

Patience (aka “Hajde pi kafe)

How did serving in the Peace Corps affect my life? I learned to be more patient. Not that I was impatient in America, but I was a big fan of our fast-paced lifestyle. All of which came to a crashing halt once I settled into the Mountainous Mediterranean.

I learned patience in the form of coffee. While living and working in Albania I learned that coffee is the beginning and ending of every possible social interaction. “You got engaged? Let’s have a coffee to celebrate.” “I think we could be business partners. Let’s go have a coffee and talk about it.” “I’m an American and I’d like to help you out, can we have a coffee to discuss the possibility?” If I didn’t have at least two coffee breaks during the work day, well then, that was a poor work day.

I’ve loved coffee for years, from long before I began the Volunteer journey. But coffee in America is an impersonal thing. It’s anything *but* impersonal for Albanians. Here in the States I take five minutes to grab a huge cup of coffee, sometimes even waiting in line with people on cell phones, texting, surfing the web, reading the paper, or whatever else, every one of us alone in our own little sheltered world.

But in the Balkans if you’re going to have a coffee you’re going to do it with a friend; someone to sit and enjoy the whole experience with. You’re going to ask about their family and talk about yours. You’re going to discuss the local climate, news, sports, and whatever the latest hot topic is. Instead of sipping from a much-too-big designer cardboard cup at a trendy wifi hotspot you’ll be using two fingers to gently lift a glorified ceramic shot glass of a macchiato. And yet, it will take you three times as long to finish it because you’ll be enjoying the sunshine on your face, the wind in your hair, and the good conversation seated across from you.

Even now, I’ll occasionally slip into Albanian and ask a friend if they’d care to “hajde pi kafe,” (or in English), come and have a coffee with me.