



Peace Corps Features



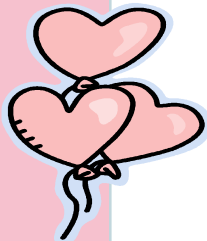
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Los Angeles Regional Office - Southern California & Arizona

February 2003

Loves Takes Couple To East Africa

**By: Jason Rothbard
Eritrea, 1995-1997**



Melissa came home from work as an elementary teacher one afternoon and said to me, "Jason, do you want to join the Peace Corps?" I think I was a bit taken aback by this unexpected question, but I immediately responded with an enthusiastic, "Yes." Peace Corps was something that I had thought and day-dreamed about for many years, but my life just seemed to be taking a different route. Needless to say, we applied within days and were at the airport saying goodbye to our families within a year.

We were bound for Eritrea, a country on the Horn of Africa, that had only gained its independence from Ethiopia four years prior.

We were each to be English teachers: Melissa, ninth grade and me, eighth. However, similar to most Peace Corps volunteers, we developed a number of secondary projects, as well. We designed and implemented an adult literacy program, a basic first aid and water sanitation program and worked on a number of other community development projects.

About 8% of all Peace Corps volunteers are part of a married couple, serving together. Life in the Peace Corps as a couple is somewhat different than serving as a single volunteer. The up-side is large, but negatives exist, as well. First of all, serving with one's spouse provides for a natural support system...someone who intimately understands you, someone who shares in your successes and comforts you in your failings.

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Cupid Strikes in Morocco

**By: Bill Parmentier
Morocco, 1986-1988**

Mary Jane was an English teacher living in Ait Ourir and I was a waterbaby based in Nador. We met officially at a throne day party in Safi. Mary Jane's roommate, Lori, decided to throw a party for her birthday and invited me to come down for the weekend. It took roughly 16 hours of various buses, trains, and taxis to get from Nador to Ait Ourir but I didn't hesitate.

I showed up on the appointed weekend and was the first one to arrive. Mary Jane was surprised. My first task was to gut two freshly killed and defeathered chickens for dinner that night. I had no experience gutting chicken but I somehow managed it.



We met again at the All Volunteer Conference in Efran. I asked her on a picnic date along a stream in the woods. It was very romantic. Mary Jane came up to visit me about a month later. She didn't waste any time getting me to the fish market where we purchased a 2 kilo octopus. Another culinary experience for me.

[See Cupid Strikes on Page 5]

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THE REGIONAL MANAGER SENDS HER LOVE

What's Love Got to Do With It?

By: Jill Andrews, Los Angeles Regional Manager

The focus of this month's newsletter is LOVE!

What's love got to do with it? I would answer everything. Are you working in a job you love? Do you know who you really are? Do you like that person? What do you value? Are you in a good relationship? If not, why don't you have the courage to seek a more meaningful one? Do you love yourself enough to want to be happy?

I would encourage you to integrate what your real values are into what you do, where you work, how you live, and who you love.

What are your strengths? How often do you get to use them? Are you lucky enough to get to do you do what your best at everyday? If not maybe it is time for a change?

Are you doing what you love? Do you hate getting up in the morning, dread the commute to work, resent the daily demands of your job, always wish it were Friday? If the answers are yes then you're probably in the wrong job.

Do you have the courage to make significant changes in your life? Is it time to change jobs, take on a cause, get out of a bad relationship, improve the lives of others, or just be a better friend to yourself?

Discover your strengths and make the changes that are needed. Know what you love and do it! Both your career and personal relationships will flourish.

The Peace Corps offers an opportunity to clarify your values, test your strengths and share your talents and skills with others. It may even change your perceptions of yourself, your job, your country and the world. Peace Corps offers opportunities to meet others who share your values and commitment to making the world a better place, and it almost always leads to building relationships that last a lifetime.

“No love, no friendship can cross the path of our destiny without leaving some mark on it forever.”

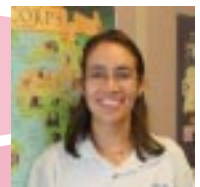
~Francois Mauriac



HOPE • FAITH • COURAGE
GROWTH • CHANGE • SERVICE
LEADERSHIP • TEAMWORK
RESPECT • KINDNESS • COMPASSION

Q & A!

**Your Questions Answered
By Recruiter Cristina Hernandez**



What is the required commitment?

27 months. There is a three month training period that takes place overseas. After the training your two years of service begins.

Are there any shorter termed assignments?

No. There is a lot that Peace Corps Volunteers have to accomplish in those 27 months. They have to learn a new language and culture, re-establish their own daily routine and life style, integrate themselves into their community and gain their trust, do an assessment of what are the needs of the community and identify available resources before any significant progress is made in their projects. Once you are there, it may seem like two years is not enough!

Sparks Ignite in Cameroon: Two Peace Corps Volunteers Find Love

By: Alexandrxra Saperstein and Julie Hanson

When Julie Hanson applied to be a Peace Corps Volunteer in 1990, she applied for the same reasons many do: the chance to use her degree in an international and humanitarian way, and the chance to live out in person



what she had seen in her National Geographic magazines she grew up leafing through. When Hanson arrived at her post in 1991, she didn't know that the Peace Corps Volunteer in the village nearest to hers would become her husband five years later, and that her life would be forever changes by her Peace Corps experience.

Hanson still vividly recalls the day her plane flew into Douala, the provincial capital of Cameroon. "Africa is such a visually, stunning place," said Hanson. "As our bus traveled from the airport to our training site, I remember all the colors, the smells of firewood and cooking, the children smiling and waving as they stood beside the road, and the women carrying all sorts of things on their heads. It was amazing."

Hanson served as an Agroforestry Volunteer in Ndu, a village of 1,000 people in the highlands of Cameroon. Her main duties were working with villagers to create sustainable agriculture systems and developing pottable water systems by tapping into the natural springs.

Explained Hanson, "A typical day would begin with the "snooze farm." I'd be awakened in my mud-brick house by crowing roosters and snorting pigs. Not ready to get up just yet, I'd wait for the clomping of the goat hooves outside my window. That was my signal. After greeting my neighbors, my work day would begin by meeting my farmers and working alongside them tending seedlings in the nursery, or managing soil improvement projects on their farms.



Then I would have lunch with one of them at their house, generally fufu corn (a pounded ball of broiled corn flour and njama-njama (a leafy green vegetable served with garlic, tomatoes, and peppers). Then, back to work!

Meanwhile, Mark Hanson was in his second year of service as a Peace Corps Volunteer in a village about 20 miles away. He was a science



teacher at a local high school. When the two met, it was love at first sight. "I guess it takes a certain kind of person to travel thousands of miles from home, and be passionate about this kind of work. We found that we were a pretty good team. In his free time, Mark seemed to enjoy meeting my colleagues and helping out a bit too. As a secondary project, we painted a World Map at a local elementary school in one of my farmer's villages," recalls Hanson. In time, each of their respective villages adopted the other as one of their own.

Along with meeting the love of her life, Hanson said she has many equally fond memories of her experience as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Cameroon. One of her favorite traditions was the way Christmas was celebrated.

[See Cameroon on Page 5]

UPCOMING RECRUITMENT EVENTS

- February 4th:
Borders Books
Westwood
- February 9th:
Los Angeles Central
Public Library
- February 11th-13th:
Tulare Agriculture
Expo
- February 11th:
USC
- February 11th:
Pomona College
- February 11th:
Northern Arizona
University
- February 14th:
Chapman University
- February 20th:
University of Arizona
- February 23rd:
Borders Books
Costa Mesa
- February 25th:
Occidental College
- February 25th:
UC- San Diego
- February 26th:
UC- Santa Barbara
- February 26th:
Tucson Library
Wilmot Branch
- February 26th:
Pitzer College
- February 27th:
Cal. State Univ. of
San Luis Obispo

For additional dates and
specific times please
visit:

www.peacecorps.gov

Peace Corps Features



Aira & Craig Harris – A Peace Corps Courtship

By: Craig Harris
Paraguay 1995-1997

Aira and I met in training in Paraguay in 1995 (A-21). She is from Washington, Iowa, population 5,000 and surrounded by corn fields and prairie. I was a long-haired surfer from Santa Barbara, and a recent graduate of UCSB. We were an unlikely match to say the least

We ended up in the same language class in training. Three trainees and the instructor, in a classroom the size of a closet, average temp 90 degrees and 100% humidity, 2 hours a day for 3 months, learning both Spanish and Guarani, the indigenous language of Paraguay. You really get to know someone in those conditions. About halfway through training, during a long field training weekend, our group was camping in the mountains of Paraguay (the only mountain in Paraguay for that matter). Aira forgot to bring her tent, and she set up camp under the stars next to the river. At 2:00 am, freezing and damp, Aira woke me up and asked if she could stay in my tent with me. To this day, 7 years and two kids later, we have been inseparable.



We moved to Santa Barbara upon our return, and began to enjoy the comforts that we had long left behind. Aira pursued her teaching credential, and I went to work as a fundraiser for local nonprofits.

We were married in July, 1999, near Aira's hometown alongside the Iowa River. It was 90 degrees and 100% humidity, just like the first day we met. Aira glowed in her gown that was handmade in Paraguay. Twenty RPCV's from our group traversed the country to join us for our wedding.

In June, 2002, Aira delivered twin boys, Zachary and Noah. Our sense of adventure has started all over again. *Twins...the toughest job you'll ever love.* We are forever indebted to the Peace Corps for giving us the experience of a lifetime, and for bringing us together. ■



Aira, an Environmental Education volunteer, went off to the small town of Ybycui. I was an Agroforestry volunteer in the small secluded village of Santo Domingo. We were 8 hours away by bus and foot and oxcart, (or 15 hours if the roads were wet). Our relationship was put to the test, as we only saw each other about once a month. And because neither of us had access to a phone, we would have to agree on a time and place to meet each month. If either one of us failed to show up, there was no way to call or leave word. On many occasions one of us would have to walk 10 miles in the rain to make our rendezvous. It was always worth it.

After two years in our respective sites, Aira signed on for a third year as Coordinator for Peace Corps Paraguay Environmental Sector after my service. I ended up co-founding a nonprofit demonstration farm in Paraguay with 10 fellow RPCVs serving as the first executive director of S.E.P.A. (*Servicios Ecoforestales Para Agricultores*).

We still can't believe some of the adventures we shared together, both in Paraguay and on our travels. From swimming with crocodiles and piranhas in the Pantanal of Brazil, to getting stuck in horrible storms at 14,000 feet in the Peruvian Andes, to having lightning strike 10 feet from us, to being holed up in a hotel in Ecuador during a declared state of marshal law, as well as experiencing a coup attempt in Paraguay, we have had some unparalleled adventures together. *A Peace Corps courtship* by any standard.



Cupid Strikes



Continued From Page 1

We worked on meeting each other as much as possible and we managed to work in a trip to Granada, Spain.

Things were a little uncertain by the end of our service but we knew we wanted to try to stay together. We were able to spend about 2-3 months traveling around the US and visiting our various family members. By October of 1988 we had settled in to my sister's basement while job hunting



We ended up in Denver late in the year and it was some time before I woke Mary Jane up at about 1:00 am on my birthday to propose. Despite the early hour and despite my long delay in asking, she said yes. We were married in Colorado Springs in 1990 with many of our Peace Corps friends in attendance. We were thrilled to have so many that could come.

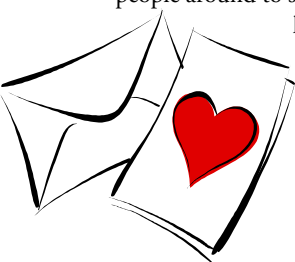
We are now living in Arizona and have two sons, ages 7 and 4. ■



Distant Lands

Continued From Page 3

Recalls Hanson, "Christmas isn't about gifts, it's about making food to share with friends and just being together. Community and family are so important in Cameroon that no one is ever really alone. There were always so many people around to share and enjoy the day with. No one is homeless there. Families would never have a homeless relative. There would always be a space for them in their homes and their hearts. At Christmas, neighbors and family go from house to house, visiting one another and enjoying each other's cooking and company.



In 1993, Julie and Mark returned to the U.S. and settled for a bit in San Diego, California. They soon became active members of the local returned Peace Corps Volunteer group- a group that continue to guide and support their career paths. In his first job after returning to the States, Mark's boss was also a returned Peace Corps Volunteer. Julie and Mark were married in 1996 and that same year returned to graduate school. Both selected programs that reflected the important influence of their Peace Corps experience, and Mark's actually granted him substantial academic and financial credits for his Peace Corps work. The couple now works and lives in Santa Monica with their eleven-month-old son. ■

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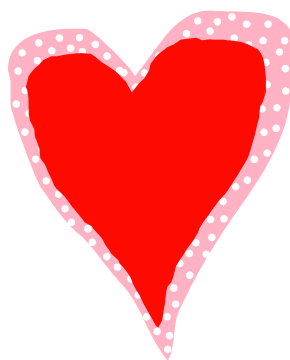
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Africa

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On the other hand, many couples often find that they are slower to learn the host-country language because they are not forced to speak the local language all of the time.

If your relationship is strong going into the Peace Corps, it will almost always get even stronger when the couple is tried with the additional pressures of living in another country with different rules and expectations placed upon couples. Additionally, sometimes it is easier for couples to assimilate into a culture where it's normal for people to be married at a very young age. That is if you don't mind being asked, "where are you kids?" at least 20 times a day. ■



Happy Valentine's Day!

