



PEACE
CORPS

Times

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PEACE CORPS ANNIVERSARY

50 Years of Collective Wisdom RPCVs Offer Advice for Today's Volunteers

From the Director *Building a Better Peace Corps*

Dear Peace Corps Volunteers,

Recently the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs convened a hearing to explore the safety and support operations at Peace Corps. The hearing gave me the opportunity to discuss the reforms we have put in place over the past couple years to better protect and support Volunteers. I believe the agency will emerge stronger as we continue to implement new reforms. The RPCVs who testified are courageous and I am thankful for their input concerning these sensitive topics and for their continued support of the Peace Corps.

The Peace Corps takes the issues of sexual assault prevention and response seriously and is dedicated to providing compassionate victim-centered care. The safety and health of our Volunteers remain our top priorities and we continue to do everything in our power to minimize the risks associated with service overseas. We will offer compassionate support and guidance during difficult periods, both to our Volunteers and to our wider community. We strive to be both supportive of our Volunteers and transparent about the realities of service.

The Peace Corps is united in its efforts with current and returned Volunteers, staff, outside organizations, and leaders in the field of sexual assault awareness to strengthen global operations and support for the thousands of Volunteers serving around the world. We will continue to do our best to make Peace Corps a safe and productive experience for the thousands of Americans serving today and in the future.

We are committed to strengthening all facets of our program and, in doing so, further enhancing the quality of our agency. All Volunteers—past, present, and future—have a voice as we work to improve our operations. We take to heart the messages and communications that you regularly share with us.

The Peace Corps has always been an extended family. Together we will continue to build an even better Peace Corps. Thank you for your service.

Aaron S. Williams
(RPCV/Dominican Republic,
1967-1970)

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A new group of Peace Corps trainees complete staging in Washington, D.C., and prepare for their flight to Peru, where they will serve as Volunteers in small business development and youth development. Clockwise, from left, are Nicole Thomas (Tampa, Florida), Jonathan Bibb (Woodbridge, Virginia), Kerry McKean (Ridgefield, Connecticut), Philip Moss (Mt. Joy, Pennsylvania), Richard Cochran (Shepherdstown, West Virginia), Mary Kate Shannon (Front Royal, Virginia), and Christopher Duron (Tampa, Florida).

While the days of Peace Corps service may sometimes seem to pass slowly, 27 months goes by more quickly than one would imagine. Most Volunteers will continue to think about their service, work, relationships, and daily life as Volunteers long after their close-of-service ceremony.

We recently polled our RPCV community on Facebook and at Peace Corps headquarters to see what they wish they

had known or done differently during their service.

Since 1961, more than 200,000 returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) have had similar experiences as PCVs in 139 countries worldwide. Though experiences differ, we all share many of the same highs and lows, goals and successes. Let's face it: we're the same breed of idealistic change-makers who want to

make a difference.

Ryan Van Duzer (Honduras, 2003-2005), a participant on Discovery Channel's "Out of the Wild," regrets having packed too heavily at the outset of his service. "I wish I had not brought so much stuff; packing light is better. If you end up needing anything, you can always buy it locally. For example, if you need

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50th Celebratory Tips

We are celebrating our 50th anniversary worldwide throughout 2011. Please consider some of these suggestions to mark this historic event with your local community.

- Give a talk about nutrition and include recipes from America and your country of service
- Create a World Map (a template is available on peacecorps.gov under "Third Goal Activity Suggestions")
- Plan a civic engagement event to promote volunteering
- Plan a lesson involving American traditions or symbols
- Celebrate the Fourth of July, Halloween, or Thanksgiving with your community
- Have your students or neighborhood children color Peace Corps logos or flags
- Teach an American dance or song and hold a community performance
- Blog about your experiences and activities
- Teach your favorite American sport and hold a game or tournament



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The Peace Corps will continue to make additional changes to strengthen operations as the agency works with Volunteers and leaders in the field of sexual assault risk reduction and response. The Peace Corps has instituted the following reforms to strengthen safety and security procedures and ensure compassionate care for victims of crime:

- Issued Peace Corps' Commitment to Sexual Assault Victims, a set of core principles to ensure timely, effective, and compassionate support to victims of sexual assault.
- Implemented and trained staff on new Guidelines for Responding to Rape and Sexual Assault, emphasizing a victim-centered approach with specific procedures posts must follow to respond to an incident and provide the best possible support. The agency's Sexual Assault Working Group is developing a comprehensive sexual assault prevention and response program. The working group includes returned Volunteers and survivors of rape and sexual assault, as well as staff members with expertise in trauma response.
- Created the Peace Corps Volunteer Sexual Assault Panel, comprised of outside experts and returned Volunteers who were victims of sexual assault, to help Peace Corps design and implement sexual assault risk reduction and response strategies.

More information on the Peace Corps' safety and security program is available at www.peacecorps.gov

COLLECTIVE WISDOM FROM PAGE 1 ■■■■■■■■■■▶

some new clothes and you buy them in your village, you'll fit in better with the local style," he said.

Providing fodder for those *Welcome Book* packing lists that Volunteers are provided before service, Jeff West (Ukraine, 2005-2007) listed 27 months worth of hot sauce as a "must-have" commodity, while Joshua O'Donnell (Georgia, 2001-2003) wishes he had taken more shoes. "I wear size 14 shoes. Do you know how many size 14 shoes exist between Germany and China? None. None at all," he said.

Meanwhile, Cicely Lewis (Nicaragua, 2005-2007) said she would take an ample supply of duct tape if she were to serve again. "We used it for everything in my community: to fix a roof, make a wallet, patch pants, etc. I must have gone through 20 rolls during service," she said.

Many RPCVs wish they had been even more engaged in their local community, acquired a new skill, learned to play a musical instrument, traveled in the region more, or appreciated the experience in the moment.

ular suggestions that may still be heeded by today's Volunteers:

- Take photos of your everyday life, documenting everything from your neighbors to a day at the market
- Learn to play a new instrument or sing a song
- Keep a journal or highlights from your best blog posts
- Spend more time learning the local language or languages
- Visit fellow Volunteers in their sites
- Visit your host community from training after you have settled into your permanent site
- Learn new recipes
- Acquire national dress
- Participate in a classroom exchange with Coverdell Worldwide Schools

Nicola Cullen (Ghana, 1992-1994), who currently serves as director of management and operations in Turkmenistan, is among those who regrets having put down the camera. "I wish I had done a photo essay of my life as a PCV. I had this idea where I would spend a day

"I wish I had danced more. As a teacher I felt that I had a certain level of respectability to uphold."

— Erica Burman (RPCV, 1987-1989)

Chris Matthews (Swaziland, 1968-1970), host of MSNBC's "Hardball with Chris Matthews," offered these simple words of wisdom: "Read a lot. You'll never get as much time to read."

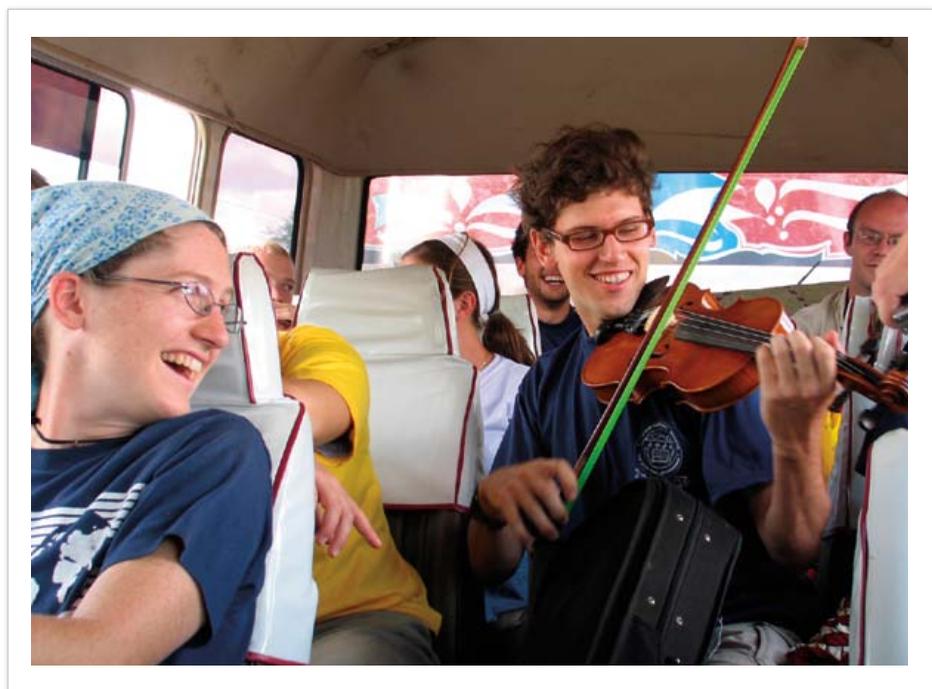
Adrienne Benson Scherger (Nepal, 1992-1994) echoed that thought, regretting that she hadn't taken the time to read "War and Peace." She stated, "Now, with three kids, a house, a husband, a dog and a job, I may never get the chance. My village in Nepal offered such quiet, and such 'long' stretches of time. I still miss that calm, even after 17 years."

Following are some of the more pop-

taking pictures of what I did and where I went so my family would have an idea of the things I saw and the people I was talking about in my letters," she said.

Erica Burman (The Gambia, 1987-1989) wishes she had taken the time to relax and integrate more into the community. "I wish I had danced more. As a teacher I felt that I had a certain level of respectability to uphold. ... I wish I had visited the compounds of all of my students."

Andy Hallock (Ukraine, 2004-2006) lists three regrets. "First, I wish I would have learned to accept every invite and chance to do something/go



A violinist entertains his fellow Peace Corps Volunteers during a bus trip to a game reserve in Morogoro, Tanzania, in 2006. This photo was provided to the Peace Corps Digital Library courtesy of RPCV Richard Sidney. Share favorite photos from your service by going to peacecorps.gov/collections.

somewhere during my first year, not my second year. Second, I wish I brought my PC-issued heater when I switched sites because minus 35-Celsius is very cold. Third, I wish I had gone to Chernobyl."

Looking back on his days as a Volunteer in Bolivia (1997-2000), Ken Goodson may have summed it up best when he stated, "I would have stopped, looked around, and realized it was the single most powerful experience of my life, fully relishing that fact while I was still knee deep in it."

As you consider the above advice, remember to enjoy those moments with your host community and take time to consider perspective.

RPCV Bob Michon (Lesotho, 1995-1997), who recently served as assistant director for the Office of Public Engagement and managed Returned Volunteer Services, offers this parting advice: "During your last three months in-country, get great closure. Say goodbye. Say goodbye by doing certain activities or visiting certain things that you've always wanted to see or experi-

ence in-country. Do all those things. Don't focus so much on the next. The next will come to you."

Digital Library

Share photos and stories of your Peace Corps experience with future Volunteers as they approach pre-service training.

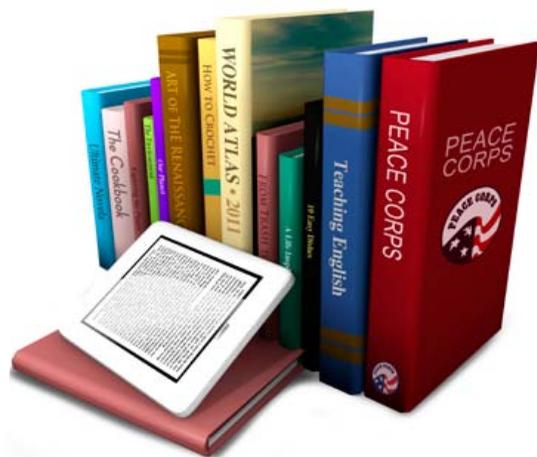
Visit collection.peacecorps.gov/addstory.htm today!

CORRECTION

The dates of service for Volunteer Darlene Grant were incorrectly cited in the Peace Corps Times 50th Anniversary edition. A resident of Austin, Texas, Grant is currently serving (2009-2011) as a teacher trainer in Cambodia. Peace Corps Times apologizes for the error.

THAT WAS THEN ... THIS IS NOW

By Candle, Lantern, or Headlamp, a Good Read is Priceless



“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times ...”

While such words are lifted from Charles Dickens’ “A Tale of Two Cities,” many Peace Corps Volunteers can identify with that saying during some point in their service. Reading a good book makes things a bit easier, allowing Volunteers to escape from the daily routine. A great book can transport the reader to places far away, or evoke deep emotions, including laughter and tears.

So what have Volunteers been reading for the last 50 years? To answer this burning question, *Peace Corps Times* took an unscientific poll of PCVs and RPCVs through Facebook. The responses were too exhaustive to list, ranging from “Lonely Planet” travel books to John Grisham novels, but one of our favorites is

the RPCV who noted, “There was an entire Encyclopedia Britannica in my house in my small village. I read all of it except the S volume (it was used by some village boys to smash a rat in my house and was too gross to put back on the shelf!)”

Many works of literature resonate across generational lines. After all, who hasn’t heard of Atticus Finch, one of the central characters in “To Kill A Mockingbird”? One RPCV recounted being assigned to read the book about the southern attorney and his courtroom defense of an African American. He decided to read the book a second time when he saw it in his country’s Peace Corps library—20 years after that middle school assignment. “I appreciated it more the second time around because I didn’t have to do a book report when I was done,” he said.

That book was among the best sellers of 1961—the same year the first groups of Peace Corps Volunteers started service. Among today’s best sellers that have resonated with Volunteers over the past year are the “Lonesome Dove” series of books by Larry McMurtry.

The Facebook survey resulted in responses from both current Volunteers and RPCVs. While the bulk of the responses were from those who have served in the past decade, several RPCVs from the 1960s mentioned the type of books that any Volunteer can identify with. “The Fannie Farmer Cookbook” is among the

favorites listed by Larry Halsey (Costa Rica, 1969-1972). “I still have (that cookbook), stamped Peace Corps/Costa Rica,” he wrote.

Fellow 1960s alumni Rob Hudson (Brazil, 1967-1969) listed “The Arrogance of Power,” by J. William Fulbright. A U.S. senator at the time he wrote the book, Fulbright spearheaded the legislation that gave us the prestigious scholarship that many RPCVs have earned.

The popularity of such books have spanned generations, with “War and Peace” also among those being mentioned multiple times. “Where else will you have the opportunity to read it?” deadpans Joe Valasko (Papua New Guinea, 1998-2000).

Many RPCVs who recently completed service mention such biographical books as “Three Cups of Tea,” by Greg Mortenson, and “Mountains Beyond Mountains,” by Tracy Kidder. Meanwhile, any book involving Harry Potter receives a thumbs-up as both a source of entertainment and an educational tool.

While some Volunteers obviously read more than others, one would be hard-pressed to find anyone who has completed service without reading at least one good book. After all, asks Kristin Fredriksson (Bulgaria, 1999-2001), “Didn’t everyone read ‘Where There Is No Doctor/Dentist’? We all got handed those books during training.”

Peace Corps Facebook Top 10

(The following books were listed the most during a recent Facebook survey of Volunteers and RPCVs)

1. “One Hundred Years of Solitude,” Gabriel Garcia Marquez
2. “The Poisonwood Bible,” Barbara Kingsolver
3. “Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure the World,” Tracy Kidder
4. “War and Peace,” Leo Tolstoy
5. “Catch 22,” Joseph Heller
6. “Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance,” Robert Pirsig
7. “Three Cups of Tea,” Greg Mortenson
8. “Lonesome Dove,” Larry McMurtry
9. “Atlas Shrugged,” Ayn Rand
10. “The Ugly American,” Eugene Burdick and William Lederer

I Like it!

Peace Corps/Ukraine Partners with Operation Respect

Ukraine Youth Development Volunteer Bob Schlehuber (2009-2011), a native of Loves Park, Illinois, saw instances of bullying in his small village and decided to do something about it.

He initiated a project after learning about Operation Respect, an organization founded by Peter Yarrow of the folk group Peter, Paul, and Mary. Schlehuber found Ukrainian nongovernmental organizations (YMCA, Alternative V, and American Music Series) willing to help, and worked with the U.S. Embassy to finance a training and concert by Yarrow in Kyiv.

Operation Respect is a nonprofit organization working to provide students with a respectful, safe, and compassionate climate of learning, free of bullying, ridicule, and violence.

Yarrow was excited to launch his program in Ukraine and offered some free concerts at local schools. He and his children, Bethany and Christopher, began their trip with a concert for Peace Corps trainees. That was followed by a concert supported by the U.S. Embassy for a wider audience in Kyiv’s Ukrainskiy Dim (Ukrainian House Hall), with famous Ukrainian folk singer Mariya Burmaka participating. A day earlier, Yarrow and Burmaka recorded “Don’t Laugh at Me” in English and Ukrainian to be distributed to Ukrainian schools.

Operation Respect members and Peace Corps staff traveled to the village of Volunteer Mike Carlo (2009-2011). There, the group performed a small concert for



Peter Yarrow of the folk group Peter, Paul, and Mary performs with students in Ukraine. Yarrow introduced the anti-bullying organization Operation Respect to the country with the help of Volunteer Bob Schlehuber.

local youth, the school administration, and parents. Students joined the band and played some songs together, with Yarrow singing in English and the students in Ukrainian.

“We start with the kids, with the youth. Music brings people together, educates ... and teaches them to

grow in their hearts; to grow in their generosity,” Yarrow said.

Operation Respect staff held a four-day workshop for Volunteers, YMCA, and Alternative V representatives. They will now go to towns and villages in Ukraine to promote the program.

Go Farther with the Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Program

In a recent survey, 42 percent of companies surveyed said they expect to hire more employees in the next six months. That's not all. The U.S. Census Bureau has reported that higher education attainment is positively correlated with work-life earnings and net worth. And last, but certainly not least, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics has published data showing that the more education you have, the less likely you are to be unemployed.

So what does all of that mean to you? Well, 90 percent of Peace Corps Volunteers have at least an undergraduate degree, but just 10 percent have a graduate degree, meaning the odds are good that you have educational room to grow with the Paul D. Coverdell Fellows Program. Those with master's degrees may also want to consider one of Peace Corps' more than 55 partner universities if they are considering a career change.

Peace Corps Fellows receive financial aid from Peace Corps partner universities, reducing the total cost of tuition. Fellows also undertake career-building internships in underserved American communities. Applying their Peace Corps service experience to serve others in the U.S., Fellows teach in public schools, work



in public health facilities, and contribute to community development projects for nonprofit organizations.

Since 1985, nearly 4,000 returned Volunteers have participated in Fellows. Jared Buono (RPCV/Ghana, 1997-1999) parlayed his Fellows experience into a doctoral degree in watershed management from the Uni-

versity of Arizona. He now runs his own nonprofit, overseeing domestic and international projects. Of Fellows, he says, "I don't know why any RPCV who goes back to school wouldn't want to participate in the program."

As long as you satisfactorily complete Peace Corps service, you have lifetime eligibility for Fellows. Completion requirements can be found at peacecorps.gov/fellows under "Eligibility and Admissions." Graduate school is a major—pun intended—decision. If you're not ready after closing your overseas service, don't worry, the program has been around for 25 years and it grows every year. If you wait awhile, you may find that there are even more options that are a match for you.

When you're ready to go to graduate school, we're ready to help. Whether you are interested in business, education, public health, or another field, chances are that Fellows has a program that's right for you. For more information, go to peacecorps.gov/fellows.



President of Panama Visits Peace Corps



President Martinelli is presented a gift by Peace Corps Chief of Staff Stacy Rhodes.

The Peace Corps hosted Panama President Ricardo Martinelli and the official Panamanian delegation for a panel discussion at its Washington, D.C., headquarters on April 27. Participants joining the president and Peace Corps Chief of Staff Stacy Rhodes included U.S. Ambassador to Panama Phyllis Powers, returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) who served in Panama, Panama Vice President and Minister of Foreign Relations Juan Carlos Varela, Ambassador to the United States Mario Ernesto Jaramillo, and Panama Minister of Education Lucy Molinar.

During the event, President Martinelli and Rhodes delivered remarks and thanked one another for the spirit of cooperation that represents the Peace Corps program. RPCVs introduced themselves to the panel and shared stories from their experiences in Panama.

Malaria Prevention Focus of New Agreement

The Peace Corps and the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI) announced a new partnership that will expand malaria prevention activities throughout Africa and provide Volunteers with the best resources on malaria prevention.

PMI is led by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented with help from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).



Peace Corps Director Aaron S. Williams announces a new partnership with the President's Malaria Initiative.

The announcement was made during a World Malaria Day discussion at Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C., on April 26.

"This partnership builds on the work of Peace Corps Volunteers in Africa who have been leaders in malaria prevention

for 50 years," said Peace Corps Director Aaron S. Williams. "From distributing bed nets and eliminating mosquito breeding areas, to teaching families about basic health practices, Volunteers implement projects and solutions to help fight this preventable disease."

Congressional Delegation Meets with Peace Corps/China



United States senators, Peace Corps China Volunteers, and Country Director Bonnie Thie convene at Peace Corps/China's headquarters.

A delegation of 10 United States senators, led by Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada, met with 22 Peace Corps/China Volunteers and staff in Chengdu, China, on April 24. The delegation discussed the importance of the work of 130 Americans serving as U.S.-China Friendship Volunteers.

Other senators attending were Sen. Richard Shelby (R-Ala.), Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), Sen. Richard Durbin (D-Ill.), Sen. Michael Enzi (R-Wyo.), Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.), Sen. John Isakson (R-Ga.), Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.), and Sen. Michael Bennet (D-Colo.). They were in China for an eight-day visit.



RPCV Career Conferences on Tap

Do you need practice telling your story as a tool to find employment? Consider attending a returned Peace Corps Volunteer (RPCV) career conference, hosted by Peace Corps' Returned Volunteer Services. **The next conference at Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C., will be August 9-12, 2011.**

This four-day event includes interactive sessions on networking, interviewing, resume writing, and opportunities to put into practice what you've learned. You will also be able to connect with prospective employers.

Shorter regional versions of career events are scheduled in Dallas, Texas, on Friday, June 10, and Chicago on July 13. More information is available at peacecorps.gov. Questions about the events may be sent to rvsevents@peacecorps.gov.



NOTES *from the* FIELD

A Brief Look at Posts and Projects

BURKINA FASO

Weekend Girls Camp
Educates and Empowers

Volunteers Michael Berino (2009-2011) and Jon Rudnicki (2009-2011) created a weekend girls camp in their respective communities, with 10 girls from each community being chosen to participate based on their academic standing.



Members of the Camp des Filles (weekend girls' camp) show their camp certificates.

Activities revolved around four key themes: 1) Life skills (setting objectives and goals and planning for the future, with a panel of model women in the community speaking to the girls); 2) Health (proper hygiene and hand washing, malaria prevention, proper nutrition, moringa tree planting, and HIV/AIDS awareness sessions conducted by nurses from a village medical center); 3) English (basic greetings, numbers, simple objects); and 4) Sports (Frisbee and soccer).

COSTA RICA

PCVs Commemorate
International Women's Day

In honor of the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day on March 8, Volunteers Rebecca Stumpf (2009-2011), Meredith Burgess (2010-2012), and Hannah Evans (2010-2012) organized events to celebrate the contributions of Costa Rican women and encourage self-esteem in young girls.

Stumpf hosted a monthlong exhibit at her local bakery titled, "What does being a woman mean to you?"

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Volunteer Leads
Community Cleanup

Volunteer Nanette Hittmeier (2010-2012) organized the first *Gran Limpieza* (Great Cleanup) in her community on March 19.

The cleanup began along the community's main street and moved to parks and common areas throughout town. The event was attended by more than 40 local students, community members, and oth-

er Peace Corps Volunteers who collected bags of plastic, paper, and other garbage that littered the community's streets.

HONDURAS

PCV Helps Implement
Health Programs

Volunteer Blair Wrangham (2009-2011) trained high school seniors to implement health programs for 11- to 14-year-old girls in five small communities within her municipality.

The girls participated in activities designed to improve their self-image and lead them to a healthy future. Eighty-five girls participated in the 12-session program.

The project concluded with a closing ceremony and forum on women and children's rights in the town center. Over 140 community members attended, including the girls and their mothers.



Volunteer Blair Wrangham (2009-2011) joins community members after one of 12 health sessions provided for high school seniors.

JORDAN

Volunteers Run From
Dead Sea to the Red Sea

Ten Peace Corps Volunteers ran in the 14th annual Dead2Red relay race in March in commemoration of Peace Corps Month.

Dead2Red is an annual 242-kilometer race that begins at the Dead Sea and ends at the Red Sea in Jordan. The Volunteers raised \$1 for each kilometer for the Peace Corps Partnership Jordan fund, a community-based fund supporting Peace Corps projects.

The team placed 18th out of nearly 40 teams. To support the Volunteers, Peace Corps staff drove vehicles along the race route.

The Peace Corps/Jordan Dead2Red team included 2009-2011 Volunteers Andrew Harris, Matthew Hilgart, Lauren Moser, Torin Peterson, Naomi Simila-Dickenson, Marty Weiss, and Jana Whetzel Grindheim. Also participating were 2010-2012 PCVs Darius Bittle-Dockery, Katie Schneller-Morsch, and Kate Shaughnessy.



Lauren Moser (2009-2011) of Croghan, New York, passes the baton to Darius Bittle-Dockery (2010-2012) of New Haven, Connecticut, during the Dead2Red relay in Jordan.

SURINAME

Country's First Camp GLOW
Encourages Larger Plan

Peace Corps/Suriname successfully launched its first Camp GLOW (Girls Leading Our World) last December with the help of 19 Volunteers. Forty-nine girls from eight remote Maroon villages in the Amazon jungle attended workshops designed to encourage self-esteem, goal-setting, and leadership, as well as create awareness for personal health, HIV/AIDS prevention, and the importance of education.

In hopes of extending the goals of the camp to both boys and girls, nine Volunteers later attended a weeklong training-of-trainers facilitated by a training specialist from Peace Corps/Nicaragua.



Teens participate in a four-day Camp GLOW in Suriname. Nineteen Volunteers and 49 girls participated.

TONGA

PCV Helps Open
First Public Library

Education Volunteer Sarah Weiner (2009-2011) helped open the first public library/community learning center in her Tongan community.

Weiner collaborated with a village leader, who proposed the development of a community learning center with a library and computer lab, and donated his own money to its construction. The

Ranfurly Library Service in Australia donated more than 1,500 books, and local schools also contributed books to the facility.

Since the library opened in late February, more than 60 villagers have borrowed 300 books.



Volunteer Sarah Weiner (2009-2011) shows the new library/community learning center she spearheaded in her community in Tonga.

UKRAINE

English Club Celebrates
International Day of Peace

Volunteer Jessica Strickland (2009-2011) commemorated the International Day of Peace on September 21 by engaging her students in a conversation about world peace.

Students in Strickland's English Club, which she started along with fellow Volunteer Patrick Smith (2009-2011), were encouraged to discuss what it would be like to live in a peaceful world.

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Baños Secos: An Environmentally-Friendly Alternative

BY ROB GUNTHER | PCV ECUADOR

As a part of Peace Corps/Ecuador training during the summer of 2009, Volunteer Craig Adams visited Cayambe to deliver a presentation about *baños secos*, a type of composting toilet. He discussed some of the inefficiencies of Western sanitation systems, offering a sustainable alternative that could be applied to the communities where we would serve for the next two years.

While western societies are equipped with sewer systems and plumbing that allow waste to be flushed away, thought is rarely given to where it all goes. Gallons of fresh water are wasted and scores of chemicals are used in an effort to “treat” our waste and stop contamination. However, it all eventually makes its way back to the water supply.

This is true for a well-developed American city, and the problem is even more pronounced in areas without highly developed sewage systems and plumbing. As nations struggle to emulate the luxuries of the developed world, they don’t realize that tons of human waste is dumped directly into water supplies. Communicable diseases thrive and spread among populations living where sanitary conditions are nonexistent.

Craig went on to explain how humans have been composting and reusing their waste for centuries in other parts of the world. With minimal investment and just a little bit of maintenance, human waste can be safely and effectively converted to nutrient rich fertilizer: composting toilets.

I had never heard of anything like this before, and I was intrigued. When

I got to my site, I read all of the literature available through Peace Corps on composting and ecological bathrooms. I was even fortunate enough to be placed at a site with an actual need for sanitation systems. Located in the subtropical zone of Cotopaxi, my site is comprised of about 15 *recintos*, or small communities, spread across the foothills of the Andes. In at least three *recintos* there was a complete lack of bathrooms.

Much of what happened next was luck. I had been shadowing my counterpart, Jobany, at my host organization for some months, where we mainly focused on community gardening and home compost piles. I was extremely lucky and grateful for Jobany’s patience with a clueless foreigner living in his shadow, constantly asking what must have been ridiculous and repetitive questions.

About six months into my service, I was at a community meeting where someone started talking about the latrine situation, or lack thereof, in the outer *recintos*. The general consensus was that the town had to get its act together and start building some latrines.

I couldn’t let an opportunity like this pass by without at least offering my opinion. In my best Spanish, I attempted to explain that I had experience with *baños secos*, a type of composting toilet that I thought would be a perfect solution for the community’s needs. Everybody just stared at me and tried to smile and nod along politely. Then I showed them a slide show of photos that Craig had sent me, and people started to understand what I was talking about.

I explained that I could apply for a grant through USAID’s PL-480 program, and both my counterpart organi-

zation and the junta made it a point of the meeting to officially consider what I had to say. That consideration itself felt like the definition of a Peace Corps success story.



Volunteer Rob Gunther and community members are building 35 composting toilets like the one shown here.

After that meeting, things started happening on their own. A field trip was organized with the junta and my counterpart organization to the province of Santo Domingo de las Tsachilas, where we investigated various types of composting toilets that were currently in use. Through this experience, we gained actual knowledge of the ideas and theories.

We met with a local maestro (a car-

penter, architect, plumber, and electrician all rolled into one) to start working on a design for our *baños secos*.

After a few months of juggling schedules, dealing with grants, reviewing quotes on materials, and a few last minute trips to the Peace Corps office in Quito, the project was approved and we received the funding.

Construction is underway for 35 families to each build a composting toilet. Our team monitors the progress and instructs the community on proper use and maintenance.

Once materials and equipment were purchased and delivered, my role in this project lessened, which is what is expected. Our role is to facilitate good ideas, get projects started, and let the communities do what they need to do.

Although I believe the community would have probably ended up getting latrines without my presence, I successfully introduced an environmentally friendly view of sanitation, and then provided a means of financing it.

I’ll be spending the remainder of my service making sure that there aren’t any problems when it comes to actually composting the waste.

I strongly encourage other Volunteers who are interested in this type of project to get in touch with your program managers, read all of the available literature from the office, and determine if this environmentally-sustainable project may be a solution in your community.

(Rob Gunther is a community health Volunteer from Garden City, New York. He is expected to complete his service in August 2011.)

Kazakhstan Volunteers Pound the Pavement

BY SHANNON HUETT | PCV KAZAKHSTAN

“I spent my morning running from Asia to Europe, what did you say you did?”

That Facebook posting from Volunteer Hannah Sieling (2009-2011) says it all.

Sieling joined fellow Kazakhstan Volunteers Holly Morrison (2009-2011) and Denise Nyffeler (2009-2011) to run the Istanbul (Turkey) Eurasia Marathon, which is the only course in the world to include two continents (Asia and Europe) in one race. Meanwhile, Christopher Thomas (2009-2011) and I decided to run a marathon in Tallinn, Estonia.

During a conversation with my sister in Missouri via Skype, we discussed her short run in the 60-degree Fahrenheit weather, while I was here, sitting near Siberia with -5F and snow bluster-



From left, Volunteers Denise Nyffeler of Gurley, Nebraska; Holly Morrison of Sandy, Utah; and Hannah Sieling of Watertown, Minnesota, prepare for the beginning of the Istanbul (Turkey) Eurasia Marathon.

ing outside. She told me of a conversation she had with her professor, who

happens to be an RPCV. He mentioned that a few “crazy people” in Peace Corps train for, and complete, marathons. At that point my sister mentioned that I and a few others can be categorized as such crazy people.

Running a marathon seemed like the perfect goal to set for myself during pre-service training. “Why not,” I thought. “I’m going to need to find an activity to calm me down and help work off all the fried bread and cookies.”

Several fellow Volunteers and I drudgely piled layer upon layer and began to train, one snow crunching step after another. Four months after that the miles had increased and a typical week included at least 22 miles, if not more. Due to various reasons, the number of marathon training trainees dwindled to five.

We had originally intended to run

in Omsk, Russia, but getting a visa became a problem. As a result, three of us decided to go to Istanbul, while Christopher and I opted for the run in Estonia. Four hours and 27 minutes after beginning, I finished. Words were not enough so I cried as I was awarded my finisher’s medal. Not only had I run a marathon, but I enjoyed it and finished three minutes under my goal!

I have so much to reflect upon to make the next marathon even better. In addition, I have a story to keep telling and the enthusiasm needed to help promote a healthy lifestyle for those I serve in Kazakhstan.

(Shannon Huett is a small business development Volunteer from Poplar Bluff, Missouri. She is scheduled to complete her service in 2011.)