



Peace Corps Times

spring 2007

Building Friendships One Person At a Time

Ask nearly all Peace Corps Volunteers to describe their experience, and they'll undoubtedly share stories about the local people they met in their host country.

Stories of extraordinary marriage proposals, parades of curious children at their heels, or bus rides without personal space can make for hours of entertaining conversations.

Most Volunteers understand the contrast between America and their host country, and the many comforts we enjoy in the U.S. Many Volunteers have demonstrated that assimilating into the culture of the host country can be a challenge. For no matter how hard you try, some American habits just stand out.

"My town is too small for me to get by as anonymous," says Volunteer Hannah Mintek, a TEFL/English teacher in Georgia. "Nobody is anonymous here, even if they are Georgian. I fare well in simply being of similar complexion and hair/eye color. I don't fare so well when I go for runs into the surrounding villages. It is strange to see a new face in the villages, and extremely uncommon to see a young woman exercising here."

Through it all, returned Peace Corps Volunteers, almost unanimously, advise to appreciate and make the most of these relationships.



Education Volunteer Leilani Sabzalian enjoys a moment with two young girls in Paraguay.

Many Volunteers discuss this topic on their blogs and Web sites, offering tips for those having difficulties in their new communities, including: attending local events, networking (having a friend introduce you to a friend), starting a club, and especially making friends with a few well-connected youth in the area. To stay

motivated, they also recommend setting goals and continually asking yourself: "What do I want to get out of my service?"

And, according to most, the hard work will pay off. When service is over, no matter how difficult, Volunteers report great satisfaction and a willingness to do it all over again.

"For me, it was the people I grew close to—my neighbors and students—that allowed me get the most out of my time in Guyana," says Kati Ringer, who just finished her service. "Now that my Peace Corps service is over and I have left Guyana, I remain deeply connected with those who became my extended family."

The Joys and Travails of Going It Together

Serving in the Peace Corps presents rewards as well as challenges to every Volunteer. Just imagine though the Peace Corps experience times two. That's the everyday reality for the seven percent of current Volunteers who are experiencing their host countries as married couples.

For married Volunteers, serving together definitely has certain advantages. Lauren and David Goodpaster, Volunteers in Malawi, find that serving as a couple provides them both with a built-in 24-hour support system. "When you want to share ideas, receive advice or constructive criticism, you don't have to look very far," Lauren and David say. As Volunteers in Thailand, Kate Mattessich Valaas and Robert Valaas feel their marital status helped ease their transition

into local life. "Being married makes us seem older and more settled in the eyes of the community, and people take us more seriously as a result," they say.

Serving as a married couple, Volunteers also gain a unique perspective on the social customs of their country. For Wendy and Dulani Woods, serving in Georgia, they have noticed one major distinction in their interactions with the local community compared to their fellow Volunteers who are single. "We don't get asked if we want to marry the friend's cousin's brother's daughter/son/nephew/niece who is such a nice Georgian," the couple says.

The Valaas' have experienced first-hand how Thai culture views men and women differently. As a

married couple they are frequently compared to one another. Kate and Robert recalled that when they first arrived at their site, the locals would only address Robert (the male) in conversation. "It was difficult for people to take Kate seriously as an individual Volunteer, as opposed to just being Robert's wife," Kate and Robert say. In Georgia, Wendy and Dulani Woods have also become familiar with that country's very traditional standards, where men tend to socialize in the evenings while women are expected to be at home tending to the house. "This can be an interesting dynamic to deal with as a married couple, as the man will often be invited out with friends, but the woman's female friends are usually at home looking after their families," the Woods say.

The relationships forged between people in the local community and married Peace Corps Volunteers also allows for interesting exchanges and insight into local cultures. For the Goodpasters, those exchanges usually involve talk of the pitter-patter of little feet. "We always get asked how many kids we have," Lauren and David say. "When we say that we don't have any yet, people get very disappointed looks on their faces, and then always ask us why we don't just have one in our village—they ALL want us to have kids here! We just tell them that when the time is right, then we're sure we'll have kids."

Like other couples serving together, they will have plenty of stories to share when they finish their Peace Corps service.

Director's Vision: Volunteerism in the 21st Century

Ron Tschetter was confirmed as Peace Corps Director by the U.S. Senate September 13, 2006. On February 5, 2007 he presented the staff with his vision for the Peace Corps and his key strategic initiatives. A former Peace Corps Volunteer, Director Tschetter's service to Peace Corps has now come full circle as he represents Peace Corps at the highest levels at home and abroad.

Peace Corps Director Ron Tschetter developed his vision for the agency over time as he listened, observed, and met with staff and Peace Corps Volunteers in the field. Calling Peace Corps "the gold standard" of volunteerism, Director Tschetter urged all Peace Corps Volunteers and staff to consider how they can promote world-class volunteerism in the 21st century.

The mission and goals of the Peace Corps have remained the same since the creation of the agency by President Kennedy in 1961.

Says Tschetter, "While a lot about Peace Corps has changed since our time as Volunteers in the late 1960s, the three goals of the Peace Corps have not changed, and they are as important today as ever.

"As Americans, we cannot af-

ford to sit on the sidelines, living in isolation. We must, and we can, be active in helping to build friendships, creating opportunities, promoting healthier lives, and showing the world who we really are as people."

Director Tschetter would also like to focus recruitment in a strategic way, reaching out more to the 50+ population in order to attract older Volunteers, and developing strategic partnerships with other organizations that share similar outreach goals. In addition, he is encouraging returned Peace Corps Volunteers to share their stories once they are back in the U.S. both to peak the interest of potential Peace Corps Volunteers, and to encourage the idea of volunteerism in their own communities.

Additionally, the Director would like the agency to better measure our success and impact so that there are more statistics to share, along with all of our wonderful Peace Corps stories.

Finally, Director Tschetter is urging the promotion of volunteerism not only at home but also abroad. Says Tschetter, "The truth is there is no country on the planet better than America at volunteering, and no other organization



Director Tschetter participates in Peace Corps/Morocco Volunteer Tia Tucker's English class during his first overseas trip as director in November.

does it better than the Peace Corps. I like to say the Peace Corps is the gold standard for volunteerism. We know the value of the Peace Corps, but we need to help others see it. So our challenge is to take this gold standard to our partners around the world.

"Peace Corps Volunteers lead by example at the grassroots level. As Volunteers are sharing American culture with those they serve, they can also share that spirit of volunteerism. I think back to our experience in India, and how Nancy and I encouraged members of our host

community to give of themselves to improve the lives of others."

Director Tschetter encourages Volunteers to work with youth in their countries of service as a good way to instill the ideals of volunteerism abroad.

Although the agency will pursue these new strategic opportunities, the Director reaffirms that "The Peace Corps is already working very well, and that's because of the job that each of you is doing every day. I'm so impressed by the enthusiasm and the passion of everyone here at Peace Corps."

DIRECTOR'S FORUM

Growing up in South Dakota, I learned at a young age the value of hard work and serving others. Despite the difficulties of farming on the parched South Dakotan soil, my mother and my father were true examples of generosity.

One distinct memory was of my family learning that one of our neighbors had suffered fire damage to their home. I remember my father coming into our house with a large open box, walking directly to our kitchen, opening the pantry doors, and putting our canned goods in the box to take to those neighbors to help feed and sustain them in their time of need.

This spirit of compassion and giving that my parents passed on to me is a big part of what led me and my wife, Nancy, to become Peace Corps Volunteers in 1966.

We were intrigued by the idea of being totally immersed in a different culture and living in a very different place. We decided to join, and six months later, we were sent to India to be Peace Corps Volunteers for two years.

We had no idea the powerful effect that this experience would have on our lives. You see, once you do

something so bold, so enriching, and so all-encompassing, you realize that volunteering and giving to others is actually a gift to yourself. Our lives, and certainly our perspective were changed forever.

When we returned home from India, Nancy and I settled down in Minnesota, and began to figure out what the next steps in our lives would be—probably what a lot of you may be facing today.

I embarked on what most would call a successful career in the financial services and securities industry. This really allowed me to hone my management and leadership skills and offered a pretty good living for my family.

Last year, I received a phone call out of the blue that I never in a million years expected to receive. It was the White House, and I was asked whether or not I was interested in being considered to become the Director of the Peace Corps.

Then in July, President Bush gave me one of the greatest honors of my life by nominating me to become the seventeenth Director of the Peace Corps.

This is an opportunity that I never expected, but it is one I have, in fact



Director Tschetter and his wife Nancy served as community health Peace Corps Volunteers in India from 1966-68.

trained for my whole life. Having been on the job for six months now, I can tell you that it has exceeded my expectations.

My life has been full of twists, but has also been full of blessings. I consider all that I've been able to do

over the years, and believe that it is attributable to grassroots work and training I received as a Volunteer. I would have never dreamed, as I boarded a plane in 1966 to India, that 40 years later I'd be working at the Peace Corps as its Director.

Notes

UKRAINE

The Greatest Grandmas

P. Jay Werner, a Ukraine economic development Volunteer, recently organized a fundraiser called "Our Town's Greatest Grandmas." Proceeds are supporting the installation of laundry machines at the local children's hospital in Uzhhorod.

Five women competed for the titles of Wise Grandma, Creative Grandma, Elegant Grandma, and Super Grandma. Each grandmother was interviewed and asked a tough question about childrearing. Following the interviews, the grandmothers participated in a bake-off competition and a fashion show, where each grandmother modeled a new suit donated by the sponsors.

Ticket sales and donations raised \$2,350. Prizes for a raffle and gifts were contributed by corporate sponsors' Mary Kay Cosmetics and Hipp Organic Baby Foods.

MALAWI

Mapping Malawi

During July 2006, Peace Corps Volunteer Stephanie Margherio completed a map mural project at her secondary school in Malawi.

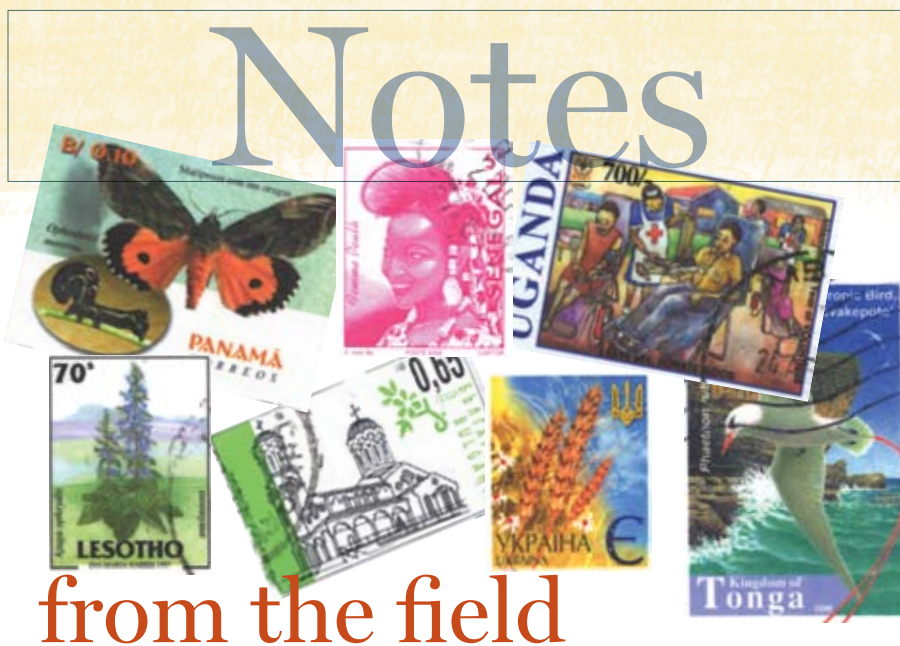
Utilizing the talents of her students and a small grant, Stephanie and her artists completed four murals for Matenje Community Day Secondary School: a world map, an Africa map, a Malawi political map, and a map of Malawi's physical features.

Due to financial constraints and vulnerable classrooms, the school could not provide maps in every classroom, so the map murals have become a permanent, sustainable solution.

NAMIBIA

Social CDs

Volunteers in Namibia are involved in Namibia Alive!, a project that fo-



from the field

cuses on HIV/AIDS education and prevention by getting HIV/AIDS messages and information out to taxi drivers, "combi" drivers, long-distance bus drivers, and passengers.

Created by two Volunteers, the project entails developing a CD that combines songs and other music from a range of popular Namibian artists with HIV/AIDS awareness messages.

The project targets drivers because they are often uniquely susceptible to HIV/AIDS. It also targets their passengers, who come from all levels of Namibian society. The Volunteers lined up popular Namibian artists who included their recordings in Namibia Alive! Several artists were prepared to talk about HIV/AIDS and include their comments on the final CD.

The Volunteers secured most of



the required funding on their own and are now looking to produce a professional CD, to be distributed free of charge. They hope to complete the project by year's end.

ECUADOR

Anti-Violence Skits

Volunteer Kendra Goffredo and members of the Mothers' Club of Carpuela, a small Afro-Ecuadorian community, recently led a successful anti-domestic violence campaign.

The mothers came together to write, rehearse, and practice skits based on examples of domestic violence that occur in Carpuela.

After weeks of practice, the mothers presented their skits to a representative from the provincial *Comisaria de la Mujer*, who followed the skits with a presentation on the laws in Ecuador that protect women and children and the rights guaranteed to them by those laws.

ALBANIA

Beautiful Trash

Volunteer Ariel Ben-Amos worked with a local art school and accessed SPA funds for a city beautification project.

The project turned dumpsters along the city's main boulevard into works of art through a community participatory design process that linked the neighborhood's residents with local art students. Participating high school students generated a series of art designs which they submitted to the community for approval. Students and teachers then worked together to paint the dumpsters (donated by the local cleaning company) with the winning designs.



JORDAN

Smiles Abound

Jordan Volunteers have been involved with four Operation Smile missions during the past two years, including a combined Iraqi and Jordan mission in July 2005. Volunteers work with 50 Iraqi children and family members at a time who must stay in an Amman hotel during the assessment, surgery, and recovery.

Volunteers rotate in teams of four for three-day periods to minimize absence from their sites. They translate, coordinate transportation and logistics, assist with errands or directions, and provide entertainment for children and rest breaks for parents.

Know someone in your community who needs reconstructive surgery? Both Operation Smile and Fresh Start would like your recommendations: operationsmile.org/contactus; and freshstart.org, click "Contact Us"

Volunteer Life Cont'd.

the afternoon. It seems that when you are fasting the day comes to a slow, screeching halt. You can get a lot done but you feel like doing nothing.

The sun seemed nailed to the same point in the cloudless blue sky. Finally, at 6:45 it began melting behind the hills of the West Bank above the Jordan River. The call to prayer went off from both mosques in the village, signaling the sunset and the end of the fast for the day. My doorbell rang. I opened up and looked down to find my neighbor's 8-year-old daughter holding up a big tray of food—chicken breast, rice, soup, olives, hot bread. I took it in my hand and said thank you. Perhaps frightened at the sound of the strange foreign voice, she darted away, leaving me there with my door open to a dark-red sky, a retired sun, and a big plate of food that I had waited all day for. Only 29 more days.

"Baking" in an Oven-less Kitchen

If you are dreaming of chocolate chip cookies or homemade bread, but do not have an oven, here is the solution! You can bake almost anything, from pizza to cakes, in a makeshift oven called a Dutch oven.

What you need:

- * a large, heavy pot with a tight-fitting lid
- * small baking pans that will fit within the pot
- * 2 empty tuna cans with the tops and bottoms removed
- * stove-top burner or hot plate

What to do:

Place the large pot on a burner. Place the tuna cans on the bottom, inside the pot. Turn the heat on low. Cover with the lid to allow the pot to preheat. Put whatever you are baking into the small baking pans. Place these pans on top of the tuna cans. This allows air to circulate, thus baking evenly and preventing burning. Cover and bake. Check frequently by peeking in slightly the first few times until you get the temperature and timing down. After that, use a tight lid to keep in the heat and prevent your baked goods from drying out.

From "Babushka's Kitchen" Volume III, Peace Corps/Ukraine, 2006

We'd like to hear from you! What would you like to learn more about from other Volunteers or development experts? Do you have any recipes to share? Please write and let us know and we will consider your ideas for upcoming issues of the Peace Corps Times: pctimes@peacecorps.gov

Peace Corps Times

A publication for Peace Corps Volunteers serving worldwide

| | |
|----------------|----------------|
| Amanda Host | Press Director |
| Nathan Arnold | Editor |
| Laura Lartigue | Editor |
| Tracy Waldman | Writer |
| Erika Eckstrom | Writer |

Do you have something to share with us?

We welcome all Volunteer submissions or suggestions. Inquiries may be made to:

Peace Corps Times
c/o Press Office
1111 20th St NW
Washington DC 20526
or
pctimes@peacecorps.gov

New Partnership Allows Volunteers to Pursue Bachelor's Degrees

The Peace Corps and Metropolitan State University in St. Paul, Minn., have unveiled a new partnership that will allow graduates from community colleges to pursue bachelor's degrees while serving in the Peace Corps.

For some community college students, earning an associate's degree is a stepping stone on the path to a bachelor's degree, and 27 months of Peace Corps service does not always factor into their career goals. This pilot program at Metropolitan State University is designed to support those applicants who have received an Associate of Arts degree from a community college and would like to work toward their bachelor's degree while serving.

World Wise Schools Launches Podcasts

The Coverdell World Wise Schools program has just launched the agency's first podcast series, called Volunteer Voices, featuring stories written and read by Peace Corps Volunteers.

The World Wise Schools program has also unveiled their redesigned Web site. Educators and currently serving Peace Corps Volunteers can now access information about the Correspondence Match program, which connects U.S. classrooms with Peace Corps Volunteers overseas.

www.peacecorps.gov/wws

Volunteer Statistics In

Continuing a trend that has seen the number of Peace Corps Volunteers across the world increase since 9/11/2001, Americans have again this year responded to the call.

Volunteers in the field represent the second highest total in over 30 years, at 7,749. While a slight decrease from last year's high, this total represents over one thousand more Volunteers than were in service five years ago. Other interesting facts include: 59 percent of Volunteers are female, 93 percent are single, and 16 percent are minorities.

Washington On Top

For 20 years the University of Wisconsin has been the top producer of Peace Corps Volunteers, but no more. This year, the University of Washington's 110 Volunteers in service lands them on top. In the medium-sized schools category, George Washington University was No. 1, and in the small schools category, the University of Puget Sound vaulted four spots into the top spot.



VOLUNTEER LIFE

By Joseph Freeman
Jordan Volunteer

In the teacher's lounge on my first day at work, no one was drinking tea. There were no cups of coffee, and you had no chance of bumming a cigarette. In Jordan, the ubiquitous absence of these three things can only mean one thing: It's Ramadan. The first day of the Islamic holy month of fasting happened to coincide with my first day of teaching.

I live in a village of about 8,000 people in the North-West region of Jordan. The Jordan Valley spreads out far and wide below, and the surrounding hills are peppered with clump after green clump of olive trees. Not too far off, the once rushing Jordan River trickles along like a small stream.

Like most Volunteers in Jordan, I was going to try and fast for the entire month. Islam stipulates that

you are only truly fasting if nothing passes your lips (including water) from sunrise to sunset, every day, for the entire month.

With that in mind, my alarm went off at 4:30 before sunrise that morning and I ate the morning meal, which is called the "Sahoor" in Arabic. I ate a few chewy leathery dates, a piece of bread, some cheese, and many large gulps of water. It was unnerving to gaze out at the morning darkness after I took my last sip of water and realize that I would not drink or eat anything again until the sun had clocked in and out.

I wasn't really nervous about being able to "make it." I had imagined a teacher's lounge full of famished, moody educators unable to focus on anything but the unraveling hours and aching stomachs. With the students I could only guess, since most Jordanian children will at least try to start fasting as early as 3rd grade. I was wrong.

The teacher's lounge on that first day turned out to be full of chatter, laughter, and stimulating conversation. I learned that in Islam you are supposed to say, in Arabic, "In the name of God," before you break the

fast at sunset and "Praise God" when you have finished eating. I spent time getting to know my counterpart Hussein on a mat outside in the sun while he taught me two Arabic proverbs:

He who lies can't boil an egg.

At every wedding he has a loaf of bread.

I've been in my village for four months now, and I still don't know exactly what those two mean.

I got my first taste of what passes for horseplay among Jordanian students when a 5th grader was dragged into the principal's office for bringing in a live scorpion to school and slipping it down the back of a classmate's shirt as a joke.

I observed a 10th grade class in which they were practicing past-tense verbs. A student wrote a sample sentence on the board that read, "We went to the Eminem party." He returned to his seat, lifted up his binder revealing a blue folder with a sticker of the great white rapper on the front. He winked at me and went back to work.

By 12:30, after a surprisingly satisfying first day at school, I meandered home to wait for the sunset.

Fasting only became difficult in

Continued on page 3

A Balanced Life

Tanzania | September 8, 2006

[My husband] has come to the conclusion that "every site is balanced" and I agree with him. Sure we may have a nonexistent school community and no water, but our town is full of great people and we have electricity. Sure other volunteers have an awesome view of Kilimanjaro and water, but they always are assumed to be tourists and the cost of living is higher.

lisaintanzaniapcv.blogspot.com

The Melting Pot

Ukraine | September 15, 2006

A debate always arises when they name Arnold Schwarzenegger [and question] whether he's "American."

I think they have no idea what a big question that is, and I enjoy watching their thoughts unravel. First they say he's not American because he wasn't born in the U.S. Then usually someone will argue, but he lives there! And I say, I live in Ukraine, does that make me Ukrainian...you get the idea. At the end of the discussion I have them vote whether or not he's American. All of my classes have decided he is. The deciding arguments: he is a politician, he speaks English, and most importantly, he has an American wife.

klukraine.blogspot.com

Under Where?

Moldova | September 23, 2006

In both my fifth-grade class and seventh-grade class this week, students used the word "underwear" in a sentence. The seventh grader used it as an example of a compound noun. The fifth

WHAT VOLUNTEERS



grader used it when he thought he was using the word for clothes in general.

I asked both students, "Do you know what 'underwear' means?"

"No."

"Chiloti," I said.

The seventh graders laughed for 15 seconds. The fifth graders laughed for nearly a full minute. It's good to be back in the classroom.

www.bbqbacon.com/moldova

Spanish Vocabulary

Peru | September 5, 2006

The 9-year-old girl that lives with us, Merli, is my little buddy. You could call her my host sister.

We've begun reading fairy tales every night before bed. It's good reading practice for her and me! Besides I'm learning all kinds of new Spanish

vocab like evil step mother, wicked witch, dwarfs, and all the world of make believe. I'm going to keep up the reading with her, as long as she's got the energy to do it!

mypeacecorps.blogspot.com

Creative Foods 101

Moldova | November 4, 2006

There's nothing like teaching in a foreign language to give you a little bit of confidence. At the end of the seminar, we organized a "haunted house" to celebrate Halloween, complete with bobbing for apples and boxes containing a (macaroni) brain, eyes plucked from bad students (wet grapes), and severed ears (dough shaped into an ear).

Always nice to toss in a bit of American culture along with the lessons.

nightpie.blogspot.com