

My Life Story



Ed Ksara



Brandy Gerhardt, Storykeeper

Acknowledgements

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Jim Mauldin

Ethnic Life Stories Project Coordinator.

The Ethnic Life Stories Project....

-giving the Springfield community a window to its diversity through the life stories of ethnic elders.

Liewe Se Storie Afrikaanse

Afrikaanse (2)

ŌSŌ GAY HĀY WŌ TAN

Apache

قصص من الحياة

Arabic (2)

Ga-no-du Ka-ne-he-lv-s-gi

Cherokee

自傳

Chinese (2)

Life Stories

English

Histoires De Ma Vie

French

Mayer rah-Khaan Knee-Hindi

Hindi

生きてきた道

Japanese

나의 살아온 이야기

Korean

ഇവിത കഥകൾ

Malayalam

Povestea Vie Ţii Mele

Romanian

La Historia de la Vida

Spanish (4)

Kuwento Ng Aking Buhay

Tagalog

געשיחטע פון מאן לעבען

Yiddish

Birthplaces of the Storytellers

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Yohannan Abraham
Pathanamthitta, Kerala, India

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Kofu, Japan

Martha Baker
San Antonio, Texas

Grace Ballenger
Shanghai, China

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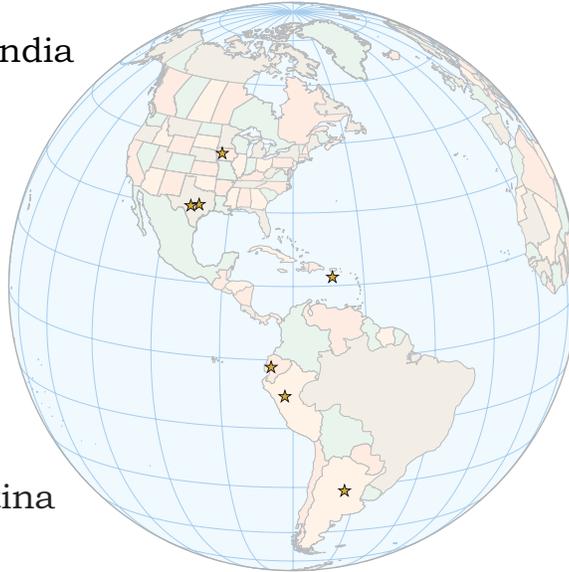
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Class of 2002

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Edgar Galinanes
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Edward P. Ksara
Tangier, Morocco

Ioana Popescu
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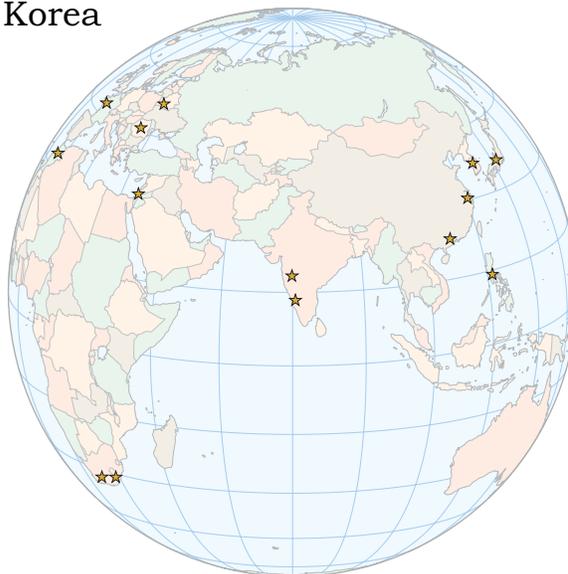
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Tuman, Peru

Ruth Penaherrera-Norton
Archidona, Ecuador

Cyril Vermooten
Beaufort West, South Africa

Joy Vermooten
Nqaberie (Natal), South Africa

Tobby Yen
Chung (Zhongshan), China



W

10°W

5°W

0°

Edward P. Ksara
Tangier, Morocco



FOREWORD

Thank you, Ed Ksara, for allowing me to peek over your shoulder as you looked back on your past. Thank you for sharing your unique treasure of memories and experiences with such generosity.

Your vast knowledge and understanding of history, politics, and geography have painted our world in fresh, new colors for me. I thank you for that.

You, Ed Ksara, are the definition of a scholar and a gentleman! Our work together on the Ethnic Life Stories Project has been my privilege.

Ed Ksara – My Life Story

A Brief History of Morocco

My Story Begins

Paths Cross

My Mother

My Birth

Fleeing Morocco

Tamara

Sefrou

Mealtime in Morocco

Typhoid

Moroccan Culture

My Parents

Returning to the States

Marriage

Children

A Brief History of Morocco

Ancient Morocco was part of the Carthaginian Empire and, later, the Roman Empire. With the decline of Rome in 350 A.D., barbaric vandals began invading Morocco in 429 A.D. In 642 A.D. Arabs from Arabia swept into the country and nominally converted Christian Berber inhabitants to Islam. Berbers and Arabs combined to form the Moors who invaded Spain in 711 A.D.

By the 11th century the ruling dynasty of Morocco controlled an empire extending from Spain to Libya. The Moors were driven from Spain in the 15th century. The Ksara family has documents relating to property they lost during this period of time when their forefathers were forced out of Spain. A few Portuguese and Spanish settlements were established in Morocco and the Spanish areas remain to this day. During the next four hundred years Morocco discouraged European settlements and resisted the Turks.

In 1800 European powers, particularly France and Spain, began to show interest in Morocco. Germany and Britain disapproved. In 1912 England agreed to France and Spain dividing Morocco into Protectorate Zones. Tangier and a 50 square mile area was designated an international zone administered by Britain, France, Spain and the U.S. Morocco remained divided until Spain and France recognized her independence in 1956. Morocco was admitted to the United Nations at that time.

My Story Begins

My story begins in 1901 with a young lady who left her parents and family behind in Kansas, boarded a steamship in New York, and set out alone on a three-week voyage to the continent of Africa. At twenty-three, Maude Cary was headed for Morocco, a small country lying across the Northwest corner of Africa.

After arriving at Gibraltar, Miss Cary traveled the twenty miles to Tangier by boat. In Tangier she was met by English missionaries who helped her prepare for the remainder of her journey to Fez, the ancient capital of Morocco, established around 700 A.D. A caravan of mules, horses and camels provided the protection they needed for their two-week journey inland to Fez.

One of the first sights to greet Ms. Cary upon her arrival in Fez were the poled, pickled heads of Berber tribesmen displayed at the city gate as a warning to those daring to rebel against the Arab government.

My father tells me that the distasteful chore of pickling the severed heads was assigned to Jews because the task was considered unclean for Muslims. (The Jews in Morocco had been run out of Spain as a result of the Spanish Inquisition several hundred years before. I have often wondered whose task it was to salt the heads before their arrival in Morocco.)

The Berbers, the original people of Morocco, were a non-Arab, tribal people who populated all Morocco and particularly the Atlas Mountains. They hated anything foreign, including Jews and “infidels”. The Berbers fiercely resisted being ruled by anyone and frequently engaged in warfare with the Sultan. Because they were part of the Roman Empire when it became Christian, many Berbers adopted Christianity. Evidence of this still exists today when some Berbers wear a tattoo of a fish and observe Sunday as a day of rest.

Throughout her 54 years in Morocco, Miss Cary kept a house in Sefrou, Fez, or Meknes, but on occasion she would visit overnight with a Berber family. In exchange for the feather beds and other comforts of home left behind, Maude Cary would find herself on the dirt floors of black goat-hair tents, surrounded by chickens, lambs, and sick cows, sleeping alongside members of a Berber tribe she had managed to befriend.

Maude Cary remained in Morocco for fifty-four years. This courageous, dedicated Baptist missionary ended up in the hometown of my Muslim father and forever changed the course his life would take.

My Father

My Grandfather Mohammed Ksara was born in 1880 in Fez, where I still have family today. Grandfather Ksara grew up in a devout Muslim household and was educated to be a Muslim Priest. His father, Judge Ksara, had been handpicked by the Sultan to study law. Although not rich, both my grandfather and greatgrandfather were considered to be among the intellectuals and actively participated in the progress of the community.



***Aunt Fatima, Grandmother Ksara,
Aunt Malika***

My Grandmother Zoubida Bent Salih Ksara was born in 1885. She was the daughter of a Muslim Priest and was a “Shurfa”. Shurfas are greatly revered in the Muslim faith because they are believed to be direct descendants of the Prophet Mohammed.

My grandfather moved to Sefrou, 30 miles from Fez, where he became the Priest in the local Mosque. Every Friday afternoon, the Muslim Holy Day, he went to the Mosque to deliver his sermon. Muslims traditionally put great emphasis on memorization and my grandfather, although literate and well educated, carefully memorized the sermons he delivered.



Grandfather Mohammed Ksara 1956

The birth of the firstborn son whose father was a Muslim Priest, whose mother was the daughter of a “Shurfa” Muslim Priest, and who was the grandson of a beloved, respected Judge was cause for great celebration. It took five sheep to feed those attending the naming ceremony of my father, Medhi Ksara, born in 1907.

My father’s education, which began when he was seven, involved memorizing the Koran, the basis of all Muslim learning. He was soon sent to French schools, as well. The French coming to Morocco in 1911 brought Western thought and Western technology to the country, and my father's attendance at the French school gave him a wider view of the world that would not have been possible five or ten years before. Studying the basics of reading and writing in two languages was very demanding and his teachers were strict. My father’s accounts of the harsh discipline carried out by his teachers against misbehaving students would result in jail time for teachers by today’s U.S. standards.



***Mehdi Ksara French School Age 10, about 1915.
Back row: to the left of teacher, on the right 1/3 of picture.***

Paths Cross

My father grew up in medieval-like times in Morocco and his day-to-day life was somewhat grueling. Anything new and different, especially anything Western, was very intriguing. The arrival of cars, trucks, and technology was impressive to a young boy. My father learned of Ms. Cary's presence in town and the interesting activities taking place in the home of this American lady. Although he had been taught to revere Islam, he was very curious about the strange, Baptist missionary. Like many of the other young boys, my father threw his share of rocks at her front door before finally venturing in. Soon he was dropping by Ms. Cary's home several times a week following his regular school day. She was not at all what the conversations he overheard among his Muslim elders had led him to expect

When Grandfather Ksara developed vision problems, my father went over his memorization and the prepared texts for his sermons with him. They engaged in many long discussions about religion. During one such discussion my father questioned a conversation the Koran stated had taken place between Moses and Mohammed. He pointed out that Moses had lived centuries before Mohammed, and wondered how such a conversation could have occurred. When my father continued questioning the Koran, it infuriated my grandfather and a heated theological argument ensued which resulted in Grandfather insisting my father go live with the Christians since he sounded just like them. He was eighteen when Grandfather kicked him out.

My father was stunned and devastated at being kicked out of his home. Although he had been curious about the Christian faith and eager to listen and learn, he was still young and uncertain, with mixed feelings and many unanswered questions. He stayed with friends while continuing his education. When final exams rolled around at the French School he attended, his anxiety was magnified by the fact that he was now on his own. He desperately wanted to do well on the exams and prayed both Muslim and Christian prayers about it. He smiles as he recalls lighting a few candles to Moulay Idriss, the Patron Saint and Founder of Fez, for "added insurance". My father did well in his exams, but he continued to be troubled by questions about the God of Islam and the God of Christianity. When my father explained his plight to the missionaries, they took him in. It was shortly after this that my father accepted Christ, was baptized into the Christian faith, and joined the work of the missionaries.

Most of those who accepted the GMU missionaries' message of Christ in Morocco were the extremely poor and illiterate and were easily dismissed by their fellow Moroccans. For this reason the missionaries were especially eager to welcome a highly educated and refined young man from a well-respected family into their fold. They hoped he might exercise a greater influence among his Muslim peers.

The scandal which resulted from my father's conversion to Christianity might be compared to the feelings generated if Billy Graham's son suddenly announced his decision to embrace the Muslim faith. The elders of the Mosque confronted my

grandfather with their plans to charge my father with blasphemy. In spite of the personal disappointment and humiliation my grandfather must have experienced, he stood adamant in his defense of my father, pointing out that nothing his son had said was in conflict with the Koran. Although the charges were made, the trial did not take place. My Grandfather Ksara continued as priest in the mosque until ill health forced him to retire in 1959. In view of the fact that two of his three sons had become Christian, one would assume that there must have been moderate Muslim leadership allowing my grandfather to continue with his work in the mosque in Sefrou.

When witnessing about Christianity to Muslims, my father reminds them that the Koran tells of Jesus ascending to heaven in several passages. He explains why he chooses to worship a living savior instead of worshipping a dead prophet and journeying to Mecca to worship the stone that marks his grave.

My Mother

My mother's father, Frederick Keller, was born on November 26, 1862, in Freyhan, Silesia, Germany. He left Germany with his family, the Kellers, when he was four. They traveled across the Atlantic, up the Erie Canal and Great Lakes, and settled in Niles, Michigan. At age 16 Grandfather Keller left home and went out West to work on the railroad. After the death of his first wife, he married Helen Kramer, my mother's mother, when they were both in their forties. Helen Kramer, my mother's mother, was born on September 14, 1867, in Louisville, Kentucky. My grandparents lived a few years in Arizona where my mother, Pauline, was born in 1909. During the gold rush they had a successful truck farm in Prescott, Arizona, selling the vegetables they raised to the local miners. It was around this time that my grandfather answered God's call for full time Christian service. He decided to become a missionary in Morocco and to serve God on a full-time basis. Exactly what prompted this mid-life career change, I do not know. In 1912 my grandmother sewed the gold pieces from the sale of their farm into the hem of her skirt and they traveled to New York City, intending to continue their journey to Morocco from there. Instead, World War I began and their plans were delayed. They remained in New York City doing mission work in the Bowery until the war ended.

In 1919 Germany was defeated and in economic chaos. Many soldiers, released from the German army, found themselves unemployed. France controlled Algeria and Morocco and needed a large army to suppress the Berbers. Due to the large numbers of German soldiers joining the French Foreign Legion, there were many German-speaking soldiers in that army. Since Grandfather Keller was from Germany, it was his desire to go to



***Fredric, Helen and
Pauline Keller***

Morocco and minister to these German soldiers. In 1920, when my mother was eleven, my Grandfather and Grandmother Keller were finally able to leave the States for Morocco where the two of them established a very effective ministry.

My Birth

The French had chosen the best students to attend higher education at the French Schools and my father was among those chosen. Since he spoke excellent Arabic and French he began giving language lessons, which is how he met my mother. Their developing friendship concerned the missionaries. I suspect they feared that my father would be less focused on serving God and less at their disposal if he married my mother. Together with my Grandmother Keller, the missionaries devised a plan to send my mother away to school in France, hoping this would end her relationship with my father. There was possibly some cultural bias motivating this plot, as well. Although she was away several years, when my mother returned to visit her parents, she discovered the letters which revealed this meddling in her life by the American missionaries and her mother. She was more determined than ever to marry my father.

In October, 1931, love triumphed, and my parents were married. They settled in the International Zone in Tangier, an area more accepting of a Moroccan becoming a Christian. My older sister, Elizabeth, was born in Tangier in 1933, followed by Paul in 1934. Paul died of dysentery when he was only an infant. Dorothy was born in 1936. I was born in 1937.

From 1932 to 1940 my father ministered to the patient population at the British Mission Hospital in Tangier. The relationships he developed with the hospital staff, particularly Dr. Fraser Anderson and Dr. Farnham St. John, became lifelong, enduring friendships. Dr. St. John named his firstborn son “Mehdi” after my father, and I have kept in touch with Dr. St. John's widow, Dr. Janet St. John, over the many years since.



The family – Father, Dorothy, Elizabeth, Edward, Mother, 1937



Elizabeth, Dorothy and Edward



My sisters and me, 1942.

Fleeing Morocco



In 1940 the Germans had invaded Poland and France. Refugees were fleeing Europe., and many were finding their way to Tangier. American passports were mysteriously disappearing and being sold for exorbitant prices on the black market. It was a chaotic, fearful time, and my parents and grandparents were very concerned about the war reaching Morocco. I was three at the time, but

I still remember a story my mother told about a Jewish woman who committed suicide when she was unable to obtain a passport. Fear of the German invasion was great. In August our family joined the exodus. We flew from Tangier to Lisbon with our American Passports. In late August we sailed from Lisbon aboard the USS Neahellas, a Greek ship registered under the neutral United States flag. I've been told that the U.S. flag was illuminated at night to discourage German submarines from targeting our ship. (King Edward VIII of England, who gave up the British throne after one year and sat out the war in the U.S. with his American wife, was also a passenger on the USS Neahellas.) A few weeks later we arrived in the United States of America and safety.

Our family settled in Huntington, Pennsylvania, and my sisters and I began school there. As I looked out the window of my second grade classroom one morning a flock of geese were flying overhead in a "V" formation. As we watched, our teacher told us the "V" stood for the "Victory" in Europe. I was quite impressed that the geese had chosen such a clever way of keeping us informed.

My younger sister, Ruth, was born in Pennsylvania in 1940. Morris followed in 1943. Morris was a "blue baby" and, sadly, did not live past infancy. Although I was quite young, I remember very well the tears, songs, and sadness surrounding the funeral of my younger brother.

Winters in Huntington, Pennsylvania, were very cold in contrast to the weather we had been accustomed to in Morocco. My parents kept us warm by shoveling coal into the coal-fired furnace. My sisters and I took advantage of the weather by sledding downhill on anything we could find. I remember Dorothy sledding on a board with the sharp point

of a nail protruding in her direction. When her makeshift sled came to an abrupt stop, Dorothy slid forward and was “nailed”. She no doubt carries a scar from that painful incident. I have always been asthmatic, and I remember many nights in Huntington when my mother sat up with me in a croup tent to treat my asthma.

My father traveled a good deal on the East coast to speaking engagements at different churches. I often accompanied him, which I thoroughly enjoyed. He donned his jelaba, displayed his map of the Middle East, and spoke to his listeners about Morocco. He told them of his conversion to Christianity, becoming a missionary, and his plans of eventually returning to his country to carry on his work. He also reminded his family regularly that we were Arab and should return to Morocco as missionaries to our people.

During the five years we lived in the United States, my father also worked for the Office of War Information, a forerunner of Voice of America, making Arabic language broadcasts to the people of Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt, telling them America was their friend and encouraging them to help the United States in their struggle with Germany and Italy.

In late 1944 the end of the war was finally in sight. My father began making plans to return to Morocco, and we went to Sulphur Springs, Arkansas, to visit Grandmother and Grandfather Keller and say our goodbyes. It was decided that Lily, Dorothy and I should attend school the two weeks we were in Sulphur. Our mother dressed us up and sent us off to the Sulphur Springs Public School. We didn't fit in. As we walked glumly toward school on the second day, Lily suggested we walk around town instead and have a picnic with our packed lunches. This seemed like a great idea and school was happily forgotten for the next six hours. The principal of the school, a friend of Grandmother's, called her to inquire about our absence. When we returned home after our day of picnicking and play, we were casually asked how school had been. Being ignorant of the term “entrapment” we foolishly replied, “Great!” My mother believed in corporal punishment and dished it out generously that night. Because I was the youngest and had been “led astray,” I got off fairly lightly.

In 1945 the war had ended, and we moved from Huntington, Pennsylvania, to Circleville, New York, in order to better prepare for our return trip to Morocco. Before our move to Circleville, I vividly remember my father's naturalization ceremony in Huntington when he became an American citizen and we children were all given American flags. My sisters and I, of course, were American citizens from birth due to our mother's American citizenship. I attended five months of my fourth grade year in Circleville before we went back to Morocco in early 1947. My father wanted to begin his Christian work there and mother planned to continue our education by home schooling us.

This was my second journey across the ocean by ship and I was nine at the time. I remember it well. Although the January sea was rough, it didn't prevent us from exploring every inch of the ship. The dining room was enormous and the food was

wonderful. During mealtime in the ship's dining room, when we caught our parents with their backs turned, my sisters and I engaged in the tempting, nefarious pastime of seeing just how far we could propel our olive pits across the great expanse of the dining hall with our spoons.

Tamara

We arrived in Morocco in February, 1947, during the winter rains. We lived in a villa or "farmette" on the coast between the capital city of Rabat and Casablanca near a small town called Tamara. The walls of our French style house were two feet thick, made of mortar and rock, (somewhat like a fortress), with high ceilings and elaborate, beautifully tiled floors. Our only heat was from small kerosene heaters. Our villa never seemed to get warm the first month we were there, but when spring arrived, the French doors and prevailing wind from the ocean kept it quite pleasant. A wind charger provided our electricity. Because of post war shortages our storage batteries were old and couldn't hold a charge for more than five minutes. When the wind died down in the evenings the lights would dim, and we knew it was time to light the kerosene lamps.

Surrounding our villa was a six-foot wall. The broken glass at the top of the wall discouraged anyone inclined to climb over. Surrounding walls such as these are as common in Morocco as curbs are in America. Guard dogs are also common in Morocco, and our watchdog, Rover, let us know when visitors approached.

The short winter was cold and damp, but most of the year was idyllic with temperatures rarely below 45 degrees. A protected cove on the beach allowed us to enjoy swimming in the ocean, less than two miles from our house. The scenic countryside was fertile and very productive with an abundance of fruits and vegetables, including figs, grapes, oranges, and pomegranates. A small store nearby offered basic supplies and my father enjoyed going to the open-air market to visit, witness, and do the daily shopping.

While dressing one morning I grabbed my shoes to put them on. Fortunately, I decided to first shake out any remaining sand from the previous day's play. To my shock, a large scorpion fell out with the sand. It was several years before I gave up the habit of checking my shoes, clothing, bed sheets and covers for hiding scorpions! Even during my years in the U.S. Marines Corp I preferred to find a vehicle to sleep in when we were in the field.

We were somewhat isolated in Tamara and my sisters and I played together a great deal. In the mornings we were home schooled and in the afternoons our mother would take a nap, leaving us free to entertain ourselves. One of our pastimes was a game we invented with the family's geese. While one of us distracted the geese at one end of their pen, the others would climb the fence and try to scramble across and over the opposite side before the geese recognized they had trespassers. If we were not fast enough, we carried evidence of the wrath of "Hisser" and "Webber" on our legs the remainder of the afternoon.

In addition to giving all of our animals names, my sisters and I also gave each other animal names. Lili was a camel, Dorothy was a cow, I was a donkey, and Ruth was a mouse.



The family, 1946.



The family, 1954



Ksara family
Back row:
Grandmother and Grandfather
Ksara;
Middle row: Aunt Khnatza,
Aunt Zenib, Uncle Mohammed;
Front row: Uncle Ahmed with
cousins; 1947



My sisters and me, 1950.

The four of us were avid readers. This, of course, was before computers, electronic games, email and television. We read Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist and The Pickwick Papers, and anything else we could get our hands on. My older sister, Lili, often read to us. Sometimes we read Bible passages out of context to bug a sibling, particularly our younger sister, Ruth, who was the most “bugable”. For some reason hearing that she was “fearfully and wonderfully made!” sent Ruth in tears to our mother. We also enjoyed acting out the Bible meetings we had seen our father conduct in the states. Our parents viewed this a bit suspiciously until they ruled out sacrilege and mocking and realized it was harmless play.

Sefrou

While the vast majority of American Missionaries are tremendously caring, sacrificing and warm people, some were bitter toward my father. Their “prize convert” had returned to Morocco an American citizen and was conducting his ministry independently of them. Jealousy is a terrible thing. The questions they presented to the U.S. Consulate and French Administrative Government eventually led to the U.S. State Department bringing accusations against my father. Under the Freedom of Information Act I recently obtained this file from the U.S. State Department. My father was accused of acquiring his American Passport under false pretenses and never intending to remain in his adopted country. In 1948 he was forced to return to the states to straighten things out. His contention to the U.S. State Department was that he was employed by a U. S. church group to work in a foreign country much like an employee of a corporation might be. Although the U.S. State Department ruled in my father’s favor, he was absent for nearly a year while we remained behind in Morocco.



Edward and Dorothy, 1948.



Bojema and me on the neighbor’s horse in Tamara 1948.

It was while living in Tamara that I became better acquainted with my father’s younger brother, Mohammed, who watched over us during my father’s absence. He was an intelligent, resourceful person and proved invaluable to our family while my father was gone. He checked in on us often and hired a young man by the name of Bojema to chauffeur my mother and teach her to drive. Bojema also accompanied us to the nearby beach, taught me to ride a horse and bicycle and, although older, became a friend.

I remember sailing down a hill behind

Bojema on a bicycle. The handlebars were a bit loose and he was trying to adjust them as we flew along. In an effort to help, I kicked at a tire and my foot became tangled in the spokes, which sent us flying through the air and landing in a bloody, dust-covered tangle of arms and legs. I still carry a few scars from that day, to remind me of my adventures with Bojema. Although he taught me many things, he failed in his efforts to teach my mother to drive our 1946 Ford.

I can still see the swarms of locusts that appeared in huge, dark, buzzing clouds, and settled over areas of vegetation, stripping them clean in an amazingly short period of time. This was before DDT and the clouds of swarming locusts sometimes caused traffic jams as the streets would be carpeted with dead locusts. I remember watching the little Berber boys collect the locusts in empty tin cans to be roasted and eaten. Although the word “Gross!” wasn’t in my vocabulary growing up in Morocco, it would have aptly described my reaction to anyone eating the abhorred locusts. Now, of course, I know locusts are an acceptable source of protein and that some Americans enjoy the delicacy of grasshoppers.

Uncle Mohammed was concerned about our safety because we were living in an isolated region without our father. At his urging, we moved to Sefrou where my father’s family lived. Living in the town of Sefrou was a dramatic, but welcomed, change. My grandparents and aunts were warm, caring people. I became especially fond of my father’s sister, Khnatza, because she could always make me laugh.

In Morocco, children are the hub of the family and family is everything. To be childless, they believe, is to be “cursed by God.” Although Aunt Khnatza was childless, she had much to give and gave to many. Over the years many needy young girls have been fortunate enough to cross paths with her and become the beneficiary of her wisdom, giving spirit, and sense of humor. I recently asked my cousin in Morocco, Abdelkrim, how many girls Aunt Khnatza had taken in and raised. He was unable to remember them all.

In Sefrou my younger sister and I attended a French school and my older sisters continued their home schooling. I was thrilled to have the opportunity to make male friends my age and enjoyed attending the French school in spite of the harsh discipline I witnessed. Students were subjected to cruel and sudden pinching, twisting, and yanking of any handy body part, and the humiliation of hard slaps in front of their peers. I made every effort to avoid being the target of my teacher’s disapproval!

On Thursday afternoons our teacher would take us for a two-hour walk. As far as I could tell, it was a pleasure trip and a pretty relaxed, pleasant event. We were allowed to take along a snack. My snack was always a bottle of milk and a sandwich. The French children, in the French tradition, carried wine as their beverage of choice. They made a joke of my milk, and called me “Le Grand American” (The Big American). I told them drinking my milk was what made me bigger than any of them.

Jean-Hussard, was the Mayor of became one friends. Michael also became friends. The always about civil maintained a fort above recall seeing movements



School Picture Sefrou Morocco 1949

Phillip whose father appointed Sefrou, of my good Pierre and Courvoisier great French, worried rebellion, well-staffed the town. I large troop and training

around the fort and being told that the troops were preparing to go to a place called Indochina. My buddies and I would go to the firing range and dig up the spent lead from the training, melt it down and fashion things out of it. We hiked, rode our bikes, swapped stories and spent many happy hours together.

Living in Sefrou and attending school there made me much more aware of the prevailing and ever-increasing tensions among Moroccans regarding the French occupation in Morocco. The desire for independence was a steadily rising rumble beneath the surface of daily life. The Sultan, the King of Morocco, had become a rallying point for independence and was very popular among Moroccans. In an attempt to address this problem the French took him into forced exile thousands of miles from Morocco in Madagascar, resulting in an increase in the violence against the French colonists and their property. I recall my uncle not wanting to hold Christian meetings in his building as he was concerned that the French might regard the meetings as nationalist gatherings., which were illegal.

Looking back on that period from the position of a retired history teacher, I realize that colonialism, which had made world powers of England, Spain, France and Portugal, was waning. Democracy and nationalism were spreading throughout the world and the fledgling United Nations echoed the theme of self-determination for all nations. The French gave up their occupation of Morocco in 1956 when Morocco finally gained her independence.



A typical Moroccan couscous tagine



A meal at Aunt Khnatza's, 1993

Mealtime in Morocco

Food preparation in Morocco is labor intensive. Preparing meals and feeding guests is a welcomed opportunity to express the hospitality that is so much a part of Middle Eastern culture. Meals are served only after guests have washed their hands in the bowls provided for that purpose and are then eaten from low tables while sitting on pillows or mattresses on the floor. Tajine, a dish central to Moroccan meals, consists of seven vegetables cooked with meat and is then served in a tajine dish from which everyone eats. Although it is typical in Morocco to eat with one's well-scrubbed fingers, my mother preferred that we use spoons. Flaky pastries called bastilla are stuffed with nuts, meat, onions, vegetables or any combination. Mechoui is roasted lamb or other meat, covered with spices and butter. The foods grown in Morocco are abundant and varied and the methods of preparation vary widely from region to region. The common accompaniment to meals is mint tea, generously sweetened.



Aunt Khnatza 2000



Elaine, Ellen, and Janice with Aunt Khnatza 1993.

Meals at my aunt's or grandmother's home often involved four or five courses, which had taken hours to prepare. They were events worth anticipating. I especially loved the homemade butter. Much as I loved this butter, however, it had been churned in a goatskin and, invariably, the goat left a few hairs behind. To my parents' amusement I insisted on searching out and removing each hair from the butter before eating it.

Fifty years ago the flat Moroccan rooftops were areas reserved exclusively for women and children. The rooftops were adult-male-free sanctuaries where the women cooked, did laundry and performed other chores. I enjoyed going up on my grandmother's roof as a child because I could see for miles around. My sisters delighted in letting me know when the time had come when I could no longer go on the rooftops. Moroccan males knew they had reached a rite of passage when they were no longer allowed on the roof with the women. Usually this happened around the age of twelve.

Typhoid

Due to the lack of adequate water purification and sewage treatment systems, conditions in Morocco were unsanitary. Cows were not tested for TB, so the milk was carefully boiled the required ten minutes to destroy bacteria. Tuberculosis, dysentery, and typhoid were common. Also common was "trachoma", microscopic worms that were transferred from hands to eyes, eventually causing blindness. Those blinded by trachoma were often seen begging on the streets.

The pressure cooker my mother had brought with her from the U.S. was one of her prized possessions. My sisters and I were repeatedly warned not to eat salads or raw foods that could not be adequately washed or sterilized. Burying the contents of the "chamber pots" had been a part of the daily chores when we lived in Tamara, but the house where we lived in Sefrou had been recently constructed with modern conveniences. Sefrou had a sewer system, electricity, and a safe water system.

In spite of our warnings, Dorothy contracted typhoid at the home of a friend. She became extremely ill with a high temperature that continued for two weeks. Typhoid causes your intestinal tract to become perforated and tender, preventing you from taking solid foods. Dorothy lost a great deal of weight and her thick, dark hair fell out. I remember a French doctor appearing and ministering to her with little cotton balls soaked in alcohol in a clear bowl. These were lit and then placed on the skin, forming a suction, which supposedly drew out impurities. (The dictionary refers to these as "cupping glass".) The missionaries helped us care for Dorothy. Thankfully, she recovered and wore a scarf over her head until her hair grew out again. I remember making the mistake of teasing her by pulling off her "head rag" when she was well enough to fight back.

Before my birth an older brother, Paul, had died of dysentery at four months of age. My brother's death, my sister's illness, and the repeated warnings about germs we heard while growing up left me with a consciousness about cleanliness which has

followed me all my life. When my children were small I was very vigilant when they went through the stage of putting anything and everything into their mouths.

We had lived in Sefrou four months when my father returned from the States, bearing gifts for all of us. The red and white American Schwinn bicycle he presented me with is one of my fondest memories. The streets in Morocco are pedestrian-oriented and European bicycles were a common mode of transportation. My red and white American bike was the envy of many and I was very proud of it.

Although my father traveled a lot, on the days he was home he held daily Bible readings every morning before school. Sometimes these readings seemed to continue indefinitely. Worried about being late for school, I would fidget and squirm impatiently until I was near tears. Finally, my mother would intervene.

My parents frowned on fighting, especially anything physical. While my sisters and I tried not to break the fighting rule, we frequently engaged in heated exchanges. When we were scolded, we insisted we had been “arguing” and not breaking the fighting rule. My older sister’s quick mind always kept me on my toes. Sloppy thinking didn’t pay when you were in Lili’s company

American troops, stationed in Morocco during and following WWII, got a kick out of teaching the Arab children naughty words and phrases. We would memorize the strange words and proudly repeat them later to parents and missionaries who were less than impressed. I also remember the beautiful, intriguing sound of the songs the French soldiers sang in the streets. While the sounds were alluring, the lyrics were inappropriate for small ears, but we learned those as well.

We sometimes rode in horse drawn carriages called “victorias” with British missionary families. When the horses passed gas, we would collapse in fits of giggling. In spite of the uncomfortable looks of the missionaries, who did their best to ignore both the horses and the giggling children, Moroccan horses never learned proper etiquette.

Moroccan Culture

If you were a male born in Morocco, you were automatically in the upper half of the population. Males, especially firstborn sons, are placed on pedestals by their parents, and taught from an early age that they are privileged individuals. Families are willing to make great personal sacrifices for their sons, especially firstborn sons. Unemployment and underemployment are very common. Moroccan males fare better whose parents have the wisdom and vision to emphasize the importance of education and hard work to the sons they adore.

There is no such thing as a non-working woman in Morocco. Women in Morocco were expected to marry, often as early as fourteen, be subservient to their husbands, raise the children, work wherever necessary, and tend the home. Sometimes physical and

emotional abuses shadow their hard work. While today more Moroccan women work outside the home, they must get their husband's permission. Usually, they work in textile, light industry, or as maids. While working, they are still responsible for the domestic chores in their own homes, including the labor-intensive Moroccan cooking.

When we left Morocco in 1953 Moroccan women wore ankle-length, long-sleeved, loosely fitting over-garments called jelabas outside their homes. They covered their hair with a foulard, or scarf, and most of them covered their faces with a chadra, or veil. This attire, leaving only the eyes visible, was intended to provide moral protection against the wandering eyes of men. The traditional jelaba is worn mostly by older women in Morocco today and European dress is common.

To discourage her from marrying my father, my mother was told many stories about how he would put a veil on her after they were married. Although this was certainly never considered, being veiled was not without its advantages. Before marriage the bride-to-be could discreetly view her future husband while he remained unaware he was being observed. I heard stories, also, of spies who disguised themselves as modest Muslim women, and my mother shared a story about a French girl who dressed herself as a Muslim woman for the purpose of keeping tabs on her fiancé.

Fifty years ago most Muslim marriages were arranged, but this is less the case today, particularly in families where education is a priority for their sons and daughters. In earlier times when marriages were arranged, the couple had to depend on family members to provide information on what their future spouse would be like. Dowries were given by the bride's family, and age differences of 25 years between bride and groom were not uncommon.

If Moroccan women didn't develop a mind of their own, chances for a peaceful marriage were increased. However, if they expressed needs, thoughts, or desires in conflict with their husband's, they could easily find themselves without a husband and without their children, as well. Under Islamic law, if a Moroccan man wants a divorce he needs only to repeat, "I divorce you" a specified number of times in front of witnesses. The divorced woman would give up her dowry and return home to her parents, possibly without her children.

I remember my father sometimes lamenting an abuse inflicted on his sisters by their husbands. If a woman had supportive males in her family, they might sit down with her husband and successfully negotiate peace between them. If efforts to negotiate failed and the abuse was extreme or frequent, male members of the wife's family have been known to take more direct action outside the law.

One of my father's brothers had a bright, lovely young wife but divorced her. Much to her heartbreak, he took their breastfeeding infant home to his own mother to care for. When they were unable to regulate the formula properly and too proud or stubborn to

return the infant to its mother, the baby nearly died. Fifty years ago women had no legal recourse in these matters.

Although now civil law in Morocco makes it more difficult for men to divorce, and states that women must give their consent in marriage, the women in Morocco remain second-class citizens in a patriarchal society. While physical abuse of a spouse is also against the law now in Morocco, it is still common. Through sacrifice, courage, tears and sometimes humiliation, women have earned the right to work and have made progress in the fifty years since I lived there. However, they have a long way to go to realize true equality. As my wife has observed, when a couple enters a restaurant in Morocco today, the waiter invariably asks the man what he wants to order for his companion, ignoring her altogether. Religion, social conservatism and tradition continue to clash with the urgency of change in Morocco.

My Parents



Mehdi Ksara (my father), 1965

My mother was an only child born late in life to her parents. I'm sure she was somewhat indulged and spoiled as a result. Being the sole focus of her parents may have made it more difficult for her to internalize the dynamics necessary for the give and take of a large family such as ours. My mother could be headstrong and very focused on what she wanted as an adult. My father, being the firstborn son in a Muslim family had a very similar mindset. I have copies of the many diaries Maude Cary kept during her 54 years in Morocco. I had to smile recently while reading a passage from her diary in which she mentioned praying that God would grant Medhi Ksara humility. God has been slow in granting this request.

Although my father rejected the Muslim faith in his youth, he internalized my grandfather's religious soul and the vigor, enthusiasm and passion he brought to his faith. He simply transferred those qualities to the Christianity he came to embrace. He is thoroughly versed in both the Muslim faith and Christianity. He speaks Spanish, Arabic, French, and English fluently. His daily trips to the market provide an opportunity for him to witness, persuade, argue and debate, all of which he thoroughly enjoys to this day.

Children in Morocco are taught at an early age to honor and respect their parents and elders. My father and grandfather had reconciled following the birth of my older sister, Elizabeth, and my father spent a good deal of his time with his parents and siblings. My mother resented this somewhat, possibly because her own parents had returned to the states and were not available to her. Father also spent at least an hour a day translating text. In spite of these activities he had perhaps too much free time, which

he sometimes spent at home meddling in my mother's daily tasks and chores. She appeared less than appreciative of his efforts in this regard.

Returning to the States

My mother longed to return to the United States. She may have blamed the death of my older brother, Paul, on Moroccan life. As my sisters grew up she may have feared they would marry Moroccan men and spend their lives in Morocco. I'm sure this concerned her a great deal. In addition, my mother's parents had returned to the United States and she must have missed them. She was very close to her mother, and whatever tensions may have occurred between them as a result of her marriage to my father had long since been mended. The hope of returning to the United States never left my mother's heart. I, too, longed to return to America where they had planes, trains, cars and things exciting to young boys. Life in the West seemed much more progressive and promising.

My mother's wish to return to the U.S. deepened with the death of Grandfather Keller. Her mother was alone now and in poor health, and she needed her only daughter. My sisters were getting older and my parents agreed their education should continue in the states. In addition, the Korean War had begun and they were concerned that the world situation might deteriorate as it had ten years before. In 1952, when I was fourteen, my family planned our return to the United States.

My sisters and I considered the trip with great anticipation but with some trepidation as well. It would mean a big change in our lives. The ferry trip from Tangier to Gibraltar was very rough. Many of the passengers suffered from seasickness. (Fortunately, this was not a problem that ever plagued my family.) We boarded the SS Marine Shark in Gibraltar for the trip to New York.

A movie was being shown onboard which my sisters and I longed to see, but we had been told by our parents that going to movies was not acceptable to them. We announced that we were going for a walk on deck, circled around, and wound up in the movie lounge where "The Student Prince" starring Mario Lanza was playing. As we settled in to watch, we looked around, feeling a bit guilty. Who did we see across the lounge but our own father! Our amazement was exceeded only by our amusement. Needless to say, the punishment for our transgression wasn't too severe. It was a very memorable experience to see our first Hollywood extravaganza, and we hummed the tunes long after the movie ended.



Edward, age 14

When we arrived in New York, our reintroduction to American life began with attending a two week Bible camp in upstate New York. We played games, canoed, and

for two weeks I didn't have to play with or see much of my sisters (or they me). It was a great way to begin life in America.

We moved to Sulphur Springs, Arkansas, where Grandmother lived, which provided me with the opportunity to get to know her better. Grandmother Keller was a competent, energetic, self-supporting woman and the first Postmistress in the United States in Shively, Kentucky. I can recall her beginning a study of the Russian language in the late 1950's because her belief at that time was that the Russians might be running the world. She was eighty-nine then, but Grandmother remained responsive to and interested in the world around her until her death at 97. I admired my Grandmother Keller's inner strength a great deal.

Our transition to American life was made easier for my sisters and me by the fact that the Wyclif Bible Translators had acquired properties in Sulphur Springs. We had much in common with the Wyclif Missionary's children and attended the Gospel Tabernacle, a warm and caring church group about four miles south of Sulphur Springs, Arkansas. I still have acquaintances from the people I met there fifty years ago.

Our mother had frequently reminded us growing up in Morocco that America was in our future. I, in particular, had thought about it a great deal and looked forward to returning. While our assimilation to Western culture happened fairly quickly, it did not happen overnight and was not without incident. Not only were we from Morocco, but we had the innocence and naiveté that often accompany children of missionaries. I was polite, respectful, eager to do well in school and to please my teachers. Those lacking such characteristics sometimes enjoy preying on those who have them. In my early days in Sulphur Springs the girls and teachers seemed to appreciate me more than some of the boys. Occasionally a classmate would try to physically intimidate me or make me the butt of their jokes. Avoiding violence of any kind had been deeply ingrained in me, and I was uncomfortable and at a loss in such situations for a while. Fortunately, this was back in the days when aggressive or bullying students were encouraged not to return to school.

Because I was tall I was encouraged to play basketball and eager to learn. However, I'd never been on a basketball court or encountered a basketball. I'm afraid I wasn't the star athlete that first year, but I was able to successfully block passes and managed to do okay. Playing on a team gave me a group of friends I "belonged" to, which was helpful. My best friend in Sulphur was Mac Fountain. Both his parents were practicing physicians and Mac had a car. He and I spent most of our free time together, not realizing he would be best man at my wedding eight years later.

During this time my father had returned to his work in Morocco. Much to the frugal dismay of my father, my mother purchased a car while I was in high school and he was gone. Having grown up in a poor country and been influenced by the miserly ways of the missionaries for many years, he seemed to think this car was an unnecessary extravagance. But there was no train or bus transportation to Sulphur Springs and the car became indispensable.

Although my mother, sisters, and I recognized the many blessings and opportunities afforded us, my father struggled. He had been a big fish in the small pond of Morocco. His ties to his parents and siblings were extremely strong. His roots were in Morocco and so was his comfort zone. He did not blend in with the “nine to five” mass, and had no intention of remaining in America.

While my father agreed that his children should be educated in the United States, he wanted my mother to leave us behind in the care of church friends and return to Morocco with him. Her response was that God had given her children and she would be the one to raise them. My father had returned to Morocco alone. He came back again to get my mother but she remained with us in Sulphur Springs. I realized when my father returned alone to Morocco the next time that our days of being together as a family were over. I was a big, gangly fourteen year old but that did not prevent the tears from falling. It was a very sad day in my life.

My mother encouraged my education and I enjoyed school. I admired the coach and geography teacher at Sulphur Springs High School, who became instrumental in encouraging my developing interest in geography and history and my eventual interest in the field of education. Following my graduation from high school, I spent two years in Miami, Oklahoma, attending Junior College and playing football before transferring to the University of Arkansas to complete my degree.

Marriage

I met my wife, Janice Rittershouse, who grew up in Springfield, at the University of Arkansas. There was nothing phony or pretentious about Janice. She was confident, capable, an excellent student and impressive in her maturity. We began dating the spring of my senior year and enjoyed a lovely semester of summer school together. After my graduation, I left for Quantico, Virginia, in September 1960 to attend Marine Officers Candidate School. In December, I signed a three-year contract with the U.S. Marine Corps and began the six-month Basic Officer's School in Quantico. Janice remained behind to complete her senior year at the University, and we kept in touch through correspondence. When she came to visit me at Quantico during Easter break we became engaged.

In July 1, 1961, in a ceremony at Calvary Temple Assembly of God Church in Springfield, Missouri, I married my best friend, business partner, lover, and the mother of our children. We have been married forty-one years and I have never looked back. A hidden bonus in my marriage to Janice was the mother-in-law who came with her. Not only was my mother-in-law an incredibly nice person, she was very bright and practical and a wonderful role model for our daughters.

Janice was 22 and I was 24 when we married. Although I had to leave my new bride for a thirteen-month tour overseas with the 3rd Marine Division in Okinawa, we

still have the daily letters we wrote to one another during my absence. I had access to a MRC 83 single-side-band 50,000-watt jeep radio, which allowed us to talk with ham operators in the states who then connected me with my wife. We could visit on the phone at no cost, which fit our budget very well in those early days. The only constraints were that there could be an unlimited number of people listening to the conversation, and since it was a one-way mike, each time one of us finished a comment it was necessary to say "Over" before the other could begin talking. During my thirteen-month absence, Janice returned to graduate school at the University of Arkansas where she completed her Masters degree in psychology.

On my return to the U.S. in September, 1962, I traveled to Missouri where Janice and I were reunited. We enjoyed a leisurely trip out to my new assignment with the 1st Marine Division at Camp Pendleton, California. In October while I was duty officer at an outlying camp we received orders to prepare for a major troop movement. The Cuban Missile Crisis was in full bloom. A week later I was part of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Brigade, a group of sixty-plus ships sailing south toward the Panama Canal. The first night out the Navy ship's Captain called me in. I was the senior Marine on board and he wanted to go over the top secret landing plan for the invasion of Cuba. Within 48 hours tensions had eased, but the 1st Marine Expeditionary Brigade still proceeded to the Caribbean where we spent three weeks in Haiti and Puerto Rico before returning home to Camp Pendleton. I was welcomed by Janice, who had found a job with the San Diego County Department of Public Welfare. The Cuban Missile Crisis, following on the heels of my 13-month assignment to the Far East, convinced Janice and me that a career in the Marine Corps would be 17 more years of unwelcome separations. In December of 1963 I was discharged from the USMC and we traveled back to Springfield, Missouri. I went to graduate school for a year before taking my first teaching job at Hartville, Missouri. I completed my Masters in Education a year later. My graduate degree was from Missouri University, which at that time was offering the cooperative graduate program at SMS.

Children

The analogy that comes to mind when I think of my children is that of a plane which leaves the hangar, taxis down the runway and lifts off in flight. Kirsten, our firstborn, was in flight coming out of the hangar. She did everything early. She has always been very bright, articulate and competitive. Kirsten and her husband, Mike, live in Overland Park, KS. Kirsten, a pediatrician, is currently a stay-at-home mom to our three granddaughters. Kirsten's birth in 1966 brought us such joy that we decided to try again when she was almost four.

When my wife returned from her visit with the doctor during our second pregnancy, she waddled in, placed an x-ray before me and insisted, "Count them." I counted. There were two! In preparation for the two new additions to our small family, we scrambled to double up on baby supplies. I learned later that twins run in my family. We still have the twins' prenatal x-ray in our freezer today, thirty-two years later. Our identical twin daughters arrived on July 10, 1970.

The twins, Ellen and Elaine, have taken up a great deal more of the runway. Ellen is a case manager with Missouri Division of Family Services in Springfield and Elaine is an RN in St. Louis. They were a delightful experience growing up and kept us on our toes. They continue to be a marvelous blessing in our lives today. The twins are, of course, extremely close. As the girls grew up Kirsten loved to “boss” her little sisters, and when Ellen and Elaine were about four I overheard them plotting revenge against their bossy big sister, “Let’s scream and get Kirsten in trouble!” Kirsten on the other hand loved to tell her young twin sisters that one of them was adopted, which worried them a good deal as they tried to sort out which one it might be.



Daughters Elaine, Ellen, Kirsten, 1975.

Because of the stories of abuse toward women I heard, and the memory of the tearstained faces of my aunts during my growing up years, I am keenly sensitive to the rights of women. Blessed with three beautiful daughters, it was especially important to me to empower our girls with the ability to make decisions and choices regarding their lives and to attain the education necessary to achieve financial independence. In this, my wife and I have been successful.

It was also important to Janice and me that our daughters grow up in a stable, Christian home, without the moving, divorce, and uncertainty which had marked my own childhood. I consider this achievement one of the most meaningful in my life.

My career as a teacher has given me the opportunity to share my love of history and geography with others and to influence youth at life’s hopeful, optimistic beginning. Teaching has many rewards and was a satisfying career. It’s interesting and often surprising to see how students who have passed through your classroom turn out later in life.

Teaching salaries in Missouri have never been the best. Janice's parents were involved in real estate and became mentors in getting us involved as well. This added financial security enabled us to provide our daughters with the opportunities all children deserve. I continue to work with our long-time real estate ventures, with the much-appreciated and able help of our Springfield son-in-law, Bob, who can fix, repair and build anything.

After teaching for over thirty years, I have enjoyed the years since my retirement from teaching in 1994. I'm able to do things I never had time for before. I teach a Sunday school class at University Heights Baptist Church, belong to Host Lions Club, and volunteer at Grand Oaks Mission. I keep myself busy around our home, and especially enjoy spending time with Erin, 8, Becky, 5, and Molly, 4, our three super grandchildren. Janice continues to work in her almost-thirty year career in childcare licensing for the state of Missouri. A frequently asked question in our family is whether retirement is in her future. She refuses to answer.

My father remarried in 1964 and is now 95 years old. He still lives in Morocco but I speak to him weekly by phone. With her children grown and gone, my mother went back to school in her early fifties to pursue a nursing career. She found this very rewarding and regretted ever having to retire in her seventies. In December of 1999 my mother began an eighteen month struggle with cancer that took her in June of 2001 at the age of 91.

Although my father came back to the states to visit every few years, I did not return to Morocco until about ten years ago in 1992. Returning after forty years to the kaleidoscope of sights, sounds and smells that make up Morocco was quite an experience. Renewing acquaintances and seeing family I had not seen for forty years was an emotional, rewarding experience. We have returned several times since. It gives me great pleasure to visit my cousin Farid and my cousin Abdelkrim and his family, and to take Aunt Khnata a generous supply of the diabetic candies and treats less available to her in Morocco. I like to walk the streets, visit the street vendors, and catch up on the many rapid changes taking place there. I especially enjoy visiting with the missionaries and the small group of faithful members in the church my father and stepmother attend in Tangier.

My childhood experience in Morocco has given me a keen appreciation for life in the United States. The modern medicine, clean food and water supply, and the many opportunities and freedoms granted men and women in America are blessings not to be taken for granted. The United States has been my home for over fifty of my sixty-four years, but Morocco will always have its own special corner of my heart.



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