

Carla Bachechi, Peace Corps Volunteer, Macedonia (2003–2005)

Biography

Greetings from Macedonia!

I am a Peace Corps Volunteer in Macedonia. In my past life, before I transported myself into this alternate universe, I lived in San Francisco. I was an attorney. While a member of this profession, I mainly practiced in the area of real estate and corporate law. (My name is pronounced ba-KEH-kee.)



Carla Bachechi

I have three sisters, a niece, and a nephew. I grew up in Albuquerque, New Mexico. New Mexico, the state known as the Land of Enchantment, is blessed with mountains and 300-plus days of sunshine a year. In the 20-

some years I lived there, I adopted a deep appreciation of both the mountains and the sunshine. I love to hike and ski and bike and swim. I also like to cook and I am learning to be creative with the available groceries in Macedonia. Big things I miss are sushi and red chili cheese enchiladas.

After I graduated from high school I moved to Washington, DC, to go to college. I studied international relations. This was the beginning of my own personal odyssey. Since then I have lived in Paris, Florence, New Orleans, Atlanta, and San Francisco. At this point I am afraid I have become an incurable wanderer. So need I mention my love for travel?

The Peace Corps was a dream of mine that never faded. So after many years of saying I wish I had joined the Peace Corps, I finally joined. Whether it is a sabbatical from my routine or the toughest job I will ever love, it is definitely an adventure and, *voilà*, here I am.

Site Assignment

I am a municipal development Volunteer in a small city in western Macedonia, only three kilometers from the Albanian border. My town is literally and figuratively at the end of the road. It is not easy to get here. In fact, there are only two roads to my town. Both wind through picture-perfect mountain canyons with stunning turquoise blue rivers rushing through them. Perfect for a great drive, except for the numerous potholes and the amazing amount of trash that lines the roads.

Most of the people here are ethnic Albanians and speak predominantly Albanian. However, there are also ethnic Macedonian, Roma, and Turkish communities. My town is rather unusual. It is by far the most ethnic Albanian community in Macedonia and is unfortunately often overlooked by the central government.



View near Carla's town, with church

The description of my assignment that the Peace Corps sent me with my invitation to become a Volunteer reads, "This program provides assistance to municipality employees, NGO [nongovernmental organization] members, and other members of the Macedonian communities interested in developing their skills in project development, strategic planning, and resource acquisition; and in improving their day-to-day operational capacities."

The up-close-and-personal translation of this is that I spend a lot of time trying to figure

out what the municipality and the NGOs are trying to do and then I try either to help them do it or find someone else to help them do it. The municipalities here are like our state and city governments combined. The nongovernmental organizations are equivalent to what we would call nonprofit organizations in the U.S. The main difference is that the NGOs here are funded by international aid money, while nonprofits in the United States are funded by government grants or private donations. So in short I try to help the municipality and the community find the resources they need to function effectively, whether it involves finding, for example, trained employees, a strategic plan, or computers.

One of the community projects I am involved in is a junior achievement class for high school students. This class covers basic economics and includes the creation of a fictional business. In addition, I am working with a youth group to improve the lakefront and publish a book of poems and essays by young Albanian writers.

This may sound like a lot of stuff—but in reality things here move much slower than in the United States. Meetings are often cancelled and calendars are not regularly consulted. So I often end up with a lot of free time to fill with coffee drinking (a national pastime), chatting, reading, and writing essays.



Carla (right) with a friend outside the office where she works



Barn for drying corn and peppers