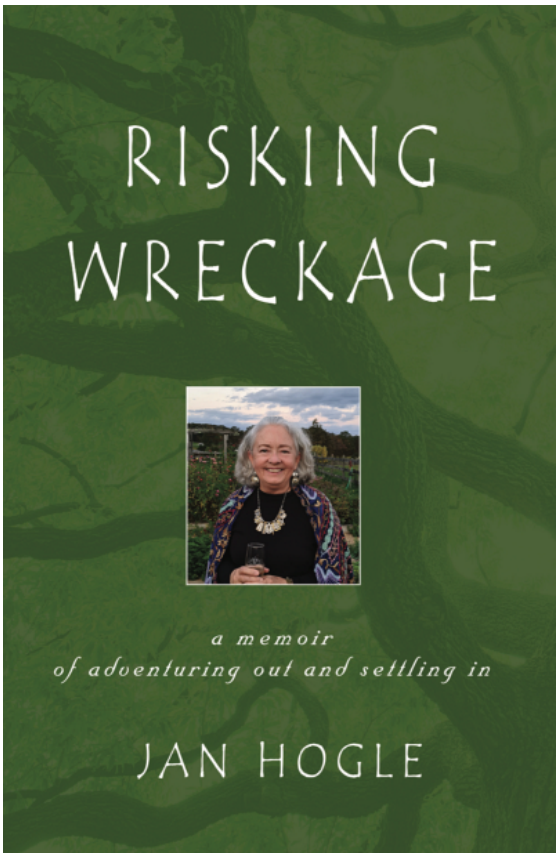

Jan's memoir chronicles her life's adventures in nine states and two African countries. Her risky passions involved mountains, oceans, and the chaos of marriage and motherhood, eventually leading to a Virginia forest.

Risking Wreckage:
A Memoir of Adventuring Out and Settling In

By Jan Hogle

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RISKING WRECKAGE

a memoir
of adventuring out and settling in

JAN HOGLE

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With this book, I leave behind evidence of my existence in this space, place, and time.

Risking Wreckage is memoir, not journalism, and not fiction. I've documented my memories and stories as best I recall them which may not match the memories of others. Sometimes, memory doesn't have much to do with reality, but these are my honest recollections. In most scenes but not all, I've used people's real names. Dialog is reconstructed although it sometimes reflects entries from my journals. No harm intended.

Journeys

1. Wisconsin 2016

2016, February 11: From witness deposition. "I saw the driver try to brake at the last instant, but it was too late. The truck smashed into the front of her body so hard that she flew backward several feet in the air. Then I saw her strike the road as she landed on her back.

"I pulled over to the side of University Avenue and rushed over. As I reached her, I could hear her groaning. I asked her about her condition, but she was unable to respond. I then called 911 and waited with her until an ambulance arrived. I also helped gather jackets from bystanders to keep her warm. Before she finally was transported from the scene, she was able to tell me her name and that her chest hurt but seemed unable to say anything else. She was visibly experiencing significant pain during the time I stayed with her while she lay on the pavement."

--Eyewitness

The Hit-By-Truck Incident. "Who can I call?" asked the ambulance attendant as I lay on the gurney on a sunny freezing February morning, clutching my cell phone and groaning with each lurch of the ambulance.

"Uh, well, my husband is working in Manhattan right now. My brother's in Costa Rica, my son is in Norfolk, Virginia, and my daughter is in Maryland. There's no family here right now." Here being Madison, Wisconsin. Anyway, there is no other family, except a sister-in-law in Vermont and a niece in DC. That was the extent of the extended crowd.

After all the risky stuff I'd done in my life, involving mountains, oceans, hot-air balloons, charging rhinos, dehydrated nomads, and gun-toting African teenagers, I never could have imagined that the wreckage from an encounter with a Dodge Ram pickup truck, driven by an 80-year-old man, would prove the most damaging. Seven broken bones requiring a few weeks of oxycodone did not flip me into drug dependency. But I couldn't walk without a walker. Me, the mountaineer.

Lying on the stretcher in the ambulance, I extracted my cell phone from my coat pocket, clutched it to my chest, and announced that I didn't want anyone to take it from me. Even in pain, my phone addiction is stronger than opioids. I texted my husband; he called and spoke to the attendant. I could barely talk; I was just trying to breathe.

The attendants established that I was oriented and knew the basics: it's 2016, my name is Jan Hogle, I have health insurance, Obama's in the White House. They asked which hospital I preferred. Dumb question. The University of Wisconsin hospital is just up the hill. I said, "UW. I work there." As confirmed by the badge on a lanyard around my neck.

Being hit by a truck while walking in a crosswalk is no adventure of the Kilimanjaro variety since neither choice nor a helmet is involved. One fraction of a second and life careens off in an unexpected direction, leaving time to think about my upcoming retirement which I had announced a few weeks previously. Time to move, again. But right now, I can't move without pain.

Lying in the hospital bed, grateful that I hadn't died, I wondered how it happened that the truck didn't run over me but instead, sent me flying like a tackled NFL receiver. I kept thinking I'd get out of bed and go upstairs to work. But then, I'd breathe and feel the crackles that meant broken ribs and could manage no more than a groan.

Marooned alone in the Upper Midwest, at least for the moment, my text to my husband from the ambulance was brief: "Hit by truck. Ambulance. UW Hospital." It took him 10 hours to get home from Manhattan. He walked into my hospital room, directly off the plane, sat down in the chair opposite my bed, and said, "I never thought I'd see you like this."

I never thought I'd see myself like this either. Mine had been a peripatetic life. Six decades took me from Ohio to New York, Florida, Wyoming, Connecticut, New Mexico, California, Virginia, Wisconsin, Niger, and Kenya. By age 12, I'd lived in three states. There were 30 different dwellings in 19 cities. I'd never have known exactly how many, but my mother kept track of every address. Still, I couldn't home in on a permanent place, nor could I explain why. Being a nomad is exhausting. And sometimes dangerous. But I'd thrived on adventures, surviving all the dislocations and disruptions. If anything, the more I traveled, the more rootless I became. I thought I was convinced that I didn't want to live in the same place forever.

Now, hampered by pain that was tolerable only if I didn't move, I had time to review. Reflect. Consider my next move.

Surviving the hit-by-truck incident while crossing a street on that cold February morning was not the defining incident of my life or even of my seventh decade. But it was significant.

#

2. Ohio 1951 - 1954

1951: Toledo, Ohio, Jan drops in. "Why did you and Dad wait so long to have children?"

Mother and I were organizing her photos in an album in the late 1990s. She agreed to write some captions but said she didn't remember enough to write anything at length.

"I didn't think we should have children until we were settled somewhere." That much she was quite clear about.

Married in late December 1939 in Salem, Ohio, my parents were at the beginning of the multi-state road tour with The Red Jackets quartet that consumed five years of their lives. Olive Kennedy and Duane Hogle were 22 and 23 on their wedding day. There was no church or long white dress, although Mother had been raised Catholic. None of my mother's family attended; her mother had died in 1927 when Mother was a child. She was estranged from her father. But the Red Jackets celebrated: my dad, his parents, and two other musicians. Between 1939 and late 1944, the quartet toured America playing popular music of the day to enthusiastic crowds in hotels – my dad on accordion and grandfather Art on violin. My grandmother Ethel, known as Nana, and Mother were the groupies. Mother said she usually found work at a switchboard or a front desk wherever they were staying. In her youth, she'd been a dancer in upstate New York, but she left that behind when she escaped from Kennedy's Inn in Binghamton after it burned in 1937.

In 1945, Dad at age 29, and my grandfather, age 54, joined the USO and spent nine months in Europe playing music for our troops. My mother and her twin sister Rosemary spent most of 1945 working in Burdines flagship department store in Miami and hanging out at the

beach, while my uncle Ernie shipped out with the Navy. When Dad and my grandfather returned in September 1945, my parents reunited and ended up eventually in Toledo, Ohio. The only clue to Dad's activity after the USO tour and before Toledo is a large diploma from the American School of Photography in Chicago, dated 1948.

Twelve years into my parents' marriage, I arrived in 1951, a planned event according to Mother's story. They had settled, were in their mid-30s and the clock was ticking. Likely, it had been a long hot summer for Mother, living in an apartment with no air conditioning. The baby shower photos show a dozen women in dresses and heels, smoking cigarettes, and sweating. Mother was unconscious at my birth. Dad paced in the waiting room, smoking, and waiting for news. I came home from the hospital in their black car, held in my mother's arms in the front seat. No seat belts, baby carrier, or car seat. Risky.

The extensive photographic record of my arrival in Toledo includes 8mm color home movies and black-and-white photos. In the silent color movies, Mother's red-polished fingernails pull cards out of a recipe box with information about the month and year of the events being filmed. As the months of my first year ticked by, I learned that the bright lights on the flash bar meant I should smile and wave.

Delicate watercolor drawings of smiling babies illustrated my pink silk baby book. Mother dutifully documented 1950s-style infant management, just as she had documented in detail the Red Jackets' nationwide musical adventures. The recipe for baby formula is also entombed in that book -- evaporated milk, water, and Karo syrup – as instructed by a pediatrician with no apparent nutritional knowledge. Typical of those times, I was bottle-fed, while breathing second-hand smoke from Dad's Marlboro's.

Mother would have followed the doctor's orders exactly and she wrote them in my book: give cereal at age 2 weeks, pureed vegetables

at age 3-4 weeks, and fruit at age 4-5 weeks. I was on a schedule – "breakfast at 7:30 AM, dinner at noon, supper at 5:30 PM." Regardless of the regimentation and lack of breastmilk, I survived. My parents never mentioned what I was like as a baby. They never commented on whether I slept well or not, if I had colic, or cried much, or objected to the schedule. Despite the many photographs and movie film, neither of my parents wrote anything about my early years. So much of what I write about the distant past is based on looking closely at old photographs. And once you start writing about what you see in photographs, suddenly, you begin to see more.

In the summer of 1952, when I was 10 months old, the three of us took a vacation to visit extended family in New York State, driving about 450 miles in the heat without air conditioning. The photo of my mother and me in the front seat shows me in a 50's-style child car seat that looks stiffly uncomfortable with metal bars and thin cushions. No interstate highways, so travel was slow. The silent color movie film taken during the vacation complements the many black-and-white photos now preserved in albums. Frowning in the intense Syracuse summer sunlight, I was the only child in that whole crowd of mainly older people from Dad's side. In Binghamton, I met Aunt Rosemary and Uncle Ernie, visiting from Florida.

Back in Toledo, my parents celebrated my first birthday in late August with color photos and plenty of toys. As fall cooled outdoor temperatures, the photos show me in overalls and long-sleeved shirts, reading books in a child-sized wooden rocking chair, and playing with blocks, a tea set, a kid-size table and chairs, and a doll stroller. Without those photos and home movies, I'd know nothing at all about my first couple of years. Everything seemed fine in the photos. Smiles all around.

My brother Don arrived in September 1953, just after I turned two.

#

1954: Leaving Ohio. During the winter of 1953/4, Mother was hospitalized in Toledo and treated with electroconvulsive therapy for what was apparently severe post-partum depression (perhaps postpartum psychosis) a few months after Don's birth. Living in Ohio, we were isolated from extended family in New York State, perhaps contributing to Mother's illness.

Only my mother succumbed to psychological mayhem; her fraternal twin laughed her way through her 81-year life. The contrast between the dancing Kennedy Twins was the clichéd night and day and rumored to mirror the contrast between the twin's parents, neither of whom I met. Mother spent a couple of decades beginning in her mid-thirties, at home re-enacting her ideas about what a family should be like, based on magazines like *Good Housekeeping*, *Woman's Day*, and *Parents' Magazine*. Her twin, in contrast, worked all her life in cosmetics and department stores, avoiding family life with multiple abortions, a cigarette in one hand, and a drink in the other. My aunt laughed in technicolor and my mother scolded in black and white. As a child, I thought of most other people's mothers, and my teachers, in color.

#

Our paternal grandmother, Nana, arrived by train from upstate New York to take my brother and me back to Liverpool, near Syracuse. I barely knew Nana. Our dad stayed behind with his job and his hospitalized wife. In 1954, our grandfather Art at age 63 worked as the harbormaster on Onondaga Lake living in a multi-story house on Brow Street. He played violin, had worked previously in a bookbindery, and was about five years away from a fatal heart attack. I called him Bumpa.

Nana was 61 when she assumed care for the two of us. She had married young in 1913, had one child in 1916, was present for her son's marriage in 1939, and welcomed grandparenthood in 1951 and 1953, from a distance. Then, the two grandchildren took up residence in the house on Onondaga Lake in Liverpool. There are photos, color home movies, and just two notes in my pink silk baby book, penned in Nana's hand:

"I took my first train ride from Toledo to Syracuse with Brother & Nana on Mar. 1st 1954."

"Easter Sunday, Apr. 19, 1954. The Easter Bunny brought 2 baskets with candy, eggs, etc. and Daddy brought me 'Howdy Doody.' Had my first white gloves & was all dressed up & went to Church with Daddy & Bumpa – Stayed in the Nursery. Daddy took pictures of Brother & me in the house & movies out of doors."

White gloves. I wasn't even three years old.

Those two entries are cryptic clues to early childhood distress about which I never asked enough questions while the key participants were still alive. We remained in the Liverpool house through my kindergarten year, then moved twice to other houses near Syracuse. Our frayed and fractured family life left me with few early memories of growing up. Our grandparents were kind, generous people, but our mother's precarious mental health dominated or perhaps decimated my childhood memories.

It never occurred to me until I began writing a memoir, that this train trip and separation from my parents would have been traumatic for both my brother and me. I was just two and a half. Don was an infant. I knew about the trip from a young age; it's not as if no one talked about it. Dad mentioned the momentous train journey often.

"Nana came to Toledo to pick both of you up and take you on the train back to Syracuse while your mother was in the hospital." He talked about it often enough that I imagined I remembered the trip. His words planted images in my memories that became real. When Dad talked about the trip, he spoke matter-of-factly, with no emotional hint of sadness or regret or guilt. At least that's what sticks in my memory. But to be fair, there must have been intense emotion for him that I simply never saw. I was only two and a half.

A few months after Mother's hospital stay, our parents showed up in Liverpool. Nana told us years later that Mother did not recognize Don as her son.

What was it like living in Ohio during my first two years? I haven't the slightest idea; no memories at all of Ohio as a place. Just the family photographs of interior apartment life with occasional outdoor shots. Despite being born there, I have no genealogical roots in the Buckeye State, so I never developed any interest in returning to investigate my birth state. But on forms, I have to write "Toledo, Ohio" in the birthplace box. Except on Facebook, where I wrote "Syracuse, New York" as my hometown.

#

7. Niger 1983 - 1988

1983, August: Leaving for Africa. "Why do y'all have to go to Africa? We've got plenty of black people right here in Florida."

Bruce's uncle was among the crowd that assembled in Tallahassee to say goodbye before we boarded a plane for Washington DC. His joking comment probably reflected the thoughts of other relatives, or maybe he was just being Uncle Bernard. That space of a few weeks in which we left America for Africa was like an intense ride at a theme park. We packed up our lives in southern New Mexico, putting things in storage and sending air and sea shipments to Niger. We sold my little green car and Bruce's truck, then flew with my cat, Jennifer, to Florida to see the families, say goodbye, and gift Dad with the cat, again.

After my parents and Bruce's mother shed tears at the departure gate, Bruce and I boarded a plane in Tallahassee and then flew to DC where we walked with a quarter of a million people in the August heat to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Martin Luther King's March on Washington. The celebration happened to coincide with Bruce's two weeks of orientation for his new job as the Peace Corps Medical Officer for Niger and Upper Volta in West Africa. The march felt like a fitting send-off.

Then, time for the reality check. The day we walked through the doors of the Peace Corps DC medical office, there was a flurry of intensity that we eventually learned was characteristic of that hub of urgency. Little did we know what awaited us in the "field." But that first day, as we walked into a dispatch environment, I heard people yelling:

"Get line 2! Someone in Kenya is dying of rabies!"

"The PCMO in Senegal is on line 6; they need a medevac to Frankfort, NOW!"

"There's a question about schisto on line 3; can someone take it?"

It sounded like TV news -- pandemonium and disaster around the globe. That same morning, we heard there'd been a coup in Upper Volta (new president: Thomas Sankara) and the country's name would change eventually to Burkina Faso ("land of honest men"). I knew that Bruce was supposed to cover Upper Volta, as well as Niger, but what did that mean for our safety in West Africa? I had no clue and the risk seemed worthwhile. I was elated and anxious to get on the plane to this next adventure. Finally, I was going to Africa.

I know people thought we were crazy to go to West Africa and live in a traditional Muslim country when we didn't speak any of the local languages or French (the official language) and had never lived outside the US. Neither of us had been Peace Corps volunteers. Certainly, we considered alternatives, but Bruce's opportunity to work on Peace Corps staff as a regional medical officer was too exciting to reject, and the recruiter told me there were health projects at the US Agency for International Development mission in Niger where eventually I might find work.

What she didn't say at the time, and what I'm sure she was thinking, was that since I had no previous overseas experience and didn't speak fluent French, it was unlikely I would be employable anytime soon. At the time, I probably thought about these same dampening realities, but I also knew that Peace Corps volunteers got language training and cross-cultural enlightenment as part of their indoctrination during their first few months. I wasn't going to Niger as a PCV, but I figured I would learn what I needed to know and play everything by ear. I certainly wanted to work during our tour in West Africa, but I also accepted that I might need to spend months settling

into the expatriate life. This was my big opportunity to get to Africa; I would go as a dependent spouse and take my chances on employment. I felt confident and positive.

We knew nothing about Niger before accepting the job offer, other than its location at the edge of the Sahara Desert, north of Nigeria, and that it was part of France's former colonial empire. Most of the population lives along the southern edge in ancient towns stretching from the capital Niamey in the west, out to Nguigmi near what used to be Lake Chad before it dried up.

Knowing that the tour of duty was three years, plus some training for Bruce, we thought we would be in Niger for the required time and then come home to do something else – we didn't know what. Long-range planning was not our specialty, nor apparently, was packing for three years in Africa. What were we thinking?

What we took to Niger (air freight and sea freight plus carry-ons):

1. Several bags of masa harina for making corn tortillas
2. Cameras and lenses
3. Dress patterns for boubou-style clothing
4. Singer Featherweight sewing machine
5. Shakespeare's complete plays
6. Electric typewriter, vintage 1960s (the one with the manual carriage return)
7. External frame backpacks
8. Hawaiian shirts
9. African boubou-style dress given to me by a returning Peace Corps volunteer
10. Flip-flops
11. Bathing suits
12. Beach towels
13. Corelle dinnerware for 4 people

14. Forks, spoons, knives for 4 people
15. Camping gear
16. Feast of Santa Fe cookbook
17. The Joy of Cooking
18. Paella pan
19. Quilting frame
20. The quilt I was working on
21. Thread, needles, scissors
22. Hiking boots
23. Water bottles
24. Sunglasses
25. Tampons
26. Popcorn popper
27. Waffle iron
28. Teabags
29. Mixing bowls
30. Cup measures
31. Spoon measures
32. Rolling pin
33. Bible

What we didn't take to Niger:

1. Jennifer, my Siamese cat
2. Set of dishes for 12
3. Potato peeler
4. Wedding photos
5. Enough silverware

#

"Do you mind if we stand here while you open this crate? We wanna know if it's full of rocks or if your stuff is really in it."

The Embassy employees who delivered our air freight six months after it should have arrived were understandably intrigued by what might be in the huge box. The shipping container had been labeled for Niger but ended up sitting forlornly on a dock in Nigeria. The enormous carton looked weathered.

We had already borrowed or bought what we needed to set up housekeeping before the air freight made its delayed entrance, full of our stuff and not rocks. There was different drama to distract us from worrying about the number of place settings for dinner.

#

During the first six months of our African adventure, major mayhem littered our letters home. People wondered if we'd just leave, as the previous Peace Corps doctor and his wife had done after only nine months in the country. Three months into our life in Niger, the Peace Corps director's fiancée died in an automobile accident in Washington DC, thus, Bruce's supervisor left for home. Three weeks before Christmas, a volunteer wrecked her motorcycle driving to Niamey leaving her unconscious for several hours. Her injuries were superficial except for some trouble with balance and cosmetic facial damage. But soon after that crisis, a worse nightmare unfolded.

"A volunteer drank too much at a party and drove his motorcycle into a tree at 1 am," I wrote in a letter home. "He was found unconscious by a French national who, not knowing he was a PCV [Peace Corps Volunteer], took him to Niamey Hospital rather than to the private hospital where volunteers are normally taken. By the time Bruce found out about it, the PCV had been intubated, but no efforts had been made to stabilize his neck or back. He remained unconscious and died just before a US Army transport plane would have evacuated him to Germany. Everyone in the American community was stunned and depressed. The morgue here is not well-cooled; there are no

facilities for embalming and no crematorium. On Christmas day, Bruce had to help the French pathologist do an autopsy. The volunteer died of pneumonia (which developed rather quickly within 18 hours of the accident) and of the fact that his lungs were full of blood despite the absence of chest injuries. Bruce thinks that the NG tube might have been improperly inserted causing stomach bleeding which the volunteer then aspirated, causing the pneumonia. He had a fractured skull and probably (though this was not certain), a broken neck."

Another incident involved a car wreck in Maradi, a city eight hours drive from Niamey, in which a nurse volunteer exited a vehicle through the windshield into the road. A small private plane belonging to a local religious mission flew Bruce and me out there to pick up the injured young woman and take her back to Niamey so that a C-130 plane could transport her back to the US. I had had EMT training in New Mexico, so went along to assist Bruce, glad that I was still unemployed and thus available to help with spontaneous rescue missions. The volunteer was unconscious from the head injury and had been taken to a hospital staffed by Chinese health care providers. They had stabilized her as best they could, given limited resources, but were waiting for the Americans to retrieve her and take her out of Niger. So, we did, and Bruce accompanied her back to America.

And then there was the PCV who died in a bus accident that killed dozens of people on a distant stretch of narrow highway, hours from Niamey. Each time, Bruce accompanied the volunteer, injured or deceased, back to the US and was gone for a week or so. It was part of his job to travel with crises.

At the time, there were about 130 Peace Corps volunteers in Niger, spread out in isolated villages and remote towns along roads leading east and north from the capital city. Since Bruce wanted to visit each volunteer within a few months of their posting, I happily went along to

see the countryside and the lives of volunteers in isolated locations. He checked on their living situations, their mental and physical health, their water treatment systems, their food security, jobs, and latrines. I grabbed any opportunity to travel, while practicing my French language skills, and soaking up the local culture.

#

1984, January: Into the Desert. That first year in Niger involved nearly non-stop excursions around the country, and overland to other countries including Burkina Faso, Togo, and Algeria. One feature of motoring around West Africa was the ever-present road barricades overseen by young armed military-garbed soldiers whose French language skills were worse than ours. As white expatriates, we were harassed somewhat less intensively, traveling in large vehicles labeled *Corps de la Paix* and with drivers who spoke most of the local languages, or at least Hausa, the *lingua franca* in the region. And we had "papers" indicating where we were headed and why (in French), along with our Official US passports (in English).

Endlessly fascinated by all the new sights, sounds, smells, and sandiness of the environment, I adapted easily to the strangeness that sometimes seemed to plunge other dependent spouses into negativity or depression. Hope for employment always fluttered in the back of my mind, but when opportunities emerged for travel, I was delighted to be free for spontaneous trips. My long letters home to friends and family prompted plenty of updates on their lives back in Florida, New York, New Mexico, and California – all places containing our social networks from which we'd launched our lives.

I didn't miss home much, being too focused on absorbing my new environment.

On one of my trips in Niger, I accompanied the Peace Corps nurse's husband Ralph on a visit to a school being built with funding from an American aid organization that he directed. Our destination was an isolated village called Abardok in the Aïr Mountains, a brown desolate region of striking rock formations, sparse vegetation, and villages that somehow survive in the arid Sahel regions at the edge of the Sahara Desert. We were gone for about a week, bouncing over bad roads in a four-wheel-drive vehicle, staying in small hotels, and once in a Tuareg tent. My French was poor at that point and I spoke not a word of any local language, but visually, I was taking it all in and keeping copious notes in my journal.

Happy to return to Niamey and Bruce after that trip, I began Hausa language lessons since Peace Corps French training had ended. I spent my days practicing French on my own with cassette tapes, writing long letters home, learning patchwork quilting, socializing within the American community, and following employment leads.

I discovered that Hausa is a tonal language and thus more difficult to learn than French which had seemed easy to me. In a class with another American who was trained as a linguist, I felt quite incompetent at learning tones and memorizing vocabulary and grammar. She picked up the language much faster than I did, leaving me thinking I should limit my linguistic pursuits to French. I was relieved when my study of the local lingua franca was cut short by my next travel opportunity.

#

1984, February: Across the Sahara. "Would you like to go on an Embassy trip across the Sahara Desert in a couple of weeks?" asked Jim one Saturday afternoon at a softball game between Peace Corps Volunteers and grown-up USAID workers with real jobs.

"Yeah! Wow! That would be amazing! Who else is going?"

Not long after the Abardok adventure, having demonstrated my resilience under primitive traveling conditions, I crossed the Sahara Desert with five other Americans, uncertain why I had been invited. The explanation I heard was that the Defense Attaché from Abidjan, Ivory Coast, wanted to see what the route was like from Niamey to Algiers across the desert, and he wanted to do that unobtrusively by appearing to be a tourist. Whether true or not, I figured I didn't need to know. The opportunity for such a trip was priceless. I wished that Bruce could have also come with us, but his job kept him tethered to Niamey.

Our adventuring group consisted of eight people: two Nigerien drivers plus six Americans – three women, three men. None of us were coupled, although the point may have been to appear that way. The men in the group included Michael, the Embassy Deputy Chief of Mission, Jim, the Embassy economic officer, and the American Defense Attaché. The women in the group besides me, included Susan, the Embassy nurse, and Debbie, a graduate student living in Niger to work on her dissertation. She had studied Hausa, so could communicate to some degree with locals encountered, although the drivers also spoke Hausa and Arabic.

In the photo taken on departure day, we were dressed in clothing befitting American tourists looking a bit ridiculous as we tried to look local. Spouses and significant others assembled to see us off, as we drove out of town on the two-lane national highway, in the direction of the town of Tahoua about 550 km northeast of Niamey. In two large Chevy Suburbans, we looked like extravagant tourists launching a major desert expedition, vehicles piled with camping equipment, extra gas and water cans, and various kinds of emergency equipment like extra tires and metal platforms for helping a vehicle extricate itself

from soft sand. Our drivers looked smug in their Embassy uniforms, perhaps imagining that they were driving important people. Of course, the weather was typically hot and dry, however, it was January, the so-called "winter season" and compared to America, the air felt balmy.

I wore a short-sleeve shirt and a homemade ankle-length A-line wrap-around African print skirt. Think about it. We were crossing a desert. No trees. No bushes. No restrooms. Nowhere behind which to modestly attend to nature's demands. My plan, developed and used during earlier travels around Niger, was to walk a distance and squat in the sand, privacy preserved.

We reached Tahoua after driving more than seven hours, passing through small towns where Peace Corps volunteers lived, but not stopping to visit. We wanted to reach Tahoua to spend the night in a guest house belonging to a USAID-funded project. After the long drive, a shower, and a change of clothes, we spent the evening yakking with the Americans living at this remote research station. As we talked, I wondered if their research might provide a slot for an anthropologist in the future. I never stopped thinking about how to work in Niger.

On our second travel day, we spent six hours getting to Agadez which I'd already visited the previous month. In my journal, I wrote: "We stopped for gas in Abalak and as we sat in the blowing beige sandstorm, the wind made music on some kind of hardware like the sound of a simple desultory flute. It was bizarre, mystical, surrealistic in the cold, sunless wind of the harmattan." The harmattan is the January dust season that blows for a few months from the Sahara over West Africa into the Gulf of Guinea.

Arriving in Agadez after driving through a major sandstorm, I wrote in my journal that it was like a beige snowstorm with no wetness but some degree of cold. I described what I saw as "beige drifts

mounding with indistinct edges. Yellow-green tufts of grass. Bushes with no leaves… Occasionally, the first car disappeared in a particularly heavy blow… Sometimes we could see a patch of blue sky, off in the distance, and a furious whirling dust devil, light brown and visibly in action, against the softer beige of the less frenetic general harmattan." My picturesque description reflected my intense excitement about this Sahara Desert experience; I was sorry that Bruce couldn't be there with me.

Spending a night in Agadez, we made a quick pass by the Grand Mosque, my second glimpse of that ancient mud-brick structure. As before, I was disappointed that we could not see the inside of the mosque. I kept wondering about how a mud-brick structure survives centuries of use through sandstorms and political upheavals. And I kept trying to look at it from different angles, imagining what the town might have been like in the 1500s. Hordes of children followed us, intrigued by pale foreigners in strange clothes, as we moved around the ancient dusty city.

We were impatient to leave the road and launch the expedition across the limitless sand, but we had yet another day of highway driving from Agadez to Arlit, the last town in Niger before heading into the Sahara Desert. But I use these terms frivolously – "highway" was an asphalt road with no shoulders, no line down the middle – just a narrow, two-lane hard-top pitted passage with an occasional sign. No intersections because there's only one road. No traffic lights because there are no intersections.

The road exiting Agadez seemed narrower and more deserted than other roads we'd traveled so far. With only about three and a half hours driving to reach Arlit, we planned to locate the hotel midday, have lunch, and then tour the uranium mines. Now that sounded like

an immensely boring activity to me, but I was only along for the ride, so I decided to see what the mine had to offer.

"Town" is another questionable term. Yes, Agadez might count as a city, but anything else we drove through just barely fit my image of "town." Arlit at the time didn't look much like a town to me. We dropped in on two Peace Corps volunteers living their dusty dingy tour of duty in this oasis village three days' drive from the capital city. In Arlit, we toured both an underground uranium mine, and an open-top strip mine. The small person we encountered dressed in a long robe reminded me of a scene from *Star Wars*. All of Arlit reminded me of a desert planet in a distant galaxy.

The next day, before heading due north into the desert, we checked all our provisions – gas, water, food, tires, shovels, sand guards – and made sure we were ready for anything. Our first day in the desert took us 200 kilometers to the Algerian border. Altogether, we'd cover more than 2,500 kilometers of the Sahara Desert from Arlit to Algiers.

Our first three driving days from Niamey had been on roads with destinations in towns where small but adequate hotels offered beds and meals at restaurants – such as you might define them in one of the poorest countries on the planet. But now we were heading off on the sparsely-trafficked *piste* – French for the unpaved track or trail through the desert. We saw the occasional henna truck or SUV, but for the most part, what we saw from the windows of our air-conditioned Suburbans was sand, distant mountains, and brilliant blue sky. Winter is the best time to cross the Sahara Desert. Temperatures climb to 80 during the day, then plunge to near freezing at night. At other times of the year, temperatures over 100 degrees make the trip much less appealing and more dangerous.

We camped for a few nights along the route, preparing food on a camp stove, sleeping in sleeping bags on cots, and making coffee and

tea in the morning. We brought tents but didn't use them. The air was desert-dry, no dew. The wind was more than we expected, but we slept well enough outdoors. Always we found intriguing campsites – next to huge rock piles, in among dunes, or nestled in little sand valleys. We never worried about security; I don't even know if anyone had brought weapons. I didn't ask.

I loved camping in the great black desert at night and watching the stars while drifting off to sleep. The night sky, overflowing with the Milky Way and thousands of pinpoints of starlight, was an incredible sight to us Americans used to light pollution. Every night, there was a torrent of shooting stars – the sky seemed to be pulsating with celestial energy. The experience reminded me of camping with Bruce in Joshua Tree in California -- the sandstone rock formations, scrunchy sand, huge open sky. He would have loved this trip.

One night, a bizarre dream invaded my sleep – a bunch of Tuaregs appeared on some rocks near us and when they saw me looking at them, they yelled (in English, of course) "Death to infidels!" Brandishing their huge sabers, they leaped off the rocks, robes billowing in the desert breeze. Then I woke up. Lying awake for some time, I thought I saw a black form among the nearby rocks, robes flapping. But my imagination in strange places was just teasing me.

Each morning with the rising sun, I'd gently wake up to a rosy sky and silence. In the desert, no birds sing in the morning, there are no trees or bushes rustling, and no insect noises. Just total silence. The wind blows but there is nothing for it to blow through except our clothes and hair. One morning, I woke early near the house-sized boulders that protected our campsite from the wind. The *piste* was quite a distance away although visible. Walking away from camp to squat in the sand, I stood up afterward and listened – to silence. The sound I thought I heard was more like static. I heard something, but I

wasn't clear about the nature of the sound other than noise generated by air on my eardrums.

My feet on the sand made squishy squeaky noises as I walked farther away from the campsite in the direction of the *piste*, but I heard nothing from the enormous truck that appeared in the distance. I could see the vehicle slowly lumbering through the sand, the truck lights, and the shape of it moving along, but oddly no sounds came in my direction. I sat down in the sand to watch the truck and scanned the horizon as the sun began to creep up. The wind picked up a bit, blowing past my ears, leaving silence behind. The desert at dawn seemed completely alien and bizarre to me.

As we drove along each day, we didn't see people on foot or camels or horses or any animals at all, not surprisingly. But one day, with no warning, a Tuareg man appeared at the side of the *piste*, carrying a plastic *bidón*– a jerrycan – waving us down. I never saw where he came from; just suddenly, I looked out the Suburban's window, and there he was, waving his jug. The driver spoke to him in Hausa, asking what he wanted. He asked if we had extra water. The driver said we did not. The Tuareg man didn't seem distressed by this. He didn't appear to be in trouble. The driver asked him where he lived, and he waved vaguely in a direction behind him, "not far." We drove away, leaving him standing in the sand, holding his *bidón*. I wondered where he came from, and where he was going.

Eventually, we arrived at a monastery in the Hoggar Mountains in a region called Tamanrasset in southern Algeria. We were still, at that point, almost 1500 km south of Algiers. This hermitage was home to a few monks who told a story about a French mystic and explorer, Pere Charles de Foucauld, who lived at the monastery for a few years before his murder in 1916. The compound is on the Assekrem, a mountain moonscape and the highest point in the region at nearly

9,000 feet. There, we had a place to sleep and dinner served by a Tuareg man wearing an American tee-shirt that read, "Beam me up, Scotty, there's no intelligent life down here."

The rest of the journey across Algeria took us through desert towns where we stopped for supplies, a night in a hotel, a meal, or a visit to a market. Day after day of driving across sand in two vehicles, making sure to keep each other in sight was an adventure that began to wear on all of us. Eventually, we left the desert and began to see more evidence of a different, greener environment. In Algiers, we stayed in a guest house at the American Embassy for a couple of nights, then flew home to Niamey. Altogether, our risky adventure lasted two weeks, during which we were completely out of communication with folks back in Niamey.

I'm glad I had the opportunity to cross that huge desert in 1984. Today, crossing the Sahara on a south-north route between Arlit and Algiers involves security risks well beyond what the average tourist might be willing to endure. Between politics and the climate, the risks are not worth the adventure thrills.

As much as I thrived on the experience of the Sahara Desert crossing, it was a huge relief to return to Bruce and our house. We filled each other in on his latest Peace Corps patients, and the details of my adventure, plus all the updates from the American community into which we were slowly beginning to fit. I immediately produced a flood of letters home to tell everyone about the Sahara expedition. Bruce and I slipped back into the expatriate social scene, meeting new Americans, hosting volunteers at our house, and networking with an eye toward employment for me. We had been in the country barely six months, but it felt like years. I wanted more news from home and yet, I wasn't homesick. Letters from our siblings and parents led us to

believe that their lives were cranking along energetically on the other side of the Atlantic without our direct participation.

#

1984, November: On vacation in East Africa. A year and change after relocating to Niger, we opted for a three-week vacation to Kenya and Tanzania rather than going to Florida for home leave. Most expatriate Americans took extended time during the summer to return to their stateside homes and visit family. They viewed home leave as a necessary antidote to being so far away from people they'd normally see more often. However, we didn't feel a need to fly home. Although our families likely wished we'd come home a year after we left, we'd been talking to friends in Niamey about their trips to Kenya. We wanted to visit that country and here we were already on the convenient side of the Atlantic. We learned that Air Ethiopia had a non-stop flight from Niamey to Addis Ababa and then another non-stop to Nairobi, making the trip easier than it had been in the past. We booked our flights.

Our ambitious itinerary included a week climbing Kilimanjaro across the border in Tanzania, a week on a walking safari in Tsavo National Park in Kenya, and a week on Lamu Island just off the Kenya coast.

Arriving in Nairobi, we stopped by the Peace Corps office for advice on the best way to get to Kili. We had a lot to learn about overland travel on the cheap in East Africa, most of which we collected from Peace Corps volunteers, rather than from tourists on expensive safaris. Although we understood the risks of high-altitude mountaineering, we didn't know at the time that every year, about 1,000 people are evacuated from Kilimanjaro and about 10 deaths are reported, although the true mortality is likely higher. The main cause of death is altitude sickness, which Bruce avoided by taking Diamox

(acetazolamide). I had never experienced symptoms of altitude sickness, so didn't take the drug.

A public taxi transported us from Nairobi to the border with Tanzania – a scary trip in a fast old vehicle with no seat belts – the first of many dangerous risks. Once at the border, we shouldered our backpacks and walked to the customs office to spend an hour crossing the border with our Official American passports. On the Tanzania side, we then had to find transport to Arusha, the nearest town at the entrance to the national park surrounding Kili.

Asking around, we identified a public bus going to Arusha. We were the only *muzungus* traveling on that bus that day; everyone else was Tanzanian or Kenyan. Late in the long, hot, and dusty day, sometime around dinner, the bus dropped us off at the end of a dirt road leading to the small hotel in Arusha where we would hire the required guide and porters. The guide makes sure you're on the correct trail, and more importantly, goes with you to the summit to make sure you find it. The porters carry your packs so you can walk a bit faster along the trail. Each day's hike brought tourists to a campsite by late afternoon. There, we had a covered place to sleep but no showers or electricity. There were latrines. We used our backpacking stove to cook our little dinners each night.

The hike takes a few days of walking to get to the base of the volcanic cone. During that time, we were slowly gaining altitude and climbing through a confusing variety of ecologic zones with bizarre plants and forest until we got above treeline where we could see Kilimanjaro's cone. The climbing exhausted us because of the altitude, the blinding sun, and the rough trail crowded with tourists. At the same time, we felt energized and excited to be attempting the highest peak in Africa at 19,341 feet. Finally, we reached the last base camp at the foot of the cone.

After an early dinner, the guide said he would come for us at midnight for the final climb straight up the cone to the rim of the volcano. He explained how the next day would unfold. "At night, the scree on the cone freezes, so we climb in the darkness before sun-up while the climbing is easier on frozen gravel. We will get to Gilman's Point. There's no trail. Once at the rim, we will continue around the edge of the caldera to the summit at Uhuru Peak as the sun comes up." He emphasized we'd have a short time enjoying the view on the summit, before retracing the route back to Gilman's and descending straight down back to base camp. By then, the sun will have melted the scree and we could easily heel our way down the slope.

So, we did that. However, because we didn't realize that it would take so long to get to the rim, we hadn't planned enough food and water. By the time we got to Gilman's Point, we were hungry, thirsty, and out of provisions. Also, at that altitude, there isn't enough oxygen for brains to work at their best capacity, and we didn't trust ourselves to push on to the summit, without clearer heads and more food and water. Thus, we made the wise decision to turn around and head back down.

Six years and two children later, we joined several friends for a repeat attempt at Kili. After living at altitude in Nairobi (comparable to Denver), we were better prepared physically to reach Uhuru Point. Traveling in more expensive but safer buses and taxis, we were better-rested just before the climb. We took the risk of leaving the children with our *ayah*, Tafroza, in whom we had complete trust. In our absence, our friends in Nairobi, whom we'd known for three years, kept a watchful eye over our household. But, in retrospect, I wonder at the risk we took in 1990 for that adventure.

#

1984: Walking in Tsavo National Park, Kenya. Recovering from the Kilimanjaro trek, we contacted the tour operator with whom we'd arranged a walking safari in Tsavo for Week 2 of our vacation. I wanted to talk about safety issues. This type of outing raised a bunting of red flags for me as I considered the kinds of animals that live on the Kenyan savannah and in or near rivers: elephants, lions, cape buffalo, rhinos, hippos, cheetah, leopards, and crocodiles. I knew enough about safariing in East Africa to be aware that large wild animals are unpredictable and that you are likely to see more of them if you're in a vehicle rather than on foot. However, the tour office dismissed our concerns, saying that the walk was truly magical, there were armed guards, and the company had never had customer injuries. And we liked the idea of walking through the park – lower impact than driving a noisy Land Rover through the savannah landscape.

We signed up. There were just four of us on the trip – the other couple was visiting from Malawi. They worked for the American Embassy and the four of us became instant friends. Our guide was assisted by a team of Kenyans who transported our camp from one location to the next and cooked for us while we hiked between campsites with the guide and the armed guards. One night, we camped near a prime swimming hole on the Tsavo River where a rope swing provided some entertainment for swimmers. Although I was nervous about swimming in an East African river, thinking about crocs, our guards stood watch while we swam. We saw nothing scary, and the swimming was a welcome relief after the dusty savannah walk.

As I suspected, our views of animals were restricted by our human presence rustling through the underbrush. We saw elephants in the distance from the top of a hill, but never close enough to distinguish detail. We never saw lions and I can't say I was disappointed. But one day, as we walked along a trail near the river, we spotted an adult hippo on the other bank. He was snorting and trotting back and forth.

The river at this point was not wide so we had a clear view of the solitary hippo -- an enormous barrel on four stubby legs, capable of moving at terrifying speed on land or in water.

Our guide paused so we could take photos, and as we clicked and admired the enormous beast, the guide said, "Now, if the hippo charges down the bank, and attempts to cross the river, we will run up this bank here, and he likely won't follow us." Within minutes of the guide issuing instructions, the snorting hippo charged down the bank into the river, exactly as scripted.

"Run!" yelled the guide. The guards stepped forward with their rifles, and our group took off running up the bank. We ran as far up the slope as we could and then turned around to see if we needed to keep going. The guards were aiming at the hippo but did not shoot. The animal had stopped in the river. We detoured and continued the walk with no more hippo excitement.

Another day on the river trail, our guide abruptly yelled at us to head up the bank, steering us clear of a rhino. Pointing at his receding figure, the guide said, "Look at his side. He's been shot. See the wound? Likely, it was a poacher. He's too distracted to bother us." It didn't occur to me until that moment that we could have encountered poachers in the park.

The best part of the days on the Tsavo safari came at the end of hot hikes as we walked into camp, set up for us by the tour company's employees. Comfortable camp chairs were arranged each day with a view of the river and the distant savannah. In the spirit of Ernest Hemingway, we slumped into our chairs, weary from walking, and watched the sunset, as our hosts brought us cold Tusker beers and a snack while dinner cooked over an open fire.

Nearly a decade later, we came across a news report about that same walking safari tour company, whose operations had been

suspended due to the death of a customer. The walking group had surprised a cape buffalo in a wooded area and had not been able to respond quickly enough to the unexpected encounter. Before the guards could defend the tourists, the buffalo charged and gored a woman so badly that she died.

Note to self: In the future, when on safari, ride in vehicles.

The week on the beaches of Lamu Island was a welcome calm and lazy end to a long vacation, so relaxing in fact, that I didn't write about it in my journal.

Luxuriating in our experiences on our Kenya vacation, we surprised ourselves by talking about our families at home and realizing we had no regrets about moving overseas. We were in our early thirties, without dependents, and financially comfortable enough. About a year after we arrived in Niger, I found part-time work at the USAID office, working in the health section with the new Health Officer. Finally, I was using my training and making headway in the world of international public health. I couldn't think of anything else that would make me happier than the life we'd created for ourselves on a continent we'd both aimed to explore for years.

#

1985: Niamey, Niger, baby. Motoring slowly across Niamey's dusty asphalt in 110-degree heat, we sweated in our air-conditioned Peugeot station wagon, slowing for donkeys in the street, and a camel at the side of the road. Nigeriens walked slowly in the blinding sun and stifling heat balancing enormous piles of belongings on their heads. We were impatient to visit baby Katherine, recently born to Jill and Tim, our first close friends to plunge into parenting. Without family nearby, a dozen or so couples in their late 20s and early 30s had bonded over *Bière Niger*, couscous and mutton, French and Hausa,

and travels around the interior. With these friends, the talk was of the deadening drought, starvation among the nomads, lack of millet in the villages, dying herds of goats and camels, and emergency food distribution from foreign governments. No one discussed starting a family, but then there was Katherine.

Now we focused on little Katherine in her onesie, a tiny child born in upstate New York some weeks ago, smelling of baby powder, breast milk, and freshly laundered blankets.

I asked to hold her.

Sitting in the living room filled with government furniture, the bare floor swept daily by Zenabou, who also helped with cooking and childcare, I settled Katherine comfortably on my shoulder using both hands to support her head and diapered bottom. A thin cotton blanket protected my African print shirt from spit-up. Awake and looking around, she seemed strong and wiggly. Her little head with wisps of light brown hair was close to my cheek and I instinctively kissed her. I was overcome with the urge to stand up and sway back and forth while holding her. Moving my hand over her back and feeling her infant warmth and energy, I wished that I, too, could have one of these.

Jill and Tim were excited to be back with our large group of expatriate friends – playing Sunday doubles tennis at the American Rec Center, working at the Ministry of Health, taking Tai Kwan Do lessons, playing Saturday softball, and swimming in the Ambassador's pool. Our group of American friends was entranced by the new baby in our midst. Her parents didn't realize they were starting a trend.

Married six years, Bruce and I hadn't talked much about having children. All we had said was that we weren't ready to commit to the enormous responsibilities of parenting. If the subject of babies came up, Bruce thought we should have two children or none; I thought we should try having one and see how it went. Thus, we did neither.

Thoughts of motherhood remained far from my mind for a long time. I was an applied-research anthropologist living my dream in Africa and approaching my mid-30s.

My work in Niamey at USAID involved assisting groups sending consultants who needed on-site help with doing their jobs. My French was improving steadily after weeks of intensive study with Peace Corps volunteers during our first few months in country. We were both getting the hang of our overseas life and loving it.

That afternoon in Tim and Jill's living room, Katherine burped on my shoulder, leaving a spot of sweet breast milk on the blanket. She wiggled comfortably, relaxed after being relieved from the strain of expanding gas. The fans turned on medium speed, keeping us a bit cooler. Street noises drifted in over the compound walls and through the metal gates – voices calling out in unfamiliar languages, sounds of old cars that should have been junked decades ago, the laughter of city children who weren't as thin as those in the villages. The guard walked slowly around the compound in his robes and turban, his sandals flapping softly on the dirt.

Finally, Katherine began wiggling more and as I shifted her tiny body to the crook of my arm, she instinctively turned her head and rooted for something that I certainly was not able to provide. Jill laughed and said, "I guess she wants to nurse again! She's insatiable!" Of course, she is -- she's just six weeks old, I thought. But what did I know of babies? Nearly nothing. Reluctantly, I handed her over to her mama, who expertly shifted clothing and discreetly provided Katherine with a mid-afternoon snack. I wondered what it might be like to nurse a baby.

#

1986: Capital Regional Medical Center, Tallahassee, Florida.

I found out about nursing when Andy was born.

"How's it going?" asked my friend Jane. We were comparing notes on breastfeeding having both delivered at about the same time in different parts of America.

"My nipples are in constant pain and cracked, but I'm not giving up. Eventually, they'll toughen up."

"Same here, and I don't want to deal with bottles once we're back in Niamey."

"He was so cute last night. After he nursed, I let him sleep next to me and I woke up a couple of hours later as he was butting his little head in my back. He was hungry again."

When we decided to have our first child six years after marriage, it seemed sensible and logical to return to the States for the delivery, considering the meager obstetrical resources in Niger, and the fact that we were having the first grandchild on both sides. Six weeks before the due date, Bruce and I traveled back to Tallahassee, staying at his mother's house. My mother joined us for a few weeks but returned to N. Ft. Myers before Andy arrived. The logistics of delivering in a place that wasn't home were complicated. Two weeks overdue, Andy popped out at 9 lbs 9 oz, arriving by C-section at the same hospital in which his dad had been born 35 years earlier. Bruce and Andy were the only males in the delivery room, during which I observed the procedure with a mirror, assisted by epidural anesthesia. Bruce was the first to hold our son during an emotional moment when we became a family of three.

By the time Andy arrived, Bruce had been gone from his job in Niamey for too many weeks. Within days of Andy's birth, we had him baptized in the same Methodist church in which Bruce had undergone

that rite of passage as an infant, and then Bruce returned to Niger while I waited for our six-week checkups so I could go back with Andy. We both realized how painful the separation would be, with Daddy leaving when Baby Andy was only a few days old and then missing his first six weeks of life. However, we didn't see any way around the situation.

During those six weeks, Don flew down from New York to meet his nephew and the three of us drove from Tallahassee to Ft. Myers to meet Grandma Hogle and Aunt Rosemary, then to West Palm to meet Grandpa Hogle and a few of my high school friends, and then to Miami to visit my college friend Lynn. Andy traveled well, having adjusted nicely to breastfeeding and being held constantly. In retrospect, I'm amazed that we drove all over Florida after I'd just had a C-section and when Andy was so young.

Days before our return to Africa, Andy, his grandmother Mallie Slater and I were driving in a rainstorm to our six-week checkups when a car slid through a red light and broadsided us at an intersection, severely damaging the car but not us. I was at the wheel with Mallie and Andy safely in the backseat. We missed our appointment but rescheduled in time to make the original plane reservations from Tallahassee to Atlanta, to France, and then to Niamey after an overnight in Paris. Somehow, I adventured that trip alone with Andy in a sling and half a dozen duffels of baby stuff. We settled into new-parent mode and back into our life in Niamey, surrounded by our expatriate friends.

Bruce and I became co-conspirators in the complicated process of parenting, a project for which we were completely unprepared, although we had planned the pregnancy with precision. Andy didn't sleep through the night for roughly 16 months and seemed to require both of us working intensely together to manage all the baby details.

For me, sleep deprivation became the new normal, as I juggled part-time work, mothering, and snatching naps. We had help, though, from our *nounou*, a quite capable *Béninoise* woman who came each day during the week to assist with baby management. All expatriate families in Niger had *nounous* to help with their infants and small children. It was the way things were done.

The parenting adventure took all our energy and became the priority focus around which the events of our life revolved for the next couple of decades.

#

1988: Niger, London, Kenya, and another baby. "It's a girl! It's a girl!" Running through the Embassy, yelling with excitement and grabbing people I knew, I joyously announced the result of my amniocentesis received in person from our dear friend Candace, the Embassy nurse. Now, we'd have one of each, just as Bruce had one sister, and I had one brother.

Weeks before, I had traveled alone from Niger to London for the amnio, as recommended at the time for women in their mid-30s. We had agreed in advance that if the amnio revealed serious medical problems, then we would terminate the pregnancy.

I flew up to London for a week, staying in a hotel and poking around in shops and restaurants, enjoying burgers and fries, and buying baby stuff. The amnio went well with the fetus conveniently moving aside as the needle extracted fluid. I rested for a couple of days to make sure nothing weird happened, and then it was time to return to Niger, Bruce and Andy.

Leaving London turned out to be an epic adventure. A hurricane hit the city in the darkness of the morning my plane was leaving. High winds, no electricity, and nervous hotel staff delayed my trip to the

airport, but the taxi driver got me there despite the risk of falling trees and blowing debris in the pre-dawn darkness. The flight left late, landing in Paris. From the arrival gate, running in my fatigued pregnant state and holding my belly, I made it to the departure gate for the flight to Niamey. I wanted badly to get home to Bruce and Andy. That day.

Fortunately, for everyone's peace of mind, the results of the amnio came in weeks later indicating all systems were go. Now I could start thinking pink, looking ahead to… oh yeah, we're moving to Kenya. Where am I going to have this baby?

When we left America originally for Niger, we figured three years in Africa and then we'd come home. But the time flew past and we were still enjoying our overseas lives, so we extended our Niger tour. Bruce continued working for Peace Corps, and I continued part-time consulting, working on maternal/child health projects, and celebrating my tax-free income.

Within a year of Andy's arrival, we began to plot another baby. Bruce and I now agreed that a family of four seemed best for us. There were two years between me and my brother Don, and between Bruce and his sister Ellen. Doing the math and checking calendars, we planned and implemented the next pregnancy. Everything went according to schedule. The only unknown was where to have the baby.

Meanwhile, Bruce attended a Peace Corps medical conference where he learned of a new position in Kenya for a PC physician. He volunteered, knowing we'd both love to live in Nairobi. With four years of experience as a PCMO, he'd be perfect to open that new position. But I was due at the end of March 1988; where would the baby be born?

For Andy's delivery, we'd gone to Bruce's mother's house in Florida where there was room for us. But for this second delivery, a

rerun of that scenario seemed inadvisable, since his mother's arthritis would make it impossible for her to help with Andy while I was giving birth to the next one. My mother lived in an apartment with no room for us. And finding an obstetrician who would take me on six weeks before the due date for a vaginal birth after my first C-section seemed impossible.

We decided that returning to America for this second birth would be too complicated, and once we found out that other expatriates routinely delivered in Nairobi, we communicated with new friends there, and with medical providers to arrange a delivery at Nairobi Hospital.

#

Why did we spend four-and-a-half years in a Muslim country on the edge of the Sahara Desert? From the perspective of Foreign Service officers and USAID employees, Niger is a hardship post, where new USG employees tough it out in the hopes of future assignments in cushier countries. We left for Niger knowing little about living in poor developing countries, except what we'd read over the years. We only knew that this was a unique opportunity to experience living in Africa where both of us had always wanted to land.

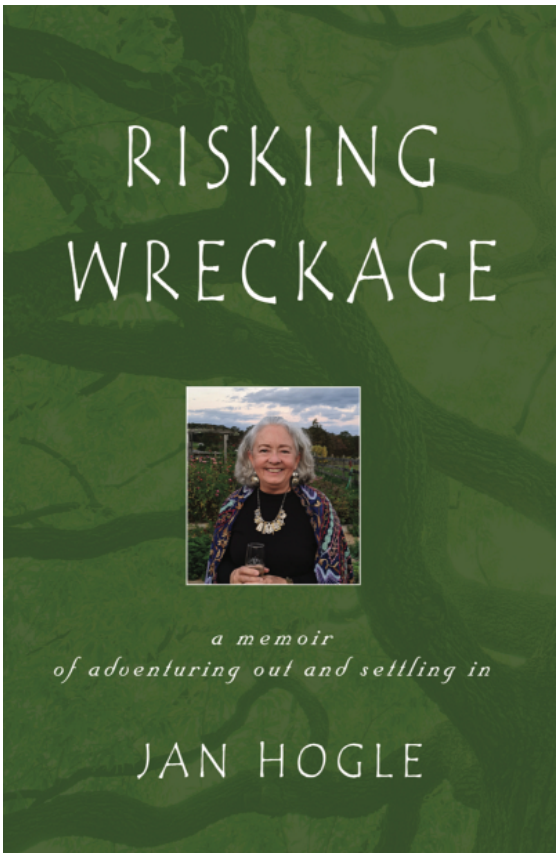
We stayed for the required three years and extended our tour, trying to understand the life experiences of the country's residents at a time when severe drought and famine afflicted many African countries. Mainly, though, we nestled into expatriate life in Niger's capital city. As Americans abroad, bonding with expats from other countries, we found it easier to communicate with people who spoke English. Our French was functional but communicating in another language is exhausting when your skills for doing so are minimal. We never learned any of the local languages. If we'd been Peace Corps

volunteers, we would have been immersed in local language studies for our assigned regions, but as a PC staff person and a dependent spouse, we were lucky to be included in intensive French language study with the volunteers. After the intensive training, I practiced French on my own and achieved an FSI 3/3 rating which helped me obtain future employment with international public health projects. Still, I never thought or dreamed in French.

In retrospect, we straddled a fence between multiple cultures, not immersed completely in local life and not totally in expatriate life. We were happy there, nonetheless. I spent two pregnancies floating about in cotton boubous to stay cool, with affordable household help. Our closest friends were other Americans, Canadians, or British citizens whose homes were more elaborate than Peace Corps housing, but we had air conditioning! Heat never bothered us anyway.

Neither of us would have traded those years for lifestyles in which we had little interest. Bruce didn't want to spend decades in private practice in the same town. I didn't want to be a professor of anthropology. We absorbed all we could in that West African Sahelian country, knowing there was an end to our posting and accepting an opportunity to leave for Kenya.

#



Jan's memoir chronicles her life's adventures in nine states and two African countries. Her risky passions involved mountains, oceans, and the chaos of marriage and motherhood, eventually leading to a Virginia forest.

Risking Wreckage:
A Memoir of Adventuring Out and Settling In

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