

S·V·P News 18

Sudan Volunteer Programme

Registered Charity No 1062155

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English language skills are needed more than ever by Sudanese graduates looking for work either in Sudan or abroad. SVP continues its policy of placing our volunteers where possible outside Khartoum, to support the teaching of English as a second language in towns and cities across the country.



Near
the dam
at Jebel
Aulia

photo
by Sam
Godolphin

a note from the chairman of Sudan Volunteer Programme

This is the eighteenth annual issue of SVP News. It contains a selection of stories from our volunteers in last year's programme. We hope these will encourage others to join us. We thank all the friends, supporters and members of SVP-Sudan and SVP-UK whose donations and goodwill, ideas and skills, time and enthusiasm make our work possible.

SVP specially thanks all our volunteers and their families - who give so much of themselves:

**Krista Wise Robert Dvorak Dylan Watkins Piran Treen Sam Godolphin Caroline Hammargren
Simone de Monerri Ryan Brenner Rachel May Simon Conrad Yuleina Carmona Alec Thurnham
Matt Foster Dan Morgan Stuart Perks Ross Killion Emily Brewster Tim McVicar James Jacob
Jessica Tana Dominic Ronzo Briana Humphery Niamh Lyons Joseph Payseur Damian Kruz
Patrick Haverty Charnaë Supplee Azza Bakhit.**

Dear SVP members - please stay with us: we urgently need your support.

Ahmed Bedri

Stuart Perks from England - Sudan had never been a place high on my agenda to visit; yet I had long held a curiosity about the place. 25 years ago, I recall meeting a Sudanese camel merchant in Cairo, who invited me to visit him in Khartoum. I had always felt a bit cheated of the opportunity and recall staring south from Abu Simbel across the desert to Wadi Halfa and a whole other world just a stone's throw away. Fast forward 23 years and in Sudan I was expecting to find a blend of both Africa and Arabia and that is what I got - and a whole lot more.

What struck me most from the start was the overwhelming friendliness and hospitality of the people. I lost count of the many times complete strangers paid for my coffees from the tea ladies in the street or for my bus fare. I had experienced overwhelming hospitality before in many countries, both Egypt and Japan standing out as fine examples but this was something else! In fact, I can't recall a single moment when I didn't feel welcome. A welcome in Sudan with open arms with a grace and sincerity that could only ever be African.

I began my placement at Omdurman Ahlia University and moved to Omdurman. I loved it there - less frenetic after the chaos of downtown Khartoum, even slightly rural. The first morning I could hear birds chirping outside; I knew I was in the right place. Teaching at OAU was a unique experience. I loved the students who generally demonstrated a motivation and determination for learning English that I had rarely seen across the many different cultures I had previously taught. Being late to class was often an issue but this cultural norm exists across Sudan and is often frustrating for a westerner. Resources were also minimal but it was a case of being inventive with what was available and more often than not, I was able to pull off a lesson that was communicative.

My time flew by and soon my 7 months were at an end. I was ready to leave on the one hand, mainly because of the heat, but on the other, felt once again cheated of being somewhere where I wanted to stay longer yet couldn't due to other commitments. Sudan has left a huge impression on me and I am still in contact with many of the new friends I made. If you have the time available to do this and enjoy a worthy challenge, I strongly urge you to apply!

Briana Humphery from the US: Into the night we travelled across the stretch of desert road between Atbara and Ed Dammer, returning from Ustaza Fatimah's house. We reluctantly tore ourselves away from the friendly smiles of Habooba, Nabawiyya, Amal, Ahmed, Malaz and Ustaza Fatimah. Of course, Fatimah had invited us to spend the night but we had early class the next day in Ed Dammer at the local boys secondary school and had to come up with a lesson plan. Being late there were no regular big buses in the station so we had to take the much smaller quicker minibus, which picked up and dropped off patrons along the way. It was dark night yet the patrons knew where exactly to snap their fingers to signal to the driver to stop and the driver, through the vast, dark desert, could see the people on the side of the road waiting to be picked up.

A group of teenage boys were sitting behind us lingering on to our silences and holding on tightly to every word of English. Finally

one asked us where we were from, and my co-volunteer about her time in Sudan but when it came to me, and being black, they did not quite believe that I was American. I knew that my skin colour would be a part of my experience here. I had noticed the confusion in the eyes of the people and I tried to digest the sometimes abrupt words told me in Sug Arabi which I understood to be orders to cover my head.

I then tell them that my mother, my father, my grandfathers, my grandmothers are all American. "Kullu min America." (every one of them from America.) After saying this, most of them just say "okay" but some of them feel the need to say 'But you are African.' - as if that settled the point,

As an African American in Sudan, my experience thus far has



New building in Khartoum Margaret Scarborough

definitely been special compared to volunteers visibly white skinned 'khawadjas and khawadjiyas' (ie male and female foreigners)

I can travel around Khartoum with no one asking me to teach them English, or wanting to practice their English. I am not often overcharged by rickshaw drivers. Because I have brown skin and usually wear a scarf over my head, to just 'blend in'. Blending in has allowed me to see a different side of Sudan. A side that is not made up or that is not made to look 'pretty'. Through this I have been able to see what might be the ugly sides of people. There have been times where I have been treated rudely. At times I have learnt what it might be like to be a Sudanese woman. I have also been treated as if I were an Ethiopian woman, in the eyes of some, are seen as dirty, stupid, sexually promiscuous.

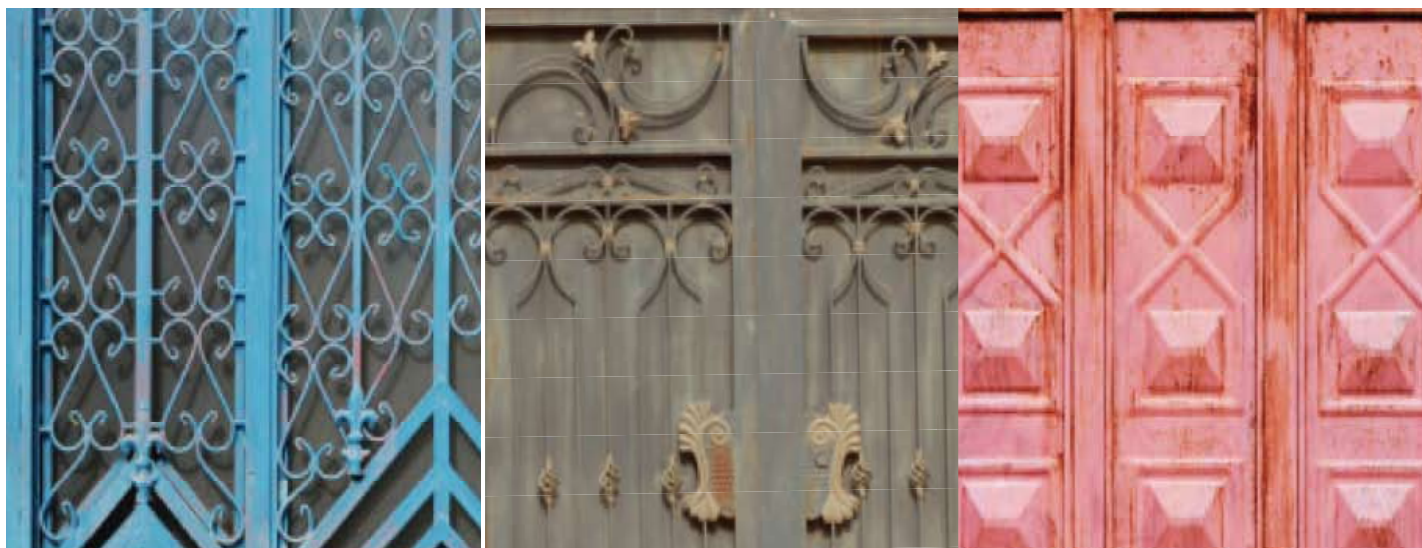
In all this it has been fun living life within the different spheres in Sudan; it will bring more clarity about my identity and my role as a 'not-quite-a-foreigner'. Now, when people do not believe I am American, I no longer try to explain myself to them. After all, it doesn't matter if they think I am Nigerian, Tanzanian, South African or Ethiopian. I know I am American.

Damian Kruz from New Zealand: I had been in Sudan for all of three days before I was thrown into the role of being a teacher. My body clock was still set to GMT when I turned up to my first ever class to take a beginners English course. I was told that in my case it was trial by fire as my previous teaching experience had consisted solely of taking a discussion club the previous day!

So there I was in front of a class for only the second time in as many days and feeling wholly under prepared. I had a course book to teach from and my wits to tackle the daunting task of the next two hours. I made it through. And after a few classes I found something of a

rhythm that the students seemed to respond well to. I was lucky to have a great set of students who were relaxed, hungry to learn and worked well as a team. Much of my first experience of Sudan came from them before, during and after class and often became topics of debate. My impressions were shaped by the students, I had opened up to them and they had interpreted my experiences and offered suggestions, in a cycle of exchange that was filled with good will and excitement.

Being thrown in the deep end had, after some initial splashing, created something that has remained very special for me. It was strange when the class finished, as if I had lost an adopted family but thankfully with everyone having phones some of us were able to keep in touch and remain involved in each other's lives along with many cups of tea and coffee.



Entrance gates in Khartoum Jessica Tana & Dominic Ronzo

Jessica Tana from Australia: The smell of dust grows heavy on the setting sun. A gust of warm, thick air brings with it other smells, of ginger, gasoline, frying oil and garbage. We live in a concrete box high above Suq Al Arabi, glimpsed between the hanging scarves on the balcony. Hawkers crying out, honking cars, distant Sudanese rhapsodies played on metallic speakers, the calls to the faithful, chatter, a splash of water and the humming of fans - an afternoon in Khartoum.

One block down on a sandy patch of garbage or a garbage dump of sand, young men sell deep fried falafel rolled into balls and squashed into morning baked bread rolls. Add a boiled egg, lime and chilli sauce and a handful of chopped coriander, at SDG 4 it makes an addictive lunch. across the road a turbaned man in white takes our order for mixed juice greeting Dominic with his usual "Amrikki! Salam!" and politely ignoring me.

How did I end up floating down the Nile in a leaky, wooden dinghy and had to be rescued by Sudanese fishermen? Climbing down the steep brick steps to the muddy water of the Blue Nile below, the first thing I noticed was the floating jetty was neatly tucked away on the shore. The boats were still tied to it though and with a bit of clambering and a small jump it was still accessible to our party of six. We were celebrating the breaking of fast one muggy Ramadan night, with a picnic by the famous waters of the river, Blue. Sudan has both the White Nile and the Blue, converging in the capital Khartoum.

Someone has the bright idea of climbing into one of the boats. We pick, amongst an array of motor boats, water homes and the like,

a small, white, paint peeling dinghy. Immediately our shoes are soaked from the brown, murky water swooshing around inside the vessel and we laugh as it sways precariously back and forth, desperately trying to hold our weight.

As soon as the rope is untied the once sad, unassuming dinghy leaps into action. It pushes away from the ledge and catapults itself into the onrushing current. Still laughing we realise the paddles on the boat are actually just two long wooden sticks that fatten about two inches at the end. The guys heave and push and throw water about until we are spinning round and round like a ballerina, all the time further away from the shore and faster along the Nile. There is a point here, where the laughter fades away and we gaze around at the dark rippling waters sprayed with reflecting specks of gold from the lights on Tuti Bridge. The giant egg-like shape of the Corinthian Hotel looms in the distance and the air is filled with the

shrills of tiny birds and bats. The full moon lights the dusty sky and for a moment a look of awe crosses every face huddled on the creaky, wooden dinghy. The Nile is filled with sediment washing down from mountainous regions (the Blue Nile starts in Ethiopia, the White through Uganda, as far down as central Africa) and bringing with it nutrients and minerals integral to the desert civilisations of Sudan and Egypt. A fishing vessel from Tuti Island, warned by our anxious picnickers on the shore, hurries out to meet us - a large boat with a roaring motor, it still struggles against the heavy current of the Nile, bringing back our now water logged dinghy safely to shore. We apologise to the owners, who accept with gracious good faith, our foolish endeavour.

One of the things I like about walking about Khartoum are the many metal gates lining the city streets. A lot of people live in compounds with a high wall and several small buildings behind it which they share with family members. The gates often decorative, colourful and each unique. Here is just a small sample.

Joseph Payseur from the US: The University of Kassala closed for thirty days between the winter and summer semesters. Patrick, the other SVP placed in Kassala, and I decided this would be a great opportunity to travel, and to further immerse ourselves in Sudanese culture. Adham a mutual friend of ours invited us to visit the State of Al Jazeera, staying with him in his home village of Alti, where we would attend his cousin's wedding. Unbeknownst to us, this would mean a great amount of traveling and a greater amount of hospitality.

Arriving at the Kassala Souq al Shabi bus station early in the morning, Adham explained to Patrick and me that since he invited us on this journey we were his guests, and that we were forbidden from buying anything while on this trip, as it was his duty to do so. Adham informed us that since we were guests in his home it would be shameful for him not to provide us with everything we need. He was adamant, and it was too early to protest, so we gratefully accepted. Six and a half hours later we were in Alti, a small village located along the Blue Nile between Wad Medani and Khartoum. Upon arrival at Adham's home, in a neighbourhood named Rasa Hilla, we were greeted by his brother and sisters with what can only be accurately described as a feast. After a few days of feasting, exploring, and meeting family and friends it was time to travel to Medani to attend the wedding. This meant piling into the back of a pickup truck and racing one hundred and twenty kilometres south down the highway. Driving through the winter night, the high speeds and fierce winds proved a chilly adventure, but the dim flash overhead of a shooting



Khartoum child Margaret Scarborough

star brought an auspicious peace. We arrived in Medani and were warmly welcomed by the groom and his family, and informed we would be spending the next few days in their home, just in time for the henna party. The house was filled with the smell of burning bahore incense as the groom's sister entered and began preparing the henna. The groom was to be first, and as he is seated having henna placed on his hands, he asks me if I will join with him in receiving henna. Sensing my reluctance, Adam and Patrick reassured me that they would both get henna as well.

Next morning was the day of the wedding, we immediately began by meeting arriving guests and feasting. The day was filled with a round of eating, chatting, and relaxing, fuelled by bottomless cups of coffee and tea. By dusk it was time for the wedding party, which meant traveling to the bride's home of Managil, a village southwest from Medani. Back into the bed of a pickup truck and we were off. The formerly sequestered men and women converged in a party tent, outside the home of the bride, where we began to dance and celebrate. After the party, we were invited into the home of the bride's family to feast yet again.

We returned to Medani late at night a happy band of brothers and sisters. The generosity I received on this trip was not limited to the material. We all shared in the anxiety, joy, and exhaustion of a

Sudanese wedding. Sudan is a place where a simple backpacking trip transforms into a cathartic journey.

Margaret Scarborough from the US: I am told it is not possible to sit here in summer. Now, midday in late January, it is pleasant enough in the shade. A man at the hotel-cum-cleaners across the way, outside the blue shuttered Funduq al-Nada, he irons his clothes. He is there in the mornings and there in the afternoons, the strength of his upper arms visible as he works, turn, this angle, this fold. The Sudanese are master ironers.

Abdel Rahman, his hand blackened with henna from his brother's wedding last Friday rests, reads the Old Testament on the sofa. He astonished me - he knows the sonnets before Petrarch, my former area of research. A poet, he cites rap as the inspiration of his verse. He knows many American artists.

Here is a confluence of rhythms, a running together of the two Niles. I have learned the avalanche of the ceiling fan, at first deafening.

Tim says it becomes akin to silence: You will cease to notice it.

The muezzin, the shuffling of rugs rolled out for the traders.

The hand brooms the women use as they prepare the pavement.

The pattern of generosity: coffee, water, shirya, tea.

The expectation of release come 5pm - the heat will soon abate, a loosening, a gushing over.

Dirt Road Bakery. The hour the flat loaves are ready.

The dance of the mosquitoes under a streetlight. The buzz of a fly at the moment of sleep.

The crazy man who carries a radio. I have seen him twice today.

Give me money! he demands. He wears all green.

When I give him nothing he shouts at me ya haram! I am not generous. He follows me. The onlookers plead with him: Leave the khawajia alone!

The starting of motors, the tuk-tuk of the rickshaws, the clinging of mobiles, the smooth-fingered swipe of the swish Samsung smartphone.

The string of greetings exchanged among acquaintances.

Keef? Tammam. Sabatak?

Kwayissa. Tammam. aHamdulallah. Tammam!

Kulu fi mabala. Everything in its place!

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