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Peace Corps Times

The "Life After
Peace Corps" Edition—
Plenty of Options
for Future RPCVs!

Storytelling Your Way Back Home

By Robert Michon, Returned Volunteer Services, Peace Corps

This issue of Peace Corps Times focuses on coming back to the U.S. and the reentry process itself; i.e., the process of reentering the U.S., your community, your social environment, your family, and, in some cases, your career. It is an important topic, for a successful reentry can enable a smoother transition and catalyze personal and career ambitions. Therefore, how do you manage a "successful reentry?" The answer is to substantiate your Peace Corps experience by communi-

need to realign expectations to conform to the realities of what they find back home—many of which may have changed or shifted while they were away. You have changed and grown as well, so the lens through which you view familiar people and places may also be quite different.

When we talk about "home," we don't mean your "home of record." Rather, "home" is that place of recognizable feelings, predictable responses, known routines, comfort,

"Reentry in short is a deeply personal experience and a cultural one as well."

— CRAIG STORTI, THE ART OF COMING HOME

cating its meaning to others—and by extension you—by telling your story.

One recently returned Volunteer described the process this way:

"I find myself struggling with some of the everyday trials and tribulations of being back in America. I look back at what my country director told us during our COS conference and think just how apt he was and how at the time I naively believed I would be able to avoid many of the issues that he said we would face upon re-entry, such as coping with the apathy that so many people have in regards to your service and your experiences, the distance between your 'old' life and your 'current' life, and many of the other small issues that were not issues pre-service."

Many of these struggles are a result of expectations associated with home. In the same way that you had to realign some of your expectations when you went out into the field as a PCV, Volunteers who finish their service and come back to the U.S.

and trust. It's where you have an intimate knowledge of geography (streets, buildings, stores, clubs), of social routines (how and why people relate to each other), and of phenomena (events, activities, occurrences).

Finally, it is a place where traditions and habits are worn without wondering whether or not to slip them on. It is where you can be yourself and still be recognized, understood, and accepted.

When you return home and your expectations and feelings of home aren't met, what you thought of as reality has shifted. You've changed, and so have other people and you find yourself going through yet another transition.

Storti writes in *The Art of Coming Home*, "For all its minor and a few major annoyances, [reentry] can't begin to diminish the luster of any expatriate experience. Indeed it is in some ways precisely because the overseas experience is so rich and stimulating that reentry becomes a problem. In



RPCV Suzanne Zoller giving a presentation on Gabon at the Marie Reed Elementary School in Washington, D.C., during Peace Corps Week.

other words, if you are having trouble readjusting, it's probably because you had such a terrific time abroad."

Take comfort in knowing that it is, in fact, your overseas experience that can help you manage your transition—for it is a deep reservoir of relevance from which to draw. Call forward your "rich and stimulating" experience, understand its significance and implications and how it redefined you, and then tell your story to different audiences (friends, family, community, hiring managers, graduate school administrators, etc.), through different canvasses (written resumes, oral resumes, presentations) and across different venues (interviews, coffee shops, libraries, schools) to satisfy their needs...and yours.

You have a wealth of incidents, activities, accomplishments, and other experiences to share, each one

relevant in some way. The key is for you to uncover these and then share them.

Practice your storytelling with others either in the same situation as you, or with those who have experienced reentry themselves. These are the individuals who "get it"—who can empathize—and who can encourage you along that path of readjustment. Generally, these are repatriates past and present, among whom, most notably, are other RPCVs.

Seek these RPCVs out. They could be your PCV cohort, or they might be members of a returned Peace Corps Volunteer group (many of which can be found online at www.rpcv.org/groups). These individuals can serve as transitional partners, as coaches, as friends, or as mentors. Whatever the role, they can assist you in negotiating your way back home.

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Peace Corps Helps You Share Your Story

Want a way to share your story? One of Peace Corps' three goals is to help Americans better understand other cultures—including the one in which you are living right now. The agency has two great programs to help you spread the word about your service after your return: Peace Corps Week and Speaker's Match.

The Peace Corps Week program invites RPCVs to share their Volun-

teer experiences with their communities during the agency's week-long anniversary celebration each year in March. Whether you have been back four days or four decades, it's important to share your Peace Corps stories—it's a great way to relive your service, put your experience into perspective, and promote global awareness and a sense of service. Visit www.peacecorps.gov/pcweek for more

information, and to register to participate—this also helps the agency show Congress that we're carrying out the Peace Corps' third goal.

The Coverdell World Wise Schools Speakers' Match program offers a means to find student groups eager to hear about your Peace Corps service—the work you did, the friends you made, the places you saw, even the insects and reptiles you may have

encountered. It will notify you when a teacher in your area requests an RPCV speaker.

World Wise Schools also has presentation materials, including books, posters, lesson plans, videos, slide shows, and podcasts. To take advantage of Speaker's Match, register as an RPCV speaker. Find out more at www.peacecorps.gov/wws/speakers-match/

Crisis Corps—A New Way to Give Back

After serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer, many returned Volunteers wonder—what next? For some Volunteers, the desire to continue serving burns even more brightly. Whether a Volunteer served a few years or a few decades ago, one option for continued service is Peace Corps' Crisis Corps.

Mary Angelini, Crisis Corps Director, oversees the recruitment and placement of Crisis Corps Volunteers worldwide. Says Angelini, "Crisis Corps Volunteers carry out well-defined assignments that meet a country's critical needs. Often they work in countries that have experienced a trauma of some kind and are trying to get things back to normal."

Crisis Corps works in a variety of areas, including HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, natural disaster relief, disaster preparedness, and humanitarian assistance. Assignments can be anything from helping a health ministry formulate an HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment strategy to teaching livelihood skills like beekeeping or carpentry in post-conflict environments.

Ed Oshiro, a Crisis Corps Volunteer in Malawi, works with the Lighthouse Trust to support its home-based care and clinic programs, which offer educational and psychosocial support to people with HIV/AIDS. "My organization is an incredibly efficient

and effective NGO," Oshiro says. "It's been a great experience thus far and I feel I will learn a lot from working with them."

At 66, Oshiro first served as a Volunteer in Ghana from 1963-1965. He then served in South Africa from 2001-2003, and in Samoa from 2003-2005. He also served as a Crisis Corps Volunteer in Uganda from 2005-2006. "Serving in the Peace Corps changed my life," Oshiro said. "I can't think of a better way to enjoy retirement," Oshiro says. "I'm making a real difference, not merely awaiting tee-off time at the golf course!"

Another returned Volunteer who is currently engaged in Crisis Corps service is Sara Wakild. Sara served in Benin from 2004-2006, and was searching for something meaningful to do before starting business school in late 2007. When she saw an open Crisis Corps position in Namibia working with an HIV/AIDS organization, she sent in her application that day.

"It was a four-month-long assignment and seemed tailor made for me," Wakild says. She is currently in Namibia working with at-risk youth and orphaned and vulnerable children.

While Crisis Corps Volunteers don't go through the extensive training that Peace Corps Volunteers do at the beginning of their service, the les-



Children in Guatemala holding tree seedlings. The community worked with CCV Max Ashwill to carry out a tree reforestation project after Hurricane Stan hit in 2005.

sons Wakild took away from her previous Peace Corps experience helped her hit the ground running in Namibia.

Says Angelini, "Crisis Corps can also provide a bridge into one's professional life, particularly for someone interested in development work—Volunteers are often able to use their practical experience with local groups to pick up contracts with local or international organizations."

Says Wakild, "My goal is to take advantage of the unique opportunities Crisis Corps has to offer. It's an excellent way to continue or rekindle the joys of being a Peace Corps Volunteer."

This is how it works: Crisis Corps maintains a database of interested re-

turned Peace Corps Volunteers. When requests come in for Crisis Corps Volunteers, the database is searched for candidates with appropriate skills.

Candidates are also encouraged to reapply for specific positions as they come open to demonstrate their continued interest.

Crisis Corps Volunteers generally receive the same allowances and benefits as Peace Corps Volunteers, including round-trip transportation, living and readjustment allowances, and medical care.

Visit www.peacecorps.gov for more information. You'll find the link to Crisis Corps on the home page.

CAREER CORNER

Did you ever consider the Peace Corps an "employer?"

Undergraduates apparently do. In a survey conducted by UNIVERSUM called the "2007 Most Desirable Undergraduate Ranking," Peace Corps was recognized by undergraduate college students as the fifth most ideal employer to meet their career goals.

The survey gathers students' perceptions of companies and expectations upon entering the working world.

The study, which recognized the Peace Corps' mission in global development, was recently published in www.BusinessWeek.com, and listed Peace Corps behind Google, Disney, Apple, and the Department of State.

Peace Corps moved up dramatically in the rankings—from number 138 last year to number five. The agency was also recognized by liberal arts majors as the second most ideal employer and among science majors as the third most ideal employer.

The survey noted that many students are making a significant

choice to seek out and engage in volunteerism by selecting the Peace Corps before embracing private-sector employment offered by many companies.

Others receiving awards noted that Peace Corps Volunteers are among the best employment candidates, who bring skills and cultural awareness that only comes from their international experience.

Many Volunteers enter Peace Corps service having scant knowledge of what they will do after service. However, while serving, they begin to see clearly which paths their careers will take, and they find that the skills they have gained overseas have more than adequately prepared them for future jobs.

Here's some post-Peace Corps testimony from RPCVs:

"Peace Corps solidified my desire and passion to work not only internationally but interculturally as well. I now am a health educator for a refugee resettlement agency that primarily resettles East and West



RPCV Nina Denise Hernandez (South Africa, 1997-1999) back in New York City.

Africans and Cubans. The Peace Corps was my gateway into learning more about African cultures."

Byron Williams, Lesotho, 2003-05

"When I left Peace Corps, I did not change my career goals, but I did learn Spanish, which is beneficial to me now and also will help in my career as a social worker."

Cynthia Jones, Honduras 1997-99

"Before my Peace Corps service, I was a bank manager, very materialized and task-oriented. My value system has shifted. I found that the local nationals' lives were centered on the importance of relationships and family instead of this drive to get ahead. I now see this as important in my life."

Georgann Gall, Lesotho, 2003-05

Notes

MOROCCO

Moroccan Delights

PCV Lauren Stark is a small business development Volunteer who met Samira in a telephone center in Morocco. Lauren discovered that Samira had a special talent for baking, as was evident from her delicious cookies. Lauren suggested that Samira open her own bakery. Soon enough, Samira was selling her goodies in a vacant store that her parents owned.

Lauren has since given a positive update on Samira's progress. Her bakery doors were painted by a local artist to help advertise her products. Samira even traveled to Meknes, a city in Morocco, for three weeks to network with other bakery owners. "She went every day, helped them with their baking, learned some new recipes, and watched how they conducted business," said Lauren. "She's already tested out some of the recipes, and she told me that she's interested in starting an association to teach baking to young girls."



Moroccan cookies

UKRAINE

Reaching for the Top

It had snowed more than 10 inches in Volunteer Daniel Reynolds' town in Ukraine, preventing him from doing his favorite hobby, rock climbing. Daniel met with a local professor, Nikolai Kostriysya, who also loves rock climbing and chairs Polissya, a youth sports organization. Members of Polissya had been building a climb-



from the field

ing wall but lacked money to finish it. Daniel secured a small grant, making it possible to finish the wall. On Saturday mornings students come for a two-hour introductory course. One hour is spent learning climbing skills; the other is spent with another organization, AIDS Care Education and Training, learning about HIV/AIDS and drug abuse. "Climbing is different from other sports," said one local youth. "It's not for entertainment or keeping fit. It makes you mentally stronger. I like difficulties. Each hold is an aim to reach. Having reached the higher one, you feel energy to climb to the top."

CHINA

World Wise Pen Pals

TEFL Volunteer Derek Kolb recently worked with 60 writing students from



Pen pals in the World Wise Schools Program

the Chongqing University of Medical Sciences (CQUMS) on a semester-long letter-writing project with first graders from Salk Elementary School in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Using World Wise Schools' Correspondence Match program, they exchanged letters and artifacts three times over the course of the semester. CQUMS students learned how to write letters and continued with the project on their own for the semester as a review. They wrote about various things and gave the American students Chinese names. The American students studied China in a year-long unit which entailed learning Chinese characters language, art, and culture lessons.

NIGER

A Star Trek

PCV Natalie Beck and two other Volunteers in Niger set out from their site on foot for Niamey, a 350-kilometer trek. They left their town with an albino donkey, a donkey cart and its driver, Daoui, a Tuareg friend called Alkassam, and Lola the horse. They stopped at towns and schools, leading outreach health sessions to any interested group they found. Other Volunteers would join the

group for a stretch; at one point there were 12. They met with mayors, chiefs, and villagers to talk about the Peace Corps. "Sixteen days later, our caravan wandered into Niamey, finishing what was one of the most rewarding and fun experiences in our Peace Corps service," said Beck. "We slept in a camel herder encampment, baked bread in the sand, saw the harvest moon rise over the Sahel, and reached over 1,000 men, women, and children in 17 villages."



Volunteer Amber Greening

EASTERN CARRIBBEAN

Carnivale Cleanup

St. Kitts Volunteers Amber Greening, Marty Landis, and Shelagh Murphy worked with UNESCO's Small Island Voice and Solid Waste Management Corporation to sponsor a "Clean-Up" Carnivale troupe. The theme was "Reduce and Reuse in 2007." The troupe followed the annual Carnivale parade throughout its procession, picking up trash in order to encourage others to keep St. Kitts clean. The troupe made decorations from discarded and recycled items such as water bottles, plastic soda bottles, cans, an old umbrella, and an old food barrel. Local businesses donated the troupe's trash bags and wheelbarrows. Volunteers from several other groups throughout the island participated, including the St. Kitts Sea Turtle Monitoring Network and the St. Christopher Heritage Society.

RECIPES

EASY CHINESE CORN SOUP

Prep Time: 5 min. Cook Time: 10 min.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 can (15 oz.) cream-style/sweet corn
- 1 can (14.5 oz.) chicken broth (or cube style)
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 T cornstarch/or potato starch*
- 2 T water

* Flour can be used in place of starch if necessary to get the right consistency.

DIRECTIONS:

In a saucepan, combine the corn and chicken broth. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat. In a small bowl or cup, mix together the cornstarch and water; pour into the boiling corn soup, and continue cooking for about 2 minutes, or until thickened. Gradually add the beaten egg while stirring the soup. Remove from heat and serve.

FROM PCV BETTY THAM, BUSINESS EDUCATION, ARMENIA

TIP: *Make your own cookbook!* Each recipe we feature will fit on a 3"x 5" index card. Cut out, paste, and save for future use.

Do you have any recipes to share? Send them to pctimes@peacecorps.gov—we will consider them for inclusion in upcoming issues.

Storytelling, cont'd from p.1.

The National Peace Corps Association and the Peace Corps (through the Office of Domestic Programs) have entered into a cooperative agreement to pilot mentor programs in which recently returned Peace Corps Volunteers (those back a year or less) are matched with more established RPCVs. The Peace Corps hopes these pilots will become mentoring programs connecting RPCVs with returning Volunteers around the country. Whether or not this happens, know that a crucial element to your reentry success might be connecting with other RPCVs who "get it" and who can help you understand who you are, where you've been, and where you are going. You may share more than a few laughs as well.

Good luck. and we look forward to hearing your story!

Visit www.rpcv.org for more information

Peace Corps Times

A publication for Peace Corps Volunteers serving worldwide

Do you have something to share about your Volunteer experience? We welcome all Volunteer submissions and suggestions. Send your inquiries to:

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agency NEWS

In remembrance of Julia Campbell, PCV, Philippines

Here is just one of hundreds of statements left on Julia Campbell's blog, by a Filipino friend, following Julia's death in April:

You didn't have to leave the comforts of home—yet you did.

You didn't have to share yourself selflessly—yet you did.

You didn't have to spend two years in our country as a volunteer—yet you did.

You didn't have to help my countrymen—yet you did.

Thank you for everything you didn't have to do but did anyway.

Maraming, maraming salamat

[Tagalog for “very much, very much, thank you”]

Fellows/USA Partners with Yale University

The Peace Corps began a partnership with Yale University in February, accepting Yale as its newest Fellows/USA partner school, and its first in Connecticut. Through this partnership, returned Peace Corps Volunteers now have the opportunity to build upon their service while earning an international relations degree at Yale.

After completing service, returned Volunteers will need to apply to Yale Graduate School through its regular admissions process. If admitted, the Fellows program will allow returned Volunteers the opportunity to pursue a graduate degree at reduced cost while aiding underserved U.S. communities through internships.

Peace Corps Begins Partnership with Cambodia

On April 4, the first group of 29 Peace Corps Volunteers was sworn in, signifying the historic beginning of a partnership with the Kingdom of Cambodia and the opening of the Peace Corps' 139th country in its 46-year history.

The group of 29 new Volunteers is made up of 13 men and 16 women of diverse backgrounds, including recent college graduates and a married couple in their 40s. Since their swearing in, the Volunteers have moved in with Cambodian families and begun teaching English at the upper secondary level and helping teachers in Cambodian districts improve their English language proficiency.

Only seven months into my service in Macedonia, the two most popular questions I get from host country nationals are, “What will you do when you are finished with your service?” and, “When will you get married?” I normally just shrug my shoulders to both...but then I think about it for a while and wonder what the answers really are. I am not preoccupied with the marriage question. But the “what will you do when you are finished with your service?” That's a big one!

I think that part of the process of deciding to join the Peace Corps and going through the application process really is about being willing to put your plans on hold and pressing “pause” for a moment. So when the question arises (especially this early in my service), I just sort of freeze up.

The truth is, I got accepted to law school and the Peace Corps around the same time. Then after having multiple

lawyers surprisingly tell me to “join the Peace Corps, because there is always law school,” it became clear to me that committing 27 months of my life wouldn't “set me back,” as some people worried, nor was it going to “lessen the choices that I'd have upon my return,” as others warned.

I will think about my future more during the second half of my service I think, but I strongly believe that I will continue my education—just wondering whether it will be law school or possibly a master's in public policy or international studies. Yet some days I think I want to get a joint law and master's in public policy degree. I often search the Peace Corps website and weigh the different Peace Corps Fellowship programs throughout the nation and wonder, when the time comes, which one I will apply to (I've seen more and more universities joining the Fellows Program regularly). So as my

VOLUNTEERlife



Tara Trepanier
MACEDONIA

language skills have improved I now am able to answer that I will most likely go on to further my education either with a law or master's degree... then the host country nationals suggest I become the next U.S. Ambassador to Macedonia... then I reply “*mojabi*” or “maybe” because I haven't figured out how to say “anything is possible” in Macedonian yet.

As for when I'll get married? I have learned that the best answer to this is to reply to them with one of their favorite phrases—*Ima Vreme*—which translates into English, “There is time.”



WHAT VOLUNTEERS ARE BLOGGING...

ZIMBABWE | FEBRUARY 13, 2007

Reverse Culture Shock

When I returned from my too brief stint as a Peace Corps Volunteer in early June of 2000, I didn't put too much effort into reassimilating into my American existence. I'd walk out of grocery stores empty handed because the abundance was overwhelming, but beyond that, I didn't recognize any “reverse culture shock” that Peace Corps had warned us about during our close-of-service conference. Confident I'd be returning to my little village and my brood of nesting hens shortly, I blew through my readjustment allowance taking trips to see my family throughout the Midwest, and visiting my boyfriend's family in northern Mississippi. While I did plan to go back to Zim, I thought a plan B was in order. So in early July, I applied for graduate school for the fall. I took my GREs as the first of many malarial fevers took hold, assembled the necessary paperwork, secured recommendations.

It amazed me how quickly I could get those things done.

I loved grad school, and I soon secured a job that I loved even more. I took a full course-load and worked 30 hour weeks, so that left little time for socializing, and no time for television. I hadn't gotten to return to Zim, but things were working out well for me.

rootless.wordpress.com

ST. LUCIA | DECEMBER 31, 2007

Applying to Extend

I plan to apply for an extension. I would return home Sept 2008 instead of this upcoming September. There are many reasons I want to continue on in this wonderful nation. First, there are several projects that will not be quite ready for me to leave in September. Secondly, I feel as if one particular project (introducing service learning) will need an extended amount of assistance so that it will not die out as soon as myself and another key PCV leaves. Finally, I am not ready to go home, or go on with my life.

jeninpeacecorp.com

ECUADOR | MAY 4, 2007

More Patriotic After PC

I am in love with my community, but obviously it is just not home. It is known that Peace Corps Volunteers always return to the States more patriotic than when they left, this I can understand. We take for granted so many things like plumbing, trash pick-ups, sewage systems and the like. However, we are far from perfect, I feel that with our daily comforts we compromise a certain passion for all living things, somewhat of a disconnection from the land and each other. But damn do I miss those comforts!

blog.myspace.com

KENYA | MARCH 29, 2007

The Storm Before the Calm

Before Peace Corps I had a habit of, shall we say, “sweating the small stuff.” Major life-altering issues I could handle, but throw one old lady with coupons in front of me at the grocery store, and suddenly my life was unbearable.

Before Peace Corps, I'm not even sure I knew all of this about myself. I spent years being blissfully unaware of my anger. But in Kenya, there was a lot more time to be reflective. Plus, there's just no place in Kenyan society for being uptight. Every time I would express my frustration with a late meeting or lose patience with a Kenyan tout, I would immediately feel bad. It was their culture I was entering, and in any case, how does getting angry solve the problem?

I learned a lot from my time there, and I came back feeling like a more centered, self-aware person.

after-peace.blogspot.com