

## PRESIDENTIAL INTERNSHIP PROGRAM



**NOVEMBER 2020**

*WELCOME OUR  
2020-21 INTERNS*

## **GOING TO MOROCCO (FOR REAL)**

*WRITTEN BY NATHAN LINCOLN*

This past August, I was preparing to leave my home in Bloomsburg Pennsylvania, United States, for Morocco. This move would be the farthest anyone in my family has relocated in the last four generations. During my packing, I had a particular song playing on repeat: John Darnielle's "Going to Morocco," off his 2002 collaborative album, *Martial Arts Weekend*, with Franklin Bruno. Just over two minutes long, the song is driven by Darnielle's familiar, frantic guitar strums, a melody that plunges down the scale like a diving hawk, and vocals that are sharp and sporadic, more like chanting than singing. I was not looking for any deep meaning in this song: I wanted something as unsubtle and uncompromising as my coming departure. I was going to Morocco; ready or not.

I was excited, and maybe anxious. This will be the farthest away and longest time I've ever spent away from my home country. But does distance correlate to difference? I've spent most of my life growing up in a small, rural college town. You could describe Ifrane in much the same terms. Truthfully, I did very little research on the country before travelling here, instead choosing to experience any differences first-hand. I flew to Morocco two weeks early to get accustomed to the changes. During the interim, I stayed with an incredibly gracious family in Rabat.



I immediately recognized one, intimidating change, in Morocco's urban centers: Traffic! Even when travelling the Jersey Turnpike, I had never seen so many vehicles crammed into one road. In my short time in the city, I saw trolleys, buses, cars, trucks, trucks full of unsecured humans in the back, bicycles, motorcycles, tricycles, motor-tricycles, mule drawn carriages, and one determined man pumping his wheelchair down the freeway. It's not the amount or variety of vehicles that surprised me, but the total disregard of lane lines. The general rule for passing seems to be, "I'm going to honk at you for going too slow, and you'll honk at me for passing you." There is also an abundance of traffic circles, a piece of engineering I would usually appreciate. However, motorists in Rabat have a happy habit of cutting off everyone to get to the center most lane of the circle, only to then cut everyone off again to take their left turn out of the roundabout.

Throw into this mix the common pedestrian, who's only real option to cross the street is to play a game of chicken with the cars. There are two types of pedestrians and they always travel as a pair: the one who stops and waves on your car, and their friend, who chooses the moment when you have decided to accelerate to stride boldly out into the road, confusing your poor manual car and stalling you out in the middle of the street (naturally, Pedestrian 1 still waits for you to pass, even if your engine has obviously shut off.)

Off the roadways, however, I find that life slows down considerably here. I think there is a deeper cultural attitude regarding one's time. My favorite example of how this manifests is, naturally, while eating. When I was staying with my hosts in Rabat, lunch was a big deal. The parents would come home from their jobs for an hour or so to sit down and share a meal with family. Typically, it might be roasted fish or tajine, but always delicious. Interrupting the workday for a family lunch is, literally and figuratively, a foreign concept for the majority of Americans. (Continued on page 5).

# ADAPTABILITY

WRITTEN BY CHOLEKATE ABEL

2341 days ago, I set foot in Morocco for the first time. I came not knowing much about anything, let alone what I was looking for, but somehow, I kept finding myself returning to this place. If someone had told me then that I would be writing this article from a cafe in Rabat, while a global pandemic was raging, and watching Donald Trump possibly be elected President for a second term in a matter of days, I would have laughed in your face and begged to be woken up from such a crazy dream.

Nonetheless, here I am, living in that upside down fantasy. While returning to Morocco after college had been a plan in the making for a year, the events of the past eight months had me confronting the reality that it would likely be a dream deferred. Despite it all, due to some twist of fate, I got the green light. Wow. Pinch me. But this time not because I want to wake up - but because it's hard to tell where the dystopian dream that is 2020 ends and where my present reality begins. I feel so lucky to have gotten to move overseas during a global pandemic. While some of my closest confidants questioned me and my choices with quizzical looks or what they thought was the good advice of "don't get your hopes up, disappointment feels terrible" or "maybe try again in a year, it's not safe right now", still I persisted.

If the past eight months have taught me anything it's "if not now, then when?" Although my initial laundry list of goals to accomplish during quarantine was vast, ranging from starting a blog to crocheting a baby sweater, my motivation for said goals dwindled with each passing anticlimactic day. Once again, I found myself having the same inner monologue I usually have when I want to justify getting out of something: "Ehhh, I don't know. I can't do X because like, \_\_\_\_\_..." I've learned a valuable lesson in developing personal accountability. If I want something to happen, I CAN make it happen. Perhaps this experience, this crazy move across an ocean during a pandemic and heightened political tensions at home, this is me actualizing this lesson of accountability and fearlessness, in acting without justification or excuse. I hope to carry this lesson with me, both here at AUI and beyond, wherever I may end up.



# A GOOD DAY FOR PASTA

WRITTEN BY MADELEINE ZAHN

A few weeks ago, a salad sounded like the perfect lunch. I had decided to treat myself to a pasta salad after eyeing it at the café the day before. After ordering in broken French, I sat at a socially distanced table outside, and began to eat. As I ate, the mountainous winds began to pick up, naturally I grasped by salad bowl tight. Not a second later, my napkin began to fly away, I let go of the bowl inadvertently to grab the napkin only to watch my bowl be whipped off the table too. I rushed up, chasing after my bowl across the patio, finally grabbing it only to turn around and see a group of girls staring at my spilled pasta, which had flown on to their feet. Instinctively, I hurried towards them, apologizing profusely, while picking up the pasta off the ground. Realizing what I was doing, I quickly got up, threw away the bits of soggy pasta, and returned to the safety of my office, still hungry and quite embarrassed. I had felt helpless as I chased after my forgone pasta. Everyone had been staring at me, no one offered to help. As I sulked in my office, I thought ‘You cannot let the thought of being helpless stop you from doing things. It inhibits growth and fosters negativity.’ How could I accept change, if I refused to grow and kept a negative mindset? In the end, this experience would give me the will to get back on my feet and adapt to my new life in Morocco.



Now, I look back and laugh at myself chasing my bowl and picking pasta up off the ground. I see how I have adapted since I arrived in Ifrane and I look forward to many opportunities of growth, whether they be embarrassing, comical, or a bit of both.

# MAKING THE MOST OF THE UNEXPECTED

WRITTEN BY ASHLEY JAZAYERI

This year went nothing like I expected it to - I'm sure I'm not the only one who can say that. As someone who plans everything, this was especially difficult for me to navigate (believe me, I have five plans for the next ten years depending on x or y factor occurring or not occurring). But you can't plan for a pandemic.

For this reason, when I was recently confronted with the question “What was the best thing that happened to you this year?” as an essay prompt for a scholarship application, I had to pause for a moment. I had to pause not only because this year held many challenges that I never would have imagined myself facing as a recent college graduate, but also because as someone who is always planning five steps into the future, I never stop to focus on the present.

The essay prompt rattled around in my head for a few weeks, but I kept coming back to one thing: The best thing that happened to me this year was having all my plans fail. Every time that an opportunity fell just outside my reach, I somehow stumbled across another. Putting my plans to move overseas last spring on hold, I ended up with the opportunity to work at the election office in my hometown, learning more about my local community than I had during my entire time in college. I'd never had the chance to become involved because I was always so busy looking outward.

With all the horrible things that accompanied the pandemic, I was very fortunate. I had my health, my family was close to me, and I knew that I could rely on a steady paycheck to pay my bills. Throughout my time as a college student, I was always pushing myself to go, go, go. Every opportunity – whether academic or professional – was simply a milestone to the next best thing. So, when my carefully laid plans were interrupted by the pandemic, my anxiety spiraled out of control. Every night I would fall into the same pattern of thinking, asking myself questions like: How will I ever get a decent job if I don't line up the perfect opportunity right out of college? What will my future look like as a recent graduate with a degree in international relations in a world where borders everywhere are closing indefinitely? What next?

Fast forward to today, where, despite challenges with PCR tests, cancelled flights, and closed borders, I made it to Morocco to continue pursuing a goal of mine that I'd put on hold: fluency in Arabic. This last year has forced me to embrace the unexpected – I am both excited and terrified to see what's next.

# WALKING THE ROAD TO MOROCCO

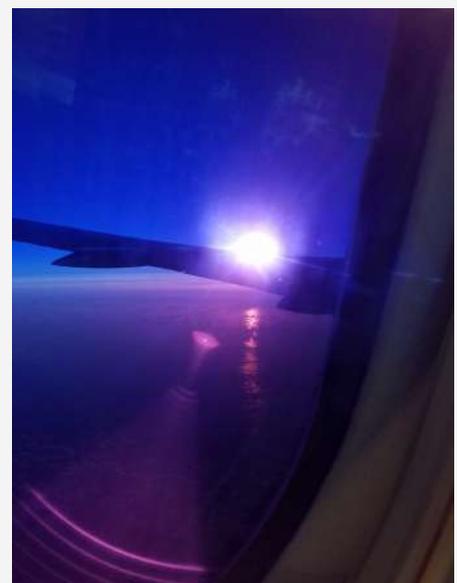
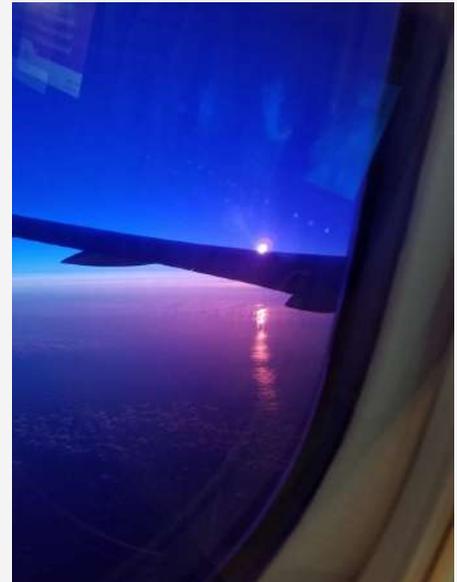
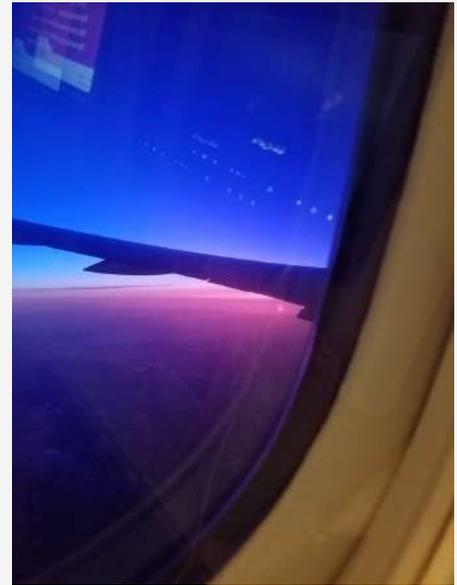
WRITTEN BY TERESA DERR

If I'm honest, this pandemic hasn't affected me very much. No one I knew got sick or worse. I was able to find a job for the summer. I was fine in quarantine, because staying at home for long periods of time is wonderful when you're an introvert who is quite content to hole up in one room and watch the rain (figurative and literal) on the windows. That isn't to say that I don't want this pandemic gone, or that I didn't notice its effects – I never would have predicted that my graduation ceremony would be online and that I would watch it from my living room with my family. I'm sure I'm not the only one who is completely fed up with masks and having to breathe in my own breath hour after hour. But I think I am a pretty 'go-with-the-flow' type of gal, and this pandemic has yet to throw me a punch that I couldn't roll with.

That isn't to say it didn't try. I did not think I would make it to Morocco to be able to attend this program. I wasn't even an original candidate – I guess it is thanks to the pandemic and others dropping out that I got a spot at all. And then with all the documentation, Covid tests, and authorizations that we needed to collect before we could board the plane – it was a mess! I barely got everything together in time, and then I woke up four days before I was supposed to be getting on a plane to learn that Morocco had extended their lockdown once again and had rescheduled all the flights. I couldn't get ahold of anyone to confirm when my flight was rescheduled to until the day before I needed to fly out. It was stressful! But also, it felt very Moroccan, all the way down to the very much not socially distanced line for getting on the airplane.

So, here I am. I reflected on this as I watched the sun rise over the wing of the plane while I jetted towards this future. The world was turning underneath me, lives were being lived out, and the sun rose. I thought, "Anything is possible, so long as the sun keeps rising." Despite my misgivings, despite the obstacles I faced, I made it here. I am in Morocco, getting international experience during a pandemic. I didn't take the road I thought I would to get here, but somehow, my path still led me here. And so long as the sun keeps rising, I will continue to walk my path and delight in where it takes me.

**THE WORLD WAS TURNING UNDERNEATH ME, LIVES WERE BEING LIVED OUT, AND THE SUN ROSE. I THOUGHT, "ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE, SO LONG AS THE SUN KEEPS RISING."**



*Continued from page 2*

Outside of the house, restaurant culture is also far more relaxed compared to what I'm used to. In America, when you sit down at a restaurant, you are now occupying real estate that needs to be sold to the next customer ASAP. Here, some fellow interns and I got rained in while eating out for dinner on my first night in Ifrane. Despite spending a solid couple of hours at the table, even long after we finished our food, no server or host came to usher us out of the building. We could comfortably enjoy our time and company together. Restaurant staff sometimes go so far to leave you alone that I wouldn't be able to find any servers to pay for my meal.

Not that this pace is always preferred. On a trip to Casablanca to get some critically important documents notarized, my cab driver pulled into a market and straight up left for half an hour to get himself some coffee. Another time I spent a few hours running to every department in Azrou hospital looking for someone who would bother to prescribe me a PCR test, so I could access campus to attend my internship's orientation. In case you're wondering, I missed every day of orientation.

That brings up a question I keep running into: how would my experiences here be different if I had come any year before 2020? Does anyone really remember what life was like before March? Before Covid was a known reality? I remember there were some rumors, early on ("Have you heard of this thing happening in China? I think it's just some kind of flu."). Then, we were given a week off school. Then a second week. Then countries worldwide began to lock down.

My heart goes out to all Moroccans who were left stranded internationally with no easy entry back to their home country. More specifically, my heart goes out to those who had to deal with the highly specific documentation required to get a flight ticket. My trip was delayed a week because my PCR test results came in a few hours over the 48-hour requirement. And I'm just one man: I saw whole families turned away at the flight gate due to factors that were largely out of their control.

Now that I am here, there are some factors I can control. In order to protect the AUI community that I am now a part of, I limit my exposure to this country I came to see and to the interactions with people I came to meet. I don't mean for this to be misconstrued as complaining (although I suppose it is). This is our new, hopefully temporary, reality and neither Morocco nor her people owe me anything. In truth, I am completely grateful for my opportunity to move to this country, in spite of the hardships we all face. There is still beauty in the landscapes around me, still kindness in all the folks who have helped me adjust to my new home, and there's still a pack of monkeys up in the hills to whom I get to feed nuts on my days off.

The song, "Going to Morocco," ends with these lyrics:

"The desert stretches far and wide. Sands blow, grains collide. I am changing inside and there's a guttural stop in my throat."

Like much of Darnielle's work, the imagery is strong, but the meaning is vague, demanding interpretation from the listener. When I listen to this final sentiment, I can't help but feel hopeful for whatever future is before us. At the very least, I am hopeful for my time at AUI. Change is natural. Oftentimes it's even good. It can be a change in setting or a change in situation. Some days you wake up in a new country. Some days you wake up in the greatest international health crisis of your lifetime. The truly exciting part, to me, is the experience of learning from and adapting to those changes. Afterall, isn't that what makes us human?

---

### **Note to Alumni**

We hope you are doing well, we would love to hear from you! If you are willing to share a little bit about your experience in the PIP Program or how it has impacted what you are doing now, please send us an email at [auiqip@aui.ma](mailto:auiqip@aui.ma) to share about your time at AUI.



AUI Presidential Internship Program



COMING SOON !



@auipresidentialinternship