



# EVE BRANSON FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

NEWS AND DEVELOPMENTS FROM  
THE HIGH ATLAS MOUNTAINS

ISSUE 20 SEPTEMBER 2013  
COMPILED BY EVE BRANSON



RELAXING BY THE POOL

## SUNDAY 30TH JULY 2013

Leaving 15°C behind in England what a joy to arrive in Marrakech! On the drive up to Kasbah Tamadot in the Atlas Mountains the clear blue sky suggests heat for days to come. The snow tipped mountains are no longer – now replaced by brown parched earth whilst the winding river below has but a trickle of water.

Green fields are now brown and the dried earth showers our car with dust as we arrive at the gates of Kasbah Tamadot. Having caught an early flight I have time to relax by the infinity pool – the temperature is now 29°C – so it's time for a swim.

I lie pampered by the pool as the local Berber staff brings me a towel when I emerge to a thermos of ice cold water and a selection of fruit on my lounge table. Tomorrow it will be time to hear the achievements of the village girls before some much needed whisky and wine on the candlelit terrace, with the sounds of a braying donkey, a screeching peacock and frogs croaking the night away.

The next day was certainly sobering as everyone involved with the Eve Branson Foundation (known as the EBF) arrived including the lawyer and some local Berber staff. The legalities, complaints and praises were thrown into the meeting which I hope will forward the foundation's aims yet further.

Sadly we can no longer rely solely on the annual 'Rock the Kasbah' charity ball held in Los Angeles to fund the foundation. It's now over to me - hence my crazy idea of holding a polo match in Morocco last April. Let's say we didn't lose any money, but we only made enough to keep us afloat for a few more months.

The success made us realise we should hold it yearly. If you are interested in attending next year's event from the 18th-20th April 2014 please ask at Kasbah Tamadot's front desk and we will send you an invitation.

The meeting ended with our treasurer saying it is too hot for the good production of fibre taken from our herd of Cashmere goats, and also that the food and vet bills are too high. I was given only three more months to make the goats viable or else the whole herd would need to be slaughtered. With these thoughts I left the meeting saddened. But you're never sad for long out here! Brahim Bendar, the EBF chairman, cheered me up saying he knew a retired herdsman in the cooler higher Atlas Mountains... Would I like to visit? You bet!

Early on the Wednesday Brahim and I sped higher and higher through dried up mountains separated by the trickle of water in the river below. Each bend bought another scene: colourful Berbers squatting on the roadside whilst fully laden mules enter busy market towns, always at the centre the mosque standing supreme. Higher and higher, cooler and cooler as we climb with bend after bend each more picturesque than the last - we passed yet another red bricked village, the village of **Aremd**, which is certainly cooler at 4665m above sea level.

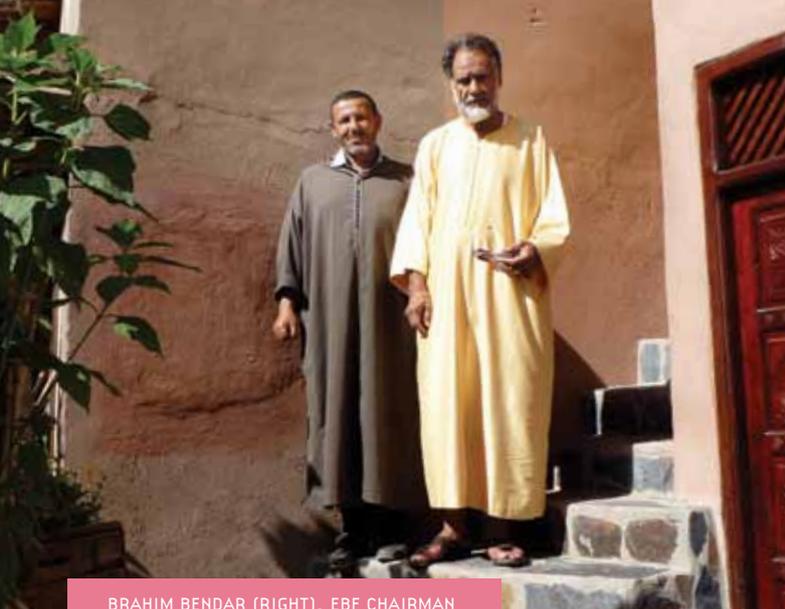
In spite of the poverty everything was clean – even the well fed mules shimmering under the sun. At last we arrive at **Lacen** where its mayor, farmer and owner offered us a jug of rose petal scented water to cleanse ourselves before leading us up yet more steps to the top terrace where we were offered dates, mint tea, homemade bread, local honey and their own



IMSKER VILLAGE – 98% ILLITERATE



CASHMERE GOATS NOW SAVED



BRAHIM BENDAR (RIGHT), EBF CHAIRMAN



VIEW FROM THE GOATS' NEW SHED

walnuts. Time to view the potential goat shed: down the uneven steps finally ending up in a dark cowshed. Two cows freely welcomed us from a floor littered with well-fed fat hens. Here and there in the midst of the farm yard odours we explained our predicament. Yes, the owner would be thrilled to manage my Cashmere goats and put his black male billy goats with them. After showing us the different dried grasses they would give them to eat he sounded knowledgeable and happy whilst I certainly was! At last something hopeful – a reprieve!

This does however leave me with two empty fields... As luck would have it two beautiful New York girls were dining at Kasbah Tamadot and I mentioned to them my new predicament and how I wanted to create a 'forest garden' of fruit trees (perhaps pomegranate and figs). But with little money and no water this did not appear possible. Right there and then the girls said they would make it possible by arranging a New York ball, leaving us tasked with the job of finding water and digging a well. My return luggage included some earth for the 'powers that be' in England to check its feasibility for growing fruit trees, so I hope one day you too will be enjoying the fruits of the Moroccan 'forest garden'.

## REFLECTIONS AND PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

The three days of my last trip to Morocco went by all too quickly, so I was overwhelmed when I received an e-mail from Zoubair, my translator, with some tales of how the EBF has affected the lives of some of the girls who come to the craft houses. I hope you too will read and appreciate the work and teachings behind the EBF which make it all possible for those unspoilt, happy girls in the Atlas Mountains.

## FATIMA'S STORY

Fatima Imni is one of the girls born in Imsker village. She went to primary school in Imsker up to the age of 12 but unfortunately could not continue her schooling as the secondary school and high schools are one and a half hours from the village. Luckily there is the EBF craft house.

Fatima was very eager to continue her studies in order to save herself and her family from the poverty overwhelming the

village. She used to work in the fields because they have an orchard of pears and apples and also had to take care of her brothers and the household. "Everything I do is for free", she says, "but when I started learning in the craft house, I found myself, and when my items were sold and started generating money I became independent. Now I can buy certain things I would like to have. Moreover, I can now make some of my own clothes and I would not worry about future", Fatima adds. Fatima now is hopeful about the future since she will help her future husband to establish a family. Fatima also is learning English language and she is happy to communicate with guests who visit the craft house. Her next step is to apply for a job at Kasbah Tamadot or anywhere in order to meet her expectations and satisfy her eagerness for financial independence. "I have put my feet in the right path now and I will never look back in anger as I see myself really saved," says Fatima with a big smile.

## NAJIA'S STORY

The second story is Najia's. She has never been to school as she has an eye condition, and besides her family is very poor. "If there were not the EBF craft house I am not sure of what'll happen to me", she says. "I will be neglected to death. I can make now small carpets that I sell and I can make monthly some money that helps me buy a lot of things I am bereft of." Despite her eye troubles she can work and chat with the girls the whole day. She becomes happier when she hears that her work is appreciated by guests and especially when a guest asks her to take a photo with her sold item. "I do not need a husband now, I have a lot of things to do now" Najia says laughing.

## MORE ABOUT THE CRAFT HOUSES

We have an average of 40 girls in 3 villages, but hope to help more accordingly to our limited funds. Meanwhile, thank you for all the support you've given them to date. I am ever hopeful they soon will be knitting you a brand new scarf!

EVE BRANSON



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ISSUE 8 APRIL 2009



ISSUE 9 MAY 2009



ISSUE 10 OCTOBER 2009



ISSUE 11 DECEMBER 2009



ISSUE 12 JUNE 2010



ISSUE 13 OCTOBER 2010



ISSUE 14 DECEMBER 2010



ISSUE 15 SEPTEMBER 2011



ISSUE 16 DECEMBER 2011



ISSUE 17 APRIL 2012



ISSUE 18 NOVEMBER 2012



ISSUE 19 FEBRUARY 2013

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