. It is obvious that there are many jobs available to the foreign-born, but the country has never had to deal with any change to its homogeneity. Different cultures, different religions, different skin colors – all are new to Icelanders. This will be a definite challenge."

"Much is made of the cradle to grave security of Icelanders, but one has only to look to the US to see the frailty of that position. The security of old age may founder when the numbers of citizens who exceed the mortality tables increase exponentially." Joan Poulos

"All Iceland was a bit like one small town, one phone book and one area code for the whole country, and everyone seemed to know or have heard of everyone else of note in any part of the country." Kathleen Huston

"Small population, small country, proud past, strong psyche – hats off to you Icelanders who can stand tall amongst the people of the world. Your voices are heard. Your penchant for independence, your endurance through the centuries, your thrust to the future through education and involvement are exemplary." Marty Atherton

"I am hopeful that when AWIU hosts any incoming delegations that we will be as generous of our time, energy and spirit as the women of Iceland. I believe our ties to Iceland will be long and fruitful." Lois Ryan

"It goes without saying that our delegates are sharp and well informed. We are gracious and competent in our fields of interest as well. It is always rewarding to me to become better acquainted with our own delegation. Suggestions for future delegations: power point presentation of AWIU besides our brochures, when appropriate. Dossiers/short bios of each delegate to hand out, if permitted. Limit introductions to 2-3 minutes. Continue to have a group photographer." Robin Winder Odem

"As a lasting effect of my trip to Iceland, I feel a renewed sense of purpose and enthusiasm. It seems I work a little harder. I listen a little more carefully, and I am a little more open to new ways of looking at things. I credit this to the wonderful people I met on our trip. And maybe one or two elves. At least I wouldn't rule it out." Barbara Rubio.

End

# AWUI-Iceland Delegation, 2005-Barbara Rubio, New York Chapter

We launched our adventure early in the morning on June 16<sup>th</sup>, arriving at the Kaffiár (coffee) factory for a brisk introduction and tour (Coffee is central to Icelandic Hospitality and a centerpiece to social gatherings. Adelheidur impressed us with the neatness and efficiency of her factory and her dynamic strategies to build and expand her business. However perhaps most intriguing was her probing visits to coffee plantations in extensive parts of the world to educate growers to adopt more enlightened (more earth-friendly, tastier coffee) techniques. Adelheidur capped off the tour by demonstrating the art of coffee tasting (an art comparable to wine tasting) and opening our senses to the elegant possibilities of the bean.

From here we went on to soak in the magnificent hot springs of the Blue Lagoon, waters used to heal people who come from all over the world to seek relief from psoriasis. Medical facilities have been developed to explore and utilize the healing properties of these springs, which some refer to as Iceland's Eiffel Tower!

We ate dinner with the Association of Women Entrepreneurs of Iceland at Hotel Glymur, which like its name "glimmered." Hansina, the owner of the hotel, a keen-minded businesswoman regaled us with stories of ghosts known to visit her hotel. Her beautiful hotel though, anything but ghost-like, was graced with large expansive windows opening up to vistas of the Icelandic landscape in every direction. In well placed spots of the hotel, Hansina arranged dramatic tableaux of "objects d'art" acquired in her travels to many different countries. One of the conversations at the dinner with which (as a psychologist) I particularly resonate with was the woman who created "self-awareness" workshops for business firms. Her premise was that in that in an institution (company) environment, toxicity can build up among staff because of the tendency to "give away" our energy. Her workshops center on enhancing the clients' sense his/her physical, emotional, and mental "presence" to counter defensive, less wholesome ways of relating. To paraphrase what I absorbed from speaking with her: if we can all remain centered in our own beings, there would be no need to defend against other (competing with, denigrating, feeling intimidated). Instead by learning to stay in our own energy, we would also be free to participate synergistically (whole greater than sum of its parts) with others, in essence opening up ourselves and others to a type of "human magic."

The next day we went to Reykholt, where some of the most famous sagas of Norse Mythology were written. We learned of Snorri Sturluson, the foremost saga writer of Iceland. We went to a church, museum, and bookstore owned by an Icelandic family. The daughter of the family spoke charmingly and with feeling about the writing of the Viking sagas and related Viking history. A number of us brought books in the church bookstore of Viking sayings ("Load no man/with lavish gifts./Small presents often win great praise./With a loaf cut/and a cup shared/I found fellowship." (Viking gods, for example Bragi, famous for wisdom and eloquence and skill with words and his wife,



Idun, who keeps in a box special apples for the gods to eat, when they grow old so they can be forever young), and Viking sagas (among them the stories of Leif, the lucky, and his father, Eric, the Red). As we imbibed our surroundings we suddenly became aware of hoofs pounding in the distance. When we went outside, several hundred feet from us, a procession of riders in horses, in a curved path winding in and out of trees, appearing, disappearing, then reappearing again, were glimpsed riding to the church we were visiting on their Independence Day. Several of us seized the opportunity to watch the epic riders as they arrived at the church door dismounted and take off their shoes before entering the church for prayer service.

We spent a magnificent morning on top of a glacier near our tour guide's (Gudrun Bergmann's) hotel. Bundled in snowsuits provided by the glacier staff, all seventeen of us rode up and down the glacier on our "Snowcat". It was a sparkling and sunny morning with glorious vistas in every direction. We felt the "vortex energy". Gudrun spoke to us of the confluences of ley lines, which create energy fields on the glacier, to which Icelanders have been historically attuned.

We met with a number of interesting women, among them lovely mayor of Grundarfjordur, the manager of the local bank of Olafsvik, the impressive women's organizations at the university of Akureyri, the women's council members of the town of Akureyri, representatives from the Women's Association of Skagafjordur, and Drifa Hjartardottir, a member of Parliament. Each woman we spoke with emanated a sense of optimism and confidence about what could be done to "make a difference."

In one of the last days of our trip, we went to Thingvellir, where the old parliament was formed (in 930 AD, the first democratic parliament in history). Thingvellir looked to me like the rocky canyons in old Western movies. Gudrun had us imagining families with their sheep and belongings, many on horseback, traveling from far and wide to the annual gathering set at this site, (specifically to settle disputes and attend to diverse community matters). The rocks in the canyon were magnificent, no doubt chosen as an acoustically effective backdrop, allowing chieftains to be heard by large disparate crowds in the open air. It was a site where major ley lines meet, providing vortices of energy, probably also sensed by the chieftains and contributing to the choice of site.

I sense in Iceland today a pioneering spirit reminiscent of the early colonial days in America. The people, in particular the women, appear to be seizing the opportunity to make things happen, to make things better, to have an impact. They are a young country in the global sense. Their entrance into the global community has been very recent (independence from Denmark only established in 1945). With only 280,000 people in the country, they do not have that big city, big country feeling of being overwhelmed by millions of others, but have instead a sense of being able to make a unique contribution. I admire their fervor about protecting the environment; their world class fisheries make this a necessary priority.

Other things I love about Iceland. Their gamboling sheep (which I am sad I found delicious), their puffins (which we did not get to see but which inhabit the Westman Islands), their special breed of (Viking imported) horses with five gaits and a predisposition toward developing a special emotional bond with their master. (They also tend to lie down on the grass, not typically seen on ranches or farms in America.

Guðrún, our guide was inspirational and famous in Iceland. Although it is easier to be famous in Iceland than in large, populated countries, Guðrún is so dedicated and interesting I think she would be famous just about anywhere. I ate reindeer carpaccio in Reykjavík; Reykjavík was very hip and hilly. (I think I found the shop where Björk buys her clothes.) The biggest church in Reykjavík has a huge statue of Leif Erickson (probably founder of Newfoundland, son of Eric the Red who founded Greenland) in front of it. Kathleen and I went to church there on Thursday evening after the American delegation had departed. There was an evening service on that particular day, we believe as part of the Solstice celebration, and we were so pleased to be able to join the congregation in singing the old familiar hymns in Iceland!

I think I would feel very at home in Iceland because of their deep confidence in the presence of nature spirits. I can not help but feel at least part of this affinity to the natural world came from the Celtic women the Vikings enslaved (and subsequently impregnated) on the way over to Iceland. Upon returning to NY and my daily New York Times I was delighted to find a major news piece (July 13<sup>th</sup> 2005: "Building in Iceland? Better Clear It With the Elves First?") on the necessity of rerouting road plans to allow for peaceful co-existence with Iceland's elves. The writer, who interviewed a handful of Icelanders sporting a variety of shades of beliefs and disbelief, concluded the article with the opinion of one Iceland's "hard core" skeptics: "If you were to ask me, 'Are you sure there are no supernatural being?' I would say I don't believe there are. But I wouldn't rule it out."

As a lasting effect of my trip to Iceland, I feel a renewed sense of purpose and enthusiasm. It seems I work a little harder, I listen a little more carefully, and I am a little more open to ways of looking at things. I credit this to the wonderful people I met on our trip. And maybe one or two elves—at least I wouldn't rule it out.

pcs/2017

## **Iceland Report Robin Winter Odem 2005 (edited by Sue Devick)**

### **1. Physical Beauties of Iceland**

My first impressions of being on a moon crater, surrounded by black lava rock with no grass or trees. What a surreal experience! Known as the "Land of Fire and Ice," this peaceful island encompasses a breathtaking variety of landscapes and natural phenomena- icebergs/glaciers, thundering waterfalls, blue lagoons, unusual rock formations, geysers, volcanos, flowering fields, birch forests, and miles of sea coast.

We saw farm houses and churches out in the middle of nowhere. The isolation of people and communities was unbelievable. I wondered what it would be like to live miles from a grocery store, gas station, or movie theater. Horses are an important aspect of culture and life; they have adapted to the cold climate by growing a thick, shaggy coat for winter. Horses are known for their five distinct gaits.

### **2. Climate and Quality of Life**

Iceland is a place of extremes, from long nights in the winter to even longer days in the summer, and to the threat of volcanic eruptions. There was daylight for 24 hrs. a day when we were there, with "sundown" at midnight. The summer lasts from June through September, but between mid May and the end of July, there is almost perpetual daylight. There can be quite a bit of wind and rain. In winter, there is daylight only from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Living with darkness can cause psychological distress.

### **3. Genealogy of Icelanders/Migration to America**

Starting around 1870, many Icelanders migrated to North America and the Midwest following poverty that resulted from a series of volcanic eruptions. Icelandic genealogy is interesting, as everyone is related in some way. The population is small, around 290,000, and immigration is limited.

Iceland uses the old system of patronymics, whereby a child takes his father's first name, to which is added son or dottir. They go by their first names. I found the Icelandic Center in Hofos extremely interesting.

### **4. Mythology and Sagas**

The medieval Icelandic sagas tell of the early settlers, their lives, families, and struggles. Classified under the term "sagas," which means simply "story," are countless historical chronicles, romances, legends and biographies of kings and holy men. Until the 20th century, they were taken as undisputed historical fact, passed down through the generations as oral history, until finally recorded on manuscript. More recent scholarly studies demonstrate

the tendency of these works to be fiction. The identity of the authors remains a mystery, although we heard from a docent in Reykholzt about the chieftain Snorri Sturlason, author of *Heimskringla*, about the kings Norway, making the sagas believable.

## 5. Financial Situation

Everything in Iceland was expensive. The guidebook said to expect everything be three times more expensive than what we were accustomed to. The price of a glass of wine was a shock to all of us! Alcohol is imported to Iceland and we paid dearly for it.

## 6. Lastly, the Women!

The women that we met were interesting and forward-thinking people. Everyone spoke English and was well informed about America and the world. They were friendly and easy-going. When we met with the U.S. Ambassador and his wife in Washington, D.C. prior to our trip, I asked the question, "Why are the Icelandic women known for being so sharp and aggressive?" I was told that it was because women had to take responsibility from the beginning in caring for their families, providing education, and governing the communities because their men had to go to sea to make a living (fishing). The men were gone for long periods of time, so the women had to adapt and take charge.

All women considered, I would like to mention three who impressed me most favorably. First was our tour director, Gudrun Bergman of Hella. She was gracious and informative. She was a recent widow and shared many personal experiences with her late husband. She was very proud of being the travel entrepreneur of the year. Gudrun and her husband also started a self-sustaining ecological community in Hella, emphasizing organic food and living. They received the Green Globe certificate in 2002.

Secondly, we met with Aaálheiour Heiðunsdóttir, the young woman who owns the Kaffitar Coffee enterprise in Njardvik. She had lived in Madison, WI while her husband attended graduate school. While there, she became interested in coffee. She sold her "beloved" car to buy a coffee roaster. She operates a beautiful, contemporary, artistic, creative café. We toured her factory where she roasts and markets her coffee.

Thirdly, I was impressed by Drift Hjartardóttir, a member of Parliament for 16 years, and owner of a huge farm, over 25,000 acres outside of Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland. We saw original sod homes and listened to her speak to us about the farm and her work in the Parliament in an old church, dated 1875, where her son had recently been married.

In conclusion, our AWIU delegates are sharp and well informed, too. We are gracious and competent in our fields of interest, as well. It is always rewarding to become better acquainted with our own members while on delegations such as the one to fabulous Iceland.





Iceland 2005 Lois B. Ryan, Ryan Law Offices

I was most impressed by the Icelandic women that we met during our stay. They were all highly competent, conscientious, gracious, and productive in their respective fields of endeavor. First and foremost was our outstanding tour director and hotel owner, Gudrun Bergmann of Hellnar. Our time spent with her was informative and fun, and she balanced our itinerary in a fascinating and thoughtful manner to expose us to many aspects of Icelandic life. She is a true entrepreneur and extraordinary environmental leader of the Snaefellsnes Peninsula.

On our first day, we met Aoalheiour Heounsdothir, a young woman who owns the Kaffitar Coffee enterprise. Interestingly, she became enamored with coffee-serving cafes while living in Madison, WI., where her husband was a graduate student. Her expertise in roasting, marketing, and managing her various cafes rivals Starbucks on a smaller scale; one of her sites is an obvious success in the Reykjavik Airport. We also met with Anna Sverrisdothir, who is the manager of the Blue Lagoon, a truly rare and extraordinary destination that encompasses spa and medical treatments and utter relaxation in the thermal waters.

At the Hotel Glymer on the fiord, we met and enjoyed the company of hotel owner Hansina Einarsdothir. She arranged our dinner there with the women from the Association of Women Entrepreneurs in Iceland. Our conversations were enlightening and entertaining; we went around the tables introducing ourselves. The history of this area was captivating, with its church nestled below the hotel on the fiord.

On Iceland's National Day, we had the extraordinary luck to be at Reykholt at the church when the congregation approached on horseback for the holiday services. The pastor was dressed in his historical vestments while waiting with us for the congregation to arrive, which was a magical moment. His daughter, Dagny Emilsdothir, was our very capable docent, reciting the most famous sagas of Norse Mythology, written and preserved in that locale.

Staying at Gudrun's hotel in Helena was a particular treat. While there, we went "next door" to meet the young woman manager of the Snaefellsjokull National Park. A large part of the peninsula has been declared a national park, including the glacier area, and we were very impressed by Iceland's huge undertaking in preserving such a large geographical area.

We were fortunate to have lunch with Helga Guojonsdothir, manager of the local bank in Olafsvik. She kindly entertained us on her day off, having made other arrangements for her family, while regaling us with stories of her background and experiences in the banking business.

We visited Glaumbaer on Women's Rights Day in Iceland, where Gudridur (a tenth-century female explorer appearing in the Saga of Erik the Red) probably built the first church. Representatives from the Women's Association in Skagafjorður met with us over lunch in a traditional old house, and some of the women wore in authentic historical dress. Afterward, we were able to visit the fascinating adjacent museum in rooms of the extensive old sod house.

In the second largest city of Iceland, which is in the northern part of the country, we met with women in the university community, and had lunch with women in the local government. Surprisingly, one of the young women at the university had received her medical school training near my home in the northern Chicago suburbs. Our visit to IMG Gallup and the Educational Centre for Women illustrated the similarities between our respective lives.

A highlight for the lawyers in the group was the trip to Thingvellir, where the oldest parliament in the western hemisphere was formed. Gudrun was such a capable guide to the history of Thingvellir, and the park information pavilions were also educational and excellent in regard to amenities.

Finally, we met for lunch with Parliament Member Drifa Hjartardottir at her home, which was a huge farm. We were so fortunate to have her time and attention for a very comprehensive visit and meeting. I am hopeful that when AWTU hosts any incoming delegations, we will be as generous with our time, energy, and spirit as the women of Iceland were to us. I believe that our ties to Iceland will be long and fruitful.

Iceland 2005 Joan McEachern

When the delegation for Iceland was being planned, I gave Martha Atherton contact information for a woman I knew from Iceland. I had worked with Drift Hjartdottir at as Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) triennial conference in South Africa in 1998, and had seen her at the Canadian conference in 2001. She had since been elected to the Parliament in Iceland. On one of our last days there, she hosted a lunch for us at her beautiful farmhouse in the southern part of Iceland... situated on many acres (probably miles) of farm land with grazing sheep, stretching north to a volcano. She shared with us her experiences of being a member of Parliament and the role that women played in Icelandic politics. Just prior to visiting with her, we had been to Thingvellir, where the old parliament was formed in 930 A.D., known by local tradition to be the first democratic parliament.

# **INDIA / SRI LANKA**

## **2006**

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### **Delegate Report for India/Sri Lanka Trip, October 2006**

**by Molly Waite**

#### **The Past is Present: A Worm's Eye View of India**

Trained as a social scientist, it is hard not to make some observations about my recent trip India, however, valid or invalid they might be. India is a large subcontinent with and very diverse cultures. Within each sector of the society, there can exist opposite tendencies. So in describing India's social, economic or political situation, one finds that while one sector may be moving in one direction, another sector is still steeped in tradition. Rather than being one way or the other, in India it might often be both. For example, education for some might be excellent and for others the exact opposite. The situation is not yes or no, but yes and no.

What follows is an account of what I perceived, heard or read while we traveled across India. In November, 2006, I traveled with a group of nine as part of a small delegation for American Women for International Understanding(AWIU)

#### **The Changing Role of Some Women**

While traveling in Tamil Nadu, a state in the southern part of India, we met women who were part of self-help organizations. Groups of women received small loans to enable them to start small dairies, brick making factories, food canteens and other small businesses. With the income they had been able to send their children to school, feed and clothed their

families and also save money.

Likewise we met female university professors and professionals who were working outside the home while living in the traditional extended family setting consisting of the husband, children, and numerous in-laws. The majority had arranged marriages. Yet the women had asserted themselves both at home and professionally.

At the same time we saw women, who due to poverty, had become prostitutes to feed their families. Others were begging to provide for their children. Some literally slept on the sidewalks. Based on the traditional mores, most women go to live with their husband's family and are required to assist in working to take care of their husband's family.

Dowries are illegal but everyone we agreed that they still exist. Excessive dowries can be extorted from the bride's family. The wife can be physically harmed if the dowry is not sufficient. Traditional practices do not die easily. Although there are widows who live on their own or with their son's family, we read in the local newspapers about women who voluntarily or involuntarily committed sati, the practice of wives jumping on the funeral pyres of their dead husbands. Even though the British outlawed the practice of sati over 50 years ago, traditions are not easily eradicated.

### **Education For All?**

During our visit we saw a government school in Rajasthan. Approximately half of the students drop out between primary school and the last year of the secondary. The students were provided free uniforms and lunches in the primary programs. However, the primary class we visited had no furniture. The class was segregated. The young boys sat in the back and the young girls in front. All the students sat on

makeshift rugs. The class we saw did have textbooks. We read about other primary classes that had no books. While the Indian Constitution mandates free education up to the age of 14, not all children can attend. Education for young girls especially is not valued since they are expected to marry and raise families. We were told that sticks were not used for discipline, but we saw them in evidence. Nevertheless, literacy in India has increased over 20% in the past 15 years and is up to 65%.

At the same time, India sends on average 80,000 students per year to study in the US and India alone graduates well over 200,000 students from universities a year. Many are engineers working for foreign and domestic firms located in India or abroad.

India has also enticed research divisions of foreign companies to locate in India, such as the big multinational, GE, which has a large research and development division in India.

### **Child Labor Outlawed**

A few months ago the Indian parliament passed outlawed child labor. This seems like a straightforward situation, yet poor families rely on the income of their children to work as domestics or on farms or in factories. We noticed children of school age were often not in school. Some children have been sent or sold by their parents to work abroad or in cities. Young girls have been forced into sex trafficking. However, the Indian government is investigating, fining and preventing child labor in certain sectors. Yet we read articles in which the government explained delays on the implementation of the law until replacement labor could be found.

### **Medical Tourism**



In Chennai, which is the new name for Madras, we saw a big new hospital that was built to attract people from the developed world for operations involving new hips, knees, hearts, and other transplants or extensive proceeds. The cost can be a fraction of what it costs in the developed world.

Yet due to poverty India experiences outbreaks of cholera, tuberculosis and other preventable diseases. Large posters in Delhi were announcing polio vaccinations. Polio has made a comeback in India. There have been over 500 cases of polio this year according to an article in the local newspaper. While the vaccine is available, some parents refuse to have their children vaccinated because of rumors that it will prevent them from being virgins or harm them in other ways.

India has about five million people with living with HIV. Yet only 100 centers give out free treatment to 42,000 patients. Although plans are in the offing for 250 centers, in reality, most people in the village areas do not receive treatment. In India, there is a great divide between the urban and rural areas as well as those who have resources and those who do not.

### **Castes and Class: Living with Division**

Article 17th of the Indian Constitution outlaws the ostracism of untouchables. While there are set asides and affirmative action quotas for them in the parliament, at medical colleges, technical schools, and other institutions, the "dalits," as they are called, still experience discrimination in terms of jobs, schooling and other areas of life. There are, of course, exceptions like a movie star or supreme court judge.

We met people from a variety of castes. We even had an audience with a maharaja in Thanjavur, a city in the state of Tamil Nadu. He talked about his duties in

terms of taking care of temples and his philanthropic activities involving supporting schools for children without means. His aristocratic birth no longer grants the political powers. Today despite legislation there is still discrimination against the former untouchables. Tensions exist within villages where those people are agitating for more power and rights. Violence is at time the consequence. Social injustice is often a source of conflict.

### **Gandhi: A Legacy of the Past**

We saw statues of Gandhi, the shrine for his ashes, a commemoration of the salt march against the British, and a house where he stayed in Mumbai, which is now a museum.

There are people who still follow him. We saw some people spinning yarn near his memorial site. However, non-violence was not apparent. Tensions are high with Pakistan, especially in terms of recent terrorist bombings in Mumbai and as violence in Kashmir. Maoists are fight in the eastern states, such as Orissa. And India has an ongoing nuclear program and just recently tested some of its non-nuclear weapons. Where is Gandhi and non-violence?

### **The Haves and Have Nots**

The Indian economy has been growing at about eight percent a year. Thomas Friedman in *The World Is Flat* uses Bangalore, India, as a prime example of the outsourcing of phone services, among other things, that has helped make India grow. The World Bank in Washington, DC, even outsources its accounting to Chennai (the old Madras) in a brand new environmentally friendly building constructed for this purposes along. Yet some estimate poverty at over 25 percent and underemployment as twice that. Out of a population of over one billion, many people are being

left behind in the rural areas especially. Based on our discussion with a public affairs spokesperson at the well-

guarded US Consulate in Chennai, the US has identified healthcare and education as two areas in which India needs to expand its services to meet the needs not only of the

upper and middle classes but also the rural poor. Part of the US mission is to support innovative efforts by nonprofit organizations working providing assistance in the field of expanding education and health services to all sectors of Indian society.

The above observations are based on a worm's eye view of India. No doubt the account is not totally balanced or accurate. Based on my short visit, I was enthralled with the vastness and diversity of the country. In closing I would welcome comments and corrections from others who know more. I am eager to learn more about this huge subcontinent

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[Carole Lewis](#)

[Robin Winter Oden](#)

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**AWIU****American Women for International Understanding**[HOME](#)[Contact Us](#)[Search](#)[Site Map](#)[About AWIU](#)[Membership](#)[Delegations](#)[Grant Program](#)[Award Program](#)[Board](#)**Delegation to India, November 2006****by Carole Lewis**

Our arrival in India coincided with the implementation of their Domestic Violence (prevention) Act 2005. Under the provisions of this Act, the wife or female live-in partner will be protected from violence by the husband or male live-in partner. The commentary in the papers was the usual pro and con you would expect on this issue, however, it is important that the issue is being addressed and that the abuse of women and children is crime in the eyes of the government. In addition, The Ministry of Women and Child Development is pushing for amendments to make the anti-Sari laws more effective. Sati, in which a woman is forced to burn alive with her dead husband's body is still a big problem in rural and tribal India. It was getting a lot of publicity in the papers during our visit.

The government of India appears to be to aid women and minorities despite rampant corruption. India is about a third the size the US and has about four times the population. It is a third world country with at least 75% of its population mired in poverty. Fifty-two percent of girls 10 to 14 years of age do not attend school.

One of the government projects, implemented through government owned banks, we were fortunately able to experience is their Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) which is based on the simple notion that poor women need aid. Once a group of women proves that they can save money, they qualify to borrow money to start small businesses. These micro-loan programs are greatly assisting some of the rural poor women.

On the grounds of the World Heritage listed temple of Brihadeeshwara, built in 1018, we met with a good sized number of the recipients of these loans and listened to their stories. With us was Mrs. Shyamala Seelin M.A., D.D. of the Thanjai Janaseva Bhavan the South Indian Association of Canadian Studies. Over 18,000 families have participated in these grants and loans. The groups usually consist of 16 to 20 members. They have started all sorts of businesses. They sell milk, raise goats and chickens, operate canteens and stores, sew uniforms, etc. They rely a great deal on mutual help. This ability of Indian women to work together is a great life saver for them. These groups also work to aid the schools, the disabled, and assist the old.

At a later dinner meeting, members of the women's auxiliary of the local Rotary Club, the Union Wheel Club Of Thanjavur, met with us and further described the programs available. Their President, Mrs. Ponulila Ganesan, is an instructor at the Bharath College of Science and Management. She talked about the various management programs they have in place to help women and the training programs they run. There are also a large number of NGOs operating in Thanjavur and throughout India.

**A Meeting with a Maharaja**

The Maharaja of Thanjavur, who lives in a palace whose construction was begun by the Nayaks of Madurai around 1550, graciously received our delegation. He was born in the palace and attended the University of India. The rule of his family dates from 1676. The Maharaja is the 13th generation to reside in the Palace of Thanjavur which has greatly evolved over time. The huge corridors, spacious halls, observation and arsenal towers, and shady courtyards of this vast labyrinthine of buildings were completed by the Marathas.

The Maharaja is responsible for 88 temples. He sits on the Board of Trustees of the Library, Art Museum, and a large number of charities. He supports a dormitory for 260 young girls.

attending primary and secondary school. The girls are chosen by family status and poverty levels. He has broad responsibilities for maintaining the art and culture of his ancestors.

The Maharaja is very active in the performance of social, religious and other public activities. His sisters effectively left the family when they married into another one. He made the interesting comment that after the Muslim invasion, women were kept at home for protection and they now have forgotten the reason. The Maharaja's responsibilities have not changed that much over the years. He is the Custodian of the Temples. This is his destiny. He will come and go, but the temples will endure. His responsibility is to keep a good record. Otherwise he has no claim over them. Some of the temples are not what he would like them to be. This is not due to vandalism, but to neglect. He does receive income from the land attached to his palace which he uses to address the problems of his people and the temples. These rice paddies are an economic mainstay of the area. He works with the following problems among others: excess population, lack of water, few sources of income, lots of trash, etc. Poverty is decreasing and he reminded us that the Hindu philosophy goes beyond materialism.

The Maharaja is optimistic for the future. He sees greater participation of women directly in the economy, new methods of agriculture, and new energy sources, (solar) as offering hope for the future. Altogether a most interesting man and meeting.

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**Other Delegate Reports:**

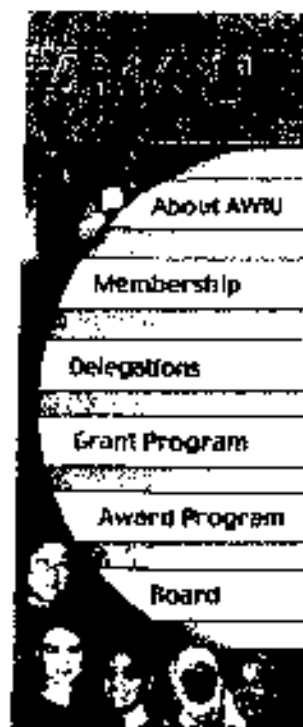
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### Delegate Report for India/Sri Lanka Trip, October 2006

by Robin Odem

1. AWIU Dinner at Mrs. Nirumala de Mel's home in Colombo. We met 7-10 women from a variety of different professions. I met a woman who was going into Tamil area to help women obtain water after the tsunami. She got her husband, a doctor, to leave his position for three years to help her with this project.

2. Visit to a local school in Colombo which was founded by an American woman in the late 19th century. We met with the principal and interviewed several girl students regarding their career choices.

3. Visited the site of future Montessori school for children 2-4 years old who are victims of tsunami in Galle. It is a Steppingstone project that our tour guide is involved in. We met the Monk who donated the land for the school and community center. We donated money for the educational fund. Steppingstones has a website or will have and we hope to learn when the school opens.

4. Visited a housing development for fisherman families who were victims of the tsunami in Galle. The Monk and other notables spoke to us about the development, which is funded by the local government and Unilever. Families are selected to live there and can't sell the house.

5. Interviewed a potential applicant for AWIU grant program in Colombo. She was recommended by the Ambassador we met at Mrs. Nirumala de Mel's home earlier. The applicant is a lecturer at the University in Colombo and is interested in Gender issues. She plans to begin a PhD in Australia next year. If she were to come to the USA, she would be interested in learning more about women's groups. Interviewers were Joan Poulos, Molly Waite, and myself.

Even though our delegation to Sri Lanka was not considered 'official' by the Board, we followed through with the program as planned. Therefore, I think the Board should reconsider its resolution it passed at the last Board meeting in August. (If a motion is made to this effect, you have my proxy vote or Joan McEachern's).

Thanks,

Robin Winter Odem

#### Other Delegate Reports:

[Cynthia Lewis](#)

[Joan Poulos](#)

[Kathleen Rocher-Tansey](#)

[Molly Waite](#)

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### AWIU Delegation to Sri Lanka, October 2006, by Joan Poulos

The unofficial delegation to Sri Lanka the last week of October 2006 was a great success. In spite of the initial trepidation, the seven members who went to Sri Lanka, via Dubai, had a wonderful time and adhered to the best tenets of AWIU throughout the trip.

When we reached Colombo, after the Dubai by Night tour which introduced us to the most conspicuous consumerism most of us had ever seen (Las Vegas pales by comparison) the first thing we noticed were the people. Everyone we met had a warm, welcoming smile. Although Colombo is a relatively large city, and the capital of Sri Lanka, the airport is small and manageable.

For example, I had to make several trips through security back into the area where the luggage was arriving, to get all of our group together so that we could make contact with the local guide. As I went back and forth, the soldier guarding the door smiled, then laughed outright as I made my third trip. His comment, "don't worry. That's how it is when I travel with my wife and daughters, too." I had some apprehension about going back into the interior of the airport, but after his warm smile and down-home welcome, my apprehension about the whole trip disappeared. We were going to have a good time.

We were lucky enough to be in the hands of Quickshaws—an excellent travel expediter. For example, not only were we welcomed with cold water and a clean bus but with orchids. As soon as we met our main guide, Dharmu, we were given individual presents. Each of us received a book about women's issues in Sri Lanka, tailored to what the guides thought each of us would enjoy. This set the tone for the entire trip.

We were intent on finding out about the war; we were intent in finding out how the status of women was affected by the tsunami. We wanted to understand more than the press covered about the underlying tensions which had flared up again (the Tamils had tried to take over the government naval station in Galle (a town we visited; with no visible evidence of any fighting/conflict.)

We soon accepted the perspective that neither side wanted to involve civilians; that when there had been civilian deaths, they were a sad incident to a primarily military conflict. We learned about the differences between the Tamil merchants (who dominate Colombo) and the heavily-Indian dominated Tamils of the north and east who are the well known Tamil Tigers.

We learned that rather than being the peacekeepers the press paints, Norway and Japan are playing an integral part in keeping the conflict going. Apparently the Tigers have a deal with Norway that if they are successful in obtaining a separate homeland, Norway gets the oil concession. Most Sri Lankans are Buddhist (and Sinhalese) and do not like whaling. Both Japan and Norway are adamant about decimating the diminishing whale population by extensive whaling activities.

Ever mindful of our role to investigate women's roles and their place in the society of the country we were visiting, we observed, first hand, how many of the small businesses are run by women and how education seems to be available both to boys and girls. We were lucky enough to meet at the owner of Quickshaw's own personal residence) women who were policy makers in Sri Lanka. We had dinner with the women who were in the diplomatic service (the first woman ambassador) and with women involved in current legislation. We met with women from academia; we met with women involved in journalism. We had a truly delightful evening and came away with great respect for the involvement of women in government in the top levels.

When we traveled into the countryside, we visited very poor homes. One family who live in very straitened circumstances, showed us how self-sufficient they could be, using coconut in all its forms (milk to rope.) We visited a large home turned into a workshop for women from the small villages so that they could embroider beautiful hangings and pillows that would sell

readily in the open market. We visited with women who picked tea; we visited with women who were principals of schools. We talked to University students; we talked to women who were living in the small houses built to replace their seafront shacks that had blown away in the tsunami.

The former Ambassador to Austria suggested that one of her young academic friends might be a good candidate for our program. Molly, Robin and I interviewed her and found her a very acceptable candidate. We felt that she should formalize her program in chief (she is hoping to get her PhD in Australia) and then we could consider her application for a short term stay in the US. She teaches English literature and her English is excellent. This was a very good possible candidate. In India we also met a possible candidate (in Mumbai).

Everywhere we went, people were interested in what our organization did. We realize that we need to develop some brochures to hand out to casual contacts. Some got very excited. On the boat from the elephant caves (in Mumbai) we got acquainted with a Canadian group of women and their leader (from British Columbia) is very interested in furthering our contacts.

While sitting in the airport in Dubai, waiting to go to New York, I met a very qualified woman who is an academic from Ohio and originally from Pakistan. She is eager to get an application and is considering joining AWIU.

In India, we were lucky enough to meet with person to person workers who excelled in helping each other for mutual assistance. Carol Lewis will report on this, but I have contacted the lawyer from India and sent her pictures and our thanks for all she did to expedite this contact. We realized that we need follow up procedures so that all of this good energy is not wasted. I know that the travel expenditures have already contacted me about additional information I am getting from UCD to send to them (about bat houses.)

It is my perception that this delegation made a difference. In Sri Lanka we found a charity we can all wholeheartedly support; we contacted women who are in positions of leadership and who can share ideas about programs that really work for women's betterment. In India we have contacts that cry out for our continued help in making resources available for mutual assistance programs. Internationally we found agreement programs that help women help the world—whether it is emphasizing maternal/childhood health; whether it is demanding that resources be equitably distributed to achieve equal education or whether it is helping governments look behind the headlines and find what the real effect of policies is.

We saw lots of women working. We saw vendors; teachers, principals, Legislators, police officers, journalists, craftspeople. We saw nurses, bankers, ngo officers, musicians, athletes, sailors. We saw the woman who still has to sweep up the cigarette butt the elegantly-suited man threw down and then motioned for her to pick up. In her same city we saw a cadre of women police officers. We saw the woman who was the first female ambassador from Sri Lanka. We saw an academic who is worried about gender equity; we saw the Dean of a college. There are women like us—from many backgrounds. We are lucky enough to travel; we are lucky we have no war in our homeland. We are lucky our coasts were not decimated by a tsunami; we are lucky that we have adequate resources in our country to feed us all, if we would but distribute them better. This is what you learn on a delegation. Let us not forget.

#### **Other Delegate Reports:**

Carole Lewis

Robin Winter Oden

Kathleen Rache Tansley

Molly Waite

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## AWIU REPORT. SRI LANKA

The unofficial delegation to Sri Lanka the last week of October was a great success. In spite of the initial trepidation, the seven members who went to Sri Lanka, via Dubai, had a wonderful time and adhered to the best tenets of AWIU throughout the trip.

When we reached Colombo, after the Dubai by Night tour which introduced us to the most conspicuous consumerism most of us had ever seen (Las Vegas pales by comparison) the first thing we noticed were the people. Everyone we met had a warm, welcoming smile. Although Colombo is a relatively large city, and the capital of Sri Lanka, the airport is small and manageable. For example, I had to make several trips through security back into the area where the luggage was arriving, to get all of our group together so that we could make contact with the local guide. As I went back and forth, the soldier guarding the door smiled, then laughed outright as I made my third trip. His comment, "don't worry. That's how it is when I travel with my wife and daughters, too."

I had some apprehension about going back into the interior of the airport, but after his warm smile and down-home welcome, my apprehension about the whole trip disappeared. We were going to have a good time..

We were lucky enough to be in the hands of Quickshaws—an excellent travel expeditor. For example, not only were we welcomed with cold water and a clean bus but with orchids. As soon as we met our main guide, Dharmi, we were given individual presents. Each of us received a book about women's issues in Sri Lanka, tailored to what the guides thought each of us would enjoy. This set the tone for the entire trip.

We were intent on finding out about the war; we were intent in finding out how the status of women was affected by the tsunami. We wanted to understand more than the press covered about the underlying tensions which had flared up again (the Tamils had tried to take over the government naval station in Galle (a town we visited; with no visible evidence of any fighting/conflict.) We soon accepted the perspective that neither side wanted to involve civilians; that when there had been civilian deaths, they were a sad incident to a primarily military conflict. We learned about the differences between the Tamil merchants (who dominate Colombo) and the heavily-Indian dominated Tamils of the north and east who are the well known Tamil Tigers. We learned that rather than being the peacekeepers the press paints, Norway and Japan are playing an integral part in keeping the conflict going. Apparently the Tigers have a deal with Norway that if they are successful in obtaining a separate homeland, Norway gets the oil concession. Most Sri Lankans are Buddhist (and Singalese) and do not like whaling. Both Japan and Norway are adamant about decimating the diminishing whale population by extensive whaling activities.

Ever mindful of our role to investigate women's roles and their place in the society of the country we were visiting, we observed, first hand, how many of the small businesses are run by women and how education seems to be available both to boys and girls. We were lucky enough to meet ( at the owner of Quickshaw's own personal residence) women

who were policy makers in Sri Lanka. We had dinner with the women who were in the diplomatic service (the first woman ambassador) and with women involved in current legislation. We met with women from academia; we met with women involved in journalism. We had a truly delightful evening and came away with great respect for the involvement of women in government in the top levels.

When we traveled into the countryside, we visited very poor homes. One family who live in very straitened circumstances, showed us how self-sufficient they could be, using coconut in all its forms (milk to rope.) We visited a large home turned into a workshop for women from the small villages so that they could embroider beautiful hangings and pillows that would sell readily in the open market. We visited with women who picked tea; we visited with women who were principals of schools. We talked to University students; we talked to women who were living in the small houses built to replace their seafront shacks that had blown away in the tsunami.

The former Ambassador to Austria suggested that one of her young academic friends might be a good candidate for our program. Molly, Robin and I interviewed her and found her a very acceptable candidate. We felt that she should formalize her program in chief (she is hoping to get her PHD in Australia) and then we could consider her application for a short term stay in the US. She teaches English literature and her English is excellent. This was a very good possible candidate. In India we also met a possible candidate (in Mumbai).

Everywhere we went, people were interested in what our organization did. We realize that we need to develop some brochures to hand out to casual contacts. Some got very excited. On the boat from the elephant caves (in Mumbai) we got acquainted with a Canadian group of women and their leader (from British Columbia) is very interested in furthering our contacts.

While sitting in the airport in Dubai, waiting to go to New York, I met a very qualified woman who is an academic from Ohio and originally from Pakistan. She is eager to get an application and is considering joining AWIU.

In India, we were lucky enough to meet with person to person workers who excelled in helping each other for mutual assistance. Carol Lewis will report on this, but I have contacted the lawyer from India and sent her pictures and our thanks for all she did to expedite this contact. We realized that we need follow up procedures so that all of this good energy is not wasted. I know that the travel expeditors have already contacted me about additional information I am getting from UCD to send to them (about bat houses..)

It is my perception that this delegation made a difference. In Sri Lanka we found a charity we can all wholeheartedly support; we contacted women who are in positions of leadership and who can share ideas about programs that really work for women's betterment. In India we have contacts that cry out for our continued help in making resources available for mutual assistance programs. Internationally we found agreement-programs that help women help the world. Whether it is emphasizing maternal/childhood health; whether it is demanding that resources be equitably distributed to achieve equal education or whether it is helping governments look behind the headlines and find what the real effect of policies is..(our representative in the US Consulate in Chennai was very

surprised about our degree of information about the Sri Lanka war and who the international troublemakers REALLY are..(fortunately not us, this time..)

We saw lots of women working. We saw vendors: teachers, principals,. Legislators, policeofficers, journalists, craftspeople. We saw nurses, bankers, ngo officers, musicians,athletes, sailors. We saw the woman who still has to sweep up the cigarette butt the elegantly-suited man threw down and then motioned for her to pick up. In her same city we saw a cadre of women policeofficers. We saw the woman who was the first female ambassador from Sri Lanka. We saw an academic who is worried about gender equity; we saw the Dean of a college. These are women like us—from many backgrounds. We are lucky enough to travel; we are lucky we have no war in our homeland. We are lucky our coasts were not decimated by a tsunami; we are lucky that we have adequate resources in our country to feed us all, if we would but distribute them better. This is what you learn on a delegation. Let us not forget.

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## **Delegate Report for India/Sri Lanka Trip, October 2006**

**by Kathleen Roche Tansey**

### **Reflections of Sri Lanka**

#### **A Travel Team that Made a Difference**

Many thanks to Ms Nirmala De Mel and her Quickshaws Tours in Colombo, Sri Lanka for her thoughtful planning for our group of seven AWIU members who visited Sri Lanka this past month. From the moment we landed her careful planning was evidenced. Her assistant was there to meet us as we arrived early in the morning. We were unexpectedly gifted with a different book each about Sri Lanka to enhance our understanding of this beautiful island.

From thence we commenced our travels up and down and around Sri Lanka from sandy beaches to teeming jungles to gorgeous mountain valleys with green layered tea plantations covering their slopes.

To guide us was Dharmin, a true prince of Sri Lanka, a renaissance man of many talents and interests, including being a naturalist and ornithologist. To support us was our very skilled driver who effectively drove us through blinding rains and flooded roads as it was monsoon season. His assistant was Lal, a handsome 28 year-old who's wife was expecting a baby, who not only led us out of narrow roadways but assisted we travelers with an assisting arm at the necessary times.

Thanks to Ms Nirmala, we were hosted at her home in the Cinnamon Gardens section of Colombo to a wonderful dinner meeting where she arranged for us



to meet her friends, a very diverse group of talented women. Among the women we met and conversed with were the first woman ambassador from Sri Lanka, one of the leaders of the Muslim community, leaders of a committee for rural women and representatives of the academic community. Also included was a member of an old Burger family which gave us a personal sense of the pluralistic composition of this country. This wonderful occasion led to the introduction of an outstanding professional woman our AWIU leadership team was subsequently able to interview for a future AWIU sponsored professional visit to the U.S.

Dharmin's sensitivity and flexibility was further demonstrated that evening as he graciously assisted Ms Nirmala in hosting. This followed an earlier excursion where he took us to a shopping center to pursue our interest in purchasing copies of the film *Water* photographed in Sri Lanka, getting sim cards for phones, and locating an internet café to allow us to retrieve our Email.

Throughout the days that followed Dharmin continued responsive, willing and able to meet the very different needs of seven independent women.

As he got to know us and understand the mission of AWIU he made arrangements for us to visit the now-under-construction pre-school for the poorest children of tsunami victims. We met the Buddhist monks who donated the land, saw the final stages of construction at the site, and were shown the plans for utilizing the classroom buildings and community center. Dharmin also explained to us how construction was ecologically designed to do the least amount of damage to the existing environment. In completion landscaping would include planting more cinnamon trees by the community and enhancing the already existing pond to create a water garden.

150 children had been interviewed, 70 of the poorest were selected, teachers were hired, and school was scheduled to open two weeks after our visit.

With the community center, the mothers could gather on a daily basis to receive training to develop skills which would help them to support their families.

This project was truly inspiring and gave us the AWIU team an opportunity to contribute to the Stepping Stones Foundation and have direct contact in seeing how we can financially support tsunami victims in a sustainable project. With its sustainable creation and long range planning and now improved world wide communication we will be able to maintain our contact and contribute into perpetuity.

Visiting this project and our ongoing interest led Dhammin and the Buddhist monk to have us return in the afternoon to meet the village elder and travel to a tsunami housing reconstruction project.

That afternoon we returned to Rathgama where we met the village chief who rode with us. Further out in the countryside, off a dirt road, we came upon what looked in the distance to be a California style housing tract with small homes with red tile roofs all built as a donation by Unilever Corp.

As we met with the new home owners we could see their pride of ownership as we saw them planting gardens and creating personal space. One woman I met, standing with curiosity in her doorway, happily agreed to be photographed and later invited us into her home and into her back yard to show us her separate hand-constructed kitchen that followed the local custom of separation of kitchen and living quarters to avoid fires.

Thanks to Dhammin we left Rathgama with a far

greater understanding of the tsunami cycle than anything we had previously gleaned from media reports. In summary we saw the ocean incursions, the Pandamas trees that saved lives, the train tracks where the train had derailed, the damaged homes of the fishermen, and the construction of the new homes and the new pre-school for the children of victims.

Dharmin's talents and sense of being totally present were further exemplified by his sudden stopping our van along the roadside over a creek en route to the school site to point out to us a water monitor lizard, a natural phenomenon of Sri Lanka as we were passing by.

Suggestions to future AWIU planners:

- 1) All delegation members should have AWIU business cards and name badges
- 2) All delegates should have brochures which clearly state mission and objective of AWIU.

With these constraints our delegation leader Joan Poulos gave us guidelines all along the way to insure a successful AWIU visit to Sri Lanka and is to be commended for her leadership.

**Other Delegate Reports:**

Carole Lewis

Ruth Winter Olsen

Joan Poulos

Molly Waite

[Back to Delegations page](#)

# **ARGENTINA**

## **2008**

### Delegation Report from Argentina.

The overriding lesson learned from our delegation's visit to Argentina is the confirmation of the power of individual commitment as the paramount power against evil and injustice.

We saw, time after time, how individuals who had the courage and belief in the course of action they chose, could change government policies and help assuage injustices locally and nationally. Individuals, acting together, can effect change.

The premier example of the bravery of individuals who confronted the evil policies of the dictatorship is the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, and now the Abuelas (grandmothers.) These women, who had lost children and grandchildren to the violence perpetrated in the late seventies, used the only legal avenue open to them; they walked. They walked around the Rose palace; they walked around the park in the Plaza de Mayo. There was no law against walking, but theirs was the only act of defiant resistance and many of them became victims themselves and became one of the *desaparecidos* (the disappeared.) Their courage, however, sparked others to rise up against the evil policies.

In spite of their own pain, the Mothers wouldn't quit. They had seen their daughters kidnapped, (twenty per cent of which were pregnant at the time) and killed and their grandchildren either killed or sold to (or given to) friends of the dictatorship. More than 30,000 people were killed or simply disappeared—buried in mass graves, pushed from airplanes or burned in unmarked piles. The mothers, and the grandmothers, persist even after thirty years, in trying to reunite the snatched babies with their true families and at least trying to identify those who died. Even while we were there, one more *nieto* (grandchild) was identified—sadly from dental records after he committed suicide. But there are success stories, and the Abuelas push on.

Other individuals chose to "follow their dream" and make the world a better place. A financially successful couple sold all they had and bought a farm where they could help young boys (and now some girls) who otherwise would have grown up in foster care, either because their parents couldn't or wouldn't care for them. Susanna and her husband now house twelve young boys and insure them a safe and supportive childhood.

Some of the siblings have joined the boys, and there are now girls who come daily to the farm to receive food and support. Because the couple had previously provided the furniture to hotels and restaurants, they had extensive contacts in those fields. They called upon their friends to help them set up a restaurant, for which they grow all the food they serve and train those who want to learn, the restaurant/cooking trades. They teach children to care for animals and to tend gardens. They insure that all the children attend school full time and some have even reached the university.

The children seem happy and contented... their future bright because two people followed their dream.

And then there are the two women who, themselves, were outside the mainstream. As lesbians, they understood hardship, but were successful and decided to commit themselves to helping those preyed on by the sex traffickers. They made arrangements to get an old house, and adapted it to provide shelter to the victims (many of whom had been kidnapped and became pregnant) reaching out to shelter those who escape and their children.

They have confronted the Mafia and the drug trade who profit from the sex traffic trade, and have been threatened and exposed to hardship and fear. They will not be dissuaded. We tried to help by being sure that the US Embassy and Mr. Kelly, the Deputy Chief of Mission, had their address and he agreed to try to assure that they receive some of the aid we as a nation, have authorized for victims of the sex trafficking trade. This is such an international problem that when I went through Immigration, the officer asked me what I had been doing in Argentina. I told him that we, as a group, had been seeking information as to how we could help with the problem of sex trafficking, and he said he, in his job, sees this as a great problem. As I moved on, he said, "Thank you for going to help."

We saw others working together to meet local needs. There were the low income families who banded together, under the guidance of some very caring teachers, to form a school with an alternative goal; social responsiveness as well as academic success. The children and their parents form committees to set the rules of the school. Even discipline is administered by the students as a group.

They have learned to recycle everything, making insulation for the walls of their old school building from the plastic bottles discarded everywhere. They are working with alternative energy programs and with very little capital they try solar projects and conservation. They have decided against the school uniforms which are required even in the public schools, and they keep the tuition so low that every family can send their children.

The parents are active members of the project. They cook the food for the lunches; they clean the school; they supervise the projects at the school.

The philosophy of the parents was summed up for me by one very large woman who obviously had few economic advantages. She tried to supplement the English of the interpreter[ since the group all talked at once)--maximum involvement sometimes is more enthusiastic than orderly.

I asked her how she learned her English, since we had been told that she had little formal schooling. She said from television. When I looked perplexed, she made me understand that she had a deaf son and that English language television had Spanish subtitles so her son could learn and she learned the spoken dialogue (which was in English). I told her I was impressed and she shrugged and told me "Tenamos solamente uno mundo."

This commitment to bettering the "One World" which we all share was shown by the nearly universal recycling we saw; by the concern for helping the 400,000 Bolivian refugees who live in Buenos



Aires, by the intense interest of taxi drivers, teachers, politicians and storekeepers in the American elections. Argentina has suffered from political instability and economic misjudgments by their leaders. They have present concerns about their President's political acumen and her independence from the policies of her husband, the previous President. They seem to agree that new policies are needed and that her position urging the restoration of retirement benefits to governmental control (privatized by a previous President) is well founded. They are eager to establish better relationships with the US and to end the distrust they have felt for our foreign policy (largely centering around the war in Iraq.)

With a new President-Elect and with new doors being opened, we should continue to stay in contact with our large Southern neighbor. I hope AWIU can soon extend a grant to one of the many deserving women we met and bring them here so the entire membership can share some of the insights we have gained.

October 23 - 29: Buenos Aires.

This portion of the trip would include visits to an Estancia (a ranch in the pampas), to Tigre (an old town at the mouth of the Delta) a Tango show, wonderful museums, a city tour, local craft fair, etc. It would also include visits with two congresswomen, a researcher who will brief us on the history, geography, and economics of Argentina, meetings with other women's groups including a group represented by a woman who was a torture survivor of 16 years in the late 70s and who will discuss with us the period of the Disappearing People.

Pictures of Buenos Aires

Recoleta Cemetery

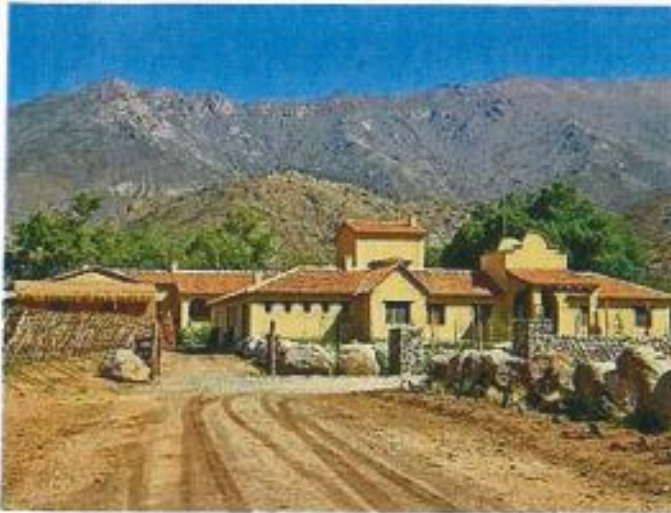


## 1. Plaza de Mayo



An estancia





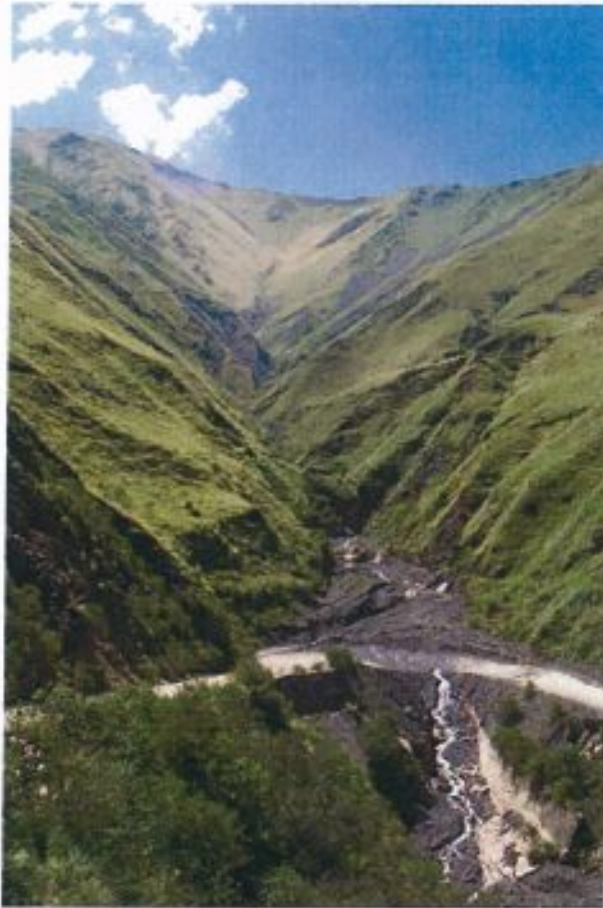
Pictures of Tigre



October 30 - November 4: Salta and Jujuy

Travel to Salta and Jujuy which is in the high mountains of northern Argentina , an area noted for its subtle, but beautiful desert colors. It is close to Bolivia and has the highest population of indigenous peoples who still maintain their traditional dress and language. Here, poverty is widespread and many still suffer from discrimination. It is reputed to have wine that is superior to that in Mendoza and we would be able to visit small bodegas for a taste of their wine and their cocoa tea.

#### Salta Images



**Salta**  
**Salta, Argentina**





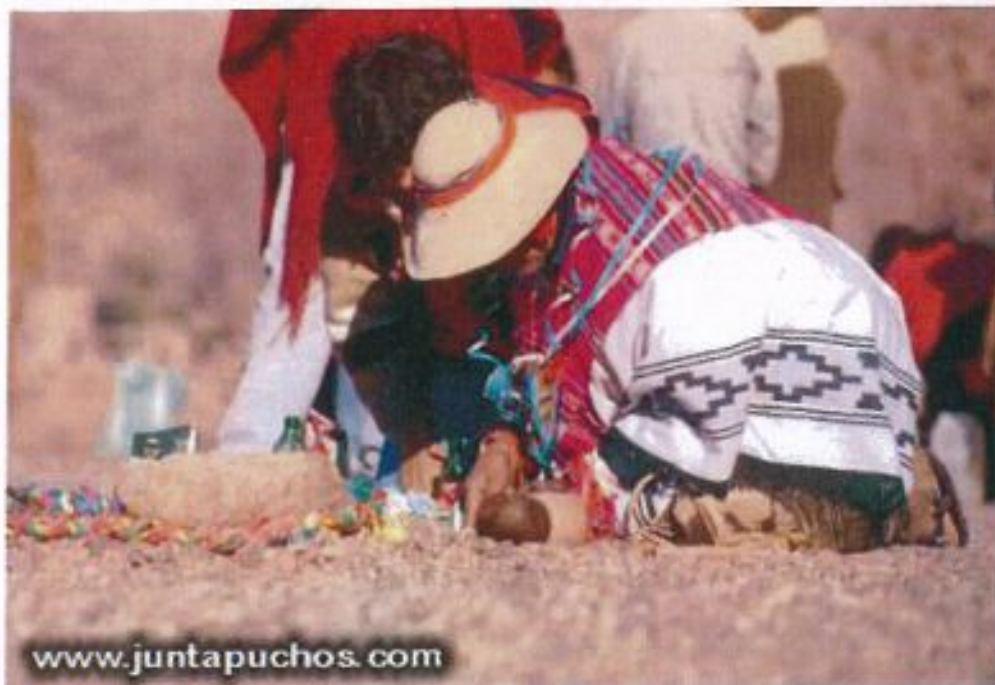
Salta's cathedral dates from the 19th century and pales in contrast to the ornate Iglesia de San Francisco, a local landmark.



Pictures pf Jujuy







#### November 4 - 6: Iguazú Falls

Travel to Iguazu Falls and stay at the base of the falls -- 275 impressive and thundering cascades of falls which are on the border of Brazil and Argentina. The park has many trails into the subtropical rainforest surrounding the falls. There is a good chance of seeing some exotic wildlife that inhabits the area.





November 6: Travel Home

# **LIBYA**

## **2009**

## Robin Winter Odem travels to Libya for AWIU

Robin was a member of a delegation of 11 women who returned in November, 2009, from Libya with the American Women for International Understanding, AWIU. It is a non-profit and non-partisan organization of American women that sponsors delegate exchanges and an international grant study program. The delegation was granted a business visa, which is very difficult to receive and is rarely granted. The delegates were allowed to move freely around the country, but there was a security person with them at all times.

The delegation was treated with much importance and was interviewed for television several times with cameras following their activities as they went to historic Roman sites of Sabratha, Leptis Magna and even to the desert town of Ghadames. The television coverage was shown several times a day on government sponsored TV channels.

There has been no diplomatic relations between the US and Libya since the 1970's when Muammar Gaddafi assumed leadership. Last year, diplomatic relations were begun with the appointment of an US Ambassador, Mr. Gene Cretz. The delegation was invited for tea with the Ambassador and his wife in the residence of the US Minister of Affairs. He said there are several US oil companies drilling out in the desert - Exxon Mobile, Marathon and Hess. He also stated that Libya is not involved in terrorist activities and is against weapons of mass destruction and nuclear weapons.

The delegates visited schools, a Petroleum Institute, and learned about the Underground River Project, considered by many as the 8th Wonder of the World. Also, the 7th of April University was visited where the delegates met with many outstanding women students from the College of Education. The University is looking for more opportunity to send students to study in the US where they will be sponsored with full tuition by the Libyan government. Because there were no diplomatic relations for many years, plus the embargo, it was more difficult for Libyan students to receive visas to enter the US. Until April 2009, Libyans had to go to Tunis to apply for a visa. Now, with relations renewed, it is hopeful Libyan students will start coming again. Not for profit organizations were also visited by the delegates. A highlight for Robin was the presentation of awards to athletes with excellent academic records. They also ben-

efited an exemplary mother who raised 10 children successfully. This award involved a present and a trip to Mexico. The delegation presented a small monetary award to the mother and they were blessed with gifts and presented to the audience.

The delegates were guests in many lovely homes where they were served delicious food, such as camel meat with couscous, while sitting on cushions on the floor. A featured highlight was a fashion show for modern wear following an interesting dialogue about gender equality in employment and education. These women were from Tripoli, mostly English speaking, well educated, and many had traveled out of the country.

There was an invitation to a large beautiful wedding celebration. It was the groom's family reception for women only. There were no men involved, so the women were free to dress as they pleased. And we saw gray flattering evening gowns and dresses. However, when the groom appeared for pictures, many women put on their scarves. The hijab or head scarf is not required clothing for women in Libya. Even though there is no legal dress requirement, in public over 90% wear the head scarf. We were told that the percentage wearing the scarf is much higher now than it was 10-15 years ago. Wearing the scarf seems to be a combination of religious respect and fashion, as well as delineating a separation between men and women.

Another highlight was a long bus trip into the Sahel desert to Ghadames, a desert town which used to be part of the trade route. We attended a cultural festival where we saw Berbers, Tuaregs and others performing various dances and musical numbers in their native costumes. We went to a Tuareg camp where we saw camels in a corral made of sticks and branches. The Tuareg tribes are nomadic Berbers where the men cover their faces, travel on camels and are indifferent to national boundaries.

We also had lunch in a typical old Libyan house. The advantage of the old city with its thick walls and covered passageways is its' adaptation to the conditions of the desert. When it is hot it is cool and when it is cold it is warm. We went up steep and narrow steps to enter these homes. Where we had lunch we continued up another set of stairs to reach the roof of the old city. Here the homes are connected by a series of steps and the roof was the private road of the women of the city. They could go from home to home to visit and not



Robin Winter Odem, formerly of Wapello, pictured in Libya.

be seen by the men who moved through the city on the narrow streets below.

Because of the embargo, tourism in Libya is just developing. Most of the hotels are still government owned and managed. American tourists are extremely rare; we saw no other Americans except those from the embassy, and Libyans often assumed we were European. No tourist visas are issued to US citizens. The Libyan embassy in Washington D.C. issues only Diplomatic, Official and Business visas and these are issued only in response to an invitation

by the Libyan American Friendship Association that had been approved by the Libyan government. We waited some six months for the letter of invitation to be approved by the government and to reach the embassy. As a result we had less than a week from our scheduled departure to get our passports translated into Arabic (a requirement of the Libyan government) and to get our visas. By all reports, this was a remarkable achievement as many have waited months and months for their visas.

(The delegation experienced

lovely hospitality everywhere we went. We were entertained, hosted and welcomed throughout our time in Libya. We found a sincere desire for there to be more interaction and exchanges between Americans and Libyans. For those interested in learning more about our delegation, the blog site is <http://www.libyadelegation.wordpress.com>

Robin Winter Odem, Chap  
Chicago Chapter  
American Women for  
International Understanding

## Select your Monument Together



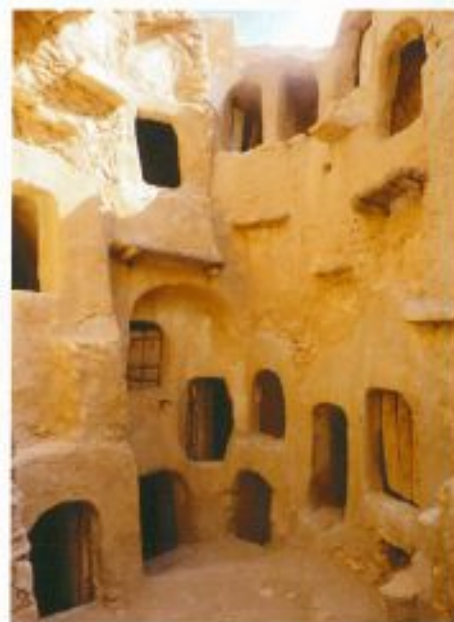
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Libya—Paula Cofresi-Silverstein's summary of Robin Winter Odem's article 2009

The delegation of 11 was granted a business visa, which was very difficult to receive and rarely granted, which allowed for free movement around the country with the accompaniment of a security agent at all times.

The women of AWIU were treated with much importance and were interviewed for television numerous times with cameras following their activities as they went to the historic Roman sites of Sabratha, Leptis Magna and the desert town of Ghadames. The television coverage was shown several times a day on government sponsored TV channels.

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Highlights included visits to non-profit organizations, a presentation of awards to orphans with excellent academic records, a trip to Mecca, a fashion show for modern wear, a discussion of gender equality in employment and education, a long bus trip into the Sahara desert to Ghadames where they attended cultural festivals, and saw Berbers and Tuaregs and other performers in native costume. They met women from Tripoli who were English speaking, well educated and well travelled. The delegates were guests in many lovely homes where they were served delicious food, such as camel meat with couscous, while sitting on huge cushions on the floor.

A special highlight was an invitation to a large beautiful wedding celebration. It was the groom's family receptions for women only. There were no men involved, so the women were free to dress as they pleased. And we saw many flattering evening gowns and dresses. However, when the groom appeared for pictures, many women put on their

scarves. The hijab or head scarf is not required clothing for women in Libya. Even though there is no legal dress requirement, in public over 90% wear the head scarf. We were told that the percentage wearing the scarf is much higher now than it was 10-15 years ago. Wearing the scarf seems to be a combination of religious respect and fashion, as well as delineating a separateness between men and women.

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The delegation experienced lovely hospitality everywhere we went. The people were so happy to see us and went out of their way to entertain us and make us comfortable.

# **Awiulibyadelegation's Blog**

Just another WordPress.com weblog

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## **Learn what's happened since our Delegation and links to pics**

January 4, 2010 by awiulibyadelegation

Now that we have returned from Libya we are reflecting on our delegation and doing presentations of our information to others we want to give you an update and more overview of the delegation experience.

We have had nearly 1000 visits to our blog and over nearly 6000 visits to our flickr account and hosted seven presentations around the country. More presentations are scheduled for 2010. Please contact [infor@awiu.org](mailto:infor@awiu.org) if you would like a presentation for your organization.

You are reading the blog. You can find out about the next presentation by e mailing [awiudelegations1@yahoo](mailto:awiudelegations1@yahoo). And you can check out flickr at

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/awiulibyadelegation/sets/>

We have 29 sets of pictures out there with some explanation to go with it. You can turn each set into a slide show by clicking on the set and then clicking on "slide show" on the right).

As you watch the slide show you can see comments by clicking on the picture and then clicking "show info"

To make it easier to follow our trip we have re ordered our posts from first to last. (normal blog entries are last to first)

Tell us what you think of our trip and our images at [awiudelegations1@yahoo.com](mailto:awiudelegations1@yahoo.com).

Tags: [American Women for International Understanding](#), [awiu](#), [awiu.org](#), [international women](#), [Libya delegation](#), [Libyan American Friendship Association](#), [Libyan women](#), [women delegations](#)  
 Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [Leave a Comment »](#)

## **Post # 1-AWIU GOES TO LIBYA-ARRIVING OCTOBER 23**

January 4, 2010 by awiulibyadelegation

Hello from the AWIU–American Women for International Understanding–delegation to Libya. Ten members are traveling to Libya with our first stop being Tripoli.

In Libya we will be meeting with ngos, government agencies and local people.

We will spend 11 days learning about the country, the culture and the citizens

Please follow our blog to follow our journey.

And a big thank you goes to our Member Magda Sharkasi who made this delegation possible. Magda who belongs to the Chicago Chapter was born in Libya, has a home there and has worked very hard to help AWIU get this delegation on it's way.

Anne Tonks, President

Tags: [American Women for International Understanding](#), [awiu](#), [awiu.org](#), [international women](#), [Libya delegation](#), [Libyan American Friendship Association](#), [Libyan women](#), [women delegations](#)  
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## **SOME BACKGROUND ON LIBYA**

January 4, 2010 by [awiulihyadelegation](#)

Several readers have asked for more information about the country and its history. Here is a copy and paste of the background section of the CIA FACTBOOK. The link

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ly.html>

### **BACKGROUND**

The Italians supplanted the Ottoman Turks in the area around Tripoli in 1911 and did not relinquish their hold until 1943 when defeated in World War II. Libya then passed to UN administration and achieved independence in 1951. Following a 1969 military coup, Col. Muammar Abu Minyar al-QADHAFI began to espouse his own political system, the Third Universal Theory. The system is a combination of socialism and Islam derived in part from tribal practices and is supposed to be implemented by the Libyan people themselves in a unique form of "direct democracy." QADHAFI has always seen himself as a revolutionary and visionary leader. He used oil funds during the 1970s and 1980s to promote his ideology outside Libya, supporting subversives and terrorists abroad to hasten the end of Marxism and capitalism. In addition, beginning in 1973, he engaged in military operations in northern Chad's Aozou Strip – to gain access to minerals and to use as a base of influence in Chadian politics – but was forced to retreat in 1987. UN sanctions in 1992 isolated QADHAFI politically following the downing of Pan AM Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland. During the 1990s, QADHAFI began to rebuild his relationships with Europe. UN sanctions were suspended in April 1999 and finally lifted in

September 2003 after Libya accepted responsibility for the Lockerbie bombing. In December 2003, Libya announced that it had agreed to reveal and end its programs to develop weapons of mass destruction and to renounce terrorism. QADHAFI has made significant strides in normalizing relations with Western nations since then. He has received various Western European leaders as well as many working-level and commercial delegations, and made his first trip to Western Europe in 15 years when he traveled to Brussels in April 2004. The US rescinded Libya's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism in June 2006. In January 2008, Libya assumed a nonpermanent seat on the UN Security Council for the 2008-09 term. In August 2008, the US and Libya signed a bilateral comprehensive claims settlement agreement to compensate claimants in both countries who allege injury or death at the hands of the other country, including the Lockerbie bombing, the LaBelle disco bombing, and the UTA 772 bombing. In October 2008, the US Government received \$1.5 billion pursuant to the agreement to distribute to US national claimants, and as a result effectively normalized its bilateral relationship with Libya. The two countries then exchanged ambassadors for the first time since 1973 in January 2009.

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## **Post # 2–OCTOBER 27–YES INTERNET!!! AND A POST**

January 4, 2010 by awahlbyadelegation

**OUR ARRIVAL:** Friday October 23, 1:55 PM, right on time we arrive in Libya. The AWIU delegation is 7 members from Chicago, 1 from San Diego, 1 from Washington, DC and 2 from the virtual. Chicago members are Robin Winter Otem, Chapter Chair,, Martha Atherton, Past President and Bernice Behrens award winner; Kathleen Heffernan, Lois Ryan, Kathleen Foerster, Joan McEachern and Magda Fehema Sharkasi. Magda is originally from Libya and has been the catalyst for this trip. The other members are Anne Tonks, President; Gayle Morin, Delegation Leader; Kathleen Roche-Tansey and Laura Schuldt.

We are here under the Sponsorship of the Libyan American Friendship Association headed by Executive Director, Dr. AbdrahimMalloug, who is also a professor at the Seventh of April University in a suburb of Tripoli.

**FINALLY OUR TECHNICAL INTERNET DIFFICULTIES ARE OVER:** We have now had three nights in Libya with many meetings but we have not been able to blog because internet access has been very limited and the delegation days start at 8 in the morning and extend typically to 9 or 10 at night.

**SO, WE WILL ADD INFORMATION AS WE CAN.** This trip is exciting and we are meeting many people and learning much about the country. BUT, tomorrow we begin a 3 day trip outside Tripoli and internet access is likely to be even more limited until we return on the 31st.

We have a flickr account and this blog may morph to a flickr update if we can upload the pictures with the wi fi service from this hotel which is erratic.

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/awinlibyadelegation/> So this blog will be an on the fly thing—it the wife is flying and if we have access we will let you know what is happening

### **THE WEDDING PARTY FOR THE GROOM-BUT WOMEN ONLY (well the groom came in after 4 hours for pics)**

The big event of day one was our invitation to the third day of a wedding celebration. We were invited to the groom's family reception held at a club on the grounds of a former US military installation. The groom's celebration is women only. There were about 500 women in attendance. With no men involved the women were free to dress as they pleased. And it pleased them very much to wear their finest and most flattering evening gowns and dresses. Satin, beads and décolletage were the order of the day.

Here is a brief overview of what we have seen so far—we will expand on what we learned as we are able. And we have many many pictures—but to give you an idea of the issues for 12 minutes this internet service has been uploading 6 pictures to flickr. So our time constraints limit the number of pictures we can put up.

Where we took pictures of women at the wedding, we are only going to post those where the women can not be identified. For example, you may see a fabulous blue dress with a trailing skirt made of peacock feathers, but the person wearing the dress will not be shown.

**SEVENTH OF APRIL UNIVERSITY.** Day one after the wedding we headed off to the 7th of April University which is in a suburban area. We were over an hour late because it has been raining very hard here. And although the infra structure is generally good and serviceable, this is the desert and a couple of inches over few hours causes flooding and delays. At the University we learned about their many programs and met some outstanding women students.

They are looking for many more opportunities to send students to the United States and the subject of Visa was raised by the professor presenting the overview. Visa's to the US are hard to arrange. The US has only had an ambassador since December 27th of last year and up until April an individual wanting to apply for a Visa had to go to Tunis to do so.

**LUNCH WITH WOMN LEADERS:** We had a luncheon with distinguished women following our meeting at the embassy. Here we met a woman physician, a college professor who also represents the government on women's affairs, a woman politician also prominent in woman's issues in the government, a lawyer, a journalist and others.

**HANDICAPPED THERAPY CENTER:** We met with the director of a Handicapped and Therapy Center that focuses on both in patient and out patient care and training of accident victims. **FAMILY CARE ASSOCIATION:** Another important group who hosted us was the Family Care Association. This group is all volunteer, but since 1993 has served over 900 families. There care and support is ongoing until a family is able to provide for themselves. Over 400 families who were once clients are now living without assistance.



**LIBYAN AMERICAN FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION:** We met with Dr. Mattoug the director of the Association. We exchanged greetings, discussed our program while in Libya. AWIIJ presented the Association with a Certificate of Appreciation. The association is directly responsible for our access to Libya. Without their letter of invitation we would not have been able to secure visa's. Every where we go we find we are among the first Americans to visit. We find our hosts interested in visiting America and/or promoting more understanding and exchanges between the two countries.

**VISIT TO A GRADE SCHOOL FOR GRADES 1 TO 6.** Here we visited several classrooms and spoke with some students through an interpreter. We asked several classrooms where they might like to travel. Many would like to visit America but others mentioned Europe, Switzerland, Pakistan and other countries as well. Then the school hosted us for light snacks and presentations by boys in English and young girls showing the native costumes of Libya.

**TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS:** It's been over 40 minutes since the photos started uploading to flickr and they are not done yet. It is 11:40 pm and tomorrow we have a day that starts with a checkout from our hotel at 8 am to leave for a TV interview at the Libyan American Friendship Association.

So here is quickly the **highlight of today.** We drove about an hour and ½ out of Tripoli toward the mountains where we met with a branch of El Hanan Association and attended a presentation of awards to orphans with excellent academic records. Also during this awards ceremony they honored an exemplary mother. This woman had 10 children and was widowed in 1973. Now all her children are on their own and successful in their lives. This award involves a present and trip to Mecca for the award winner.

We presented a small monetary award to the association. And we were honored and presented to those present with gifts and a plaque. Later we ate lunch at the home of one of the Executives of the program. Mecca for the award winner.

We have been doing much more in the last few days including learning about the Underground River Project considered by many as the 8th wonder of the world and visiting the Petroleum Institute. We want to expand on what we have learned and are learning. We also met with a staff member from the embassy. He was surprised to find that we had been able to get Visa's and get here. He said that we are one of very few America groups visiting here.

Most people we have met are surprised and pleased to be meeting Americans. Everyone expresses interest in more contact between Americans and Libyans.

For those who don't know it, the visa story is a fascinating saga of it's own. But it will have to wait.

It looks like we may meet the ambassador and his wife early next week just before we leave.

Right now 12:20 am, we have 5 pictures up on flickr—2 from the wedding and 3 from our arrival. More later. Thanks for following us.

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## **Post # 3-TV INTERVIEWS, THE DESERT, MEETING WITH THE AMBASSADOR AND MORE**

January 4, 2010 by awiulibyadelegation

**AWIU IS INTERVIEWED BY LIBYAN TV:** Dr. Matooug, Executive Director of the Libyan Friendship Association arranged for AWIU President Anne Tonks and Delegation Leader Gayle Morin to meet with a TV reporter in his office on Tuesday Morning. The Delegation had met with Dr. MatOoug earlier in the week in the same office. AWIU is grateful for the invitation of LAFA to visit this wonderful country as well as the efforts of Dr. Matooug and LAFA to ensure that we were able to meet with prominent Libyan women, members and recipients of charitable organizations, professors and students of public schools and universities, and to visit ancient archeological sites and festivals.

We have had reports of four separate appearances on Libyan TV, but we have not had the opportunity to see any of the broadcasts.

We were proudly told that Joe Biden the Vice President had met with Dr. Matooug in the same office. In response to the reporter's questions on our impressions of Libya, we related some of our wonderful experiences mentioned above. Highlighted were our visit to the Orphan and Mothers Ceremony with HANA, the Man Made River Project and the visit to the 7<sup>th</sup> of April University where we met with faculty and outstanding women students.

But our strongest message for the interviewer was the warmth and hospitality of the many Libyan people we have met.

**THE DESERT TOWN OF GHADAMES:** Many of the citizens of Libya are light-skinned, dark haired European or Arabic in appearance. Having been occupied by Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Vandals, Arabs and Italians over the centuries and having Berber and Touregs who have lived in Libya for thousands of years, Libya has a diverse and proud history. More than 90% are Muslim which strongly influences behavior and customs in homes, schools, and communities. Since we last updated you we have spent three days in the desert at Ghadames. Ghadames is a town of about 20,000 people close to the borders of Tunisia and Algiers. For many centuries it was part of the trade route of the desert. Since the revolution in 1969 much of the town has been completely reconstructed.

We toured the Old City which in ancient times was home to about 4500 citizens. The city is a warren of covered passageways with houses and shops extending up to two or three stories. When the opportunity for new housing came in the 80's most people moved for the convenience of running water, sewers and electricity.

Many of the original residents still own the properties within the old city. Here we toured a shoe factory where the techniques used are centuries old. The men cut the basic patterns for the boots and slippers from soft red leather and young girls add the hand embroidery and jewelry which make them so unique. Today in Libya these shoes are used for special events.

We also had lunch in a typical old Libya home. The advantage of the old city with its thick walls and covered passageways is its adaptation to the conditions of the desert. When it is hot it is cool and when it is cold at night or in the winter it is warm. We went up steep and narrow and uneven steps and stairs to enter these homes. Where we had lunch we continued up another set of stairs to reach the roofs of the old city. Here the homes are connected by a series of steps and the roof was the private road of the women of the city. They could go from home to home and visit and not be seen by the men who passed through the city on the narrow streets below.

**At the Ghadames Museum:** Ghadames has a small museum with four sections devoted to the history of the area. Upon entering the museum we ran into Ambassador Cretz and his wife touring the museum as well. We were all in Ghadames for the annual festival where over 10,000 people come to shop, perform, watch the dancing, and hear music. When we arrived late the evening before, we checked into our hotel, had a quick dinner and went to the evening performance of the festival. Dr. Malooug was in Ghadames for this event and met us at the Festival where we were fortunate to have front row seats courtesy of Dr. Malooug. News and TV reporters were plentiful, photographing us along with the many officials who were in attendance. We stayed till after 11 watching performances of a wide variety of dancers and musicians in fabulous costumes perform that represented their villages and tribes. We saw Berbers and Touregs and others. The performance went on long after we left, but the last performer we saw was a singer in a white blazer and jeans accompanied by two costumed belly dancers. This performance was popular with the crowd and was a long performance lasting at least 8 or 9 minutes. The endurance of the women dancers was noted with some wonder.

**WE GO TO THE SAHARA DUNES, EAT SAND BREAD AND SEE A DUNE VERSION OF AN AUTO RALLY.** After our morning in town and a lunch at a typical restaurant, we had a rare experience. We took a rare 30 minute break at our hotel. This was the "fast break" version of the desert siesta period. There are so many people to meet and so much to see that we have on all days traveled beginning at 8 or 9 in the morning and continued through 12 to 14 hr days with no breaks.

At 5 PM we got into four wheel vehicles and drove to the Sahara Desert which is about 20 minutes out of Ghadames. Here we climbed the up to the high point of the area where for centuries there was a fort. At the top at the remaining ruins of the fort you can see for miles. From here you can see both the desert dunes rolling on for miles and in the distance both Tunisia and Algeria.

Reentering the vehicles we drove to a gathering point on the dunes to see the sunset. A desert sunset is bright, colorful and quick. We went to a typical desert tent of woven fabric with colorful rugs for seating where watched the cooking of "sand" bread. This bread is made simply with water, flour and salt. It is seasoned with anise seeds and decorated with sesame seeds

before being buried in a sand pit for cooking. We ate pieces broken from the round flat loaf while still hot. It was delicious, particularly when eaten with a traditional frothed sweet tea drink.

Then we climbed in the sand up to the top of a nearby dune. There were several hundred people lining the tops of nearby dunes. When we drove up in the twilight we could see the figures silhouetted and at first marveled that the desert had "trees". But the "trees" were people gathered to see the sunset and the informal 4 wheel drive desert races.

Drivers in four-wheel drive vehicles were racing up and down steep dunes. Even after dark this racing demonstrations continued. We were particularly intrigued by one of the drivers who was a woman. (It is not unusual to see women drive in the city, but this was the only woman driver we saw in the desert.) She was driving a dark Mercedes and was a crowd favorite. Men standing around us kept pointing her out to us. His demonstrations of machismo by a woman was a rarity. This is a country where women by choice wear head scarves from their Muslim tradition. And you don't see many women out in public in the evening. At one point this woman driver got her car stuck in the deep sand. She jumped out and began to let the air pressure out of her tires to give her more traction. This was "old meets new" desert style in the dunes.

**WE VISIT A TOUREG Festival:** On our second morning we were the first to visit a Toureg Festival. We were early but our guide was able to get us inside. Here the camels were in the center of the camp in a corral made of sticks and branches and the typical tents which serve for sleeping and for selling were not yet ready for the day.

We saw a family preparing their own sand bread for breakfast. Later as the camp came to life we saw camels being saddled. Gayle and Magda each had a camel ride on one very cranky camel who didn't much seem to appreciate our early morning visit. He was snarling and making rude noises who showing his big dark stained teeth.

The Ambassador and his wife arrived just as we were leaving and we exchanged greetings and met more people traveling with the Ambassador.

**VISITING FORTIFIED FOOD STORAGE BUILDINGS IN THE DESERT:** There is so much to tell on this trip and so little time to write it that we know this blog may leap from place to place. But on our trip to and from Ghadames we stopped several times to see ruins. Particularly interesting was the town of LaLude. Like the Ancient city of Ghadames this Berber town on the top of a spectacular Mesa was inhabited until the late 70's when the residents moved to nearby new housing. We toured and photographed the original city. We visited the circular storage center. Food is always a prized commodity but particularly in the desert. The ancient civilizations developed storage buildings which were solid on the outside with large interiors and several stories high with narrow steps built into the walls to reach the top stores. Throughout the building were storage areas with jars for grain and for olive oil. These buildings had a single entrance so all the stores could easily be locked and guarded.

**MODERN CARAVAN SERRIAS.** The old camel routes had centers where camels and people could stop and overnight and refuel both men and beasts. The modern day version of this is the service station with a restaurant. We stopped at one of these both going and coming from

Ghadames. We had a couple of chance encounters here that demonstrated the many opportunities for meeting new people. The waiter in the restaurant was a young man in his 20's wearing a blue turban who had lived for two years in Sweden. Soon he and Martha Atherton were conversing in Swedish. And we met a woman lawyer from Cairo who was working for the ministry of Justice in Libya designing new legal systems. Throughout our journey we are privileged to meet many who added to our experience.

**WE MEET THE AMBASSADOR FOR "REAL"** Back in Tripoli we are invited to tea at the home of *Deputy Chief of Mission Joan Polaschik*. Here we met with Ambassador Cretz—see his biography here—(<http://libya.usembassy.gov/principal.html>). The ambassador has been here since December of last year. He made a presentation to our group about the challenges and opportunities for the US in Libya. The last time the US had an ambassador here was over 40 years ago. Since 2003 when Qaddafi agreed to renounce weapons of mass destruction the US has been working to normalize relations with the government of Libya. Right now Libya is strategically located in the Middle East and is a Muslim country that the U.S. believes will be an ally against terrorism. There are many business opportunities and the tourism industry is at an early stage.

**RECIPROCAL VISA CHALLENGES:** We discussed visa's between Libya and the US. There are over 1500 students from Libya now in the US on student visa's. Reciprocal student visas to Libya are an unresolved issue.

We are traveling on a business visa which and we are one of the few groups of US to be able to enter Libya. We would not be here without the assistance of the Libyan American Friendship Association.

The embassy is working to improve the visa opportunities between the two countries.

**AWIU CAN HELP EDUCATE AMERICANS ABOUT LIBYA TODAY:** The Ambassador stressed that our Delegation can help the relationship between Libya and the US by informing people about what we observed during our time in Libya. He encouraged us to write about our experiences here. He urged us to be active and to educate as many as possible about our positive experiences in this hospitable country.

**OLD MEETS NEW:** The connection between the old and the new says much about a country. And on the old side of the equation, Our group has had the opportunity to tour some of the old sites. Here is a quick recap of our visits to some of the old with some links for more information. So here we jump back a bit in our travels and tell about our experience with the old.

**Libya has some of the best Roman sites in the World.**

**THE NATIONAL MUSEUM:** The National Museum in Tripoli is a new treasure displaying old treasures. See some photos here  
[http://www.galenfrysinger.com/tripoli\\_libya\\_museum.htm](http://www.galenfrysinger.com/tripoli_libya_museum.htm)

The Museum is located next to the souk or old Medina on the waterfront. Here they display cars from the revolutionary period in Libya, but most of the items shown here start around the first or second century BC. They also have a strong showing of items from the pre civilization period going back to 8000 BC.

**SABRATHA:** (see pics here [http://www.travelpod.com/ad/Roman\\_Sabratha-Sabratah](http://www.travelpod.com/ad/Roman_Sabratha-Sabratah)) The Roman cities of Sabratha and Leptis Magna are both on the coast an hour or two outside of Tripoli. Both were ancient cities and active trading ports. The museum prominently displays frescoes or “mosaicos” and statuary from both Roman and Greek periods from these two sites and others.

The first day the delegation visited the museum. Then on Day 2 we visited Sabrahta. Sabratha is particularly recognized for its huge theater. Recently, special events have been staged in the theater to commemorate occasions such as the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the revolution.

**LEPTIS MAGNA:** (see pics here [http://www.travelpod.com/ad/Leptis\\_Magna-Al\\_Khums](http://www.travelpod.com/ad/Leptis_Magna-Al_Khums)) This is the archeological site of a once-magnificent Roman city occupied by 10,000 citizens. Among the features here are the ancient baths, the ancient court and church and the largest Roman amphitheater in the World.

**BLOG INFORMATION:** AWIU has provided this information about our trip in blog form, but we have been limited by a lack of time due to our passion for seeing everything possible and by the lack of internet access. We begin to return to the US in two days—but the blog entries will continue after our return. Each of our Delegation members has many personal experiences and observations which they will be adding in the coming days. For those who have waited with patience for entries to appear—we thank you.

This AWIU delegation is committed to bringing our knowledge back to the US and sharing it with as many as we can. So until later—we sign off from Tripoli.

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## **Post # 4—THOUGHTS ON WOMEN, HOSPITALITY AND MORE REPORTS ON EVENTS**

January 4, 2010 by [awialibyadelegation](#)

Although the AWIU delegation has returned to the US, we will continue our blog to fill in information that we didn't have time to report before.

**THE PETROLEUM INSTITUTE:** On the second day in Tripoli we visited the Petroleum Institute. This school is funded by the oil companies with a budget of \$20 million per year. With 1000 students this works out to \$20,000 per student. Students who live on campus come from all over Libya. And the competition for places in the school is intense. They have 4 or 5 applications



for each opening each year. This campus is complete in all respects including a mosque and some very high tech simulation equipment designed particularly for training in the oil industry.

The managers of the institute are men who were mostly trained in either the United States or the United Kingdom. The institute trains students in the technical aspects of the oil industry, English and office skills such as Excel and Word. Jobs are readily available for the graduates.

**CHICAGO CONNECTIONS:** Our Libyan host member, Magda Sharkasi, is from the Chicago Chapter as were 6 other members of the Delegation. So, as we introduced ourselves, Chicago was always mentioned. And we found that Chicago was well known to many we met in Libya for two reasons.

As you might expect Obama was one of the reasons. But the other well known Chicago notable was Ophra. We heard several mention that they watch her every day. Another sign of how "connected" the world is today.

**ZAKAT:** Several times during our trip we heard about Zakat which is a requirement that Muslims support charitable and religious programs.. On the last night of our trip we talked with the Executive Director of the Family Care Association and gained a greater understanding of the personal nature of the support they provide to families. Most of their funds result from contributions or Zakat. However, in addition to contributions, the volunteers for this organization work closely with each family to help them attain independence. It seems that the financial support from Zakat plus the personal support for volunteers accounts for their almost 50% success rate. Success being measured as families who once needed their services who work themselves into an independent circumstance.

**SPECIAL WORLD OF WOMEN:** We had the opportunity to meet many women in business and office settings and in personal and private settings. The hijab or head scarf is not required clothing for women in Libya. This contrasts to Iran where a scarf is required by the Islamic Republic and a woman can be arrested for not dressing properly. Even though there is no legal dress requirement in Libya, in public well over 90% of women wear the head scarf. We were told that the percentage wearing black is much higher now than it was 10 or 15 years ago. Wearing the scarf seems to be a combination of religious respect and fashion.

**WEARING OF THE HIJAB:** Women generally start wearing the hijab or head scarf in their early teens. Most wear scarves which drape the head and are wrapped at the neck. There is a wide variation in colors and materials. Girls of 10 or less do not typically wear the scarf. We sometimes saw a woman who had the most conservative use of the scarf—meaning her head and face except for the eyes were covered,—holding the hand of her young daughter who was dressed in jeans and bright tops and sneakers.

**WOMEN'S DRESS AT HOME:** We had the opportunity to meet women in their homes. At home with only women present, women do not wear the scarf. At our lunch after the HANA association meeting you could sense a special bond between the women. We women gathered in the living room and sat on low couches and ate food from large common bowls. There was lots of informal conversation and laughter. After the food was cleared the hostesses took their

scarves tied it around their hips and began a dance which was followed with laughter and clapping by the other women. There seemed to be a special ease and closeness among the women present. And even though those of us from AWIU came from a different culture, most of us sensed a commonality and bond with the Libyan women we joined in this informal home setting.

When a male reporter came to interview us, scarves were donned again. The scarf delineates a separateness between men and women.

At the wedding, where there were several hundred women and even the musical group was all women, women dressed as they pleased. Most were elaborately dressed in ball gowns or elaborate traditional dress. Most did not wear scarves with only women present. However, when the groom arrived and was now the only man present, most women donned their scarves with respect for the traditional differences between men and women..

**GENDER EQUALITY:** Under the law, women and men have equal treatment in employment and education. At a tea on our last day we discussed the topic of gender equality with a number of well educated career women. There was agreement that the opportunities for women are much greater now than they were 20 or so years ago. Qaddafi is seen as supportive of women in education and employment.

The women present clearly demonstrated opportunities in business and the professions. There were teachers, heads of schools and charities, architects, dentists and several other professions in attendance. Several of the women were successful business owners. Some of the businesses had international ties as well as local ties.

On the subject of equal pay for equal work there was disagreement. Some women present said there was no difference between pay for men and women doing the same work. But in private conversations others said they women were often paid less than their male counterparts for the same type of work. We admitted that studies in the US show that women still on average receive lower pay than men in similar jobs.

**URBAN VERSUS RURAL OPPORTUNITY:** As might be expected, most of the women we met were from Tripoli, English speaking and well educated. Many of them had traveled out of the country.

These opportunities contributed to their success and sense of well being. But, we heard from them that in the cities women had more opportunities for employment and education than did women in distant or rural areas. Living in an urban setting contributed to the opportunities available to both women and men. Change is slower in more distant areas of the country.

**HOSPITALITY IS EVERYWHERE AND NATURAL:** We experienced fabulous hospitality everywhere we went. We were entertained, hosted, gifted and welcomed throughout our time in Libya. We found a sincere desire to have more interaction between US citizens and Libyan citizens. There was an genuine openness to Americans and to US opportunities for both friendship and business connections.

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## **Post # 5 TOURISM INFRA STRUCTURE AND LIBYAN SOUP**

January 4, 2010 by awiufibyadelegation

**TOURISM IN LIBYA:** Because of the embargo, tourism in Libya is just developing. Most of the hotels are still government owned and managed. American tourists are extremely rare: we saw no other Americans except those from the embassy, and Libyans often assumed we were European. No tourist visas are issued to U.S. citizens. The Libyan embassy in Washington D.C. issues only Diplomatic, Official and Business visas and these are issued only in response to an invitation by the Libyan government. We were issued business visas after the embassy received a letter of invitation initiated by the Libyan American Friendship Association that had been approved by the Libyan government. We waited some six months for the letter of invitation to be approved by the government and to reach the embassy. As a result we had less than a week from our scheduled departure get our passports translated into Arabic (a requirement of the Libyan government) and to get our visas. By all reports, this was a remarkable achievement as many have waited months and months for their visas.

At our request we stayed primarily in small hotels which, with one exception, were clean and adequate. All were conveniently located, some with views of the Mediterranean Sea. These are the hotels used by most foreign businessmen. We were told that the government could decide to move us to other hotels at any time, but this did not happen to us. The nicest rooms were in a small hotel run by our tour agency, Arkno tours.

**THE DUGOUT HOUSE:** On the way to Ghadames we stopped for dinner in a subterranean structure that was 343 years old and still owned by the same family. The patriarch of the Berber family built the many roomed structure underground in 1666. The entire structure is 27 feet below the surface and has been expanded over the years to include 8 large rooms which each housed one family. The families were large and shared cooking duties by sharing cooking facilities which were separate from the sleeping and eating rooms. By building structures below ground, these desert peoples were able to protect their dwellings from invaders because you couldn't see them from above ground and at the same time, control the temperatures that were above 100 degrees in summer and extremely cold in the winter.

In the desert this underground dwelling is perfect for the extreme conditions there. During the hottest and coldest times, the temperature is a comfortable 68 degrees.

We entered the house to the music of a local group. We had a demonstration by Magda of some local line dancing and we all joined in on the dance floor and tried to copy her. Then we had dinner in one of the family homes (one room about 20 by 30). Our host for the evening had been born in that very room 39 years ago and was the youngest of 9 children that grew up there. Each of the rooms is divided into three parts separated by curtains.

The first section is the public living section, the second is the area for children and the third area is for the parents. And in an alcove at the very back of the room is a primitive "privy".

The cooking for all 8 families was done in a communal kitchen. It is now a tourist attraction and no families live there. However, it was occupied by at least one family until 6 or 7 years ago.

**LIBYAN SOUP:** They say an army travels on its stomach. And that can also be true for tourists. Libyans are famous for their soups and their desserts—and their white bread (their sand bread with sesame and anise seeds is pretty good too—if a bit gritty). We had Libya soup nearly once a day and it was delicious. And the white bread served with it was just right for dipping (sorry Emily Post)

This is so typically Libyan that we are providing three different links here to slightly different Libyan Soups!!

The first is one with coriander which we would guess is the spice we remember. However, there are two other versions as well. You can find the recipe in the following links:

<http://www.innamaskitchen.com/RECIPES/RECIPES/Maghreb/Libya/shorba-libiya.htm>

And here is another with cinnamon

In the picture this looks right since most have a tomatoe base

<http://pomegranatesandzaatar.blogspot.com/2009/06/shorba-libiya-libyan-soup.html>

But our guess is this is the one that is most like what we had in Libya

[http://www.cliffordawright.com/caw/recipes/display/bycountry.php/recipe\\_id/865/id/11/](http://www.cliffordawright.com/caw/recipes/display/bycountry.php/recipe_id/865/id/11/)

Lots of soup experimenting here.

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [Leave a Comment »](#)

## **Post # 6 Lois Ryan, Chicago Chapter, Adds Her Observations**

January 4, 2010 by awulibyadelegation

Lois Ryan, former attorney from the Chicago Chapter, adds to our discussion of the Delegation to Libya.

Here are her reflections:

## JAMAHIRIYA MUSEUM IN TRIPOLI, SABRATHA & LEPTIS MAGNA:

For those delegates particularly interested in art and history, the highlights of our journey to Libya were our excursions to the Jamahiriya Museum in Tripoli, Sabratha (to the west of Tripoli) and Lepis Magna (to the east of Tripoli), all on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. We particularly enjoyed visiting these sites with our Libyan hostesses. Several of them had not returned to these inestimable archaeological treasures since they or their youngsters were school children. Their responses, as more experienced adults, to these amazing sites were wonderful to witness and share.

It was fascinating for all of us to see the various layers of civilization built upon one another by the Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Ottomans, Arabs, etc. Much of the archaeological work to date was done by the Italians in the 20th Century. There has been a very turbulent history in this part of North Africa.

We visited the Jamahiriya Museum in Tripoli first to get an overview of the history and art of Libya. The Museum houses one of the finest collections of classical art in the Mediterranean. Built in consultation with UNESCO at enormous cost, it is a world class institution with extraordinary displays of the statuary, mosaics, pottery, coins, etc. of the early civilizations. We were fortunate to have a guide to the exhibits who facilitated our understanding and preparation for visiting the ruins at Sabratha & Leptis Magna. The exhibit placards of explanation are only in Arabic, so it is necessary to have translations regarding the various displays. The upper floors of the museum were under restoration, so we did not see those areas of the Museum. However, the chronological exhibits on the lower floors were breathtaking.

There is a new, additional Museum which will open soon in the gorgeous domed Governor's Palace, in Tripoli, which will house additional exhibits, and should be extremely interesting to see in the future.

On the day we drove to Sabratha there was a strong rain storm and the highways were flooded, making it difficult to reach our destination(s). We had completed a wonderful visit with the women students in the School of Education at the Seventh of April University in the morning before going on to Sabratha.

At the Sabratha site, there is an exceptional museum also, which helped our understanding before we ventured out into the ruins. We had an extremely knowledgeable and helpful docent accompanying us on this tour of Sabratha. It is hard to express the extraordinary beauty of the architecture, statuary, mosaics, etc. at Sabratha. The Roman Highways are still perfectly serviceable. The sophisticated techniques used to place the blocks has maintained the roads in working condition for thousands of years.

The second century A.D. was the great period in the history of these three great cities, i.e. Sabratha, Oea (Tripoli) and Lepis Magna. Goods such as ivory, animals, slaves, and precious stones were brought by caravans from the south of Africa through the Sahara to the coast and then shipped throughout the Mediterranean areas. The amphitheater of Sabratha could seat

about 5,000 spectators, making it the largest among the theaters of Roman North Africa. The amphitheatre has been quite fully restored, particularly the stage areas. The front of the elevated stage is simply magnificent, and three large concave niches are the highlight. We met fellow travelers from France while up in the amphitheatre seats.

A huge rain storm had previously caught us walking through the women's bath ruins. We had to stay out of the rain and wind under the vaults of the baths until the storm from the Mediterranean stopped raging toward us on the shore line.

We later also visited Leptis Magna, which is even bigger and more impressive and important than Sabratha (if that is possible). Leptis Magna had become the greatest Roman city in Africa because of a native son, Septimius Severus (r AD193 – 211), who became Emperor of Rome through the military ranks. He bestowed enormous prestige on his African capital – Leptis Magna. Here we saw the magnificent Hadrianic Baths, judicial courts which became the Severan Basilica, the fabulous theatre, etc. etc. The Arch of Severus at the entry to the ruins is at the intersection of the Roman roads leading to the sea shore and the interior and parallel to the shore.

These Roman sites seem so much more impressive than the sites at Ephesus and the Moroccan shores. There is still an enormous amount of archaeological work that could be done in Libya, which makes the future even more exciting.

We had the good fortune of being escorted for security purposes throughout our journey in Libya by Major Anwar Abu Zhenain, who has also written a book entitled, Mostac Art in Libya, Stone Lyrics. Several of our delegates purchased his book while in Libya. The book is written in both Arabic and English, and was used as a reference during our trip.

Later in our journey, we appreciated the fact that the exhibit placards in the museum in Ghadames were in both Arabic and English. The culture of the southwest oasis city of Ghadames is very different than the Tripoliana cities, but equally fascinating. Eight hundred year old Ghadames is now a UNESCO World Heritage site. We were so lucky to be visiting on the one weekend a year that the three-day town festival is held. People came from everywhere to celebrate the old city.

All in all, we were so very fortunate to see and do as much as we did in our short stay of 11 days. We will be forever grateful to our Libyan hostesses and hosts for their generosity of time and talent during our delegation's recent visit.

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [Leave a Comment »](#)

October 20, 2009 by awiulibyadelegation

Hi fellow travellers. Look forward to seeing you all on Thursday and or Friday.

this is my first blog...



# **RUSSIA**

## **2010**

# AWIU Russia Delegation



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*Dear American Women for International Understanding,*

*Welcome AWIU Russia Delegation. This 15-day Delegation begins in St. Petersburg, the Venice of the North, Peter the Great's "window on the west." In addition to your official agenda, we'll visit the Hermitage, one of the world's most amazing museums; step inside the Peter and Paul Fortress; marvel at Catherine the Great's palace; see the Admiralty Building and Smolny Convent.*

*To meet with officials in residence, we're whisked off by overnight train to Moscow, established 200 years later than the founding of Vladimir – the capital of Russia. Again, in addition to your Delegation visits, you will marvel at Red Square; step inside the Kremlin; shop in GUM; see St. Basil's Cathedral and delight at the world-famous Moscow Circus.*

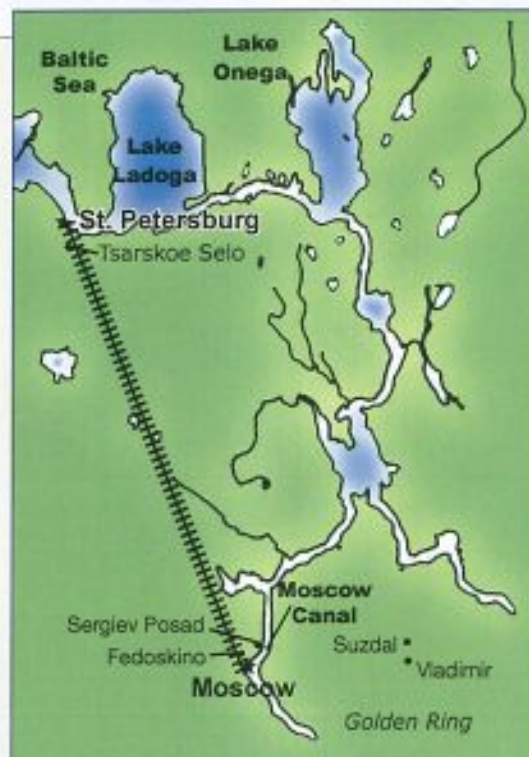
*Next we'll visit the Golden Ring and the Medieval towns of Vladimir and Suzdal. We'll stop in Fedoskino to step into a picture-perfect village made famous by the exquisite papier-mâché boxes.*

*Finally we return to our nice hotel in Moscow and continue our AWIU connections. The order of sightseeing will be slightly rearranged to accommodate these official meetings.*

*Let us show you Russia at its best.*

*Gwen*

**Gwen Erwood**  
President of TCI



### Discovery Highlights

- Fly roundtrip from New York via **FINNAIR**
- Meet with Russian officials, NGOs and other women's groups
- Travel in comfort and security with our private coach and our favorite guide, Ludmila
- Visit the Hermitage, one of the world's great museums, in the Winter Palace
- Visit the mysterious Usipov Palace
- Take an excursion into the Russian countryside to Tsarskoe Selo to see the exquisite Catherine Palace
- Stroll the fashionable Nevsky Prospekt, marveling at the grand neoclassical architecture
- See the fountains at Peterhof
- Travel first class by overnight train to Moscow
- Stand in Moscow's Red Square in the shadow of St. Basil's Cathedral
- Venture inside the walls of the formidable Kremlin to discover its hidden treasures
- Enjoy a guided tour of the Armory
- Delight in a show of the Moscow Circus
- Visit a school and artist in Moscow
- Meet with the Women's Union of Russia
- Explore the countryside and the medieval towns of Vladimir and Suzdal
- See artists in Fedoskino produce miniature paintings and **authentic** Russian lacquer boxes and have the opportunity to make purchases
- Enjoy convenience – Most meals and all tips prepaid



### About AWIU (American Women for International Understanding)

Pictured above is the receiving line at the AWIU International Women of Courage Event. Those pictured from left to right are the International Women of Courage awardees from the countries of Iraq, Niger, Malaysia, Russia and Uzbekistan and an AWIU member host.

## AWIU GOES TO RUSSIA–Trip Summary Post–Detailed posts follow in trip order

Posted on July 8, 2012

AWIU completed its 48th member delegation with a two week trip to Russia. The delegation met with a number of non profit and governmental organizations in St Petersburg and Moscow.

Trip Highlights were

1. Meeting with students of oriental studies St Petersburg University
2. Meeting with Jocelyn Greene, wife of the US Ambassador to Moscow at Spaso House, the Embassy Residence in Moscow.
3. Meeting with a Consortium of Women's NGO's to learn more about issues for women in modern Russia. This group represents 160 women's organizations around the country.
4. Session at the Moscow Carnegie Institute, an award winning think tank. Here we heard about the political and social issues in the country.
5. Met with the Women's Union of Russia. This organization is a vital thread in the government of Russia. They were formed in the early 90's to represent women to the congress of Russia.
6. We spent 1 1/2 hours with Chairman Platanov, the head of the Moscow DUMA or the Moscow City Council. This meeting was filmed and segments were presented that day on the Moscow TV news at 3 and 6 PM.
7. Meeting with Veronika Marchenko, Founder and Chairman of Mother's Rights, an NGO dedicated to supporting the rights of Russian Soldier's. Veronika was a 2009 International Women of Courage Awardee and was hosted by AWIU at our 2009 Gala at the National Press Club.

The delegation is now back in the US and is doing presentations to interested organizations on the Russia trip and the insights gained in Russia.

If you want a presentation for your group or if you have any questions about the trip, please e mail AWIU President, Anne Tonks [annetonks@yahoo.com](mailto:annetonks@yahoo.com).

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | Tagged [American Women for International Understanding](#), [AWIU](#), [AWIU.org](#), [russia](#), [russia women](#), [Women's issues in Russia](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

## AWIU GOES TO RUSSIA

Posted on July 6, 2012

AWIU's 9 member delegation arrived in St Petersburg, Russia on May 13 for a two week visit to St Petersburg, Moscow and the historic Golden Ring.

**THE DELEGATION:** Delegation members are Anne Tonks, President; Gayle Morin, VP Delegations, Kathleen Hunt, VP Membership; Barbara Rubio, Chair, Virtual Chapter; Robin Winter Oden, Chair, Chicago Chapter; Diane McGlinchey, Chair, Orange County Chapter; Merry Lee Eilers, Co-Chair, Northern California Chapter; Laura Schuldt, Chair, Washington DC Chapter and Judith Russell, Member Virtual Chapter. In Moscow they will be joined by Yeena Rozin, a new AWIU member working in Moscow who has helped in all aspects of the [Aurkuzsadelegation's Blog](#).  
Created from website of blog at WordPress.com.

**MISSION OF THE DELEGATION:** The purpose of the delegation is to support the AWIU mission of person to person dialogue and understanding between people from around the world.

We have arranged many meetings in the country including with Jocelyn Greene, the wife of the Ambassador, The Moscow Carnegie Center, A consortium of 160 Women NGO's, the Russian 2000 Secretary of State's International Women of Courage Winner, Veronika Marchenko; The Women's Union of Russia and with the Moscow City Council or as it is called in Russia—the Moscow DUMA and many others.

AWIU Virtual Chapter has been studying Russia for the last year in anticipation of the Delegation. Delegation member Vesna Bozic belongs to that Chapter and has brought many opportunities to the delegation to meet with local organizations in Russia.

**THE ITINERARY:** The delegates will spend 4 days in St Petersburg and 9 days in Moscow and vicinity. As the delegates are learning about life in Russia, this blog will provide links to areas and topics about the country and its history and life at present in the country.

**BACKGROUND ON RUSSIA:** Here are some of the links used in the Delegation planning. These links

provide background to Russia and to some of the sites we visited in St. Petersburg.

On Russia—just the facts—can be found in the CIA Fact Book which you can find here

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rs.html> Russia is vast and has a history going back well over 1000 years as a nation. Currently the country has 140 million people and spans 11 time zones from the European border to Siberia. Well it stretches over 11 times zones for the world—but recently for administrative reasons—Russia consolidated to only 8 time zones.

**St. Petersburg. A city of about 5 million near the Baltic Sea. Home to the Hermitage, one of the world's most famous museums. Learn more here:**

**[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint\\_Petersburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Petersburg)** The city is filled with canals and is known as the Venice of Russia

**FIRST STOP:** University of St Petersburg. We visited with students from the Department of Japanology and School of Japanese Language, within the Oriental and African Department at the University of St. Petersburg. Professor Victor Rybin introduced the class, and told us that the History of Japanology goes back 300 years to Peter the Great who founded Japanese Studies.

The students here were studying Japanese and Chinese and other languages. Their studies focus on the far eastern side of Russia 10 or 11 time zones from Europe.

There were Introduction of the AWIU women and an explanation of what we do. The students introduced themselves. Barbara Rubio asked what led them to learn Japanese. Most intend to become translators for Japanese who visit or work in Russia. For instance, Toyota employees. There are not too many Japanese tourists.

The students here spend 80 % of the time learning to write Japanese, and 20% speaking the language

We were told about the St. Petersburg University: There are about 20,000 students, faculty and tutors. Tuition costs about \$7,000. Some students pay. The government pays tuition for the top students.

In the Oriental and African Department, 612 students are enrolled. Ninety languages are offered.

In elementary and high schools, English is the main second language now.

They gave us an overview of their program and we had the opportunity to the Universities sculpture garden.

See and overview of the University here

<http://www.eng.spbu.ru/university/today/>

**STARTING TO LEARN ABOUT RECENT HISTORY OF RUSSIA IN ST. PETERSBURG:** By recent we mean 1700 to the present!!!

St. Petersburg is near the Baltic Sea and has been the capital of Russia in the past. This city was founded as a link to Europe and its commerce which could be reached by sea from this port. It was the dream of Peter the Great to link Russia closely to Europe and he chose St. Petersburg as the place to start. Learn more about him



here [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter\\_1\\_of\\_Russia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_1_of_Russia)

**THE HERMITAGE:** This is one of the most famous museums in the world and it is located in the Winter Palace used by Catherine the Great and other members of that royal family. Here are links to what we saw.

<http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html/En/index.html>

Check out pictures of the Hermitage taken by the delegation here:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/50034331@N02/sets/72157624097854694/>

More tomorrow on more historic sites in St. Petersburg and our overnight train trip between St Petersburg and today's modern capital Moscow.

Posted in Uncategorized | [Leave a comment](#)

## **CASTLES, CASTLES AND CATHEDRALS**

Posted on July 6, 2012

Today in our blog we tell you about some of the sites we saw as we learned about the early history of Russia and the impact of the Romanoff Family.

Come back tomorrow to learn about our overnight train trip from St. Petersburg to Moscow and our first person to person meeting with Jocelyn Greene: Jocelyn is the wife of the US Ambassador to Russia. She is a long time student of Russia and the area. She speaks candidly about Russia today and the role of women in this evolving country.

But for 300 years the Romanoff Family dynasty which began in 1613 left a legacy not only in St Petersburg but in all of Russia. We told you yesterday about our visit to the Hermitage which began as the Winter Palace for the family.

The fabulous collection there began during the reign of Catherine the Great in 1762.

Our delegation spent the next two days visiting more palaces and cathedrals from the 18<sup>th</sup> century which were the homes or places of worship for the family.

For over 300 years Romanoffs ruled Russia ending with the death of Czar Nicholas and his family in 1917. They were killed as part of the Communist Revolution which was the beginning of modern Russia

In Moscow the delegation will meet with groups who will inform us of the current Russia. Visiting St. Petersburg we learn about the nearly 400 years of history which sets the framework for today.

**THE SUMMER PALACE:** This opulent palace was the favorite of Elizabeth of Russia

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth\\_of\\_Russia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_of_Russia)

We learned that if we saw over the top “gilt” (not guilt—she had none of this) it was a design for Elizabeth who ruled before Catherine the Great. Elizabeth believed in “only the best” When she

died she had a collection of 15000 dresses but only 3 rubles in the treasury. She had as many as 6 illegitimate children but since none of them could succeed her she chose her nephew—husband of Catherine the Great as her heir.

To reach this palace we drove out of St Petersburg passing through pleasant residential areas.

**TODAY, PEOPLE LIVE IN RESIDENTIAL HIGH RISES RINGING THE CENTRAL CITY** See some of our pics of residential high rises here:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/50034331@N02/sets/72157624347909941/show/>

**PETERHOF IS ALL ABOUT FOUNTAINS:** Peter the Great built a palace right on the Baltic. It had an elaborate system of Fountains. See our pics of the fountains here

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/50034331@N02/sets/72157623981850675/show/>

and see the professional description of the palace here

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Summer\\_Palace\\_%28Saint\\_Petersburg%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Summer_Palace_%28Saint_Petersburg%29)

See more details here

<http://cruises.about.com/od/northerneuropeancruises/ig/Peterhof—Russian-Palace/>

**BACK IN ST PETERSBURG WE GO TO A RUSSIA FOLK SHOW, VISIT THE Church of Our Savior on the Spilled Blood and see a PINK CADILLAC.**

**THE CHURCH OF OUR SAVIOR ON THE SPILLED BLOOD IS AN ICONIC CHURCH IN ST. PETERSBURG.** It is a domed Byzantium style church.

Learn more here: <http://www.saint-petersburg.com/virtual-tour/church-of-savior.asp>

**MARY KAY COSMETICS CONVENTION:** At our hotel in St Petersburg we visited with some women who were attending a Mary Kay Cosmetic Convention in St Petersburg. The founder of Mary Kay used to award a pink Cadillac to their most successful sales people—and while visiting the Church of the Spilled Blood we saw a pink Cadillac parked across the street.

Now here are our pics of both the Church of the Spilled Blood and the Pink Cadillac parked across from the church

**RUSSIAN FOLK SHOW:** Our last event in St Petersburg was a Russian Folk Show. There was amusing dancing and spirited singing and a light dinner of traditional Russian food including caviar on small bread circles and vodka.

See some of our images from that event [here](#).

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/50034331@N02/sets/72157624106310686/show/>

**NEXT WE TRAIN OVERNIGHT TO MOSCOW, MEET WITH JOCELYN GREENE AT SPASO HOUSE AS PART OF OUR WEEK OF MEETINGS WITH NGO'S AND GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN MOSCOW.**

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | Tagged [Next to last paragraph should read, "the execution of the last year and his family"](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

## **THE NIGHT TRAIN TO MOSCOW**

Posted on [July 6, 2010](#)

Does that sound like a song title? Maybe not—read on to find out why.

### **NIGHT TRAIN FROM ST PETERSBURG TO MOSCOW**

The train leaves at 11:40 pm and arrives at 8:50 am. Here is a pic of the train and the sleeping car. Each compartment has 2 hard beds about 6' 6" inches long. There is a window between the beds with a small table underneath. Your luggage can go several places, but none are easy to reach.

#### **The Adventure Begins: Getting to the train**

Getting to the train is a challenge because we needed to hire a porter. The porters charged \$6 for each bag and more to put a bag onto the train.

Often while traveling some of the most irritating experiences come from taxi drivers and porters. These porters were true to this tradition. In this case a porter grabbed the money from our guide's hand and wouldn't give us our luggage until more money was forth coming. They also grabbed 100 ruble notes (about \$3.30) from two different people as "Tip". Before entering the station we were strongly advised to beware of pick pockets and keep close attention to our hand bags. But the only pick pockets we encountered were actually our porters.

## ONCE ON BOARD YOUR FIRST TEST IS TO STORE YOUR LUGGAGE:

You can lift up the bed and there is a box space underneath for luggage. Smaller luggage can go under the table. And high above over the door is room for two good sized suitcases, but even a tall person must stand on the bed and lift the luggage over their head to get it in the space. Here is what you can look like

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/50074331@N02/sets/72157624006101797/show/>

Fortunately for some of us on the train, a gentleman, named Fema from Princeton offered to lift some bags into that space. As we were traveling we met a number of business people from the United States and from other countries.

At our hotel we met a fellow from Czechoslovakia who was buying "trees". He loves Texas and President Bush and President Reagan. We didn't bring up politics—he did.

Fema was originally from Lithuania and has lived in Princeton for many years. His wife works for the library at the University. He travels in Russia in connection with his business which provides MRI and CAT scan equipment to hospitals. He sees Russia as an excellent market.

Each sleeping car had a bathroom (toilet and sink) at either end of the car. In the morning, we were served breakfast of oatmeal (rather watery) and half a sandwich. We had a choice of cheese or ham so most of us as a double room had a cheese sandwich delivered for one member and a ham for another and then turned reorganized them ourselves into a ham and cheese breakfast "treat".

Posted in [Unalaska 2nd](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

## We Reach Moscow and See Red Square

Posted on [July 6, 2010](#)

**OUR WONDERFUL HOTEL IN MOSCOW—THE KATARINA:** Upon arrival in Moscow we got into a van and went to our hotel—the Katarina. This turned out to be a marvelous choice. It's a 4 star hotel with 5 star service. They have a free mini bar (beer only for alcohol but many snacks), free wifi which worked everywhere and wonderful service throughout the hotel.

**EVEN THE BREAKFAST THERE IS SPECIAL:** Most hotel breakfasts are pretty pro forma, but this hotel had a wide selection of fruits, vegetables (vegetables for breakfast are common in Russia) and some things not usually found. They had raspberry and cherry "shooters" a rich fruity mix of each fruit in small shot glasses. They had cappuccinos in addition to regular coffee. One member found their "Oily" fish particularly delicious. They also had salmon every morning.

## ON TO RED SQUARE AND SAINT BASIL CATHEDRAL—ICONIC SITES OF MOSCOW

After checking into the hotel, we went out to see St. Basil's and Red Square. St Basil is the cathedral with multi colored domes that you see in many television reports from Moscow. It is in a square just outside the red walls of the Kremlin.

—see more information about St. Basil [here](#)

[http://www.google.com/#hl=en&source=hp&q=st+basil%27s+cathedral&aq=0&aq=gs5g=s1g4&agf=&oq=st+basil&gs\\_rfai=&fp=7e4fce8e7e3fc9dht](http://www.google.com/#hl=en&source=hp&q=st+basil%27s+cathedral&aq=0&aq=gs5g=s1g4&agf=&oq=st+basil&gs_rfai=&fp=7e4fce8e7e3fc9dht)

See out pics here

**NEAR BY IS AN UPSCALE 3 STORY SHOPPING AREA ½ BLOCK FROM ST BASIL.**

Hugo Boss is the first store you see when you walk in. This particular shopping area is in a building that dates back to the late 1800's. Here you see the delegation members exiting the shopping area.

In one of the photos you will see a much decorated veteran of the Second World War wearing his medals. He was proud to have his picture taken.

**LUNCH AT AN ELEGANT RESTAURANT NEAR A PART OF THE BRICK MOSCOW WALL LEFT FROM THE 1600'S.**

We left the Red Square area for lunch at a restaurant located next to a fragment of the original brick Moscow city wall. This wall was originally built in the 1600's. Our restaurant was downstairs in an elegant setting with chandeliers. The stair steps were rose marble and curving down for 1 ½ stories before we reached the restaurant.

We leave lunch for our meeting with Jocelyn Greene, the wife of US Ambassador to Moscow, John Beyrle.

Posted in [Ukraine](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

## **MEETING WITH JOCELYN GREENE AT THE AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE**

Posted on [July 8, 2010](#)

The US Ambassador to Russia is John Beyrle and his wife is Jocelyn Greene. They met in the Foreign Service and both had strong interest in Russia for many years.

The delegation was invited to the Ambassador's residence in Moscow where we met with Jocelyn Greene for nearly two hours. The discussion was wide ranging on the relationship between the US and Russia over many years.

The residence is an impressive home which has been used by the US since 1917. As you enter there is a flower display in the yard of the US and Russian flags side by side. See more info here <http://moscow.usembassy.gov/spaso.html>

Ms. Greene first came to Russia as a student and on that trip she spent 8 weeks on a camping tour of the country. Later she spent several years there over several periods. Prior to this assignment she was there twice with her husband when he was posted there on prior assignments in Russia.

She is sincerely interested in the people she has met in Russia and their background.



The couple has two daughters one of whom just graduated from Kenyon College in Ohio and the younger is now graduating from high school in Moscow.

She is particularly interested in preservation of historic buildings in Moscow. She regularly meets with local groups and finds the Moscow scene lively and interesting.

She sees women as the backbone of the country. Particularly since the Second World War when the country lost so many men during the war, women stepped in to keep families together and still are a major factor in family life here.

We were interested in contrasting the US and Russia and we asked her to outline the biggest challenges facing the country. Not surprisingly her observations on pressing issues had similarities to a number of countries including the US.

The first issue she mentioned was health care. The health care system in Russia has many challenges.

There is a significant orphan population in the country that needs care.

Another important issue for everyone but particularly women and children was education.

Bribes and corruption are a significant issue.

The elderly have been particularly affected by economic changes over the last 20 years.

And one unique opportunity for improvement would be hospice care. There is only one hospice in the country.

Ms. Greene was interested in all the activities of our delegation in Russia. She observed that more contact between people from Russia and the US was beneficial to the relationship between the countries.

You can see pictures from our meeting here:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/500234331@N02/sets/72157624130435766/show/>

And wondering about the ambassador? Here is his bio here

<http://moscow.usembassy.gov/ambassador.html><http://moscow.usembassy.gov/ambassador.html>

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

## **Out and About in Moscow—We meet artists, see a fabulous historic grocery and some street views**

Posted on [July 8, 2012](#)

Learn more about Moscow here <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moscow>

When we visit the DUMA or City Council on Friday, we include more information about the Mayor and his wife.

But for the moment this post is about a couple of things of interest.

For the real “foodies” of the world, one of our best known groceries is the Dean and DeLuca group located in places like Georgetown area of Washington, DC. But for pure grocery glamour you can’t beat the historic grocery in moscow center complete with Chandellers.

Read about it here <http://guides.themoscowtimes.com/articles/detail.php?ID=368210>. And see us shopping there and a couple of shop windows scenes from nearby here:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/50034331@N02/sets/72157622083725513/show/>

And we visited artists Tatyana and Nicholas—husband and wife who are both painters. Tatyana does some sculpture as well. Their friend Valentin was there with his famous miniatures. See our pics here.

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/50034331@N02/sets/72157624100012180/show/>

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### Russia Delegation 2010 Robin Winter Odem

Russia was one of my favorite delegations. Nine of us went in 2010 and visited St. Petersburg, Vladimir, Suzdal, Fedoskino and Moscow. Despite the social and political problems, it has to be one of the most interesting and beautiful countries that I have visited, particularly the architecture.

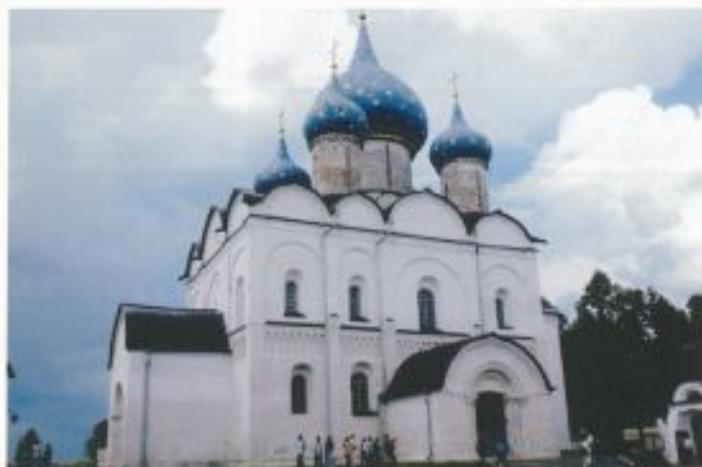
My favorite memories in Moscow began with a visit with Veronica Mearcheno, the 2009 IWOC award recipient. Veronica was the director of the "Mother's Right" organization, which provided legal support to families whose sons were soldiers who died during peacetime. Veronica answered our questions eloquently and said that these deaths were due to hazing, bullying, suicide, and beatings for financial purposes. There are rackets, and soldiers are beaten by other soldiers if they won't give money to criminal networks. It was interesting to learn about this organization and to meet and hear from our IWOC recipient.

Also in Moscow, we visited Mr. Vladimir Platonov, chairman of the Moscow Duma. We were seated at a long council table in the Chairman's private meeting room. The local deputies influence adoption of legislation and city charters, budgets, amendments, new taxes, and legislative authority. The Moscow Duma city deputies elect the mayor of Moscow. After our meeting, we had pictures taken in the deputies' chairs. This productive meeting, where many questions were asked and answered, was arranged by the President of Moscow Friendship Force, who I met in Chicago earlier in the year.

We enjoyed a wonderful schools experience at an "Exceptional School for the Languages." Two students gave us a tour of the classrooms, and the children were well behaved and happy to see us. It was graduation day, and we met the principal at the end of the day, or what they refer to as the "end of the bell."

We also visited a military museum where there was a great deal of war history and displays of military weaponry. The man who talked to us about the weapons was highly attracted to a member of our delegation and kept "sneaking" kisses to her. We laughed and tried to get photos of them!

Our farewell party was at Vesna Bosnia's residence, who was serving in the American Embassy in Moscow. (We met her earlier during our trip, where she and the Russian Ambassador's wife participated in a round table discussion with us.) Her friends attended, and we were served great food along with a bottle of Russian vodka. We called Paula Cofresi-Silverstein by cell phone, as Vesna had babysat for Paula's children when she lived in Chicago. All in all, this was a fabulous farewell party ending a wonderful delegation to Russia.



# **JAPAN**

## **2010**





AMERICAN WOMEN FOR  
INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING

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### JAPAN DELEGATION



### JAPAN DELEGATION



In October, 2010 a 12 member AWIU delegation set off for Japan. The delegation was led by Roxi Goin Northern California Chapter Co-Chair who has already made 15 trips to Japan. Roxi works closely with Sister Cities International which shares many common interests with AWIU.

The delegation visited with local politicians and women's groups to learn more about the role of women in Japan today.

Here you see the delegations members meeting with the Mayor of Hiroshima.

The delegation members from around the country are available for [presentations](#) to interested groups.

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## Our Mission

Promotes woman-to-woman interaction and understanding Worldwide through meaningful visits, grants, educational support, the celebration and support of the International Women of Courage, and participation of local Chapters which act locally and affect globally.

## Quote

Roshika Deo, 2014 International woman of courage, Fiji

“I appreciate the work that American Women of International Understanding (AWIU) is doing to generate awareness on women's issues around the globe. Their support, empathy, effort and time as a volunteer, to feature problems that women face within and outside the U.S. is simply commendable. Raising awareness on women's issues is a crucial step towards progress and so is working together in global solidarity. ”

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## Delegations



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### Japan Delegation 2010

#### JAPAN DELEGATION RETURNS TO THE US

Ten AWIU members went to Japan in October, 2010 to visit with governmental officials and women's groups. Every delegation has a goal to learn more about the cultural traditions and about the life of women in the country today. And each delegation brings that information home to help others learn about the country today.

The delegation met with the mayors of Shingu City and Hiroshima.

Here the delegation meets with Mayor **Tadatoshi Akiba** of Hiroshima. Hiroshima holds a place in the world's imagination due to the events at the end of the Second World War.



Joan Poulos, AWIU Vice President and Grants Committee Chairman was a member of the Japan Delegation. She has been on past AWIU delegations. Her observation on this experience "Again, AWIU, through its delegations, has broadened our understanding of other cultures and left behind citizens of another country with a new understanding of Americans and our respect for them".

When delegations return to the US they begin to take their knowledge to others. The Japan Delegation returned to the US on a Thursday and the next Sunday, Joan did a presentation to a group in her local community in California. Want a presentation? Go [here](#) to request one.

Immersion in cultural heritages is also a part of AWIU delegations. Pictured below is the delegation honoring an ancient tradition. They are on the Kumano old road (part of the pilgrimage road from Kyoto to Shingu (Santa Cruz, CA sister city), a round trip of one month of walking) Dressed in the kimonos of the 12th century and standing between 800 year old cedar trees. This road was used by the emperor and for many others. If dressed as we were the people likely they were not walking so much, but this experience carried the idea of the pilgrimage. Footwear was straw sandals only.

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## Our Mission

Promotes woman-to-woman interaction and understanding Worldwide through meaningful visits, grants, educational support, the celebration and support of the International Women of Courage, and participation of local Chapters which act locally and affect globally.

## Quote

Maya Angelou

How important it is for us to recognize and celebrate our heroes and she-ros!

## Flickr Photos



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American Women for International Understanding

## AWIU JAPAN DELEGATION REPORT

As leader of the delegation, perhaps my view will be slightly different from other delegates. I felt it a very well rounded group of delegates and that the meetings we had were significant. The questions were pertinent and the sharing important.

Having been to Japan many times, I felt strongly that we needed to experience the deep beautiful culture as well as to meet with different groups of women. Women's groups are not as common in Japan as in some other countries and so setting the meetings were done only through personal contact. \*

Through the Kumano/Kii area was named as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2004, much of it is economically depressed. It is an area of incredible beauty and includes the *Kumano Kodo*, the pilgrimage road that lead to *Kumano Sanzan* (the three grand shrines of *Kumano*: Hongu-taisha, Hayatama-taisha, Nachi-taisha). The Emperor of Japan used the pilgrim's path in the 1200's, taking 30 days to make the round trip from Kyoto. Those that walked wore straw sandals and heavy kimonos. The emperor was most likely carried in a palanquin most of the way. The UNESCO area includes both Shingu and Nachi-Katsuura.

We met with four women in Shingu, a Santa Cruz, CA sister city. The mayor of Shingu, Michitoshi Tauka, joined us for the entire meeting (one and a half hours). Women shared problems of domestic violence and the need of facilities and help for them. One woman spoke of personal abuse. Japan is a country of privacy, still quite male dominated, so to speak out in front of Mayor Tauka took a great deal of courage. He listened and, as mayor, will lead the efforts to provide women with help and facilities.

We also met with three women in Nachi Katsuura, primarily a social group, but also focused on how best to promote their area to bring visitors and to provide jobs for the local people. This was a time of sharing, questions and answers.

While in Hiroshima, we visited the Peace Park and the Peace Museum. We were privileged to meet with hibakusha, a woman survivor of the A-blast of 1945. Her story was so powerful of trying to survive while severely burned, of trying to find her family and she told of how she became inured to the pain of others as she made her way. She was only 12 years old and about one kilometer from the epicenter! Her focus from the time she was 13 was, and has continued to be, a peaceful world. She and other hibakusha travel world wide to give their stories, to promote peace and no more nuclear bombs. The motivation is that what happened in 1945 should never happen to anyone anywhere in the world ever again.

Later that day we met with the mayor of Hiroshima, Tadatoshi Akiha, now in his 12<sup>th</sup> year as mayor. His platform is and has always been for a nuclear free world. He told about Mayor's for Peace and how it was started in 1982 by the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to promote the total elimination of nuclear weapons as a vital step toward genuine and lasting world peace. In 2003, with 500 member cities, they launched a 2020 Vision campaign aiming at the total abolition of nuclear weapons by 2020. Mayors for Peace now has 4,207 members in 144 countries and regions engaged in a wide variety of peace activities worldwide.

When visiting a shrine in Nara, Japanese junior high and high school students interviewed many of the delegation. This was a part of their curriculum for studying English language. Everywhere we went, we saw many students. It is a part of the school programs country wide to take overnight trips to visit the important areas of their heritage.

It would have been nice to meet with more women, but the meetings we had gave us insight into the problems some experience. AWIU focuses on both meeting with women's groups and also learning about the people and culture of a country. We were fortunate to be able to experience both the wonderful culture and people of Japan.

- For future delegations, it would be helpful to have as many personal contacts made available to promote meetings with women. Certainly from the women in a delegation, but from AWIU members in general.

Submitted on 8 November 2010 by Roxi Goin

Corrections submitted 11 November 2010 by Roxi Goin



## AWIU JAPAN DELEGATION REPORT

Rudyard Kipling is reported to have said, "And what can they know of England who only England know." This statement highlights both the role of comparison in learning and the necessity of travel to fully comprehend not only another culture but also one's own. This delegation to Japan was an active statement of our desire to "know".

Through our lengthy and frequent meetings with Japanese women this delegation was able to learn of mutual values, customs, and challenges and also start to problem solve some of the issues we all face. The heartfelt comments of an elderly woman who lived alone and looked forward to declining health were memorable. Her comments prompted renewed commitment to work on this world-wide issue. The same can be said of the women who discussed their views and partial solutions to spousal abuse. We all came away with a sense of "being in this together".

In casual contact on the streets and in restaurants, etc. we were conscious that our actions should be those of good ambassadors and not of "ugly Americans". The fact that we took time, effort and money to visit Japan and showed respect for its culture during our visit was not lost on the people with whom we had contact. It was clear to these people that we had a strong interest in and alliance with the citizens of Japan.

Our meetings with the children who wanted help improving their English were a delight! Their smiles and appreciation for our time and efforts made me hope that these events will have some value into the future.

In Hiroshima, our meetings with the mayor, his staff, the press and especially with the survivor of the atomic bomb blast on August 6, 1945 were informative and moving. I have repeatedly discussed these meetings since I have been back in the United States. I will continue to do so because of the impact the survivor's account had on me and also because of the responses I got from those who hear about this woman's courageous life.

For AWIU members the delegation was a wonderful bonding experience. And it also gave us face time to review our practices and to continue to refine our goals and skills so that we can continue our work as effectively and efficiently as possible to promote international understanding.

We even met with a potential new member!

In short, I think the delegation was a great success!

Joan M. Starr, Ph.D.  
November 13, 2010

## **Meetings of the Delegation to Japan**

### **October 16, 2010 – Shingu**

A dozen or so women joined us at City Hall for a meeting concerning women's issues in the Shingu area. The mayor was also present, as were several men who were involved with helping us with our activities. The men were in the background and the women and the mayor sat facing each other at tables. After some preliminaries, the conversation delved into the problem of domestic violence, and the Shingu women asked what sorts of shelters and other safe places we have in the United States. A very intense conversation developed with both Japanese and American victims telling of their abuse. We were touched and impressed by their candid conversation.

A second theme we explored was help for the elderly who live alone, as it is common for Japanese women to outlive their husbands by many years. We explained the "lifeline" service and other systems, suggested calling each other daily and in general supported them in their desire for more services.

### **October 17, 2010 – Katsura**

We visited with three women who represented a group known as the "Rainbow Women" who are mainly interested in maintaining and spreading the cultural heritage as it has been passed down in the area. They have put together materials for use in presentations in the schools and regularly get together to discuss and expand on heritage and other local issues.

### **October 24, 2010 – Hiroshima**

We returned to the Peace Museum where we heard an account of a 78 year old woman's journey home the day the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Her story was gripping and moving and miraculous. She has been to the United States five times and spoken at various peace gatherings and universities and high schools.

Mayor Akiba then met with us and presented his plans for peace in the world and the complete elimination of nuclear weapons by 2020. He has met with President Obama and many other world leaders and has made this his life's work. He also hopes to have the Olympics in Hiroshima in 2020. He was articulate and compelling as he urged each of us to work for peace.

Kathleen Foerster  
November 2, 2010

Notes-Paula Cofresi Silverstein,  
 Sunday October 24<sup>th</sup> at The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park  
 Speaker Ms. Sakao: Atomic Bomb Victim

She was twelve years old. School had been called off and at 8 am she stood at ground zero waiting for the rest of her classmates to gather for the demolition project planned for the day. There was mention that American planes had been sighted overhead earlier that morning.

At 8:15 am she heard a whistling sound, saw an intense flash, then everything became black. She was blown away 15 meters, her hair singed, skin peeled, flesh exposed. Many were dead everywhere she looked. Those alive were drenched in blood, crying for help and hurting. The river was full of dead bodies. The bodies floated up and down with the tides for days afterwards. As she passed, many called for her help. Many called asking for water. She did not drink the water and that helped save her. All she could think about was 'getting to the hill'. Sixty thousand were killed instantly. Fifty thousand died within the next three months after the bombing. By 1950 200,000 had died as a result of the bomb, exact figure unknown.

Determined to get to "the hill", and from there to her city (20 kilometers away) she walked east, witnessing the devastation along the way and the many calls for help she chose to ignore. Later her heart ached when she thought of those who cried for help, realizing that the atomic bomb mass murder weapon removes your feeling for humanity. She crawled up the hill to see the city of Hiroshima a sea of fire. The city burned for three days. She walked down and found a group of Junior high students naked, drenched in blood, fleeing from one place to another. A woman saw her naked and wrapped a curtain around her hips. When a truck came to rescue 'young injured males only', everyone scrambled to get in. The driver allowed her to get on. She was brought to a makeshift hospital 10 kilometers away from her city. Doctors were very busy. The hospital was packed with patients like fish in the market. Everyone crying from the pain of badly burned bodies. Everyone was crying for parents and asking for water. Many died from infected flesh. Corpses were tossed in trucks like garbage, gender unrecognizable, burned in heaps. She laid delirious on tatami mats agonizing from flesh wounds and swollen face and eyelids.

Her father heard she was there and came to get her. He took her home where he treated her flesh wounds with Zinc oxide and sesame oil for months. Suffering from pulsating pain, high fever, severe diarrhea and vomiting, the family prepared for her death. At night when her mother and sibs went to the mountains, afraid that the Americans would return to bomb them, her father stayed with her, risking his life to save hers.

After three months she could walk. She went to the park one day where the children ran away from her calling her 'a monster'. Her family had hidden all the mirrors in the house. When she saw herself in a neighbor's mirror, she was thunderstruck. She looked completely different. Her face was scarred, like pieces of liver had been pushed into the skin. The suffering now shifted from physical pain to emotional pain, feeling great anxiety and fear of being seen. Who to blame? Where to complain? She became suicidal.

One day she over heard her father talk with neighbors. She realized that her father had risked his life to save her. He told the neighbors he believed that his daughter would do her best to live her life. She realized that she was 'to live a life with courage' rather than die." She had 15 cosmetic surgeries and gradually regained normalcy. She says that her suffering was nothing compared to fate of others. For sixty five years she has suffered from dreadful nightmares that continue to this day.

Her classmate Chia returned from Hiroshima and one month later she got sick. She was bed ridden with swelling all over, purple spots and bleeding through nose, mouth and ears. One month later she and others who returned home after doing clean up volunteer work after the bombing died from the residual radiation. Twenty minutes after the dropping of the bomb, the mushroom cloud over Hiroshima City transformed to into a black rain of radioactive waste contaminating the ground and water used for cooking and drinking,

At the time no one knew what had hit them. Afterwards they were afraid of being identified as victim, afraid of the stigma.

### Impressionistic Report of AWIU Japan Trip October 2010

At dusk: spooky but gorgeous shrine of many hundreds of orange torii gates, tightly spaced, in descending size, curling three and a half miles up and down Inari Mountain outside Kyoto. A most perfect combining of aesthetics and advertising: corporations and individuals can buy a gate and have an attribution on the reverse side. (As seen in "Memoirs of a Geisha.")

Buddhist temples: Baby stone Buddhas draped with red clothing to speed a dead infant to its next incarnation.

Roxi Goins' grit in negotiating the massive and confusing Osaka and Kyoto rail stations.

Meeting with Mayor of Hiroshima: Several photographers madly popping flashes. Stifling impulse to smile at the cameras, knowing the Mayor was the subject. A taste of paparazzi-ism.

Chilling documents at the Hiroshima Museum: U.S. War Department memo suggesting sporadic bombing of Hiroshima be suspended temporarily in order to HEIGHTEN the impact of the A-bomb. Hiroshima was chosen over Kyoto because it held the fewest Allied prisoners of war. If we can be grateful about anything concerning Hiroshima, it's that the architectural treasures of Kyoto were spared.

An inscription on a peace monument in Hiroshima reads something like, "Let us never be warlike again." The Japanese language often drops the sentence subject, so the ambiguity of the statement suggests the subject is the Japanese, the WWII Allies, or all of humanity.

Small, lush vegetable gardens anywhere there was an unused plot of ground—next to warehouses, freeways, truck stops, parking lots.

Aesthetic immersion: No trash, no graffiti. Planter boxes in train stations. On weekends women promenading, shopping dressed up in kimonos. Calling smokers banned to indulge outdoors "fireflies." Taxi drivers wearing white gloves and covering headrests with white lace doilies. Tiny carved wooden scoops to remove ear wax.

Religion: instead of the usual Gideon Bible in the bedside stand, a book of sayings of the Buddha. A hi-tech Westernized country where, surprisingly, animistic Shintoism is alive and well. At the Shinto shrine toss a coin, ring the bell, clap twice, bow head and pray.

Hi-tech humanism: A robot to direct freeway traffic changes at construction sites.

Sport of geisha-spotting in Gion district, Kyoto. Find a knot of bystanders and sure enough a geisha would emerge from car or doorway. (If they wished to be so elusive, why would they sometimes walk unescorted through the streets? I suspect some PR at



work here.) Some geishas would apply lipstick only to the bottom lip in an exaggerated way. To enhance poutiness? An expensive entertainment, sometimes up to \$3,000 for an engagement.

One of our hosts in Shingu cried at our departure. Was meaningful on both sides to have visited there.

Of course a need to mention the toilets and baths. Toto bidet biffies with cushioned, heated seats, choice of stream or spray and even artificial flushing sounds for cover. In the Ryokan traditional inn, separate scuffs to wear in the toilet room. Pristine waters of communal baths with no evidence of chlorine.

Honesty of the Japanese: If you forgot your umbrella, take one as you exit and leave it at the doorway of your next destination.

Awesome bullet train roaring through the middle of Kyoto station at 180 mph without slowing.

Ubiquity of vending machines, even along the roads in the middle of nowhere. Excellent idea. Many creative beverages. Soon to come: vending machines with face recognition. You'll get suggestions based on previous choices.

Japan's population is aging. Even though we walked a considerable amount I saw only one or two pregnant women.

Unsurpassed elegance of food presentation: one-inch portion of something in my soup tied with an edible thread in a tiny bowl.

Railcar conductors bowing as they enter and leave a car.

Carol Wollson

To: The Delegations Committee  
 RE: AWIU Japan delegation

The country of Japan far exceeded my expectations in terms of the friendliness of its people, the beauty of the landscape, and ease of travel. Our delegation was composed of a very compatible group, and I feel that we were all very impressed with our experience. Marty Atherton pointed out, correctly, I think, that the richness of our experience in Shingu, a small city on the eastern coast, was due to the relationship which Roxie had developed during her many years of contacts, through her Sister Cities role. There, we were introduced to a group of women who are dealing with issues of domestic violence. They were very honest in expressing their concerns, and seemed open to suggestions from our group, based on our experiences in our own communities. I wondered if this group's candor, and interest in organizing around this issue, could have been inspired by their exposure to the residents of Santa Cruz. During this same meeting, a woman brought up the matter of elder isolation, as a result of the many young people who have had to move to Tokyo in order to find jobs. Again, we could only draw on experience of the various senior services in our own communities.

The area in which Shingu is located is somewhat geographically isolated, and economically depressed. The second women's group that we met, was formed around a wish to preserve the history and natural resources of the area with the object of also trying to market those attributes. The latter seems somewhat optimistic, but is certainly a worthy goal, as the area is physically beautiful, as well as having what we felt was a spiritual aura.

We also visited Hiroshima, and met the mayor of Hiroshima, as well as a survivor of the atomic bomb blast, who presented a very detailed and painful description of her experience on the day of the blast. It was an honor to meet a woman who experienced what was arguably the pivotal event of the twentieth century, and who not only survived, but has turned her horrific experience into an effort to promote peace.

In Kyoto, Roxie tried to find a women's group, but this plan fell through. We later realized that within our group we might have had contacts, in Japan, which we had not explored before arriving. We felt that further delegations should elicit possible contacts from AWIU members before visiting the target country.

It was disappointing not to have more contacts with women, as we had many questions, but those contacts which we did have were very enlightening, and the experience of seeing Japan was very valuable. There is much we can learn from this country, as it, too, is experiencing an economic recession, but it seemed to me, that there wasn't the anger that is said to pervade the American electorate, and it seemed that the Japanese took pride in their work, and maintained an enviable level of civility in their public interactions.

*Marshe Leigman*

### Reflections on Japan Carolc Lewis 2010

It was interesting to note that the island mentality of Japan survives. The Japanese feel that their society and culture have certain unique aspects that they are not going to willingly sacrifice for the goal of globalization or some foreign standards of Western life. I think that the Western view of the stagnation of the Japanese economy is off-base. They are doing what they want to do.

China and topography, along with natural resources, are their biggest concerns. A lot of the country is mountainous and extremely beautiful. But they are an island (like England) and, more to the point, somewhat isolated. Women, except the elites and well educated, are still considered second class citizens.

It did not seem important for those that we met to speak English. Visiting the U.S. if the opportunity presents itself was acceptable, but some questioned possible reasons for traveling throughout the U.S. Older men were sometimes rude to older U.S. women, but the younger men displayed better manners.

The women, as usual, are wonderful. More should be done to strengthen our ties with them and to encourage their progress in human rights and other women's issues, as the other member of the Japan delegation have already noted in their insightful commentary.

Japan 2010 Marsha Niazmand

While Japan is a first-world country and superficially appears very westernized and similar to the U.S., it was interesting to observe the ways in which it is quite unique. Our delegation tour was different from many tours of Japan, I suspect by not being centered in Tokyo (which we did not visit) but in focusing upon the small towns and cities of Japan. Our first stay was in Shingu, a fishing village which is part of the Sister Cities program. There we met with a group of women in the Mayor's office who described their situation as women. Because much of financial and political Japan is centered in Tokyo, ambitious young people leave their small towns to move there. This leaves the elderly, particularly women, with few social supports. It was also notable to us that there were few women's organizations in Japan with which we could connect. At the time of our visit it still seemed to be a very patriarchal country.

We saw many Shinto and Buddhist shrines which are scattered throughout the country. What particularly intrigued me were small shrines (some of which looked makeshift and were on the sides of roads) of what appeared to be small babies wearing bibs and little hats and surrounded by toys and stuffed animals. When I asked our lovely guide, who was from Shingu and did not speak English, she explained through an interpreter that these are Buddhist shrines to "water babies," the babies who have been miscarried, stillborn, or aborted, and to their spirit guide, Jizo, who transports the babies across the water to the land of the dead.

Because I found this topic so interesting, I researched it upon returning to the US. I learned that in 1949, the government made abortion legal, as there was a population boom at the same time as economic recession. Also, birth control was not legal and condoms were the only accepted form of birth control for years. (Only in 1999 when Viagra became available to men was there enough of an outcry that birth control for women became legal.) Even after it became legal, it was expensive and very difficult to obtain. For instance, a woman was required to have a physical exam every six months in order to have a prescription of birth control pills refilled. It seems that abortion was the only birth control option for women until then, and, at the time of our visit, was still very common.

There is a ritual called "mizuko kuyo" which a Buddhist priest performs in order to bless the "mizuko" or "potential Buddhas" which is attended by the

parents and occasionally by the abortion doctors themselves. This interpretation may be distorted by my Western attempt to understand the culture. In trying to understand it, I found the articles I read (written by Westerners) to be highly colored by their own biases...a hazard of trying to understand another culture which is difficult to transcend. This is part of the reason as to why we travel.



# **BALKANS**

## **2012**

## AWIU DELEGATION TO THE BALKANS

June 2012– Part 1

The idea for an AWIU Delegation to the Balkans was triggered when we met The Honorable Agnes Osztolykan at a U.S. State Department celebration to honor her as an International Women of Courage. Agnes was the first Roma woman in history to be elected as a Member of Parliament in Hungary, and as such, has been a source of inspiration and a role model for Roma Women throughout Eastern Europe. “Ms. Osztolykan speaks out for Roma in the face of open hostility, fearlessly advocating for the equal rights and inclusion of Roma in Hungarian society.”

As we began our year long study of the Balkans, we quickly came to realize that the Yugoslav wars of the 90s had and continue to have an inescapable impact on the entire area. We studied the history of these countries beginning with the Illyrians who were conquered by the Romans in 9 A.D.; the immigration of the Southern Slavs in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the long rule of the Ottoman Empire, the first and second world wars, and the communist period under Tito. We were briefed on current political and economic events by the Department of State in Washington D.C. and were gifted by advice and presentations from three of our members: one who grew up in Bosnia and offered advice on organizations to meet with; one who had been posted as an USAID officer in



In 2011 Agnes Osztolykan was honored as an International Woman of Courage by the U.S. State Department as the first Roma woman elected Member of Parliament in Hungary.

Bosnia; and one who lived as a teenager through the siege of Gorazde, Bosnia. See Picture of Bojana Blagojevich with excerpt from her book, *STORY OF ONE HEART*.

*"I LIVED IN A MULTI-ETHNIC, BEAUFITFUL SMALL TOWN WHERE PEOPLE HAD RESPECTED EACH OTHER, INTERMARRIED, AND LIVED IN PEACE. GORAZDE IS SITUATED IN THE VALLEY OF RIVER DRINA WHERE, AS CHILDREN, WE USED TO SUNBATHE AND SWIM. WHEN THE WAR STARTED, IT WAS THE RIVER WHERE PEOPLE WERE TAKEN TO BE KILLED AND WHERE CORPSES WERE SEEN FLOATING WHEN PEOPLE FETCHED WATER. IT WAS HARD TO BELIEVE THAT NEIGHBORS, WHO LIVED TOGETHER, PARTIED TOGETHER, WENT TO SCHOOL TOGETHER WOULD TURN AGAINST EACH OTHER IN SUCH VIOLENCE."*



Bojana Blagojevich on the right with Delegate Diana Kruse.

For a time, it seemed that the more we knew, the less we knew. How could countries whose citizens had lived and worked together as neighbors be persuaded by their governments to massacre one another. The term ethnic cleansing, often used, is a misnomer when, with the exception of the Albanians in Bosnia, most of the citizens in every country are of Southern Slav heritage.

The religious differences are more distinct -- coterminous with nationalities and may be majority or minority in each country. Serbs, primarily Serbian Orthodox, slaughtered Bosnian Muslims and Roman Catholic Croats attacked Serbian Orthodox in Croatia. Prior to the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Tito managed to keep the conflicts among nationalities in check, but with his death, came the struggle for power, independence, and territory by each of these countries.

Because the majority of the organizations we met with were in Bosnia, we heard more about the Serb inflicted atrocities, but battles



with the Croats were equally violent. In 1995 Croatia drove out more than 250,000 Serbs who lost their property and their homes. In Bosnia, the Serbs massacred more than 10,000 and left untold thousands homeless in an attempt to rid Bosnia of all non-Serbs.

The devastation is still evident. We saw buildings in Sarajevo and Mostar that were still pockmarked from the shelling that rained down on ordinary people trying to survive. Throughout Bosnia there were well-built homes that had been abandoned as people were forced to flee for their lives. These abandoned homes are often next door to other occupied and thriving homes -- evidence that neighbors once lived together in the same communities.

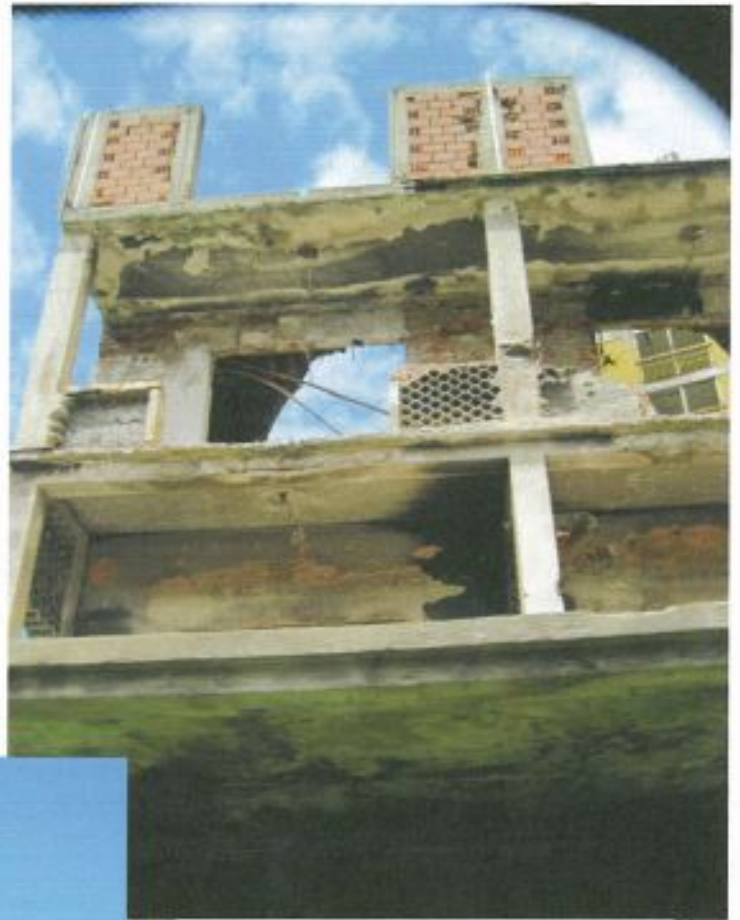
### BATTLES RESULTING IN THE DISSOLUTION OF YUGOSLAVIA







Building in Sarajevo pock marked with bullet holes



Destroyed by battles in Mostar



Family occupied home next to abandon house

We studied the Vance agreement that didn't work, and the Dayton agreement that is still problematic, but we still can't understand "why." Why did this happen and

how could it have happened in our life time? As we planned the specifics of our Delegation to the Balkans, we determined that we may never understand how leaders hungry for power and territory can convince ordinary men to kill and rape those who were once their teachers or their dentists or their friends. We decided that



rather than focus on the “why,” we would focus on what is being done to rebuild -- how citizens whose sons and husbands were slaughtered and who witnessed vicious rape, lost their homes and their livelihood --how these people can once again trust their neighbors enough to start over in either their own or their new communities.

To do this we focused our Delegation on the former Yugoslavia countries of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina while including short side trips to Montenegro, Croatia, and Slovenia. Our last two days would be spent in Budapest. We started in Serbia



Serbia

Go to Part 2 to learn more.

## Part 2 Delegation to the Balkans June 2012

Why did things happen in the Balkans in the 90's? To find out why, we focused our Delegation on the former Yugoslavia countries of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina while including short side trips to Montenegro, Croatia, and Slovenia. Our last two days would be



Serbia

spent in Budapest.



We found beauty in the mountains, farmland, rivers, lakes and seas. We saw grandiose buildings that



survived untouched and others that were destroyed. But most heartening, we met people who had dedicated their lives to help victims of war and to ensure that nothing like this could happen again.



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Montenegro

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Croatia

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Slovenia

READ ON TO LEARN MORE ABOUT 3 OF THE ORGANIZATIONS THEY MET INCLUDING THE MOTHERS OF SEBRENICA.





*Part 3*

June 6, 2012 twelve professional AWIU women arrived in Belgrade, Serbia. Many had never met, except by teleconference, but we came to appreciate the knowledge, talent, and perspective that each brought to the Delegation.



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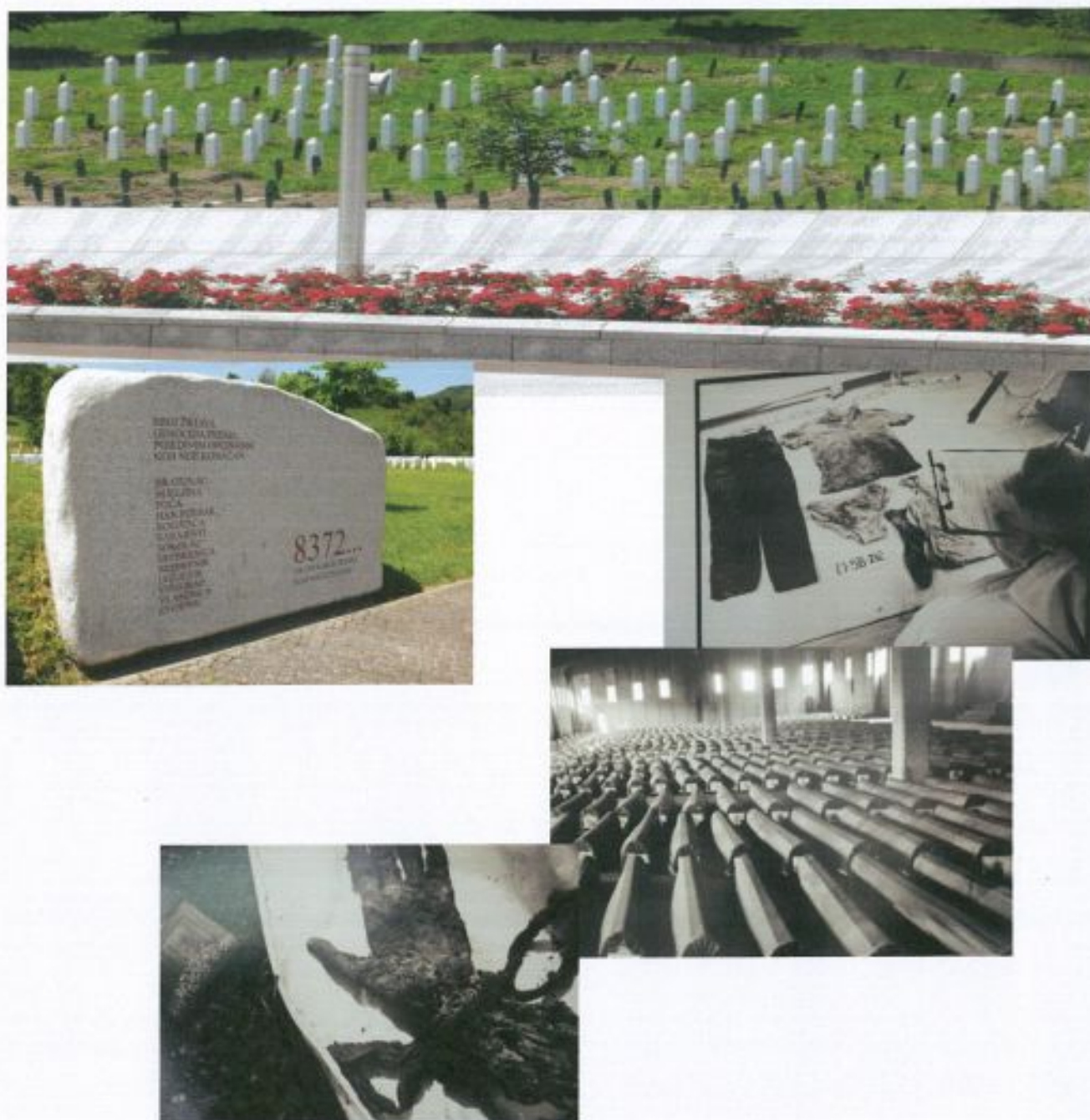
AWIU Delegation to the Balkans meets with U.S. Ambassador to Serbia, Mary Burce Warlick

To focus on how citizens of these former Yugoslav countries, especially women, coped with the aftermath of the wars, we describe three organizations that were formed to address what they could do to heal the wounds, provide shelter for the displaced, and build a future without war. They told us their stories based on personal experience and what they did to overcome.



## MOTHERS OF SREBRENICA in SARAJEVO

We saw it even before we met with the Mothers of Srebrenica --the partially destroyed and abandoned homes; the memorial with thousands of white obelisks, each marking the grave of a father, husband or son who had been killed in the Massacre at Srebrenica.





In relating her own memories of this meeting, our AWIU president wrote: "As the discussion ended, one of our Delegates, Diana Kruse of Serbian heritage, stood up, tears streaming down her face. She addressed the group and in a spirit of reconciliation and deep sorrow expressed her heartrending apology for the devastation and pain her 'people' had inflicted..." The emotions felt by both of our organizations were palpable and the hug received from their President was, "the most powerful token of affection I have ever experienced from a stranger. We were strangers no longer."



Munira Subasic, President of Udruzenje-Pokret  
(Mothers of Srebrenica) and  
Kathleen Hunt, President of AWIU



Members of AWIU and Udruzenje-Pokret



We saw the museum with heart wrenching pictures of caskets, bits of clothes, bones, and other remains used to identify the more than 8,000 whose names are now listed on the white marble monument. Some are still missing - have never been found - leaving children, mothers and wives still hoping for closure.

The founder and current president of the Mothers of Srebrenica, Munira Subasic, told us they had organized originally to find out what happened to those who were killed in 1996 - 10,701 men including 570 women and 1,042 children - and to bring the perpetrators to justice. More than 5500 children were left as orphans and thousands more had only one parent. She said, "We are traditionally a patriarchal society, but the more than 8,000 women members of this organization have managed to raise our children to be successful, without bitterness, nurture, love, not hate."

"We now join with women in other post-conflict countries. Every mother is a mother - no matter her religion, country, or race. We want to make sure this never happens again. The government wants everyone to forget what happened. But we will not forget. Some mothers are still looking for their sons. We have to tell our grandchildren the real truth - the hardest thing is not to hate."

Munira also explained that from World War II they were a very diverse population. They were all Bosnians. Now, because of what happened, they have to be segregated. There are only 5-10 % Muslim in some areas. Now three Presidents serve at the same time and rotate chairmanship every eight months. Munira says the Presidents can't agree. When asked privately, the people we met in both Serbia and Bosnia/Herzegovina are unified in their belief that their governments don't work.

## Part 4 Balkans Delegation

### **BOSFAM (Udruzenje Bosanska Familija) in TUZLA and SREBRENICA**

The AWIU Delegation met with Beba and the women working at their center in Tuzla and also in Srebrenica. BOSFAM (short for Bosnian Family) was founded by Beba Hadzic, a former teacher, who came to Tuzla as a refugee when she and her family were forced to flee from their homes leaving everything they owned -- their property, their schools, their doctors, and their friends and relatives -- even their shoes. Beba told of encountering a former student who was in the military and asking him, "Why?" His only response was, "All non-Serbs must be removed from the Drina River area."

When she arrived in Tuzla in 1994, Beba worked to establish BOSFAM as a refuge for displaced women made homeless by the war. Thousands of women, poured into the town of Tuzla after the Srebrenica massacre. Having lost their families, homes and possessions, these women had no place to go and no means of making a living. BOSFAM's mission was to help these Bosnian women gain economic stability.

They began with knitting projects and now, having acquired looms, have expanded to making beautiful rugs, quilts and other handicrafts. From the beginning they emphasized the requirement to accept all women regardless of religion, ethnic background, or education. The women had only to agree to work together. Over time, many Bosnian Serbs risked intimidation when they agreed to help Bosnian Muslims acquire the needed documentation to reclaim their personal property.



In addition to hearing the stories of how BOSFAM has helped thousands of Bosnian women survive, be productive, and return to their homes, the Delegation enjoyed their hospitality and was able to meet the next generation of



beautiful young women who helped us try on knitted garments and select from hundreds of unique handmade rugs that were offered for sale to support the organization.




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**Beba Muhic, founder and President  
of BOSFAM**

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### OKC ABRASVEVIC IN MOSTAR

In Mostar, the AWIU Delegation met with a youth cultural center called OKC Abrasevic. It is the only youth center in the city without a national/ethnic prefix -- meaning it is open to all religions and all nations. Because the city has been divided since the war, they now have segregated education, parallel utility companies, cultural centers, sports clubs, and post offices. Organized by a few young people who saw a need to bring youth together, OKC Abrasevic is intentionally located on the line between the Croat and the Bosnian sections of the city with the goal of providing a facility where young people of both nationalities can meet.

Astonishingly, more than half of the



young people of Mostar do not know anyone of another nationality even though the city wasn't divided until after the wars of the early 90s. Abrasevic provides an opportunity for youth to work together on projects. They have an in-house media center which encourages creative productions. They encourage roundtable discussions, cross-cultural performances, and workshops. One of their projects was, "Art in Public Places" which focused on art by all nationalities represented in Croatia. They have also conducted and recorded several hundred interviews with those who stayed and those who left during the war.

OKC Abrasevic lives by their founding ethical principles: never support racism, sexism, gender bias, religious intolerance, or prejudice of any kind. Kristina Coric, the Program Coordinator, is an impressive young woman who has managed to convert an admirable goal into a reality that will make a difference.

### **INTERNATIONAL TRUST FUND (ITF) FOR ENHANCING HUMAN SECURITY IN LLUBJANA**

A land mine does not care if it gets the foot of a soldier or a child. It remains dormant until someone "wakes it up" usually by an innocent citizen stepping on it. Land mines and other unexploded ordinance remain in the ground long after the conflict is ended and, as a result, become totally non-discriminatory in their devastation.

The International Trust Fund for Enhancing Human Security (ITF), one of the most impressive organizations we met with has had a major positive impact on dealing with

**Kristina Coric (on right) and  
Assistant, OKC Abrasevic**

the aftermath of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. ITF was founded in 1998 to assist BiH implement the Dayton Agreement concerning the removal of land mines and other unexploded ordinance (UXO) left behind after the war.

Under the direction of Dorijan Marsic, ITF has worked on 2746 mine action programs in 28 countries, beginning with 6 former Yugoslav countries and Albania. In BiH

Dorijan Marsic, Director ITF

alone, they have cleared 16,814



mines, 15,334 UXOs and 30,000 square meters.







Typical land mine

We learned how ITF is working to help victims of explosives; how they are working

internationally toward agreements with countries not to use land mines; and about International Mine Action Day, April 4, which is set aside to raise awareness of mine problems. On this day, participants roll up their pant leg to symbolize support, and we will do the same to honor these victims next April 4.

Training a dog to find land mines

Child injured by land mine

Dolls tell the story of rehabilitation for mine victims

## **BALKANS 2012-Judith Jakaitis**

I joined AWIU to go on a trip to the Balkans in 2012. I love travel and adventure, and although the Balkans was not on my bucket list, I wanted to find out what the organization was all about. The three week excursion turned out to be one of my favorite all time trips—not because of the adventure, but because of the amazing women I met and the new friends I made, none of whom I knew before.

The first two weeks were a whirlwind of pre-arranged meetings, way too many to enumerate here, but several are very memorable to me. In Serbia, we met with Roma women whose difficulties included discrimination, education for their children, prevention of abuse, and teaching life skills to adults. We also met Gordon Comic, a member of the National Assembly and Speaker of the House in Belgrade. She was a very warm, dynamic, and funny lady with lots of inspiring quotes. She told us that it is the law that one third of the House is women, and they work together across party lines to get things accomplished.

In Bosnia, we met with Mothers of Srebrenica. Their mission is to identify the remains of the victims and put them to rest in a memorial site. They work with other women's groups all over the world to organize conferences that focus on human rights. They have designated March 8th as Women's Day, as "Meet Me on the Bridge." Women from Serbia are invited to come and talk with them.

The most encouraging meetings for me were with the younger people, hearing their thoughts and hopes for a better future. We sat in on a formal debate of college students practicing their English. The topic was "Should women be paid for injustices done in the past?" It was a very thoughtful and lively debate. In Mostar, a city divided in half between Muslims and Christians, the youth organization is located on neutral ground and brings together young Catholics, Muslims, and Orthodox for cultural events such as plays, concerts and art shows, with round table discussions. Their motto is "Never support negativism".



We covered a lot of ground in those three weeks. Besides the meetings, we were able to do quite a bit of sightseeing and shopping. On some of the long rides in the van, the group often broke out into song. We had plenty of time to get to know each other. We had a few celebration dinners, including a private river dinner cruise on the Danube, and a very special dinner on the last night in the castle in Budapest.

Our young tour guide admitted that she preferred guiding river raft trips with teenagers. She liked order and punctuality, and was often frustrated trying to corral 14 independent women, especially when we were turned loose in the markets. But when the tour was over, she parted with tears in her eyes and said that she had never met a group of more caring women who looked after each other. I felt the same way.



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Chicago



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## Ashley Devick Reports Back on 2012 Balkans Delegation Organizations in Three Videos



In October 2013 Ashley Devick, a Passport to the Future member, traveled to Bosnia and Serbia to revisit and report on the work of the organizations that AWIU's Balkans delegation met with in June of 2012. From her visit she created videos in service of the three of the organizations. You can learn more about Ashley's experiences in Bosnia and Serbia and view her videos through the following links.

**[Roma Women for a Better Future". \(Tuzla, Bosnia, October 2013\)](#)**

**[Yakli: "It's Time" Recipient of AWIU Grant, 2013 \(Begrade, Serbia\).](#)**

**[CURE Foundation \(Sarajevo, Bosnia, October 2013\)](#)**

Ashley's trip was funded by Dr. Bradley Hamm, Dean of the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University, from which Ashley earned her Masters in Journalism. Based in Chicago, Ashley works as a writer and editor.

Related Links: [Passport to the Future – 2012 Balkans Delegation](#) – [Ashley Devick Website](#)



Ashley Devick

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### **Bosnia & Herzegovina: How Women are Changing the Economic Climate.**

The incomprehensible events that took place during the 90s in Bosnia & Herzegovina continue to haunt the region. The terror of neighbor fighting against neighbor and the heartbreak of families being ripped apart is visible with every bullet hole that dots the buildings and the skeletal remains of structures that were unable to stand their ground against the bombs.

The war didn't happen yesterday but there are signs of it all around.

The recovery has been slow and the changes far from immediate. So as the world forgot about the region that still bears fresh scars from the Bosnian wars, the people living there pressed on. They fought to regain normalcy and strived to maintain the same conventions that they were known for before the war: a diverse and friendly society that is hospitable, welcoming and unassuming.

The region has a pulse that is constant. When it comes to economics and human rights, they are fighters. Women are at the helm, leading several non-profit organizations to better the society through outreach directed towards women.

During a visit to the region four years ago, I had the opportunity to interact with several of these organizations. It would be an eye-opening portrayal of strength to show just how far the country has come and how much further they have to go. To feature each of the organizations individually with an overview of how they work together to

The one that stands out to me the most is **Roma Women's Association for a Better Future**, a group that provides economic guidance and resources to Roma women living in Tuzla. Their poverty was so desperate. When I met with them, we filmed their stories. More than one woman asked me if I could give relatives messages if they saw me on the news. They didn't understand that I was not from a network. I had no idea who would listen to their stories.

But what made this program stand out, was that it provided communities with the means to build their own economies. From livestock to wool, they were provided with trade opportunities to strengthen their families and those around them. I think about these women often, to this day.

Here is a video <https://vimco.com/76986754>

# **MYANMAR / BURMA**

## **2013**



**awiuburmadelegation**

awiu goes to burma/myanmar-2014

**In the Beginning ... AWIU Delegation to Burma/Myanmar**Posted on February 5, 2014

AMERICAN WOMEN FOR INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING (AWIU)

DELEGATION TO MYANMAR (BURMA)



January 5 – January 16, 1024

More than a year ago, the American Women for International Understanding (AWIU) voted to sponsor a Delegation to Burma/Myanmar. Over the course of the year, interested members formed a study group who wanted to learn more about this historically fabled and currently troubled country. We studied the history, culture, ethnic composition, and both past and current political issues.

In January 2014, fourteen members, selected as Delegates, traveled to Myanmar to meet with NGO's, government officials, political leaders, businessmen, tribal elders, tradesmen, and ordinary citizens of Burma. The Delegation

was composed of professional women who are medical doctors, lawyers, social workers, educators, public administrators, government executives, artists, and active members of NGOs and other international organizations. They traveled to Burma from their homes in Illinois, South Carolina, Tennessee, California, and China. While in Burma, the Delegation traveled from Yangon, to Mandalay, down the Ayeyarwady River to Bagan, and then to Inle Lake before returning to Yangon. They marveled at the still-standing structures built in the 9<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> centuries; admired the industry that produced verdant farmland and intricate crafts; and appreciated their cultural traditions and friendly acceptance of foreigners.

This report documents the highlights of the Delegation through photos and narrative. Credit for the photos, posting and format goes to Merle Cherney. Other members contributed to the report narrated by Gayle Morin.

#### LIST OF DELEGATES:

***Gayle Graham-Morin, Delegation Leader***

***Judith Jakaitis, Delegation Co-Leader***

***Colleen Berk***

***Carolyn Johnson***

***Merle Cherney***

***Joan McEachern***

***Merry Lee Eilers***

***Robin Winter Odem***

***Magda Fehema Sharkasi***

***Joan Poulos***

***Khadduja Ghinniwa***

***Jasna Svarec***

***Betty Houbion***

***Joan Westgate***

***Anne Tonks\****

***\* Anne was not able to participate as a Delegate, but she continued to support the Delegation through her tireless efforts before, during and after the Delegation.***





## Day 1 A View of Yangon

Posted on February 4, 2014



### Meeting the People of Yangon

The Mon village named Dagon existed on this site since the 6th century A.D. It was renamed **Yangon** (meaning end of strife ) by the Shwebo King Alaungpaya when he captured it from rebel Mon leaders in 1755. The city gained in importance only after the British occupied it during the Second Burmese War in 1852, made it the capital and trading and commercial centre of Burma, and renamed it Rangoon. Again renamed Yangon after independence from Britain, the city is currently an amalgamation of British, Burmese, Chinese and Indian influences and is known for its colonial architecture, which although decaying and beyond appreciation, remains an almost unique example of 19th-century British colonial capital. While in the city of Yangon, we met with political, educational, and business leaders of Burma.

### Taking the Ferry to Dalah on the Opposite Side of the Rivers





After a good nights sleep at the Summit Parkview Hotel, the first group of delegates were ready to get started on the morning of January 5th. First stop was the Scott Market, then we were off to the docks. The ferry ride, brimming with people, bicycles, chickens and baskets, was across the confluence of Yangon and Bago Rivers. It was at short journey to the other side.





When we got off the ferry we were told it was one of the poorest areas in Yangon. Hit hard by the 2008 Cyclone Nargis, when 200,00 people were killed, this area still hasn't recovered. Everyone climbed into a trishaw and off we went on an hour long tour of the area. The drivers of the trishaws rent them out daily because they can't afford to buy them. Most of the young boys have dropped out of school to help support their families.









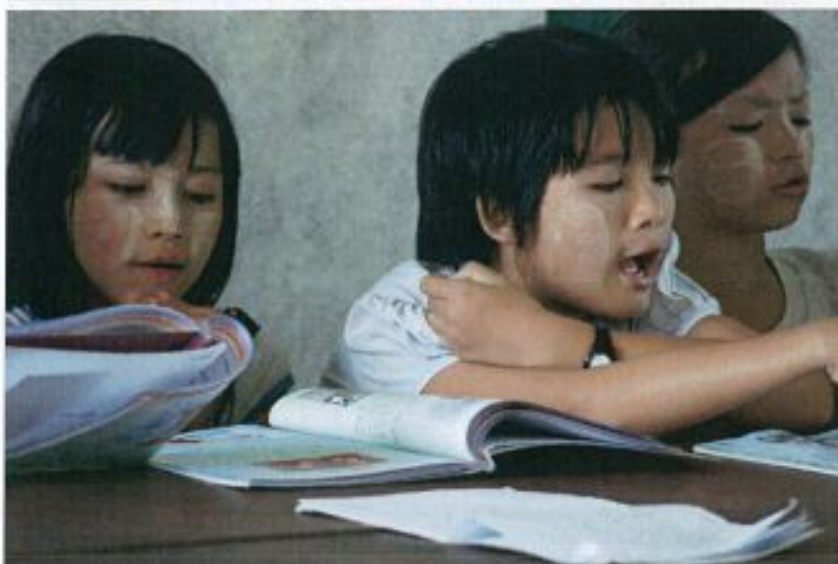
Bamboo and tin are cheap and plentiful, so they are used for most buildings. The state run hospital is free to people in need, but Myanmar ranks in the bottom 3rd for health care in the world and has a lot of catching up to do. Also shown is a home of nicer quality with a tin roof.







We made a stop at the **Dalah Middle Monastery, Kyaung Monastery and Orphanage**. The school takes in orphans, children of single family parents and children of families in need of assistance. The monks in Myanmar take on the task of educating children.





### Wedding Season in Burma



Back at the hotel where a few more Delegates had arrived, we were able to see a number of weddings with elaborate receptions and gorgeous attire for both men and women. January is the start of the wedding season.



### Meeting with Professor Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt



Just in time for our first lecture called, "History in a Nutshell: Bagan to the Present." Professor Dr. Khin Maung Nyunt did an outstanding job in educating us on the history of Burma. He briefed us on the demographics, the geography, the geology beginning 40 million years ago, and the cultures including the influence of the Hindu Brahmins, the Chinese, the Mongols, the Portuguese the Dutch, and the British. Dr Khin Maung Nyunt was a master in helping us understand the many different ethnic groups and their influence on current political issues. He told us of the restrictions he had been under as a professor when the government told him what he could and could not say in the classroom. But now he is under no such restrictions, which led to a very open and informative beginning for our Delegation.

### House of Memories – Former Office of Aung San







Off to the "The House of Memories", for our first Burmese dinner. Built over 100 years ago by the British, it was later used as the office of Aung San. Aung Sun was Aung Sun Suu Kyi's father, a leader of the movement to gain independence from Britain. He was assassinated in 1947 about six months before Burma achieved independence. Myanmar celebrated 66 years of independence on January 4 while we were there.

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

## Day 2 in Yangon – Ancient History and History in the Making: Working for Peace and Democracy

Posted on February 4, 2014



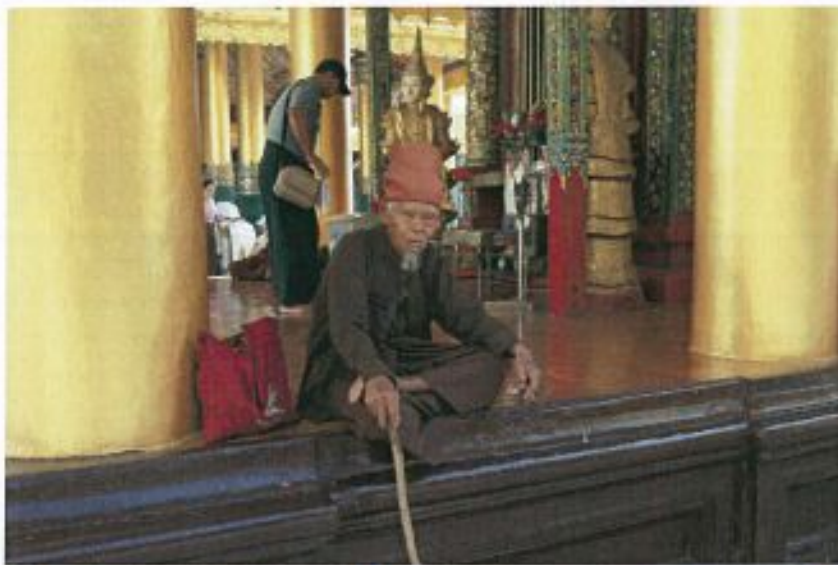
Shwedagon Pagoda

### Understanding the Historical Buddha

Notwithstanding unforeseen travel delays, all Delegates had arrived in Yangon. Our first stop was **Shwedagon Pagoda**, no doubt the most revered site in all of Burma with a history that began some 2,500 years ago. We were reminded of Rudyard Kipling's observation: "Then, a golden mystery upheaved itself on the horizon — a beautiful, winding wonder that was neither a Muslim dome or Hindu temple spire ... The golden dome said, "This is Burma, and it will be quite unlike any land that one knows about."

Not being able to decide whether we wanted to see it early in the day or at sunset, we did both, walking up hundreds of steps and exploring every facet of the Pagoda without shoes or socks. To see it, as well as learning the history of Buddhism, was an amazing experience. Around every corner was another surprise — we even met the wedding couple from the day before, as both natives and tourists wanted to document this day with photos. The marble floors heated up as the day went on, happy that we made the trek early. The stupa is a 99 metres (325 ft)

and gilded in gold. Just west of Kndawgyi Lake, it sits on top of Singuttara Hill, thus dominating the skyline of the city. It is the most sacred Buddhist pagoda for the Burmese with relics of the historical Buddha and three of his predecessors enshrined within. We were told that an exact replica of Shwedagon Pagoda is in Naypyidaw, the new capital of Burma.







Generation 88



From history and awe, we transitioned to reality of the political struggle encountered by many over the last forty years under a military dictatorship. Our meeting with Generation 88 was both sobering and encouraging. This group of impressive young activists, imprisoned for their leadership of the student protests of 1988, is actively

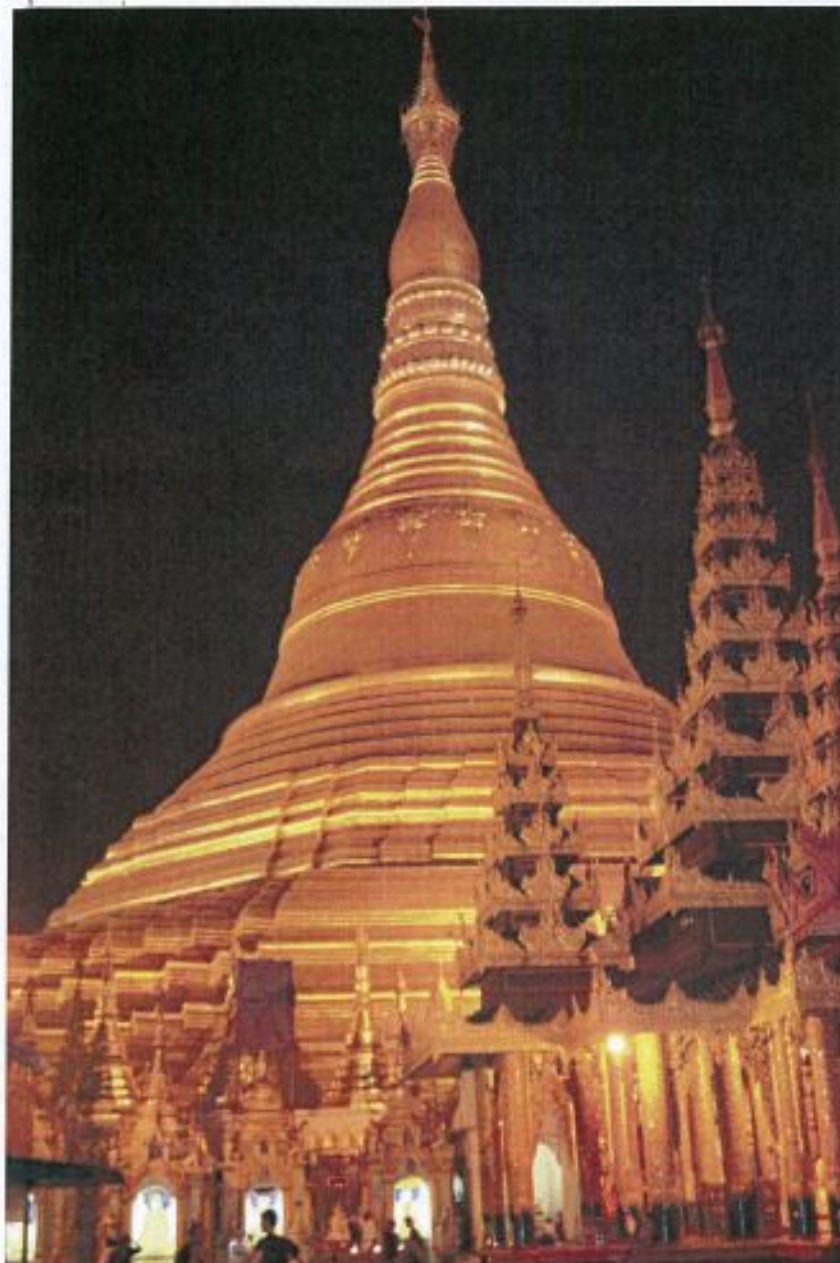
working to bring peace and open society to Myanmar. Most of the current members of Generation 88 have been imprisoned for more than half of their young lives. Arrested and charged for criminal offenses for their leadership of the student protests in 1988, they currently continue their political activism by organizing coalitions intent on changing the current government by peaceful means. They were arrested in 1988, released in 2005 and rearrested in 2007. One couple who both have responsible positions with Generation 88 were married and had a baby during their short release, but had to return to separate prisons, leaving their baby with her parents, when they were rearrested in 2007. On January 13, 2012, the last of the political prisoners were released from prison.

When asked what kept them going in prison their response was: Buddhism; Flexibility; and a Good Sense of Humor. Their Yangon office has 50 people working tirelessly to unite the many interests including the more than 100 ethnic groups in Myanmar who have been fighting for independence, not necessarily a democracy. When asked about sexual trafficking, they acknowledged that trafficking across the borders is a problem. Women are being sold to China as brides, on the promise of better lives and the hope of escaping poverty. We were both moved and impressed with the dedication of these young people.

### Shwedagon Pagoda at Night – Even More Spectacular







Dr. Soe Aung





Our meeting with Dr. Soe Aung gave us a whole new perspective on the health care delivery system in Myanmar. Currently he is working with UNICEF, the Gates Foundation, Global Alliance and others to try and bring better health care to Myanmar. There is no insurance system for the country, the wealthy go to private hospitals. Some of the problems they face are: polio coming in from Bangladesh, immunizations and care for babies, TB, HIV, and malaria. The health care system is trying to concentrate more on the rural areas, but there is a real shortage of trained medical assistance. One of the biggest problems is the low wages for doctors (about \$12 per month) and the difficulty of training the number of medical professionals needed to provide adequate care. The government provides midwives for the rural areas, but the population exceeds the supply by 5,000 to one. UNICEF has worked to provide training for "Traditional Birth Attendants," women who have had minimal training to help deliver babies.

Posted in [Burma 2014](#), [Uncategorized](#) | Tagged [american women for international understanding](#), [ASEAN](#), [AWIU](#), [AWIU Burma delegation](#), [AWIU Women's Delegation](#), [awiu.org](#), [Burma Economy](#), [Burma Education](#), [Burma Independence Day](#), [AWIU Burma Delegation](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

## Day 3 In Yangon – Visit to the U.S. Embassy and Zin Mar Aung, International Woman of Courage in 2012

Posted on [February 4, 2014](#)

### Meeting at the U.S. Embassy with Deputy Chief of Mission, U.S. Department of State



Our meeting with the U.S. State Department Deputy Chief of Missions, **Virginia Murray**, left us very impressed with the size and scope of the challenges facing the current government of Myanmar as it continues its transition toward a full fledged democracy. Accompanied by USAID Democracy Officer, Andrea Sawka, and Political/Economic Officer, Shayma Jannat, Ms Murray briefed us on a wide variety of programs and goals where U.S interests intersect with Myanmar's programs. She briefly explained AID's Midwifery support; their National Dialogue on women's issues that addresses human trafficking; and their efforts to work with ethnic minorities, especially the Rohingya, the largest ethnic group not yet granted citizenship. Ms. Murray also described the challenges facing the current Myanmar government: their upcoming 2015 elections; the March 2014 census that will attempt to quantify ethnic populations; the visibility of chairing ASEAN, especially with so many needed internal reforms; the meetings of the Eight Dialogue Partners where Burma must play a lead role in brokering issues involving the South China Sea; the need to continue its efforts toward a nationwide ceasefire for the first time in 60 years; and working on a Myanmar Code of Conduct that will withstand greater scrutiny as IMF and the World Bank encourage foreign investment. These discussions increased our knowledge of current issues and heightened our interest in topics covered by the organizations and citizens of Burma we met with throughout our Delegation.

### The family home of Aung San Suu Kyi



We stopped to see what we could of **Aung San Suu Kyi's family home**. Aung San Suu Kyi is now a member of Parliament and the leader of the National Democratic League. As we traveled throughout many areas of Burma, we found a fierce loyalty to Daw Suu Kyi and many look to her as the only hope for the future.





Yangon School of Political Science



Our meeting with **Zin Mar Aung** was much anticipated as we had remained in contact after meeting her at the U.S. Department of State where she was selected as an International Woman of Courage in 2012. At the age of 25, Zin Mar Aung was arrested and held as a political prisoner for eleven years. Released in 2009 she founded two organizations: the **Yangon School of Political Science** and **Rainfall**, an organization that works for gender equity in Burma. The Yangon School of Political Science educates young people about the democratic process and encourages them to take an active part in political issues. It was inspiring to see the hard work and dedication she and her colleagues demonstrate. They are committed to making changes in Burma through the democratic process.

### Colonial District of Yangon



Stopping at the famous Strand Hotel for High Tea also gave us an opportunity to walk around the old colonial district where we saw street side markets and natives meeting to chat with friends over tea and snacks.

Posted in [Uncategorized](#) | [Leave a comment](#)

## Day 4 Mandalay – Famous under British Rule – Famous Now

Posted on [February 4, 2014](#)



**The Royal Palace, Mandalay**

**Mandalay** is the second-largest city and the last royal capital of Burma. Located 445 miles (716 km) north of Yangon on the east bank of the Ayeyarwady River, the city has a population of one and half million. Here the country maintains many of its Chinese business relationships.

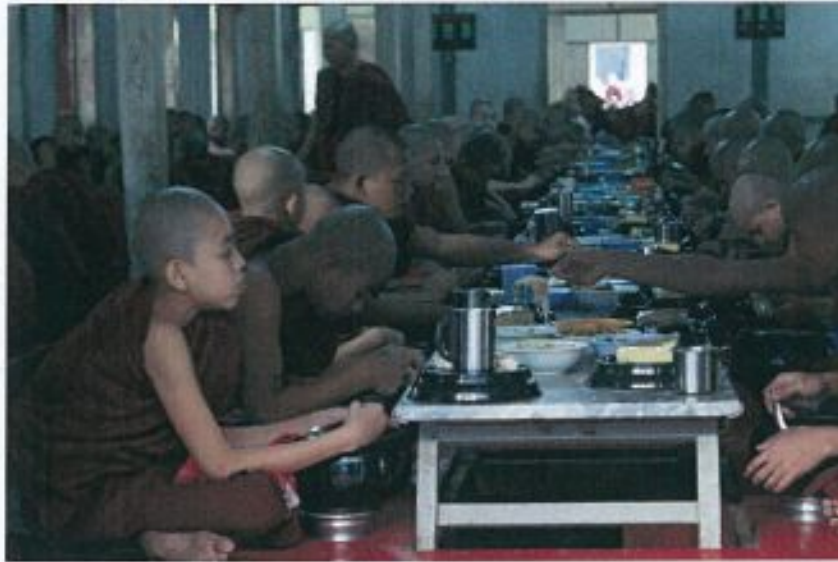




### **Silk Weaving in Amarapura Village**

The silk weaving workshop in Amarapura, a village near Mandalay, allowed us to see how they wove intricate and beautiful pieces on big looms. Couldn't resist the shopping next door.

### **The Mahagandayone Monastery**



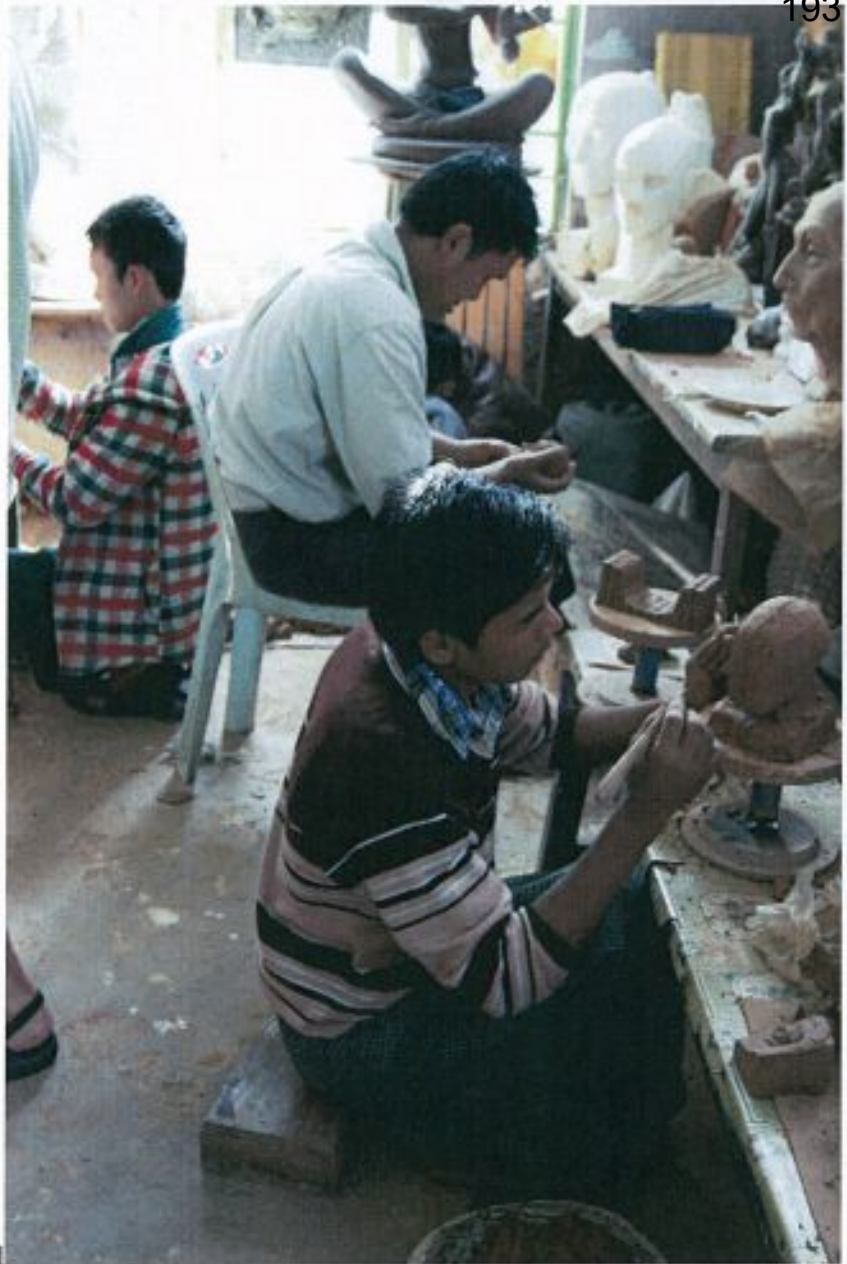
The Mahagandayone Monastery monks, mostly young boys, walked with their bowls to receive their major meal of the day. More than 1,000 monks live and study together – only religious subjects can be taught as mandated by the government. The food looked to be simple, but nutritious. All food and other costs are donated.

### **U Bein Bridge**



The famous **U Bein Bridge** that is featured in every guidebook of Burma and is located at Taungthaman Lake in Amarapura. The 1.2km wooden bridge is made of teakwood and was built in the mid of 19th century. It is the longest teak bridge in the world. The bridge crosses both farmland that is flooded in the rainy season, but where workers are farming a variety of crops including corn and vegetables during the dry season. It also spans a river where we watched fisherman in small boats catching fresh fish.





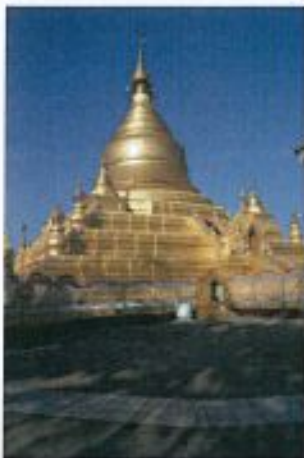
Mandalay School Fine Arts School

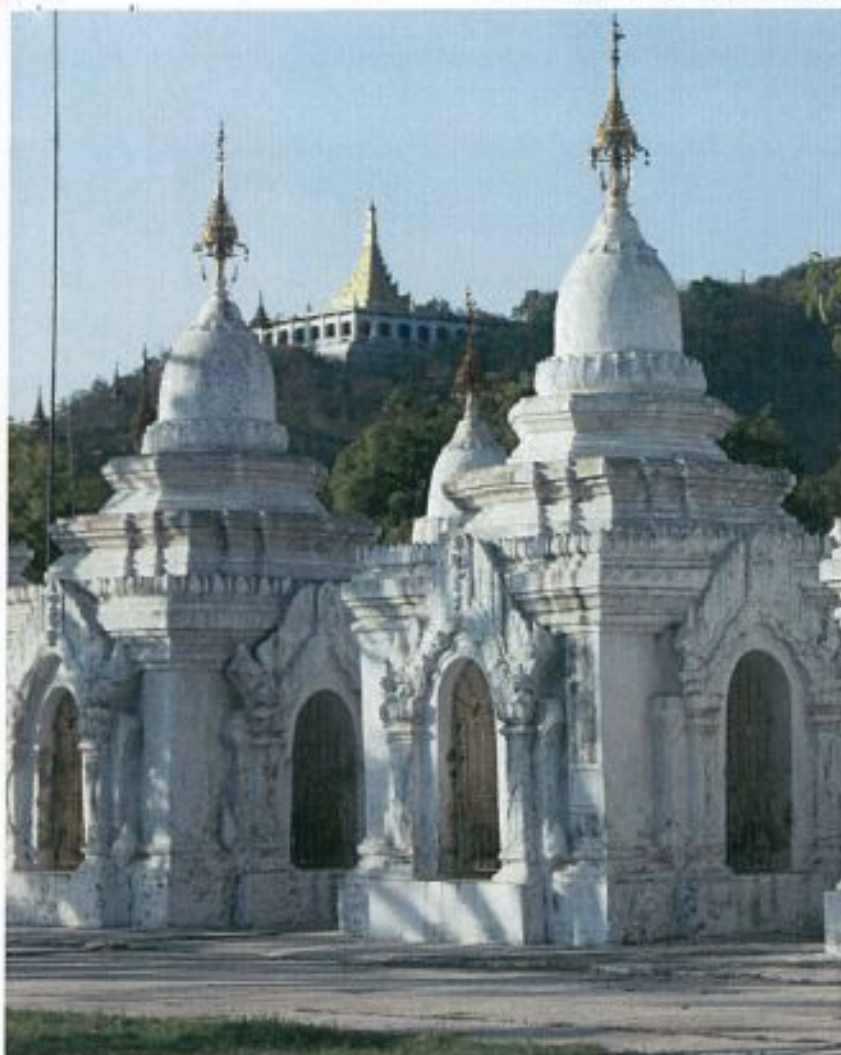




Although tired, we were rejuvenated when we visited the Mandalay Fine Arts school – the first time non-Burmese visitors were allowed in 40 years. We watched the students learn skills in drawing, painting, copying the classics and sculpture, but the highlight was watching their young students perform the classic dances to the accompaniment of their traditional xylophone, harp, and other Burmese instruments. The students were very engaging and well-trained and it was a unique opportunity. The government pays for the schooling and the parents pay for their supplies and housing.

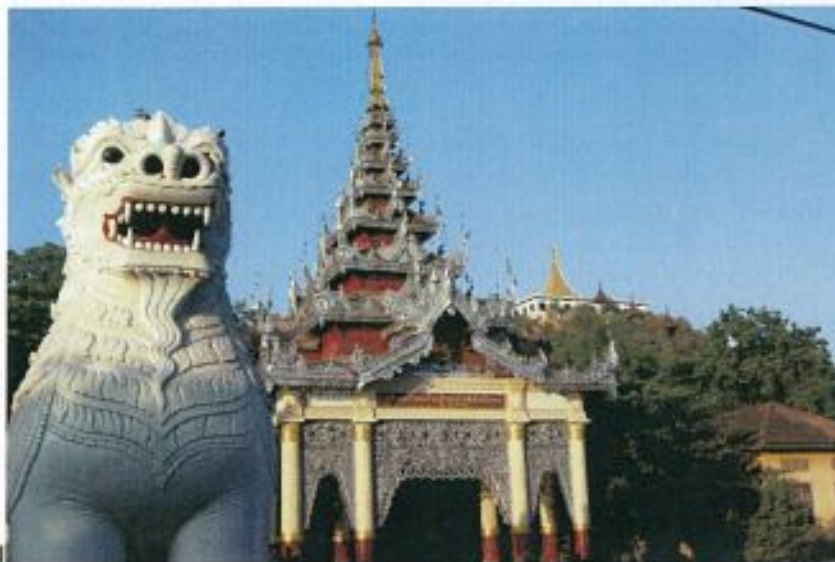
### The Famous Kuthodaw Stupa





A visit to the Kuthodaw Stupa, at the base on Mandalay Hill, was built by King Mingdon to house 729 whitewashed pagodas erected in 1872. All of the Buddhist scriptures (Tipitaka) were engraved on stone zayat tablets and veneered with gold leaf for the first time. Reportedly, it took 2400 monks six months to recite the text, often referred to as the world's largest book.

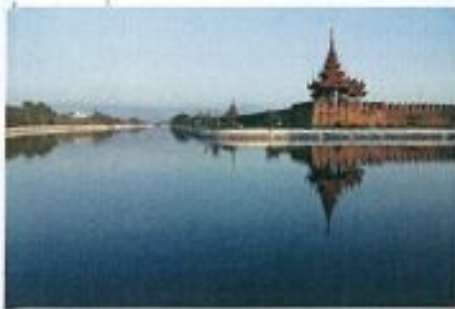




Mandalay Hill



A brief stop to view **Mandalay Hill** gave us an opportunity to watch the nuns as they arrived to climb the many steps to the top. Nuns seemed more inclined to smile than their male counterparts.



As we passed **The Royal Palace**, the evening sky had a golden hue and the water was calm and blue. See our photographer's masterpiece as she captured this beautiful sight. The walls are a mile long on each side and surrounded by a deep moat, remaining as they were built, with 12 gates when, in 1885 when the British entered the city and ousted King Thibaw Min. During World War II the Japanese captured the palace that was later bombed and destroyed by the Allies. Few original buildings remain and the rest was reconstructed in the 1990's.

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## **Day 5 The Amazing City of Mandalay – Lawyers Council, Jade and More...**

Posted on [February 3, 2014](#)

**Mandalay**, a city of horns honking, motorcycles, and ladies with goods piled atop their heads. The second largest city in Myanmar and the former capital. The city is the economic and religious hub of upper Myanmar. A city of culture whose fine arts include gold leaf, lacquer, weaving bright silks and cotton fabric, carving intricate patterns in wood and marble. Our morning was spent visiting their studios.





Making gold leaf



Polishing marble





Embroidery



Beautiful crafts







Beautiful People

After lunch we found ourselves at the famous **Jade Market** learning how jade is grade and marketed.







## U THEIN THAN OO

In the evening we met with an attorney, U Thein Than Oo has a long history of activism, having been arrested as a political prisoner three times for a total of more than 25 years, first under Ne Win in 1976, then in 1988 just five years after becoming a lawyer, and again in 2001. He currently is pursuing several important cases including a writ submitted to the Supreme Court claiming the government took property illegally and without compensation. He is very active in organizing the consortium that will meet mid January to consider proposed changes to Myanmar's constitution. The three major issues under consideration are: 1) To reactivate a democratic Fed/State Union (Myanmar is now a unitary state); 2) To determine whether the 2008 Constitution should be amended or abolished; and 3) who and how a new Constitution should be redrawn to ensure inclusiveness.

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## Day 6 Rolling, Rolling, Rolling Down the River

Posted on [February 3, 2014](#)



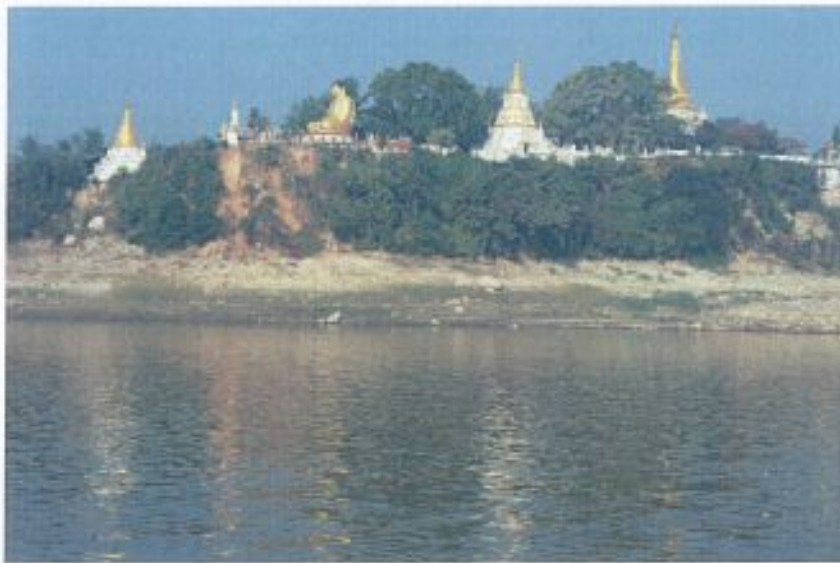


Up again at dawn, we loaded our luggage, a formidable task were it not for the local porters who carried it from the bus down a steep rocky hill to the boat that would be our transportation for the day.





We traveled down the Ayeyarwady (Irrawaddy) from Mandalay to Bagan which was named by the British as the "Road to Mandalay." The Ayeyarwady begins in the Himalayas and travels south for 1,350 miles. It is still a major means of transporting products and it provides rich delta soil for farming. Until 1962 Burma was the world's largest exporter of rice because of this rich wet delta.



As we left Mandalay and all along the beautiful green riverside, we couldn't quit taking pictures of the many, many golden spired stupas in the distance. This was our introduction to the thousands we would see when we reached Bagan.



We were the only passengers on our flat boat whose crew cooked a wonderful lunch for us as they guided us down river.



A leisurely, but a brisk day, we relaxed for the first time since reaching Burma.





On board were two individuals that kept us occupied. One was a traditional Burmese fortune teller. He uses an astrological system which is based on the zodiac of stars, planets and the time of birth and age. Only time will tell whether his predictions were accurate.



After a break with tea, a gelled dessert, bananas, watermelon slices and mandarin oranges, we heard from a doctor about the basics of Burmese traditional medicine, which is a combination of Indian Ayurvedic and Buddhist teachings. The therapeutic use of herbal and mineral compounds are used. He was available for personal consults.



The deck hands used long poles to test the depth of the river. Late in the afternoon we hit some sand bars and it took awhile for the boat to back off and get to the deeper channel.



As the sun did splash down to the west, and we all took photos of the sunset. It was then time to have a little fun. After 11 hours we approached the jetty at New Bagan and made our unsteady way off the boat and along a single plank to the embankment, where helpful men, and some children, helped us climb up the steep bank. After a 45 minutes bus ride we were happy to finally arrive at the Razagyo Hotel.

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# **CHIAPAS - MEXICO**

## **2015**





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### Delegation Report: AWIU Delegation To Chiapas Mexico November 2015



#### Chiapas Delegation Report

November 11 – 19, 2015

Colleen Berk, Delegation Leader

Nine AWIU members visited Chiapas as part of a delegation from Nov 11-19. Chiapas is a Mexican state that borders Guatemala. The population of Chiapas is 30% indigenous and as high as 80% in the mountains near San Cristobal de las Casas. This delegation was unusual in that it was limited to visiting a region within a country.

We began in Palenque which is known for Mayan ruins. According to the World Heritage Committee: "The archaeological site of Palenque in the state of Chiapas is one of the most outstanding Classic period (500-900 AD) sites of the Maya area known for its exceptional and well conserved architectural and sculptural remains." While in Palenque, we visited with CAM an NGO that provides health care and other services to women in the indigenous communities.

After 2 days in Palenque we travelled to San Cristobal de las Casas where we spent a week. En route we visited Casa de Migrante El Caminante Don Samuel Ruiz Garcia which is a Migrant center. This apolitical center provides as little as a meal and bed for the night or as much as a place to stay for those in the process of seeking asylum in Mexico.

San Cristobal is a beautiful colonial city situated on a plateau surrounded by mountains. Our time there was a mix of meetings, sightseeing, a lecture, museum visits and a visit to Acteal, an indigenous community in the Mountains.

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**Museums:** Sergio Castro museum of ceremonial costumes and other artifacts. For decades Señor Castro has provided burn care at no charge to the impoverished. He has been given the costumes by grateful patients.

Don Samuel Ruiz Garcia was the bishop of Chiapas for decades. The recently opened museum traced his life story with emphasis on the work he did for the Indigenous while he was bishop.

**Lecture:** Miguel Pikard, a political analyst, brought us up to date on the sociopolitical situation in Mexico today. Topics included migration, political reform and free trade agreements.

**Meetings:** Meliel Xojobel is a children's rights group. The streets of San Cristobal are full of young children selling handicrafts. Memel Xojobel's goals are: reducing the risks of the street such as car accidents, seasonal illnesses and child trafficking; educate about rights; helping children enter and remain in school. They also have a day care program and an early education project.



AWIU Chiapas Delegation November 2015 -  
Chiapas-Codimuj Mujeres



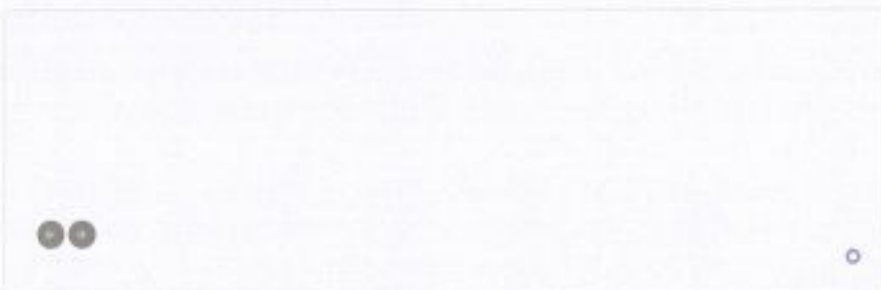
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Chiapas-Codimuj Mujeres

Chiapas Delegation November 2015 -  
Chiapas-Codimuj Mujeres



AWIU Chiapas Delegation November 2015 -  
Chiapas-Codimuj Mujeres

#### Kinal Antsetik – A Women's Weaving Cooperative.



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- Northern California Orange County
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**CODIMUJ – A Women's Rights Group.** It is sponsored by the Catholic church and the advisors are Catholic nuns.



AWU Chiapas Delegation  
November 2015 –  
Chiapas-Codimuj Mujeres



AWU Chiapas Delegation  
November 2015 –  
Chiapas-Codimuj Mujeres



AWU Chiapas Delegation  
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Chiapas-Codimuj Mujeres



AWU Chiapas Delegation  
November 2015 –  
Chiapas-Codimuj Mujeres

An important goal of the delegation was to coordinate the efforts of the Delegation Committee with those of the Grant Committee. AWIU Chiapas Delegation will work to help some of the organizations that they met apply for grants from AWIU.

Share this post

#### Our Mission

Promotes woman-to-woman interaction and understanding Worldwide through meaningful visits, grants, educational support, the celebration and support of the International Women of Courage, and participation of local Chapters which act locally and affect globally.

#### Quote

Maya Angelou

How important it is for us to recognize and celebrate our heroes and she-ros!

#### Flickr Photos



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## Delegations


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### AWIU Delegation To Chiapas Detailed Activity Report: November 11-19, 2015



American Women For International Understanding Delegation to Chiapas November 11-19, 2015

#### DELEGATES

Andrea Bascon

Robin Winter Odem

Colleen Berk, Co Leader

Barbara Rubio, Co Leader

Barbara Disko

Judith Russell

Barbara Feig

Nancy Shinowara

Katherine Heffernan

#### November 11, 2015: Welcome to Palenque!

Our lovely hotel is located in the jungle very close to the archeological site. Bungalows are scattered around the property amid lush vegetation and we wake to the sounds of birds and monkeys.

#### Nov 12 -13

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The ruins of Palenque are a World Heritage site. According to the World Heritage Committee: "The archaeological site of Palenque in the state of Chiapas is one of the most outstanding Classic period (500-900 AD) sites of the Maya area known for its exceptional and well conserved architectural and sculptural remains." We enjoyed an excellent tour of the ruins. Even though the site is expansive, only a small percentage has been excavated. We were able to view an excavation in progress.



There were two meetings near Palenque including a Women's Rights

group CAM: Casa de Apoyo de la Mujer. Two doctors provide medical care and other staff members offer workshops on women's rights and empowerment among the indigenous. We also met with Sister Nell at Casa de Migrante El Caminante Don Samuel Ruiz García which is a Migrant center. This center provides as little as a meal and bed for the night or as of much as a place to stay while refugee status in Mexico is being processed.

Travel from Palenque to San Cristobal de las Casas involves a four hour drive through the mountains. We stopped en route at a restaurant with a beautiful view of a valley high in the mountains. Clouds were both above and below us.



**Nov 14**

A sightseeing day in the beautiful colonial city of San Cristobal de las Casas.

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#### Nov 15

A two hour drive into the mountains took us to Acteal, a typical small indigenous community. Unfortunately, what makes the community unique is a massacre that took place there. In 1997, 45 people, mostly women and children, were murdered while attending services at a Catholic church. A paramilitary group, known as the Red Masks were responsible.



#### Nov 16

We began with a lecture by political analyst Miguel Pikard. He brought us up to date on the sociopolitical situation in Mexico today. Topics included migration, political reform and free trade agreements.

Later we visited two museums. Don Samuel Ruiz Garcia was the bishop of Chiapas for decades. The recently opened museum traced his life story with emphasis on the work he did for the Indigenous while he was bishop.



Group Photo at the Bishop's Museum



Sergio Castro is a humanitarian who came to Chiapas in the 60's as an agronomist. He was alarmed at the lack of health care for the poor and trained himself to treat burns. He accepts no money for his services though, over the years, some patients have donated colorful ceremonial costumes and other gifts. Don Sergio created a museum of these costumes and opens the museum to visitor who often make donations for his work.



Nov 17

Melel Xojobel is a children's rights group. The streets of San Cristobal are full of young children selling handicrafts. Melel Xojobel's goals are: reducing the risks of the street such as car accidents, seasonal illnesses and child trafficking; educating about rights; helping children enter and remain in school. They also have a day care program and an early education project.



Kinal Antsetik is a women's weaving cooperative. We enjoyed a presentation and an opportunity to shop for the remarkable textiles of the region.

Nov 18

Today was the last day. We had one meeting today. The organization is CODIMUJ which is a women's rights group. It is sponsored by the Catholic church and the advisors are Catholic nuns.



## CONCLUSION

We had many excellent meetings on this delegation. We learned about the history of the region and the challenges that remain today. We developed enormous admiration for the local indigenous people and the groups which support and assist them. Since our return we've made recommendations to the Grant Committee regarding potential grant recipients among these groups. Even with a full schedule while we were in Chiapas, we had time for independent sightseeing, relaxation and shopping. Very few of us left without some of the beautiful local textiles and jewelry. We agree, however, that what made this delegation such a rich experience were the people we met in the scheduled meetings.

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## Our Mission

Promotes woman-to-woman interaction and understanding Worldwide through meaningful visits, grants, educational support, the celebration and support of the International Women of Courage, and participation of local Chapters which act locally and affect globally

## Quote

Zuzana Stevulova, 2016 International Woman of Courage, Slovakia

"Women leaders around the world are working on issues, which promote peace, justice, and progress for societies. As Margaret Mead famously said, all it takes to change the world is a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens. In their work, AWIU recognizes efforts and lasting achievements of women around the globe and encourages them to take action. Thus, this group of committed citizens becomes stronger and leads the world towards

## Flickr Photos

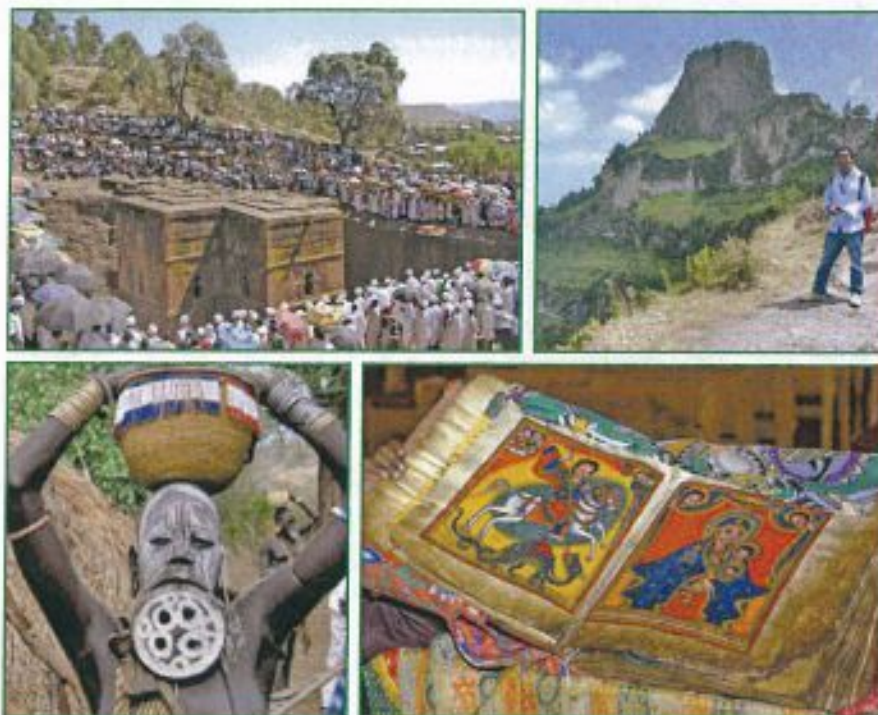


# **ETHIOPIA**

## **2016**



# AWIU Delegation to Ethiopia



## Historic Ethiopia & Ethiopia Today

**January 17 - 29, 2016**

Addis Ababa • Bahirdar • Blue Nile Falls • Lake Tana

Gondar • Simien Mountains • Axum

Yeha • Lalibela • Taboat Maderia

**Delegation Leader is Judith Jakaitis and Co-Leader is Gayle Graham-Morin**

**Deposits Required by June 29, 2015**



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Dear American Women for International Understanding Delegates,

This 13-day journey takes our Delegation to Ethiopia, which is old beyond imagination, dating back to the very beginning of mankind. The earliest known human remains were unearthed in this mystic country. It is also the land of the Queen of Sheba—a place of legendary rulers, fabulous kingdoms and many ancient mysteries. Act quickly if you wish to participate in this Delegation.

In addition to our official agenda, we are planning our visit during the colorful Sebaratmu Giorgis Festival, before the rainy season. Ethiopia's Biblical roots are both Jewish and Christian since the time of Solomon. Less revealed is the Holy Ark of the Covenant, which is said to be in Axum. You'll see the church that may house the Ark and learn about the legend. Is it a legend only? See the Italian influence on customs, churches and monasteries. The proposed itinerary may be adjusted to accommodate official Delegation meetings.

*Amen*

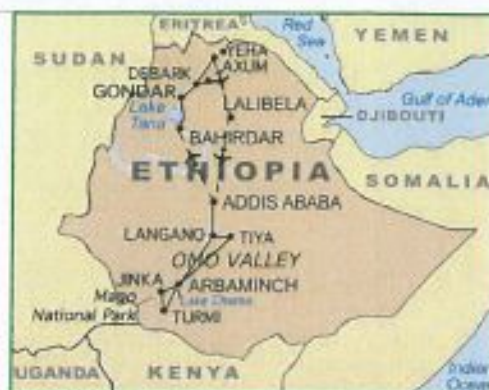
Gwen Erwood  
President, Travel Concepts International

P.S. See our 2013 traveler, Jeanette Williams' photo album at  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/jjwilliams/sets/72157637061759815>

This is the first announcement of our planned Delegation to Ethiopia. The brochure is designed to highlight a few of the amazing opportunities to visit historical sights and participate in local culture. Other details on organizations we plan to meet with are still being developed. This information will be shared as soon as it is available. Please contact us if you are interested in participating or have suggestions or questions.

Delegation Leader is **Judith Jakaitis**  
Email: [judithjakaitis@gmail.com](mailto:judithjakaitis@gmail.com)  
Phone: 773-334-4211

Delegation Co-Leader is **Gayle Graham-Morin**  
Email: [gaylemorin@mac.com](mailto:gaylemorin@mac.com)  
Phone: 615-414-4427



### All this is Included

- Fly roundtrip from Washington, DC to Ethiopia via Ethiopian Airlines including three internal flights
- Meet with the Ambassador at the U.S. Embassy. Also meet with selected women's organizations. Details provided later
- Prepare with pre-trip study material
- Participation at action-packed Sebaratmu Giorgis Festival in Lalibela with dancing, feasting and singing, including the moving of the Tabot
- Visit the National Museum of Ethiopia where relics of the oldest human, called Lucy, are found
- Experience one of Africa's spectacular waterfalls, the Blue Nile Falls
- Take a boat to the Islands of Lake Tana, site of over twenty different 14th century monasteries
- Make a two-day journey through the Simien Mountains National Park to gain insight into current ecological and environmental issues
- Discover the Felasha or Black Jewish village said to be established at the time of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon
- Explore the beautiful countryside to meet its citizens and understand its culture
- Relish the sanctity of the 17th century medieval castles of the Royal Enclosure at Gondar
- Visit one of the oldest cities in the world, Axum, purportedly the home of the Holy Ark of the Covenant
- Optional treks in the Simien Mountains National Park
- Experience a traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony



Photo by Scott Walker

#### Our guide, John

Yohannes Mitiku (John) is a graduate from Lion Tourism College in tour guiding. He has been leading groups and individuals throughout Ethiopia for more than 7 years. He has a very good knowledge of the culture and history of Ethiopia.

"Wonderful guide. Warm, considerate, fluent."

-Scott Walker

"What a wonderful, warm, friendly and knowledgeable guide he was!!"

-Jeannette Williams



Photo by Pat Southward

#### Our driver, Alex

Aleemnew Temesegen (Alex), has been driving through the remote terrains and inaccessible valleys of Ethiopia for more than 12 years. He is a very friendly, very careful and communicable driver.

"Alex was excellent. He took his job seriously. Alex was the best."

-Scott Walker

"Excellent."

-Jeannette Williams

Cover photos clockwise from top-right: Our Guide, John in the Simien Mountains by Pat Southward (PS); illuminated bible [Gondar] by Gerry Olsen (GO); Mursi woman [Omo Valley] from Grand Holidays Ethiopia Travel (GHET); festivities at rock-hewn church [Lalibela] (GHET)



## AWIU Delegation to Ethiopia Day-by-Day Itinerary

### January 17 Depart U.S.A.

#### Sunday

Meet Judith, Gayle and other Delegates by 7:30 AM for departure from Dulles International (IAD), Washington, DC at 10:30 AM local time with Ethiopian Airlines ET501. Meals aloft

### January 18 Arrive Addis Ababa

#### Monday

Arrive in Addis Ababa (ADD), Ethiopia at 7:20 AM. Welcome to Ethiopia! Upon arrival at Addis Ababa Bole International Airport, we will be welcomed and assisted by our guide and driver to the Radisson Blu Addis Ababa Hotel (4\*).

Addis Ababa, founded in 1886 by Menelik II, is situated at 2,500 meters (8000 ft) above sea level. It is the highest capital city in the world, after La Paz and Quito in South America. The city enjoys an excellent climate all year round, with an average temperature of 25C (77F). With a multi-ethnic population of over 5 million, Addis Ababa is a pleasant city with wide avenues of jacarandas, interesting museums, and one of the largest open-air markets in Africa, known as the "Mercato".

Delegates will have time for a short rest in the morning. In the afternoon we will start our city tour and sightseeing tour of Addis Ababa, which includes the National Museum, Ethnographic Museum and Merkato.

The National Museum of Ethiopia is one of the best museums in quality and diversity. Archaeological exhibits include the 3.5 million-year-old fossil of Lucy (or Dinkinesh - 'thou art wonderful' in the native language), a humanoid woman of the species of *Australopithecus Afarensis*. The discovery of Lucy's fossil in 1974 forced a complete rethink of human genealogy, providing that our ancestors were walking 2.5 million years earlier than had been supposed. The National Museum also contains many wonderful artifacts dating back to pre-Axumite civilization.

The Ethnographic Museum is very different to the National Museum, but equally absorbing. This museum exhibits a varied array of artifacts and daily objects related to most ethnic groups in Ethiopia. After a



city tour of Addis continue to Merkato, the largest open-air market in the continent. The evening is free to recover from jet lag.

\*\*\*\* Radisson Blu-Addis Ababa

### January 19 Addis Ababa Tuesday U.S. Embassy and Other Meetings Bahir Dar

After breakfast, drive to the U.S. Embassy to meet with the U.S. Ambassador. Also, meet with Ethiopian female members of Parliament and other organizations of women entrepreneurs.

In the afternoon, transfer to the airport for Ethiopia Airlines ET140 (5:30 PM/6:30 PM) to Bahir Dar. (B-D)

Avanti Blue Nile Resort-Bahir Dar

### January 20 Bahir Dar Wednesday Blue Nile Falls

In the morning, we will drive 22 miles to visit the majestic Blue Nile Falls. Eighteen miles after it exits Lake Tana, the Blue Nile plunges over a 148 ft high face to form one of the most spectacular waterfalls in Africa. Walking to the falls through the beautiful river gorge on the ancient bridge from the 17th century, and meeting the local people at the small villages on the way to the falls is also a great experience. Later, walk around the beautiful town of Bahir Dar and visit the local market.

Take a boat over Lake Tana to visit the ancient 14th century island monasteries there. The 37 islands of Lake Tana shelter twenty monasteries-surviving remnants of an old, contemplative tradition. Because of their isolation, they were used to store treasures and religious relics from all parts of the country. The Lake's monasteries are famous for their typical Ethiopian religious paintings, illuminated manuscripts, and other ancient church treasures. The monasteries that we are going to visit include Ura Kidane Mihret and Azua Mariam. (B-L-D)

Avanti Blue Nile Resort-Bahir Dar

### January 21 Gondar Thursday

After breakfast, drive to Gondar through the beautiful countryside scenery to arrive around lunchtime.

## Dates & Rates

### AWIU Delegation to Ethiopia

#### Air Inclusive • 13 days

January 17 - 29, 2016 • \$4990\*  
based on double occupancy from Washington, D.C. (IAD) via Ethiopian Airlines including three internal flights plus departure taxes of \$589 and \$50 Ethiopian Visa  
\$770 Single Supplement

#### In Country Land Only • 11 days

January 18 - 28, 2016 • \$4060\*  
Begins and ends in Addis Ababa  
Domestic flights in Ethiopia additional

\*In addition to Delegation price, a \$200 contribution is due directly to AWIU's grant fund for charitable organizations that support educating and empowering women.



International Women of Courage, recognized by the Department of State in 2015.

## Comments from our Past Travelers to Ethiopia

"So much seems dreamlike—the shadowy rock-hewn church interiors, the folk-like iconic paintings in monasteries and churches, the colorful ecclesiastical robes, the comfortable relationships between tribal mothers and their babies, the dancing Dorze children."

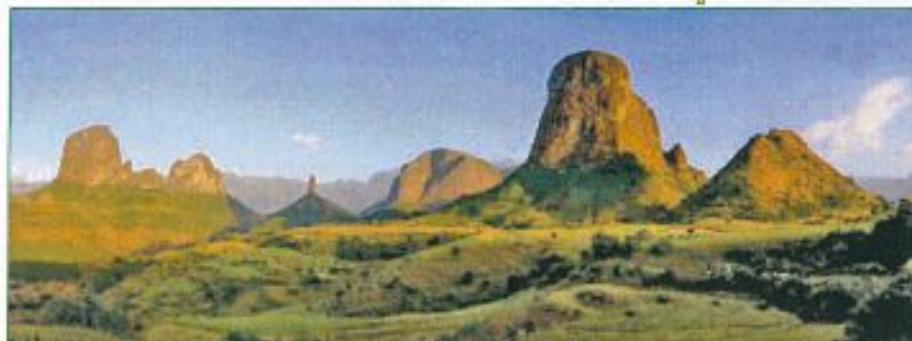
—Lois Chaney

"The two trips I have taken to Ethiopia remain perhaps the most satisfying trips that I have been privileged to take. I look for more in the future."

—Gerry Olsen

LEFT: PANORAMIC VIEW OF BLUE NILE FALLS BY JEANNETTE WILLIAMS (JW)





After lunch, explore the ancient city of Gondar. Founded by Emperor Fasilidas around 1635, Gondar is famous for its many medieval castles and the design and decoration of its churches. In particular, Deberberhan Selassie represents a masterpiece of unique Ethiopian School of traditional art and adorned by brilliant frescoes.

Later, visit the Royal Enclosure, a walled compound having 6 different castles built from the 17th century by different kings who ruled in different times, the pool of King Fasilidas which still serves as a baptismal pool during Ethiopian Epiphany. (B-L-D)

Goha Hotel-Gondar



#### January 22 Gondar-Simien Friday Mountains National Park

After an early breakfast, we will drive to Axum through the Simien Mountains National park. En-route we will be visiting the "Felasha" or the Black Jewish village. It is believed that the "Felashas" settled at this village during the time of King Minlik I, the son of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon.

Driving from Gondar up to Simien Mountains National Park provides an opportunity to understand ecological and

#### Alternate overnight in Debark

If the altitude at Simien Lodge is a concern for you, we have arranged for overnight accommodations in Debark (at 7,333 feet in elevation) about 13 miles from Simien Lodge on the road from Gondar. The next day, on their way to Axum, you will be picked up to join the Delegation and continue with the itinerary.

environmental issues facing Ethiopia. The rolling grassy plateau comes to an abrupt stop, and sheer cliffs plunge almost vertically for 1,000 meter (3,280 feet) to the plains below. The massif itself has been sculpted by 30 million years of up thrust and erosion into a wonderland of jagged ridges, pinnacles and strangely cropped conical mountains. Looking out over the heart-stopping precipice, you feel you might just be at the edge of the world.

The rest of the day, trek to explore the surrounding of Snakaber, part of the Simien Mountains National Park. The elevation of the Simien Lodge "The Highest Lodge in the World", is 10,695 feet. (B-L-D)

Simien Lodge-Buyit Ras

#### January 23 Simien Mountains Saturday Axum

After breakfast drive to Axum through the beautiful scenery of the Simien Mountains, Limalimo and Tekeze River Gorge. Trip will include a picnic lunch in the Tekeze River Gorge. En route we will visit different villages and monasteries. (B-L-D)

Sabeen Hotel-Axum

#### January 24 Axum-Yeha Sunday Axum

After breakfast, we will start with a visit to the ancient city of Axum. This is the birthplace of Ethiopian civilization, and by the first century Axum was a major trading center for exotic goods from Egypt, Rome, Nubia, Greece, Syria, and India. The Holy Ark of the Covenant was brought here before the destruction of the Temple, and Axum is reputed to be the second Jerusalem.

Our visit in Axum includes: the Stele Square, Kaleba Tombs, the 4th century Christian inscription of King Ezana, Queen of Sheba's Palace, Archaeological Museum, and Tslon Mariam Church where the original Ark of the Covenant is housed.

Also visit Yeha, "Temple of the Moon", pre-Christian temple from the 5th century BC and center of the Sabeen Civilization which preceded the Axumite era. (B-L-D)

Sabeen Hotel-Axum



#### About Ethiopians

Ethiopia's population has grown dramatically in the last several decades, from 33.5 million in 1983 to an estimated 91 million today. The country's population is highly diverse. Most of its people speak a Semitic or Cushitic language. The Oromo, Amhara, and Tigray and Somali make up three-quarters of the population, but there are more than 80 different ethnic groups within Ethiopia. Some of these have as few as 10,000 members.

Ethiopians and Eritreans, especially Semitic-speaking ones, collectively refer to themselves as Habesha or Abesha, though others reject these names on the basis that they refer only to certain ethnicities.

According to the Ethiopian national census of 2007, the Oromo are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia at 34.5%. The Amhara represent 26.9%, while the Tigray people are 6.1% of the population.

Other ethnic groups are:  
Somali 6.2%, Gurage 2.5%, Sidama 2.3%, Wolayta 2.3%,  
Afar 1.7%, Hadiya 1.7% and Gamo 1.5%.

(Courtesy of [www.Wikipedia.org](http://www.Wikipedia.org))

LEFT ABOVE: SIMIEN MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK (GHET);  
LEFT BELOW: GONDAR (AW); RIGHT ABOVE: ETHIOPIANS  
(GO)



### January 25 Axum-Lalibela Monday Sebaratmu Giorgis Festival Eve

After having an early breakfast at the hotel, transfer to the Axum Airport for your flight to Lalibela by Ethiopian Airlines ET123 (11:15 AM-11:55 AM). After checking into our hotel, we will concentrate on some of Ethiopia's most famous rock-hewn churches, mostly referred by many as "the living wonders of the world." These churches are, and they have been for at least 800 years, an active Christian shrine - the spiritual center of the country's religious life. The monolithic churches were carved out of 8,500-sq foot of natural rock terrace in the 12-century AD by King Lalibela.

Bete Medhani Alem, the largest monolithic rock-hewn church in the world, measures 37.7 ft in height, covers an area of almost 2,625 square ft and has walls that are up to six feet thick. A plain building supported by 36 pillars on the inside and another 36 pillars around the outside, Bete Medhani Alem was modeled on the original St. Mary Zion Church built by King Ezana in the 4th century at Axum.

The rock-hewn churches that we will visit today include: Bete Medhani Alem, Bete Mariam, Bete Meskel, Bete Denagil, Bete Golgotha Michael and Bete Giorgis.

At Bete Giorgis, we will attend the eve of Sebaratmu. Here the priest and deacons will be chanting with their drums and sistras to celebrate the eve of Sebaratmu. (B-L-D)

Tukul Village Hotel-Lalibela

### January 26 Lalibela Tuesday

After breakfast we will continue our journey into Ethiopia's long and marvelous past with a visit to other St. Lalibela's remarkable churches-their architecture and artistry must be seen to be believed. Once we finish visiting the second group of churches, we will walk to the village through the complex bewildering labyrinth of underground tunnels to the monastery where the monks and nuns live.

The rock-hewn churches that we will visit this afternoon include: Bete Gebriel, Bete

Mercurios, Bete Amanuel, Bethlehem and Bete Aba Libanos.

In the afternoon, visit the Lalibela Hospital and St. Lalibela Elementary School. Meet with female teachers and discuss the challenges girls face to make it to school and be successful. (B-L-D)

Tukul Village Hotel-Lalibela

### January 27 Lalibela-Taboat Maderia Wednesday Participate in Coffee Ceremony with Native Women

After breakfast we will drive to the Taboat Maderia where the replica of the Ark of the Covenant will be rested overnight. The following day the Ark will be transported to Bete Giorgis accompanied by feasting, singing and dancing. When the Tabot reaches the church, there will be dancing by the priest along the cliff edge of the church while the faithful continue to dance forming different smaller groups.

In the afternoon, meet with selected women's organizations and learn about their lives and the challenges and rewards of living in Ethiopia. Following these meetings there will be a traditional Ethiopian coffee prepared for the Delegates at a local home. Delegates may be surprised to learn that the birthplace of coffee was in Ethiopia's Kaffa region - from which it gets its name. Originally the berries were eaten, never roasted. Only since the 13th century has coffee been a hot drink. A coffee ceremony is a traditional Ethiopian way of welcoming a guest and showing hospitality. (B-L-D)

Tukul Village Hotel-Lalibela

### January 28 Lalibela-Addis Ababa Thursday Departure

After breakfast, transfer to Lalibela Airport for the flight to Addis Ababa. After checking into the hotel, we will take a city tour of Addis Ababa which includes: Merkato, the largest open air market, and the view of Addis Ababa from Entoto. We will also have an opportunity for other meetings before strolling around Piazza and Churchill Avenue.

Day rooms will be available at the Radisson Blu hotel until evening. Enjoy a farewell dinner before transferring to Bole International Airport for flights back home with Ethiopian Airlines ET500 departing at 10:30 PM. (B-D)

### January 29 Arrive U.S.A. Friday

Arrive at Dulles International airport (IAD) at 8:30 AM. Welcome home!

Note: Flight schedules always subject to change.

## Accommodations

### Radisson Blu Hotel ★★★★★

The Radisson Blu Hotel, **Addis Ababa** is ideally located in the heart of the Ethiopian capital, also known as the capital city of Africa. A stylishly modern hotel, the Radisson Blu Addis Ababa offers a vibrant feel and top-of-the-line amenities.  
[www.radissonblu.com](http://www.radissonblu.com)

### Avanti Blue Nile Resort

Our accommodation in **Bahirdar** is a resort spa on the shores of Lake Tana.  
[facebook.com/avantibahirdar](https://facebook.com/avantibahirdar)

### Taye Hotel ★★★★★

Taye Belay Hotel is a newly-opened grand hotel offering the best complement to a visit in **Gondar** Ethiopia. Situated just across the street from the Fasildes castles and inspired by their unique architecture, it is the ideal accommodation in the heart of the city.  
[www.tayebelayhotel.com/](http://www.tayebelayhotel.com/)

### Simien Lodge

On the mountain in **Buyit Ras**, the Simien Lodge - the self-proclaimed 'Highest Hotel in Africa' - offers upmarket accommodation in tukuls, or huts.  
[www.simiens.com](http://www.simiens.com)

### Sabeen Hotel

An enjoyable place for family and friends to stay in **Axum** with comfortable luxury rooms with beautiful views.

### Tukul Village

Tukul Village is a new hotel with attractive views of **Lalibela** and its surroundings. It is in fact not a hotel but a small village. It is within walking distance of many of the ancient churches.  
[www.tukulvillage.com](http://www.tukulvillage.com)

## Top Travel Destination

Ethiopia was mentioned as one of the top places to visit in 2014. It is among the 52 places in the *New York Times* and as #1 in the top 10 places in *Rough Guides*.



LEFT: AT SEBARATMU FESTIVAL (GHET)

## Ethiopia 2016 Ellen Werner's Presentation (edited by Sue Devick)

Four million years ago, there was a lake in a verdant valley in what is now Ethiopia. In 1974, the ancient shore yielded the fossilized remains of "Lucy," whom the Ethiopians refer to as *Birkinesh*, or *Thou art Wonderful*. When the anthropologist brushed the first bit of dirt from this human ancestor's bones, the Beatles' song "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" was playing in the background; that is how the world became familiar with this ancient, eerie, queenly being, now on display at the National Museum of Ethiopia

Mankind's evolution in this area continued through agricultural development, animal domestication, language development, and finally, to trade and commerce. Ethiopia became wealthy, which lasted for approximately 2,000 years. Now, Ethiopia is a poor country, facing the worst drought in fifty years; it is also fighting famine. Despite its poverty, the people of this land demonstrate great resilience, having pride in a nation that appears to have an infinite historical background. Ethiopians live their lives believing that their country is still great.

Our delegation went there to meet with various groups, seeking to find out if there was any possibility of our involvement. We were particularly impressed by the work of Dr. Rick Hodes, whom we met with our first day after arriving in Addis Ababa. (See below.) The process of making charitable donations in this region is complicated by political barriers, which limits foreign aid to some degree.

### **Tonography**

Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, is situated at 8,000 ft. above sea level, one of the highest capital cities in the world. The landscape of this country changes from region to region, including arid desert conditions, rolling hills with fertile highlands, savannas, and finally, very mountainous regions. Rash Dashen (or Ras Dejen) is the highest mountain in Ethiopia at about 15,000 ft., and the highest in the Simien Mountain range in northern Ethiopia. As part of its course, the Blue Nile River crashes almost 150 ft. over the famous Blue Nile Falls as the waterway makes its way to join the White Nile River in Khartoum, Sudan. The importance of the Nile River in this region (which flows northward to the Mediterranean Sea) is evident in many facets of life.

### **Character of the Ethiopian People**

Although the people of Ethiopia are very poor, their generous nature is revealed by how much they give to each other without expecting any personal gain in return. They assist each other, and they also often offer guidance to foreigners, not always expecting compensation; however, when they receive a tip or a gift, their gratefulness is enormous. For example, I left an embroidered blouse for our room maid, and when she saw it, she kissed it and cried. Also, I tipped a boy for carrying my luggage. He returned to give me a cross on a cord, and with a big

smile, he told me that he had never received that much money. (An American may have taken this for granted.) Every morning during my stay, he was waiting for me to walk me to breakfast.

### **Coffee and the Ethiopian Economy**

The coffee plant, or *Coffea arabica*, originated in Ethiopia, and about 3% of the world's coffee production comes from this country. Approximately 60% of foreign income is related to this industry, which in some manner employs millions of Ethiopians. About one third of the exports of this country involves coffee.

The coffee ceremony is an exceptional ritual to observe in Ethiopia. Coffee is brewed by first roasting green coffee beans over hot coals in a pan called a *brazier*. The beans are then ground in a wooden mortar and pestle, and then placed in a vessel to be boiled, which is called a *jebena*, and made of pottery. The preparation continues through a second and third brewing process before the coffee is finally served, usually with a small snack such as popcorn, peanuts, or baklava. The ceremony sometimes includes the burning of traditional local incense.

### **Religion**

Forty percent of Ethiopians identify with Christianity, and their traditions are among the oldest in the world. The celebration of the Epiphany is the most important religious holiday in Ethiopia; it is called *Timkat*, and honors the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River. There is a reenactment of the baptism, as well as processions of people honoring replicas of the Ark of the Covenant, which are carried from one site to another through crowds of celebrating people. A replica is called a *tabot*, and it is wrapped in cloth; a *tabot* is found in every Ethiopian Orthodox church. (The original Ark is said to hold the Ten Commandments, which adherents believe God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai; Ethiopian Christians claim that the actual Ark of the Covenant is at the Church of Saint Mary Zion in Axum (or Askun); see historical sites, below )

There is joyous clapping and singing during *Timkat* as the religious processions pass the crowds of people. In a two-day celebration in the city of Lalibela, we witnessed the *tabot* being carried to the Tabot Maderia, where it rested overnight; the following day, it was carried in a very long procession followed by crowds singing and dancing to musical instruments and drums (See report and photos by Peggy Leon )

### **Historical Sites**

#### **Lalibela**

We were impressed by the historic architecture at Lalibela, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that is named for a 12th century emperor who ordered the construction of eleven subterranean monolithic stone churches, carved out of about 8,500 square feet of natural rock terrace. The emperor's goal was to recreate a vision of Jerusalem that he had experienced. The Bete



Giyorgis (Church of St. George) is the most spectacular of these churches; it was carved out of the ground, and from the inside outward, from a single, unbroken piece of stone. Many bas-reliefs are chiseled into the churches' walls to commemorate biblical events. Bete Giyorgis is connected to the other sunken stone churches and structures through a labyrinth of elaborate tunnels.

### Lake Tana

Christian monasteries were built in the 14th century on islands in Lake Tana. The monasteries are famous for their exquisite wall paintings and manuscripts. The paintings have been used as an educational tool. The thirty-seven islands on the lake are home to twenty monasteries, which were sometimes used to safely store religious relics and treasures.

Gondar was founded by Emperor Fasiledas around 1635, and it is known for its many castles and the brilliantly colored frescoes and traditional art adorning the local churches. A walled compound known as the Royal Enclosure holds six different castles that were built by different kings starting in the 17th century, there once was a large pen for the royal lions. A pool originally built for the founding ruler is now used for a baptismal pool during the Ethiopian Epiphany celebrations.

### Axum (or Aksum)

The actual Ark of the Covenant is believed by Ethiopians to be in the chapel of the church of St. Mary Zion, and it is guarded by monks who have vowed not to leave the chapel grounds until their death. There is one head monk in charge of this responsibility.

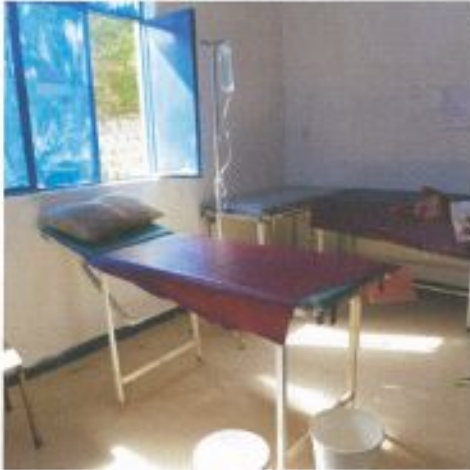
Axum was the center of the great Axumite kingdom, which originated about 3,000 years ago. The kingdom stretched eastward from the Red Sea to Saudi Arabia, southward to Mozambique, and westward to Sudan. Trade was dominated from this region to Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Now Axum is a small, dust-filled town. The Great Temple of Yeha (to the northeast of Axum) dates to the 7th - 8th century B.C., but a Christian church was built over this structure in the 6th century A.D. German archeologists have begun restoration, and there is a museum on the site that displays illuminated manuscripts and other artifacts.

### Medical Care

The state of medical care is not very good in Ethiopia; for example, medical equipment in hospitals is not up to date and often broken. Typically, not much of the nation's budget is spent on health care. A bright spot was the work of Dr. Rick Hodes, an American physician originally from Long Island, New York, who has provided medical care and free life-altering surgeries to Ethiopian children for decades. (See [rickhodes.org](http://rickhodes.org).) He found that the only way he could provide much-needed care to some children was to adopt them, which he has unselfishly done over the years, living and caring for numerous children in Ethiopia.



We had a meeting with Dr. Rick (as he is called) in Addis Ababa, and he brought a son, who is now grown and working for his organization. He gave a slide show presentation, then invited us to his house and clinic; unfortunately, we could not go there, but we were highly impressed by him and his organization. Dr. Rick travels around the world educating people about the challenges facing Ethiopian children with deformities and other medical problems that are treatable through his organization. See photos of primitive hospital, top row below.



## Ethiopia 2016 by Kathleen Huston

Following AWIU's pattern, Ethiopia was chosen for a delegation as a country in the midst of change. In 2016, it was continuing to stabilize from the challenges of political upheaval, war with Eritrea, and famine. We discovered that the people of this beautiful, ancient country are experts in resilience. The Ethiopian people remain proud of their traditions and religion despite the difficulties of recent decades; the country was never colonized, although it was occupied by Italy for about five years before the outbreak of World War II.

The non-Western aspects of Ethiopia were widespread. Our delegation spent most of its time in towns from the northern part of the country, where traditions and ancient ways permeated the culture. People with handsome, exotic faces wore clothes that looked like they came from Bible illustrations. We observed women that appeared regal; cool, dark, mysterious churches; frescoes on church ceilings with rows of angelic faces (looking down with huge eyes); and priests dancing and chanting in unison on the edge of a cliff while wearing long, white, scarlet-trimmed robes. We saw a church gong that was cut from one large rock (prehistoric-fashion), and church stairs that were covered with freshly cut grass. Ceremonies for coffee were common, with fresh flowers spread on the ground, beans roasted over an open fire, then hand pounded in wooden mortars. Coffee was always served with sweetened popcorn! Spicy communal meals were eaten from one dish, and not with utensils, but thin spongy bread called *injera*. More goats than cars were on the roads, where we saw mostly intermittent truck traffic, boys walking, girls carrying water, and herders in white robes.

So old is human-like activity in Ethiopia that we visited the prehistoric skeleton *Lucy* found in 1974. Ancient history was spoken of as if it was not really so long ago. We saw the remains of what is popularly known as the Queen of Sheba's palace. This vast excavated, ancient site revealed a compound of great size and scope. Ceremonial and private spaces were sophisticated and elaborate. One could sense that this royal figure was impressive and powerful. Ethiopians add much more to the Queen of Sheba's story: she made a long journey to Israel, where she had a liaison with King Solomon. In their tradition, she returned pregnant, and bore a son, Menelik I, who ruled around 950 B.C., and who is considered to be the founder of the long line of Solomonic Ethiopian kings whose descendants ruled Ethiopia until 1974.

Another story states that the Queen of Sheba returned to Ethiopia accompanied by 10,000 Jews and the real Arc of the Covenant — the one given by God to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Ethiopians believe the original Arc of the Covenant remains there today, housed in the small church of Saint Mary of Zion — also known as the “Chapel of the Ark” — which we saw in the sacred city of Aksum. One monk is entrusted to guard the “Tabot.” Abba Gebre Meskel, now in his late 50s, will guard it until he feels his death approaching and selects his replacement. Every church owns

a replica of the Ark of the Covenant, which the main priest wears on his head during all formal ceremonies. The famed stone churches of Lalibela (dating from the 12th and 13th centuries) were carved down into solid rock. Cool, dim, small, interiors with uneven floors evoked mysticism so central to Orthodox Ethiopian Christianity. In the midst of the dimness, a priest would stand, resplendent in long brilliant robes. Other older, round churches reflected Old Testament stories in vivid colors.

The Timkat (Epiphany) Festival was both sacred and raucous. During processions, streets were filled with people wearing long brightly colored (or white) garments, priests with elaborate headdresses and silk umbrellas, boys carrying long staffs, and people running beside the parade, all accompanied by drumming, clapping, horns blowing, and singing. Suddenly a hand slipped into mine as a tall, slim boy guided me quickly through the fast moving, unsettled crowd. Later, a beautiful girl watched me from afar, then shyly came close, taking my arm when the ground was rough. Many of us accepted this type of kind assistance and relaxed. All was not selfless, however; the teens wanted tips and email addresses to follow up with requests for monetary help. Education is free only up to high school, and with limited availability in the countryside. Teens came to cities and seemed to live on their own in order to get an education.

Ethiopian women were striking. Their facial structure showed Arabic influence, but with high cheekbones, narrow noses, and large eyes. For festivals, their hair was elaborately styled while their modest national costume, yards of gauzy white cloth with gleaming embroidery, highlighted their beauty. Nontraditional dress could be equally dazzling. We saw them dressed elaborately at parties, some in long Egyptian style dresses. With their elegant movements, they seemed to be aware of their beauty and that they received attention. When we interacted with them, however, there was no prideful posturing. They were gentle to us and with each other. When meeting with a group of homeless girls in their group home, we were struck by their giggling, like girls everywhere, but more by their obvious affection for each other and ease with human proximity.

In contrast to the charm of ancient ways, we also learned about some hardships of the old ways. One of our first meetings discussed the ancient practice of female genital mutilation, which is still practiced there. Government officials are trying to reduce its prevalence, and this presentation was given by men. The practice has diminished in more urban areas, but it runs as high as 80% in very remote areas, especially in the tribal southern part of the country. Officials identified five different degrees or types of the practice from moderate cutting to very severe alteration of external genitalia, often done with unsterilized tools. Norwegian agencies were funding much education against this in Ethiopia.



Medical care, or rather its inadequacy, was probably the most disturbing aspect of Ethiopia. One of our delegation members broke her hip, so we saw hospital care firsthand. The sparseness of basic supplies, a lack of heated water in patient rooms, and the slow treatment was alarming. Visiting another hospital, we found that most articles of medical equipment, i.e. x-ray machines and sonograms, were broken. Patients waited considerable time in the heat for limited care. An American doctor spoke to us of his surgeries for severe spinal stenosis, which was often untreated there--modernization that we were relieved to see.

In summary, we came away enchanted by this ancient culture but worried about the precarious nature of life there. With the world's growing interest in Ethiopia, we hoped that change would allow for blending the new with the old.





Joan McEachern Ethiopia 2016 (edited by Sue Devick)

I was looking forward to the delegation to Ethiopia, and had at least four meetings in advance of my departure. I prepared for our meeting with Dr. Rick Hodes in Addis Ababa by packing and bringing dresses and boys' shorts to Ethiopia. My county's charitable organization had made these, and we presented them to Dr. Rick for his work with children in this country.

I also was anxious to look into my genetic background, and was fascinated by the *Lucy* exhibit at the National Museum of Ethiopia in Addis Ababa, which we visited on our first day.

Unfortunately, early in the delegation, I had an accident that cut short my visit to the historic and interesting country. I fell on a rough path going up to a monastery; I think I had taken a photo of money up in a tree, and turned around too fast. I then tripped on a hole or a rock and broke my hip.

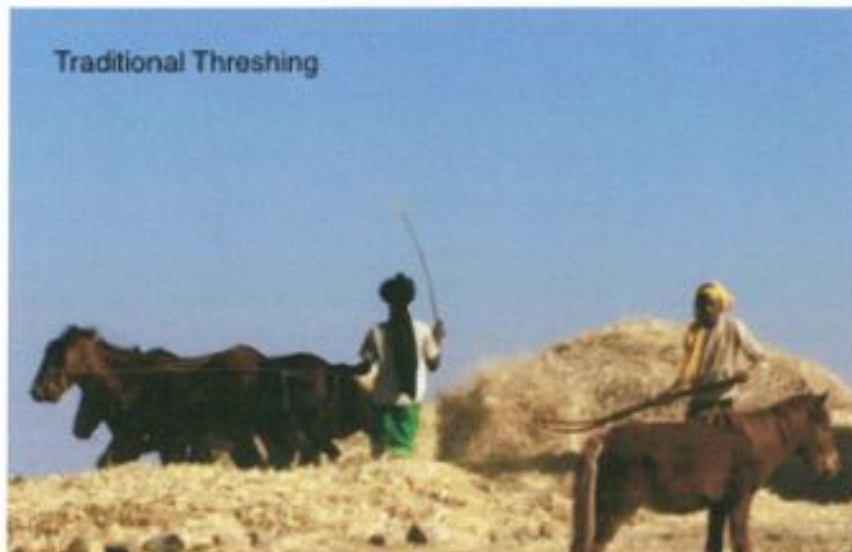
I had excellent care at the hospital in Nairobi Kenya, where I was treated. I didn't want Judith to have to come with me (and ruin her experience), but in the end I am glad that she was with me to deal with the insurance and the hospital bills. Glitches with the paperwork resulted in a longer stay than would have been necessary.

Because of the extra days in Kenya, I did meet with the "Book Lady," and we talked a lot about women in Kenya. Her organization was not a member of ACWW (Associated Country Women of the World, based in London), but they did the same type of work in helping women and families. One of the organization's brochures that she left with me had an article about the ACWW World President from Malaysia, who had visited them in Ethiopia, and I knew her. ACWW also has done many projects to help women in Ethiopia.

Although it took a few months, I completely recovered from the hip replacement surgery. Even though I did not completely experience the Ethiopian delegation, I have enjoyed all of the trips that I have been on with AWIU, which has opened up my world even more than before.

Amid our travels in a vast and achingly beautiful landscape, inescapable throughout our visits to the stunning monuments of an ancient culture and shining through our stops and discussions with teachers, doctors, NGOs and activists, was the spirit and heart of the Ethiopian people. More than anything else, this is the memory I will carry with me the longest.

Traditional Threshing



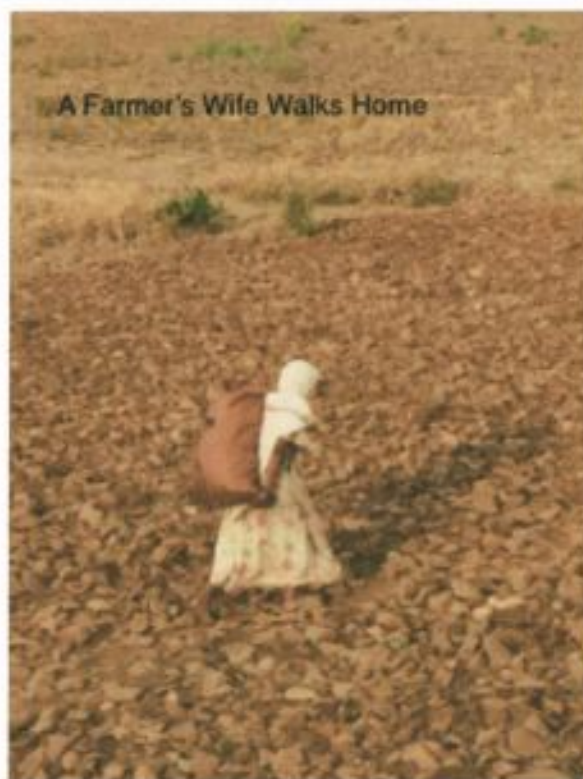
Despite a difficult agrarian existence of subsistence farming, rural Ethiopians are proud of their land and their heritage, happy to share their customs.

Using homemade, rudimentary farm implements for endless hours of work, walking hours barefoot to local markets to sell goods and buy necessities then, laden again, beginning the journey back home—I know I would find this existence disheartening. It would break me. Yet, this tough life is *their* life and they execute it with seeming equanimity and poise.

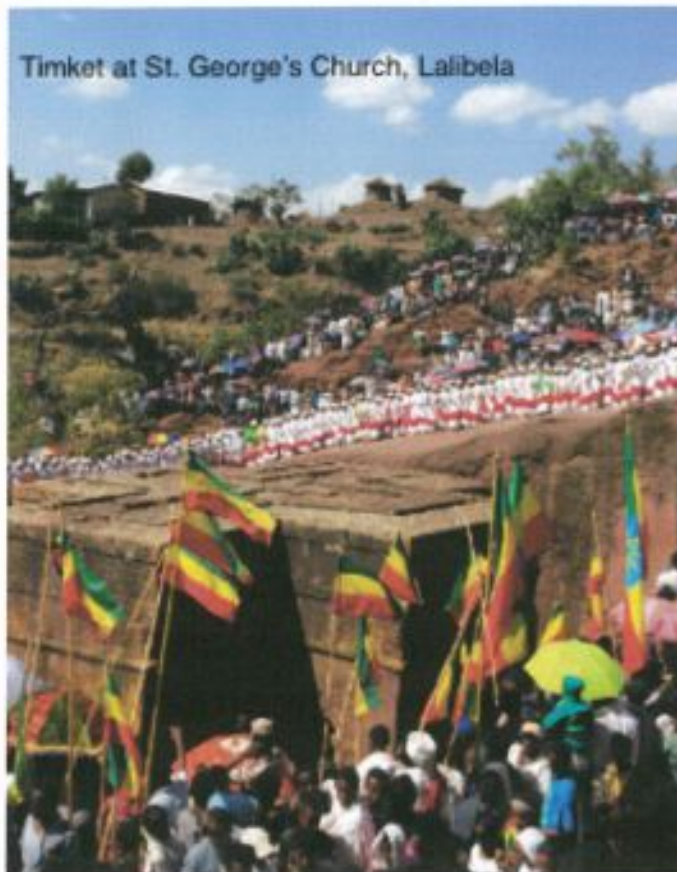
We were greeted with so many smiles, such interest and warmth. They wanted to know us. They wanted us to know them. Students we talked to wanted to be doctors, engineers, journalists or teachers. They were filled with dreams and hope.

They asked how we liked their country, their celebrations of Timket. “Very beautiful, huh?” I was asked so many times. I had to agree.

A Farmer's Wife Walks Home



Timket at St. George's Church, Lalibela



I am astounded by the depth of the people's faith, the level of their participation.

All this amid the backdrop of churches hand-hewn centuries ago from the solid rock of the land. The sheer magnitude of the task of creating these churches is, unfathomable and the level of commitment to something felt but not seen is both beautiful and unknowable to me.

Thousands of people show up to celebrate Epiphany. Hundreds of deacons young and old, hundreds of nuns and priests all chant, sing, dance in joyous expression of their belief.

Despite the crowds, we were always politely given a spot to watch and encouraged to join in the celebration, and despite the crush of humanity, I never felt uneasy or threatened. People were curious, but their focus on each other, the holy day, the loved tradition.

It was an amazing experience to be among the few outsiders experiencing a culture as its people go about the business of experiencing it themselves.

There is such beauty in Ethiopia, in its harsh and wild landscape, in its unforgiving fields and clear, bright sunlight. I believe most Ethiopians live a hard life, but they live it with color, with faith and hope and with an exquisite, dusty grace.

That is the memory I will carry with me.

Peggy Leon

Timket in Gondar






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## AWIU Delegation To Ethiopia Spreads Ethiopian Sentiment: BE KIND



### An Article By One Of Our Delegates, Joan Poulas, to Ethiopia:

Our trip to Ethiopia was far different from what we had expected. Most of us did not realize that this is NOT an Arab country; nor is it even primarily Muslim. Instead we found a country trying very hard to be peaceful and celebrating the baptism of Christ as the beginning of Christianity. We saw the churches that were being used during the time of Jesus; and saw where Mary and Joseph had come. No one was pushing the religion, or any course of conduct, except to try to follow their national motto: BE KIND.

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We saw very poor people struggling to learn to read. We saw children with English alphabet books and teachers that stressed health and sanitation in their very crowded classrooms.

Ethiopia is a very poor country. We did not go to the south, where the tribes are more active. In the north there is little malaria; few mosquitoes. We saw national parks full of baboons and beautiful rock formations. We saw more park rangers than we see in our own parks. They were charged with double duties: protect the park and the baboons, help the tourists enjoy the park, which included prevented them from being pestered to buy handicrafts from children who should be in school (and were told as much by the rangers.)



Ethiopia is a rugged country. The monastery we visited was difficult to access and the subterranean churches were very difficult. We came away with a new sense of a very ancient culture which is desperately trying to maintain the peace and educate their children. The dedicated medical personnel we saw had outmoded instruments, few amenities but a strong commitment to save babies and mothers and keep their patients as comfortable as possible in difficult surroundings.



We saw strong leaders trying to convince tribes to abandon female mutilation; leaders trying to teach rural parents that young girls ought to be able to go to school and not be traded away for marriage at a very young age.

The prevailing feeling we evidenced was that this was a country trying very hard to improve the life of its citizens and to avoid the hostilities that their neighbors suffer. They live their motto, BE KIND, and we wish them the very best.

-Joan Poulas

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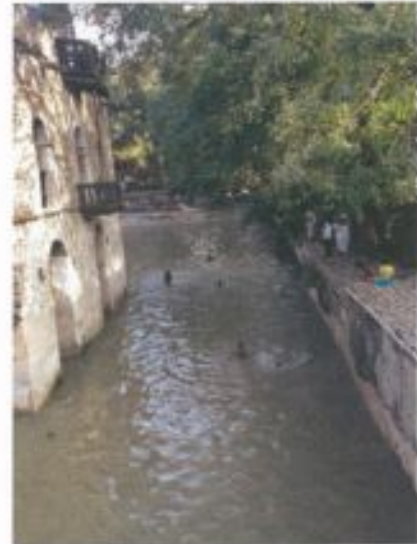
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Promotes woman-to-woman interaction and understanding Worldwide through meaningful visits.

Diane McGlinchey

Photographs from Ethiopia





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