



EL CLIMA

Peace Corps Ecuador

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## Beyond Sustainability

By Whitney Ciofalo

One of the hardest situations for many of us Peace Corps Volunteers to find ourselves in is explaining that we are not and cannot be the savior with an unending supply of money. The modern day White Man's Burden is not just one of fostering development, but of combating past missteps of handout aid. It is a situation, for those of us on the ground, that often involves crushing someone's dreams and hope right before our eyes. More so, it is something that we have become hardened and accustomed

to. In fact, many of us interested in development see it as a necessary evil that is simply part of the line of work. And we justify it in the name of sustainability.

But this is not a story of that.

This is a story that begins on a site visit with a scared and intimidated volunteer and a child unaware of the harsh realities life had thrown her way.

Zoila was and still is suffering from leukemia, although due to my lim-

ited knowledge of Spanish medical terms, I did not fully grasp the severity of her illness until several months in site. My ignorance, however, did not hinder our friendship. Five years old with smiling brown eyes, she immediately jumped onto my lap, stuck a red hibiscus behind my ear, and asked me my name. That was the beginning. Time passed, and our friendship grew. Sneaking away from hordes of siblings and cousins, she would

“They wanted me to help their daughter”

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Cover photo courtesy of Benjamin Niespodziany, a Youth & Families Volunteer from Omnibus 106 living in Machala, El Oro.

come to my house, where we played sudoku and Frogger on my cell phone until her mother came looking for her. She would talk to me without the realization that she was only five or that we came from completely different worlds, with the innocent candidness that we slowly lose as we leave childhood. Then came the big question. A ver... SOLCA had found Zoila a marrow donor in Mexico, and they were ready to move forward with her treatments against the cancer that had been dictating her life for the last three years. But her parents were worried. Their family of five lived off the meager income of her father's job at the bananera, and although the government would cover the actual treatment, it did not help with the small expenses: the medicines, the ointments, the IV tubes, the hospital pajamas, the traveling expenses to Guayaquil every week, the three months of her parents visiting her behind hospital doors. Si puede buscar... They wanted me to find a sponsor. To wave my magic wand and summon the savior with his unlimited bank account. They wanted me to help their daughter. And in a moment of questionable weakness, I agreed. I could not crush this dream and dish out the hard fact that not every American has hundred dollar bills flowing out of their pockets. This was more than a farmers' association wanting tractors and pruning shears, or a school asking for new computers. This was a little girl and my friend. Luckily, stateside, my aunt had recently retired from years of working as a coordinator at a hospital in my hometown. Still well connected, she set to work enthusiastically to raise money for Zoila's family. As long as the parents were able to provide

thorough documentation of all the costs, my aunt assured me, the money would be there.

As I am writing this, Zoila is still under anesthesia. Marcelo, her father, promised to call me in the morning to let me know how the transplant went. "¿Y cómo está Usted?" I asked him over the phone when he called to inform me that Zoila had gone into surgery. "Ahí," he replied, "luchando, pero ahora todo está en las manos de Dios." Peaces Corps teaches us that the most important aspect of our work in terms of development is sustainability. Without it, our two years of work is essentially worthless. Over and over we hear, "Why give a man a fish when you can teach him to fish?" I am in no way arguing against that. But there is another aspect of Peace Corps, one of cultural exchange. This is the part of our service that seeds the friendships we will cherish long after we leave Ecuador. Friendships that require investing ourselves in another individual. And that is something beyond sustainability. Marcelo and I sat in my living room poring over the endless copies of hospital tests that he diligently brought to my house every week so Zoila's sponsors could follow the progress of her treatment. As he frantically shuffled through papers, I recalled a conversation I had with my aunt a few nights prior. "There's just so many terms I don't understand and it's all so complicated," I gabbed to her over the



phone. "And think," she said, "you grew up around medicine. Now imagine how her parents must feel. They probably understand less than you do, and this is their daughter." My aunt had not given a name to it

while we spoke, but what she was describing was fear, and I saw it flash before me in Marcelo's eyes. Suddenly the fear faded and tears fell in behind it. "My newborn," he started, "is sick, my wife is tired because I'm at the hospital all the time and never home to help with the kids. And Zoila doesn't understand why she can't go out and play with her friends. But what more can I do?" For a moment I froze. I have seen my own father cry without shame before, but for some reason Marcelo caught me off guard. Peace Corps had hardened me and taught me to keep my emotions well protected. Then, suddenly, it struck me: this was not another excerpt from an office manual. This was my friend, someone I cared about, someone I was invested in. So I took Marcelo's hand and let him cry. We have all coped with the stress of living in a developing country by joking that our time in Peace Corps is not "real life." We will return after

"This is the part of our service that seeds the friendships we will cherish long after we leave Ecuador"

two years and still be the same age as when we left. We counter the absurd with our own absurdities. Our friends will still be the same and our families, for the most part, unchanged. As much as we joke about this, there is something cynical and dehumanizing lurking behind the joke. Have we become so bogged down in the jargon and "the experience" that our grip on the present reality has slipped that far? What have we done with our long term investments in individuals? Zoila has a long three months ahead of her. While she recovers, I continue to nurse my love/hate relationship with Ecuador. Projects come and go, organizations fall apart and counterparts sometimes return our phone calls. All of these

setbacks are intertwined with the idea of sustainability. Without it, development as a whole is improbable. But what matters to us as individuals are our personal investments. And I have mine.

Whitni, an Agriculture Volunteer from Omnibus 105, lives in Venecia de Chimbo, Guayas. Whitni is Co-Editor for El Clima's Volunteer Life section.

## Defeating Embarrassment

By Hannah Reed

My friend Emma took me to her home in San Rafael to watch the Super Bowl our freshman year of college. "My dad is really going to like you," she said, "because you're tall." Her dad, Ernie, was and is a man given to grand, sweeping statements. He claims, for example, to be the only person in the Bay Area who has to wear shin guards to dinner parties given how frequently his wife and daughters kick him under the table. And, that day in 2005,

he told me very seriously that he had defeated embarrassment. "One day," he said, "I hope the same for you."

That isn't why I joined Peace Corps, but I've started to think of all this as treatment by overexposure. Within my first three months of living in Ecuador, I had sprawled out in a dance circle trying to flee a pursuing salsero; misunderstood the intentions of a playful dog and ran, fully clothed, straight into the ocean; and publicly announced that I had romantic feelings for a prominent psychologist.

One of the beautiful things about Peace Corps Volunteers is that they embrace embarrassing experiences as only one can who finds himself in constant and violent relationship with the family latrine. So, in the style of those odious publications that teach teenage girls how to be properly ashamed of their bodies, we've solicited Peace Corps Volunteers' Most Embarrassing Moments—but not in the spirit of anonymous horror and commiseration. Rather, El Clima celebrates the embracing and defeating of embarrassment á lá Cuerpo de Paz.

Try to match the story in column A with its author in column B (answers on page 11):

Claire Davis  
Jason Kreiselman  
Mitch Adams  
Elizabeth Stokely

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
(One Of) My Most Embarrassing Peace Corps Moment(s):

The most embarrassing PC-friendly tale that I can share (other than my first dressing-in-drag in my rural village experience) is the first water sanitation meeting that I attended. I was fortunate enough to have my first (but not the last) bout of giardia at this magic moment in time. In short, sitting through a meeting in which we explained the water examination results to the public - the water until this day contains human feces - for about two hours with mud butt is not as pleasant as it may sound. Yes, I pooped my pants at the beginning of the meeting. This made me an ardent advocate of water treatment. Results of the meeting: "Tell us something we don't know." We are not going to spend our precious \$USD's on water treatment when we have free medical attention and bicho meds - Money is better spent in fiestas - and to some extent they have won me over. ¡Que viva la fiesta! ¿Que viva?

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
No More Reindeer Games

Co-teaching in Ecuador reached new heights in a recent high school English class. After a workshop on Christmas traditions in the US, the Ecuadorian teachers couldn't wait to put what they learned into practice. Upon entering class a few days later, my co-teacher informed me that she wanted the class to learn "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer." She insisted that I perform my own a cappella rendition of the children's carol. I hesitantly agreed and decided to teach the "fun" version of the carol with the children's repetitions. Just after singing "as they shouted out with glee," I threw up my arms to yell "yippee." I sensed something awry, but it was too late. I fell off the raised, stage-like platform at the front of a classroom of 50 sixteen-year-olds. My only consolation was that the faux pas would go down in history (like George Washington).

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
Hot Showers

One morning when I was taking a shower at my host family's house, one of the wires leading to the hot water heater suddenly burst into flames above me. I hurriedly wrapped myself in my towel and ran outside to sound the alarm, but I was caught off guard because I forgot that my host family was having a party that day and there was a huge crowd of people outside. I was so embarrassed to be standing in front of half the town in my towel that I forgot my Spanish and could not explain what had happened. All I could manage was to yell, "FUEGO, FUEGO" and point dramatically at the house. Everyone was laughing at me, but eventually someone followed me inside to put out the fire.

4. \_\_\_\_\_  
Burial Rites

I had not been at site long when an acquaintance passed away. I accompanied my coworkers to the funeral, and afterwards we sat around drinking cerveza and talking. Someone asked me what burial rituals were like in the United States. I attempted to explain that in the Jewish culture we have different burial rituals than in the Christian culture. But this is how I said it: "Los judeos se van a la tierra directamente, sin preservativos." The expressions on my coworkers' faces were a mixture of amusement and alarm. It was only later that I realized I had explained like it was some valuable cultural insight the Jewish reluctance to put condoms on the deceased.

Hannah Reed, a Youth & Families Volunteer from Omnibus 104, lives in Loja, Loja. At this point in time, she is 94.6% embarrassment free.



## Postscript: Reflections from RPCVs

"I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve." -Albert Schweitzer

We are all at different points in our Peace Corps service; some only just arrived, others are approaching the half-way mark, and the rest are preparing to leave soon. Regardless of omnibus distinction and where we fall on the timeline of community integration or project development, there is one question that newcomers and veteran volunteers have in common: What will be the impact of my Peace Corps service? While many of us have doubts about the sustainability of our projects and the legacy we will leave in our respective communities, we all expect to experience

"92 percent of RPCVs believe that the Peace Corps changed their lives for the better"

change on a personal level. We wonder how we might be different, how the Peace Corps will shape our career paths, and where we will go from here.

Upon Close of Service, we become Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs), but we never stop being Peace Corps Volunteers. These two years of service are transformational, and the lessons learned here will continue to be relevant throughout our lives. This fact was recently affirmed by the first comprehensive survey of RPCVs, conducted during the 50th anniversary year. More than 11,000 RPCVs from all over the

United States, representing the five decades of the agency's existence and all 139 host countries, participated in the survey, which sought to gather insight into how being in the Peace Corps influenced RPCVs' lives. Among many interesting findings, the survey reports that 92 percent of RPCVs believe that the Peace Corps changed their lives for the better; 60 percent said that the Peace Corps influenced their choice of career; and almost 70 percent said that it changed their personal values. It is not surprising that the biggest impact the Peace Corps has made over the past 50 years has been on the lives of its

volunteers. We live and work in a foreign environment ripe with challenges and opportunities for growth, where all of our successes, failures, frustrations, and joys are magnified and experienced more intensely because we are outside of our comfort zones. Of course we become stronger, more resourceful, and more open-minded. Of course we leave feeling more connected after forging new bonds and relationships with Ecuadorians. This forces our worldview to shift, and we come closer to understanding how we fit into the bigger puzzle. Community and service become inherent parts of who we are.

It is encouraging to hear the positive expressions of the several thousand volunteers surveyed about their experiences (you can find a link to the survey on [peacecorps.gov](http://peacecorps.gov)), but the El Clima staff wanted to share inspiring stories of a few RPCVs who served here in order to show how Ecua-

“Tip for all those seeking employment with PC or other international development agencies: temp gigs are oftentimes the way to get your foot in the door.”  
-Kerry Carmichael

dor has changed volunteers and to provide a window into what may happen next for all of us. We asked Ecuador RPCVs to reflect on their time here and how it shaped their careers and lives. We received commentary from RPCVs spanning five decades, from the first year that Ecuador received volunteers up to last year. From the stories of Molly Maguire-Marshall (2009-2011), Selina Howe Carter (2006-2008), Kerry Carmichael (1992-1994), Doris Rubenstein (1971-1973),

and Rhoda Brooks (1962-1964), we learn that these two years of Peace Corps service in Ecuador will change us in significant and lasting ways.

Volunteers from Omnibus 103 or 104 may remember Molly Maguire-Marshall, who served in the Youth & Families Development Program in Guayaquil from 2009 to 2011. When talking about her Peace Corps service, Molly focuses on how her experience shaped her “concept of community—what it

“Peace Corps saw my game face, my cry face, my laughing face, and some of the most spiritually honest, natural moments of my life.”  
-Selina Howe Carter

is, how you can be a part of one, how you can contribute to one, and why it is important.” She explains, “Community integration doesn’t start and end with your Peace Corps service. It can be a lifelong process and can begin anew every time you move to a different place or become a part of a different group.” Currently, Molly is teaching conversational English classes at Dr. Khastigar’s Government School for Girls in Chittagong, Bangladesh as a Fulbright Grantee. She often thinks about the various communities to which she belongs and how she can better integrate into each one in order to deepen her connections with people, believing that “the most important part of living abroad (or just living, period) is how you choose to connect to people.” Learning a new language, Bangla, has been a challenge: “Right now my communication is pretty limited, but I use the few simple phrases I know often and with a smile, which seems to go a long way.” And when she’s feeling frustrated? “I remember how I felt at the end of my service, being amazed by how far I felt that I had come and how many relationships I formed, maintained, and strengthened, and I look forward to feeling that again and again throughout my life...I think that’s one of the

biggest things I took away from my PC service: that becoming part of a community (however you define it) is a wonderful, beautiful, sometimes infuriatingly frustrating process, but vale la pena. Now, can someone please send me some *encebollado y chifles*?”

Like Molly, Selina Howe Carter was a Youth & Families volunteer from our generation, serving in a small banana-producing community in the El Oro province from 2006 to 2008. “Everything about Peace Corps was amazing, or at least that is how I feel four years after it ended. Peace Corps saw my game face, my cry face, my laughing face, and some of the most spiritually honest, natural moments of my life. It was hard, but nothing could have been better for me at that time,” reports Selina. She adds, “People around me who haven’t had that type of experience often lack a certain underlying passion that I find crucial for living.” Today, Selina is pursuing a career in international development and has undertaken a triple master’s degree program in economics, public administration, and international relations at Syracuse University. She has also traveled and studied new languages since departing Ecuador: a Fulbright Scholarship took her to Portugal in 2009, and she

will spend 2012 in Ankara studying Turkish on a Boren Fellowship. When asked if Peace Corps has been a professional asset, Selina responded, “You bet. But don’t be surprised when you meet critics of your service who claim that you don’t know anything about development issues because you were technically just a volunteer. These critics are almost always envious of your courage.”

Kerry Carmichael was a Natural Resources Conservation Volunteer from 1992 to 1994, “back in the day when your esteemed Director was a Tech Trainer and Don Nelson Oleas was beginning his reign as King of Quinoa,” and worked as a forester in Azogues, Cañar. Kerry shares with El Clima, “Peace Corps instilled in me a passion for community service and the environment which I still hold dear to this day. My service opened lots of doors for me, both educationally and professionally.” After COS, Kerry obtained a Master’s degree in Natural Resources and says that his experience with the Peace Corps is what got him into the program. Kerry also credits his Peace Corps service for a humanitarian relief job working with Cuban refugees in Guantánamo Bay. Eventually, Kerry went on to become a Peace Corps staff member, first at the South America desk at Headquarters in Washington, D.C., and later back in Ecuador as the APCD of the NRC program. Of his job at Headquarters, he states, “I don’t think I will ever find another job that employs so many like-minded people. Imagine ten floors of RPCVs who have served all around the world and share the same values and commitment to service.” More recently, Kerry has worked for AmeriCorps VISTA (the domestic



version of Peace Corps) and says that the non-competitive eligibility benefit helped him land the job. Today, Kerry works for a non-profit organization that creates employment opportunities for the blind and visually impaired. Reflecting on his career path post-Peace Corps, Kerry says, “I’ve taken a somewhat crooked path, but none of this would have been possible without my experience as a Peace Corps Volunteer.”

Doris Rubenstein (1971-1973) initially felt underprepared for her Peace Corps assignment teaching English to agronomists and professional staff at the Ecuadorian National Agricultural Research Institute. “Although my B.A. from Michigan was in Spanish, I was far from proficient in “agricultural” Spanish—no surprise considering I was an inner-city kid from Detroit.” However, Doris learned a lot about agriculture and science during her service and afterward joined the fundraising staff at the University of Minnesota. Doris recounts, “My colleagues were constantly amazed at my knowledge and familiarity with crops and animals. My ability to identify different breeds of cattle and enumerate their various traits was a real shocker for many. And as for the parasitologist, my intimate familiarity with amoebas, ascaris, giardia, and other bichos put me head and shoulders above him when it came to describing symptoms of their infestations in the human gut!” Doris adds, “The scientific knowledge that I absorbed from Ecuadorians as a Peace Corps Volunteer gave me a certain degree of credibility and made my job a lot easier.”

Rhoda Brooks and her husband, Earle, were among the first 700 Peace Corps volunteers



sent abroad in 1961 and 1962, and they were in the very first group to come to Ecuador. Reflecting on their service, Rhoda shares, “Now I am in my seventies and Earle is gone, yet the experience is still as vivid and meaningful as it was the day we first walked the dusty streets of Manta. What we learned can scarcely be measured. What we

shared in skills and understanding has never been quantified, but the impact of those two years on our lives was monumental.” Rhoda and Earle were sent to Manta, Manabí, where they had the vague assignment to “work with a host-country counterpart in community development.” Rhoda explains, “We had little understanding of what this

meant...and the people in the barrio where we lived had no context in which to understand why we were there.” Eventually, the couple was able to develop a community center, where they taught classes in carpentry, mechanics, sewing, nutrition, and other useful skills. They also began school kitchens for impoverished schools where children could get a daily hot lunch, as well as starting a program of garbage/rat eradication to counter the bubonic plague epidemic. Reflecting on their initial expectations of Ecuador, Rhoda says, “The hardships of living a simple life among our fishermen neighbors were tougher than we expected, the linguistic challenges more difficult, and the initial lack of response to our effort more disheartening. Now, looking back on the past 50 years, I realize that this choice set in motion events and experiences that have enhanced our careers and lives.”

Rhoda and Earle left Ecuador in 1964 with more than newly honed professional skills, Spanish fluency, and memories; they brought back with them two adopted children (and a biological baby on the way). Rhoda shares, “Both living with our two adopted Ecuadorian children and 47 years of ongoing communication with their families in Manta have been momentous... We became part of the process of enfolding the rich cultural heritage of the Latinos into the customs of our own country. We have enjoyed the use of the Spanish language and the resulting three generations of Brooks’ endeavors to become a Spanish-speaking family.” Rhoda, Earle, their children, and their grandchildren returned to Manta regularly throughout the years, keeping the connection to

Ecuador and the legacy of their Peace Corps service vibrant. The Brooks truly are a Peace Corps family; their adopted son, Ricardo, became the first second-generation Peace Corps Volunteer in the world when he served in his country of birth, Ecuador. Rhoda and Earle’s daughter, Carmen, met and married a Peace Corps Volunteer while her parents served as co-directors of the Peace Corps in Chile in the early 1980’s.

Rhoda continues to be awed by “the tremendous depth of resourcefulness, courage, and optimism that bolsters the spirit of our South American neighbors, no matter how difficult their lives may be.” One lesson Rhoda learned from her Peace Corps service was to recognize and appreciate these values. Concluding her reflection, Rhoda says that she sometimes thinks about what her life would have been like if she and Earle had not joined the Peace Corps: “I do know that the Peace Corps experience completely re-set the course of our lives from the day we volunteered. I am still amazed at what this has meant to each of us personally and as a family, with an ever-widening ripple effect on the world around us.”

These reflections from Molly, Selina, Kerry, Doris, and Rhoda serve as previews of all the possible ways in which our lives may be shaped by our Peace Corps service in Ecuador. Upon COS, we will join these men and women among the ranks of over 200,000 RPCVs. Some of us, like Molly, may continue to explore the meaning of community and strive to be more engaged in the communities in which we live. Others, like Selina, will have an increased curiosity for travel and will desire to

learn third or fourth languages. A few, like Kerry, may go on to work within Peace Corps or feel called to pursue a career in public service. Following in the footsteps of Doris, some may translate skills learned in Ecuador into jobs back home. Perhaps someone will, like Rhoda, go back with an adopted child, or an Ecuadorian spouse; it is likely that most of us will have formed close friendships and that we will strive to maintain those connections. Right now, we can only imagine where the road after Peace Corps will lead, but with these stories as examples, it seems the adventure and personal growth is just beginning.

Claire Davis, a Youth & Families Volunteer from Omnibus 104, lives in Machala, El Oro. Claire is Co-Editor for El Clima’s Volunteer Life section.

#### Answers to “Defeating Embarrassment”

- 1 – Mitch Adams
- 2 – Elizabeth Stokely
- 3 – Claire Davis
- 4 – Jason Kreiselman

# Ask Ronald!

By Ronald Ikechi-Ogbonna

Dear Ronald,

Last night I had strange dreams that involved Muppets...do you think it's the Mefloquine, and should I let the PCMO know?

–Pesadillas in Puerto López

Strange dreams with Muppets, eh? Fortunately, I think you're okay. I'm no doctor, but unless Oscar the Grouch or the Cookie Monster are really ruining your sleep, I think you'll be fine. Malaria medication is a pain in the butt, for a variety of reasons:

- 1) It tastes really bad. Don't let it sit on your tongue for too long; the residue is so chalky you'll be foaming at the mouth the entire day trying to get rid of the taste.
- 2) Whether you take it daily (Doxycycline) or weekly (Meflo), your hectic volunteer schedule will hinder you from maintaining the 2-year regimen without a hitch, which will inevitably lead to you calling Kelly or Carmen and begging them for a way to adjust your dosage.
- 3) The long term effects of this stuff are unknown, so the added paranoia of potential liver damage blows.
- 4) Did I mention it tastes bad?

If you're actually really bothered about this though, call the medical office just to make sure. Contrary to Volunteer rumors, PC won't kick you out for talking to the medical office about the effects of your malaria meds. And if they do kick you out it's probably for your own good, you nut job. (I mean that in the friendliest way possible.)

Hey Ronald,

My host family's cat keeps sneaking into my house, beating up my cat and stealing her food. How would you propose I remedy this situation?

–Scared-Silly Kitty in Salinas

Your cat is obviously a "wussy" house cat. Your pampering has obviously rendered your cat stiff. Shame on you for not exposing your cat to the realities of the developing world. The streets BE HARD for the feline species here. The streets are hard not necessarily because the dogs are aggressive or anything, but because



the climate is unstable and food is scarce. For any of the 104ers still around, remember Parmer's cat story and how the people in his community would tell him, "Cats don't eat tuna." What I'm trying to say is that until your cat gets stateside, he'll need to learn what life is like for his mates. So let her outside and see what life is like. This way when she comes home to eat she'll realize nothing is easy in this world and won't let some punk street cat pimp her for her fine china bowl of milk and silver plate of Friskies.

Dear Ron,

I accidentally started dating an 18-year-old (he showed me his brother's cédula). Help!?

–Cougar Conundrum in Colimes

Dating an 18-year-old, huh? Way to go, you cougar you. Enjoy this! When else will you ever have the chance to be wooed by a younger Latin lover? He can't really be so immature if you're dating him; somehow his Don Juan ways have brought you to your knees. This is not necessarily a bad thing. It's not like we're talking statutory rape here. He's 18 for goodness sake, not 16. Don't let age be anything but a number. As far as I'm concerned, you've already bought the ticket. Just take the ride. Besides, unless you're a fluent speaker, this is one of the best avenues of getting to the next level in your LPI—Come on, Advanced-Intermediate fluency! By dating this guy, you're fulfilling Peace Corps Goal Number 2. You're also giving him some perspective. This is also another great teaching

opportunity to teach him proper relationship skills, whether in regards to rejecting machismo or getting him centered on his sexuality. As a volunteer, we have to deal with being uncomfortable; that's part of the reason we got to be here: because we said we could not only handle it, but embrace it as well. Don't run from this. Just get out the sheets and make his cuna!

Dear Ronald,

My host brother is getting married this weekend. Can I wear the same dress to his wedding that I wore last month to the town's fiestas?

–Dressless in Daule

Dressing conundrums. Oooh. I'll do my best with this. Put simply, this can work in one of two ways: (1) You can let everyone know you're a poor volunteer who only has one outfit for special occasions, or (2) You can scrounge up whatever monies you have saved after paying rent and splurge on a new dress.

Personally, I think you go with Option 1. It's not like the dress is dirty, right? You washed the sweat and grime you got on it from the last shindig, right? If everyone thinks you are poor, they're less likely to ask you for money. I mean you can't even afford to buy a dress for your brother's special day—how on earth could anybody expect you to have enough dough to help someone else out? Your broke volunteer butt needs a job.

Have you thought about borrowing a dress? You're obviously integrated enough to be invited to the wedding, so why not ask your neighbor to borrow a dress just for the night? It's not like they're going to be wearing all their dresses at once. Tilt your head to one side, squint your eyes a little bit, and say, "No seas malita. Prés-tame tu vestidito para la boda, ya?" Bam, you'll have a "new" dress in no time.

Ronald,

Carnaval is coming up and it's my first one in site. Should I spend it with my community or spend it with some PCVs and a jaba in Guaranda?

–Desperate for Debauchery in Durán

Oh, Carnaval. It is quite the holiday. You can get messy and dirty (covered in water, urine, and other nasty fluids), or you can be tranquilo in Ambato (immersed in flowers and folkloric melodies). This year I've got my Mardi Gras beads, so wherever I end up you can bet your bottom I'll be earning my ashes on

Wednesday.

Real talk though, you should probably spend this first year in your community. Chances are they know how to have a good time and you won't worry about hitting any traffic because believe me, traffic BLOWS here. There is no amount of audiobooks, podcasts, or bus games that will keep you sane enough while you're gridlocked in holiday traffic in this country. Count your blessings and stay home this year. Next year when you're bitter and old take that crazy trip to wherever. But now, while you're still a robust and high-spirited volunteer, buckle down and be part of the family.

Dear Ronnie,

My computer crashed (read: I can't watch movies) and I'm looking for a new hobby at site. Should I learn to play guitar, start reading Tolstoy's War and Peace (unabridged), or nap in my hammock?

–Nap-Inclined in Napo

Do anything but nap! Read Pablo Neruda's Canto General before you consider napping. Reading this will also help you with your conditional tense problems.

Ronald Ikechi-Ogbonna, a Community Health Volunteer from Omnibus 104, aids in the integration of street cats, wears dresses multiple times before washing, and practices the conditional tense at his site in Santo Domingo de Los Tsáchilas.

## Better Know a Volunteer: PCV Jarrett Bates



PCV Jarrett Bates  
Site: Yantzaza, Zamora-Chinchipec  
'Bus: 106  
Hometown: Fayetteville, AR

Are you the only volunteer in Ecuador from Arkansas?

Unless there are any Arkansans in OMN 107, I would currently be the only one in country.

What three words would you use to describe yourself?

Allow me to use three phrases my students have attributed to me in English class, with mistranslations: "teacher pretty" (profesor guapo), "hardworking young" (jóven trabajador), and "private friend" (no idea).

What's your dream job?

Some sort of combination of traveling, writing, and taking pictures.

Hobbies: got any?

Absolutely. Distance running firstly. Secondly, photography (plug: [www.365project.org/jarrettbates](http://www.365project.org/jarrettbates)). Thirdly, playing a little guitar to entertain myself (and generally no one else).

Favorite Spanish phrase?

This changes weekly. For awhile it was the combination of the words "normal...lógico" (said in sarcastic agreement with something), but this week it has to be "esa manquita," which is so Ecuadorian: the word "man" from English (the speaker rarely knows it's English), plus the diminutive (of course; normal...lógico), and then apply it to a woman?

Favorite Ecuadorian food?

Churrasco: grilled flank steak, egg, avocado, fries, rice (normal...lógico). Bam.

Favorite book/writer?

The late David Foster Wallace, hands down. I usually suggest that people start with his non-fiction, like the essay "A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again"

or "Roger Federer as Religious Experience," and then move on to his fiction such as Infinite Jest (my favorite book), which is intensely genius, comparable to Ulysses (and thus not for everyone). (Sorry for all the parenthetical statements.)

Favorite music?

This is too hard to answer. Some of my all-time favorite albums are Highly Refined Pirates by Minus the Bear, The Bends by Radiohead, At Home with Owen by Owen, Mountain Tracks Vol. 3 by Yonder Mountain String Band, Vitalogy by Pearl Jam, and Chutes Too Narrow by The Shins.

Most interesting place you've ever lived?

Aside from Yantzaza, Sevilla, Spain.

Most interesting thing you've done to kill time since being in Ecuador?

This is a perceptive question, but unfortunately time-killing activities are usually inherently not interesting. I guess my answer would be that I've developed the habit of trying to climb up things – trees, bridges, buildings, mountains – to try to get interesting angles for pictures.

Most embarrassing moment since being in Peace Corps?

Proclaiming in front of my host family that the "chucha está deliciosa!" (I meant to say trucha, trout; look up the other word if you don't know it.)

If you could have one superpower, what superpower would it be?

Ah, a timeless question. I've thought about this many times, and I always come back to flight. Imagine the new meaning of being able to go up to a girl and saying, "Hey babe, wanna take a ride?"

If you could meet one person, whether they are currently dead or alive, and ask them one question, who would you meet and what would you ask?

I would want to meet Michael Crichton and ask him, "Mike, is it okay if me and Steven Spielberg make Jurassic Park 4?"

Where would you like to be 25 years from now?

In Vilcabamba looking forward to my next 50 years of life.

Interview by Whitney Ciofalo, an Agriculture Volunteer from Omnibus 105 living in Venecia de Chimbo, Guayas.

## Better Know a Staff Member: María Dolores Chacón



What is your current position with Peace Corps-Ecuador?

TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) Program Manager.

Where are you from originally?

Quito, Ecuador.

What three words would you use to describe yourself?

Practical; Dreamer (with my project); Realistic.

What were you doing before you started working for Peace Corps?

I always worked in the teaching area. I was a teacher for the last 18 years in private schools and at university. I worked as a teaching books assessor for a publishing company, and worked implementing ISO quality standard for schools.

Do you have any hobbies?

I read a lot, play volleyball and bordar.

What's your favorite phrase in Spanish?

I cannot tell you!! (jaja)

What's your favorite phrase in English?

"Is that it?"

What's your favorite book?

Mal de Amores by Angeles Mastretta.

What's your favorite type of music or musician?

Joan Manuel Serrat y Diego "El Cigala."

If you could have a superpower, what would it be?

I would like to be a witch.

What's your favorite Ecuadorian food?

Empanadas de morocho y ceviche de camarón.

What is your favorite place you've ever lived in or visited?

I love Quito, but I loved Paris as well.

What is one thing you would change about the world?

Distribution of wealth.

What is your dream job?

Ministra de Educación.

If you could meet one person, whether they are currently dead or alive, and have a conversation with them, who would you meet?

Depends on the kind of conversation we will be having.

Where would you like to be 25 years from now?

Managing my own company.

Interview by Whitney Ciofalo, an Agriculture Volunteer from Omnibus 105 living in Venecia de Chimbo, Guayas.

## Room for Debate: Arrested Development?

By Claire E. Davis

### Introduction

The Peace Corps' mission to promote world peace and friendship is three-pronged: to help people of interested countries meet their need for trained men and women, to help promote a better understanding

of Americans on the part of peoples served, and to help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans. One of the greatest challenges faced by the agency today, fifty years after its founding, is the question of its effectiveness. It is no easy task to quantify the impact of

the type of work that Peace Corps Volunteers carry out in relation to these three goals, yet the Peace Corps must prove to Congress and the American people that it remains a valuable and relevant organization. Recently, an independent group released the first-ever comprehensive survey of Returned



Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs), and it found that, according to RPCVs, the Peace Corps' impact has been most deeply felt through the second and third goals—through the relationships and common understanding it has fostered among Americans and people from countries around the world—more than through the first goal of meeting the need for trained men and women. This sentiment has sparked a debate within the agency and among volunteers. Is the Peace Corps more effectual as a development or as a cultural exchange organization? If the Peace Corps is unable to live up to its three goals – especially its first goal to provide development assistance – should it attempt to reform or adjust its mission statement? Most importantly, what could Peace Corps Ecuador do to ensure that volunteers are capable of success on all three points?

#### Discussion

**The Debater: Jack Woodruff, Sustainable Agriculture, Omnibus 103**



Development or cultural exchange? This is absolutely a false dichotomy—indeed, Peace Corps can't have one without the other. And of the two, development is primary.

To realize this, simply ask yourself:

## “Is the Peace Corps more effectual as a development or as a cultural exchange organization?”

Just how much cultural exchange can take place between a PCV and members of his or her community if that volunteer has no skills that are relevant to community life? In what spaces or mediums is cultural exchange to take place? People in Ecuador are incredibly welcoming, generous, curious, and friendly, and will certainly receive any new volunteer with open arms. But at the end of the day, they need to feed their families. They need to eke out a living from their land or from their job, need to not get sick, need clean water, and need their community to provide a healthy and positive environment for their children. The PCV who is not relevant to these needs will likely end up a marginal figure in the community.

If, however, the Peace Corps Volunteer actually has some skills or critical thinking to contribute – if he or she can assist a farmer in renovating exhausted soils, or help a family save money and improve health by starting a garden – that volunteer will find him or herself intimately involved with the community in all ways—culturally especially. It is only by working in development, broadly defined, that good working community relationships with strong bonds will develop, and only in such relationships is there the possibility of a cultural exchange that goes beneath the superficial.

The volunteer's skills need not be extensive. In the (sadly discontinued) Sustainable Agriculture

Program, for example, volunteers with a working understanding of pH correction, agro-forestry, cover cropping, and organic fertilization can make great contributions to their communities. And of course, skills can and do grow during service, if a volunteer has access to the right resources. If Peace Corps were to invest more than just the token week of tech training, I'm certain that the payoff would be immense—for development, and for cultural exchange. Anecdotal evidence from Omnibus 105, which received a heavier focus on tech than is typical, already suggests this.

What better medium is there for cultural interchange and the fostering of mutual respect than the shared effort to improve community well-being? If we focus on goals two and three, I fear that we won't accomplish *ni uno*. If we focus on goal one, however, goals two and three will more often than not come easily, and Peace Corps can be the immensely rich and beautiful experience for both parties that it should.

**The Debater: George Beane, Community Health, Omnibus 104**



While the spread of mutual cultural awareness is an important part of a volunteer's experience, that goal has to be grounded in the PCV's daily work objectives – which inevitably share an aim of improving places through either soft (education) or hard (physical infrastructure) development. Efforts to spread cultural awareness grow out of the credibility, confidence, general knowledge, and social relationships that a volunteer attains through his regular job pursuing some form of community development. So, regardless of whether Peace Corps is more effective as a development or cultural exchange organization, its efforts and priorities should focus on the former.

A more labored case could be made that spreading cultural awareness is really just an oblique form of promoting development goals. Cultural exchange of the type Peace Corps encourages is ultimately designed to teach Ecuadorians (and Americans) to be more tolerant and better informed, and thus to be less likely to pursue narrow interests based exclusively on circumscribed ethnic and geographic identities. According to that reasoning, promoting cultural awareness is just a sneaky and farsighted form of soft development. Yet even if that is the case, the more overt and immediate development approaches (working at the local subcentro, teaching at a school, leading neighborhood youth groups, etc.) seem to better justify a volunteer's presence in-country.

It's also worth digressing slightly to address a related question of whether soft or hard development is more appropriate to Peace Corps' core mission in Ecuador. My own feeling is that hard infrastructure

requires big fundraising, more specialized training, and greater administrative oversight, and would therefore necessitate shrinking the number of PCVs in Ecuador. There doesn't seem to be much reason to do that, given the success of the current volunteers working in Y&F, CH, etc. As important as better physical infrastructure is, especially in rural Ecuador, I'm not sure the effort could justify the resources that the organization would have to invest in such programs, even for a small number of specialized, highly competent volunteers.

**The Debater: Claire E. Davis, Youth & Families Development, Omnibus 104**



After nineteen months of Peace Corps service and countless conversations with my friends and fellow PCVs, I have a firm conviction that volunteers make an impressive impact on their host communities through building relationships while, in general, achieving only minor successes on the develop-

ment front. However, I believe that the Peace Corps is more pertinent and valuable as an organization today than ever before, given the growing globalization and interconnectedness of our world. All three goals are still important. Mutual understanding, trust, and respect will become increasingly necessary values as we become more interdependent and must share more resources, especially in regions like the Middle East. Of course, compassion and enlightened self-interest should still motivate us to provide aid to developing nations and seek solutions to problems that affect us all. We absolutely still need the Peace Corps because, even if volunteers are frustrated with what they are able to achieve developmentally, goals two and three are clearly being met and are equally essential. Most people agree that there is room for improvement regarding the first goal; the problem is, however, that the Peace Corps' strengths as a development-focused agency are also its weaknesses. First, the Peace Corps attracts young idealists and the vast majority of volunteers are people who have a lot of passion and motivation, but little practical experience and technical know-how. These qualities can be wonderful for injecting life into the stuffy, bureaucratic organizations that we often encounter in our communities, but

“It is only by working in development, broadly defined, that good working community relationships with strong bonds will develop.”  
-Jack Woodruff

there are also problems of credibility and effectiveness. Second, volunteers have the flexibility to design their own secondary projects or find new primary projects. This flexibility allows us to be creative, something that many development professionals cannot be. But, with all the possible projects that a volunteer might have, training tends to be unspecific. In the Youth & Families Development Program, for example, we got one day of working with people with disabilities, one day of facilitating sex education charlas with youth, and one day of working with padres y madres de familia. The only thing in which I am an expert is dinámicas. That said, if we were given more specific work assignments and targeted training, we might go into our communities thinking that we know all the answers and we might miss something. We might not take the time to connect to people and work with them to find solutions. And I believe that the best and most sustainable development solutions are organic and indigenous. Perhaps that is why Western-style aid, although usually well intentioned, often fails.

As Peace Corps Volunteers, we are in a unique position. We live and work among these people that we are trying to help for two years; we have opportunities to listen to them, to become friends with them, to understand local politics, and to figure out what could actually work. Again, we have the time and the local connections that other types of development organizations do not. Perhaps there could be more collaboration between the Peace Corps and other organizations with more access to resources, so that development projects and initiatives could be more appropriate for the com-

“Although our number one goal is development, we all know that the PC is a completely different animal than USAID or an international NGO.”

-Andrea Gesumaria

munities that we come to know so well. It is easy for us to identify those people in our communities who could become leaders or to discover communities that have potential but need a push to get going – in these cases it would be helpful for volunteers to have connections to other organizations and resources.

**The Debater: Andrea Gesumaria, TEFL, Omnibus 106**



A few months ago I was escorted (politely forced) to get a pedicure by a fellow teacher, Sandra. Sandra told the pedicurist that I was American. “American?” she said, her eyes widening. “But, where’s your blonde

hair? Do you dye it brown?”

Because of basic assumptions like this about what it means to be American, I think the Peace Corps functions best as a cultural exchange organization. Because of Facebook, Google, and the Internet, the world is much larger than it was before. But people in my town still learn everything they know about Americans through TV and movies. Most still think an American has to be blue-eyed, blonde, rich, and Christian. I told a class that my dad was Jewish, and one girl raised her hand and innocently asked, “How many wives does he have?”

I think many men in town were disappointed that I wasn’t wild and crazy like Paris Hilton. My sitemate’s host nephew asked him why I didn’t take my clothes off and dance on tables like American women do in the movies. He looked shocked (and disappointed) to find out that most American women were normally tranquila.

It goes both ways. I thought that the whole culture of Ecuador was machista and conservative, but I’ve met women here who don’t even want to get married; others tell me they want to wait until they’re at least 30 to start a family. And while

I initially dreaded the lack of privacy and constant influx of family in my host family’s home, I’ve grown to profoundly respect the closeness of the families here. I hope I take that home with me to the States.

Although our number one goal is development, we all know that the PC is a completely different

animal than USAID or an international NGO. We’re (mostly) young, college-educated kids with no development background, working to improve the lives of the people at our site. And while most of us will, in our two years, do just that, I think the real impact of our service is how it opens up our eyes to the problems of the third world and to

people who live differently than we do. It will help enrich us as people and put us in a better place to tackle big problems in the years to come.

Claire Davis, a Youth & Families Volunteer from Omnibus 104, lives in Machala, El Oro.

## Introducing the new Peace Corps Ecuador minority outreach network: FREE (Fomentando Relaciones Étnicas y Éticas)

**Mission Statement:** FREE strives to promote understanding, respect and acceptance of the ethnic and cultural differences that exist within Peace Corps Ecuador and the country we serve.

**The Committee:** One of my first conversations with the rector of my colegio involved him questioning me being American. Pero no eres de Norte America, de dónde eres? This question immediately brought flashbacks from people in the States asking me, “Where are you from?” or “What are you?”—questions asked in order to categorize me into a specific group and apply stereotypes and generalizations to figure out who I am. In the rector’s case, he was pointing out who I am not; in his mind, I am not American. Although I was used to the inquiry in the States, I naively believed that as a Salvadoran-American serving in a Latin American country, I wouldn’t face discrimination. My false perception and my inability to present a coherent and culturally sensitive

response to his comments made me realize that there was a need. This sparked the idea of creating a group that will be specifically trained and prepared to help PCVs dealing with similar situations.

Katya Rodriguez, Youth & Families OMN106 in Pedro Carbo, Guayas.

“YES, I wash my hair!” So far my time in Ecuador has been pleasantly entertaining, with each day being completely different from the last. Being American of African descent in this country has its interesting perks. One of the reoccurring questions that I receive from the people of Ecuador is, “De dónde eres?” Normal enough, I thought. But I never thought that I would have to answer a question with, “Yes, I wash my hair.” As we sat waiting to speak with the director of the Sigsipamba Subcentro, my coworkers and I passed the time by asking each other cultural questions. They asked me standard questions, like “How’s the weather in California?” and “Does everyone

own a car?” Then the hair questions and comments came, still normal enough. Until I got hit with, “DO YOU WASH YOUR HAIR?” \*Snap\* Did someone really just ask me that? Wait...maybe my Spanish is off...

Nope, Spanish is definitely on! WTF?!?

Do you shower, Do you brush your teeth, Do you clean your ears? Who doesn’t? I asked myself. Does my cotton-like hair give off the impression that it isn’t regularly washed?

\*Snap back\*

Sí, claro! Me lavo el pelo. Not so normal of a question for me. I discussed it with a PCV friend, and she informed me that some people back in the States question if we wash our hair as well. This sort of questioning makes me want to lobby for mandatory ethnicity courses in the worldwide school system. But we shall start here with a Necessary Charla: “Hair Hygiene

(Yes We Wash Our Hair!)”  
Portia Boykin, Community Health  
OMN106 in Ibarra, Imbabura.

I must acknowledge that every volunteer has a different experience during their journey, and I am simply sharing mine, which I truly feel is unique strongly based upon the fact that I am an African American.

I was delayed about three hours at the Peruvian border because they thought I fabricated my passport. One border employee confidently claimed, “There are no black gringos. All gringos are white!” So, I played the Afro-Americano card. He wasn’t buying it; they don’t travel, which from my observations is technically true, as I have not encountered any African-American travelers outside the Peace Corps or other organizations since I’ve been here the last twenty-two months. It ended with me cleverly playing the “my parents are Cuban and Dominican” card. Surely, they had immigrated to the States and I was born there, so besides location of birth, I’m full Latino, which is COMPLETELY UNTRUE, but within five minutes of disclosing that, I had stamps to enter Peru.

Naim Edwards, Natural Resources  
OMN103 in Zaruma, El Oro.

Along with having to explain things associated with being an African American, I’ve also had to explain my denomination of Christianity. Here is an example of a conversation I had with my host dad about my beliefs.

Host Dad: So you’re not Catholic but you’re Christian?

Me: Yes.

Host Dad: Oh, so you are Evangelical?

Me: No, but my denomination is

probably closer to that of an Evangelical rather than a Catholic.  
Host Dad: Well, what are you then?  
Me: I’m Baptist.

Host Dad: Ahhhh, so what do you believe?

Me: Well, I am Christian, so I believe the same things you do, we just don’t pray through saints and we don’t do the same rituals as you.

Host Dad: Well we believe in the Bible, do you know what that is?  
It’s the book of truth.

Me: Yes, we use the same Bible.

I then proceeded to change the subject because my Spanish wasn’t that great and I was getting a little frustrated; he was talking to me about the Bible as if I were a crazy person who had never seen nor heard of the book.

This conversation happened within my first month at site. With time, I have explained more about church services and even let people listen to some Gospel music I have on my iPod. Other than the interesting conversation of being a Christian, but neither a Catholic nor an Evangelical, religion has been a good topic for cultural exchange.

Rebekah Clark, Community Health  
OMN106 in Colimes, Guayas.

I live in a town that is about 50% indigenous and 50% mestizo. As a black American, I receive stares everywhere I go. People are shocked when they question where I’m from and I tell them the United States. I usually receive a follow-up question about whether my parents are from Africa. I understand that people aren’t trying to be offensive, but it’s frustrating having to explain and justify my nationality just because I don’t look like a “stereotypical” American.

Thomas Laxton, Youth & Families

OMN106 in Guaranda, Bolívar.

The formation of FREE stems from the ever-present social issues that arise from ethnic differences (differences in diversity). Thus, FREE was approved to address issues of culture and ethnicity within Peace Corps Ecuador and Ecuador as a whole. The group will provide an open, judgment free space for PCVs to discuss how their backgrounds affect their Peace Corps experience. The FREE Committee will also work to create materials for all Volunteers to easily address issues of ethnicity in their sites. These materials will cover the ethnic and cultural diversities found in the United States, but will more importantly discuss and seek to understand those same diversities within Ecuador. The group will serve equally to assist volunteers in their sites as well as during training by promoting productive conversations, as well as how to address racial issues.

FREE is open to all who are interested and feel that they would benefit from and contribute to it. Feel free to contact any one of the committee members for more information:

Portia Boykin portiaolivia1@yahoo.com

Rebekah Clark clark.rebekah@yahoo.com

Naim Edwards naiedwards@gmail.com

Thomas Laxton twlaxton@gmail.com

Katya Rodriguez  
katya.e.rodriguez@gmail.com

Who has the audacity to be FREE, we do!



## Foiled by the Fancy Almuerzo

By Kristin Farr

Mango season is a joyous time of year here in Ecuador, yet it is sadly coming to a close. I mentioned during a conversation with my host family how I used to prepare dishes with mango back in the States. “You put mango in food, comida con sal?” they asked me. “Why of course I did. Mango salsa, mango with chicken, even mango in rice.” “Habla serio,” they responded. My host sister-in-law was intrigued by this idea, and together we planned to make one of my favorite mango dishes, mango salsa with shrimp, for almuerzo. We set to the kitchen, and I prepared my dish while she prepared hers, mine being made with fresh red onion, tomato, green bell peppers, cilantro, lime juice and of course mangoes straight from the tree outside; hers, fried shrimp accompanied with patacones. As you can see, the gringa made something with raw vegetables and fruits in a healthy way while the Ecuadorian fried it.

Regardless, my host sister-in-law was excited about our time in the kitchen together and came up with the idea to festoon our dish by presenting my mango salsa and shrimp in leaves of purple cabbage. She made the dish even more elegante by molding the rice into a cup, creating a beautifully shaped mound of rice. I put a twist of lime on it, and she contributed by adding boiled carrot and a few kernels of corn. I sliced a bit of mango and used it to decorate the plate while she spooned her perfectly cooked patacones and fried shrimp onto the dish. She topped it off with a sprig of cilantro. Our dish was breathtaking. We had grins from ear to ear as we set it on the table and took photos of our masterpiece. Never had such a fancy almuerzo graced my host family’s lunch table.

We called the muchachos to the table as we served them. One host brother, my cooking companion’s husband, complained about how cumbersome it was to eat the mango-salsa-with-shrimp “thing.” He also remarked that the maracuyá juice we made wasn’t sweet enough. My host sister-in-law asked how much they would pay for such a beautiful dish if they were served it in a restaurant, to which they replied “Mmm...fifty

“Never had such a fancy almuerzo graced my host family’s lunch table”

cents?” We looked at each other and rolled our eyes, thinking they were just being silly. She and I sat down to enjoy our creation while looking at the men to see how they liked it. Five minutes into the meal, my host dad scraped off my contribution to the lunch onto my counterpart’s plate. Every scrape he made to get the mango salsa off his plate was a scrape on my heart. I internalized my emotions and began to think, If I were back home no one would do such a thing in front of me. They would grin and bear it or simply say, “It’s good but not my favorite” to soften the blow. This was blatant. He might as well say “Kristin, your food is crap!” For me, that set the tone for the rest of the meal. I finished the delicious dish, and I do mean delicious, in silence. My host sister-in-law and I looked at each other from time to time and smiled with satisfaction despite the negativity in the air coming from the men.

When everyone was finished they simply got up from the table and walked off, leaving their dishes for us to clean up. No “Buen provecho,” no “Gracias,” nothing. Only one of my host brothers had the couth to say he thought it was tasty and “Thank you for preparing lunch for us.” My host sister-in-law and I remarked at how rude the boys were and that on top of it all they’d left the dishes for us to clean. I would have left those dirty dishes on the table for the rampant flies to feast on, but I knew my overworked host mom would be left to clean up the mess. We cleaned up the kitchen, and I went back to my room feeling defeated. They didn’t like my crêpes with strawberries, they didn’t like my fish tacos with homemade tortillas, and they didn’t like my mango salsa with shrimp. I think I’ll put my efforts to add a little zest into their lives on hiatus.

Kristin, an NRC Volunteer from Omnibus 105, lives in Churute, Guayas. She still seeks to add zest to the lives of the Ecuadorians in her community, albeit no longer by culinary means.

# Caption Contest

Last Issue's Winner:

Peace Corps Training Cultural Integration Practice: "Very nice Todd, your peeing-in-public-because-there-are-no-bathrooms style is improving. Swing it a little to the right, relax the hands, there you go...people will start thinking you're a local in no time." — Sean Maloney

Runners Up:

"I see you care about fortifying the environment. Would you be interested in signing a petition for Greenpeace?"

"Excuse me, could you spare a moment? Oh sorry, I see you have your hands full."

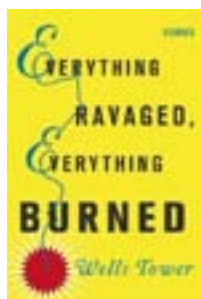


# Book Blurbs

By Benjamin Niespodziany

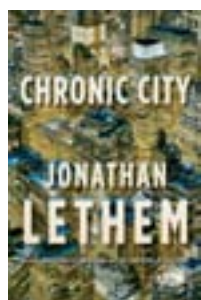
Everything Ravaged, Everything Burned by Wells Tower

Modernism at its finest. This is a beautiful collage of short stories dealing with middle-American struggles (alcoholism, divorce, sibling rivalry). Told through the narrative voice of a teenage girl, a young father, an old war veteran, and numerous others, this collection also features a story that deals with Vikings and dragons. Yes.



Chronic City by Jonathan Lethem

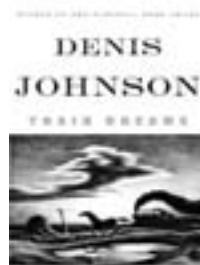
A mammoth novel about a washed-up childhood celebrity who finds himself lost amongst the glam-



our and grime of New York City. This is a wonderful novel, my first (not my last) read by Lethem, and he delivers throughout. By directly attaching the reader to the characters, Chronic City absorbs you. Grab this book if you miss wearing a tuxedo.

Train Dreams by Denis Johnson

Johnson's newest work, this 128-page novella dives into early 1900 colonial America. Riding by train through Montana and Idaho, Johnson covers forest fires, shoot-outs, killer dogs, a man from China who escapes death, and mumbled curses. This book was a blast to read.



Luka and the Fire of Life by Salman Rushdie

Rushdie's mediocre follow-up to the magnificent 1990 Haroun and the Sea of Stories. This book

has Haroun's younger brother, Luka, on a wild, out-of-this-world journey through the magical eyes of a video game. Although the term mediocre was mentioned before, mediocre Rushdie remains above average on any other author's level. Check it. It has robotic birds.



Townie by Andre Dubus III

The most recent release of Dubus III, author of House of Sand and Fog, is also his first memoir. This emotionally overwhelming true account takes the reader through Massachusetts, Connecticut, Maine,



Texas, and Colorado as Dubus tells of his childhood (tree houses, Bruce Springsteen, drugs), his march into adulthood (he gets super buff), and, most gripping of all, his odd relationship with his distant yet loving father, who also happens to be a famous author. Grab this book if you feel like crying and/or lifting weights.

Benjamin Niespodziany, a Youth & Families Volunteer from Omnibus 106, may or may not perform dramatic readings when he is alone in his room at his site in Machala, El Oro.

# The Ultimate Confusion

By Portia Boykin

Confusion makes its appearance one way or another during our service and sometimes it can stress us out! Despite the months I've spend in Ecuador deepening my understanding of the culture, I still often find myself in a state of confusion. One piece of advice that I can give to OMN 107 is to be as inquisitive as possible. The questions you ask could very well save you from severe frustration. Here's an account of my ultimate confusion: During work one day at Cruz Roja, I was told that the Japanese were coming to the office and that I should be at work at 11:00 the following morning. "Great! The Japanese are coming," I thought. "I'll be there."

I wondered why the Japanese were coming on this occasion, but foreigners come to the Red Cross all the time, so I didn't give it much thought.

"But lo and behold, the sight that was in front of me when I stepped into the building"

That morning I got dressed (casually dressed, because it was Friday) and walked down to the Cruz like normal. But lo and behold, the sight that was in front of me when I stepped into the building: huge bouquets of red roses filled the entrance and hallways and all volunteers were on deck, perfectly groomed in blue polos and business suits. What is going on? I definitely missed the memo. I walked upstairs and saw the salon filled with more roses, a full band, MC, and podium. Caterers scurried around with glasses of champagne and bizcochos, and the Japa-

nese and Ecuadorian flags stood proudly. I turned and saw my counterpart standing behind me, sharply dressed in a grey business suit and tie. I, bewildered, looked at him and said, "Should I go home and change?" "YES," he said, without hesitation. With that I ran home snatched off



my white linen pants and stylish blouse and sandals (I looked like a California hippie) and opted for my Red Cross polo, black slacks and black shoes. A touch of makeup and I was ready to roll.

Speeding back to the Cruz I thought to myself “Why didn’t I know about this? Why was I left out? Why was everyone else informed? How can I avoid this embarrassing, confused feeling from happening again?” As I entered the building, huge smiles were planted on everyone’s faces and they expressed to me how nice I looked for the event: The Inauguration of the Blood Laboratory donated by Japan.

Amazed at how beautifully orchestrated this vital ceremony was, I still couldn’t help but think of a way that I could have avoided my confusion from taking place. Ask more questions. This was the simplest, most logical response that I could give myself. How else would I have

“I still couldn’t help but think of a way that I could have avoided my confusion from taking place.”

known the magnitude of the event that was ahead of me? Simply ask. As new additions to our communities, we are surrounded by difference. Difference in culture, customs, language, and communication. We come to realize that the more time we spend being inquisitive with our counterparts and community members and the less reserved we are, the less stressful our time will be here and the more clarity we will gain.

Granted, there will always be a hint of uncertainty while we are in service, but establishing open communication will take care of the bulk of mental frustrations within site. Our community members and host families know that we are for-

eigners and understand that we are learning the culture and that this may even be our first time out of our own country. They understand that we will have questions and experience confusion and repeatedly say “No entiendo.” They are also more than willing to share their culture and answer any questions that we may have. So let’s take it upon ourselves to be the nosiest volunteers they have ever met and avoid being ultimately confused. After all, this is for our sanity. Portia Boykin, a Community Health Volunteer from Omnibus 106, now asks hundreds of questions a day at her site of Ibarra, Imbabura.

## Creative Writing: Fisherman, Fisherman

By Manuel Melendez

Fisherman  
Your arms carry a rat basket of wasted bait  
Your eyes trail teal sea, searching for just one to bring back  
Feel the night music swift, swirling grey wind in your hair  
Hunger refuses you to turn—this is it.

If only you heard the first wish  
Incantation solemn, its eagerness to be unheard  
But the ivory bones through his peeling flesh  
And your carvings, which you keep tucked against your heart  
Reminders that you aren’t alone, your impossible wife must eat  
Must not be silenced anymore

Here, fisherman, hear  
He calls to you again, ‘Put me back, put me back’

But you cannot listen to whispers of reason  
You must kill another, and another, to survive tomorrow’s wrath  
Dig deep, fisherman, dig deep  
Bring the dead to the wooden table—bring the dead to the broken bread  
Quiet him, and the songs your own hurt allow.

Flounder, fisherman, flounder  
Shrug the seaweed away, tug the net tightly round your wrist  
You have it, the magic catch—the golden tailed  
And this one, this one speaks  
‘Don’t do it, don’t do it’  
Even to you, wearisome body, he’s colored in loneliness  
And he survives the biting embrace of January  
To murmur against your silky ribs.

Impeccable timing, you think  
This the instant you no longer saw twilight  
Saw only an endless eye of black  
And mother to a child, you find the fish cradled against you  
Whimpering in the ink night, following the droplets of stars  
Knowing only it does not want to die  
But plead, fisherman, plead, ‘You must, you must, you must live too’  
And the net follows, crashing to earthy ground  
Sighing lastly—you’ve passed his test.

‘Thank you, fisherman, thank you’  
And he tries a smile, tries to light the candles in his eyes  
But too far away, too long gone in this voyage  
And leaving joy at home  
‘Fisherman, you have won me, I am yours to keep’  
And this he understands, this he kneels for  
A prayer in his hollow shadow  
Already trailing away  
‘Anything you wish is my command’  
Yes, fisherman, yes—this is how you survive.

As a black curled boy you learned to beg  
For pretty coins, for words of consolation, for fast love, for easy death  
But this sanctuary, your final rest  
‘Please, golden one, give me something to eat’  
Is the moment you forget that face.

‘Of course, fisherman, of course’  
And your golden haired fish shines  
Forcing you a blink until the air chimes  
And the net weighs down unexpectedly  
With the fish you couldn’t catch  
All the fish your jagged fingers couldn’t hold tight.

No more speaking, to speak petty, to speak less

And you swear—the fish brightly shines again as it leaps through invisible tears  
 Rain, the magic rain, coming to whisk it away  
 ‘Come tomorrow, fisherman, come tomorrow’  
 But no, fisherman, no more  
 You must satisfy your hunger  
 Not your fill.

She is sure, on the way back  
 Holding her broken waist to yours  
 That you have chosen right, you have made her complete  
 Setting the torn, satin mantle for two  
 Asking, ‘How, how did you do it?’

Miles away  
 You want to kiss her curiosity  
 Where the golden haired fish sings for those who know—no.

Manuel Melendez, a TEFL Volunteer from Omnibus 106, casts lines for golden-haired fish and marries myth to meter at his site in Yantzaza, Zamora-Chinchipe.

## Muy de moda: Spandex

By Chloe Pete

Spandex, otherwise known by its alter-ego "Lycra" here in Ecuador, seems to be the trend of the century. It's definitely not just a seasonal fad... mostly because seasons don't exist here. Regardless, Lycra has the sort of staying power that defies seasons, weather patterns, health epidemics, and Acts of God. What did Ecuadorians even wear before Lycra? Surely it was a less slimming time.

Born in 1959, spandex quickly revolutionized the clothing industry in the United States and around the globe. Clothes no longer had to be tailored so precisely to fit every body; just add a measly 5 percent spandex to that fabulous poly-cotton blend and ta-da! That shirt looks reasonably good on double the customers. According to a recent National Public Radio story, of the 20.5 billion pieces of clothing purchased in the USA in 2010, an estimated 80 percent contained spandex. Eighty percent! Surely the percentage must be closer to 99 in Ecuador.

In recent years, there has been a significant uptick in the appearance of spandex pants in the general population of the United States. Well, general population

“Just add a measly 5 percent spandex to that fabulous poly-cotton blend and ta-da! That shirt looks reasonably good on double the customers.”

might be too broad; women between the ages of 12 and 35, particularly the 15 to 23 range. When I first started spotting these Lycra-loving youngsters, I must admit I was appalled. The nerve! I tell ya, kids these days don't understand the importance of virtue, modesty, hard work, or sacrifice. The feces-igniting pyromaniacs!!! Er...wait. I didn't say that. My great-aunt Hortence did. I have a feeling (that is entirely unjustified in science) that Lycra has been popular in this country for awhile. That would explain why so many of the Lycra-based outfits that we see around town are nearly threadbare and/or hiked up to Chimborazo's peak. Spandex

“The final issue in the Ecuadorian spandex discussion can be summed up with one tiny acronym: VPL.”

doesn't last forever, people. It does in fact get stretched out, especially after 40-odd washings on the rock followed by the all-natural super-intense sun-and-wind drying method. Followed by the iron. “Don't you want to iron that?” all the host moms question in unison. Patterned spandex in particular suffers the most severe consequences.

Actually the washing habits here would really hasten the aging of any spandex garment, and for that reason alone it is probably a poor fashion-dating method (you know, like carbon-dating). The only purely scientific way to obtain the origins of spandex in Ecuador is through a rigorous photographic study of fashion through the ages. I started my investigation on the internet, Googling “ecuadorian fashion.” First hit? [www.EcuadorFashion.org](http://www.EcuadorFashion.org). Mission accomplished.

Unfortunately, this website has zero information about the fashions of yesteryear in our adoptive country. The only thing I learned is that Salinas Fashion Week is February 10-12, so get excited! The theme this year is “No More Jeans: Absolute Denim Attitude” (in English, to be sure) which according to the website represents the beginning of a new way of looking at fashion in Ecuador; namely an infusion of creativity and variety, giving the consumer more choices in comfort and style. So obviously, a number of the promotional photos include models wearing jeans, colored jeans, or jean-like pants. Just like at home, jeans aren't “jeans” if you pay a month's salary for them. No More Jeans, indeed.

On a side note, I wonder if the organizers of Salinas Fashion Week consider Jeggings (denim-colored spandex) to be in the category they are banning. In my mind, spandex lovers and jeans lovers could unite for the first time in Ecuadorian history to create an army of Jeggings. Imagine! This marvelous denim-and-Lycra alternative already exists here, but it needs to be encouraged and popularized. (Thus far, my only Jeggings sighting was during a recent basketball game; the best player on the opposing team wore them without a trace of irony. She was the mother of 3 and at least 35. Talk about cajones!)

The final issue in the Ecuadorian spandex discussion can be summed up with one tiny acronym: VPL. For those of you unfamiliar, VPL stands for Visible Panty



Line, a concept cooked up by the evil minions of Victoria and her Secret sometime in the late 1990s. Making women terrified that other people might see their underwear lines, VPL was the first and final drastic

marketing tactic in the push for thongs. Shame can be very persuasive.

The VPL memo never made it to Ecuador though. Women (and some men) seem to revel in the fact that the entire outline of their skivvies can be viewed clearly as the little black hairs in pigskin soup. In the case of those plenty-washed threadbare spandex (or just plain old white), you can not only see the outline, but often the pattern of the undergarment material as well. I once saw a woman wearing white spandex pants and a very transparent white top with a matching yellow panty and bra set underneath. In Riobamba. In December.

Why, Diosito? Why do people wear such painfully tight clothing, one piece on top of the other? Is there any possible way that that kind of intense bunching of materials is comfortable? Or healthy?

## Movie Reviews:

### Attempting to Follow the Oscars in Ecuador

By Ricky Ackerman

At the time of writing, the end of February is approaching, which means the Academy Awards are nearly upon us. That special annual event that nobody in Ecuador cares about, especially considering that none of the Best Picture nominees contain severe violence, nudity, Nicholas Cage or are likely to be handed to the ayudante on a bus by a nun (it happens). This year the Academy has nominated nine films for Best Picture and I have managed to watch seven of the contenders (getting ahold of these films in Ecuador is a bit difficult). Of the two I have not seen, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* and *Hugo*, the former I hear is not worthy of the nomination and the latter is directed by Martin Scorsese, so how good could it really be? (Sarcasm.) Let's take a look at what I have seen.

#### War Horse

I feel there are two reasons this film was nominated for Best Picture: It is a crowd pleaser and it is directed by Steven Spielberg. That is not to say I think the movie is bad, but rather that I do not see it as worthy of this nomination. The film follows a horse that ends up involved in World War I. The cinematography is beautiful and the movie is well made and directed, but it is not anything special, just a straightforward story with cliché characters. The great tragedies of WWI are mostly ignored to focus on this horse. In the end, I still do not care about that horse.

#### The Help

While a good film, *The Help*, like *War Horse*, is not great. The acting is quite good, especially Viola Davis and Octavia Spencer, who

Alas, I have no answers for these provocative questions. I could offer you some roundabout justification for the state of spandex in this lovely country, something involving capitalism and Asia, and the intersection of culture, fashion, and tradition, but let's not kid ourselves. There mostly is no reason. Ecuadorians love their Lycra and that's that!

As part of her project as a Community Health Volunteer from Omnibus 106, Chloe Pete offers free counseling to any volunteer who has looked down and realized they are wearing top-to-bottom spandex. Sessions will be held at her site in Alausí, Chimborazo.

are both up for nominations (Best Actress and Best Supporting Actress, respectively). The film, based on a popular book, focuses on the relationship between African-American maids and their employers in 1960s Mississippi. It is an entertaining and worthwhile film, but it is not as biting as it could be. The issues present are delved into effectively, but the movie never goes very far and remains simply a feel-good movie about racism.

#### The Tree of Life

Is a beautifully filmed, abstract look into the childhood of three boys in the 1950s, but it is so much more than that. Some may be turned off by the deliberate pace, the odd image sequences and the depth the movie reaches for, but for me *Tree of Life* was a film that reached for the stars successfully. The visuals are qué gauu good, and the emo-

tions this film evokes and the deep thought it triggers are something I rarely experience from a movie.

#### Moneyball

This film follows the management behind the Oakland Athletics' 2002 season. Brad Pitt's character, the general manager, is forced to rebuild his baseball team with few monetary resources. He turns to a theory based on statistical and cost-benefit analysis. The movie is not as much about baseball as it is business. It is an intelligent and intense movie driven by great writing, excellent acting and a good story.

#### Midnight in Paris

Woody Allen, in good form, directs the story of Owen Wilson and Rachel McAdams as an engaged couple in Paris. Though they're engaged, the relationship is more or less a sham, with no real connection ever appearing between the two. Wilson's character dreams of living in Paris and getting inspiration to finish his first novel while McAdams wants to go live in some American suburb like her rich parents. The film is charming and fun, especially for those familiar

with the creative types hanging out in Paris in the 1920s like Hemingway and Fitzgerald. My main issue was the fact that I really do not care for Owen Wilson, but I am able to tolerate him in this. Adrien Brody's portrayal of Salvador Dalí was a particular delight for me.

#### The Artist

This silent, black-and-white film directed by a mostly unknown French director came out of nowhere to take the awards tour by storm. It has scooped up multiple best picture wins at various awards shows and is likely to do the same at the Oscars. The movie follows a formerly successful silent film actor struggling with the advent of talkies (played by the wonderfully expressive Jean Dujardin, who has a good shot at the Best Actor Award). Many might write this film off since it's silent and in black and white, but fortunately the Academy has not. *The Artist* is charming and superbly well-acted and well-written and definitely worthy of multiple viewings. It is likely to win and I am fully supportive of that. Simply a delightful film.

#### The Descendants

Though I love *The Artist* and would be happy to see it win, this may be my personal favorite film of the nominees. George Clooney, who gives one of his best performances yet, deals with the decision to open up his family's land in Hawaii to development and tourism while at the same time he has to contend with a personal crisis. Alexander Payne (*Sideways*, *About Schmidt*) does a wonderful job directing to build the complexity of each character and move the morally complicated story along. He has a way of finding that perfect point between drama and comedy to look at the disorder of life. I absolutely love this film.

I think we can all agree that Ricky Ackerman, a Natural Resources Conservation Volunteer from Omnibus 105, has thus far done an outstanding job of following the Oscars from his site of Bahía de Caráquez. A round of snaps to you, sir.

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## Rayito de Luz. Machala. El Oro. Ecuador. Late January. 2012.

By Benjamin Niespodziany

During the rainy season, on Saturday and Sunday afternoons in Rayito de Luz, a miniature sector of Machala, the young adults of the barrio played liberal futsal (soccer) in a smaller field, with a smaller

“The princes of Rayito de Luz (the Shimmer of Light) played in the street right outside the only high school in the area.”

ball, and with more aggression) in the street. With slippery screams, sporting knee and ankle cuts that were washed away by the daily downpours or by a puddle splash from a muttering taxi, the teenagers craved the game. When the rain was absent, which was rare, they played in the sun, a brutal heat that they paid no attention to. The games lasted until their parents called them for dinner, until someone's wife called them to care for their family, until the darkness swept over the energetic street corner and forced them to limp back to one of the 100 homes in the area.

The princes of Rayito de Luz (the Shimmer of Light) played in the street right outside the only high school in the area. They made the field with cheap chalk and imperfect lines that faded within moments of starting the game, their lives inevitably cut short by the downfall of rain and the amount of dust (or mud) kicked into play during the event.

The men barked from their busy intersection at the blue buses that passed in both directions every ten minutes, taking community members away to the hustle of the center of Machala, where one could buy fresh fruit, meat, lukewarm coffee, paint, and overpriced electronics.

Stray dogs covered in purple permanent marker constantly interrupted the games, chasing the tiny soccer ball, the kids kicking the homeless monsters away. Oftentimes, both the soccer ball and the dogs were speckled in red.

The athletes laughed, mocked each other, got pushed around. They took off their shirts to cool off, to show their neighbors and best friends their strength. Some wore long-sleeved shirts and

“When the kids played, they forgot about their trumpet lessons, about their pregnant girlfriends, about yesterday's biology test, about the heat.”

high socks to avoid bloody cuts when they inevitably fell on the blackened, dirty streets. They got back up.

Large women on mopeds flew past the games, embracing the wind that helped them escape the heat, despite being surrounded by it, and breast-fed their children as they skidded through bent stop signs.

Poor men on bicycles rode past, offering a sentence of motivation or comedy to the focused players. Sometimes they stopped to watch, finding a nearby sidewalk beer to drain.

Young brothers of the jóvenes watched the game from the weak sideline shadows that the high school's fence provided. The young ones cheered for their brothers, cheered for their cousins, cheered for their friends, craving to be older.

Shoeless kids wore Polo shirts, baseball hats, tank tops with logos of distant companies. One 16-year-old kid was often seen wearing a red Simpsons shirt that contained four Duff beer cans, stating: Four Course Meal.

No one cared.

For a few hours every weekend, these kids forgot about their fathers that had passed away one month prior from terminal cancer, the deceased refusing to get out of bed for two months before

the breathing stopped, renouncing his faith in God. When the kids played, they forgot about their trumpet lessons, about their pregnant girlfriends, about yesterday's biology test, about the heat.

Sometimes, after the game had finished, after the rain had stopped and the moon was bright, they sat on the sidewalk, laughing and talking shit about their favorite soccer teams, their heroes. They talked of leaving the barrio that was once a city landfill. For the kids of Rayito de Luz, sometimes 10 in size, sometimes 30, side-street futsal (indo, as they called it) was perfection, it was something they rarely said no to. It was life.

Benjamin Niespodziany, a Youth & Families Volunteer from Omnibus 106, practices futsal connoisseurship at his site in Machala, El Oro.

# Recipes

By Jordan Shuler

Here is what the following three recipes have in common: you do not have to slaughter a pig to make them. And thank goodness for that, because as I can testify, a pig slaughter can last a lot longer than you want it to. Instead, we bring you chicken! batidos! and, inspired by Kristin Farr's culinary creativity (see her article, “Why Don't Ecuadorians Like Flavor?” in the Volunteer Life section)...mango salsa! Buen provecho, compañeros.



## Chicken achiote

### INGREDIENTS

- 2 chicken breasts
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 Tbsp achiote seeds
- 1 red onion, sliced
- 1 green bell pepper, sliced
- 1 tomato, diced
- 1 tsp achiote oil
- Pinch of salt

### DIRECTIONS

1. Slice two boneless, skinless chicken breasts into strips. For best results, pound strips with the flat of a knife to achieve equal thickness for even cooking.
2. Toast garlic and achiote seeds in a pan over medium-high heat.
3. Add chicken to pan and cook until lightly browned.
4. Add onion, pepper and tomato. Add achiote oil. Cook, stirring frequently, until chicken is done.
5. Season and serve warm. (Tip: Best eaten with patacones.)





## Mango Salsa

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 ripe mango, peeled/pitted/diced (yields about 1½ cups)
- ½ medium red onion, finely chopped
- ½ cup bell pepper, finely chopped
- 1 small tomato, diced
- 3 Tbsp fresh cilantro, chopped
- 3 Tbsp fresh lime juice
- Minced ají to taste
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 3-4 tsp olive oil (optional)

### DIRECTIONS

1. Combine ingredients in a bowl.
2. Season to taste with ají, salt and pepper, and olive oil. If the salsa ends up being too hot or acidic, temper it by adding some diced avocado.
3. Cover and chill.



## Batido de aguacate

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 avocado
- 1 cup milk
- ½ cup yogurt
- 3 Tbsp honey OR sugar
- 8 ice cubes

### DIRECTIONS

1. Blend ingredients in blender until desired consistency is achieved. Serve immediately.

Tip: Plain yogurt gives this batido a tangy taste; use vanilla yogurt for a milder flavor, or if you're really feeling gutsy, try using cream.

Jordan Shuler, a Youth & Families Volunteer from Omnibus 104 living in Guayaquil, Guayas, has adopted the new philosophy that a batido a day keeps the doctor away.