

El Clima Magazine

The Official Peace Corps Ecuador Volunteer Magazine



Fall 2015 - The Omnibus Issue



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From the Editors

Welcome to *El Clima Magazine* and thank you for reading. This issue—The Omnibus Issue—highlights each of the five amazing groups of volunteers that currently serve together here in Peace Corps Ecuador.

Since Peace Corps Ecuador's inception over 50 years ago, there have been 114 groups consisting of about thirty volunteers each, serving in at least a half dozen programs. In this *El Clima* issue, we proudly present Omnibuses 110 through 114 who represent the

Community Health, Youth and Families, Teaching English as a Foreign Language, and Natural Resource Conservation programs.

Readers will gain a unique perspective as they follow our writers through each phase of the Peace Corps experience. Omni 114 recently finished its pre-service training. Omni 113 and 112 recently attended their respective Reconnect and Mid-service conferences, and Omni 111 readies itself for the close-of-service conference while Omni 110 waves goodbye.

Regarding goodbyes, *El Clima Magazine* extends its sincerest thanks to Omnibus 111 editors Dani Gradisher, Yajaira Hernandez, and Chris Owen. As re-founders of *El Clima Magazine*, they proudly hand the baton to *El Clima's* newest 113 and 114 editors—Robert Jamieson, Rae Sterrett, Courtney Evans, Devin Olmack, and Melia Cerrato.

And so the Peace Corps legacy continues.

Sharing your Peace Corps story,
The *El Clima* E-Team

Cover Photos: Omni 114 during pre-service training / Omni 111 mural / PCVs at Mital del Mundo / Shay Priester with the Omni 112 mural

El Clima is a digital magazine written, organized, and published by Peace Corps Ecuador Volunteers for the greater Peace Corps Community.

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Omnibus 114

As Peace Corps Ecuador's newest group of volunteers, Omni 114 combines both the community health and youth and families programs, focusing on projects ranging from youth leadership to HIV/AIDS prevention.



(A) Omni 114 overlooking the Tumbaco Valley from the new training center (B) Cultural presentation (C) An organic garden project in Nayón

Bye-Bye Bibi!

Wyatt Clay

Before we left, at least a dozen people warned us, “Peace Corps won’t be easy.” Moving to a new country with a group of new people can be quite a daunting task—that is, unless your Training Manager is Bibi Al-Ebrahim.

During her visit to Ecuador, Peace Corps Director Carrie Hessler-Radelet was disappointed about Bibi’s departure but didn’t hesitate to refer to her as “world famous.” Anyone who has been privileged to spend time with our favorite Training Manager would have a hard time arguing against that.

Bibi was born in Kuwait and raised in the United States. She was a multi-sport athlete throughout her childhood and played soccer, basketball, and softball at Allderdice High School. She then went on to Denison University where she studied Biology before joining Peace Corps and being placed in Ecuador.

After her work as a Natural Resource Conservation volunteer, Bibi got her master’s degree in international public health from Tulane University. Shortly thereafter, she returned to Ecuador to work in the non-profit field before

joining back up with the Peace Corps Ecuador team. Bibi has also had quite a wide variety of jobs.

While studying at Denison, Bibi worked at the school feeding salamanders. Needless to say, her favorite job has been her position as Training Manager. Her dream job however, is as an eco-friendly fish farmer on her new property.

Aside from Bibi’s long list of accolades, what are some things that you might not know about her? For starters, she has been wreaking havoc on local soccer fields around Ecuador for more than a decade. When she isn’t busy with work or spending time with her dogs—sometimes accomplished simultaneously, to the joy of trainees—she enjoys being with her family and staying active outdoors.

Here are some other quick facts: her favorite Ecuadorian food is the various soups, her favorite musician is Tracy Chapman, and you shouldn’t ask her to dance to salsa music. Depending on the season, her favorite places in Ecuador are Baños and Canoa.

As she prepares to return to the United States, she expects to miss the soup, her family, the *tiendas*, and the walkability of the places she has lived. Her advice to us as a

former volunteer is to take advantage of our awesome opportunity and make it our own experience.

Looking back on her experiences in Ecuador, she has realized that “the most difficult challenges in life have produced the most amazing outcomes.”

Through Bibi’s undeniably positive attitude, her respect for her coworkers, and the attention that she puts into the atmosphere of training, she has positively impacted the lives of thousands of people and we know she will continue to do so in the future.

Bibi’s guidance and friendship will be sorely missed, but the influence she has had on each of us will continue for decades.



Al-Ebrahim says goodbye with Omnibus 110.

Change Day by Day

Anna Sombrio

The first few days in country we stayed in the training center located just outside of Quito's city center. Dormitory-style rooms. It felt a little like summer camp.

Day one, I had my first experience with trying to explain that I cannot eat meat. I was able to spit out a few words in Spanish like, "Vegetarian. No meat. I am allergic." My food came out perfect. I made it through obstacle one. Days two and three were long ones—full of safety classes, rabies shots, and languages.

There are some 40 of us Peace Corps trainees here in Quito. Over the three months of training, we spend close to 470 hours together, so our first few nights consisted of getting to know each other through late night talks, yoga on the roof, as well as listening to other trainees sing and play guitar.

On day four, our host families picked us up. This was way more stressful and nerve-wracking than I had originally anticipated. The idea of living with a family I do not know in a country that I do not know, all while using a language I can barely speak, is quite

intimidating.

I was placed with a beautiful host family that invited me into their home with open arms. I couldn't be happier. They took me to "El Panecillo," a hill that sits between central and southern Quito. "La Virgen de Quito" is a statue that sits atop the hill and overlooks the city.

My host family finds some of the stuff I do or say pretty comical, like eating bread with my soup. Instead of not eating my soup with bread, I have just ac-

cepted my inner gringa and started using it to my advantage. For example, my family does not question me about the unhealthy amounts of avocados I eat here. They just assume it is a gringa thing, and I plan on keeping it that way.

I spent week three in Riobamba. It is a city a few hours south of Quito in the Chimborazo Province. I fell even harder in love with Ecuador during this trip. The time spent in Riobamba consisted of learning about culture, indig-



Sombrio overlooks Old Town, Quito. "La Virgen de Quito" rests on the hill in the distance.

enous language, and sitting on the roof of my hotel drinking horrible boxed wine with friends that are undoubtedly becoming family.

On day 22, I ATE MEAT! I accidentally ate meat (I'm blaming it on the language barrier; I was made to believe this dish was meat free) and it was the worst meat I ever would want to accidentally eat...pig skin. I honestly thought it was yellow pepper, until I noticed long hair coming out of the skin and the chewy pig tasting substance that filled my mouth. I vomited almost immediately after.

Everyday there is something that shocks me or catches me off guard here in Ecuador. These things aren't necessarily bad, just different, and I am so grateful to be able to experience these things.

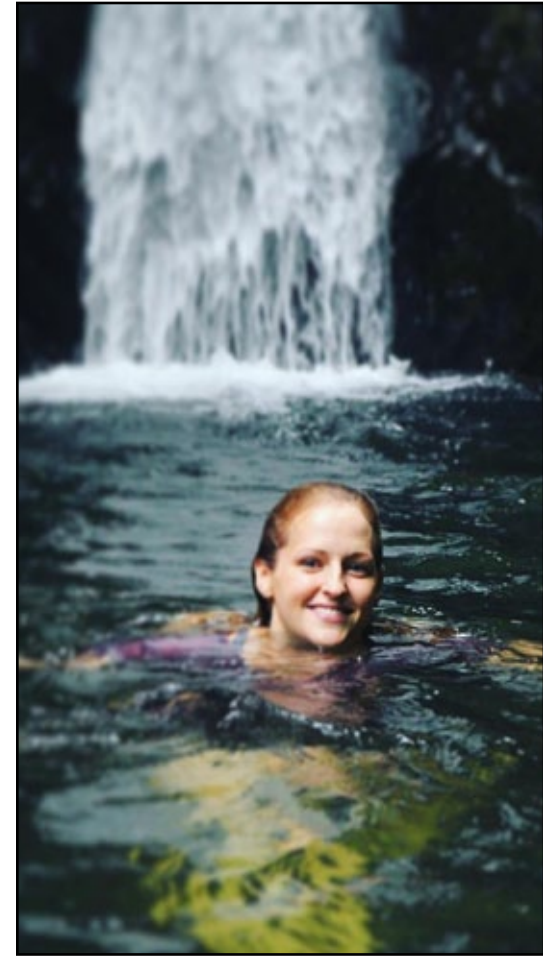
I am learning that everyone has something to teach, and everyone has something to learn. I have learned a lot of things that cannot be taught in classes but only through experience. I have learned that it is not a lunch if there isn't rice and also that it is easy to be a vegetarian here. I have learned not to drink the tap water, but DO drink it if you want to fit into your skinny jeans. I have learned that my stomach will never be the same, and not to throw your toilet paper in the toilet (only the trash can). I have learned not to walk around my house bare-foot; I have no idea why, only that I should not do it. I have learned that nose picking it not a thing

people try to hide. I can just sit on the bus with everyone else and dig away. Pick and flick my friends, pick and flick. I have learned that it is true you definitely do learn from making mistakes.

Most importantly I have learned how much relationships are valued in the Ecuadorian culture. How much people shower one another with kindness and love. I have come to envy the importance of love this culture has. I think we can learn from them. If we all just loved a little more, this world would be a little more delightful for all of us. When you see yourself battling between love and logic, just let love win. Love is more important than logic.

Lastly, no, I have not changed the world yet. No, I don't expect to change the world...although I do see it changing me.

Sombrio enjoys one of Ecuador's waterfalls.



Sombrio takes a break from pre-service training with her Ecuadorian host parents.

Spiritual Cleansing

Alana Lopez

Two months into training we went on the first of three trips scheduled during training: our cultural trip. We spent the week in Riobamba (jokingly referred to by our Language and Culture teachers as “Fríobamba,” *frío* meaning “cold”). In addition to getting to know Riobamba, we took day trips to smaller communities such as Cebadas and Guamote. Both places had extremely high indigenous populations—we’re talking like 96%.

It was amazing. My group spent two days in Cebadas, a small town right next to a gushing river. When I say gushing, I mean gushing. If one were to slip and fall into that baby, game over.

On our first day there, after interviewing a passionate, eloquent, and committed parish council member, we were lucky enough to be invited to an indigenous cleansing ceremony. We followed a caravan of community leaders, council members, and *yachags* (indigenous religious leaders) down a winding road toward the river. Then we hopped over to the side of the road, slid down a steep ravine, and followed the river to a small spring.

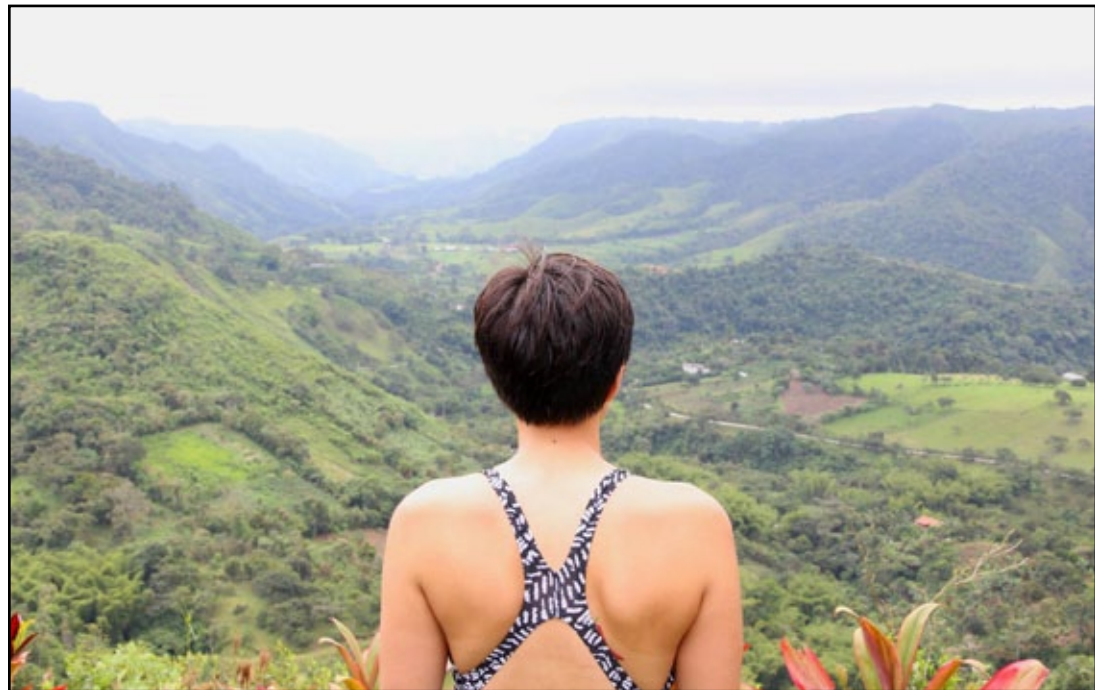
The indigenous people of the Andes feel intimately tied to the

Earth—the *Pachamama*. For this reason, the ceremony took place in the cool, clear running water of the spring. The spring itself was adorned with Catholic images, showing just how intertwined Catholicism has become with pre-Columbian indigenous religions.

From the outset, I was overwhelmed by how readily the ancient indigenous traditions of spirituality and religion mixed with Catholicism. To me these two religions seem so contradictory—monotheism and polytheism, ancient traditions and a religion imposed by the Conquistadors—but the indigenous people have somehow found a balance.

The ceremony itself was power-

ful. I was lucky enough to be able to participate in the cleansing, which went a little like this: I took my shoes off and rolled up my pants and made my way to a large rock which served as a seat.



(A) Lopez participating in an indigenous cleansing ceremony. (B) A view of the lush Andes.

With my feet in the cool running water, the *yachag* asked me to pick two of the four stones he had placed under the water just upstream from me. He gently set them in my hands and began by shaking large leaves which had been soaking in blessed water over my head.

Then he rubbed some sort of scented liquid along my forehead, under my nose, and over my hands. He grabbed a plastic bottle filled with herbs and a different but equally powerfully scented liquid. After taking a swig, he grabbed my arms and sprayed it over me in a mist.

Then he asked me to rub the stones all over my body while he continued to spew mist over my head. It may sound a little strange, but afterward I felt so calm, relaxed, and truly cleansed.

The next day, we walked to the town square where an altar filled with fruits, grains, and legumes had been artfully arranged as an offering to the *Pachamama*. The ceremony that followed, called *Inti Raymi*, is one of four *Raymis* during the year. Each celebrates a different season, giving thanks to the sun and the earth for harvests.

Luckily, all of the PCTs were able to partake in the ceremony by entering the altar and taking grapes to both give to the *Pachamama* and to eat while thinking of a wish.

Then on Thursday, we spent the morning learning phrases in Kichwa, a language spoken by the

many indigenous in Ecuador.

Let me just start by saying this: Kichwa is hard. It is nothing like Spanish—nothing like anything I've ever heard before. But wow is it beautiful.

Here are a few phrases in case you ever need them:

- *Alli punsha*: Good morning
- *Alli tuta*: Good night
- *Katakama*: See you later
- *Imanalla kanki*: How are you?



(A) Lopez hiking Volcán Pichincha (B) An altar display celebrating the *Inti Raymi* harvest.

Omnibus 113

As Peace Corps Ecuador's first full group of TEFL volunteers, Omni 113 works with middle and high school English departments throughout the country, equipping and empowering teachers and students alike.



(A) Omnibus 113 celebrates swear-in (B) 113 PCVs present a cross-cultural show (C) A team building during their first months in Ecuador

My Ecu Momms

Allison Wilhite

“Call your mom.”

These three words, depending on the situation, can invoke panic, annoyance, or nostalgia. When our program director, María Dolores, pulled me aside during training to say just that, I immediately panicked. What was wrong? Did something happen to my family in California? Why did my mom call Peace Corps first and not me? And that’s when it dawned on me to ask, “Which mom?”

I have three moms: Susann, my *mom*, the woman who raised me; Adri, my host mom during training; and Alba, my current host mom at site in Ambato. The latter are the women who have welcomed me into their homes and hearts here in Ecuador.

A unique benefit of Peace Corps service is the host family experience. During the three months of pre-service training and the first six months of service, volunteers live with a host family. Host families come in all shapes and sizes, but their purpose is the same: to help the volunteer learn the local language and culture, integrate into the community, and feel safe and welcome in a strange, new

country.

It’s no easy task, and the host families may feel as much stress, if not more, than the volunteer as they adapt to having a stranger in their home.

My omnibus, TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) 113, was the first group of volunteers to be trained in the new Peace Corps Center in the town of Nayón, just northeast of Quito. We were each of our host families’ first experience with Peace Corps and, for some, with North Americans.

My first host mom, Adri, warmly opened her home to me and quickly became my confidant—which was no small feat considering my low level of Spanish. Adri would spend an hour or more with me each night while making dinner, asking about my day, helping me with my homework, and sharing her life. Throughout such a challenging training period, having a host mom like Adri made all the difference as I learned the language, culture, and traditions of Ecuador.

Near the end of training, I had the bittersweet realization that I would have to leave Adri and the family I had grown to love

in Nayón. I would be moving to Ambato, my site for the next two years in the sierra.

My new host mom, Alba, came to my “swearing-in” ceremony, or public service oath to officially become a volunteer, and she sat in the audience with Adri. Both of them came with their cameras, ready to capture my momentous day just like my actual mom would.

By the end of the ceremony, my moms had become fast friends, each sharing their anxieties and hopes about hosting a volunteer and Adri the fact that I am good kid who can bake great chocolate chip cookies.

That night I packed my bag, loaded Alba’s car, and said a tearful goodbye to Adri and her two daughters. I promised them I would be back soon to visit. I am so grateful for the experiences shared in Nayón with Adri and to now have her as part of my extended family for life.

Oh, and which mom was I to call, you ask? It turns out it was Alba. She wanted to know if I ate chicken because she was anticipating my arrival with a traditional meal. I will be in good, loving hands these next two years.

Putting down Roots

Zackery Hersh

People are trees.

The more time I spend away from the States, the more I feel my roots. The connections I have spent my life growing strain me as I stretch them farther and closer to their breaking point. I feel them buried deep in the ground, tugging me backwards. I feel them changing and being uprooted, and I feel new roots slowly replacing the old ones.

Roots take hold of places, people, and things.

The place I feel the most is my old home in Seattle. I was just a seedling in Los Angeles when my parents dug me out and moved our family to the Pacific Northwest. I only lived there for a couple of years, but it was plenty of time to grow attached to the tall evergreen trees, the rainy afternoons, and the tall snowy peaks off in the distance.

The people I feel most strongly are the people I met in college. My branches tangled and knotted with other trees and we created our own weird, little forests. Four

years of living together, seeing each other weekly, and staying up late under the winter moon created quite the wooden knot.

The thing I miss most is camp, which is actually cheating because camp for me was always just a combination of people and places. I guess then this root grew into

“Roots take hold of places, people, and things.”

the soil of all those emotions I felt: the love, support, and exhilaration that radiated through me every day of the summer.

Most people stay. Trees are not the migratory type and neither are people. Sure, the tree may spread its branches over to explore new lands every now and again, but it never leaves. But we did. We left and our roots remained in the ground and are stretching to keep up with us.

And more than my roots straining at the cracks of my heart, I worry about the new roots that have started to form. Tiny, brown

wooden hands escaping from the seed of my heart. The more I live in Ecuador, the bigger they get the more they drain all the nutrients from the top soil. They become stronger and I see more and more that it will become just as hard to leave Ecuador and Peace Corps.

Left in indecision, some days I just stay in my room out of the sun, away from internet, my roots unable to grow. I am still learning how to choose: which roots do I cultivate, which roots do I let wither and die. The past month has been a failed experiment in trying to tend to all my roots and feeling overwhelmed by the number.

I don't think there's a right answer to how we choose to spend our energy and on what root. But I think, because we're in Ecuador, to stay and leave without any roots would defeat the purpose of our time here. Because these roots that we create with people, places, and things are really just there to help us continue to grow our branches strong and tall. And I didn't come all the way to Ecuador to leave the same tree that arrived.

Expect the Unexpected

Stephanie Hon Bielik

Omnibus 113 arrived in Ecuador in late January of this year. During the first few days of training, the ongoing theme was expectations: how to lower them, how to readjust them, and how to try not to have them.

This, of course, is impossible! I am human and American. I want things a certain way. I want to make a difference. I want to have fun. I want constant cues of what is going to happen, how it will occur, and how to respond. But this is Peace Corps...a true journey into letting go of control, expecting—and accepting—the unexpected.

Before my husband and I moved to Ecuador with Peace Corps, we sold everything we owned (minus my wedding dress, some photos, and our two adorable cats) and took a road trip to visit our families.

We were continually asked questions about where we would live, what we would do, what we would eat, if we would have run-

ning water, etc. We really had no answers, other than we would be co-teaching with current English teachers in local high schools.

Our expectations of life in Ecuador certainly changed as we learned more about our site, met our host family, and became part of our school communities.

From pictures on the Peace Corps website and stories of friends who have been Peace Corps Volunteers, we figured we would live in a tiny town with

clothes hanging off the line and children lining up at our door for piggy-back rides or water fights.

We never expected to live in the capital city of Quito, the second largest city in Ecuador, or to be fully equipped with modern amenities, malls, and constant traffic. We were surprised when our host mother had a penthouse apartment with a washer and dryer, a car, and wireless internet.

We dreamed of evenings and weekends filled with Ecuadorian



The Ecuador saying, “Ama la vida”, welcomes Stephanie to her new site—Quito.

music and dancing in typical Ecuadorian vestments. Instead, our first weekend at site oversaw our attendance to the Ms. Teen Ecuador Pageant, and I had to wear our host sister's prom dress from fifteen years ago!

We had many preconceived ideas about life in Peace Corps Ecuador, and many of them were shattered in the first few months.

However, Peace Corps Ecuador has many of the things we were expecting. We expected to meet new people, integrate into our host family and community, and connect with students and teachers in our schools.

We made friends with the Cuban owner of the shwarma restaurant on our street. We watched

the Pope say Mass with our host mother, her daughter, and her grandchildren on TV while listening to the chorus sing outside of our window. We have been able to visit the homes of our co-teachers and meet their families. We see students in the street or at the mall, and they shout out "teacher" to greet us in English and smile.

Although things look different than we expected and we have had experiences that we never could have imagined, we consider ourselves in the right place at the right time.

We know this journey has brought us to this place, and we are continually ready for the next unexpected adventure, friend, or conversation.



(A) Stephanie, accompanied by her husband, wears her host sister's prom dress to the Ms. Teen Ecuador Pageant. (B) Stephanie in Quito.

Six Months in Review

Rae Sterrett

One week before Staging:

Holy cow, my email inbox may break from all these messages. Language Proficiency Interview, Host Family Interview, Google Drive Instructions, the training center address, last minute, read-this-before-you-go handbooks...I haven't said goodbye to my family yet, how am I gonna find time to do all of this before I leave?!

Staging: Most of these people seem normal at first, but then we did that one session and some people went off on tangents about stuff I thought was a little out there. Hopefully no one speaks to me too much so they don't find out how weird I am.

Two weeks into training: You know, these people are pretty cool, and Ecuador is SO pretty! The Training Center is great, the sofas are so comfortable for relaxing after class. I can't wait to head into Plaza Foch, explore the Mariscal, climb Pichincha, and even head to the coast! These two years are gonna be a BLAST!

One month into training: OK, how can I still not understand the juice lady when she asks me what fruit I want in my smoothie? I swear she's speaking a different

language than my Language and Culture Facilitator...wait, maybe that's it! Maybe she's speaking with a coastal dialect! Or Kichwa...

Six weeks into training: How can there possibly be this much homework? I swear I never see my host family. I can barely understand anything at the kitchen table anymore. My host brother laughed at me when I mixed up the words for comb and fart again. I know he's only 6, but it wasn't THAT funny.

Man, all I want right now is REAL peanut butter, a hot shower, and the ability to order a beer on the first try...I'd settle for a Reese's Peanut Butter Cup, though.

Two months into training: OK, if I hear one more talk about identifying a safe taxi, I may have to stuff my ears with cotton balls. If they could just teach me something like how to NOT sound like an idiot when I'm talking to that incredibly attractive man who sells the to-die-for ice cream. It would also be great if I could learn how to get my host mom to stop commenting on my weight or how to make llapingachos...because I'm pretty sure I'll be living on those once I get to site.

Swear-In: WE DID IT! We all got to swear-in! I'm beyond

pumped to FINALLY be a PCV! I mean heck, as many acronyms as I've learned, I can practically talk in code now, so they HAD to let me in. I even passed my Language Proficiency Interview! I am READY Ecuador, let's do this!

One week in site: I wish another Peace Corps Volunteer lived closer to me. I could really use a partner for that hike I want to do. My host parents work so much that I know they won't have the time to do it. I miss the camaraderie of my omnibus.

Two weeks in site: I AM SUCH AN IDIOT!! I had my backpack on my back and some &^%\$ing thief stole my iPhone! How am I gonna talk to my family and friends back home? How am I going to communicate with my omnibus? Marco is gonna be ticked, and now I have to go buy one of those cheapie Ecuaphones. No streaming, no music, no chatting. Worst. Day. Ever.

Three weeks in site: I never thought I'd discover another ice cream place to rival the one in training, but I have! I have decided that I need this in my life. Every week. Maybe every other day. Oh man, I love you, ice cream. You're the only one around here who gets me.

One month in site: I just had a really awesome chat with my host parents. I think I finally understand what they did for a living before they had kids. The fact that my dad actually was a part of a dance troupe is really cool. I had no idea my mom was such a financial whiz either. She looked over my shoulder at my bank statements and asked me why I was paying so much interest on my credit card.

Six weeks in site: Well, that's the last time I listen to my host aunt for a recommendation on a hiking trip. I slipped and slid all over the mud on that trail, and the view from the top was pretty disappointing. It didn't help that the only food available in that park was chips and beef jerky. Good grief, I'm hungry!

Later that night...Oh no, I knew I shouldn't have eaten street food, but I was famished. Now my stomach feels like it is on fire, and I have diarrhea worse than I during training. Oh no, bathroom!!

Six-and-a-half weeks in site: Well, the digestive issues have finally subsided. Thank goodness for the medical officers. I'm finally feeling well enough to head back into work.

Two months in site: Today my counterpart told me about a dance studio that offers salsa dance classes. I went in with my host dad to check it out. It seems

like a decent place, and I've saved a bit of money, so I figured I'd pay for some weekly classes. We'll see how it goes.

Ten weeks in site: I spoke with my family back in the U.S. for over 3 hours today. It felt so good to tell them about my adventures. My grandmother even thought my diarrhea story was funny. I miss them a lot, but they were so happy to see that I finally got the book and stickers they sent, although I'd already eaten the Reese's, so I couldn't show them that. My host parents thought it was pretty cool to see my U.S. parents over Skype, and my host niece kept waving hello to my family just to see them wave back. I feel pretty lucky to have two families now that care so

much about me. It feels good to have those connections.

Three months in site: Well, the dance classes have been fun, so I've decided to pay for more. I've decided to start cooking more of my meals too. My host mom seems to think that potatoes are their own food group, and I can't believe I'm saying this, but I'm craving SALAD. I want to learn how to make her empanadas, but I also want to make more healthy stuff.

I can't believe I've already been in site three months. I need to start working on my Community Assessment Tools, and soon! The Reconnect Conference is in another month...how could the time have flown that fast?!



Rae shows off the contents of a care package from home, sans Reese's.

All in the Family

Robert Jamieson

As Peace Corps volunteers, we come prepared to live a different life, a simpler life. What we might come unprepared for is everything else.

We go from being in on the joke to being the joke, from laughing with to being laughed at, from thinking we know what we are doing to thinking how the hell am I going to do this? And now, not only do we lack those comfort items to which we are accustomed, but also our families and friends. Our rocks.

We leave our moms, dads, brothers, and sisters. We leave our grandparents with whom we had coffee every afternoon and our aunts with whom we could talk to about anything. We left our friends and friends who shared bath time with us as toddlers and friends who helped us get up for 8 am history in college. The same friends who stood by us when no one else would and friends who made us feel like everything was

going to be okay without having to say a word. We left our rocks. We left our family.

Yet even after leaving all the impossible good-byes and late night cries, we realize something upon arrival: we are not alone. We realize that there are 30 others humans that are just as excited and terrified as us. And, while all of it is impossible and frustrating, we are able to keep going because we are not alone.

We have new rocks. We have a

new family. Omnibus 113 is our family. While we may not be your typical family, we help each other get by. We understand what each other are going through. We don't judge, we listen.

So here's to Omnibus 113, the professional, motivated, and sometimes a little *loco* group of TEFLeros.

David and Stephanie, who laugh with us when we have no idea what is going on in language class.

Heather, Camille, and Katie,



113ers show their playful side as they attempt headstands in Parque de la Madre, Cuenca.

who share coffee with us after training and make pop-remixes about some of the problems we have as volunteers.

Rob and Frank, who inspire us to want something more.

Rae, whose effort to make other people feel included and special is contagious.

Ben and Patrice, who are the best scavenger hunt partners anyone could ever ask for.

Margaux and Alyssa, whose smiles are as contagious as the outrageous accents they occasionally grace us with.

Kevan, who will never say no to having a catch and will never let you forget that he has been to Ecuador before.

Alex and Alejandra, who remind us that being passionate about your beliefs is never a bad thing.

Jackie and Brandon, who taught us that sometimes courage is realizing it's time to move on.

Zack and Z, who make us feel like we've known them for years, not only a few months.

Nora, who shows us that we can climb to the tops of mountains.

Tamara and Christine, who remind us that everyone has an inner dancer.

Jona, who will go in blind to the battlefield that is an EFL classroom with you.

Charlene, who shows us that the strength to stand up for yourself is inside.

Tori, who reminds us that there is always fun to be had.

Charlotte, who shows us that

even if we hit a little speed bump we don't need to stop driving.

Sara, who shows us how far a positive attitude can take us.

Lucy, who shows us how much a smile in someone else's direction can do for them.

Allison, who teaches us that being a professional and having fun don't have to be mutually exclusive.

Angela, who helps us realize that some things need patience

and others need action, and while there is no way to be sure, that's okay.

We are family. Family makes the good times great, the bad times bearable, and the shared times unforgettable. Family makes us realize that in the end, everything will be all right, and if everything isn't alright, it's not yet the end.

Thank you, Omnibus 113, for being family.



Robert takes a group selfie as 113ers wait to enter the "Mitad del Mundo" monument.

Omnibus 112

As Peace Corps Ecuador's most experienced group of community health and youth and families volunteers, Omni 112 leads a wide variety of projects, including bailoterapia, community gardens, and youth groups.



(A) Omnibus 112 shows off their Ecuador FIFA jerseys. (B) PCVs gather at the official line of the equator. (C) Nayón training center rooftop.

Stay or GO

Bryanna Stukes

In Peace Corps, each country has different rules regarding volunteer housing. In Ecuador, after the first six months of living with a host family, volunteers are permitted to live on their own. Because most volunteers have experienced living alone in the United States, many have already decided to move out before they even know their sites. However, there are pros and cons to each side. From my experience, there are five reasons to move out or to stay with your host family. Depending on a volunteer's priorities and preferences, the decision could go either way.

Why you should stay...

1. Integration

Although you can still integrate into your community when living alone, it is not the same as living with a host family. By being a part of the home, you are constantly updated on everything that is hap-

pening in town. You are also able to constantly practice Spanish with your family.

2. Money

All volunteers receive a "moving out" allowance. If you stay with your host family, you still have that money to spend on other things. You can get a dog, take a trip, and many other possibilities. When living on a Peace Corps budget, it is always a great idea to save when you can!

3. Cultural Exchange

Being surrounded by a host family allows you to learn so many aspects of everyday life. You can learn customs, recipes, and maybe even gardening. By being in the home, you are in a position to observe and learn countless things from your family!

4. Reputation

Being the "gringo/a" in town makes it harder for organizations to trust you or want to work with you. There are many instances

where organizations do not recognize *el Cuerpo de Paz*. Living with a respectable family allows community members to associate you with someone they know. It makes it easier for organizations to trust you.

5. Moving is hard!

Apart from the physical inconvenience of moving and the financial burden of furnishing an apartment, moving can be difficult. You have to find a place within the very small budget. If you are in a small town there might be nothing available and, if in a city, nothing suitable. Then, your home must meet an array of guidelines set by Peace Corps. It is very time consuming and can take time away from projects or work in site.

Why you should go...

1. Privacy

Ecuadorian culture does not value personal space or alone time as in the United States. If you do anything alone like watching Netf-

lix or going for a run, people often assume something is wrong. It is also rude to keep your room door closed or stay in your room for extended periods of time. Living alone gives you that space without being judged or offending others.

2. Visitors

When living alone, you have the privilege of inviting other volunteers or friends and family to your home. Unlike when living with a host family, there is often no space and inviting others may feel like an intrusion to your host family.

3. Autonomy

Rather than worrying about what others think, you can make your own rules. You can clean,

decorate, and cook when and how you like. Moving out gives you the autonomy to live on your own terms. You no longer need to please your host family or follow their method of doing things. You can blast your music, paint your walls neon green, or even dance in your underwear!

4. Cultural Independence

By managing the rent, maintenance, and business that goes along with an apartment, you learn so much about Ecuadorian culture. You are forced to interact and manage difficult situations on your own. This definitely increases your Spanish fluency and your ability to navigate the country.

5. Peace and Quiet

When living with a family you never know when the extended family will visit, the adorable children may want to play, or when your host mom might decide to endlessly call your name. Living with a family can be unpredictable and often interrupt your peace and quiet. Living on your own ensures that you can manage your own time and decide when you want to interact with others.

The decision to stay or go is one that can affect the rest of your service experience. It is important that you establish what is important to you during those first six months in site. Every case is a little different, so there is no “right” choice, only the choice that’s right for you!



Bryanna is all smiles with her host parents—dad (L) with her community landscape in the background and mom (R) at a wedding.

Dating Endeavors with Adam

Adam Shahar

A widely known dating app has unexpectedly led me to learn much about Ecuadorian culture and, more specifically, about *Ecu*-dating. Perhaps my following candid observations may help you just a little in your own Latino/a dating endeavors.

There are many words that cause confusion in Spanish; among them are the different levels of “like” and “love.” Whereas, in English, it is straightforward, in Spanish you have this other level besides “*me gustas*” and “*te amo*.” It is the softer, friendlier: “*te quiero*.” The kind of love that cedes to “I love you bro/dude/man/*mi pana*.” This phrase is commonly used for friends, family and between two people beginning to court each other.

In our culture, the words “I love you” don’t come out until a couple has been exclusive for quite some time. But here, you will hear “*te quiero*” early on, perhaps just after a few dates, and this may overwhelm or creep you out.

What we must understand, however, is that these words are common and used loosely. It’s akin to “hey, I kinda like you.” I suggest you mentally use that

translation the first few times.

Relationships progress at a much different pace here, and any imposition of American views on the topic may cause conflict.

It is important to know that when you ask if someone is “*solt*-ero,” you are actually asking them if they are “unmarried.” Someone may say “*soy soltero*” and you’ll go for it, only to later discover that they actually have a boyfriend or girlfriend. Ask if they have an *enamorado/a* (boyfriend/girlfriend) or *novio/a* (serious relationship/fiancé).

Another cause of confusion was the misinterpretation of “*con-*

ocer.” In the early stages of dating I said, “*Me gustaría conocerte más*,” meaning, to my mind, “I want to get to know you better.” My *dulce* words had the opposite effect intended: I received a blunt “*como!?*” A few more days of clashing and I finally understood the situation.

After going out a few times we had, in her eyes, already “*conocido*” each other. So for me to say I would like to “*conocer*” you more was me saying, “I am undecided about you and we need to go out more for me to determine if I want to be with you or not.”

Which was completely true.



Adam relaxes with some friends out on the town to facilitate integration.

I think it's normal for people to want to get to know each other on a deeper level before they decide if they want to continue with that person exclusively. But for her, it was different and offensive. This leads to my next point.

In Ecuadorian culture, the idea of going out until you really get to know each other and then deciding to be exclusive is nearly non-existent. The "getting to know each other" phase is actually a phase within the "we are boyfriend/girlfriend" phase. The whole aspect of dating doesn't actually exist here.

The Ecuadorian paradigm of relationships: "I like you, let's be boyfriend/girlfriend and get to know each other better." Then there is the U.S. paradigm: "I like you, let's get to know each other, and then decide if we want to be boyfriend/girlfriend."

Naturally to us, the Ecuadorian

paradigm seems illogical. How can you decide to be in a relationship with someone you don't know that well? Well, try and explain that to your Latin interest and *buena suerte* to you!

If you do decide to dive into the mysterious courting stages of our Latino counterparts, then it will serve you well to understand the immense affection that may be displayed and expected from your newly acquired *amante*. Phone calls, texts and chats are all mediums of demonstrating affection when not physically with your partner. Expect this *carino* several times a day and expect them to expect you to send them equally cheesy, lovey-dovey messages.

Whereas Americans refer to each other affectionately by sweet delicacies such as cupcake, honey buns, and sweetie pie, Ecuadorians prefer to be referred to as royalty such as king, queen, and

princess. Prepare yourself to be called "my queen" rather than "honey bunny." If you can't handle a bit of the cheese, then you can't handle a Latino/a sweetheart.

The final observation I shall bestow upon you is the issue of jealousy. We view jealousy in relationships as a form of insecurity and lack of trust in our partner. It's an emotion we mostly keep hidden. In Ecuador, exhibiting jealousy is common. It makes your partner feel desired and demonstrates that you want to be exclusive.

Yes, Latino/as are passionate, do not hold back and will take you on a ride of joy, confusion, tenderness, frustration, cheesiness, and dare I say it...*amor*.

Keep an open mind and accept the distinctions without forcing our paradigm on theirs and... you'll end up learning a lot of Spanish.



Adventures are a fun way to build relationships. Adam, with fellow PCV Kate Barba, pose for a picture after canyoning in the Pasaje region.

Omnibus 111

As Peace Corps Ecuador's final group of natural resource conservation and TEFL volunteers, Omnibus 111 has focused on NRC sustainability while expanding the "Training of Teachers" (TOT) workshops.



(A) Omnibus 111 pose for a picture during swear-in with the US Ambassador. (B) 111ers show their spirit animals. (C) A day trip to Quito.

J.O.G.O.T.

Just One Gringa or Todas?

Alicea Settlemoir

I live in Puyo, in the province of Pastaza. It is the biggest city in the jungle, though it's really not that big. Though I live in Puyo, I bus out to smaller communities every day for work. Social norms differ pretty extremely in each community.

It took me a long time to figure out when to shake hands and when to do the cheek kiss; I probably looked like someone with balance issues for the first few months.

As a Peace Corps volunteer, a third of our job is to share the culture of the United States with our host country. A large part of this endeavor is to dispel misconceptions that people have due to movies, television, or that one U.S. citizen who was just raro.

Let us not forget that one acronym that I really can't recall at this moment had something to do with not judging, exploring and recognizing the difference between a cultural difference and a personal difference...or were those two separate acronyms?

Either way, I began to wonder what my neighbors, friends, and community partners thought of me. If they think that all people

from the U.S. share my characteristics or if they understand that everyone is different and, just because I like picking random pieces of trash up of the street and putting it in my bag on the sly, that doesn't mean that this is the norm in the U.S.

Thus, I decided to do my own assessment tool. Let's call it JOGOT: Just One Gringa or Todas.

The interview consisted of seven questions about U.S. stereotypes I've heard from Ecuadorians. I started with what a typical person from the U.S. is like and then got to more specific things they think all or most people from the U.S. do, or if just me. I put these questions to a few friends and neighbors, some of whom I see often and others are acquaintances.

One woman admitted that, although when she sees a foreigner she assumes that they have money, she knows that it isn't necessarily true.

When I asked about the stereotype I have heard often: that gringas like indigenous men, she just laughed. All the individuals I talked to agreed that U.S. citizens they have come in contact with have been happy, fun, well educated, and interested in getting to

know Ecuador and the people.

When asked about my personal quirks, they talked about the music I listen to, or the fact that I make recycled art. They thought that these things were typical in the U.S., but they also understood that people are distinct and there is a diversity in the things we do and like.

As I asked the questions, I began to wonder myself, what is a typical person from the U.S. like anyway? And what does that make me? "Typical" is hard to define, so maybe the second goal isn't as easy as we like to make it sound. I mean, I can make chicken and dumplings, and apple pie for as long as people want to eat them, but what does that tell anyone about what it is like to live in the U.S.? I can answer every question about how much a plane ticket, a car, or tablet costs in the U.S., but what does that say about the value of life that you live?

So maybe the point isn't always showing what the U.S. culture is, rather just being yourself, and showing your neighbors, counterpart, students and friends that you are an individual. You are excitingly different from the movie stars, that one guy they met that one time, or the PCV that was in site before you, because that's what we are in the U.S., a little bit of everything, so pretending that we all eat hamburgers every day for lunch isn't doing anyone any favors.

So relax, and just be you.

Otra Mami

Rachel Childs

It is 8:00 pm, and someone knocks softly on my wooden kitchen door. I clack the latch back and the door opens.

A short, older woman wearing plastic gardening shoes and a black pointed hat made from a strip of fabric stands on the porch outside.

“You don’t want to come eat?” Her small, brown eyes are barely visible on her round face as she looks up at me. This is a common question. Dinner is important for the whole family, so we walk together to join them.

Maria Rosario Perugachi Torres has seven adult children, five of whom have a total of 16 kids. This makes dinner anywhere from a small gathering to a banquet.

She has gained the nickname Otra Mami or “other mother” because of her large family who comes to her for food most days. Neighbors tend to drop in for dinner or are brought extra food when times are hard. She often pays for help in rolls of homemade bread that she cooks in an enormous brick oven on her property.

In the kitchen, Otra Mami sits on a yellow mat made of woven reeds and dispenses soup to everyone. Grandson Tedi, 2, cries for his mother Blanca while Alex, 17, plays ‘Stand by Me’ on the guitar. Hungry cats wail and guinea pigs squeak. Everyone talks in Kichwa. Otra Mami fills bowls to the brim and encourages seconds.

“You don’t want more?” she questions me when I hand the bowl back after a single serving. She belongs on a box of some faux-classic recipe series, with a wooden spoon in her hand above the “Otra Mami’s Famous Soup

Mix” title.

Rosario is the last surviving sibling of three in her family. Her brother died nearly seven years ago, and her sister died as a child. She says she grew up fairly well off in the rural town of Morochos, where she still resides.

“We had 30 cows, many sheep, pigs and chickens,” she said one night in the empty kitchen. Her identification lists her birthdate as April 21, 1954, but no one really knows if it is correct. A birthday photo from 2013 shows Rosario with former Peace Corps volunteer Paige Fisher next to two



Rosario and Francisco celebrate the wedding of Daughter Stella with a cleansing ceremony.

cakes topped with 59 and 60 to recognize both possible ages. Her mother left the family for another man when Rosario was a teenager and henceforth lived away from everyone.

“My mother abandoned us. I was very sad. I cried a lot because my mother was gone,” she said. The familial shift sent her to work in Quito as a maid for a family. She became pregnant with her first child, Rosa Elena, who is now 38 years old and has four children.

“I never met my father. I heard he came by twice to take me. My grandmother refused and said that I would live with her,” Elena said while shucking corn on her front porch. “I loved my grandmother. I was very sad when she died.”

Rosario met and has a common law marriage with Francisco “Otra Papi” Torres. They are still to-

gether after nearly 36 years. Early times were not kind to the family.

“We were very poor. We lived in an old-style home and slept on the floor on reed mats,” Elena said. Food was scarce and the children had to take up jobs to support the family. Eventually, Rosario bought her mother’s land after she died and lives there today in a three-story home complete with livestock, crops, fruit garden, and two loyal guard dogs.

Rosario never attended school. Instead, she fed animals, tilled the soil, cooked, and learned about natural medicine.

This has made her a go-to for people who are sick or afflicted with what they call *mal aire*, which can range from stomach aches to high blood pressure. She does *limpias*, or cleansings, in her kitchen with neighbors and family members. She rubs herbs on people’s bodies and uses her hands to

soothe aches, all while breathing out the supposed sickness.

Her other job for nearly 20 years has been a *partera*, or midwife. Her mother taught her as a young girl how to naturally help expectant mothers. Daughter Rosa recently gave birth to her fourth child with Rosario’s help. Local hospitals call her to assist with births and they give her a certificate to validate her work. She does not ask for pay but will accept money or gifts.

This life has left her face wrinkled but not a grey hair on her head. Her age is nothing as she still dances at parties and works outside until dusk.

After the dinner rush clears, Otra Mami lies on the reed mat and rests. It is well deserved.

(Quotes from Maria Rosario and Rosa Elena are translated from Spanish.)



Rosario (center) runs around her home 3 times with her wedding party to signify good luck.

New Site New world

Chris Crawford

One of the most difficult experiences for me as a Peace Corps volunteer was changing from the loud, robust coastal town of Chone, Manabí to the quiet, introverted highland provincial capital of Ibarra, Imbabura.

Chone was and will probably always be considered a special place in Ecuador to me. It was the first place where I had a host family that accepted me and where my school community welcomed me warmly.

When I first went to Chone for my site visit, I loved it. My school eagerly received me. During my initial visit, my teachers spent the day preparing sandwiches and serving cola to make me feel welcome.

Still, whether it was being stopped by the police for “looking suspicious” or having a young lady whisper to her mom, “Pero es negro, Mami. No me gustan los negritos,” (But he’s black, Mom. I don’t like blacks.) being in Chone wasn’t always easy.

Despite all of this, I knew that I had a duty to my school and community. My school meant more to me than the city-wide experi-

ences, and I wanted to do all that I could to help it.

That’s why, on the day I got assaulted, it seemed like my world came crashing down on me. Someone from this community that I had grown to love was suddenly responsible for the blood dripping down my face. It didn’t matter to me. I thought, I still have a school that loves and appreciates me...

A few days after the assault, I realized that I would be forced to change sites for security reasons. How would I explain this to the teachers that had been waiting

for months to work with me or to the students that called me “el profe chévere” (the cool teacher) and greeted me in English on the streets? And my host mom that originally didn’t want a male volunteer but had come to love and support me?

To make things worse, this was right after Reconnect when I spent a week talking about new initiatives to implement at my school. I felt like I failed my community. To make the despedida, farewell, less difficult, I packed my things, gave the teachers and school staff the news, and left all in the same



Crawford’s coastal high school students show the results of their hot dog recipes from class.

day. Even then, my teachers and host family members cried.

My new destination was San Miguel de Ibarra.

I thought, I'm going to live near an extinct volcano, and in a place where Kichwa people, Afro-Ecuadorians, and mestizos co-exist (more or less)? Ibarra has not only one, but two malls?

I was enjoying the city already, but I quickly learned that things wouldn't always be this way.

The first day when I was introduced to my school was one of the most awkward of my service. There were no teachers welcoming me, no ham sandwiches with cola being served, just four English teachers doing their work. "How is everyone?" I asked just to be occasionally met with a slight nod or a faint smile.

"Who wants to work with Chris this week?" my English teacher and host mom asked. Silence from the room. I knew then that it was going to be an interesting 19 months.

Although working with my community in Ibarra has its rough patches, it has taught me patience and perseverance like nothing before. It has also taught me that first impressions are not always accurate. I feel like I've grown as a human being.

I discovered, for example, that one of the reasons why my teachers were so shy upon seeing me was that they had limited experience working with native speakers in the classroom.

"I've never worked with a foreigner before," the head English teacher told me once, "and I may

be shy sometimes, but I really want to practice."

This conversation opened a door of trust and friendship between me and my head English teacher.

Once, while giving my teachers a TOEFL Speaking session, I asked them what had been their most positive experience learning English. To my surprise, two out of the four teachers said working with me was that experience. I have come to appreciate moments like these more than I let the adverse times get me down.

So, after all these changes, why am I still in Peace Corps? Because I have a duty, not just to Peace Corps, or to my community, or even to my friends and family back home, but to myself to be a better person to others.



Unidad Educativa Ibarra (UEI), Crawford's new school in the Sierra Highlands.



Crawford reaches a Sierra summit - Pichincha.



Katzman always remaining a kid at heart.

Kid at Heart

Rachel Katzman

Throughout my entire life, I have worked with children, and it has always brought me joy. I like to think part of the reason I prefer to hang out with kids is because I'm a kid at heart, but it goes deeper than that.

Children have not yet been jaded by the issues that most adults think about on a daily basis. Kids think that being an adult is cool. In reality, being a grown-up is not as much fun as anyone thought it would be. We have too many responsibilities and never enough money.

And those responsibilities multiply while serving as a Peace Corps volunteer. Not only do our salaries get a large decrease, but we also have to learn how to navigate our new communities and, for many, in a new language. We arrive to our communities with so many goals that we want to achieve. We want to make our staff, families, country, and even ourselves proud. Having such

high stakes heightens the challenges that we face.

When we meet our counterpart, we want to appear strong and smart by presenting our ideas and possible projects to introduce to the community. We want to prove ourselves right off the bat, and that is not the simplest thing to do.

When I arrived in Las Tunas, Manabí, I wanted to make an impact just like any other bright eyed and bushy tailed volunteer entering the world of Peace Corps. I was hoping my first impression of my community would be, "How did they survive without me?" If only.

As our first months pass in site, most of us learn that this is only our fantasy. It is only something that we write in our journal and put on inspiration boards. The hardest part about this experience is that it is always changing, meaning that we have to get very comfortable with our failures just as much as our successes.

But for me there was always a constant in my little town of Las Tunas: my host siblings. Even if I felt that I failed every day for my whole service, my host brothers and sister never saw me as a failure. In their eyes, I could do no wrong. I was their *gringita* superhero sister. It took me by surprise how much I cherished each moment with them. These kids proved to me once again that working and spending time with kids is something I truly enjoy. I

began to feel as if everything in the world is possible again.

Their outlook on life is magical. One minute they can be hysterically crying and the next they've never had a bigger smile on their face. There is no end to the world in their eyes. They will be ecstatic if you can take them to the beach with you but will be equally as excited if you just sit in the town cancha, field, and listen to them talk, and how wild their imagi-

nations can run. The time they spend with you is perfect in their eyes. They don't expect anything from you. They don't care that your organic garden has failed multiple times, that your counterpart thinks you're useless, or that you haven't showered in a week.

They are sunshine when it has been cloudy all day. It is an unconditional love that I have never experienced, the way a mother loves her children. Many people

say you can't understand this type of love until you have children of your own. I now understand. My host siblings have become my children.

Antonio, Fernanda, and Matías have taught me invaluable, intangible lessons in life during my stay in Ecuador. They have opened my eyes, let me into their world, and permitted me to join them on their amazing journey of growing up in Ecuador. They have taught me that, in the end, everything will be okay as long as I learn to be open and love, not only the people but the experience itself.

As long you make a difference in one person's life, you can be proud of the amazing job you have done as a Peace Corp volunteer.



Kids from Katzman's community attempt to build a human pyramid.



Katzman with one of her Las Tunas siblings.

PC's Fourth Goal

Miranda Duncan

Those of you who know me, you know how much I talk about my kids. It's no surprise, then, that when I heard about the theme for this issue of *El Clima*, "the different stages of the Peace Corps experience," I immediately thought of a figure in my son's research on "Mechanisms of Tight Spike Synchrony." Like the brain cells underlying our behavior, life in Peace Corps fluctuates rapidly, the cycle of excitation and inhibition always in motion.

We have all experienced those peaks and valleys of Peace Corps. The initial excitement of arriving in Ecuador. Language barriers, cultural shock and meeting new people every minute. Loving training, hating training. Thriving in the sierra and being assigned to the coast. Pride in becoming an official PCV and off to site, finally! Getting stuff stolen on the way. Adjusting to a new host family. Feeling welcome and integrated in my site. Work expectations unfulfilled. Taking solace in sunsets, visits with other volunteers, and opportunities for new projects. Getting sick. The exuberance at Mid-service with less than a year to go! Still 8 more months to go...

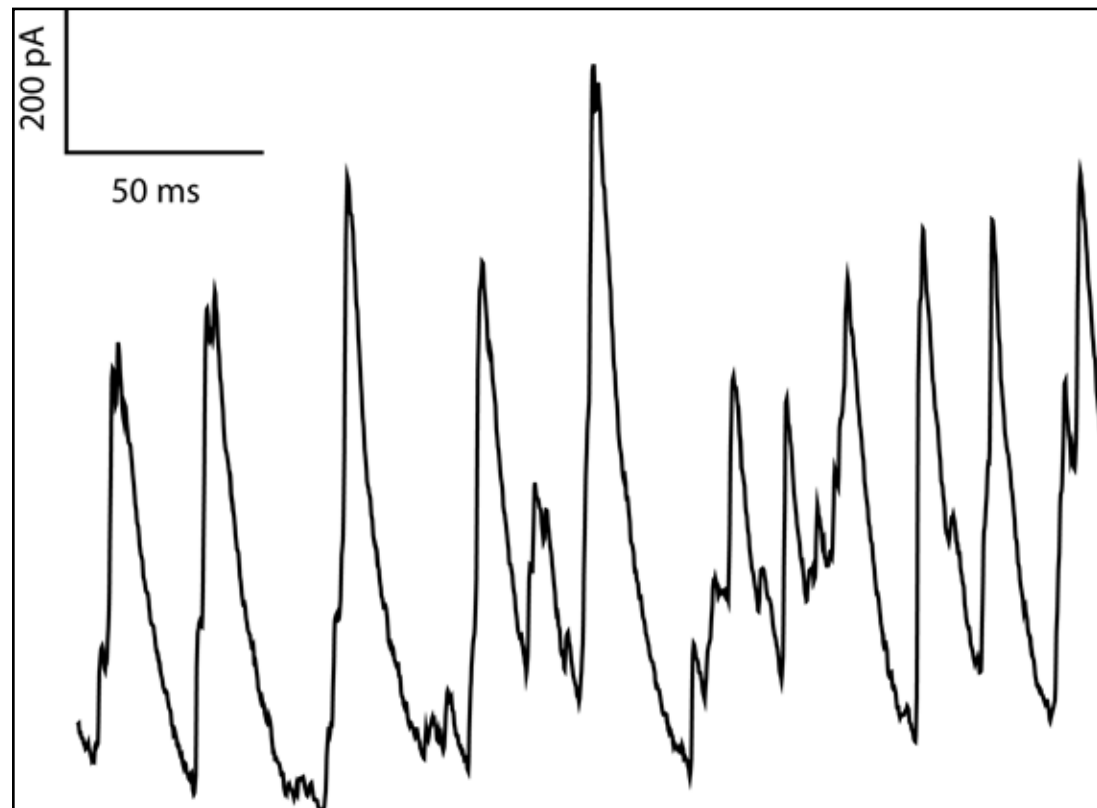
But I knew what to expect when I signed up. I have a history with Peace Corps service. I was with my kids' father in Colombia when he was a Peace Corps volunteer from 1967 to 1969. My daughter and son-in-law served in Guatemala 30 years later. My son joined Peace Corps in 2009 to teach 9th grade chemistry in Mozambique.

So I was prepared for no water, electricity, or Reese's Peanut Butter Cups. For thievery, evil mosquitos, and fatal bus accidents. For cultural stereotyping of U.S.

Americans, missing family and friends, and wondering if I am making enough of a difference to justify the sacrifice.

And now here I am with Ecuador, sticking with it for two reasons.

First: the ups and downs are just that, life's rhythm of rewarding moments and disappointments. Just when I think I can't walk into another classroom with 35 students, 27 of them not wanting to be there, the next class goes well.



The figure "Mechanisms of Tight Spike Synchrony" from the research of Duncan's son.

Mark Twain once said, “If you don’t like the weather in New England, just wait a minute.” So true in Ecuador, not about the weather, but minute-by-minute change: a disastrous class and a near-perfect class. Successful teacher trainings and unexplained no-shows. Friendly people and mean-spirited drunks. Yummy food and then there’s white rice.

All of this makes it hard to ride the crest of those spiking neurons. “Most people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be,” said Abraham Lincoln.

I’ve made up my mind to be happy, so how do I ascend from the crevices of inhibitory hell?

This brings me to the second reason it’s all worth it: “True happiness is not attained through self-gratification, but through fidelity to a worthy purpose,” said Helen Keller.

For me, since its inception, Peace Corps has been a worthy purpose. Even when you think you’re failing on goals one, two and three, there is still goal four.

I proclaim the fourth goal is to sustain Peace Corps. Why? Because Peace Corps tells the world “We believe in people, the power of learning and self-determination. We want to help not hurt; improve not disapprove.” Cooperation. Mutual respect.

I committed to these values when I signed up, and fulfilling that commitment keeps me going even when all else is falling apart.

Duncan’s son serving as a Peace Corps volunteer and 9th grade teacher in Mozambique.



Duncan’s daughter working with children as a Peace Corps volunteer in Guatemala.

110: You Will be Missed

Rebecca Carofilis

Omnibus 110 Community Health volunteers arrived to Ecuador in 2013. Soon after their swearing-in ceremony, we started to see progress.

This group of volunteers has

taken part in amazing experiences, including: HIV tours, bringing pap smears to rural areas, sex education in the highlands and coast, English classes, and health education in little coastal cities, keyhole gardens, Grass Root Soccer, among many other wonderful

arts and music projects.

We are very grateful for our 110ers and as cessation of service approaches, we want to thank them for their committed contributions to the Community Health program and wish them the best in their new stage of life.



Volunteers from Omnibus 110 wear their custom-made omnibus shirts with Bibi Al-Elbrahim, their pre-service Training Manager.

Cristina Rojas

With the same sentiment as the Peace Corps advertisement, “Life is calling...how far will you go,” we welcomed Omnibus 110 into our post in Ecuador.

Within Omnibus 110, we were happy to receive fourteen volunteers for the Youth and Families Development Program here in Ecuador. In regards to my 110ers, I am proud of having such a committed group of individuals who have worked with at-risk children, youth, and families in both the coastal and highland areas of Ecuador.

We have worked on the follow-

ing technical areas of the Peace Corps framework: asset-based development with youth, building skills for the world of work with youth, engaging youth as active citizens, and building community support for youth development.

Among so many amazing projects and activities, here are a few that have been exceptionally meaningful for our program: Youth Day celebrations, life skills activities and trainings, service-learning projects, drugs and substance abuse prevention workshops and activities, parenting schools, life skills development summer camps, radio programs with youth, community and eco-

nomie development projects, etc.

Thanks to this group’s significant technology and filmmaking skills, we were able to produce our first program video to share with the public about our field work.

We were excited to receive and grant four extensions of service requests for Youth and Family volunteers who will continue to work with us on programmatic goals for the upcoming months.

Although it is sad to see the 110ers leave, I know that this group’s close-of-service is really the beginning of their continuation-of-service—no matter where their paths take them! Best of luck, Youters!



Omnibus 110 Youth and Families volunteers pose for a picture together as a program.

Connections Corner

Peace Corps Fellows at Michigan Tech



Michigan Technological University offers Peace Corps Fellows programs in Applied Ecology, Biological Sciences, Civil and Environmental Engineering, Environmental and Energy Policy, Forest Ecology and Management, Forest Molecular Genetics and Biotechnology, Forestry, Geology, and Industrial Archaeology. All programs include one year of VISTA service with the Appalachian Coal Country Team, the Western Hardrock Watershed Team, or the Department of Interior VISTA Team which includes tribal colleges and universities. All Returned Peace Corps Volunteers receive Michigan Tech's National Service Graduate Fellowship and one year of VISTA service includes a tuition award of just about \$5700. For more information contact Blair Orr at bdorr@mtu.edu. (<http://www.mtu.edu/gradschool/programs/degrees/pc-fellows/>)

Michigan Technological University is an equal opportunity educational institution/equal opportunity employer, which includes providing opportunity for protected veterans and individuals with disabilities.

“Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.”

– John F. Kennedy

UPCOMING

Ecuador National Holidays

- November 2 - All Soul's Day
- November 3 - Cuenca Independence
- December 25 - Christmas Day
- January 1 - New Year's Day
- February 8-9 - Carnival

Peace Corps Events

- October - Cluster Meetings
- October - VAC Meeting
- October - 2016 PC Calendar Release
- November - Thanksgiving Events
- January - OMNI 111 COS Conference
- January - OMNI 115 Arrives



Art by J. Andrés, Omnibus 114

Parting Shot



The outgoing Omnibus 111 *El Clima* Editing Team: Dani Gradisher, Chris Owen, and Yajaira Hernandez. Thank you!



“ Unity is strength. . .
when there is teamwork and collaboration,
wonderful things can be achieved.” ”

– Mattie Stepanek

Suggestions or submissions? Email us at elclimamagazine@gmail.com. Thank you!