Morocco 1995

1 Prelude

Al Akhawayn University, located in Ifrane, Morocco, opened its doors in January, 1995 to its first 300 students. In Arabic, *Al Akhawayn* means *the two brothers* and is named to honor its two benefactors: the king of Saudi Arabia (Fayd) and the king of Morocco (Hassan II). Thanks to Will Swearingen, a geographer at Montana State who is doing collaborative research with Abdellatif Bencheraifa, a provost at AUI, the two universities are sister universities. All instruction at AUI is done in English.

Meanwhile, back in Bozeman, Montana, computer science professor John Paxton is happily going about his business in January, 1995, completely unaware of the existence of AUI and the future intertwining of their two destinies! (OK, this is melodramatic, but hey, it makes the writing more fun!) One day, John's illustrious department head, Denbigh Starkey, mentions to John that AUI is seeking a visiting computer science professor. After two seconds of careful consideration, John agrees to submit a curriculum vita and in March, is informed that AUI will pay for him to make a brief visit in early May. Knowing very little about Morocco, John immediately starts reading travel books and talking to friends who have been to Morocco in order to find out what to expect. What he finds out is a mixed bag and leaves John somewhat puzzled. On one hand, he learns that he might be a target for terrorists, that he had better wear long pants and long shirts at all times because Muslims are offended by skin showing, that he had better drink only bottled water, that he had better not eat any fruits or vegetables (Morocco is known for its fresh produce), and that he can expect any room he stays in to be broken into by thieves! On the other hand, other sources tell John that Morocco is a beautiful country, that the Moroccan culture is a wonderful one, and that Moroccan cuisine is top rate (even the French are alleged to visit Morocco with the main purpose being to sample the fare). What should John believe? There is only one way to find out: onward to Morocco!

2 The Trip Over

John's first challenge is to procure his prepaid airline ticket. He is told that it is a simple matter of calling Royal Air Maroc (the Moroccan national airline) in New York City. When he does, he is given another phone number to call that handles prepaid reservations. "No problem, just call Delta since they are your origination airline", the voice on the phone says. With some skepticism, John calls Delta, states his name with authority, and asks for his airline ticket. Unfortunately, Delta does not know John from Adam! Back with Royal Air Maroc, John discovers that there is a prepaid ticket number that might be helpful and so he again calls Delta, filled with that warm fuzzy feeling of completing the transaction. "We're sorry Mr. Paxton, but that confirmation number is not one of ours. Perhaps Royal Air Maroc booked you with Northwest instead.", the voice on the line states. "That stupid Delta, of course the confirmation number is not theirs, it's OURS!!", exclaims the Royal Air Maroc ticket agent. "We're sorry, Mr. Paxton, but unless you're a ticket agent, we can not let you talk to our department that handles prepaid tickets by other airlines", says the Delta agent sweetly. At this point, our hero is tired of talking to ticket agents and forlornly explains his plight. After thirty minutes on hold, the Delta agent triumphantly returns to the phone and the necessary information is passed on to John. The ticket has been obtained!

John's 7:00 a.m. flight on Saturday, April 29th takes him from Bozeman to Salt Lake City to JFK in New York City. His flight from JFK is quite interesting as he has the opportunity to speak French with the woman sitting next to him (Fatima) and her 1.5 month old son (Ryan) who are traveling to Dakar, Senegal. At times, John thinks that Ryan is understanding more of his French than Fatima! Towards the end of the flight, John is able to catch a little bit of shut eye. When he awakens, he discovers that due to fog, the plane is landing in Marrakesh instead of Casablanca. After a two hour layover, the plane departs for Casablanca, arriving around 9:30 Sunday morning.

At the airport, John is met by Hussein, a driver sent by AUI to take him to Ifrane. The four hour drive takes John from the coast of the Atlantic Ocean up into the middle-Atlas mountains. Driving in Morocco is quite different than driving in the U.S.: only about ten percent of the people own a car, the cars are all stick shift, the roads are narrower, one encounters many horses and donkeys laden with goods, and one encounters an incredible number of people either on or near the road. On the trip to Ifrane, John once again has the opportunity to practice speaking French. In Morocco, everyone speaks Arabic, most people speak Berber and/or French, and some people speak English. Being able to speak some French is a definite bonus when traveling in Morocco.

3 The University

In the middle of the afternoon, John and Hussein arrive at Al Akhawayn University. AUI is perhaps the most beautiful university in the world. The lawns are bright green, the buildings are cream colored with steeply pitched red tile roofs, and the sky is invariably a bright blue. The campus buildings are centered around a mosque. The architectural style is reminiscent of something that one might find in Switzerland. (OK, the mosque is not reminiscent of Switzerland!) The lawns are maintained by a herd of sheep that graze on campus and a crew of 20 men with scythes!

During his one week stay, John is housed in the fourth floor of an on-campus faculty residence. His suite consists of a bathroom, a living room, a bedroom, and a stocked kitchen. John is surprised to discover that buildings and sidewalks on campus are sometimes cleaned several times each day!

The food at the university cafeteria is better than the food at most U.S. university cafeterias, nevertheless, the food is still prepared en masse and is consequently not as good as the Moroccan food prepared in individual's homes. There are two interesting features of the AUI cafeteria. First, the student dining area is downstairs while the faculty dining area is upstairs. Second, the university has contracted the food service to a private company. To ensure the honesty of this food company, students have also been hired to verify the number of people who actually eat at the cafeteria.

AUI is located in the resort town of Ifrane, a town that offers nearby skiing, fly-fishing, and beautiful cedar forests. The town was built by the French in 1929. It takes 15 minutes to walk from campus to town and one needs to make sure to return before midnight because the gates to the campus are locked at that time. With the opening of the university, the town is busily expanding to meet the new demands being placed on it. A new private American school is slated to open in the near future. This school will exclusively serve the children of AUI faculty and staff. A new hospital is also nearly finished. The entrance to the hospital has a beautifully carved, handpainted, wooden canopy. One person hoped that this canopy did not come in exchange for vital hospital equipment! Currently, the AUI faculty face a fairly severe housing problem. Once it became public knowledge that AUI would be located in Ifrane, the king put a freeze on all real estate transactions to try and halt speculation and escalating prices. Most of the faculty either stay in faculty housing on campus (more is currently being planned) or in apartments at the Banque Populaire.

One of the first cultural observations that John makes involves personal space. Following a tour of the campus with the orientation director, the orientation director introduces John to Amine, a student from Marrakesh. The orientation director and Amine then talk to John for 10 minutes with their arms around each others shoulders. In Morocco, personal space is smaller than it is in the U.S. and bodily contact is made more often. For example, friends always shake hands when they see one another or part. When good friends meet, they first touch right cheeks while making a kissing noise, then touch left cheeks while making a kissing noise. When a child meets a parent, the child not only touches cheeks with his parent, but then also kisses the parent's hand while bowing slightly.

In the evenings, there is a game center that is open from 9 p.m. to midnight. Word games are the most popular type of game at AUI, with a miming version of Pictionary and then Scrabble heading the popularity list. The students also enjoy figuring out card tricks and a dice puzzle (called petals around the roses) that John has. One evening in the game room, a student named Nabil approaches John and asks him if it would be possible to find housing for him in Bozeman for 6 weeks this coming summer. John tells Nabil, "You are welcome to initially stay with me." To make sure that he can obtain a passport, Nabil has John write a brief letter, estimating the cost of the visit and stating that Nabil will be staying with John.

Sartorially speaking, AUI students dress fairly similar to students in the U.S. There are some students who wear the traditional Islamic veil, but these students are in the vast minority. Most students wear long pants and long shirts. The colors are more subdued than they are in the U.S. Being able to afford cigarettes is a status symbol in Morocco, and consequently, many of the AUI students smoke occasionally.

During his entire visit to AUI and to Morocco, John is continually impressed by the hospitality and generosity of the people he meets. At AUI, a computer science graduate student from Agadir, Sidi Ali, acts as John's host. Sidi Ali makes sure that everything is going smoothly, eats several meals with John, plays pool with John at the Cookie-Craque (the student hangout in town that apparently sounds like something pretty terrible in Arabic), and invites John to play basketball. John accepts the basketball offer, despite not having played basketball competitively in years. During the game, John notices that he is not being guarded heavily and he is passed the ball more frequently than his level of play deserves, allowing him to score several points. Perhaps this example underscores better than any other the incredible hospitality that Moroccans show to their guests.

The Moroccan attitude toward the U.S. is generally a positive one. Moroccans are quite proud of the fact that their country was the first one to recognize the independence of the

U.S. in 1776. One thing that some of the AUI students worry about is that the U.S. will export its culture to Morocco through television and fast food restaurants. (McDonald's and Pizza Hut have both recently arrived in Morocco.) One student who watches CNN's international channel, thinks that the U.S. must be a dangerous place to live due to all of the fires, floods, bombings, and murders that he sees so often on CNN! One general criticism that Moroccans have of the U.S. is that what is said and what is done in our foreign policy are often not the same. "How can the U.S. let their ambassador to Iraq tell Saddam Hussein that it is OK to invade Kuwait and then immediately cry foul when he does?" or "How can the U.S. complain about civil rights violations in South Africa and then do nothing about the situation in Bosnia?" Moroccans would prefer for the U.S. to be up front with its foreign policy and to provide honest reasons for what it does. If you are considering a trip to Morocco, it is advisable to learn about world events because the average Moroccan citizen is much more aware of what is going on in the world than the average American citizen.

Moroccans also are critical of the fact that the U.S. media casts the Arab world in a negative light. (The immediate suspicion of Arab terrorists in the recent bombing of the Oklahoma City Federal Building certainly lends weight to this observation.) One person stated that this is because both the U.S. government and the U.S. media are controlled by the Jewish community and that this bias is to aid the cause of Israel. Another person explained that this bias is to make it easier for the U.S. to justify its oil wars in the Middle East.

Regarding racism, Morocco believes that Europe is deeply racist, while the U.S. is not. In Europe, Moroccans fear the fact that France is turning more and more to the European Community (which has denied Morocco entry) while at the same time, political candidates who promote returning Arabs to their home countries in the Maghreb enjoy considerable popular support.

When it comes to education, primary and secondary schooling in Morocco is either done in Arabic schools or in French schools. The French schools are typically used by the wealthier families. Except for AUI, all of the other Moroccan universities are French-style universities. Because AUI is a private university, the students who attend come by and large from the wealthier segment of Moroccan society. The French educational system educates fewer students than the American system, but provides a deeper education. The American educational system educates more people and tends to foster independent thinking.

During John's visit to AUI, he gives four 80 minute presentations to Amine Bensaid's artificial intelligence class. The presentation topics include incremental concept learning, genetic algorithms, Kohonen networks, and research issues in decision trees. The students (Sidi Ali, Yassar, Salim, Taufir, and Taufir) enjoy the talks and ask several perceptive questions. One of the biggest challenges for John is to remember people's names. When one has never heard a name before, it is very difficult to remember it! (In Arabic each first name has meaning. For example, Amine means *honest.*) The classroom is located on the second floor of one of the classroom buildings. Because of the steeply pitched roof and the absence of sound absorbing pads, the room has quite an echo in it! At the end of the week, John asks the class "Would you like to come to my apartment tonight to talk and help me drink up the soda that the university provided me with? If you don't, the soda will end up going to waste." Amine quickly points out that the phrasing of this invitation leaves something to be desired!

John also gives two evening talks to Amine Bensaid's beginning computer science students. One talk is entitled *What is Computer Science?* and the other covers a topic called recursion. Except for struggling to describe what cinnamon is, these talks go quite well. The students ask good questions and are eager to solve some of the various puzzles and problems that they are presented with.

And finally, John gives two talks to the university at large. One of the talks is entitled *Problem Solving and Creativity*, the other *Intelligence And Artificial Intelligence.* The first talk starts 15 minutes late, but John is assured that the full hour can still be used. At the 45 minute mark, several new students begin showing up. "Wow, news of my brilliant talk must be spreading through the university!" says John to himself. Unfortunately for John, it is not his brilliant talk, but rather part two of a movie that has attracted these students to this auditorium! Ah, such is life.

Bachir Raissouni is the dean of the school of science and engineering. His secretary, Ahd, is incredibly beautiful and her office is one of the busiest places on campus. John is privileged to get to spend quite a bit of time in this office because Bachir has requested John to make a copy of each one of his talks. You might think that this is a simple request - NOT! When there is one machine serving the entire school of science and engineering and when each page needs to be copied individually, copying 200 pages or so ends up taking several hours. During this time, John gets to sample some of the cookies and chocolates that Ahd brings in daily, talk to some of the other faculty, respond to a fax from MSU for Bachir using a French style keyboard, (does Bachir really believe that John is a computer scientist after watching him type out a response using only one finger??) and even be in a promotional video for AUI. For the promotional video, the producers set forth the challenging request to Bachir to talk at length about the philosophy of final's review week while John and two other faculty members are requested to respectfully listen.

One day during John's visit, the university has an end of the semester reception in the cafeteria for the AUI faculty. John goes expecting to find a few sandwiches, but instead finds the entire upper floor of the cafeteria surrounded by lavish amounts of food and drink. In Moroccan culture, it is considered good form for a host to provide the guests with overwhelming amounts of food and drink! This is another way in which Moroccan generosity is displayed.

What does a typical student think of AUI? For the most part students like AUI quite well. There are however a few complaints. First, he feels a little bit like a monkey in a cage. Because AUI is new, dignitaries (a group of ambassadors' wives came one day during John's visit) are constantly coming to explore the king's new university. Second, he does not like the fact that the gates to the university are locked at midnight. Third, he does not like the fact that men and women live in separate dorms and no visitation is officially permitted. (In practice, clandestine visits do occur! Nearly half of the students at the university date.) Similarly, when the swimming pool opens, the hours will be divided so that men and women swim at different times. Fourth, the selection of courses to choose from is very slim. All students who have a common major are currently taking exactly the same set of classes. (This should change as the enrollment of the university grows.) Fifth, he feels that his social life is somewhat impeded. Alcohol is not officially permitted on campus and the three social hubs of the campus are the game room, the fountain (water represents great wealth in Arab countries) on campus, and a pool/music hall in town called the Cookie-Craque. Sixth, he is not allowed to change majors. AUI currently admits students into particular programs of study, not into the university as a whole. Seventh, the administration sometimes makes a decision without taking him into account. For example, the administration decided to reverse a decision to allow students to stay on campus during a holiday before finals, forcing students to leave campus, and making it difficult to study. Also, the administration decided to stop food service on the day before this holiday week, despite the fact that students were on campus to review for finals. This decision was quickly revoked after a hungry howl of protest by the students!

4 Fes

On Sunday, Amine Bensaid (a computer science professor at AUI who has acted as John's primary host) drives John to Fes to spend a couple of days at his parent's home. Fes is one of three imperial cities in Morocco, the other two being Meknes and Marrakesh. Amine's father is a prominent lawyer and his parent's house is quite beautiful. The exterior of the house is fairly simple. It is a white stucco that is arranged into cubes, an architecture that is fairly typical in Morocco. As one enters the house, one is greeted by a marble floor and a fountain. Above the fountain is a skylight surrounded by beautiful, handpainted woodwork. The main living room is a large rectangular room. From top to bottom one sees woodwork, zellige (handcarved clay), tile mosaics where each piece in the pattern has been individually cut and placed, backless sofas that surround the perimeters of the room, and then several carpets on the floor. In contrast with American homes where the focus of the room is on the furnishings, the focus of a Moroccan room is on the ornately decorated room itself.

John's first lunch at the Bensaids is very memorable. Before lunch begins, fresh buttermilk is served. Once mealtime arrives, the family sits down around a low table on sofas and on chairs. At the start of the meal, 6 different vegetable dishes are served on 12 small plates. Then a seafood pastilla is brought out and set in the middle of the table. Pastilla is perhaps John's favorite food of the entire trip. There is filo dough on the bottom, covered with vermicelli, shrimp, vegetables, and spices. The blend of textures and tastes makes this dish truly one of the great culinary delights anywhere! Following the pastilla, a delicious couscous covered with lamb and vegetables is served. Preparing couscous requires much care. First, the grains are moistened and then rolled by hand. Then the meats and vegetables are cooked for several hours. The couscous is placed in a separate vessel that sits on top of the meats and vegetables while they cook. The food vapors are thus absorbed by the couscous. For desert, couscous covered with milk and sugar, and a large selection of fresh fruits is served. At the end of the meal, mint tea, the most typical drink of Morocco is served. Mint tea consists of water, mint leaves, green tea and sugar. One always drinks mint tea hot and John is told that in a hot climate, a hot beverage is much more refreshing than a cold one, because it brings your body temperature and the climate into closer harmony. John's own experience bears this out.

Amine's family enjoys discussing politics. One of the conversations revolves around problems that Morocco is now facing that were caused by the French occupation. First, there is a pervasive level of corruption in Moroccan society. If you are stopped by a police officer, you can often bribe your way out of the situation. If a student at AUI is caught returning to campus after midnight, it might be possible to bribe the guard. If you want to obtain a passport to travel, it might help the process to bribe the passport agent, etc. Second, the French made an effort to diminish the importance of Islam. Despite still being woven into the fabric of society, the weakening of Islam has caused several problems such as unwanted pregnancies, begging, and some crime. Third, the French encouraged the indigenous people of Morocco, the Berbers, to resent the Arabs. Today there is some conflict between these two groups whereas formerly, there was not. (On John's visit, he does not notice any hostility between the two groups.)

The old city of Fes, the medina, is perhaps the most exotic locale that John encounters on his trip. John and Amine hire a guide (who seems to be more interested in taking John into shops than in showing him attractions such as the Moulay Idriss shrine) and spend a morning exploring the medina. During this time, John is accosted by a barrage of sights, smells, and sounds such as he has never before experienced. Donkeys laden with goods frequently brush by (no motorized vehicles can fit in the narrow roads of the medina). Rows of small stores vending fruits, carpets, embroidery, and leather goods (spherical leather seats are quite common) line the narrow covered winding streets. Acrid smells and multitudes of colorful vats can be smelled and seen from buildings that are close to the tanneries. And finally, people are seen everywhere carrying sheep that they have purchased to sacrifice at an upcoming Islamic religious holiday.

John and Amine also visit some other attractions in Fes. The Museum of Batha is a former residence of Hassan I (a former king) that contains a very nice garden in the courtyard and some very old Korans. There is also an arms museum overlooking the city in an old fortress. Admission to museums is typically 10 dirham (about $1.25 cents) and it is customary to tip one of the attendants if they point out some special features to you. Also, there are no parking meters in Morocco, but each time one parks a car, one must tip a parking attendant 1 or 2 dirham before one drives away.

John has the opportunity to do several "everyday" things with Amine in Fes. He exchanges some traveler's checks at the Al Maghreb bank and he accompanies Amine while he works on getting a visa to work in Holland this coming summer. The process of getting a visa is fairly involved. Amine gets some passport photos, then goes to the Moroccan embassy to get some special letters of recommendation to take to the French consulate (These letters can be obtained because his father is a prominent lawyer in town and has connections. Without these letters, the visa process would be significantly more difficult.), and then goes to the French consulate where it costs roughly $120 to buy a three year visa that is good for working anywhere in Europe. The French do not give out visas easily because they are concerned about Moroccans going to Europe for work and then not returning. After observing the errands, John concludes that things are done less efficiently in Morocco than in the U.S. However, a benefit of this more leisurely pace is that people spend more time talking to one another.

On Tuesday, May 9, John catches the 2 p.m. train from Fes to Rabat. For the first time in 15 years, the trains are on strike and this is the last train that runs before the strike begins. As John travels from Fes to Rabat, he wonders just when the strike will end. "Will it be over before I travel to Marrakesh?" "Will it be over before it is time for me to return to the U.S.?" Only time will tell! The express train is a comfortable one and the time passes quickly. The 2nd class compartments (cost: 70 dirham) are divided into smoking and nonsmoking sections, but the nonsmoking sign is not heeded. When the train arrives in Rabat Agdal, several people assist John in getting his two suitcases off of the train.

5 Rabat

At the recommendation of Souhail (one of the students whom John met at AUI), John stays at the Moussafir hotel (250 dirham per night) that is conveniently located next to the Rabat Agdal train station. The Moussafir hotel chain (Moussafir means *traveler* in Arabic) is owned by the train company and is just three blocks from the apartment building where Souhail lives. The halls in Souhail's apartment building are somewhat fragrant because everyone is bringing live sheep into their homes for the Islamic holiday and sacrifice that takes place the next day. (In the morning people watch TV and after the king sacrifices his sheep, the people can sacrifice theirs. The morning is then spent preparing the sheep. After lunch, the men visit friends and relatives while the women stay at home and receive guests.)

Souhail and his cousin take John to Pizza Hut for dinner. Pizza Hut has just arrived in Morocco and this Pizza Hut in Rabat is one of only two in the entire country. Souhail's cousin is a descendant of Moulay Idriss and consequently receives an annual stipend from the sale of candles.

On the Islamic holiday, John has the day to himself. At the end of breakfast John says "Je voudrais payer" (I would like to pay) and a moment later, the waiter brings another cup of tea. (Apparently the waiter thought that John said "Je voudrais du th/'e", I would like some tea!) After downing the second serving of tea, John finds a taxi and goes downtown to the medina. He starts off by exploring a cemetary that overlooks the Atlantic Ocean. The graves in the cemetary are partially above ground and many of the headstones are covered with handworked tiles. While John is standing in the cemetary, he meets a 23 year old named Driss who lives in the medina. Driss initially thinks that John is German. They end up speaking French to give John the opportunity to practice his French. Around 11 a.m. they agree to meet again around 3 p.m., giving Driss time to eat lunch with his family. As John walks through the medina, he observes many sheep being cooked in makeshift grills. He is told that some of the best parts of the sheep to eat are the cheeks, the tongue, the eyes, the brain, the internal organs, and the feet.

John and Driss meet back at 3 p.m., and then explore the Casbah. The Casbah is a small, fortified city that overlooks the Atlantic Ocean and a river that separates Rabat from Salé. At one time, pirates used to sally forth from this location and the Casbah gave them protection from enemy ships. While having mint tea in a café in the Casbah, Driss tells John that the biggest problem facing the youth of Morocco is unemployment. Many of the youth have college educations, yet can not find work. Driss works at a café and makes 1200 dirham per month (less than $150). He lives at home with his parents and six siblings and most of his paycheck gets used to help cover his family's housing costs. Driss and John then walk back through the medina, and shoot a couple of games of pool downtown. Driss is planning to enter a competition in two weeks. Before John and Driss part, Driss asks John for "un truc" and John gives him 50 dirham for helping him to pass a pleasant day.

In general, if one visits Morocco one needs to be prepared for the fact that numerous people will approach you and ask to be your guide. If you approach this fact with the right frame of mind, it can be very educational and fun. These guides are motivated because they hope to earn a few dirham. (Remember, poverty is a big problem in Morocco.) For the most part, the guides are very pleasant and it provides one a great opportunity to see the area without getting lost and to practice speaking almost any language than one desires. (Arabic, Berber, French, English, German, Spanish, etc.) If the guide is trying to get you to buy things, trying urgently to take you someplace, or trying to take you off the beaten path, you are best advised not to stay with him. However, if all that he wants to do is to walk around with you, point out a few sights, and chat, then these "guides" provide you with a wonderful opportunity to do some sightseeing and to discover how another segment of Moroccan society lives.

Back at the hotel, John decides to drink some late afternoon mint tea and says "Je voudrais du thé" to the waiter. A few moments later, the waiter returns with two mint teas! The waiter apparently has thought that John said "Je voudrais deux thé". Couple with the morning's tea experience, the day is definitely a "bad tea day" for poor John!

When it comes to taking taxis, one needs to be a little bit careful. In Rabat, it is important to make sure that the taxi driver starts the meter when you first enter the taxi. The drive from John's hotel to the medina typically cost 7 or 8 dirham (10 dirham with a tip). On one trip, John notices that the taxi driver has not turned the meter on. "That's odd", thinks John to himself, "I wonder what will happen when we arrive". When they arrive, what happens, is that the taxi driver asks John for 25 dirham! Fortunately, because John knows what the price of a taxi ride should cost, he is able to bargain the price down to 15 dirham. One of the most striking differences between Morocco and the U.S. is that in Morocco, almost everything is negotiable. Not only does the negotiating process serve to fix a final price, it also serves to help the people get to know one another better.

One day, Souhail invites John to his house for lunch. Souhail's aunt and mother have spent most of the morning preparing a magnificent couscous that is topped with mutton, potatos, mushrooms, carrots, cucumbers, and saffron. The couscous is followed by two types of shishkabobs. One of the shishkabobs contains a particularly spicy type of mutton. After commenting how good this tastes, Souhail informs John that he has been eating the heart of a sheep! "It's a good thing that I ate first and found out later!", thinks John to himself. Accompanying the couscous and shishkabobs are several small vegetable plates containing prunes, olives, green peppers, and beans. After the main meal, melon, oranges, and apples are served, followed by a tray of four different types of homemade cookies. Finally, mint tea is served and Souhail's mother encourages John to drink two glasses because this is how much one needs to drink to aid the digestion. It is the Moroccan custom to pour the tea from a significant height above the teacup and then to sip the tea rather loudly when it is first served.

After lunch, John, Souhail, and two of Souhail's cousins explore Rabat. First, they go to the new house that Souhail's family is building. Souhail's father is in the construction business and has helped construct the airports in both Casablanca and Marrakesh. Consequently, he knows many of the best craftsmen in the business and is now employing them to help build this house that he has designed himself. The house is beautiful. Some of the highlights of the home include a marble floor, mosaic walls, zellige, woodwork, stained glass, a fountain, two kitchens, a sauna, a turkish bath, a guest room (Souhail tells John that this is where he would stay if he visits in the future), a separate clothing room for the master bedroom, and a swimming pool. The fountain has been located on a wall instead of in the center of the room so that when Souhail and his siblings get married, there will be more space in the house to entertain guests.

During the remainder of the afternoon, these four visit Chellah (the ruins of a Roman city, complete with hot springs that have since turned cold and are now home to numerous eels), the gardens of the Casbah, the medina (where John learns that non-Moroccans often pay two to ten times more than Moroccans do for the same item), the Mohammed V mausoleum (an incredibly ornate building to pay homage to the king who ruled after Morocco regained its independence in 1956), and the remains of the Hassan tower.

In the evening, Souhail visits the Moussafir hotel and gives John some homemade cookies, a Berber blanket, and some orange water. John also tries to call Ahmed, a chemistry professor from AUI who lives in Marrakesh. Unfortunately, Ahmed is not at home and the person who John speaks to can only speak Arabic!

The next morning, John meets Sidi Ali in town. The two have tea at Sidi Ali's favorite undergraduate hangout from his days at the French university in Rabat. Then they have lunch at McDonald's. McDonald's in Morocco is more expensive than McDonald's in the U.S. Consequently, only the well to do people can eat there! After McDonald's John and Sidi Ali go to the bus station and Sidi Ali helps John to buy a CTM bus ticket to Casablanca. (The CTM bus is the fast bus in Morocco. There are many other buses, but some of them make numerous stops and Sidi Ali wants to make sure that John gets the good bus.) John is taking the bus to Marrakesh instead of the train because the train strike still continues. When John arrives in Casablanca, he discovers that all the CTM buses going to Marrakesh are filled until the next morning at 7 a.m. John finds a room at the nearby Hotel Toublik (550 dirham per night) and uses the opportunity to explore Casablanca. For the most part, Casablanca is a large, modern, industrial city. There is a medina, but it is not as interesting as either the medina in Fes or the medina in Rabat. While walking around, John meets a "guide" named Adab. "You're the first American who I've ever met who speaks French", says Adab flatteringly. John hangs out with Adab for an hour or so until Adab suggests that they go and buy some hashish. "No, I'm sorry, it's time for me to be getting back to my hotel", exclaims John. "Oh, well in that case I know some prostitutes that you might like to meet.", says Adab. John replies, "That sounds like a great offer, but here, take this 20 dirham as a token of my appreciation and let's call it an evening!".

6 Marrakesh

The bus arrives in Marrakesh around noon on Saturday, May 13. The CTM buses are equipped with television and a movie is shown on the route from Casablanca to Marrakesh. At the bus depot, John is met by Ahmed and his son, Assine. Marrakesh is a beautiful city. With the snow-capped Atlas mountains looming in the background and the ruddy hue of the buildings, Marrakesh is a city with a lot of character.

Ahmed, Assine, and John first go to the Menara, a huge lake made by one of the Saadian kings over 400 years ago and surrounded by gardens. Rumor has it that each day this king would bring a woman to the Menara pavilion that overlooks this lake and then the next morning, depose of her in the lake! After the Menara, the threesome goes to the tenth floor of the Cafe la Renaissance and drink some freshly squeezed orange juice.

Lunch is eaten at Ahmed's house. His wife, sister-in-law, daughter, and parents-in-law all live in this house as well. Lunch consists of mutton, bread, a tomato/onion dish, french fries, lemon Fanta, and fruit. All food is eaten from the middle of the table using one's fingers. The bread serves as a handy substitute for a spoon.

In the late afternoon (it is too hot to do much outside from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.), John and Ahmed go into town. They visit the El Bahia Palace where John sees four identical rooms once used by the four wives of the sultan and 24 smaller rooms for his consorts. Islam permits polygamy, but only if all of the wives are treated identically! The El Bahia Palace also contains some very pleasant gardens in some of the interior courtyards. Next, John and Ahmed visit the El Badi Palace, a fortified area that was once used to defend the city, house prisoners underground, and even store water in large vats during the dry months. The Place Djemaa El Fna is the heart of the bustling medina. Snakecharmers, fortune tellers, storytellers, herbalists, street musicians, food vendors, performing monkeys, boxers, strength tests, a bowling game, and more are all found on this very large plaza. John has his fortune told and learns that he will change jobs, marry, have two children, and do a lot of thinking by a fortune teller who speaks broken French and charges 5 dirham. This same fortune teller tells Ahmed his fortune and then asks him for 5 dirham as well! Having blond hair in Marrakesh is a dead giveaway that one is a tourist. One time John watches a musical performance in the back row of a ring of onlookers. When the performers stop to collect money, they make a special effort to push their way to the back row and place a hat under John's nose! (And it works, John coughs up a couple dirham with the entire crowd looking on!)

John and Ahmed spend some time exploring the medina. They visit Ahmed's brother-in-law who owns an antique shop and serves both John and Ahmed some mint tea. One of the most interesting things at the store are small, colored stones that were used as currency in the Saharan desert long ago. As John and Ahmed walk through the medina, John notices that the medina streets in Marrakesh are much wider than the ones in Fes. John buys a pair of babouches (a babouche is somewhat like a leather slipper with no heel and is commonly worn around the house) at a fixed price store. No bargaining is needed at this store and for this reason, this is Ahmed's preferred place to buy babouches. John also notices that men and women typically stay separated from one another, both in the medina and at the Place Djemaa El Fna. Ahmed comments that until recently, one did not even see women in public places such as the Place Djemaa El Fna.

Ahmed returns to AUI the next day for finals week and after helping John to find a hotel (the Hotel Chama, 200 dirham per night), drops John off at the Koutoubia Mosque, a large and imposing structure that dominates the skyline of the medina. From there, John walks to the Mamounia Hotel, perhaps the poshest hotel in Marrakesh. The hotel is extremely elegant, has beautiful gardens, and has housed numerous dignitaries.

In the afternoon, John visits the Dar Si Sai, a former Alaouite palace that today contains carpets, weapons, and clothing. Like all Moroccan palaces, this palace contains beautiful woodwork, claywork, mosaics, and marble. After the Dar Si Sai, John visits the tombs of the Saadian princes. This area was completely buried by Moulay Ismail (to destroy remnants of other dynasties in 1677) and was forgotten for 250 years until French pilots noticed the odd looking rubble structure in 1916. Men and women are buried in separate areas in this necropolis and once again, the architecture is beautiful.

As John explores the medina, he is offered to be guided by several people. One person shows John his student ID and tells John that he wants to practice speaking English. John says that he will only speak French and so the "guide" agrees. The guide wants to show John a Berber women's auction that happens once each month. "What can this be??" asks John to himself. "Are Berber women being auctioned off?!" It turns out that the women's auction is nothing special: just several women sitting in a square vending wares. As John and his guide wind their way through the medina John notices that the guide keeps rushing ahead. "I am suspicious of something foul in the state of Denmark", thinks John. "I am going to be especially leery with this guy!" After the Berber auction, John's guide takes him to a shop. "Come on in, let's go upstairs and you can take a really nice picture of the medina", says the guide. Standing at the front door of the shop is a man who John had encountered earlier in the medina and who told John he was *lucky* to have a student guide. This, coupled with the fact that it appeared that there would be no view at all from the upstairs of this shop, signals John to bid this guide adieu. (Although John does give him 5 dirham.)

Back at the Place Djemaa El Fna, John passes a couple of pleasant hours people watching. Because of his beard, many people call John *Ali Baba*, after the famous traveler of legend.

The next morning John visits Abderrazak, Ahmed's future brother-in-law who works with a travel agency. Abderrazak gives John some mint tea and then helps him to find a nicer hotel (the Hotel Hasna at 250 dirham per night), rent a car, and find a guide. John has his best restaurant meal of the trip in the Hotel Hasna: a great salad that contains tuna, potatos, cucumbers, carrots, and potatos. The salad is followed by a delicious Moroccan specialty called a tajine. This particular tajine is a sizzling hot stew that has an egg in its center. (Before John went to Morocco, he was advised that the best couscous would be found in private homes while the best tajines would often be found in restaurants.) At 2 p.m., John picks up his rental car (550 dirham per day plus gas) and meets Yussef, his 27 year old driver, who costs 100 dirham per day. Yussef doesn't speak English, so this is once again, a great opportunity for John to practice French.

John and Yussef drive to Essaouira, a small town on the Atlantic Ocean with white and blue buildings. On the way to Essaouira, John decides to be a tourist and pay 10 dirham to ride a camel around a small lot. When the camel stands up, it is necessary to hold on tight to keep from being pitched head first off the camel! After arriving in Essaouira, John and Yussef immediately meet a guide named Mohammed who insists on coming with them, even if they pay him nothing. They first visit several spice shops. The spices (saffron, paprika, etc.) are displayed in large, colorful pyramids. One can also purchase gypsum rocks (to be used as styptic pencils if one cuts oneself shaving), squares of jasmine, vanilla, or rose, aphrodisiacs, spice mixes for couscous and tajines, decongestants, hashish(!!), and dried roses to use as a natural air freshener. They next explore some wood shops where perhaps the most interesting item is a magic box. To retrieve the key which opens the box, one must move several pieces of wood in just the right way to obtain the key. John, Yussef, and Mohammed also visit the fish market, where ugly looking lungfish are being prepared. Finally, the three end up sitting on the Casbah walls, overlooking the Atlantic ocean and enjoying the smell of the sea breeze.

The next day, John and Yussef drive to Ouarzazate. This drive takes them across the High

Atlas Mountains on a scenic, serpentine road. (The most dangerous road in the country says Yussef.) Along the road numerous vendors sell semiprecious rocks. The road to Ouarzazate passes several rural mountain villages. By and large, the mountains are inhabited by the Berbers. John and Yussef stop at one mountain village to look around. Most of the village is built around the base of a hill. On top of the hill are the remnants of an old fortification. The houses are built out of clay and rock. John and Yussef are invited to go into one house. The hallways are dark and narrow, the kitchen consists of a clay mound in which embers can be placed; a hole in the roof serves as a vent for the oven, and the living room is decked out with carpets and pillows so that people can sit comfortably and pass the heat of the day.

"What a great road to learn to drive a stick shift on", thinks John and takes over from Yussef. Except for getting the car into first, things go quite well until John encounters a wedding in a small town. The wedding party entirely blocks the street, requiring all cars to come to a standstill. With about fifty people watching, John tries to get the car into first after the wedding party passes. One try, two tries, three tries, four tries, five tries, six tries. Arghh!!!!! On the seventh try, the car finally shifts into first without stalling and John sheepishly pulls out of town!

The next day John and Yussef decide to go to the Ourika Valley, located about 45 minutes from Marrakesh. Before they leave, John confirms his Royal Air Maroc flight back to the U.S. (this is required in order to guarantee a seat), buys a bus ticket to Casablanca (the train strike still continues), and visits the Marjorelle Gardens (a private gardens next to a glaring blue house that used to be inhabited by a French artist). Once John and Yussef arrive in the Ourika Valley, they have lunch at a café in a small town. There is only one choice on the menu: tajines. The tajines have been cooking on a shelf in front of the café for the past several hours, in preparation for lunch, the biggest meal of the day in Morocco. The tajine is delicious and is once again eaten with only fingers and bread.

After lunch, John and Yussef stop in an olive grove where Yussef points out some wild mint and wild anise. As they sit in the shade, a ten year old boy named Abdellatif approaches them and invites them to come visit his family's farm that is just down the road. When Abdellatif first meets John and Yussef, he shakes their hands and then makes a friendly gesture with his hands on his heart. Abdellatif's house provides a home for eight people on one side and for numerous cows, chickens, rabbits, sheep, goats, donkeys, cats, and dogs on the other. The wheat fields are interspersed with olive trees and an old water cistern sits on one corner of the property. After touring the fields, Abdellatif invites John and Yussef into the guest room, where his sisters bring in fresh bread, fresh olive oil, and fresh butter. The guest room has a terrific view of the High Atlas Mountains. While they eat, Abdellatif talks about his plans to work in Marrakesh this coming summer as a mechanic's apprentice. In the other room on the top floor, roses are drying to be sold at an upcoming souk and wheat grain is drying to be made into bread. At the end of the visit, John gives Abdellatif 15 dirham as a small token of appreciation.

John and Yussef then drive back to Marrakesh, where John catches the CTM bus back to Casablanca. John gives Yussef an extra 100 dirham in gratitude to the wonderful guiding that he has provided and Yussef is quite pleased with the bonus. John makes it back to Casablanca around 10 p.m. and once again passes the night at the Hotel Toublik.

7 The Return Home

John gets up at 6 a.m., pays 200 dirham for a grand taxi ride out to the airport and then waits until noon for his delayed flight to depart. The grand taxis are all Mercedes and John thinks that 200 dirham is a bit high (the bus from Marrakesh to Casablanca only cost 60 dirham), but he is unable to bargain any of the taxis any lower. With the grand taxi ride, John has now experienced most of the transportation options in Morocco: train, bus, regular taxi, grand taxi (this taxi is meant to travel longer distances than a regular taxi), rental car, private car, and camel! Donkeys are one of the few transportation modes that still remain. Well, maybe next time!

When John arrives back in JFK, he picks up a phone to call home. As he is dialing he notices a horrible smell and then discovers that someone has smeared human excrement on the phone receiver! “This just figures”, thinks John, “after several people warned me to be careful about eating the food and drinking the water in Morocco due to unclean conditions, the most unsanitary thing I encounter on my entire trip is back in the States!!”

As John flies back to Bozeman, he reflects about his great experience in Morocco: the generous friendly people, Al Akhawayn University, the beautiful country, the interesting cities, and the terrific food. “If things work out, I will certainly return to AUI in the future for an entire semester.”, he muses. And if he does, this report just might get a sequel!