

The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

October 2000

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Message from the President

Greetings to each of you. Hopefully this message finds you well.

As I write this, I can't help but be drawn to the beautiful scene that is visible from the window in my work room. The leaves of the trees seem to change color before my eyes. But almost as they change color, virtually as they reach the height of their beauty, they die and fall to the ground. Part of the cycle of the seasons. A cycle that I reluctantly accept - not being much of a winter person - knowing as I do, that each autumn is part of a longer process that leads to renewal and rebirth each spring.

Not all cycles lead to renewal or rebirth; nor do all cycles lend themselves so readily to the sustenance of hope. This is the case with polio, transmitted in annual cycles to countless children around the world, including many in Niger.

In Niger, the ray of hope can be seen not within the cycle, but in the national effort to eradicate polio by the end of this year. As you can see from the story below, early stages of the effort have been successful. You will also see how you can help. And in a departure from my normal practice, I want to encourage you to be financially supportive if it is at all possible. Imagine Niger's children polio free. And please remember all of it counts, or none of it does.

In that context, I want to thank all of you who gave so generously to the campaign earlier this year to respond to Niger's meningitis epidemic and to those of you who continue to support the FON/BU chewable vitamin project.

Elsewhere in this issue, you will find Jim Bullington's first column (*Inside Peace Corps Niger*) and Jane Bonin's

farewell; information on how you can get your hands on one or more of **FON's** beautiful new T-shirts ; updates on ***FON Reunion 2001: A Celebration of Niger*** and on ***Return to Niger 2002***; and much, much more.

Regarding next year's reunion and the projected trip to Niger the year after that - a personal note. While I have tried to get back to each and every person who has responded to our call for input and ideas, I know that from time to time I have fallen a bit behind. Please don't give up on me. I will get back to you. And please believe that your responses are not only appreciated, they are important. Keep them coming.

Pentultimately, this issue also kicks off the 2001 FON membership drive. It looks as if we will end the 2000 membership year somewhere in the vicinity of 225 members, maybe a few less. To each of you who has formally joined **FON**, our very sincere thanks. To each of you who didn't quite get around to doing that - please jump on the camel express this year (see **FON 2001 Membership & Order Form** below for details).

Enjoy the newsletter and please stay in contact.

Jim Schneider, President

Introducing - Friends of Niger T-Shirts You're gonna love this T-Shirt!!

Based on a design originally created by our neighbors at Friends of Burkina Faso, **FON** had produced its first shirts in plenty of time to meet holiday gift giving needs. The short-sleeved shirts are 100% cotton, pre-shrunk beefy-T, natural muslin-colored fabric. The design (above) is four color: brown, black and the orange and green of the flag of Niger. You'll notice a nifty proximity map of Niger within the map of Africa which appears in the branches of the baobab tree. The shirts are available in Medium, Large and Extra Large sizes and sell for \$18 each, shipping included. Use the **FON Membership & Order Form** or send a check made out to Friends of Niger (indicating the number of shirts by size), along with your name and address to: **Shirts. c/o Friends of Niger, P.O. Box 33164, Washington, D.C., 20033-0164.**

You're Gonna Love This T-Shirt		
Available in 3 Sizes		Makes a Great Gift!!
- M, L, XL		It'll Look Good on You as Well!!

***... and the International Calendar 2001
from RPCVs of Wisconsin-Madison***

And this Calendar as well!!

Since 1987 the RPCVs of Wisconsin-Madison have been producing and distributing one of the finest quality calendars on the market - the **International Calendar**. This year the calendar is available through **Friends of Niger**. The calendar is open size, 12 1/4" x 18 3/4", features 13 color photos along with information from past and present Peace Corps service countries, and is printed with soy-based ink on recycled paper. Each day of the year is annotated with holiday and event information; each month includes information on lunar and celestial

events; and each photo is complimented by material related to the country portrayed. A photo of the Maradi Grand Marché graces the month of September courtesy of Tori Paide (Niger RPCV '94-'96). The calendars are priced at \$12 each, shipping included. Use the **FON Membership & Order Form** on page 9 or send a check made out to Friends of Niger, along with your name and address to: **Calendars, c/o Friends of Niger, P.O. Box 33164, Washington, D.C., 20033-0164.**



Cover
Photo
-2001



International Calendar

Tori Paide Photo

September 2001 Grand Marché

- Maradi



INSIDE PEACE CORPS NIGER



Dear Friends of Niger,

My initial impression after two weeks in Niger is simple and straightforward: This must be the best Peace Corps program in the world! I've been highly impressed by the staff, the facilities, the support from the Nigerien government and people, and most of all by the quality of the Volunteers I've met. Their enthusiasm is contagious; their dedication is inspiring.

The excellence of this program is the result of Jane Bonin's outstanding leadership over the past four years combined with the hard work of a first-class staff and great Volunteers, both those who are here today and all those who have gone before. My challenge is to keep the program functioning at this level, and if possible to take it even higher.

In the immortal words of Calvin Coolidge, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." This program certainly ain't broke," and I have no intention of setting out to fix it. That doesn't mean, however, that there won't be changes. The pace of change in the world today, even in Niger, is increasingly fast, and if we don't adapt to meet new challenges and new opportunities, we'll soon be left behind. Also, there may be some things we're doing now that could be done even better.

Although I've had considerable experience working in developing (in some cases, undeveloping) countries of Africa and Asia, I'm new to Niger and to the Peace Corps. My first priority, then, is to learn. After a few more days to get myself and family settled and to meet some of our Nigerien government hosts and partner agencies, I plan to spend much of my time outside Niamey visiting Volunteers at their sites, learning about them and from them, and listening to their ideas and plans and problems. Later this month, I expect to travel to Agadez for a COS conference, to visit Volunteers in the region, and to explore potential new programming opportunities. Over the course of the next few months, I hope to meet with all the Volunteers at their sites.

In spite of the valiant efforts of more than 2600 PCVs who have served in Niger, and the hundreds of millions of dollars in foreign assistance provided by many donors, according to a recent World Bank study the people of Niger are even poorer today than they were three decades ago. And a UN-produced poverty index," which measures both income and a series of social indicators, ranks Niger 173 out of 174 countries in the world. (Sierra Leone is 174.) All the indicators remain grim: life expectancy 47; infant mortality rate 123/1000; adult literacy 14%; only 800 km of paved road for a country nearly twice the size of Texas; and the list goes on and on.

Why has Niger failed to develop? There's no single answer, but only a list of contributing causes: the terrible drought of the 70s; the collapse of uranium prices in the 80s; political instability in the 90s; creeping desertification for decades; and this list too could go on and on. Whatever the causes, the challenges remain daunting.

I'm fortunate, however, to arrive at a time of renewed hope on the part of the Nigerien people and the foreign donor community. The new government that came to power as a result of last November's free and fair election is off to a promising start. Stability and peace have been restored. Donors are again interested in beginning new projects and are again searching, along with the government, for new answers to the development puzzle. When President Clinton visited Nigeria last month, President Tandja traveled to Abuja (the new Nigerian capital) for a meeting with him that lasted over two hours and was described as cordial and productive. Overall US-Nigerien relations are currently very warm, and Peace Corps is highly regarded by the people and government alike.

Eventually, I hope this renewed optimism and our strengthened bilateral ties will translate into growth for the Peace Corps program here. For the new fiscal year beginning October 1, however, it looks as though we will be hard-pressed to maintain the current number of Volunteers and level of Volunteer support.

Such development challenges and financial constraints are of course not new. Peace Corps has long ago learned to press on and take pride and satisfaction in the day-to-day triumphs the Volunteers achieve at the village level. We are candle-lighters, not darkness-cursors.

I'm more than happy - I'm absolutely delighted - to be in Niger and to have the opportunity to lead and serve the Peace Corps program and our Volunteers here. I welcome the support of Friends of Niger in promoting Peace Corps' three goals in this most interesting country.

Jim Bullington
Country Director
Niger

Message from Jane Bonin

Greetings, Friends of Niger!

I wanted to take this opportunity to salute all of you and to let you know that I'm back. My last day as Directrice was Sept 2. I'm back in Washington, moving back into my apartment tomorrow, and interviewing for a job at the same time. If I'm lucky, I will continue working with young people who are committed to enhancing their skills so they can make a bigger difference in the world.

I was content to leave the program in Niger in Jim Bullington's capable hands. I predict that he will be a really good director. He's solid, knowledgeable about Africa, and eager to get his hands around the job.

Working with Peace Corps has been one of the high points of my professional life. It is, as all of you know, an organization unlike any other, with a spirit that's hard to define in words but one that a person can pick up instantly, both from currently serving PCVs and from veterans as well.

To those of you that I have met, I hope we can stay in touch, at least via email. To those of you that share the bond of loving Niger and the Nigerien people, congratulations on your good works, whenever it was, and good luck. La vie continue!

Sincerely,
Jane Bonin

**BU/FON Chewable Vitamins Campaign
- Project Up-date/October 2000 -**

As reported in the last issue of *The Camel Express*, the third shipment of children's chewable multivitamins - purchased with donations to this Boston University/Friends of Niger project - was carried back to Niger in late July by Sue Rosenfeld. Sue is a member of FON and a long time resident of Niamey, where she is the BU staff person.

While the third shipment was smaller than the first two, donations continue to come in. The Board of Directors of FON has decided to treat the project as on-going. All contributions will be earmarked for the bulk purchase of chewables which will, in turn, be sent along to Niger. The vitamins are divided between the Pediatrics Ward of the National Hospital in Niamey and the SIM Hospital in Galmi.

Financial contributions, in checks or money orders, should be made out to **Friends of Niger** and sent to: **Vitamins c/o Friends of Niger; P.O. Box 33164; Washington, D.C. 20033-0164**

From the Creative Responses Department

Andrew Younger is a freelance producer/journalist who works out of Prince Edward Island, Canada. Under contract to Canada's Vision TV network, Younger was seeking information on Niger before making a trip there to do a story on Etruscan Resources Limited - a Canadian gold mining company headquartered in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

He found FON on the web and had an exchange with FON President Jim Schneider. In the process, Jim persuaded Andrew that, since he was going to Niger anyway, he should do a story on the BU/FON project - "a great example of a people-to-people initiative." Younger, in turn, convinced Vision that the idea was worth pursuing and is in the process of getting footage at the National Hospital and at Galmi. The feature is due to air this winter.

Before going, Younger convinced several pharmaceutical chains to donate to the project, then filled all the loose spaces in his baggage and in that of his cameraman with bottles of chewables.

FON Joins UNICEF & Others in NIDs Campaign to Eradicate Polio in Niger



Discussions last month between Friends of Niger and representatives of UNICEF Niger - and subsequently between Isselmou Boukhary of UNICEF Niger and Niger's Ministry of Health - have resulted in agreement regarding a specific role for FON in Phases III and IV of Niger's National Immunization Days (NID) campaign.

FON has been asked to assist with funding related to campaign activities which focus on reaching Niger's highly mobile nomadic population during their annual gatherings primarily in the north of Niger. Phases III and IV of

the campaign will take place in October and November of this year.

The NID campaign has as its goal, the eradication of polio in Niger before the end of the year 2000. by vaccinating all children 0-5 years of age. Phases I and II took place in March and June of this year. Indications from Niger are that 100% of the polio vaccine target populations were reached and that these phases were also highly successful in terms of their secondary goal of distributing vitamin A to breastfeeding women.

Those involved in the NID effort include the Government of Niger, The Association of Traditional Chiefs of Niger (ACTN), UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO), Rotary International and Helen Keller International (HKI). The participation of Friends of Niger is via UNICEF.

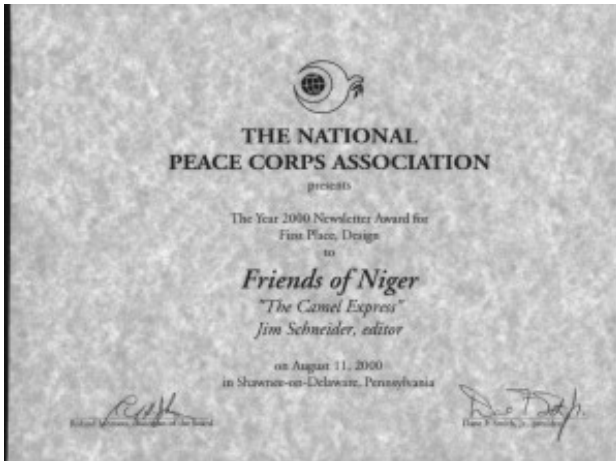
According to Julie Burke of UNICEF Niger, "We feel that Friends of Niger could be of vital importance to the success of the National Immunization Day campaign and are looking forward to further collaboration on this matter."

FON Launches Appeal

With this announcement, Friends of Niger is launching an appeal for donations to the NID campaign against polio. Contributions should be made payable to Friends of Niger and sent to:

NID; c/o FON; P.O. Box 33164; Washington, D.C.20033-0164

The Camel Express Takes First and Second at NPCA



Newsletter Awards Ceremony

When Friends of Niger President Jim Schneider attended the Awards Dinner at the National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) Annual General Meeting in August he was looking forward to a pleasant evening and received a pleasant surprise as well.

The Camel Express, newsletter of the Friends of Niger and edited by Schneider, was recognized by NPCA with the first place award for Newsletter Design. FON also tied the Friends of Burkina Faso (FBF) for the second place award for Editorial Content. FBF President Bob Osborne and FBF newsletter editor Denny Fitzpatrick were also in attendance at the meetings which took

place at Shawnee-on-the-Delaware, Pennsylvania.

FON Reunion 2001: A Celebration of Niger

Target Dates Tentatively Set for Niger's Independence Day Weekend in August

The **Friends of Niger Reunion 2001** has now been given a thematic designation and is being called *A Celebration of Niger*. This name is intended to reinforce the hope of FON's Board of Directors that next year's

event involve Niger's Embassy as well as the Nigerien community in Washington, D. C. - the site of the reunion.

On a recent trip to D. C., FON President Jim Schneider met with Mr. Joseph Diatta, Niger's Ambassador to the United States. Mr. Diatta expressed support for the reunion and has agreed to work closely with FON on the organization of the event.

FON's Board has tentatively scheduled *A Celebration of Niger* for the weekend of August 3-5, 2001. August 3 is Niger's Independence Day and a national holiday in Niger itself.

Tentative plans call for social gatherings on the nights of August 4 and August 5; exhibits and displays which highlight Niger, its culture, and the activities of FON - archives, multi-media shows, etc.; films from Niger; Peace Corps and NPCA material; readings by authors of books on Niger and by RPCV Niger authors; as well as events related to the nation's capitol - such as a memorial service at the John F. Kennedy grave site. Additional information regarding alternative accommodation and other details will be released via the FON web site - <http://www.friendsofniger.org> - and the next issue of *The Camel Express*.

The theme of the reunion, according to Schneider is "a celebration of Niger and its people as well as of our time in Niger and our experiences while we were there. We are hoping that people who care about Niger - and who fondly remember each other and the time that they spent in Niger - will bring their families, their photos, their scrapbooks and help make the weekend a very special occasion."

2002 Trip to Niger Sparks Interest & Ideas

- 40 Years of Peace Corps in Niger -

The last issue of *The Camel Express* carried a brief announcement of FON's plan to sponsor a trip back to Niger in the year 2002 - for many reasons, including the commemoration of the 40th anniversary of Peace Corps presence in Niger.

That brief announcement has stimulated considerable response from people interested in participating in such a trip - in some cases along with members of their family: spouses, parents, children. The amount of interest expressed at such an early date, means that the trip is now a likelihood.

When the trip first went onto the FON drawingboard, it was assumed that most everyone interested in the trip would be primarily attracted to the idea of returning to the community in which they served. While this is, indeed, true for many - others have expressed interest in two other kinds of activity or itinerary.

Some - especially those who served in the earlier years and who lived in the larger urban areas like Niamey - have expressed an interest in visiting locations that they were never able to get to before, like Agadez - for example. Others have expressed an interest in being involved in some manner of 'work project.'

Because of these and other inputs the Board will now be 'exploring' a wider range of potential activities. Both the timing of the trip, the content of the trip itinerary, and trip options are still open to input from anyone who might be interested. The current plan is to take the process to a second phase - involving research on more specific details regarding timing, content and cost - this coming winter.

Meanwhile, early and very tentative discussions have begun with Peace Corps Niger.

Please continue to send input, comments or questions to **Jim Schneider**. Jim is most easily reached at either his e-mail address - lorenz3@magi.com - or by telephone - **819-827-4870**. He can also be reached by surface mail at the FON address (see page 2).

Niger PCVs Organize HIV/AIDS Bike-a-Thon

On November 11, members of Niger's Club du Cyclisme along with some 50 of Niger's Peace Corps contingent will begin a 520 kilometer, eight-day bike-a-thon. The objective - to build awareness regarding HIV/AIDS: how it is transmitted, how people can protect themselves against the disease, and how people can educate others about the disease.

The bike ride will follow two routes through high risk HIV/AIDS areas. Zarma speaking participants will start in Tillabery and end in Dosso, while Hausa speaking participants will begin in Konni and also finish in Dosso. Riders will bike all day, hold education sessions in roadside villages each evening, and sleep in the villages at night. The bike-a-thon is scheduled to end on November 18 with a celebration in Dosso.

Joe Gallegos

The message below was posted by Chris Fabian (Niger 90-93) to the Bulletin Board at the FON web site. It is reproduced exactly as submitted - Jim Schneider

Danny Gallegos (Joe's brother) wanted to let friends of Joe and Laura's know of Joe's unfortunate passing. Danny submitted this note:

Joe Gallegos, RPCV Niger ('86-'89) passed away on Sept. 28th, 2000. He touched the hearts of nearly all he met; and will be remembered for his kindness, generosity and boundless love of life. He is survived by his wife, Laura and his son, Andre.

Laura and Andre can be contacted at laurawhitefeather@yahoo.com or 65 Columbine Rd., P.O. Box 1524, Idaho Springs, CO, 80452-9998.

Haoua Diatta Launches New Book at Reception in Washington



Haoua Diatta launched her new book - **Shadow of Africa: Life of an African Ambassador's Wife** - at a reception/book signing on August 27 in Washington, D.C. The book is described as a "first hand glimpse into contemporary African culture and a rich reservoir of stories and images about African folklore and history."

Madame Diatta is the spouse of Joseph Diatta, Niger's Ambassador to the United States.

The publisher is Alpha Publishing Company (Joseph Tucker), Springfield, Virginia. The book may be ordered from the author. Send \$23.95 (includes shipping & handling) to Shadow of Africa; c/o Mrs. Haoua Diatta; 3900 Argyle Terrace, NW, Washington, DC

20011.

Proceeds from the book will benefit MICA, Inc., (the Oxcart Project) a nonprofit NGO, tax deductible organization.

People Changes at Peace Corps

Dan Reilly is the new Country Desk Officer responsible for Niger at Peace Corps headquarters in Washington.

Dan replaced Marjorie Copson who has gone to Accra as the PC Administrative Officer in Ghana.

Leanne Johnson remains the Country Desk Assistant for Niger. Dan and Leanne also work with Burkina Faso, Mali and Mauretania.

The Graduate School Guide Now Available thru Peace Corps DC

The Peace Corps recently announced the release of its publication, The Graduate School Guide. Formerly entitled the Continuing Education Guide, the work "highlights the latest education resources available for returned Peace Corps Volunteers around the world." The publication includes information regarding programs that offer special consideration to RPCVs and includes the latest information on the Fellows/USA Program and other educational opportunities and services.

RPCVs interested in obtaining a copy of the guide should send their request on a 3x5 or larger card (including name, U.S. address, and COS date) to: Peace Corps, 1111 20th Street NW, Washington, D.C., 20526.

FON Board Extends Free Membership to Peace Corps Volunteers in Niger

Beginning with the 2001 FON membership year, the Board of Directors of Friends of Niger has decided to extend free membership to all current Niger Peace Corps Volunteers. At present, Niger's returned Peace Corps Volunteers are given one free year of membership upon completion of service. This practice will continue.

The number of Peace Corps Volunteers in Niger is currently 110, with approximately 20 scheduled to COS in late December of this year. A month later, in January 2001, 56 new volunteers will head for Niger.

FRIENDS OF NIGER

2001 MEMBERSHIP & ORDER FORM

Name(s)

Address

City/State _____ **Phone (h)** _____

Zip _____ **Phone (w)** _____

E- Mail Address

Connection to Niger (RPCV, etc.)

Dates in Niger _____ **Location in Niger** _____

Program or Involvement in Niger

Membership Dues & Contributions Help Fund FON Activities, including The Camel Express

Please Check Appropriate Boxes

- Enclosed is \$20 for an Individual Membership in FON
 - \$45 to cover Individual Membership in both FON & NPCA
 - Enclosed is \$35 for a Family Membership (2 Members at One Address)
 - \$67.50 to cover Family Membership in both FON & NPCA
 - I am a New RPCV, entitled to a 1-Year Free Membership
 - Please send me a Copy of FON's Bylaws (Members Only)
 - In Addition to my Membership, I have enclosed a Contribution of _____
 - Instead of Joining FON at this time, I have enclosed a Contribution of _____
 - Please send _____ Friends of Niger T-Shirts at \$18 each (Shipping Included) _____
- T-Shirt Sizes: M _____ L _____ XL _____
- Please send _____ Year 2001 Internation Calendars at \$12 each (Shipping Included) _____

TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED _____

Make Check or Money Order Payable to **Friends of Niger** and mail to:

P. O. Box 33164, Washington, D. C. 20033-0164

(Please Enclose Membership Form)

FON Participaction Menu

Indicate your interest with a check mark. Or add something new at the bottom. Tell us how to reach you on the **Friends of Niger 2001 Membership & Order Form** (see above).

- × ___ Will help set up local FON group
- × ___ Would participate in local FON group
- × ___ Reunion 2001 in Washington, D.C.
- × ___ Trip back to Niger in 2002
- × ___ Will be local FON contact person
- × ___ Will help with BU/FON Vitamin Campaign

Other _____

Credits and Other Information

This edition of **The Camel Express** was prepared, produced and distributed via hardcopy, e-mail and website posting with the contributions Sue Bracken, Irma Poots Sarata, Judd Lyon, Jim Bullington, Jane Bonin, Sue Rosenfeld, Jai Evans, Don Bracken, Julia Burke, Carrie Regan, Penni St. Hilaire, Tori Paide, Meghan Maguire, Andrew Younger, Chris Fabian, Gabriella Maertens, John Soloninka, Larry Koff and our friends from Friends of Burkina Faso and from RPCVs of Madison, Wisconsin Please send address changes and corrections, as well as any queries to **The Camel Express** at any of the addresses below.

The Camel Express is the periodical newsletter of **Friends of Niger (FON)**.

FON can be contacted via the post at P.O. Box 33164, Washington, D.C., 20033-0164;
by e-mail at lorenz3@magi.com; and you will find FON on the web at the following Internet
address
www.friendsofniger.org.

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