

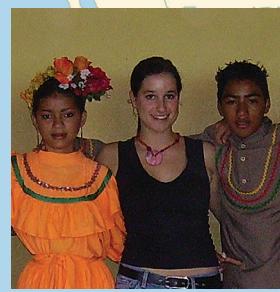
WorldView



DIVERSITY IN THE PEACE CORPS

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

- Health Justice: survey on health impacts of service
- Watsi.com: Crowdsourcing health



Susan Clark, BS '09
Honduras
2004 – 2006



Abby Goldstein, BS '11
St. Vincent
1997 – 1999



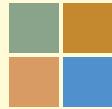
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All inquiries can be addressed to the appropriate person at NPCA by fax at 202 293 7554 or by mail to NPCA, or through the NPCA website at www.peacecorpsconnect.org or www.worldviewmagazine.com.

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A magazine of news and comment about the Peace Corps world

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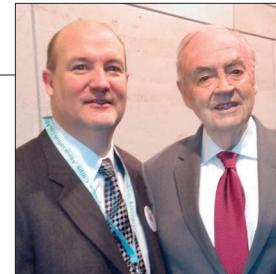
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COVER: Peace Corps public health sector Trainees, bound for Kenya, gather at John F. Kennedy Airport in 2012. Reflective of today's Peace Corps, the group included three African-Americans, four Asian-Americans, three trainees over the age of 55 and two married couples (1 couple 55+, 1 couple in their 20s).

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Brittany Nycole Werkheiser.

WorldView



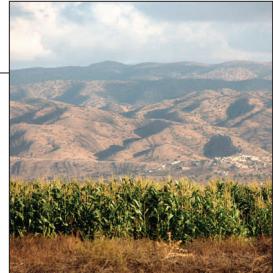
A magazine of news and comment about the Peace Corps world

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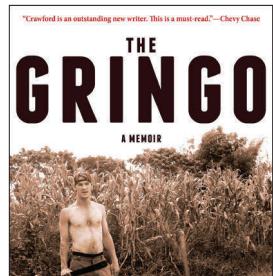
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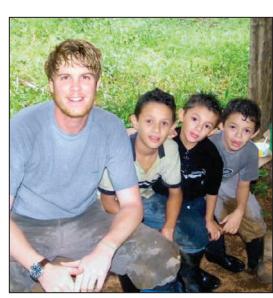
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Building A Stronger Community

The world needs more of what the Peace Corps represents

by Glenn Blumhorst



NPCA President Glenn Blumhorst (RPCV Guatemala), Congressman John Garamendi (RPCV Ethiopia), and board chair Tony Barclay (RPCV Kenya) during the Feb. 28, 2013 NPCA National Day of Action.

It is most gratifying for me to serve as the newly appointed president of the National Peace Corps Association (NPCA), a role that brings me back “home” to the Peace Corps community. Since my own Peace Corps Volunteer service in Guatemala 25 years ago, I have wholeheartedly embraced the common vision of the Peace Corps and the NPCA.

It's exciting to be a part of the NPCA leadership team and a diverse membership committed to our mission of connecting and championing Peace Corps community members in ‘bringing the world home.’

We believe that more than ever, the NPCA has a vital role to play in the national and global arena. A robust and active constituency with an influential voice empowers the NPCA in its strategy of connecting, informing and engaging.

The NPCA has a rich history and a strong foundation upon which to build our promising future. Initiatives such as Africa Rural Connect, the Global Education Program, the Mentoring Program, National Day of Action, Next Step Travel and Peace Corps Connect gatherings have proved to be highly

popular and effective in furthering our mission. We are poised to scale up and replicate.

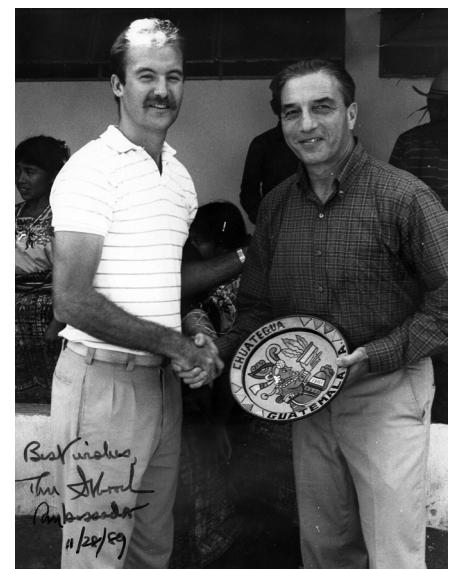
As an umbrella for more than 140 affiliate organizations, the NPCA endeavors to strengthen and promote member groups, providing tools and support for locally-driven initiatives through synergistic interaction. Our strength lies in our numbers and in collective effort—the lifeblood of the NPCA is an invested and involved membership.

Working in partnership extends our reach and impact. Clearly the Peace Corps is our foremost partner in our community and the Peace Corps' Third Goal will always be our First Goal. Our priority is to capitalize on our respective identities, synergies and complementarities.

The NPCA is your organization and your mission is our mission. If you are not an NPCA member, I encourage you to join now. Consider making a special contribution to the Find the 250K campaign or to a specific NPCA-sponsored program or initiative. Join me in our Director's Circle of major donors.



Glenn Blumhorst and Sen. Harris Wofford on Capitol Hill.



Peace Corps Volunteer Glenn Blumhorst with U.S. Ambassador Thomas Stroock, at the inauguration of a community project in Guatemala, circa 1990.

Together, we can ensure that the NPCA remains a vital leader and partner for the Peace Corps community.

Glenn Blumhorst

Glenn Blumhorst is the president of the National Peace Corps Association. He served in Guatemala from 1988 to 1991. Please send your comments to president@peacecorpsconnect.org.

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Group News Highlights

A look at what NPCA member groups are up to

by Jonathan Pearson

CALIFORNIA

On January 26th the **Northern California Peace Corps Association** (NorCal) hosted the 2013 Festival of Cultures at the Women's Club in Palo Alto, Calif. For three hours Peace Corps applicants, nominees, the general public and children from local schools were treated to exhibits, food, a fashion show, panel discussions and presentations by 50 Returned Peace Corps Volunteers. Palo Alto Mayor Greg Scharff gave the Festival's opening remarks. Later in the day NorCal held its Annual General Meeting and hosted a dinner fundraiser and chocolate tasting courtesy of Madécasse. NorCal raised more than \$3,000 from sponsorships and the dinner to pay for the costs of the Festival and to support more events like it in the coming year. Key planners of the event were Will Spargur, Jayne Booker, Laura Marshall, Frank Price, Kathryn Rato, Stephen Watkins, Janet Allen, Martha Stein, Madeline Wu and Katherine MacDougal.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Service was a key theme during the second inauguration of President Barack Obama. Thirty members of the **Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of Washington, D.C.** organized and participated in three service events during inaugural weekend. The group prepared a mural at an underserved school, worked with special needs children and helped prepare care packages for members of the armed forces deployed overseas. The service work of the RPCVs was included in a feature story that appeared on MSN.com.

FLORIDA

In Jacksonville, the **First Coast RPCVs** volunteered last December at the

Sulzbacher Center, northeast Florida's only provider of comprehensive services for homeless men, women and children. About ten members of the group helped prepare and serve dinner for the residents and the surrounding homeless population. The First Coast RPCVs first began this relationship when one of its members worked as development director at the Center and have partnered for the past three years.

MINNESOTA

RPCVs and others in the Minnesota Peace Corps community attended the **Minnesota Returned Peace Corps Volunteers' (MNRPCV) first Slideshow**

and Silent Auction Fundraiser at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, Minn. in November. St. Catherine's offers several master's degrees through the Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Program. Proceeds of over \$400 will go to the MNRPCV Small Grants Program. MNRPCV awarded \$3,600 in grants in 2012.

NEW YORK

In New York City, the RPCVs of the **Big Apple Corps** came together for an energetic and inspiring evening at the close of 2012 to determine how to distribute \$1,600 in funds raised through membership dues. Criteria include providing a focus on both



FLORIDA

On January 26, the **Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of South Florida (RPCVSF)** hosted more than 100 local children for a day of fun and education at Everglades National Park. Experienced naturalists (including RPCVs working in environmental education) and national park rangers guided the children on nature walks, teaching them to identify the different birds, alligators, and other wildlife. This was RPCVSF's 14th Annual Everglades Outing; each year RPCVSF invites children from homeless shelters and programs for disadvantaged youth to enjoy the chance to interact with rangers and guides in small groups, while learning about water conservation, local endangered species, and living a healthful life in balance with the South Florida ecosystem.

local and international needs, and supporting causes with high ratings on Charity Navigator. Four projects received \$400 each from the Greater New York RPCVs: 1) Partners in Health for work to improve health services, share information with NGOs and other countries, and alleviate health problems; 2) Project Zawadi's work to educate children in Tanzania; 3) The Fresh Air Fund, enabling New York City children to experience the joys and benefits of time away from a sprawling urban area; and 4) a Peace Corps Partnership project to protect butterflies in Mexico.

PENNSYLVANIA

On January 26, Kay Jennings, Volunteer Coordinator for the **Pittsburgh Area Peace Corps Association** (PAPCA), was presented with a Certificate of Service Appreciation for the volunteer work PAPCA does with Global Links, a medical relief and development organization



WISCONSIN

It can get a wee bit chilly in Wisconsin in the winter. But that doesn't slow down the **RPCVs of Wisconsin – Madison**. The 32nd annual Freeze for Food 5K/10K walk/run was held January 19 to raise money for Dane County's sister community in Colombia: the Peace Community of San Jose de Apartado. Partnering with the Colombia Support Network, the two groups worked together to raise around \$3,000 this year, with 183 runners/walkers, and 35 volunteers (including the core planning team of six people). In order that every penny raised from the race could go to the Peace Community, all expenses for the event were covered by the RPCV group from sales of the International Calendar.

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Around The NPCA

dedicated to promoting environmental stewardship and improving health in resource-poor communities, primarily in Latin America and the Caribbean. PAPCA members volunteered 118 hours in 2012 and have logged 1,204.5 hours overall. But that number may actually be higher because PAPCA has been volunteering with Pittsburgh based Global Links since the 1980s. One Saturday a month PAPCA members meet at Global Links' warehouse to pack up boxes of surplus medical supplies that are sent to hospitals in Haiti, Guatemala, Honduras, Bolivia, Cuba and other countries.

SOUTH CAROLINA

Another group, another running event, though this one is a somewhat warmer climate. The **RPCVs of South Carolina** helped promote healthy lifestyles last December by assisting with a 5K race for "Girls on the Run." The run marked the culmination of a 12-week program inspiring girls between the 3rd and 8th grades to be joyful, happy and confident. The program served 450 girls in Richland and Lexington counties.

KOREA

This year marks the end of a five-year Republic of Korea revisit program for Korea Returned Peace Corps Volunteers to demonstrate the country's appreciation for their service. With **Friends of Korea** acting as coordinator in the U.S., RPCVs are Korea's guests for five-day visits. Once there, they learn how much the country has changed and prospered since Peace Corps left in 1981, attend celebratory dinners and visit their former work sites. The last revisit trip is in October 2013. To date, more than 350 RPCVs have participated. Korea is the only former or current host country to recognize PCVs' contributions in this way.

In 2011, Friends of Korea, with the support of the Korean government and the Korean volunteer agency (KOICA), opened a photo exhibit in Korea, entitled "A Story of Volunteerism: Americans



COSTA RICA

On January 17 the Kiwanis Club of Washington, D.C. hosted the **Friends of Costa Rica** at the University Club to celebrate 50 years of Peace Corps in Costa Rica as well as the shared commitment to community service of Kiwanis and the Peace Corps. Costa Rican Ambassador to the U.S. Muni Figueres offered a keynote speech. Also invited were Acting Peace Corps Director Carrie Hessler-Radelet, former Peace Corps Director Aaron Williams, and staff of the National Peace Corps Association.

in Korea and Koreans in the World." The exhibit shows former Peace Corps Volunteers in Korea and current KOICA volunteers around the world. Friends of Korea subsequently held the exhibit in Honolulu, Hawaii; Washington, D.C.; New York, N.Y.; Chicago, Ill.; Los Angeles and Irvine, Calif.; Columbus, Ohio and Seattle, Wash. Additional locations are under consideration. In December 2012, the National Museum of Korean Contemporary History opened in Seoul. By 2016, the museum plans to have a permanent exhibit that focuses on the Peace Corps Volunteer presence 1967-1981, using RPCV-donated items. Friends of Korea will coordinate the project in the U.S.

MONGOLIA

Starting in 2009, the **Friends of Mongolia** has conducted a yearly winter holiday donation drive of clothes, toys and books for children in Mongolia. For the second year, the group has partnered with the Mongolian Cultural Center/ Mongol Soyeliin Tov. Collections came from individuals all around the U.S. and Canada. The Mongolian Community Association of the Washington D.C. area made significant donations. The group also received very generous

support from an international shipping company which agreed to ship at no cost more than 300 donated book. In all, more than twenty large boxes of books, clothes, school supplies, and more were shipped in January 2013. This year's beneficiary is a non-profit children's care center in Choibalsan called "Anna Home: All for Children." The center is supported in part by a currently serving Peace Corps Volunteer.

NATIONAL PEACE CORPS ASSOCIATION

Our thanks to the **115 RPCV groups** that agreed to sign an NPCA letter to President Obama. The letter, delivered to Obama administration officials by NPCA Board Chair Tony Barclay, Acting President Anne Baker and former RPCV Congressman Tony Hall asks the President to propose strong funding for the Peace Corps in his Fiscal Year 2014 budget request. The letter also put forth key criteria that the President should consider in nominating the next Peace Corps Director.

To see a complete listing of National Peace Corps Association member groups, visit www.peacecorpsconnect.org/resources/member-groups.

The Best Face of America

by Erica Burman

The best face of America.” It’s a phrase often used to describe the Peace Corps. It conveys the loftiest of ambitions, and implies the solemnest of promises: that the citizens who are selected to serve overseas as Peace Corps Volunteers not only embody the best qualities of our nation—idealism, hope, curiosity, creativity, generosity, confidence, compassion, a practical “can-do” spirit, a ready smile—but reflect all its diversity as well. Once overseas, those Volunteers are charged with helping “the people of other countries gain a better understanding of Americans;” with dispelling the notion that there is such a thing as a “typical” or “ideal” American.

This commitment to diversity—and to communicating our nation’s diversity—is baked into the DNA of the agency and can, no doubt, be traced to the values held by Peace Corps’ early leadership. Sargent Shriver, as president of the Chicago Board of Education, introduced the first school desegregation plan for Chicago in the 1950s. Harris Wofford—the first white male to enroll at Howard University Law School—was an early civil rights supporter and a personal friend of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (It was at Wofford’s urging that Shriver asked candidate Kennedy to place a supportive call to Coretta Scott King; a call that many believe ultimately swung the presidential election in Kennedy’s favor.) Wofford served as counsel to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, and later as President Kennedy’s Special Assistant for Civil Rights. Lawyer and civil rights leader Franklin H. Williams argued cases on behalf of the NAACP before being appointed by Kennedy in 1961 to assist Shriver in creating the

Peace Corps.

Speaking of those early days, political science professor and early Peace Corps staffer Theodore Vestal said, “Things were done. And the people doing them included many more women and minorities than were in the federal service at that time. The Peace Corps sought out African-Americans who composed 7.4% of the staff, compared to 0.8% in other federal agencies, and the percentage of women was impressive too.”

Today’s Peace Corps is undeniably diverse. Twenty-two percent of Volunteers identify themselves as members of a minority group; more Americans of color are serving than at any time in recent years. Seven percent of Volunteers are age 50 or older. Sixty-two percent of Volunteers are women, 38% men—a historic reversal from the 1960s and 1970s. Volunteers range in age from 19 to 82 years. And they come from all 50 states.

But how are we doing? What is it like to be a minority in the Peace Corps?

This issue of *WorldView* makes what

can only be the faintest of scratches into the complex subject of diversity in the Peace Corps.

Being a Peace Corps Volunteer is a funny thing. We come together as trainees for approximately eight weeks and then are dispersed as Volunteers for twenty-four months. Each of us undergoes a uniquely personal, transformative experience that, paradoxically, despite its uniqueness, powerfully connects us to the 220,000 other Americans who can say that they have served as Peace Corps Volunteers. These few magazine pages are not enough to contain our tens upon tens of thousands of stories, observations and insights.

But it’s our hope that this issue will serve as a starting point for reflections and conversation, for walking in the shoes of our fellow Volunteers and Returned Volunteers.

Erica Burman (The Gambia 1987-89) is the director of communications for the National Peace Corps Association and editor of WorldView.

PEACE CORPS PARTNERS

The Peace Corps has developed formal partnerships with several domestic and international nonprofit organizations and federal agencies to, among other things, aid in strengthening diverse recruitment. Partners include:

- AARP
- American Indian Higher Education Consortium
- Asian & Pacific Islander American Scholarship Fund
- Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities
- Hispanic Scholarship Fund
- Thurgood Marshall College Fund
- United Negro College Fund
- United Negro College Fund Special Programs
- Phelps Stokes Fund

Learn more at <http://www.peacecorps.gov/resources/returned/carrers/partners/>.

Serving While Black

Returned Volunteers create a support system

by China Dickerson

In his *The Soul of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Dubois—American sociologist, historian, civil rights activist, Pan-Africanist, author and editor—introduced the theory of double consciousness. Dubois describes African-Americans as being caught between a self-conception as an American and as a person of African descent, “a two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings ... two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”

Being black in America often forces me to realize, I am not just an American; I am an African-American. When the Peace Corps invited me to serve in El Salvador, I was hoping for some relief. In serving abroad, I was hoping I would finally be treated as just an American. I believed Salvadorans would see me as an American despite my complexion; there would be no double consciousness. However, the people of El Salvador were quite familiar with the issues of race relations in America and instead of referring to me as a *Gringa* or “American,” they called me *Negrita* or *Morenita*, meaning black or brown. They had their ideas about what comprises Black culture: rap music, slavery, cornrows, big lips, and wide hips. I should have not been totally surprised by their preconceived notions; human beings group and make associations. Racism crosses borders. In South Carolina, I am followed around in stores; in El Salvador, the same.

I was the only African-American out of about 32 Volunteers in my group. My fellow Volunteers thought all of us were being treated differently because we were Americans. However,



China and local children, Maiza and Victoria, during a children's dental workshop. China's church donated 100 toothbrushes and tubes of toothpaste; with the town doctor she taught the children the importance of oral hygiene.



Black Peace Corps Volunteer mixers are a chance to socialize, ask questions.

they missed that my experience as an African-American was different. White Americans are often welcomed in underdeveloped countries, seen as saviors; African-Americans, not so much. Some black volunteers tell of how when they first arrived at their site, the

host community was disappointed that they were not getting a white Volunteer.

Currently, about 5% of Peace Corps Volunteers are African-Americans. In the United States, as of 2010, African-Americans make up 12.6% of the population. The correlation in numbers

may be why the African-American experience abroad isn't much different from that in the United States. As a minority anywhere, one is sure to experience some discrimination based on stereotypes.

Realizing the similarities in the difficulties experienced by black Peace Corps Volunteers, Vance Whitfield (El Salvador 2003-05) created the now almost 500-member Facebook group, Black Peace Corps Volunteers (BPCV). Says Vance, "I wanted to create an open and candid space where [African-Americans] could encourage and be encouraged by one another. As people of color, our experience as Americans in the Peace Corps undoubtedly is unique, so I wanted those experiences to add value and be enriching to each other. Once the group was active I was excited to see how many prospective black Volunteers freely shared their fears and questions about serving, and more excited to see

the support they received."

As a member and now administrator of the group, Elijah Hunt recalls that when he first joined the group, "the BPCV group helped me with my morale [while serving] and I found camaraderie among the other members of the group."

To keep the motivation going, in 2011 I took a cue from Vance and began hosting monthly mixers in Washington, D.C. Similar to Vance, I wanted African-Americans contemplating joining the Peace Corps to have a space where they could have their most intimate and passionate concerns addressed by African-American Returned Peace Corps Volunteers.

Peace Corps makes it known to you before you commit and sign on the dotted line that it will be "the toughest job you'll ever love." I knew the service would be tough—and I loved my service. I would not change my experience for the world because it made

me a better person. What is important is that Peace Corps understands the challenges its minority Volunteers face, so it can help make the transition easier and offer an attractive overseas service option for more people. A Volunteer's story of their experience should not be, "I had a good experience but..." A Volunteer's story should be, "I had a great experience and everyone should join; all Americans should commit to serve the less fortunate abroad and the Peace Corps is the way to do it!"

Originally from Charleston, S.C., China Dickerson (El Salvador 2007-09) aspires to be an advocate for the marginalized and underserved. She is a law student at Howard University School of Law and law clerk at The White House, Office of Management and Budget, Office of the General Counsel. For more about China Dickerson, visit: <http://doubleconsciousnessq.wordpress.com/>.

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Yovotude

Navigating race in Benin

by Corey Quinlan Taylor

The issue of race as an African-American Peace Corps Volunteer is never merely "black and white." Instead there exists an undercurrent of swirling gray areas: some so subtle to almost evade notice by everyone except the black Volunteer sitting next to you, or so blatantly shocking to warrant an apology that's sometimes not given at all. For me, this was especially so during my service in Benin, West Africa.

There were complexities in my relationship with the people of Benin, in terms of their expectations and, interestingly enough, in the way I was treated juxtaposed with the way white Peace Corps Volunteers were treated. At the same time, I gradually began to see how some white Volunteers perceived our agency as a whole, in service to the people of Benin.

A typical scenario would occur at a roadside restaurant. Whether it was during my first year of service, or in the final weeks of my tour, the same scene often happened. Five or so Peace Corps Volunteers would be enjoying pounded yam with some meat sauce, talking about work or the events of our week, when we'd be approached by a Beninois, who would ask to marry one of the Volunteer women, or occasionally a Beninoise female would make the same request to one of the guys. It was all in jest, and after a bit of small talk, the propositioning stranger would be on their way.

"People in my village are always asking to marry me," one female Volunteer would say.

"Yeah me too, a *Mama* (an old local woman) felt my hips and said I should meet her son," another would reply.



Corey with members of his Beninois family.

"Marry the white Volunteers, and go to *Yovotome*, the Land of *Bon Chose* (Good Things)!" another would declare.

And chuckles would ensue around the table.

My annoyance stemmed from one basic fact: we weren't all white. During my service, out of the approximately 110 Volunteers, there were four Indian-American Volunteers, one Latino-American Volunteer, one Japanese-American Volunteer, one Korean-American Volunteer, and at least ten African-American Volunteers, spread across four training groups during a two-year period. And yet, there was this perception that white Volunteers were like prizes to attain, to marry, and go to America for "good things."

Yovotome was a euphemism for the West, whether the United States or Europe. It stemmed from the root word *yovo*, a word in Benin for foreigner, but more often than not, used to identify white people. It was also applied to African-Americans.

The frustrating irony was that, yeah—that's probably what a few Beninois actually wanted: to marry a white person and go to the West. But I'm equally certain that the majority would have preferred to live their lives in their home country. Overall, both sides,

the Volunteers and the Beninois, were buying into this stereotype.

Now for the record, many of my most solid friends were white Volunteers who served with me. They treated me with respect and as an equal. And Volunteers of any race should not be treated as a homogeneous group, in temperament or integrity—attitudes are different. Yet at least once a month, I would hear white Volunteers referring to Peace Corps Volunteers in general as "the Whites." It was never malicious, nor expressed in a bigoted way. Yet there was obliviousness in saying that. It ignored how heterogeneous we were as a team, as a group. It negated our American diversity.

There were also times when the complexities of that racial dynamic would be expressed by the Beninois as well. On several occasion at restaurants, if I were alone, Beninois waiters would pass me over for service in favor of German, French, and American expatriates—all white. When I would protest this, by the third passing over, I'd finally receive service. It was almost like there was a hierarchy of being a Yovo, mixed with residual deference from colonial times.

I asked my friend Caroline Shenaz Hossein-Sen about this. She had served in Benin with me.

"When I first got to my village, local people seemed disappointed/sad that they did not have a *vrai yovo* [true yovo]," Caroline said. "I was the *café au lait*, or *pomme de terre* [potato], meaning that I looked brown but acted like a *blanc* [white]. I think reactions varied. Folks with more education knew about the African slave trade to the Americas ... my Afro-Caribbean mum visiting was also a big hit."

Despite this initial disappointment, Caroline described how the relationship with her village improved.

"I think I connected with Beninese people," she said. "Food, style, reminded me of people I know; so many similarities to the Caribbean. I still go back to Benin and keep in close touch; there was a bond. But I was there to work, and boy did I do that."

Overall, there are no simple solutions in addressing the issue of race within the context of international development. Even after continuing a career in this field, it wasn't uncommon for me to see mostly white project management staffs in development agencies, with black staff members working mostly on the administrative end, with the exception of African consultants working in the African division. But perhaps the first step to addressing this issue is to talk openly about it, rather than avoiding such honest discussions for fear of how

DIVERSITY RESOURCES

- **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Peace Corps Alumni** – <http://lgbRPCV.org>
- **Black Peace Corps Volunteers** – <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2988255136>
- **Asian and Pacific Islander Peace Corps Volunteers** – <https://www.facebook.com/groups/190316381067524>
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- **Diversity Abroad** – <http://www.diversityabroad.com>

uncomfortable it may be.

"I wished white volunteers understood the concept of skin privilege," Caroline said. "Many walked around with a sense of entitlement that was grating.... Maybe I was *bien integree* [well integrated] and was defensive of a beautiful people and place."

This discussion is long overdue, and I hope that it happens to better fulfill all

three goals of Peace Corps and to more accurately represent those who take up the call of service.

Corey Quinlan Taylor (Benin 1997-99) was a Small Enterprise Development Volunteer in the town of Save (Sah-veh), in Benin. He taught farmers and female cooperatives during his service.

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Q&A with Michael Learned

President of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Peace Corps Alumni group

by Adrienne McCloud

When the theme for the spring issue of *WorldView* was chosen, we knew that it had to include an interview with Michael Learned, president of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) Peace Corps Alumni group. In addition to Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs), the group that also strives to connect with prospective Volunteers, currently serving Volunteers, former and current staff, and family and friends. Their website (www.lgbRPCV.org) provides the locus for communication with members around the world and includes resources for applicants considering the Peace Corps and training staff, vignettes of lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender life in a developing country, and a listing of the group's accomplishments over the years.

Q: Michael, what was your experience like as a gay Peace Corps Volunteer?

A: "I was a Volunteer in the very early days of Peace Corps (1963-65). During these early years Peace Corps would not select an applicant/nominee who was known to be gay or lesbian. So, I was very closeted during my time in Malawi. Very much an experience of the times."

Q: How did the LGBT Peace Corp Alumni group come about?

A: During Peace Corps' 30th Anniversary in 1991 several lesbian and gay Peace Corps staff and some of their lesbian and gay RPCV friends were disheartened by the lack of acknowledgement of the contributions they had made. About the same time, RPCV Jim Kelly, who was working on a graduate degree, conducted a survey of all the lesbian and gay RPCVs he could find. The nature of the survey and his thesis, which came out of it, described the experiences and frustrations of gay and lesbian Volunteers. These two events brought people together and LGBT RPCVs was formed.

Q: What have been the major accomplishments of the group?

A: We have openly solicited policy change and influenced it: the inclusion of sexual orientation in Peace Corps' non-discriminatory policy in the mid-1990s, allowing healthy HIV positive people to serve as Volunteers—this occurred about 5 years ago—and

accepting transgender people as Volunteers. And we have openly encouraged Peace Corps to place same sex couples together as Volunteers where they can be safe. I am convinced that this policy change will come soon.

Q: What changes have you seen in the Peace Corps community?

A: Peace Corps has slowly evolved. It added sexual orientation to the non-discriminatory policy in the mid-1990s, but the pace of change has been the greatest in the last ten years. Peace Corps actively encourages the formation of LGBT-related Volunteer support groups in countries around the world, and they are quite common now.

Q: The NPCA offers a mentoring program for recently returned Volunteers, how is the LGBT mentoring program different?

A: By using information from our web site (mentor page) and our listserv, LGBT applicants, nominees, and PCVs can contact others who can advise them on the environment in various countries and answer their concerns. Our mentor program has been in place for years and is our most successful program.

Q: Who developed the "Safe Zone" training materials?

A: "They were developed by LGBT PCVs in the field, and include complete materials such as PowerPoint slides. Training packets are from Latin America, both French and English speaking Africa, and one from an Arab speaking country.

Q: How does the group support PCVs coming out to their Host Country National (HCN) friends and family?

A: Advice is given on an individual basis based on the country and the status of homosexuality in that country. We also refer individuals to articles on our website that deal with this issue. Most LGBT PCVs do not come out to their local community. But most are out to their PCV colleagues and at least some of HCN staff.

Q: What story has stood out to you as President?

A: We have dozens of articles on our website that are inspirational. One by Elizabeth Tunkle, the first HIV positive Volunteer to serve (in Lesotho), is a real inspiration. Articles by two transgender Volunteers tell quite brave stories.

Q: Do you ever see the group as not being necessary?

A: Not sure. We have been influential in changing and opening up policies that provide support and respect for LGBT PCVs and there's still a way to go.

Adrienne McCloud (Benin 2006-09) is the program assistant for membership and development at the National Peace Corps Association. As a Rural Community Health Volunteer in Kolokonde, a medium sized village in northern Benin, she counts as one of her biggest accomplishments the completion of a USAID grant to teach 100 host country nationals how to properly build 50 latrines.



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Open Secrets

Navigating gay identity in Paraguay

by Manuel Colón and Fiona Martin

Do you recall the Hans Christian Anderson tale “The Emperor’s New Clothes?” It is a story of two “tailors” who promise a vain Emperor an exquisite suit of clothes made from fabric invisible to anyone who is unfit for his position or “hopelessly stupid.” The swindling tailors mimic dressing the Emperor, who cannot see the cloth but pretends he can for fear of appearing unfit for his position. The Emperor then marches in procession before his subjects, who play along with the pretense. Suddenly a child in the crowd, too young to understand the desirability of keeping up the pretense, blurts out that the Emperor is wearing no clothes and others take up the cry. The Emperor cringes, suspecting the assertion is true, but continues the procession anyway.

That story exemplifies what an open secret is. How many times have you heard about *Municipalidades*, or *Comités* that are ran by corrupt leaders, yet they continue being elected? Or youth leaders who are having inappropriate relations with students, yet haven’t lost their job? Or spouses who have extramarital relations, yet will not divorce? It’s information that is well known throughout a community, but isn’t spoken aloud because of the power that said information contains. Overt acknowledgement may encourage and sometimes require the knowledge holders to take action of what they already know, but were purposefully ignoring.

While open secrets like this, and others, make work and life difficult, they actually serve as a positive way for some Peace Corps Volunteers to serve safely and productively.

While applying to Peace Corps,



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On November 2, 2011 Peace Corps - Paraguay hosted its first ever Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender ally training with 16 participants, Volunteers and staff, in attendance. The training came as a response to the 2011 All Volunteer Survey that stated roughly 25% of the incidents of harassment received by Volunteers as a result of their sexual orientation came from either Volunteer peers or staff. Jopara, Paraguay's Volunteer diversity group, decided to step in and move forward with organizing and facilitating a training which covered topics such as facts and history of LGBT events and legislation, correct terminology usage, a guided experience of the coming out process, and an overview of the in-country LGBT resources.

I received a call from the Paraguay country desk in Washington, D.C. with some follow up questions regarding my interview and application. Near the end of the call, as we were wrapping up, the women on the line asked me, “you are comfortable staying in the closet for two years, right? The country you are being invited to isn’t that open to homosexuality. You’ll have to keep it a secret.”

I sat in the cubicle of my summer job and calmly tried to process this blunt, and rather awkward, turn of the

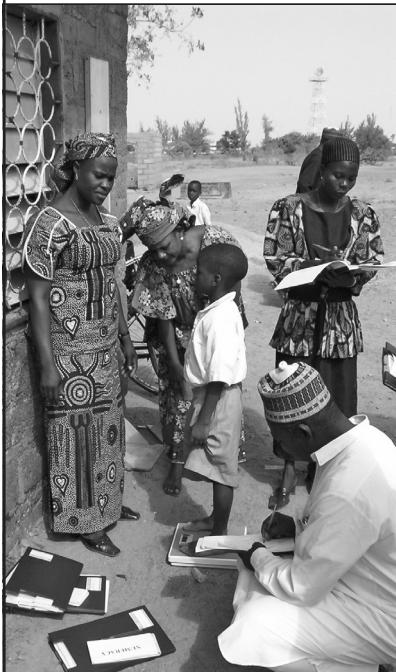
conversation. Hesitantly, not sure who might overhear my response, I said, “Well, I suppose. But, I’m pretty gay. Like, even if I didn’t tell anyone, it wouldn’t be too hard to guess.”

That was the quickest, most professional response I could come up with, as I thought about my voice, speech patterns, gestures, and general comportment that are usually a dead giveaway for my sexual orientation (and had been for many years). She politely quipped back, “Oh, don’t worry about that. Those non-spoken cues are things



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we pick up from a cultural context; the country you're going to isn't exposed to much gay culture, so the cues don't communicate the same things."

Reflecting on that phone conversation at this point in my service, I wonder what the desk officer really meant to communicate. I initially understood her to mean that no one will ever suspect I was gay and would just fly under the radar, which is definitely not the case. I'm confident that several of my community members know that I'm gay, without me ever having told them. During an *asado* at my house, during a story, my Paraguayan housemate said "Yeah, and I have a gay cousin. But, not gay like you Manú..." and continued on nonchalantly. I, however, sat there in an utter stupor for about ten seconds, food hanging from my fork, as many things ran through my mind: 1) He knows I'm gay. 2) How did he find out? 3) When did he find out? 4) Who else knows? He dropped that bomb in the conversation and carried on really casually. In that instant, I understood what the desk officer really meant in that call; people will know that I'm gay, will share their suspicions with others, but they'll simply add that information to their list of other open secrets and carry on with their lives.

One strategy in addressing open secrets is to do so indirectly. Recently, I was requested to be at a meeting to help plan *Día de la Juventud* events with the *Muni*. However, the conversation got derailed from whom to invite to speak about health and wellness, to making sure that we don't get anyone who would come and talk about sexuality. Not that they didn't value a safe-sex and HIV-AIDS *charla*, but they didn't want a situation where a *puto* would come and say that homosexuality is a normal, healthy lifestyle. They begin to discuss how lesbians and gays should not have rights; that they shouldn't be allowed to marry or raise children.

Once again, I found myself paralyzed by shock, blankly staring at my computer screen, where I was previously



Co-authors Fiona and Manuel, Returned Peace Corps Volunteers who served in Paraguay.

taking notes, with my fingers now lying flat on the keyboard. I sat there for ten minutes, listening to people who I considered friends and professional work counterparts dissect and discuss my value and worth as a human being based solely on who I love. I had been curious why I was invited to the meeting in the first place, and began to wonder if my presence was specifically requested for this very exchange. Non-confrontationally discussing my sexual orientation, in such a passive manner, allowed them to air their disapproval without the burden of actually taking action. If they were to openly acknowledge the "secret," they would be expected to do something about it, at the very least shun me, and by doing so, potentially lose a valuable and productive member of the team.

But the real impetus to write this essay was my most recent exchange with a good local friend at my site. As I was lying in my hammock, he stumbled over in his mid-afternoon drunken stupor (which is all too common) and asked "Manuel, you're a pacifist, right?" to which I responded, "Yeah, I guess so."

He followed up with, "Good. So am I. But, can you defend yourself, like if you needed to? In a fight?"

I was unsure of where the conversation was going and imagined that shortly he'd slap me in the head and run away giggling. So I stood up out of the hammock to demonstrate my clear height advantage and said, "Well, I'm a big guy, I sure think I can defend myself."

Instead, he let me know that he was glad I could defend myself if needed—and also that I could count on him if I should ever find myself in a sticky situation. He went on to recount having witnessed the hatred, discrimination and even violence, his lesbian sister had received growing up. He assured me that if I ever experienced this in my time here in Paraguay, he would have my back. And to remember that there were good, respectful Paraguayans, like himself. It was after this exchange, I began to ponder the complexity of the open secret.

Open secrets can be great. They allow me, and other lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual (LGBT) Volunteers, to safely live and work in Paraguay with minimal burden. Open secrets allow us to retain our identity and behavior but with the understanding that we must remain silent and never demand public recognition and approval. There is an unspoken agreement: we won't

say anything if you don't say anything; which is the basis of every open secret.

However, open secrets are also damaging. They contribute to the sequestering of positive imagery of gay citizens, a "glass closet," if you will. I am unable to counteract the pervasive, harmful rhetoric of gay men being pedophiles and sole carriers of HIV because despite being a successful working professional, I am not officially out; my sexual orientation cannot be publicly acknowledged. My passion for social justice and diversity advocacy is silenced and squelched where it should matter the most: my personal identity. Not only are we unable to serve as positive counterexamples to the pervasive and damaging stereotypes about gays, we are also unable to serve as positive role models to youth just now coming to terms with their sexuality. A culture of open secrets allows and encourages passiveness of the status quo, rather than challenging ignorant or bigoted ideology.

Complacency about the status quo creates a complicated environment, not only for members of the LGBT community, but as conveyed in my last anecdote, even for allies. There are situations, where LGBT Volunteers are clearly rendered powerless. However, these situations are opportunities for allies to stand up and do what we cannot. Say something when it is too delicate or dangerous for us to do so. Hearing someone who is a confirmed heterosexual speak up in disagreement to homophobic comments carries much more weight than the comments of someone living an "open secret;" it's also safer for an ally to speak up, and less likely to result in site complications.

There are two very simple choices to be made in situations like these. Similar to the Emperor's ministers and educated townspeople, we can stay silent and allow an open secret to parade through our society inserting its bigoted self, unchecked, into our lives. Or, with the purity and sense of equality of a child, we

can actively challenge the status quo and bring attention to what is wrong, and demand it be corrected. So, next time you see a naked man walking down the street...are you going to say something?

The article was originally published in The Kuatiañe'e, a quarterly magazine produced by Peace Corps Paraguay Volunteers. It has been edited for

publication in *WorldView*.

Manuel Colón, from Chicago, Ill. served as an Environmental Education Volunteer in the city of Areguá in the Central department of Paraguay. Fiona Martin, from Bloomington, Ind., served as a Crop Extension Volunteer in the community of Punta Suerte, Calle Arroyense in the San Pedro department of Paraguay.



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Skin Deep

by Ravi Shah

After months of anxiously waiting, I was overwhelmed with excitement and relief when I saw a large Peace Corps envelope in my mailbox. I opened it up and the first thing that I saw, to my surprise, was a letter about the challenges of being a minority serving in Ukraine. While I appreciated the letter and its attempt at assuaging concerns of serving in Eastern Europe, my feelings of excitement were replaced by apprehension and uncertainty.

I knew being a minority abroad would be challenging, but it had never occurred to me, perhaps naively, that my life could be in physical danger—the letter had noted instances where minorities were attacked—or that I could be prevented from making an impact and assimilating into my future community because of the color of my skin. I put down the letter and immediately started contacting colleagues, friends, and acquaintances of color that had served in the Peace Corps. The Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) shared that any prejudice that I may experience in Ukraine would be perpetrated by a few, and that the actions of those few would not reflect the majority of Ukrainians. Most Ukrainians have not had much exposure to different minorities and cultures outside of American movies and TV shows. The RPCVs reassured me that my experience, while challenging, would be an unforgettable and transformational opportunity in which I would represent the diversity of America. Soon after receiving the envelope, my fears subsided and I was mentally ready for the challenge of serving as a minority in Ukraine; the only thing left to worry about was how this California born-and-raised Indian would survive Ukrainian winters. Where



Ravi with his host family near the end of pre-service training in Ukraine. (2007)



Ravi with his co-teacher Yulia (middle) and her mentor (left), having a traditional Crimean meal to celebrate Yulia's birthday. (2008)

could I find a coat and snow shoes in the middle of summer in California?

As soon as I arrived in the tiny village where I would spend three months training to be a Volunteer, I was immediately made to feel welcomed and protected by my host family. They were so interested in my family's history and my life in America. The welcoming nature of my host family would go on to characterize most of my Peace Corps experience. Little did I know that my experience in Ukraine as a minority would be defined by only two instances of prejudice, one because of the color of my skin and the other because of the condition of my skin.

About a month into training, our training group was finally allowed to venture into the capital city of Kiev. Mindful of pickpocketing on the Kiev subway, I left my Peace Corps passport with my host family, and brought along with me my Ukrainian ID card and a copy of my passport and visa. I was unaware that I would be heading into Kiev on the same day that Kiev police received an intelligence report about a possible Pakistani spy operation. At my first subway station, a police officer approached my group and asked for my documents. Unconvinced by my passport copy, he took me to the police office in the metro station. As I sat in the

Photos Ravi Shah

corner waiting for Peace Corps security to intervene on my behalf, I saw other minorities of color enter and exit the station. It was obvious that the police were targeting any person with dark skin. Unable to get in contact with Peace Corps security, my language instructor intervened and essentially flirted our way out of my temporary "detainment." While this experience turned into a story for the ages, I knew I had to be more careful while in public, especially in major cities.

My second and most profound experience of prejudice was, as far as I know, not racially motivated, but rather driven by ignorance and fear of my eczema, a genetic skin condition. Two months into training, the opportunity every Volunteer is waiting for arrives: a site visit to the community he or she will call home for the next two years. This meant that I would be traveling by myself and relying on my language skills for the first time, adding to the stress I was already feeling about meeting my new host family and school. From my perspective, everything was going really well. My host family seemed very interested in my life and family; my host grandmother even sang Hindi songs to me from her favorite Indian movies she saw as a child. After what I thought was a successful trip, I said goodbye to my would-be host family and school and made the 23-hour trip back up to the capital city of Kiev. When I returned, my regional manager immediately contacted me and told me that I would not be returning to my site.

I would later find out that my host family was concerned about my eczema, which had flared up on my face. The family had told the principal of the school, who then contacted Peace Corps to turn me down. Being discriminated against because of my eczema was not something I expected or was prepared for. As I waited for a new site placement, I struggled to accept what had happened. Thankfully, two weeks later, I would be matched with an amazing site and teacher, who herself has a visible

skin condition. After meeting her at our swearing-in ceremony, I knew I had found my home for two years.

Aside from attracting stares from strangers wondering who I was and where I came from, the rest of my Peace Corps experience went smoothly. Neither the color nor the condition of my skin prevented me from assimilating into my community, making lifelong connections, and learning to love—and now miss—the food. I look forward to going back to my community in Ukraine, my second home. Looking back on my

experience in Ukraine, I would not have it any other way.

Ravi Shah served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Ukraine from 2007 to 2009 teaching English as a second language. After returning to California, Ravi received his Masters in Public Administration with an emphasis in nonprofit management from the University of Southern California. He currently works for Community Partners, a Los Angeles-based nonprofit, where he provides technical assistance to emerging nonprofits.

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Asian in Morocco

by Elizabeth Chon

When I first accepted my invitation to serve in Morocco, my mother was not immediately keen about the idea of me spending two years in a rural community. Her reasoning was a legitimate concern and caused me some anxiety too; I am a Chinese-American, a minority. How would I be viewed in a Muslim country? Would my community be receptive to me? What dangers existed that could be a concern to my safety? What are the challenges that I would have to overcome as a minority? Would I have to wear a *hijab* for two years, covering my skin and face to avoid harassment?

As I began my service in my final site, I was afraid of how I would be perceived as an Asian-American. Many of my community members approached me questioning whether I was truly American. I heard statements ranging from “But you do not have blue eyes or yellow hair. You cannot be American” to “You are Asian. You cannot be American.” The perceptions of Americans that my community members had were what they saw through American film. Yet over time my students, counterparts, and local community members began to understand that Americans could not be labeled under one category.

Through my primary work as an English teacher at my local youth center, I was able to convey to my students, both children and adults of both sexes, the diversity that America has. Having deep discussions about the differences between American and Muslim culture not only gave me a better understanding of the country I was serving in, but also helped me understand the perception of foreigners towards Americans. Although my first few months took a lot of



Elizabeth Chon

Elizabeth with four women from the local women's association. "These women accepted me with open arms and taught me how to sew and knit, as well as became my "girlfriends" at site."

patience, explanation, and cross-cultural understanding, I was able to gain the trust of my community.

With my community's growing trust and acceptance of who I was as an Asian-American, as a woman, and as a person, I was able to dress modestly without having to wear a *hijab* or conform entirely to their cultural ways. My community was able to accept my diversity, my culture, and my traditions. But more importantly, I felt safe in my community. I had community members and counterparts that I could rely on and who had extended their kindness and aid to me. It was an experience I had never felt prior to my service.

My two years in Morocco changed my life completely. My community taught

me the importance of extending your hand out to someone and not judging them firsthand. My community taught me how to be an effective Volunteer. But most importantly, my community showed me how important it is to spread your knowledge and education to others. And as my local counterpart and best friend once said, “*Incha’allah* (God Willing) one day we will all come together and be one.”

Elizabeth Chon served in Peace Corps Morocco from 2010 to 2012 as a Youth and Community Development Volunteer. She is currently awaiting decisions from graduate schools. She hopes to pursue a master's in Social Work with a focus on children and families.

Franklin H. Williams Award

On Sept. 21, 2012, nine returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) were presented with the Franklin H. Williams award during a ceremony at Peace Corps Headquarters. The award honors ethnically diverse Returned Volunteers who exemplify a commitment to community service and Peace Corps' third goal of promoting a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans. Award recipients were selected from each of the nine Peace Corps Regional Recruitment Offices nationwide.

Williams was an early architect of the Peace Corps. He worked at the agency from its inception in 1961 to 1963 and helped Sargent Shriver—the first Peace Corps Director—promote the agency and its programs to the world.

"These individuals have demonstrated a commitment to public service that reflects what it truly means to be a Peace Corps Volunteer," said Peace Corps acting Director Carrie Hessler-Radelet. "They have made efforts to generate awareness around the Peace Corps, provided assistance to Peace Corps' regional recruiting office staff

and worked to promote Peace Corps' third goal. Their dedication to service helps Americans across the country gain a greater understanding of the world."

The following Returned Peace Corps Volunteers are the 2012 Franklin H. Williams award recipients:

- Rodney Davis-Gilbert
(Micronesia, 1989-1991)
- Barbara Ferguson Kamara
(Liberia, 1963-1965)
- Leslie Jean-Pierre
(Guinea, 1994-1996)
- Rollin Johnson, Jr.
(Nepal & Burkina Faso, 2003-2005)
- Richard Lopez
(Mongolia, 2008-2010)
- Joshuah Marshall
(Morocco, 2007-2009)
- Rosette Nguyen
(Guinea, 1994-1996)
- Seth Pickens
(Haiti, 2001-2003)
- Jon Santiago
(Dominican Republic, 2006-2008)

Learn more about the Franklin H. Williams Award recipients at www.peacecorps.gov/resources/returned/staycon/williamsaward/.



The 2012 Franklin H. Williams award winners

Peace Corps

The Lillian Carter Award



Peace Corps

President Jimmy Carter and Peace Corps Deputy Director Carrie Hessler-Radelet presented the 2011 Lillian Carter Award to Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Diane Gallagher.

On a biennial basis, the Peace Corps bestows an award in memory of Miss Lillian Carter, who served in the Peace Corps as a senior in the 1960s. Nominees must have served in Peace Corps as a senior (age 50+) and shown a demonstrated commitment to the Peace Corps' third goal: to help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

2011

Diane Gallagher

Diane Gallagher, age 74, of Brookline, Mass. served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Cape Verde from 1990 to 1992 at the age of 53. After Diane's two years of Peace Corps service in Cape Verde, she worked as a Peace Corps recruiter in the Boston Regional Recruitment Office from 1993 to 1998. Today, Gallagher continues to promote Peace Corps by speaking at local schools, meetings, and events in the Boston area and sharing stories about her service with Peace Corps trainees about to depart for their host country.

2009

Dr. Catherine Taylor Foster

Catherine Taylor Foster became a Peace Corps Volunteer in Nepal (1996-1998) at the age of 59, building upon a lifetime of serving others. Foster accepted an invitation to serve as a community health Volunteer after nearly 40 years in nursing and climbing to the status of colonel in the Army Nurse Corps, U.S. Army Reserve. She has given numerous presentations about her Peace Corps experience and serves as a member of several Peace Corps and Nepali groups in the U.S.

2007

Shirley Maly

Shirley Maly was 60 years old in 1992 when she volunteered for the Peace Corps. In Uruguay she worked with women's groups, taught English and developed a local recycling program. Upon her return home, Maly promoted Peace Corps service as a viable retirement option. She also continued her volunteer work with various organizations in the San Juan Islands, Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru and Brazil. In June 2005, Maly published the picture storybook *Love Affair With The Americas* chronicling her experiences, including her Peace Corps service, in North, Central and South America.

Processing the Evacuation Experience

Addressing the lingering effects of abruptly closed programs on Returned Volunteers

by Jeanne Paul

For Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) whose groups were evacuated from their host countries because of political unrest, coups, or other widespread violence or risk of violence, the lingering effects of being separated from their sites, their work, and their host-country friends and counterparts can be complicated. It is natural that evacuees might feel, among other things, angry, sad, disappointed, resentful, or guilty. For all of them, a sense of not having fulfilled their commitment will probably never be completely erased. As time passes, these feelings can be integrated into their lives to a large extent (life does go on), but these Volunteers will remain a unique group among RPCVs.

As a licensed psychotherapist and the Coordinator of the Southeast Michigan RPCV (SEMIRPCV) Mentoring Program, I became concerned after talking with two former Volunteers from Mali, where Peace Corps closed its program early in 2012 as political violence began to spread in the northern part of that country. Both mentees spoke about their wish to talk with other evacuees who could understand what they had experienced and were going through now that they were back in the United States. I decided to hold a gathering to help evacuated RPCVs in Southeast Michigan begin to process their experiences. It is with the hope that other RPCV psychotherapists will make possible similar gatherings of evacuated RPCVs in other parts of the country that I write this.

On a Saturday afternoon in December 2012, four RPCVs who had served in Mali and two who had served in Honduras met at my home, where

they would not risk being overheard and could express their thoughts and feelings freely. The Mali participants had been in-country for varying lengths of time, from a few months to 21 months, and their projects varied. The Honduras RPCVs, a married couple, had been close to completing their service. Reactions to the get-together were positive, with some wishing that it had occurred closer to the time of their evacuation and some glad that they had had time to become increasingly aware of their feelings and thoughts about the experience.

We started by introducing ourselves and the evacuated RPCVs described

their sites and the circumstances of their evacuation. The group agreed that the Peace Corps had done a good job of carrying out the steps of the evacuation.

However, all of the evacuated RPCVs felt dismay that they had not been able to complete what they had set out to do—for some, their first professional endeavor after finishing their undergraduate education. Although they understood intellectually that circumstances had forced the evacuations, they felt let down and felt that they had let host country nationals down. One Honduras RPCV described the feeling as “having a sense of

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incompleteness." She said, "You commit to serve 27 months, and when you have to leave six, 12, or 18 months in, you feel like you haven't finished or achieved the goal you set out to accomplish. I felt like I didn't get the whole Peace Corps experience, and I didn't feel ready or prepared to come back."

Several of the RPCVs had served in the same country, but they experienced the evacuation very differently depending on how long they had been at their sites, the stages of their projects, whether they had had adequate time to say goodbye, and other issues. One participant said that it "was interesting to hear how different everyone's experience was, even among the other Volunteers who were evacuated with me." In Honduras, PCVs were told two weeks in advance that they would probably be leaving; in Mali, PCVs received little or no warning

of the evacuation. Some Mali PCVs who were in a city at the time were given permission to travel quickly to their villages and then to return immediately to the city. For others, no speedy transportation was available, and so they were unable to return to their sites. Since the host nationals had told the PCVs in their villages that they would be safe and would return soon, Malian denial prevented even those who were able to return to their sites from saying goodbye. One PCV had nearly reached the culmination of her project and was about to see it come to fruition when she was evacuated. Another was just beginning his second year, a time he felt he would see the "payoff" of the difficult work of his first year. Although a third had only been at her site briefly, she was dedicated to the Malians and loved living at her site; abrupt transfer to another country

to which she felt no connection and a project in which she was not interested turned out to be a disappointment.

All six had in common that they felt that they could have continued to live and work effectively at their sites without risk. The Mali RPCVs talked enthusiastically about visiting Mali in the near future in an effort to feel that they had somehow completed their commitment. One was planning to leave for a Peace Corps Response assignment in another country in January, and a second would leave shortly for a position with an NGO. Both expect to enter graduate school following these assignments, which they hope will give them a feeling of having completed a project.

The first few months back, when the Volunteers had expected to still be in-country, were disconcerting. They felt

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Health Justice

Returned Volunteers conduct survey on health impacts of service

by Felicia Kenney

In September 2003, I left a job as a computer programmer in New York City to become a Peace Corps Volunteer in Benin. I hoped after my service I could use my experience abroad to get a job overseas. In August 2004, I was medically separated from the Peace Corps with an extremely severe anxiety disorder and a variety of other problems. My psychologist and I believe that my mental health problems are due to the anti-malarial drug Lariam®, which was given to me during my service. I may never recover.

I am one of the Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) behind Health Justice for Peace Corps Volunteers, an ad hoc group formed in early 2012 that is trying to improve the support system for RPCVs who are ill or injured because of their service. We don't wish to harm the Peace Corps or exact revenge. We are simply trying to make sure RPCVs get the help they need to recover.

During a brainstorming session soon after our formation, our group decided that we couldn't really ask for anything concrete from the Peace Corps until we knew exactly what was wrong. Those of us who deal with the Federal Employees' Compensation Act (FECA), which provides workers' compensation for federal employees and RPCVs and which is administered by the Department of Labor (DoL), have experienced the problems with that program firsthand, but we didn't have any idea of what percentage of RPCVs were ill, were on FECA, or otherwise needed help. We decided to carry out a survey.

After much work, the survey went live online last August and ran until early December. With the help of the National Peace Corps Association and RPCVs

who spread the word, we gathered about 7,500 responses and more than 2,600 written comments.

The results showed some very troubling trends within the Peace Corps. Volunteer health and satisfaction with Peace Corps healthcare was definitely at a peak in the 1960's. In questions relating specifically to the Peace Corps and Volunteer health, 88% showed a negative trend since the 1960s. The Peace Corps has definitely been making an effort on some fronts, though. Seventy-five percent of the questions that asked about the Peace Corps and

how well it did in providing information, showed improvement over the decades.

The questions relating to the DoL and FECA were only asked of those who had FECA claims accepted. For these questions, there was rarely a clear trend by decade. Generally, the answers showed difficulty with most aspects of interacting with the DoL. For example, 73% of survey respondents said they have had difficulty getting bills covered by the DOL, and 70% indicated calls to the agency were not returned in a timely manner. However, on questions that

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Anthropology and the Peace Corps

Five decades of learning to learn about culture

by Anny Gaul

I remember sitting through Peace Corps staging and learning about Goals Two and Three—the cross-cultural learning and exchange goals of the Peace Corps. They sounded great—in fact, they were exactly what made Peace Corps such an appealing job in the first place. But I was also sure that my “real” purpose—the “job” itself—was that first, development-oriented, technical, and (let’s be honest) flashy Goal One. I had no illusions about “saving the world,” but I believed that if I worked very hard I could make a positive difference in my community through that first goal.

But the following 27 months convinced me that Goals Two and Three, far from being the feel-good consolation prize of Peace Corps service, are actually its greatest assets—and strengths from which all development organizations should draw inspiration. As I fretted about “making a difference” in my community, these goals provoked transformations within *myself*, leading me to view the world not in terms of making it better, but in terms of making it broader—and, as novelist Ana Menendez, describing her experience as a Fulbright fellow in Egypt, puts it, more complicated, too (read her remarks at <http://tomhealyfb.tumblr.com/post/26005260884/stories-in-the-wilderness-and-in-the-city>)

In this sense, Peace Corps has much in common with anthropology, the study of human cultures and societies. Both are marked by a commitment to long-term, grassroots engagement; both share an ethical commitment to prioritize the needs and concerns of the populations they work with. Both have also been forced to reckon with the implications of what it means to work with and learn



The author's Peace Corps site in Morocco.

from “others” in the midst of difference, hierarchy, and other imbalances of power.

Debates about these issues within anthropology have left their mark on the Peace Corps; this is nowhere more evident than in the history of its training approach. Although Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) have always participated in pre-service trainings, their location, content, and philosophy has evolved considerably. What was once an abstract, content-based model has given way to experiential learning, grounded in the types of communities where Volunteers serve and conducted primarily by members of their host cultures. The commitment to this kind of learning environment is in keeping with what anthropologist John Friedman calls the “hallmarks” of anthropology: long-term engagement “in localized, grassroots settings.” This, in part, has enabled anthropologists to question the arbitrary divides of “us” and “them” and grapple with the ultimately subjective

nature of our worldviews. And in a way, the Peace Corps has been drawing on these principles for decades.

Peace Corps’ explicit combination of cultural learning with technical work has always distinguished it from other development organizations. Reconciling cultural and local particularities with more technically-framed goals has been a gradual trend within the development field for decades; but the Peace Corps has forced Volunteers and staff to work at reconciling the two from the start. In an age of widely held beliefs about a “clash of civilizations,” careful attention to the relationship between culture and development has never been more important.

As Peace Corps trainings have been adapted—often in reaction to the needs of Volunteers themselves—they have enabled more nuanced understandings of cultural authenticity and a dialectical, rather than hierarchical, approach to development work. This, along with the practice of situating PCVs in a range

of local communities (rather than just capital cities) is what empowers them to uncover the complexities, nuances, and variations *within* their host cultures—not merely *between* their home and host cultures. Above all else, Peace Corps is a deeply humbling experience, one that leads PCVs to realize how much our values are the product of our home cultures and environments. PCVs are forced to respect local societies—not in an abstract, rhetorical fashion, but through the accountability that comes with living embedded in those societies for over two years.

In training we were told that in learning about a new culture, we would learn the most about our own. As “us” and “them” began to blur within myself over 27 months, my Peace Corps experience led me to reflect critically about my own identity, lifestyle, and perspectives. I was struck by the insufficiency of the categories—“Arab,” “Muslim,” “poor,” “traditional,” “African”—that the world had given me. This sort of reflection is essential to anthropology and grassroots development alike.

The Peace Corps is not perfect. But I believe in it still, because at its heart are experiences and relationships that foster the recognition of humanity over difference, and that teach us, as Americans, to challenge our assumptions about the way things are. In a world where people and ideas crisscross borders at lightning speed, and in which powerful voices urge us to divide humanity into “us” and “them,” the need for citizens shaped by these experiences has never been more urgent.

Anny Gaul (Morocco 2007-09) is a lifelong student of Arabic, gender, and all things food-related. She holds a B.A. from Yale and an M.A. in Arab Studies from Georgetown. She is currently on a Fulbright fellowship in Jordan and working towards a doctorate in Arabic and Islamic Studies at Georgetown. You can learn more about her passions at www.imiksimik.wordpress.com.



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Word on the Street

Georgia rallies behind Volunteers in the country's first national English spelling competition

by Susan Burkhart

A group of Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) in the Republic of Georgia, alongside thousands of students, teachers, volunteers and organizations, have joined together to successfully develop and implement the country's first-ever National English Spelling Competition (NESC).

The idea for the competition began over a year ago with education Volunteer Adam Malinowski. Like many education PCVs serving in Georgia and around the world, Adam found it challenging to motivate his students—learning for the sake of learning did not seem to resonate with many of his students. The need to make learning English more fun and engaging, as well as improve the government-mandated English learning experience, was clear. Knowing from experience that competition, certificates and accolades can be very effective at motivating students, Adam came up with the idea for a country-wide English spelling competition—one that would reward students and teachers for their hard work and celebrate their achievements in a public forum.

The competition is managed by the NESC Committee, which is comprised of six PCVs: Jack Brands, Education; Susan Burkhart, SEOD; Gus Davidson, SEOD; Shannon Knudsen, SEOD; Adam Malinowski, Education; and Caitlin McCulloch, Education; and Ilia Zukakishvili from the American Friendship Club. Beginning in the fall of 2011, countless meetings were scheduled and presentations were pitched to win the support of Georgia's Ministry of Education, Peace Corps, and other organizations that were needed to make the project feasible. Registration forms, databases, websites, marketing



Georgian students waiting to hear who will continue on to the next round.



3 winners of the regional level competition

and sponsorship materials, and a 745-word list comprised of English, Georgian, Russian, Armenian and Azeri, were created and distributed. Volunteers in the local schools and translators were recruited. Finally, with enough support garnered, the competition was announced in September 2012.

The competition was designed to take place in three stages: local, regional and national, with the top scoring students

from each level advancing to the next. Students from both public and private schools would compete in two groups based on grade level; tier one—grades 8-9; and tier two—grades 10-12.

Within a few days of the announcement, more than 50 schools had registered. By the end of the local level competitions that took place in late October, 171 schools and 2,460 students had participated, which far exceeded the

Photos Goodloe Hartman

Committee's expectations.

During the second week of December, more than 1,000 students from nine regions across Georgia participated in regional level competitions, which proved to be exceptional events that brought students from an assortment of villages and backgrounds together to indulge in a fun, educational activity. There were shouts of excitement and tears of disappointment as students were tested on their knowledge of the English language. With difficult words such as "inauspicious" and "correspondence," students who studied and prepared for the competition performed well above the rest. At the regional event in Tbilisi, PCV Gus Davidson provided interviews to six news stations, all of which aired during the evening news and online.

The 34 regional winners are scheduled to meet in Tbilisi on March 30 in hopes of becoming the first NESC Champion. Each finalist will receive an all-expense paid trip including hotel, food, and transportation, and have the chance to win great prizes including iPads, iPods, and English dictionaries and language courses, thanks to the U.S. Embassy, Education & Training International, and British Council.

Generous donations from a diverse and dedicated network of NGOs, government bodies, schools, individuals and the private sector made it possible to successfully implement the local and regional competitions. The U.S. Embassy has played an important role in promoting the event, assisting with media relations, and providing prizes. The American Friendship Club and American Corners have both contributed countless hours of their time and efforts to ensure the event is a success. In addition, the NESC's official sponsors—Free University of Tbilisi & Agriculture University of Georgia, Rico Credit, and World Vision Georgia—have provided monetary support, along with t-shirts, banners, snacks, and beverages, all of which have made this a memorable



Alexander Imedashvili, NewsGeorgia

PCVs Shannon Knudsen, Gus Davidson, and Adam Malinowski met with American Friendship Club's Director Ilia Zukakishvili to discuss the National Competition.

experience for students.

The original NESC Committee members will be leaving Georgia in July 2013, but they are confident that a new group of enthusiastic and dedicated PCVs, along with a growing number of Georgian partners, sponsors and organizations, will continue to improve the NESC and ensure that it becomes a

sustainable annual competition. Please visit <http://spellingcompgeorgia.tumblr.com> for the latest event information.

Susan Burkhart (Georgia 2011-13) is the marketing specialist for the NESC, as well as a Social Entrepreneurship and Organization Development Volunteer currently serving in Telavi, Georgia.

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Death of a Seamstress

by Terrie Schweitzer

"Stop crying," Stella chides me as we leave the house.

"I'm sorry. You send me home if you need to," I tell her. I have a feeling that Esther, her sister, is already uncomfortable about taking me along. Today we are burying their sister-in-law, and have just paid our respects at their bereaved brother's house.

We go to the mother's house. We enter the compound and they take me to the porch where the body has been laid out under a mosquito net. I don't recognize the woman, but I can't see her face well through the green netting.

At the sight of the body, Stella and Esther begin calling out and sobbing. "Ai-yay, ai-yay, ai-yay!" they cry. No one says to quit crying now. Not that it would help.

Yesterday, the doctor in Kumasi said she had bleeding in the brain, that she must have been in an accident, though she denied anything of the sort. Like most deaths here, there are more questions than answers. She leaves behind a toddler and a 6-month-old. She was just in her twenties.

Esther takes me to the side of the compound and makes me sit in a plastic chair. Most of the other women sit on benches lining the inner perimeter of the compound. Many are weeping, sometimes covering their faces with the black and red cloths draped over their shoulders. Sometimes one cries out with particular grief, either sitting in place or walking around the compound. I wish I understood more Nafaanra, even though I know the words would break my heart.

The men bring in the casket, a plastic white, blue and gold affair with painted plastic panels. The keening intensifies when the women see it.

**"Why have you left us?
Can't you see we are here working?
Won't you come back and work with us?"**

The men put it on the other side of the compound and leave.

A women's choir from the church enters, singing and playing a small drum and other percussion instruments. While they are singing, the brass band starts up their own music outside. Other women pull a sewing table into the compound, and set up three sewing machines. Someone brings small pieces of fabric. It is a cacophony as women enter, women move about and wail, and women sew.

At first I think they are going to sew some kind of shroud. Instead they skillfully fashion small blouses out of blue silk and a green print. The dead woman was a seamstress, and this is how her co-workers honor her. While they are sewing, the woman who owns the tailoring shop begins crying out as she walks around the table where the others are working. She gestures from the body to the women who are sewing, and calls out. I don't understand the words, but it feels like she is addressing her friend who has died. "Why have you left us? Can't you see we are here working? Won't you come back and work with us?"

The women finish the small garments and hold them up for a photographer.

Other women pull a large piece of fabric over the porch where the body lies and hold it in place. The casket is brought over. Women transfer the body into the casket behind the

curtain. Yet more people come into the compound and mill about. Another group is singing and the brass band outside is repeating the one dirge they seem to know. It is crowded and chaotic. It smells of grief, of the pungent odor of children playing hard outside all day in the heat and the dirt.

Men come and lift the casket; she is carried to the church on their shoulders as the brass band follows, along with the rest of us, under the bright African sun. After the church service, we process through town to the cemetery, and the casket is lowered into the earth.

In the coming months I will attend other funerals. I can't help but compare them to the funerals of my own culture. In America, we gather in honor of the departed: they have already gone somewhere else. And we remove ourselves from the experience in many ways, making grief seem to be only a condition of the mind. But here, we physically participate in each person's final rite of passage. The deceased are still very much with us. Though each one is a little different, the Nafara funeral is always passionate, visceral and corporeal. The thread of the individual is woven into the fabric of community, and tenderly the community sees each member to the other side.

Terrie Schweitzer (Ghana 2011-13) is a Peace Corps Volunteer in Ghana, working with cashew farming families.

Health Justice

continued from page 29

related to Peace Corps interaction with the DoL, there was definite improvement. Peace Corps assistance in dealing with the DoL can make a huge difference. We found that the likelihood of having a FECA claim accepted, for those who were eligible to file a claim, almost tripled with Peace Corps assistance.

We were surprised by a steady decline in Volunteer health reported in the survey. In looking for an explanation, we turned to the Peace Corps budget. When adjusting the annual Peace Corps appropriation for inflation and dividing by the number of serving Volunteers and trainees, we saw a general decline over the decades in dollars spent per Volunteer. One time period when the average Peace Corps budget per Volunteer appears to trend upward was in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This corresponds with a 1991 study into Volunteer health done by the General Accounting Office which indicated the Peace Corps was making efforts to improve and reform their health care system. We believe the Peace Corps can improve Volunteer health when that is a priority.

Our next step is to talk with the Peace Corps about our results. After years of being ignored, we were able to get in touch, through the National Peace Corps Association, with the Peace Corps administration. The current leadership has been incredibly supportive and has shown a real desire to improve the system for RPCVs.

Of all the recommendations we have, the first and foremost is that the Peace Corps do its own surveys. The Peace Corps could find a variety of problems and solutions, everything from areas that have a very high incidence of a certain illness, to problems that RPCVs have with the forms they receive for care in the U.S. The Peace Corps has taken some steps in this direction already, and we feel they should go much further. Based on our survey, other recommendations include

We don't wish to harm the Peace Corps or exact revenge. We are simply trying to make sure RPCVs get the help they need to recover.

addressing the exposure of agricultural Volunteers to toxic (and sometimes illegal) pesticides, ways to improve how the Department of Labor handles RPCV claims, reform of the AfterCorps/CorpsCare insurance system, and more.

Progress has been slow, but two big steps have been made. First, the Peace Corps now has five staff members working on post-service health needs,

there used to be one. Second, Lariam® is no longer being used as a first line malaria prophylaxis.

There is a long way to go, especially when one considers that 10% of the survey respondents answered "yes" when asked if they need immediate help for their health issues. But we believe that this survey gives us a good starting point. I never got to complete my service, but I hope that together with the other members of Health Justice for Peace Corps Volunteers, I can still do my part and help make sure that future generations of RPCVs get the support they need to get well.

Felicia Kenney (Benin 2003-04) is a founding member of Health Justice for Peace Corps Volunteers. To learn more about HJPCV, and the survey, visit www.healthjusticeforpeacecorpsvolunteers.org.



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Electric Love In The Jungle Hut

An excerpt from *The Gringo: A Memoir*

by J. Grigsby Crawford

And so you're here all alone doing close to nothing and the time passes. The days feel like they'll never end, but the weeks become a blur.

And here you are, measuring your life not in coffee spoons, but in baskets of laundry done by hand, walks down the dusty road to swim in the river, and cold showers that are good cold showers because it's hot as hell and from the bathroom you can look through the crack between the brick and the corrugated tin and see the green foothills surrounding the small valley.

You measure it in Saturdays spent drinking bad beer—except it's good beer because it's light and cold and you can drink it in the shade and watch the grainy TV in the corner while the women behind the counter ask you questions about the world.

You measure it in festivals, where you go drink and dance and then spend the next six months hearing your neighbors give recaps of every girl you danced with and are sure to impregnate and marry and stay with here forever.

There are good mornings, when the sun is shining in through the slats on the ceiling and you can feel the warmth heating up the bedroom and you can feel the soft wind pushing back through the torn curtains on the far side of the room. Then there are bad mornings when the rainwater is already flooding in through the bedroom door.

There is a calendar on the wall and turning the page over to a new month is nothing if not a satisfying and glorious feeling. But then you feel bad about counting down the months or weeks or days because you realize that this is real life, and counting the days is like marching toward death.

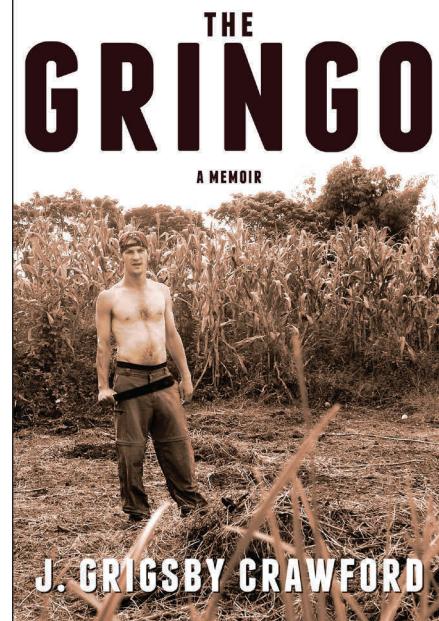
There are hikes into the jungle with clear creeks and tall trees and giant green leaves and gullies and caves with bats and rock walls and birds and monkeys in the distance. And there are waterfalls where you can take your clothes off and jump into water so cold that it takes your breath away.

There are letters home. In the beginning there were more and now you hardly have the energy to go through the motions of *explaining* everything. But you write some anyway.

On the hundreds of bus rides, you pass through towns that feel like the final frontier. And when it gets completely dark, you can press your cheek up against the cool glass of the window and see nothing but the stars overhead and the oil platforms blinking out across the Amazon. On these rides your mind spins through time, like a hand reaching into a shoebox to pull out the faded Polaroid memories. You listen to music on your iPod and then sometimes just look on in silence thinking about how naïve it was to imagine you could come down here and wake up one day knowing exactly what you wanted to do with the rest of your life. With the window cracked and nothing but bumpy open road ahead, you wish bus rides like this would never end.

And these are the moments of transcendence. These are the moments when you feel the levity in your chest—when you see all the people passing by and you can't help thinking that they are human and surely trying to just live their lives with some sort of dignity and that that's the only thing that really matters. Sure, soon enough you will go back to cursing them for being too slow or ignorant or rude or overly curious about you. But then you will have

"Crawford is an outstanding new writer. This is a must-read." —Chevy Chase



another transcendent moment in the back of a pickup truck or in the window seat of another bus ride or on another walk along the river, and you'll feel tremendous guilt about the bitterness and the anger and frustration.

Here you are at a going-away party for the beautiful doctor who originally dealt with the crippling pain in your man plumbing—which had you in severe pain for over six months—and gave you the injection at the community health center. Some of the men there are talking about how pretty she is and one of them turns to you and says, among a series of winks and nods, "Yeah, Grigsby, you should tell *la doctora* that you have the same problem"—he points to your balls—"and that you need her to 'check you out' again." Everyone at the party, including you, erupts into laughter, because in this life, you can choose to either laugh or cry.

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There are more floods and suicides and landslides and car wrecks. Life pushes on—even in Zumbi.

Here you are taking morning jogs through the jungle hills, dodging cattle and stray dogs, and you wonder if you dropped dead out there, how long it would be before anyone realized it.

Here you are walking between your apartment and the high school every day to check on the greenhouse you helped build. And on the walk, you always pass by a different, older greenhouse that was built with the help of another volunteer a decade earlier. The years have not been kind to this greenhouse: With its metal frame exposed and its sad tattered plastic flapping about in the breeze, it looks like the rotting carcass of one of those elephants that goes off to die alone on the Serengeti. As you continually pass by it, all you can think is how you're staring into a former volunteer's project and also into the future of yours.

You briefly date a woman who grew up an hour from Zumbi but studies modern art at a university in Loja. The two of you spend some days hanging out and eating lunch and swimming in the river together. But after a while, you lose touch. And one day, months later, you're on the bus to Loja and she gets on and sits down next to you. You spend the next two hours talking. And at one point she's telling you about her studies

and her life and her goals and she's smiling and she's beautiful and she says something that hits you and doesn't go away: "I don't want to live like my parents live." So then you see her a few weeks later and you spend the day making out and walking through a park in Loja.

You experience your second and final New Year's Eve in Ecuador. You go with a group of friends for a trip to the beach. You get drunk and eat good food and laugh and play cards and lie in the sand and get sunburned. And upon returning to Zumbi, you find that a neighbor has reported you to the police because he is worried that you're going to poison his dog to death. (It's because late one night, when his dog was barking so violently that you thought something dreadful was taking place, you went over to ask him if he could please quiet the dog.) The complaint is filed at the police station and you have to go in and explain that in addition to not being a dog murderer, you're actually an animal lover (which is a phrase that may or may not translate well into Spanish).

J. Grigsby Crawford (Ecuador 2009-11) grew up in the American West. His writing has been published in numerous newspaper, magazines and blogs, covering everything from politics to sports. He lives in Washington, D.C. The Gringo (Wild Elephant Press 2013) is his first novel.



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Crowdsourcing Health

RPCV-founded social enterprise makes a splash in Silicon Valley

by Chase Adam

I was sitting in the back of a bus in a small village in Costa Rica called Watsi. A woman in tattered clothing was standing in the aisle in front. She was holding a red folder and speaking to the passengers near her. I thought she must be selling stickers or skin creams.

A few minutes later I looked up and found she was making her way down the aisle toward me. She was holding a plastic bag, and although she had only passed a few passengers, the bag was bursting with money. I couldn't believe it. In my year and a half in the Peace Corps, I had never seen a bus salesperson earn so much.

When she reached me, I still had no idea what she was selling. Then the man next to me asked to see the red folder she was holding.

The instant she opened the folder everything came together. There was a photograph on one side and a document on the other. The photograph showed a young boy with an incision across the width of his stomach. The document described his medical condition. The young boy was her son.

In that moment I had what can only be described as an epiphany. If I could somehow connect this woman with my friends and family back home, she would have the money to pay for her son's medical treatment within the day.

As a result of that experience on the bus, I decided to create an organization called Watsi.org—named after the town I was traveling through at the time—with the vision of providing access to basic healthcare to every person on the planet.

I spent the final six months of my Peace Corps service writing the business plan for Watsi along with my friends and fellow Peace Corps Volunteers



Mark Murrin with his Junior Achievement class in Isla de Chira, Costa Rica.

Mark Murrin and Howard Glenn. We'd meet every few weeks to work on the plan, and together we envisioned the first global crowdfunding platform for healthcare—a sort of Kiva.org for health—whereby donors could give as little as \$5 to directly fund life-changing medical treatments for people in need.

Immediately following our close of service and return to the U.S., we brought Jesse Cooke, a technology consultant living in Portland Ore. onto our team as the fourth co-founder. Despite each of us having full-time jobs and living hundreds of miles away from each other, we spent nights and weekends working on Watsi as a volunteer project. We were a team distributed among three states and two time zones, and we'd have a Google Hangout every Tuesday to report on our progress and brainstorm about the future.



Jesse Cooke, climbing in Potrero Chico, Mexico.

Photos Watsi.org

Over the course of the first year, the team slowly expanded until we were eight volunteers distributed among five continents and six time zones all working on Watsi. It sounds crazy in hindsight, but we didn't all meet each other in person until nearly a year after beginning to work together, when we all flew to Berkeley, Calif. for the finals of the Global Social Venture Competition.

After a year and a half of working on Watsi, we launched the platform to the public in August of 2012. Within hours of launching, an online technology forum called Hacker News had driven more than 15,000 people to our site. All of the patients posted on our site had their medical treatments funded within hours, and we received hundreds of emails from people around the world who were interested in what we were doing.

Since the day of the launch, Watsi has grown quickly. We've been featured in the media by outlets like *Fast Company*, *Forbes*, and *The Wall Street Journal*; we've entered and won numerous social innovation competitions; and most recently, we were the first nonprofit to be accepted into Y Combinator, a prestigious investment program in Silicon Valley that has incubated some of the fastest growing internet companies of all time.

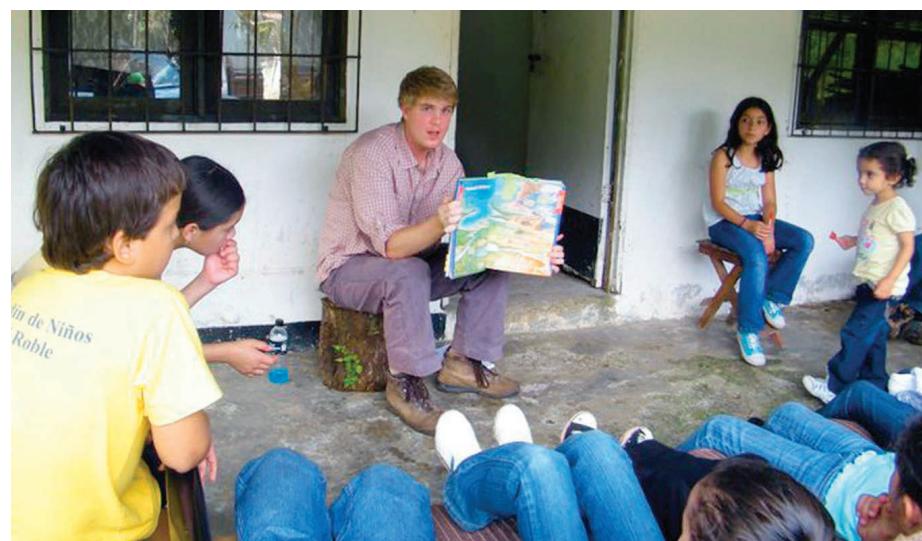
We've also managed to raise some operating money, and we're now three full time staff living and working out of an apartment in Silicon Valley—just a stone's throw away from the offices of technology giants like Google, Facebook and Apple.

We're both humbled and surprised by the amount of support we've received. But without a doubt our greatest success so far is having told the stories of the first hundred patients who've had their medical treatments funded on Watsi.

Similar to the Peace Corps, a critical part of our mission is to raise awareness by connecting people. Even more important than funding medical treatments is the power Watsi gives the patients on our site to tell their stories to the world in a positive and dignified way.



Chase Adam in Costa Rica's Corcovado National Park.



Howard Glenn, speaking with children about the similarities between Costa Rica and the U.S.

We believe that technology is fundamentally changing the face of international development. Aid is no longer an anonymous exchange of resources between two unknown groups of people. Instead, technology is making it easier than ever to bring people together.

The Peace Corps recognized the power of personal connection long ago, and we're humbly following suit with the hopes that one day, personal

connections will solve the world's greatest challenges.

Chase Adam served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Costa Rica from 2009-2011. During his time in the Peace Corps, Chase focused on community economic development and technology projects. Chase graduated from the University of California Santa Barbara with a degree in Global Socioeconomics and Politics.

Processing the Evacuation Experience

continued from page 28

they couldn't begin to move on with their lives until they had reached their expected Completion of Service date. They were still viewing the coming months as a time when they were supposed to be elsewhere serving as PCVs. Those who had expected to enter graduate or other programs suddenly had several months for which they had nothing planned and nowhere in particular to be, and some had to live with their parents until they could take the next steps in their lives.

They also felt that it was difficult for their feelings to be understood by anyone except other evacuated RPCVs. There was anger that people told them that they should be glad that they were back in the U.S., when they felt strongly that they both should be and wanted to be in their host countries. People assumed or wanted to believe that they had been in danger, which made the RPCVs take on a veneer of glamour and adventure that embarrassed and irritated them. In general, they felt that people not only misunderstood but also that they didn't want to understand

that the RPCVs' primary concern was having been forced to leave incomplete something that was very important to them—something that was about as difficult as anything they would ever attempt in life and possibly as satisfying as anything they would ever do.

About our gathering, one Honduras RPCV said, "It was reassuring to come into a discussion with other evacuees and share those feelings of incompleteness or guilt or confusion, because they understood more than a non-evacuated RPCV or PC staff person would. It was nice to hear about other evacuation experiences to put my own experience into context. It made me feel less alone. It was also helpful to hear how others were dealing with some of the post-evacuation challenges—how they were staying in touch with people in their host country, how they were talking (or not talking) about the evacuation in job interviews, how they were dealing with having to live [unexpectedly] with family members, how they tried to explain the evacuation to family and friends, whether they were going to postpone or speed up graduate school enrollment, and their thoughts about reapplying to PC.

Feedback from several who participated particularly indicated that having a discussion guided by a trained psychotherapist was helpful, allowing for both descriptions of individual experiences and some exploration of associated feelings. One found it a "safe and comfortable space to think about some of the lingering issues." Another said, "I liked the structure of the group, and exploring our different experiences of evacuation methodically. Having someone steer the conversation was good, and much different from the way my conversations about evacuation usually go."

Some members of the group are interested in reconvening in a few months, and we plan to invite other evacuated RPCVs in the area who might not have heard about the first gathering.

Jeanne Paul, LMSW, a retired psychotherapist, is Coordinator of the Southeast Michigan RPCV (SEMIRPCV) Mentoring Program. She served as a Volunteer in Brazil from 1964 to 1966, and as a member of the Peace Corps/Washington staff from 1966 to 1969. For further information about conducting a similar group session, contact Jeanne Paul at semirpcvmentoring@gmail.com.

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Janet And Wylie Greig

Avid supporters since 2004

by Sarah Kana

When Janet Greig was growing up in a small California farming community she never dreamed her life would be forever changed by the Peace Corps. As a high school exchange student in Berlin when the wall went up in 1961, she first came to appreciate the importance of international understanding. Five years later—two weeks after graduating from college—and with the wholehearted support of her outward looking family, she answered John F. Kennedy's call to action.

Janet served in the Peace Corps in India, working in a nutrition program with village women. There she met and married her husband Wylie. Thirty years later they found themselves waving goodbye to their daughter as she left to serve in the Peace Corps as a math teacher in Benin.

Avid supporters of National Peace Corps Association (NPCA), both Janet and Wylie also joined their NPCA member groups—Friends of India and Northern California Peace Corps Association—and have been members of NPCA's Director's Circle since 2004.

"The Peace Corps experience was transformative in my life," says Janet. "I believe the experience not only impacted me, but also the people with whom I worked in India."

She is committed to ensuring that young people today have access to a similar experience. "I know our country is better for each of us who has returned with a broader appreciation and understanding of our neighbors around the globe and the United States and its role in the world."

This is just one of the compelling reasons why Janet supports NPCA financially. Here are the others:

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Janet and Wylie Greig

Janet Greig

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Sarah Kana was the communications intern at the National Peace Corps Association during the fall of 2012. This was originally published online on the NPCA Polyglot blog.

Recent Achievements of Our Community

by Jonathan Pearson

BOTSWANA

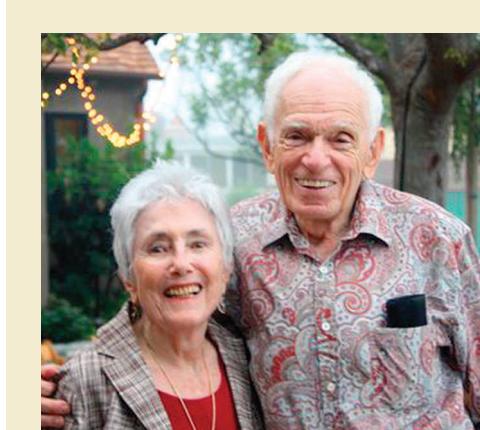
Richard Simonton Sr. (1976-78) was named the new president and CEO of the AOD Federal Credit Union in Bynum, Alabama. Simonton has more than thirty years of experience in the credit union industry. He recently worked for 17 years at the Insight Credit Union in Orlando, Florida, and was active in the community, supporting Toys for Tots, Second Harvest Food Bank, the Coalition for the Homeless and the Russell Home for Atypical Children.

CHINA

The St. Lawrence County Arts Council named RPCV **Rebekah Wilkins-Pepiton**, as its new executive director. Wilkins-Pepiton worked for two years as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Southwest China. She assumed her duties as executive director in January.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

The alumni magazine of Teachers College, Columbia University recognized the work of Nate Wight (Dominican Republic, 1999 - 01) for his work with his students in the creation of a green roof at the year-old Bronx Design and Construction Academy (BDCA). Wight and two of his students attended last year's World Renewable Energy Forum in Denver. They were the only high school represented at the gathering, which included U.S. Energy Secretary Stephen Chu and scientists from 54 nations. Along with a fully functioning green roof, Wight and his students have a full program of ongoing science experiments and various installments for data collection.



COSTA RICA

Among the honorees at the 47th annual Laguna Beach, California Patriots Day Parade in March were **Bonnie and Arnold Hano** (1991-93) named as the 2013 Citizens of the Year. The couple was recognized for their long time political and environmental activism. Along with Peace Corps service, the Hano's were recognized for their efforts to win passage of a building height limit

which led to the founding of Village Laguna, which is dedicated to preserving and enhancing the unique village character of Laguna Beach. Bonnie continues to serve on the city's Heritage Committee, while Arnold continues to be a prolific writer and spokesman on community issues.

ECUADOR

Betsy Bechtel (1964-66) of Palo Alto, California was named president of the Board of Trustees of the Foothill-De Anza Community College District. Residents of the district re-elected Bechtel to the Board of Trustees in November. Bechtel, a former Palo Alto Mayor and City Council member, has served on the Board of Trustees since 2003.

FIJI

After more than 34 years of work with the U.S. Forest Service, **Ramona DeGregorio-Venegas** (1979-81) has retired. Most recently, Ramona worked as an outdoor recreation planner at the Manistee National Forest in northeast Michigan. According to an article in the Luddington Daily News, Ramona plans to remain living in the region, and has not ruled out applying for another tour of service with the Peace Corps.

JORDAN

Licensed clinical social worker **Dorothy Walline** (2009-11) joined the staff of the Behavioral Health Center in Honesdale, Pennsylvania. Walline served as a special education volunteer while in Jordan. The Behavioral Health Center is an outpatient treatment facility providing a full-range of behavioral and mental health services to adults, adolescents and children.

KENYA

New Mexico's Fifth Judicial District Court Judge, **J. Richard Brown** (1979-81), has retired from the bench. Brown was appointed as a judge in 2006 by former New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson. That was preceded by 18 years of work as a public defender. Judge Brown and his physician wife **Caryn**—who also served in Kenya—recently relocated to New Zealand.



GHANA

The website womensenews.org began 2013 by honoring 21 women leaders in the 21st century. One of those recognized is **Heidi Lehmann** (1993-95), who serves as Director of the Women's Protection and Empowerment Unit at the International Rescue Committee. Lehmann leads work on key policy, programming and advocacy issues related to violence against women and girls. Her work has taken her to the scene of some of the worst conflicts and

natural disasters in recent history including Darfur, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Liberia and Sierra Leone.



HONDURAS

Celebrating twenty years since the founding of Central American Medical Outreach (CAMO), was not the only milestone for **Kathy Tschiegg** (1979-81) as 2013 began. Tschiegg was also one of the recipients of the inaugural REAL Awards, given to health care workers in the U.S. and around the world, in recognition of the life-saving work they provide every day. CAMO, an Orrville, Ohio non-profit serves approximately 100,000 people annually with services

ranging from breast exams and prosthetics to neo-natal care and eye surgery. Tschiegg was honored in the General Health Worker category.

KOREA

Dr. James Tielsch (1973-75) is the new Chair of the Department of Global Health at the George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services. He previously held an appointment as a professor in the Department of International Health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. While at Johns Hopkins, Dr. Tielsch focused his research in two areas, maternal and child health and the epidemiology of blinding eye diseases both in the United States and in developing countries. More recently,

he focused his efforts on studies of malnutrition, infectious disease, and environmental health among women and children living in low-income countries.

MALI

Mali RPCV **Heather Maxwell** said it was really an honor when she assumed the role at the beginning of 2013 as host and producer of the Voice of America's (VOA's) Music Time in Africa. She assumes the role following the retirement of Leo Sarkisian, the creator of the program more than a half-century ago. Music Time in Africa is VOA's

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Community News

oldest English language music program. Maxwell is an ethnomusicologist with Doctorate and Master's degrees from Indiana University specializing in African Music. She is also an accomplished jazz and Afrojazz/Afrosoul vocalist and has been working, researching, and performing in Africa and the U.S. since 1987.

SAMOA

Samoa RPCV **Sarah Nichols** relocated to Fairbanks, Alaska, after being named as the new director of the Fairbanks Boys and Girls Club. A native of Texas, her background includes teaching and the performing arts.

TOGO

Emily Lagasse (2008-10) completed the inaugural year of Sukuvi, a Massachusetts based nonprofit organization which seeks to help students in Togo attain a university education by providing community supported low-interest microloans. Sufficient funding in the first year of the program allowed thirteen students to pursue higher education. Early supporters of the program include the Boston Area RPCVs.

TUNISIA

Sheryle J. Bolton (1968-69) returned to her alma mater, Berry College in Mount Berry, Georgia, to be the guest speaker at the fall commencement in December 2012. A member of the College's Board of Trustees, Bolton is the new CEO of Sally Ride Science. The San Diego based company brings science to life through pioneering professional development, instructional solutions, and real-science investigations for students in 4th-8th grades. Bolton was named CEO in August, succeeding Sally Ride, America's first woman in space.

For more Community News go to www.peacecorpsconnect.org/nPCA/news/community-news/



SENEGAL

Senegal RPCV and current Peace Corps recruiter at the University of Virginia, **April Muniz** (2010-12) was recognized at the end of 2012 as part of the Charlottesville News and Arts Weekly Newspaper's 17th annual "Best of C-Vill". Muniz was one of five local people "who are, however quietly, shaping life in Charlottesville and beyond." Prior to Peace Corps, Muniz worked nearly 20 years in the pharmaceutical/biotechnology industry before joining a start-up company linking small farmers with families wishing to lower their eco-footprint by eating locally. Among her contributions in Charlottesville, Muniz recently joined the Board of Better World Betty, a local environmental education and resource non-profit organization.

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