



EL CLIMA

PEACE CORPS ECUADOR

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Cover photo courtesy of BENJAMIN NIESPODZIANY a Youth and Families volunteer from Omnibus 106 who enjoys the Andean mountain vistas of this great country.

A FREE MOMENT: PIECING A PUZZLE

BY PORTIA BOYKIN

An obvious “rose from the concrete” is what comes to mind as I sit in the sewing room of Centro Cultural Y Artesanal in Valle de Chota (Carpuela), Imbabura. Carpuela, the place that has bred the brilliant work of a forthcoming legend that I had luckily came into contact with. The “rose” is a ceramicist by the name of Alicia Villalba. The transgression of each piece from this striking 34 year old Afro- Ecuadorian truly speaks louder than words.

As Afro-Ecuadorian week approaches this October, I think about Black History in America and how influential it is internationally, but then I also realize how fortunate I am to have been exposed to black history in Latin America. I smile realizing that the opportunity is even more special with my experience and this living legend taking place in Ecuador. I respect her work. I’m elated to even be in her tight circle. My promoting health and wellness has transformed into something that I didn’t think twice about establishing: an ethnic bond.

As she molds the rustic clay from her backyard mountain into art, Alicia shares with me her experience as an Afro-Ecuadorian ceramicist. More profoundly, though, as an Afro-Ecuadorian.

How long have you been an artist?

15 years.

How did you start?

By invitation.



Where did you study?

At home and in the workshops where I was invited.

How has your work developed throughout the years?

My works has developed through much devotion, sacrifice, and self-research because of the fact that I did not study at an art school.

What inspires your work?

Redeeming the identity of the Afros on a world-wide level inspires me.

“Wow” I thought to myself as I jotted down the unfamiliar words in Spanish. This woman is SERIOUS.

Is there a purpose to your artwork?

Yes. The purpose is to create a consciousness within the Afro-Ecuadorians and non Afro-Ecuadorians of the situation that the Afro-Ecuadorians face today in Ecuador because of racism.

Which one of your pieces is your favorite?

“La Tema de Educación.” Not because it inspires me the most, but because I do not agree with the education system for the Afro-Ecuadorians. This is the principal cause of underdevelopment.

What’s the best thing about being an artist?

The best thing about being an artist is that you can say what you like and what you don’t like without saying a word.

What’s the worst thing about being an artist?

I don’t like that there is no support for artist.

Is there an artist you relate to?

Yes! Oswaldo Guayasamin, from Quito, Ecuador.

Have you ever feel like giving up art?

No, never because I never want to lose the oppor-

THE BEST THING ABOUT BEING AN ARTIST IS THAT YOU CAN SAY WHAT YOU LIKE AND WHAT YOU DON’T LIKE WITHOUT SAYING A WORD

tunity to express the way I feel.

What would you like to share specifically about Ecuadorian art?

Ecuadorian artists do not have very many opportunities that exist to exhibit/expose their artwork.

How do you feel after you finish or while you are working?

While I am working I feel happy because I am entering my innermost self.

Describe yourself in 5 words:

Innovative, Creative, Dissatisfied, Grateful, Proud

What goes on for Afro-Ecuadorian day in your Country?

Afro-Ecuadorian day is celebrated in the first week of October but they only recognize Bomba concerts (type of dancing/music). Other types of activities like forums, workshops, charlas, are not given because they think that the blacks are just happy with dancing. We would like to see more of these activities.

She talks about the struggles that Afro-Ecuadorians face in her country as I exchange my views of being black in America. The depths of her words scream with power through her modest voice. I am reminded of the strife that my black American ancestors have faced as well as hers. I realize how similar we are. I am intrigued with her words, and I embrace the fact that "Black History" is universal. No matter the country, year, or time, "our" struggles have been one. Being born and bred in two different environments, Alicia and I have obvious differences. But, the greatest thing that we share and always will share, is the gift of being descendants from the beautiful, bountiful, and breathtaking continent of Africa. Without stepping foot on the continent (neither has Alicia), I can describe it with those three words because of my understanding of the history, and my love for the heritage in which I have found within a new friend in Ecuador. Alicia Villalba understands the struggle of Africans throughout the world. She depicts this struggle through the Beauty, Bounty, and Breath of

her artwork. I am thankful to be able to witness this in person. She is a true unsung hero.

As we continue to not only share our technical skills with our Ecuadorian counterparts, our cultural backgrounds must be placed at the same level or priority. This connects us just as the roots connect a tree to the soil. As for me, I soak up every moment I get with Alicia and women like her in our community. I say 'our' because it is just that. We have developed a bond and trust for one another that I believe the ancestors would highly agree upon. Yes, we come from two different continents and profound cultural difference, but that sweet, silent, yet remarkable similarity connects us and keeps us connected like a puzzle. A puzzle that continues to be constructed. I'm glad I've been able to contribute.

If you all are wondering about Afro-Ecuadorian week and other cultural events going on in your own community, drop by your local Ministerio de Cultural and *pregunta no mas*. Also, if you have your own FREE (Fomentando Relaciones Étnicas y Éticas) moment, please don't hesitate to let us all read about it. Not matter what it is, as long as it is FREE! We would love for you to share your stories.

PORTIA BOYKIN is a delightful Omnibus 106 volunteer living up in the gorgeous mountains of Ibarra. She will be writing "A FREE Moment" every issue, documenting free art throughout Ecuador. Portia listens to good music.

THE PURPOSE IS TO CREATE A CONSCIOUSNESS WITHIN THE AFRO-ECUADORIANS AND NON AFRO-ECUADORIANS OF THE SITUATION THAT THE AFRO-ECUADORIANS FACE TODAY IN ECUADOR BECAUSE OF RACISM



(L to R) Jennifer Slaiman (106), Community member Daniela, Bomba Dancing Queen, myself, Alicia Villalba the Artist. Celebrating and hosting the grand opening of Alicia's art exhibition Pasado y Presente in Valle de Chota (Juncal)

BACHATA: A LOVE STORY

For the record, I'm not some fancy obsessed music genius by any stretch of the imagination. I'm a fan of music, but that is where it ends. I like some mainstream stuff, some obscure stuff, and lots of old stuff but let's not get too bent out of shape about it, ok? I will never enter a conversation with you about the Greatest Albums of All Time or tolerate any similar exchange. My enjoyment of the combination of notes, beats and vocals that make up The Music is genuine and profound... but why do we have to talk about it?

That being said, I have a confession to make: I love Bachata. It's fantastic. The bongo drums, the guitar, the dancing... It's so badass. We're going to talk about Bachata now. This is the exception to my rule.

First, however, a short anecdote: A million years ago in my Pre-Peace Corps Life (PPCL) I was in a serious relationship with a Puerto Rican whose musical tastes were vastly different from mine. A part-time DJ and lover of all things Salsa, Merengue and Bachata, she occasionally half-forced me to go out dancing Sunday nights at the local Latin gay club (just kidding about the local, there was one in the entire city). As you could probably guess, I was a terrible dancer. The Salsa steps confused me and the Bachata steps bored me. My preferred style of dance has always been freestyle (think 80's video costume dance party in a ballroom with a bouncy floor) so this hyper-organized 1-2-3 step thing really pissed me off. It felt oppressive and unfair. Why didn't they trust that I could dance on my own?

For a long time I was a brat about it. I would change the music from Salsa when we were driving in the car and roll my eyes when she would serenade me in the kitchen to Bachata. I just didn't get what all the fuss was about. "It all sounds ex-

actly the same!" I once said. I refused to get on board. And that was my position up until the end, when we got into a huge fight after I threw her Bachata collection out the window.

Joking! I didn't do that. There were other major issues in our relationship. I repeat: Bachata did not break us up.

I can admit now that I was narrow minded, yet I also know that it wasn't the right time. I wasn't open to the idea of Bachata with its predictable rhythm and steps. In fact it wasn't until about six months ago that I fully embraced my blossoming love of the genre and I haven't regretted it a single day. (Middle of article footnote: I didn't really want to make this story a metaphor for my issues, but I think its too late. Disculpe.)

Anyway, I've thought about it a lot and I think it really comes down to exposure. After being in Ecuador many, many months, the songs were suddenly familiar to me. I even knew some of the words, like we all know the words to Nickelbacks' "Remind me..." even though I doubt anyone has even intentionally played that song. In short, I unwittingly became musically integrated. That realization plus one particularly memorable evening of dancing with a great partner... and I was hooked.

As I previously mentioned, I don't know much about The Music. You know, like the analyzing of it or whatever. So suffice it to say that you'd better believe me when I say that Bachata is awesome. There are people who refer to it as simply "bus music" (which is not inaccurate... it is played on a lot of buses), but its so much more. Bachata originated in the Dominican Republic in the early 20th century, according to Wikipedia sources. At its inception, Bachata was called "*amargue*" apparently because

MY PREFERRED STYLE OF DANCE HAS ALWAYS BEEN FREESTYLE (THINK 80'S VIDEO COSTUME DANCE PARTY IN A BALLROOM WITH A BOUNCY FLOOR) SO THIS HYPER-ORGANIZED 1-2-3 STEP THING REALLY PISSSED ME OFF



it was deeply emotional, primarily relating depressing tales of heartbreak. It was marginalized for decades, until new artists in the 1990s began using the electric bass guitar instead of the traditional acoustic. That and the earlier switch from maracas to the *güira* (the big tin can with bumps thing), put Bachata in the danceable, loveable mainstream.

If you've been in the country more than five minutes, you've heard Prince Royce whether or not you know it. His big 2010 hits include "El Amor Que Perdimos" (Yo te ame/te adore/no te quiero ve-ee-e-ee-eerrr), "Corazon Sin Cara", "Rechazame", and the ingeniously Bachatatized cover "Stand By Me". The Prince's songs are catchy and just pop-y enough to be accessible to those Volunteers fresh from PST. I'd categorize 2010 Royce as "gateway Bachata". The more recent 2012 Royce, however, is sort of easy listening-ish and bad. Skip it and go on to step 2.

Once your sensibilities have adjusted to Royce's stylings (which aren't "too strong", if you know what I mean), it's time to move on to the *padrinos* of the genre, Aventura or Kings of Bachata. Born and raised in the Bronx, the quartet of Dominican-

Puerto Rican cousins and friends got their big break in 1999, producing six studio and three live albums before their recent breakup in 2011. They've got lots of great material to choose from, but my favorites so far are "Ella y Yo", "Yo Quisiera Amarla", "Los Infieles", and "Obsesion". Chances are you already know the lyrics to these classics.

If after lessons one and two, you're still hungry for more delicious, low-calorie Bachata, try Romeo Santos (former lead singer of Aventura), Elvis Crespo, Carlos & Alejandra, Luis Vargas, or go pick up one of those CDs with 115 songs and start your own personal investigation, just like Harriet the Spy. Then practice dancing in your house and hit the town! I can't speak for all regions of Ecuador, but in the Sierra, a lot of bars (not clubs) with dancing will put on a few Bachata songs at the very end of the night to wind down. Remember to take a nap in the afternoon so you'll be ready when your song comes on at 1:45am!

CHLOE PETE is a wise cracking 106er living in *frio* Tixan in Chimborazo. When she's not demanding Bachata wherever she roams, she's busy being a health volunteer at cloud level.



BOSTON KATIE ADVICE COLUMN

I LIKE MY COFFEE BITTER AND BLACK, MATCHING BOTH MY PERSONALITY AND MY SOUL

Boston Katie, I take cold showers and by the time I'm dry, I'm already sweating. Other volunteers take steaming hot showers and when they dry off, they're cold. What does it all mean?

It means you live in a country with many climates. Stop complaining.

Boston Katie, I miss home. How do I handle this?

You miss home. Simple as that. Everyone misses home, so miss it, and it will still be there when you return. Unless there is a zombie apocalypse, in which case we are all screwed.

Boston Katie, I don't feel like getting out of bed today, what wakes you up?

The thought of coffee, The Boss, and cigarettes.

Boston Katie, why do we see rainbows in an arc?

It's magic, I'm not dignifying that with a response.

Boston Katie, what's the greatest love song of all time?

Depends. I love you and want to spend the rest of my life with you love songs? "Can You Feel the Love Tonight?" by Elton John, but what do I know? Even my student's tell me I have no idea of romance. If you're not into the sap, listen to Bruce Springsteen's "I'm on Fire" and let the Boss take you away, all the while remembering an old lover that took you for a ride in their 1968 Mustang.

Boston Katie, my Ecuadorian girlfriend keeps calling me animal names like "Osito" and "Coco-drillo." What animal names should I call him?

How old are you? 14?

Boston Katie, where can I find some good coffee in Ecuador?

Happy you asked, I have been ranking the coffee as I go...

1. Las Lajas
2. Catamayo
3. Loja

I like my coffee bitter and black, matching both my personality and my soul. If you like a lighter coffee, Zaruma is good too.

Boston Katie, what's the best place in Ecuador?

Machala. Specifically, Rayito de Luz.

Boston Katie, is it true that money buys happiness?

Yes. That's incredibly true.

Boston Katie, what's your favorite word in Spanish?

MY STUDENT'S TELL ME I HAVE NO IDEA OF ROMANCE

No.

Boston Katie, what's your favorite condiment?

Boston baked beans. You can put them on anything. Eggs, on top of a burger. Fenway dog basis? With Boston baked beans. It goes with everything, and it's good fiber. Do not use if you are dating someone. Butter, bread, Boston baked beans. Soak it up.

Boston Katie, what are your favorite pasttimes?

Looking up adorable animal photos, being terrified by shark news reports, bothering Ben and Andrea in site, bothering everyone else out of site, and reading teen fiction. Also, guiding the blind. That's not a metaphor, I do it every Sunday. F*** off.

KATIE HARANAS is the light of Machala, teaching English one cigarette break at a time. When she's not listening to Bruce Springsteen, "Boston Katie" enjoys coffee, puppy photos, and talking to site-mate Andrea Goodrich about the impending zombie apocalypse.

LIKE WHAT WE DO? WANT TO JOIN IN ON THE FUN? *BACÁN*, BECAUSE WE'RE JONESIN' FOR YOUR SUBMISSIONS. PLEASE CONTACT ONE OF OUR LOVELY EDITORS OR EMAIL US AT ELCLIMAMAG@GMAIL.COM

BRO-IN' ABROAD WITH BROLAZO

REMEMBER: THERE'S A FINE LINE BETWEEN BEING A *CHOLO* AND GETTING DOWN AT THE *CHONGO*

Back in the States, bros across the country—from Sig Eps in Lawrence to Delta Phis in Gainesville—are putting their shirts back on, taking off their white-framed shades, and retiring the grill for the season. No skin off their back, because football season and a whole new level of brahpportunités are right around the corner. For as Thomas Jefferson probably said, “The U.S. is a place teeming with chances to let bros bro what bros bro, a true Shangri-brah.”

For those of us down South America way, on the other hand, it's tough living. Keystone and Natty Ice are no longer ubiquitous, no one knows about Vince Vaughan (so not money), and I have yet to see even one piece of Ed Hardy clothing here. It is simply reprehensible. Attempting the same level of bro-ness here is like John Cena aspiring to be Stone Cold Steve Austin: it just ain't happening. But have no fear, follow these five simple tips and you'll be back to an admirable bro level in no time:

1. Join a fantasy football league with fellow PCVs. Despite flipping through the channels and only finding soccer *shudders*, there is a remedy. Live the dream and assemble a bone-crushing, yard-eating personification of your brahsomeness. Hot tip: Adrian Peterson and the rest of the Vikings' offense will do it large this year. You heard it here first.

2. Embrace the finer, less misogynistic points of *machismo*. If you see a spicy *señorita* sauntering your way, stop, *echale un vistazo*, give a quick head nod of approval and continue walking. Sweet and simple. And if she throws a glance your way, toss

her a wink. Why not? Incidentally, the wink is currently being tested so any and all field results will be happily received. Just be careful not to get too carried away on this one. Remember: there's a fine line between being a *cholo* and getting down at the *chongo*.

3. Beat that beat up. Head down to the raunchiest disco in town and fly high your bro flag. Throw some product in your hair, rock the gaudiest party shirt in your closet, and bro forth and get after it. Reggaeton and electronic music are close enough to the driving beats of home to let these Brocuadorians know what you're about. Salsa, merengue, cumbia, etc. dancing is acceptable if, and only if, you're partner is all up on you. We're talking, like, Dominicans dancing close.

4. Start following WWE. Ecuador might be lacking Buffalo Wild Wings and MMA fights, but we live in a society where it is perfectly acceptable for a grown man to enjoy wrestling. FINALLY. Go out and get re-acquainted. You may be surprised to find some familiar faces. And make sure to remind Ecuadorians that there will never be another Stone Cold.

5. When in doubt, flip your baseball cap backwards.

There you have it. It'll never be quite the same as being in the U.S. but a bro's gotta do what a bro's gotta do. Take this to heart and seriously do let me know about the wink thing.

WILLIAM WEPSALA is a 106 blonde-mustached Viking, living in the jungle of Zamora. He teaches English and tries to be more and more like Robert Redford.

FOR AS THOMAS JEFFERSON PROBABLY SAID,
'THE U.S. IS A PLACE TEEMING WITH CHANCES
TO LET BROS BRO WHAT BROS BRO, A TRUE
SHANGRI-BRAH



SQUIRREL SEASON

BY KRISTIN FARR

"¡Kristín, Kristín! Mira, tenemos una ardilla!" A visiting granddaughter of my elderly host parents came bounding into my room with a gamut of her cousins trailing her. *"¡Mira, una ardilla, cógela!"* I stopped the task of making my bed and walked up to the group of kids for closer inspection. Sure enough, this cute little Quiteña girl, who I thought to be a city slicker, held a dead squirrel in her hand. She stretched her arm toward my face so I could get a good look at it. I took the squirrel by the tail and felt its dead weight. I held it up and saw that it was quite bloody around its head. I'm not much of a squeamish person but I certainly started to worry where this animal came from, why was it so bloody and why in the hell these kids brought it into my room?

"Adán lo cazado." Ah, my host brother, 28, had been a bit industrious that morning. He'd had the opportunity to 'hunt' the elusive Guayaquileño squirrel somewhere on my host family's cacao farm.

Squirrels in these parts aren't common like they are in the US. In Churute, it's an honor if you see a squirrel, let alone eat one. I urged the children outside and grabbed my camera. This was no doubt a picture-worthy occasion. I took a few photos of the children and then I was urged to pose with the carcass myself. Other visiting cousins came down and took photos of the *gringa* and the dead squirrel.

I TOOK A FEW PHOTOS OF THE CHILDREN AND THEN I WAS URGED TO POSE WITH THE CARCASS MYSELF. OTHER VISITING COUSINS CAME DOWN AND TOOK PHOTOS OF THE GRINGA AND THE DEAD SQUIRREL

I felt awkward not because I was in the presence of a dead squirrel but because it felt like it was a trophy that none of us could stake claim to. I certainly didn't shoot that cute little squirrel in the face nor did my little

host cousins. The hunter himself was above having a vainglorious photo taken with his prize. I ended the photo session to quickly and vigorously wash my hands to rid myself of the squirrel-death that lingered on my skin.

That evening a host aunt oven-baked/charred the little critter until its meat was dry and crispy. She

I LOOK FORWARD TO EATING THE NEXT EXTRAORDINARY CREATURE THAT MEETS ITS DOOM IN MY HOST FAMILY'S KITCHEN

cut it up into pieces and set the platter on the table. ¡Buen provecho! I eyed my options: a piece with a foot and claw, a piece with an eye socket and teeth, a piece with a bit of fur still on it, and an un-identifiable body part. I chose the un-identifiable body part. I chewed off a bit that I assumed to be meat and tried to savor the flavor.

It was not too far from the taste of cuy or rabbit. The problem was the way in which it was prepared. The scene from "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation" where everyone is suffering through Aunt Catherine's turkey disaster played in my mind. It wasn't finger lickin' good but it was the experience that made the squirrel dinner so special.

I've eaten many a-strange animal while living with my host family in the inner-coastal campo. Once, my host brother's wife served me meat smothered in *salsa de maní*. She and her husband, the squirrel hunter, waited until I was half-way through to quiz me on what I thought this mystery meat was. I hadn't really thought too much about it up to that point but I did realize the meat had a bit of an odd texture.

Knowing it certainly wasn't chicken I said "chancho?" They know I don't like *chancho* after nearly experiencing death from eating coastal *fritada* once so I figured they were trying to pull a fast one on me. "No, Tortuga." Huh?

The turtle, tortoise perhaps, was captured in the home of the host brother's wife's family. She was visiting when the thing wandered in unannounced and certainly uninvited. His wife said everyone was frightened because it was so large and were afraid it would bite their fingers off. She, however, took the role of *campo* she-warrior and bravely killed it with a machete. She brought home part of the prize meat for us to eat, enough for two separate meals. All the butchered meat was split between two Ecuadorian families so it had to have been a huge turtle. I asked if it was legal to eat turtle here. The response: no.

They've also served me *guanta*, or *paca*, which I also had to ask if it was legal. Apparently it is legal only if you kill it on your property so at least I didn't feel guilty digesting that particular cutie of an animal. Regardless, I look forward to eating the next extraordinary creature that meets its doom in my host family's kitchen.

KRISTIN FARR is an NRC Volunteer from Omnibus 105, enjoying the finer aspects of Ecuadorian cuisine her site in Churute, Guayas.



PCV PEN PALS FROM AROUND THE WORLD: SENEGAL

Meet Marie Schuster, a 29-year-old Peace Corps Volunteer living in Senegal, 4,500 miles away from our beautiful Ecuador. This month's pen pal is halfway through her Peace Corps experience, finishing in April 2013. Here are a few things that the Greenville, South Carolina native had to say about her time abroad:

What language(s) do you speak on a daily basis? Are there other languages in your area that you don't speak?

I speak Pulaar. There are seven types of Pulaar, so I specifically speak Pula Futa. It originated in Guinea, but is widely spoken in Senegal. Other languages in my region are Wolof, Jaxanke, Mandinka and a little Serere. Pulaar is very sing-song, making it really fun to speak. As with most languages in Senegal, it involves extensive greetings. The response to most greetings in Pulaar is "jam tun" (peace only).

Pulaars are crazy because last names mean everything. Each last name has a corresponding friend or enemy last names. It's all out of good fun, but they say stuff that's really bizarre. For example, if your last name is Diallo your "enemy cousin" is Ba. So if you meet a Ba, you would tell him, "You only eat beans. Your stomach is so big because it is only full of beans. I only eat meat." Other lines include, "You are a cat," "Your head is full of water," and the most offensive, "You are my slave. Your entire family is my slave."

WE ALSO HOST THE ANNUAL WAIST (WEST AFRICAN INVITATIONAL SOFTBALL TOURNAMENT) IN OUR CAPITAL, WHERE PCVS FROM ALL WEST AFRICAN PC COUNTRIES COME FOR THREE DAYS OF SOFTBALL GAMES AND THREE NIGHTS OF THEMED PARTIES.

IT'S BY FAR THE SOCIAL HIGHLIGHT OF OUR YEAR

I SPEAK PULAAR. THERE ARE SEVEN TYPES OF PULAAR, SO I SPECIFICALLY SPEAK PULA FUTA....PULAAR IS VERY SING-SONG, MAKING IT REALLY FUN TO SPEAK

What are your main projects?

I am a Health volunteer, so I do plenty of maternal health education, nutritional training, vegetable/medicinal gardens, baby weighings, and I dabble in sanitation awareness. I've done a few random projects just to see where I can take them. For example, I've perfected the art of solar food drying. I thought maybe they could dry things such as mangos because there's too many during the short mango season and then they could sell or eat them for the fiber during non-mango season. My villagers were disgusted by the idea of dried fruit and would barely even taste it. Fail.

PC Senegal doesn't have a Gender and Development sector so all sectors collaborate on it, properly titled SeneGAD. My region hosts an annual marathon to raise money for girls' education. We have a scholarship program that raises money for girls to go toward middle and high school. We're always coming up with fun ways to raise money for SeneGAD. At WAIST, we have a date auction. Last year, we raised close to \$5k.

What do you do on weekends? What is your social life like?

There's no such things as weekends here. We don't have a teaching sector, so nothing is on a Mon-Fri schedule. We know when it's Friday because everything stops for two hours in the afternoon because it's the Muslim day of prayer. Other than that, Saturday is Monday is Wednesday is we don't really care.

The social schedule mostly involves going to our regional houses for volunteers' birthdays, work zone meetings, etc. Social life among volunteers mostly involves cooking family meals together and sharing stories while trying to choke down the crap Senegal slings as alcohol. I read that a lot of other PCVs don't celebrate the 4th of July with their other in-country volunteers? What is that? All 240 Senegal PCVs descend on the same regional house for what becomes a two or three day celebration of America! Costumes, pig roasts, fireworks, dancing 'til our knees beg for mercy! We also host the annual WAIST (West African Invitational Softball Tournament) in our capital, where PCVs from all West African PC countries come for three days of softball games and three nights of themed parties. It's by far the social highlight of our year.

What is the weather like?

Disgustingly hot most of the year. I live in one of the hottest regions of Senegal. The breakdown: hot season (highs of 140) from March until June and the rainy season from July to August, where the humidity is only comparable to wrapping yourself in an electric blanket and lounging in a sauna. The cold season is from November to February. Cold season is really nice. We can go entire days without sweating once. It gets down to high 60s at night and we have to wrap up in sweat pants, socks, jackets, and blankets and cuddle by

IN NOVEMBER, TWO FRIENDS AND I ARE GOING TO BIKE ACROSS GUINEA. IT SHOULD TAKE 10ISH DAYS BUT THERE ARE A LOT OF WATERFALLS ALONG THE WAY, SO WE MAY TAKE OUR

SWEET TIME



the fire with our host families. True story.

Where have you gone / where are you planning to go for vacation days?

I biked across the Gambia last year with four friends, ending on the coast for New Year's Eve. It only took five days to get there. I also went back to the States for five weeks in April and May (way too long

to be at home). As I write this, I am off the west coast of France, vacationing on the Ile de Re. I will arrive back in Senegal the day Ramadan ends. Peeeeeerfect! In November, two friends and I are going to bike across Guinea. It should take 10ish days but there are a lot of waterfalls along the way, so we may take our sweet time.

What is your funniest story PC Senegal-related story?

During CBT (Community Based Training), my site mate woke up at 2am with a vicious need to immediately poop and couldn't figure out how to unlock her door fast enough, so she went in a Pringles can.

What animals have you seen?

There's a group of monkeys around my village! Monkeys and warthogs are about as adventurous as it gets with wildlife here.

Any pizza places close by?

I think the closest is 4 hours away. We make our own pretty often using what's called "machine bread." It creates a kind of French bread pizza... but doesn't taste nearly that fancy. The only cheese we have regular access to is emmental, that wanna-be-Swiss stuff. Or the Laughing Cow this-stuff-isn't-really-cheese cheese. Who's laughing now, cow?

STAY TUNED for PCV Pen Pals From Around the World's next issue, as we talk with numerous other volunteers from all over the third rock from the sun.

ROOM FOR DEBATE: LA MITAD DEL MUNDO VS. LA PERLA DEL PACIFICO

BY BUCKSHOT & DUBSTEP

Dubstep: Ahh Buckshot, don't you just love it here? The beaches are so beautiful here in Esmeraldas. Not like those hideous beaches near that ugly city people call 'Guayaquil'.

Buckshot: Hey now, don't you be hating on Guayaquil, it's the 'Pearl of the Pacific' and my favorite city in Ecuador. How could you not love its beautiful coastal sprawl sandwiched between the swamps of the Rio Daule and the Rio Guayas?

Dubstep: 'Pearl of the Pacific' more like trashy hot pink rhinestone of the Pacific. Guayaquil is one giant westernized cultural sinkhole pretending to be glitzy when in fact it's just a wanna-be United States. Quito on the other hand is real class with real culture.

B: Whoa, now I may have only spent a week in GYE, but it certainly has culture and class. It's just not prone to slapping you in the face with it, like Quito does. There's the Malecon 2000, Parque de las Iguanas, Las Peñas, the Zoo (which is next to the prison... two birds with one stone, right?), Mal del Sol, Mal del Sur, Mal de San Marino, Mal del Rio....

D: Really? Half of the things you listed confirm my argument: Malls, Malls, Malls. Who wants to visit a city just for the Malls? We're in Ecuador Buckshot! This country is

choc-full-of amazing landscapes, cultures, foods, wildlife and cities. Guayaquil offers visitors none of the above.

B: Fine, I'll give you the mall argument. But Quito has plenty of malls as well! AND what the heck do you call the Mariscal? A total westernized tourist trap with trashy *discotecas* that fail in comparison to Las Peñas Salsa clubs. As for food, there is no better cuisine in Ecuador than on the coast and Guayaquil is the epicenter of that.

D: The Mariscal in itself is a popular attraction that yes, may be westernized but is not some sort of trashy party scene. There are plenty of unique restaurants owned and operated by local Quiteños that offer up cuisines from around the world or an epicurean's take on Ecuadorian food. Any visitor can get a great taste and feel of Quiteña culture while visiting the Mariscal. And being a *costeña* myself I agree that the food on the coast is certainly better but also being a Guayaca I can tell you Guayas is not the 'epicenter' of delicious coastal food. Which are Guayas' famous dishes?

MALLS, MALLS, MALLS. WHO WANTS TO VISIT A CITY JUST FOR THE MALLS? WE'RE IN ECUADOR, BUCKSHOT! THIS COUNTRY IS CHOC-FULL-OF AMAZING LANDSCAPES, CULTURES, FOODS, WILDLIFE, AND CITIES

B: Look, all I am saying is that you couldn't pay me to eat a *ceviche* in Quito. That's a guaranteed recipe to get worked by an unhappy GI track. Nurse Kelly would not approve. Any Guayaca family will tell you that

THERE'S CARAGUAY, ECUADOR'S PREMIER FISH MARKET, WHICH JUST SO HAPPENS TO BE IN GUAYAQUIL. WHAT DOES QUITO HAVE IN COMPARISON? CAMPO CHEESE AND CUY FARMS?

the best crabs in the world come from Guayas and no *cuy* feed or pig roast can top a *cangrejado*. And I have never found an *encebollado* that beats Rosita's patio, a true GYE special. Then there's Caraguay, Ecuador's premier fish market, which just so happens to be in Guayaquil. What does Quito have in comparison? *Campo* cheese and *cuy* farms?

D: Okay, I'm giving you the *encebollado* and the crabs from the mangroves are near and dear to my heart. I will also give you the *fritada* because that stuff is dangerous. I can tell you now I'm sure I have a brain tapeworm from eating that crap, I hear it eating my gray matter at night. Anyway, the main argument I am making is that Guayaquil is void of culture. There is little to do in the city unless you want to go on a shopping spree like a Justin Beiber-lovin' teeny bopper and last time I checked Buckshot you are not a fan of JB, nor a teeny bopper, nor a *pelucon* who can afford such diversions. Who wants to spend all day at a stinky fish market after they've been out in the ocean ruining ecosystems and polluting the waters? Quito, nestled in amongst the Andes Mountains has a laundry list of sites to see. You can spend several days in the Historical District alone getting a sense of not only colonial Ecuador but also ancient Incan Ecuador. Tell me Buckshot, how can you love a city like Guayaquil?

B: Think of it this way, GYE is like a mangy stray dog that when you first meet it, you're pretty sure that it has fleas. You're also pretty sure that it's going to bite your hand off and infect you with rabies. But then after a few months of throwing it some bread as you walk by it every day and showing it a little TLC, the dog starts warming up to you. You give it a bath, some vaccines, regular meals and *¡voilà!* friend and protector for life. That stray mutt will have your back and probably get you out of a few sticky situations in the process. Guayaquil may have a bad rep for robberies, murders, taxi sequestering, machete fights, *machista* men, etc. but if you just give a little TLC, it's sure to reciprocate the favor. Like for example, how simple and efficient the public transportation is there. Even a non Spanish speaker could navigate their way through Guayaquil's Metrovia, a feat that the Ecuavia would have a hard time claim-

ing. And the bus system in Quito... it's like an angry llama trying to spit on you....

D: This 'love' you're showing GYE that makes it reciprocate is really just another way of saying you were a victim of Stockholm Syndrome. That city doesn't care about you. The love you give it is simply you lying to yourself and saying it's a great city. You obviously have a brain tapeworm that has eaten away the part of the brain that controls reasoning. I can't make head or tail of the transportation system in Quito, that's what the PCVs living near there are for. Because that's right, we can visit Quito.

B: It takes a certain breed of toughness to love an unloveable place, like Wyoming. The office doesn't feel that the average PCV is made of the right material – think of GYE as a privilege not a right. There are few of us that have ever been allowed to step foot in such a glorious city, and that comes with a certain amount of responsibility. Clearly, not being one of the chosen, Dubstep, you're just a little bit jealous.

D: Well, I was one of the 'privileged' my first year in site and they had to change that. It may be due to safety concerns but I'm pretty sure they just want to save us the trouble of putting Guayaquil on our list of 'places to visit while in Ecuador'. Peace Corps wants better for us than that.

B: Bah! I'm not backing down on this one this time, Dubstep. But it looks like everyone is about to leave for the black sand beach and you know I'm dying to paint myself up like an Uruk-hai and tackle some humans! *¡Vámanos!*

D: As always, we'll agree to disagree but I do agree that we're going to scare some little Ecuadorian children with our shenanigans.

B: You know all good Uruk-hai party in Guayaquil...

Join BUCKSHOT & DUBSTEP every issue as they argue about the super meaningful hot topics of Ecuador. Buckshot is a 105er living near Incan ruins in Paccha where she is usually ankle deep in the world of agriculture. Dubstep lives in Churute and spends her days subtly indoctrinating Ecuadorian children into the Fellowship of the Ring.



THE LAND OF PIGS BY BENJAMIN NIESPODZIANY

In the Land of Pigs, there were no rules. No running water, no sadness. The coastal city was four hours from my home, five if the bus driver was in love, and I visited often. While most cities in Ecuador contained a considerable amount of stray dogs that would run the streets and bark at passing tires, the Land of Pigs featured hundreds of overweight near-feral pigs. They breastfed their young in the streets, they scared the canines, and they were left untouched by the locals, who claimed that they were dirty creatures, unable to be eaten. Meanwhile, the rest of Ecuador continued to devour pork rinds on buses and pig soup on mountains.

THE HUNDREDS OF RAINBOW UMBRELLAS DOTTED THE SANDS WHILE TINY CHILDREN TOUCHED THE OCEAN FOR THE FIRST TIME. SOME MADE SAND CASTLES, OTHERS DESTROYED THEM

The Land of Pigs was thirty minutes away from a port city where one could find a boat to take you a massive island that no one knew about. It was undeveloped, used strictly for fishing spots, and featured a handful of unfortunate spots of attempted tourism, complete with faded signs, collapsed hammocks, and infinite litter. We only visited once. The Land of Pigs was also twenty minutes outside of the grasshopper-infested surf town known simply as Beaches.

Beaches showed off the typical South American Pacific vibes. Fresh breezes, big waves, \$2.00 souvenirs, \$1.50 beers, and the wandering foreigner. The hundreds of rainbow umbrellas dotted the sands while tiny children touched the ocean for the first time. Some made sand castles, others destroyed them.

My favorite restaurant in the city had a sign of an enormous baby drinking a bottle of water. They offered a perfectly simple array of \$1.00 empanadas: steak, chicken, cheese, or ham. I could never

decide, oftentimes buying all four. Beaches had one shawarma restaurant, serving Middle Eastern wraps ideal for the wobbling traveler. Once, in a cheerful state of drunkenness, I purchased a blue hat with KING scrawled in fine yellow print across the forehead. I didn't wear it that often.

While Beaches worked as a beach town with regular normalcy, the Land of Pigs was full of surprises. It was what kept bringing me back. The Land of Pigs had no real roads, just dirt paths (or mud paths, depending on the month), leading to square homes, each with an unusual amount of land. Normally, with coastal towns in Ecuador, the houses were almost stacked on one another, giving them just enough room to sell cold drinks and fresh fruit through their sugar cane windows. But the Land of Pigs had a few hundred spread-out brick homes, all of which had plenty of space for a muddy garden, a dirt yard, and perhaps a donkey.

The locals remained on the same level of prosperity. None of them carried fortunes, so all of them had open windows. Unlocked doors and neighbor visits were practically expected. The entire town made their money by fishing, selling pre-packaged goods, or cooking. The women were large and full of hugs. The men were amazed by the American, always offering a firm handshake. The children were lost in imagination, either spinning tops, winding up cars, or dancing with the waves alongside older siblings.

Many of us would visit the Land of Pigs, some of the locals of Beaches referring to it as "Old Russia." The distance between the two nearby areas was incalculable. Perhaps they titled it *Rusia Vieja* for the lack of rules, the "old world" feel. No one really knew. It was only a name. When we lived in the Land of Pigs for a weekend at a time, some of us traveling as far as 12 hours in a bus, we always stayed with the Cowboy. We always crashed his cubic home that his host family left him. It was full of enormous shrimp, different clocks, and hip-hop. For a tiny stretch of time, the Cowboy had a pet iguana that lived in his bath tub. It was given to him by a neighbor boy as a gift, and would always slap

at him with his tail when given food. The green pet eventually escaped through a hole in the fence, off to travel with the pigs.

The Cowboy had a farm in his backyard where we would watch monstrous frogs devour helpless grasshoppers well into the night. Numerous times, two outcast goats would break into the fenced-in backyard, staring madly at the Americans, kicking around chaos, humping insane. No one wanted them.

When we weren't laughing in his backyard or sleeping on the indoor stone floor, we were at the beach. Shrimp with rice in a hut during the sunset. Yells from the life guards during high tide, telling us to take it easy. We always walked the 100 yards to the sand at night so we could launch glow-stick balloons into the ocean for dazzles and burn dried driftwood for warmth. The bright moon would light up the constant waves, the stars shining through the clouds.

At night, the pigs hid, the dogs stood stronger. We continued our grins.

In the mornings, with stomachs full of eggs, we

would visit the Port of Pigs. It would be our final dance with the sea, fighting the water one final time before returning to our scattered towns and responsibilities hours away. The Port of Pigs allowed us one last dash of perfection. The Port was ten minutes away from the Cowboy's home, with enormous waves crashing into rocks, beautiful women, timid crabs, and hundreds of multicolored fishing boats, waiting patiently in the sand for the next adventure, all of the while obese black pigs zig-zagged between the boats, hunting for trash, hungry for everything.

BENJAMIN NIESPODZIANY is a Youth & Families volunteer from Omnibus 106. Hailing from the great port city of Machala, Ben is *el Capitán* of El Clima.

WE ALWAYS CRASHED [THE
COWBOY'S] CUBIC HOME THAT
HIS HOST FAMILY LEFT HIM.
IT WAS FULL OF ENORMOUS
SHRIMP, DIFFERENT CLOCKS,
AND HIP-HOP

BOOM: SUMMER BLOCKBUSTERS

BY RICKY ACKERMAN

Though the seasons may be a bit different in Ecuador, the summer movie season is not. It is still that wonderful span from May to August when many of the most highly anticipated movies are released and audiences around the world combine to spend billions of dollars to go see them. These are the films that have budgets that approach the entire operating budget of the Peace Corps and profits that sore well beyond it. This summer had the normal assortment of movies: sequels, superheroes, remakes, a new Madea movie along with many other dreadful comedies, and that one Pixar movie I did not see but will be told by everyone how great it was for a year before I finally see it and continue thinking those people need to start exploring films that are not made by Disney. Here is what I have managed to watch:

The Avengers

Joss Whedon puts together a thoroughly entertaining film, filled with action and about as much character development as one could expect considering the task of juggling so many major superheroes. The storyline is pretty straight forward and not all that original, but it is the scale of the movie that impresses. Whedon does a great job balancing the characters and developing the dynamic of the group while infusing the movie with extensive action scenes that are pretty astounding. The Avengers is a thoroughly entertaining movie that gives fans what they want to see, but not much more than that.

Prometheus

While The Avengers is not a film built to provoke thought, Prometheus is much the opposite. Rid-

ley Scott created a prequel to *Alien* that explores the meaning of life on a grand scale. A team of scientist travels to a distant planet after uncovering clues that point to the origins of mankind on Earth. The premise may sound a bit hokey, and it is, but Scott crafts breathtaking visuals that, along with the movie's philosophical exploration, provide an excellent film that will leave you thinking. It will probably not end up a classic like *Alien*, nor does it achieve the profoundness of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, but it is an intriguing film that is worth watching at least once. It gets credit for providing an intellectually stimulating, big budget film in a season that normally brings only throwaway entertainment.

THESE ARE THE FILMS THAT HAVE BUDGETS THAT APPROACH THE ENTIRE OPERATING BUDGET OF THE PEACE CORPS AND PROFITS THAT SORE WELL BEYOND IT

Battleship

Remember those afternoons when you were a kid playing board games in your house and thinking: I really hope they make a *Battleship* movie someday. Well, that day has finally come. You may not recall the game having an alien element to it, but that just means you were playing incorrectly. *Battleship* leaves any semblance of intellectual stimulation behind to throw lots of loud noises and explosions at you. You would expect an actress of Rihanna's caliber to avoid such a horrid excuse for a film, but she at least provides some eye-candy to help get you through it. *Battleship* lingers in that bad territory where it is awful but not awesomely awful, leaving you bored and wondering how \$200 million can be used to create such garbage and why the American public spent over \$300 million to go see it.

Men in Black III

Well, they made a third one. And since it earned a bundle of money, word is there will be a fourth. Oh joy. There is nothing remarkably bad to say about this sequel, but nothing all that good either. J and K are back to fight some more aliens, this time with time travel mixed in. Josh Brolin is one of the

highlights of the film, doing an excellent impression of a young Tommy Lee Jones (though, who has ever seen a young Tommy Lee Jones? I haven't). Overall, my thought on this film is "meh." It is sort of entertaining and worth a viewing if you like the franchise, but it is not anything special.

The Dictator

Sacha Baron Cohen plays Admiral General Aladeen, the dictator of the Republic of Wadiya in North Africa. He journeys to the USA and has a little adventure. The film is mildly entertaining with some great scenes, but overall not close to being on the level of *Borat*. It provides comical commentary on dictatorships as well as democracy. *The Dictator* is an alright film, but disappointing given what Cohen has made in the past.

The Dark Knight Rises

The most anticipated movie of the summer concludes Christopher Nolan's Batman trilogy. The film takes place 8 years after *The Dark Knight*, with Batman having to combat a new villain named Bane. The movie has several new characters, including Anne Hathaway as Catwoman, Tom Hardy as Bane, Marion Cotillard as Miranda, and Joseph Gordon-Levitt as an idealist cop. Nolan's ambitious storyline is both what makes the movie great and leaves it lacking. Some of the new characters feel incomplete as a result of having to develop the new characters and giving adequate screen time to the returning characters. Despite that, the movie is thoroughly satisfying and achieves things no other comic book movie has. Like the previous films in the series, *The Dark Knight Rises* does not present typical comic book fodder, but reaches beyond that to explore deep questions about humanity, justice and much more. Nolan also achieves a fulfilling ending that gives the franchise a feeling of closure, something not present in other comic book franchises that are always planning for sequels. *The Dark Knight* will probably be regarded as the best of the three, but the brooding pace and ambitious storyline of *The Dark Knight Rises* puts the two films on the same level in my mind.

RICKY ACKERMAN is a PCV 105 who lives on the beautiful coast of Bahia de Caraquez, where he hangs out with dolphins, talks back to people, and watches movies with more explosions than dialogue.

How do I get a VAC calendar?

WHERE?

- Peace Corps office front desk (Irene)
- Tumbaco training center
- Friends of Ecuador (<http://www.friendsofecuador.org/>) for friends and family back home who would like to support volunteer projects. Calendars that are purchased will be taken to the US by volunteers and mailed.
- Cluster meetings (if requested in advance). Let whoever is in charge of your meeting know and ask them to contact VAC.

Includes Ecuadorian and US holidays

Can be used as a cross-cultural tool

Fund grants for small projects

WHY?

GREAT CHRISTMAS PRESENTS!

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Abigael Davis
abigael.davis@gmail.com

Erica Everett
e.everett87@gmail.com

Sarah Reichle
sreichle14@gmail.com

Irene
imerizalde@ec.peacecorps.gov



SOMETIMES IN THIS KITCHEN BY WHITNI CIOFALO

Disclaimer: As a chemistry student from a family of stellar cooks, my parents have always had the hardest time understanding my resentment towards and inability to follow basic recipes. But the best dishes, in my opinion, are the result of a little experimentation and improvisation. That is to say, these following recipes are best when tweaked, modified, and altered. Think of them as more of guidelines *y sigue adelante... ¡buen provecho!*

HOMEMADE RICOTTA CHEESE

Want to add a little diversity to unvarying campo cheese but shopping at Supermaxi isn't in your Peace Corps budget these days? What if I was to tell you that making your own cheese is unbelievably simple and cheap to boot?

What you need:

- Milk. I use raw milk, mostly because milk in a bag scares me and the raw milk delivered to by doorstep by mule. Did I mention that it only costs \$0.60/L? (You don't need to boil the milk before hand to make cheese because the process involves heating it to a high enough temperature to kill off anything questionable. Obviously, if you are not using the milk for cheese, boil it.)

- Limes. General rule of thumb is two limes per liter of milk

- Cheese cloth. I would be lying I if told you I knew where to get these since my supply was gifted to me by another volunteer. I do know that she bought them here in Ecuador and I would be willing bet that the local Tia has some.

- Seasonings. I prefer salt, curry, and home-dried crushed red peppers. Roasted basil and garlic work great as well.

Direction:

- Heat the milk to 180°F or just below a boil.
- Add the limejuice. Supposedly, white vinegar will work as well as it is also strongly acidic. Although, I rather like the light lime flavor.
- Pour the now curdling mixture into a layer of cheese cloth. I usually line a colander with several layers. As the whey drains, it can be collected and feed to pigs or chickens. My host mom loves it when I make cheese for this reason.
- I add the seasons before heating up the milk to produce a fuller and more even flavor. But you can also fold them in while straining the cheese.
- Let gravity work its magic over the next hour or so and leave the cheese to drain sufficiently. Keep in mind that ricotta keeps best with a little extra moisture than completely dried out.



HANNAH'S NO BAKE COOKIES

My friend provided me with this recipe when I was complaining to her one day about not having a conventional oven. These cookies require zero cooking, are completely adaptable to whatever you may have in your kitchen, and my host family loves them. All credit can be given to the great state of South Dakota.

What you need:

- 1 cup oatmeal
- ½ cup peanut butter
- 1/3 cup honey
- 1 cup coconut flakes
- ½ cup ground flaxseed
- 1 tsp vanilla

Directions:

- Mix everything together in a large bowl. Roll into bit size balls, chill for an hour, and enjoy.
- If you can't find flaxseed or *linaza*, don't worry. Cocoa powder makes a great substitute, even if it's not doing much for the protein content. My favorite variation on these involves flaxseed, cocoa powder, and a little bit of nutmeg. Chocolate chunks are also a great addition.
- In Ecuador it is nearly impossible to find anything but raw, whole grained flaxseed. Consequently, you will need to toast it and grind it by hand. When toasting it, it's best to do so with a top on the skillet, because the seeds tend to pop like popcorn when heated.

BRAZILIAN PIÑA COLADA

This is the perfect recipe for all of us that struggled to explain that ambiguous concept of social drinking to our Ecuadorian friends. "Wait, you don't like continual shots of whiskey or Pilsener?" "No, I like sipping on piña coladas and getting caught in the rain."

What you need:

- Pineapple juice. A half of pineapple makes enough juice for about three drinks. Obviously fresh pine-

apple juice trumps the concentrate kind. But in a pinch, I'm sure *piña-ya* would suffice.

- Coconut milk, *jugo de coco*, or milk mixed with some coconut extract
- Condensed milk
- Rum
- Ice

Directions:

- One part pineapple juice to one part coconut milk to a half part condensed milk. Add rum to your own liking. Mix with ice in a blender.
- If you are feeling fancy and want some presentation points, garnish the glasses with a pineapple wedge.

CURRIED POPCORN

My host sister thinks this is the greatest thing that I have ever prepared and I haven't the heart to tell her it was a complete accident. Instead, I prefer to relish in the rare moment when she doesn't view me as a complete *machona*.

What you need:

- Popcorn
- Oil. My Italian roots have me preconditioned to believe that olive oil is the only legitimate oil in the world. However, I sure other, lesser quality oils would work just as well.
- Curry powder
- Salt

Directions:

- Add a cup of unpopped popcorn kernels to a large stove pot. Coat them well with a ¼ cup of oil.
- As the kernels begin to pop, gently move the pot back and forth over the burner to prevent burning. A lid here helps immensely.
- Once the popping has slowed, remove from the heat, add a teaspoon of salt and a teaspoon of curry powder, and shake well.
- If you really want to go crazy, ditch the salt and mix the curry powder with a teaspoon of cocoa powder and some sugar. Drizzle the popcorn with some melted butter beforehand, mix well, and enjoy.

'WAIT, YOU DON'T LIKE CONTINUAL SHOTS OF WHISKEY OR PILSENER?' 'NO, I LIKE SIPPING ON PIÑA COLADAS AND GETTING CAUGHT IN THE RAIN.'

TEN BEST ALBUMS OF 2012 (SO FAR) BY BENJAMIN NIESPODZIANY

THE SHINS – PORT OF MORROW (MARCH 20)

Five years since the band's last album. Very poppy. Yes, they still sound like the Garden State soundtrack. If this gets tired after a few listens, be sure to check out Broken Bells, which is the same lead singer and Danger Mouse of Gnarls Barkley fame on the boards.

BOBBY WOMACK – THE BRAVEST MAN IN THE UNIVERSE (JUNE 12)

Produced entirely by Damon Albarn (Gorillaz/Blur), this is a retro/soul/funk journey that allows 68-year-old Bobby to drip sweet reflective sorrow and joy over a life lived accompanied by minimalist electronica.

NORAH JONES – LITTLE BROKEN HEARTS (MAY 1)

Someone broke up with Norah Jones. How could you?! As a result, she made the breakup album of

the year, one of her career's strongest. Produced entirely by Danger Mouse (Broken Bells/Gnarls Barkley/Black Keys), Jones switches her breakup emotions from angry to sad to happy, but you will be toe-tapping and happy the whole time you're listening.

ALEXANDER SPIT – MANSIONS (FEBRUARY 15)

A formerly unknown producer released this instrumental beat tape in February for free on his website and to much acclaim. I love the Internet. Sampling crackling antique soul samples and Rick Ross vocals does something to your brain that gets your whole body moving.

MAC MILLER – MACADELIC (MARCH 23)

Fresh off his successful debut album, the 20-year-old rapper breaks away from the pop/backpack rap that made him famous and dives into a hip-hop



world much more psychedelic and dark, full of Willy Wonka samples and great guest features.

LANA DEL REY – BORN TO DIE (JANUARY 12)

Pop music's hottie released her debut album at the beginning of this year and I'm still listening to it. Crooning over sweet production, Lana Del Rey is the queen of quotable lines. She's cool and she knows it.

ALABAMA SHAKES – BOYS & GIRLS (APRIL 9)

The rock album of the year. The lead singer sounds like a mash between Janis Joplin and Rober Plant (Led Zeppelin). I know.

CLAMS CASINO – INSTRUMENTAL MIXTAPE 2 (JUNE 4)

Hip-hop's new era of cloud rap is being soundtracked by Clams Casino, a New Jersey producer who makes beats that sound like spinning on the moon. Grab some good headphones, and let the production of the year take control.

SOME TO LOOK OUT FOR:

G.O.O.D. MUSIC – CRUEL SUMMER (SEPTEMBER 18)

Kanye's crew is set to release their compilation album later this month, with the likes of Kid Cudi, Big Sean, John Legend, Pusha-T, Common, and more.

LUPE FIASCO – FOOD & LIQUOR II: THE GREAT AMERICAN RAP ALBUM (SEPTEMBER 25)

The cockiest hip-hop name ever? It probably won't live up to the hype, but it has to be better than his last disaster.

KENDRICK LAMAR – GOOD KID, M.A.A.D CITY (OCTOBER 22)

The Compton wordsmith is going to drop this bomb in October and get ready, it's going to sweep the hip-hop world by storm. On the crest of domination.

A\$AP ROCKY – LONG.LIVE.A\$AP (OCTOBER 31)

A\$AP Rocky's crew, A\$AP Mob, just released their compilation album, and it was mediocrity at best. Hopefully his solo effort will turn some heads like his debut mixtape Live.Love.A\$AP, which was also released on Halloween.

BIG BOI – VICIOUS LIES AND DANGEROUS RUMORS (NOVEMBER 13)

One half of the Outkast duo (and my favorite) released one of my favorite albums of the decade

FRANK OCEAN – CHANNEL ORANGE (JULY 10)

Quite possibly the best r&b lyricist around right now, Ocean released "channel ORANGE" to universal acclaim. Accessible, beautifully written, and catchy as ever, the new voice of soul is back. With a wild guest feature from Andre 3000 (Outkast) and a guitar solo from John Meyer. Check out "Pyramids," a 9 minute epic, and my favorite song of the year.

FRIENDZONE – COLLECTION 1 (APRIL 19)

Bay Area duo Friendzone have been all over the place in the last two years, producing songs for video games and hip-hop albums alike. This collection of their instrumentals sounds like sleeping inside of a pinball machine. Yes, that's a compliment. This is my bedtime album.

SOMEONE BROKE UP WITH NORAH JONES. HOW COULD YOU?!

in 2010. Hopefully this album will live up to his past. With expected features from Phantogram. Get ready to dance.

ANIMAL COLLECTIVE – CENTIPEDE HZ (SEPT 4)

I don't care about this band at all, but people tend to like them. Check it, if you're into that kind of thing.

DAVID BYRNE AND ST. VINCENT – LOVE THIS GIANT (SEPTEMBER 10)

The Talking Heads frontman is releasing a duet album with the kindest voice in pop music, miss St. Vincent. Coffee shops, get ready.

THE KILLERS – BATTLE BORN (SEPTEMBER 18)

The popstars are back with another album after five years away. Each of their albums has a few guarantee hits, hopefully more?

TAYLOR SWIFT – RED (OCTOBER 22)

It's T-Swift!

DR. DRE – DETOX (???)

Where is it?!

EL JEFE'S CORNER: DIRECTOR NOTES

BY PARMER HEACOX

Dear Volunteers,

I just finished reading over the El Clima articles for publication and was highly entertained from Boston Katie's commentaries through the culinary experience of eating squirrel and other mystery meats. I learned that you can be passionate about Bachata and discovered more about an Ecuadorian artist and Afro-Ecuadorian cultural heritage and the struggle to bring learning and the end of discrimination to the forefront of celebration of this amazing local culture. My mind moved in many directions so please bear with me a moment.

Over the last month, I have had some incredible conversations with Volunteers over a whole range of issues, ideas, and musings. Just moments ago, PCV Christopher Morris left my office after filling me in on the writing projects that he has carried out since his arrival in his site, Ventura. Apart from writing regular health columns for a local publication, Chris has taken CAT tools so much further than most Volunteers. He has taken a great interest in his community. Based on oral history, he has put together a history of his community; some 12 pages that he hopes to print and share with the people he has grown to love.

Kim Peek dropped in for an hour-long conversation to give me some thoughts on how we can better prepare for GLBT couples by providing Volunteers with more information and training on how to be allies. And then we got into her experience and real challenges of adjusting during the first year – and how so often she didn't realize that the challenges she was facing were really the phases of adjustment.

Issac Bickford took the time and interest to respond to my invitation for ideas and feedback regarding our preparation for GLBT couples and also shared his thoughts and concerns that the urban placement trend of Volunteers keeps us from effectively working with the poor and those most in need.

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Newly at site, Jonathan Yoe put a smile on all of our faces in a recent message to Cris Rojas outlining all he has been doing since arriving in site and demonstrating the greatest desire and efforts to truly integrate into the community.

Lori Black shared with me a heartwarming story of a gender discussion with her host mom and some older ladies that helped her to appreciate her own mother. I don't think she will mind my sharing that. All of us, when far removed from our families and familiar environments, have the great opportunity to reflect and learn from our past. That is just one of the great things about the Peace Corps experience.

Finally, I truly was in awe of the work and growth of Omnibus 104 as I sat with each of them and talked through their COS interviews. There were many tears as each one shared the experience of being a PCV and the difficulties of leaving their communities, plus the reflections of how hard it was the first year.

I am sharing these moments with you because you do need to know that everything you communicate and share with us helps to develop our program here. The more we talk (and when I say "we" I am referring to all of the Peace Corps staff and all Volunteers), the more we get to know each, the better off our program will be and the better our collective experience will be.

PARMER HEACOX is the Country Director (aka Head Honcho) of Peace Corps Ecuador, as has been forever immortalized ever since his name was tattooed on an outer space PC Ecuador dinosaur that will soon become a T-shirt.

