

Peace Corps volunteer dies in Morocco

Traffic accident killed Melissa Mosvick, 24, of Apple Valley.



Melissa Mosvick was a St. Thomas graduate and had planned to pursue a master's.

killed one other person and injured several others, including another Peace Corps volunteer, officials said.

By Kevin Duchscher
Star Tribune Staff Writer

Melissa Mosvick's personal quest to promote international understanding began last year in the Moroccan city of Ouarzazate, where she taught English and computer skills to local artisans as a Peace Corps volunteer.

It ended there Saturday when Mosvick, 24, of Apple Valley, died after the public bus in which she was riding was struck by a truck. The accident

MOSVICK continues on B2

★★★★

Wednesday, November 10 • 2004

MOSVICK from B1

She found ways to help people mired in poverty

Mosvick's death stunned her family and friends, who said she had planned to get a master's degree in international studies after her two-year Peace Corps assignment, then go into foreign service.

"She wanted to do good work for the less fortunate, and she was willing to do that in service to her country," said her father, Mark Mosvick, of Apple Valley.

Mosvick had been in Ouarzazate, a city of about 40,000 near the Sahara Desert, for about a year. Her job was to train small-business owners, but she also found other ways to help struggling people, such as teaching disabled women to paint tea glasses for profit.

"Melissa went above and beyond to share her knowledge and skills with women's groups, artisans and people in her community," Peace Corps Director Gaddi Vasquez said.

About 250 of an estimated 171,000 volunteers have died in the Peace Corps since 1961. A handful died violently, but the largest number, about 100, died in motor vehicle accidents, according to a report published last year by the Dayton Daily News.

Mosvick's mother, Barbara, said family members were proud of her service. They exchanged news often, through phone calls and e-mails, she said. Sometimes the daughter they called Honey Bee requested comforts from home, including sheets and dental floss.

But, her mother said, "It was very humbling and very spiritual for her to see what little you really need."

Mosvick graduated from Apple Valley High School and then attended the University of St. Thomas, where she earned a degree in international business in 2002. She worked in sales for her father's computer peripherals company in Burnsville before joining the Peace Corps.

Her grandfather, Roger Mosvick, said she considered taking a job with a large bank but instead chose "to commit her life to public service."

Suchita Desai, a friend of Mosvick's since high school, said she was "incredibly generous" and very funny. The two had planned to see each other when Mosvick came home for a two-week Christmas break.

"She defined friendship ... Many times people give up on people. She wouldn't do that," Desai said.

Besides her parents, Mosvick is survived by her sister, Kristin, of Apple Valley, and grandparents, Roger and Nona Mosvick, of Mendota Heights, and Odilo and Bernice Peine, of West St. Paul. Services are tentatively set for this weekend, and arrangements are being handled by White Funeral Home, 14560 Pennock Av., Apple Valley. Memorials are preferred to the Melissa Leigh Mosvick Memorial Fund, Bremer Bank, 633 S. Concord St., South St. Paul.

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Corps worker dies in crash

Melissa Mosvick, 24, was St. Thomas grad from Apple Valley

BY LAURA YUEN
Pioneer Press

Just as she hungered for the Indian dishes concocted in her childhood friend's kitchen, Melissa Leigh Mosvick was enthralled by the traditions and cultures of the world.

Now, the world is showing her that admiration was mutual.

On Saturday, the Peace Corps volunteer from Apple Valley was killed aboard a public bus in southern Morocco when a truck crashed into it and flipped it into a ravine, her family said. The recent



Melissa Mosvick

St. Thomas University graduate had been more than a year into her service, teaching villagers a breadth of skills, from computers to glass-painting.

Mosvick's parents, Mark and Barbara, have since received word from their daughter's friends in Dubai, Beirut and other distance places, attesting to the 24-year-old's Christian faith and convictions for helping others. Her friends have vouched that she was a quick learner of Serbian folk dances and a jokester on her college crew team.

"We knew she was religious, but we never knew how much

Corps worker dies

(continued)

so, and how she could really touch people's lives," said Mark Mosvick. "She was my hero."

That Melissa Mosvick was killed in a traffic accident has stunned some family members who had worried about terrorism or other risks while she was abroad.

"You know they're going to experience discomfort, but you never, ever think of this," said her grandfather, Roger Mosvick.

As of last September, nearly 5,300 of the roughly 170,000 people who had volunteered in the Peace Corps during its 43-year history were Minnesotans. About 125 total volunteers currently are serving in Morocco. The Peace Corps participates only in countries that welcome the volunteers and are deemed safe, said spokeswoman Jennifer Borgen. Assessment teams monitor the nations for political or civic unrest, crime and other factors, she said.

But by all indications, Mosvick's death resulted from "an unfortunate and very tragic accident," Borgen said.

Melissa Mosvick had gone beyond the duty of her original project of teaching English and computer skills. In her city of Ouarzazate, she instructed artisans how to paint glass so they could sell the goods for profit.

Unlike some expatriates who cocoon themselves in Western culture, Mosvick immersed herself in the Arabic world and helped disabled women in outlying villages. Mosvick would send her family pictures of Ouarzazate, known as the gateway to the Sahara, with a note: "Isn't my city beautiful?"

Noelle Bushey, 24, of Apple Valley recalled her friend's slapstick humor.

"She would always imitate Fat Bastard from 'Austin Powers,'" recalled Bushey, who traveled with Mosvick to crew meets. "My stomach would be hurting from laughing so hard from Minneapolis to the Quad Cities."

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"Isn't my city beautiful?"

Gov. Tim Pawlenty and U.S. Sen. Norm Coleman have given the family their condolences.

Mosvick graduated from Apple Valley High School. She double majored in international business and marketing and was fluent in French, a love that took her to Provence, France, for a year's study. Her father suspects her intrigue with living abroad started after she got hooked on Indian cooking by a friend's mom.

While living in Morocco, Mosvick received care packages from her mother containing the likes of shampoo, peanut butter and Rice Krispies treats. She would share or consume just about everything, except her bed sheets, which, her father said, "smelled like home."

Mosvick is also survived by a younger sister, Kristin. Services are pending, but they are expected to be at St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church in St. Paul. Her family has started a memorial in her name at Bremer Bank.

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Honoring a peace apostle

A somber Memorial Day awaits loved ones of Peace Corps volunteer Melissa Mosvick, killed in Morocco last year.

By **Chuck Haga**
Star Tribune Staff Writer

Barbara and Mark Mosvick of Apple Valley will honor and remember their older daughter this Memorial Day as a fallen American hero.

Melissa Mosvick enlisted to go overseas in 2003 to fight terrorism — not as a soldier but as a Peace Corps volunteer teaching disabled women in Morocco how to use computers to make their lives better.

Her early e-mails home were giddy with discovery and anticipation.

"I think I made the right decision to come here instead of staying in Minnesota," she told her parents on Sept. 15, 2003. "Something just seems re-

ally right about being here so far, and I think it will be a really good experience for me."

Melissa, 24, was in her 15th month as a Peace Corps volunteer in the North African nation when she was killed in a traffic accident there last November. A truck collided with the public bus she was riding.

Her parents had just bought tickets for her to fly home for Christmas. In her journal, sent to her family with other personal effects, she had marked the day of departure with enthusiasm — "Go home!!" — but Mark Mosvick knew his daughter would be antsy to get back to work.

PEACE continues on B10



Photographs by Bruce Bisping/Star Tribune
Melissa Mosvick had marked in her calendar the day she was to leave for home after 15 months as a Peace Corps volunteer in the North African nation of Morocco. She died there in a traffic accident in November, just a short time before she was to come home.



Mosvick's family — father Mark, mother Barb and sister Kristin — displayed photos, letters and other items from her stay as a Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco. "She was there as an ambassador of peace," her father said.

PEACE from B1

Volunteer loved landscape, people of Morocco

"She grew up accepting, tolerant of others," he said. "She was always a good listener, and she was absorbing the culture over there like a sponge. She had her moments when she was sad or homesick, but she wanted to do good work for the less fortunate.

"She was there as an ambassador of peace. She wanted to be of service to her country."

Since President John Kennedy launched the Peace Corps 44 years ago, 254 volunteers have died overseas, said Jennifer Borgen, a Peace Corps spokeswoman.

Accidents have claimed the largest share, about 70 percent, and the vast majority of deaths occurred in the



enough," Barbara Mosvick said. "So she came up with a business project where the women painted designs on tea glasses and sold them. Melissa applied for a grant to get them started and organized the whole thing."

Some of the women she had worked with sent the Mosvicks a set of tea glasses after Melissa's death. Each glass is painted with her name in English and Arabic.

Kristin said she was reluctant to see her sister leave.

"I was going to college and I wanted her here to motivate me," she said.

"But I told her I wanted her to be happy, and she was. She was becoming more happy by helping others and

1960s, '70s and '80s, she said.

There were two deaths in 2004, including Mosvick, and one this year.

The casualty list represents a tiny fraction of the 178,000 volunteers and trainees who have signed up for two-year stints in 138 countries since 1961.

But those are statistics, "and I don't want her to be any kind of number," Mark Mosvick said of his daughter.

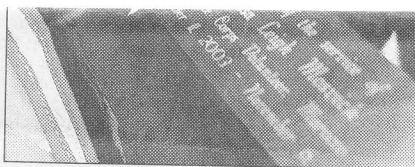
She was buried at Acacia Park Cemetery in Mendota Heights. Barbara Mosvick has ordered fresh flowers for the grave on Memorial Day, but she, Mark and Melissa's younger sister, Kristin, tend to visit separately.

"It's almost too hard, being there together," Mark Mosvick said.

"But there's a pinwheel there we all like," Kristin said, smiling. "When it moves, it's like she's talking to us."

Working with women

Melissa was fluent in French and rapidly learning Arabic, her mother said, and she had traveled to the storied cities of Fez and Casablanca and provided friends and relatives with run-



Photographs by Bruce Bisping/Star Tribune.
This Peace Corps flag was among the mementos presented to Melissa Mosvick's family after her death in a traffic accident in Morocco.

A MEMORIAL FUND

The Mosvick family has established a memorial fund to help with Peace Corps projects in Ouarzazate and perhaps to provide Peace Corps volunteers with travel assistance to improve their safety. Contributions can be made to the Melissa Leigh Memorial Fund, Bremer Bank, 633 Concord St. N., South St. Paul, MN 55075.

ning e-commentary on all she saw and experienced.

"She was teaching computer skills to women but didn't feel she was doing

by learning how she could do without material things."

Melissa wrote humorously about getting water and electricity hooked up in her apartment and other struggles with a strange new bureaucracy.

"It took her three days to set up a bank account, but it really didn't seem to bother her," Barbara Mosvick said. "She told me she was learning patience. She seemed much more calm."

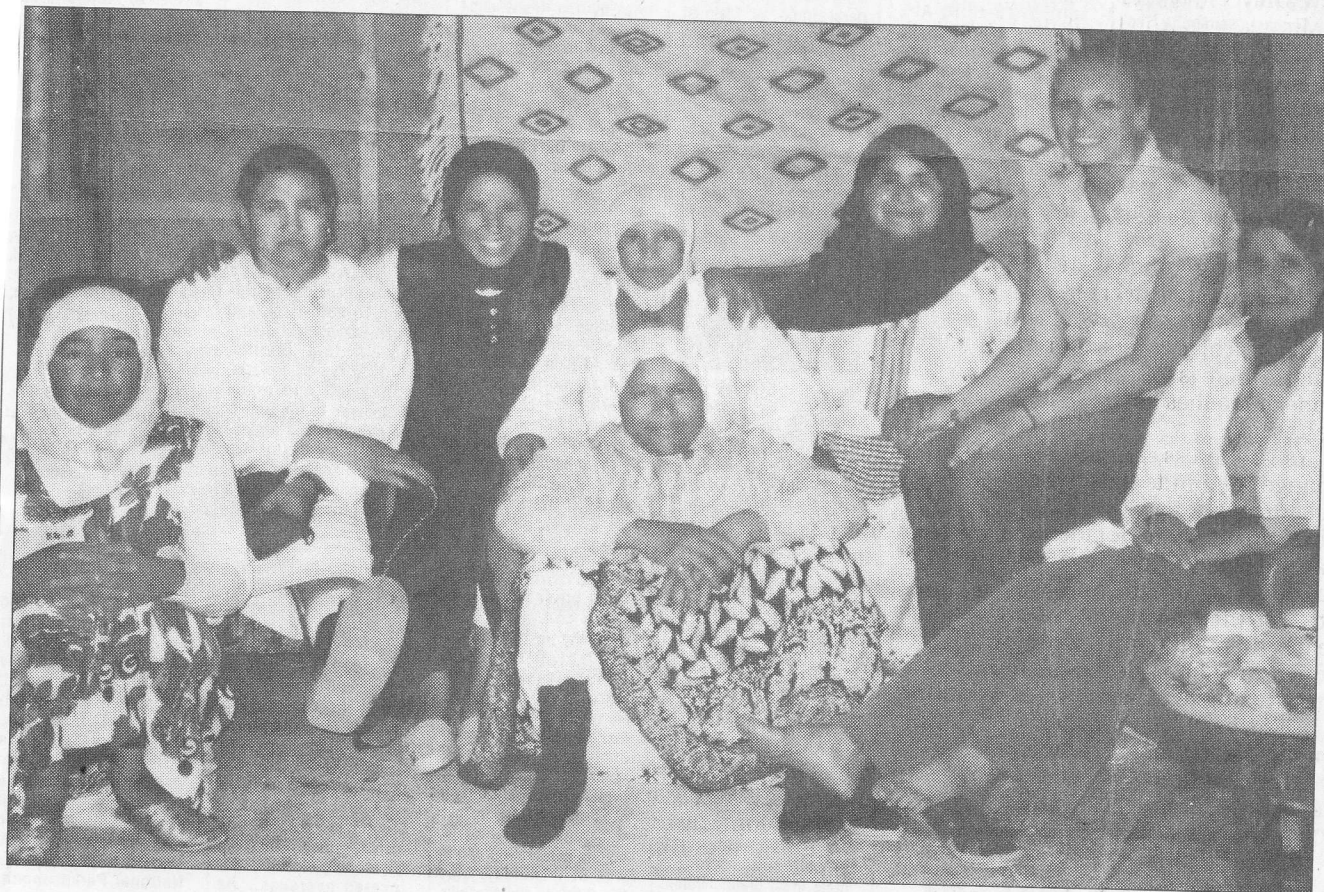
Melissa lived in Ouarzazate, "the door of the desert" and a crossroads between Marrakech and Agadir. "Lawrence of Arabia" was filmed nearby.

She called it Oz.

"The city is absolutely gorgeous," she wrote on Nov. 11, 2002. "It was rebuilt by the French not too long ago so everything seems new and clean."

"The population is 40,000, so it's small enough to get around but big enough where I can escape if I want to. It's in a dry area near mountains and there are oases nearby with lots of palm trees. Very beautiful. I think I will be really happy here."

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Mosvick, second from right, was photographed with some of the people she worked with in Morocco.

Courtesy of the Mosvick family