

EL CLIMA

PEACE CORPS ECUADOR

APRIL 2013



EDITOR'S NOTE

Another great article once again, everyone. Well done. A firm handshake and a kiss on the cheek to all of you.

This issue has a great deal of emotional value to it. While it is my third issue as an editor (I'm still figuring out the tools of the trade), it is Whitney Ciofalo's final contribution. For those of you who do not know, Whitney (you might know her as Buckshot, or weird cat lady in Paccha) is my layout editor, my second in command, my boss behind the curtains, pulling all of the levers and making all of the magic happen. Without her, I would be a lost child in front of a typewriter, searching for my technological muse, asking the wind how to spell the word "occasion." Whitney, you will be missed. From me and from the contributors at *El Clima*, thank you greatly for bringing this magazine to life, to brightening the world of Ecuador, and to making this quarterly quite the spectacle. *Muy amable, mi jefa.*

Along with Whitney, this issue is also the last of Manuel Melendez, our poet and creative writing editor who has been with *El Clima* since arriving in Ecuador. Manuel returned to the States early to pursue his dream as a poet and harsh movie critic, living out his days in Florida, hopefully writing more wisdom about wrinkled fisherman. You will be missed, Mr. Marvel, thank you for your words.

What's the saying? Out with the old, in with the new? As some have left us, we now welcome new contributions from the wonderful OMN 108. It is great to have all of you on board and I can't wait to see what you bring to the table next. Off to a great start, gang. Peter Frank, you are the man.

The next issue will be my last. And as the PDF will be stained with tears of nostalgia, please continue reading, contributing, enjoying the beautiful country within this wonderful magazine, something made by volunteers for the volunteers, when you are sitting on your toilet laughing because it is so miserable, when you need something to roll up and swat mosquitos, when you need a good bedtime story to assist your dreams.

Keep being you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

3 - JUMPING TO SEE THE DEAD by Mr. Benjamin Niespodziany: A short tale of All Soul's Day in the heart of the *campo*.

4 - SAN BARTOLOME, AZUAY by Mr. Benjamin Niespodziany: photography

4 - THAT'S NOT MY NAME by Ms. Chloe Pete: Is your name hard to pronounce in Ecuador? So is Miss Cleo, I mean Chloe.

6 - CASACADA EL BLANCO, EL ORO by Ms. Katie Haranas: photography

7 - THE CULTURE OF CROSS-DRESSING by Mr. Mitchell Adams: What more do you need for a description? Mitch looks amazing in a dress.

9 - MILDLY SMILING (PART 2) by Mr. Manuel Melendez: Read part two of the reflective poem by Jungle Manny.

10 - RODEO CLOWN by Ms. Whitney Ciofalo: photography

12 - JAMBELÍ by Mr. Benjamin Niespodziany: photography

13 - THE RAINY SEASON by Ms. Kristen Farr: Musings on a dampest time of the year.

14 - CAJAS by Mr. Benjamin Niespodziany: photography

15 - SPIN AROUND THE WORLD: DASTGAH BOOK REVIEW by Mr. Benjamin Niespodziany: A quick review on a travel book perfect for a long bus ride.

15 - GUARANDA by Mr. Benjamin Niespodziany: photography

16 - FIVE FEARS by Ms. Andrea Gesumaria: A reflection on personal growth, of sorts.

17 - GRINDING CHOCOLATE by Ms. Whitney Ciofalo: photography

18 - CUENCA by Mr. Benjamin Niespodziany: photography

19 - THE STYLE OF THE COAST by Mr. Peter Frank: Mr. Frank helps the coastal *gringos* with some fashion tips. Two words: jean shorts.

21 - BASEBALL: AN EXERCISE IN COMPARATIVE CULTURE by Mr. Wyn Bellhouse: Covering the bases.

22 - RUTA DE LOS HIELEROS by Mr. Orrin Tiberi: photography

23 - HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES by Ms. Portia Boykin: Get educated about PCVs from historically black colleges and universities.

24 - GUARANDA TWO by Mr. Benjamin Niespodziany: photography

25 - RIOBAMBA by Mr. Benjamin Niespodziany: A moment in the urban Sierra.

26 - LA HACIENDA by Ms. Whitney Ciofalo: photography

26 - SERENITY Now! by Ms. Jane Pezua: Breathe easy and relieve stress with a little help from Jane.

28 - VOLUNTEER OF THE QUARTER: AMANDA MONROE by Ms. Sarah Reichle: Read all about the Volunteer of the Quarter.

30 - PEER SUPPORT NETWORK REINVENTS ITSELF by Ms. Lauren Wagner: The Peer Support Network has something to say.

31 - PSN 2013 MEMBER BIOS: The Peer Support Network has new family members, meet the crew.

32 - FOOD! by Ms. Liz Sypher: Finish your magazine read with some delicious food options.

33 - THE GRINGO REVIEW by Ms. Kim Peek: She read it so you won't half to.

36 - THE MANY FACES OF VOLUNTEER SUPPORT by Mr. Parmer Heacox: On managing cross-cultural relationships

37 - CHIMBORAZO by Ms. Whitney Ciofalo: photography

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: Benjamin Niespodziany

COPY EDITOR: Manuel Melendez

LAYOUT EDITOR: Whitney Ciofalo

EMAIL: elclimamag@gmail.com

COVER: Paragliding over San Pedro by Whitney Ciofalo

JUMPING TO BY BENJAMIN NIESPODZIANY

SEE THE DEAD

I carried a large drum while my host sister carried a trumpet into the graveyard. We were visiting the town of San Bartolome for the weekend and the cemetery was our first stop. Later, after my host family paid their respects, we would visit my host grandparent's farm, where live music and religious ceremonies and fireworks would take us well into the next morning.

The graveyard was small, just like the city, a countryside outskirt of the tourist-friendly Cuenca. Three stacks of tombs sat quietly on outdoor marble floors that overlooked the distant mountains. The tombs looked like book stacks, the visitors trying to find their next favorite ghost novel.

My host father could not remember the name of his grandmother's last name, having been on his mother's side. She's buried here somewhere, he kept mumbling to himself. His wife and 9-year-old daughter followed behind him. It was All Soul's Day and it was important for Wilson to visit his dead.

Old couples went in front of an unmarked tomb, "197" scribbled above the space with a black marker. The pictures and figurines attached to the cement encasing was too faded to recognize. A brother? A mother? They brought flowers.

Other than the three rows of tombs (five caskets up, 30 caskets across), small crosses pierced the graveyard's golden green grass. Crosses like forks sticking up from the earth, tombstones with battery-powered candles, large stones with important names. Tiny homes with the Virgin Mary and the fallen's favorite items resting quietly within. Small trees were recently planted, the soil still wet from the morning rain. I wanted to lie down to take a siesta, the grass looked so inviting, but I knew that was not the respectful thing to do.

Wilson finally found his grandmother. Technically,

Sonia (his wife) pointed up to the third row, to a gated tomb like a prison window, asking her husband, "Wilson, Lluvichuzhca, isn't that your mother's last name?" He walked over, still uncertain, and climbed up to the third row like a ladder. "That's right," he whispered, excited. "358, now I remember."

Maria Angelita Lluvichuzhca. 1918 to 1999. Angels played harps and dropped hearts that told all about her life: Family, Friendship, Grandmother, Wife. Jesus spread his arms wide, welcoming (protecting?) her soul, holding up a sign that listed her children: Manuel, Patricia, the other two too sun-scraped to identify. A small picture was taped to the outside of the tomb, to the glass door that not all resting places had, but the photo was entirely faded, a white sticker paying its respects.

While old folks found lost ones and my host father climbed up caskets to find his grandmother, a child used his imagination in a tree, flying his action figure through the clear blue skies, making rocket noises and machine gun blasts. His make believe was the only noise in the cementerio.

Outside of the graveyard gates, happy women made corn tortillas with cheese and poured colada morada, a hot purple juice with floating fruit chunks. We each ate two tortillas and received drink refills, Wilson grabbing a few of each to go.

When we finished our food and departed to my host grandparent's farm, the only people in the cemetery were the old couple, who no longer wept, but sat silently in front of their loved one, gripping their rosaries to fight the tears.

BEN is trying to visit a few final places in Ecuador before returning to the States, where he will beg hip-hop magazines for a job.



THAT'S NOT MY NAME

BY CHLOE PETE

In high school Spanish class, we got to pick a special name in Spanish. After much deliberation, I somehow landed on Ramona, I think mostly after Ramona Quimby, Portland-dwelling Beverly Cleary's famous 8 year-old heroine. While not a name traditionally used by sophomores in intermediate Spanish, I loved the way it sounded. I still do. *Rrrrramona*. The only problem with my name was that I in no way identified with it. On too many occasions in the first few months of class when our bumbling *Senora Jones* (inexplicably pronounced with a hard J) would call on me, a silence would fall on the class. After a few moments, we'd start to look around at each other, wondering who wasn't paying attention and answering the question "*dónde está la casa*" promptly. Finally, someone would look at me meaningfully or cough out a semi-disguised "RAMONA" and I'd say "...yo?"

I tell you this story because names are important. This is a fact that I was only beginning to understand at 15 years of age, and wouldn't fully grasp until a *companero* I'd been working with closely for a month told a friend my name was Coca Cola and the *colegio* students started to call me *Senorita Cuy*. Names are important.

In the United States, naming is a serious business. A friend at home, who recently had a baby, confided to me in her fourth month of pregnancy that choosing a name was the single most daunting aspect of creating a new life. There seems to be so much pressure to pick an awesome name that people lose perspective and think it's a good idea to give their kids names like Apple and Foxtrot and Khrystyna.

Fortunately, my friend chose Jillian.

Truth be told, it seems like the tendency to want a unique name is becoming more prevalent in Ecuador as well. In my area of the Andean *campo*, parents are choosing stranger and stranger names for their newborns. Less than a generation ago, almost all girls were given Maria as a first name and all boys were given Segundo or Manuel. Now, all those Marias and Segundos are using Mayuri and Taiwa and Jezbleidy. One couple even wanted to use Chloe! While flattered, I politely refused to write down my name for them. Even in Spanish, there are too many possible nicknames, as you will see below in "Cloy's Song", if you continue reading this garbage.

I'm sure that you all have similar stories from your time here in Ecuador, because many of you have very American English names as well. These situations can be both hilarious and painful, depending on your attitude. I've found that most of my experiences in this regard have been uncomfortable for everyone because my name tends to make people feel weird. The particular combination of sounds that make up my name just don't exist in Spanish.

From the first day in site, it was apparent that my name was going to be an issue. No one can say it. Now, I'm no stranger to having my name mispronounced. Truly. Since I was small, teachers, coaches, and other kids, have butchered it. My 4th grade teacher called me Miss Pete for the first month of school because she was scared of it. Here is a brief list of some of the things I've been called: Chol, Chole, Chelo Pate (including the last name), Shiloh, Clo, Cleo, Keelo, C Lo, Clo-Clo, C\$, Chelohaaay, Carnie Thumbs, etc. The last one has less to do with my name than it has to do with my hereditarily small thumbs.

Back to the point, with a little practice, most Ecuadorians get close enough to the correct pronunciation of my name. For a while the problem was that I insisted on writing my name how I actually write my name, which was a mistake. What's that H doing in there? And the O-E combination? No, no that just doesn't make sense. Confused and annoyed with me, someone once wrote Cloie.

So what do you do when life gives you lemons? You change your name. One day I decided that Chloe no longer existed. It's Cloy. Now it's the name I use to introduce myself, the name I write on the

board for my classes, and the name on the official roster for the hospital's basketball team. I'm sure that most people still think this is a very strange name (which it is), but it's the closest approximation without outright changing it. I used to joke that I should have chosen a different name when I got here, something more normal, like Jorge, but that wouldn't do either. We'd just have another Ramona situation on our hands.

The thing is that I didn't want to change my name. Like it or not, I believe in the idea that your name is a little slice of who you are. It's the first thing people hear about you (hopefully) and is essential to your identity. Plus, I like my name. Despite all the trouble I've had, I wouldn't change it to something more mainstream, because I think it suits me. Which is why I resisted the change to Cloy for almost a year. For a very long time, it just sounded like people were making fun of me and I hated it. I thought that if I were patient enough, eventually most of my co-workers and friends would start pronouncing it better. Sadly, that's not how these things work.

And thusly, I became Cloy. It was an annoying transition, but once I embraced the new name, the whole thing became easier for everyone. People at home are also tickled when I sign my emails "Cloy", which is a perk I guess, because I'm being funny without even trying. Changing to Cloy wasn't really a choice, but more of a necessity, and ultimately, I'm glad I did it.

For any other volunteers in a similar situation, I'd say that there's no shame in changing your name. The reality is that you don't really have a choice, like I didn't have a choice. Ecuador essentially changed my name for me.

Recently The Ting Tings shuffled into my headphones, and their song, "That's Not My Name", seemed to have been written just for me. It only lacked a few biographical details, and it would be "Cloy's Song". The following are the lyrics to the aforementioned song, sang to the tune of The Ting Tings' original work. It's not perfect, but let me remind you that therapeutic expression doesn't have to be. Enjoy!

*Por fa un juguito just to get me along
Es un dificultad and I'm biting on my tongue
And I keep esperando, keeping it together
Los vecinos gotta find something to say now*

Paseando everyday igual
Don't wanna be *solita*
Escuchame, oh no
I never say anything at all
But no English to consider, they can't say my
name

They call me Cloy
They call me *gringa*
They call me *Col*
They call me *Cuy*
That's not my name

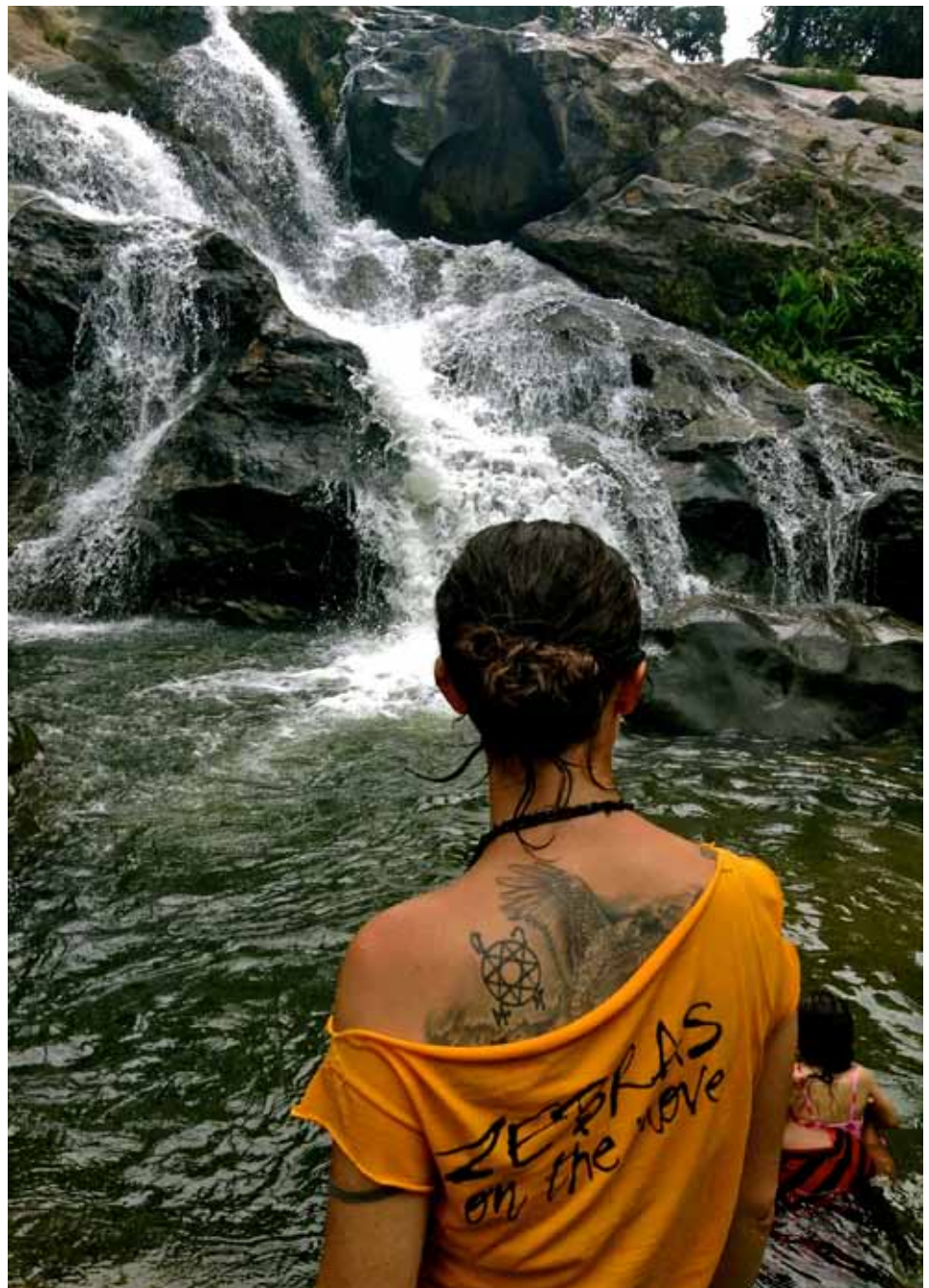
They call me quiet
But I'm a riot
La Senor-ita
Always the same
That's not my name

I miss the *broma* when *me*
burlan de mi
I'm the last chick sucking on
those *huesos de cuy*
Keep falling, with these R's
me quedan rara
Getting *calladita* and sitting
on my roof now
So alone all the time and I
lock myself away
Escuchame, oh no
Though I'm dressed up *botas*
'n all
With everything considered
they can't say my name

They call me Cloy
They call me *gringa*
They call me *Col*
They call me *Cuy*
That's not my name

Are you calling me Cola?
Are you calling me *suka*?

CHLOE is living out her days in the beautiful Alausi, where she goes from home to home like she's the mayor, shaking hands and kissing babies.



THE CULTURE OF CROSS-DRESSING

BY MITCH ADAMS

A VERY INTERESTING ECUADORIAN EXPERIENCE

If I told you that I have cross-dressed and roamed the streets of Ecuador only once, it would be a bold-faced lie. I have had the opportunity to participate in cross-dressing not only in Quito for the *viuda* tradition, but also twice in my old site of Gualleturo, Cañar for *el día de los inocentes*.

Both events are equally unique. Of course, only men participate. You may have seen some of these *viudas* roaming the streets during New Year's Eve. Men in scantily clad women's clothing, stopping cars, dancing on said cars or on each other, pulling drivers and passengers out, getting on buses, motorcycles, and, most importantly, collecting money for the festivities. Our group pulled a surprising \$270, almost tripling the previous year's take. With

said funds, we are going to have a top-shelf BBQ. Why don't we do this more often?

What you probably have not seen are the lady monsters on *el día de los inocentes*, January 6. This might only be a Gualleturo tradition, because I have not heard or seen any other instances. On this particular day, the entire village is on lock-down and men are, naturally, in dresses or women's underwear with Halloween-style masks. If a community member fails to close their doors, gates, stores, etc., the lady monsters will enter, cause a ruckus, even drag them onto the street and into the mud. Unless, of course, they donate something desirable such as a drink or some money (for drinks).





Lesson learned: Goal 3. This will be even better than teaching cuarente to my grandmother and getting owned. True story. I strongly feel that Austin, Texas will welcome cross-dressers taking to the streets for a good cause, such as fundraising for debauched/lush-related activities. Who knows? It just might be the next sensation.

Mitch is Boss Hog PCVL living in luxury in Quito, where he wears dresses to breakfast and is a big proponent of No Shirt, Just Jeans parties.



MILDLY SMILING

BY MANUEL MELENDEZ

It happens unassumingly
Staring at the smudges of the glass in front of you
And in the context of things
It was only one more way to pretend
One more way to catalog and merchant back into your mind
All the happy fears you've claimed as prize
To caress them, and mold them, and watch their petals falter
Then hunger
Then yearn for silence
For a kill
A truth
And it finds them eventually
On the edges of an ocean breeze
Cultivating the garden
Beautiful it is
Precisely so because it allows itself
To be used for something so fleeting, so organic
And only it
Can provide the fruit, can provide the juices
Required in the first place

And to be a flower in this garden
Marveling
No matter the pain
Or sorrow
Misfortune
You are forever there
Tending to your blooming and incandescent thorns
Becoming finally the eternal petal
Shining in all your hues
Singing in all your voices
The great pleasure of keeping yourself alive
Sitting
Ever thankful you get to be a part of the bruising and the wars
When the monsoon collects the fierceness in you
And passion glows most beautifully
Indefinitely
Always here
In the garden
Where you've deigned
In open secret
To show the face of Love



Foolish Love
In the face of a boy with a coin
Holding the pellets
Like manna from the Heaven sky
And in this foreign earth, it tends to stick
Like gluey patina
Hardening and bending to your involuntary will
As you deny this boy
And turn your back to his droopy eyes
Unacceptable justifications
But here, in this life
How can you be so sure he's innocent?

And so you wander the markets
Open air, a cruel joke against the work it takes
To set up shop before the sun catches you
And burns you a new color on your skin
But these people never sweat
Because these people persevere on a realm you've never known too
well
The realm of the indeterminate already now
A slow crawl to a kind of death
That builds
Nevertheless
To a true living
Sincere in its attempts to thwart the filtering of everything
Everything not this
Everything that's not the sad-eyed plea

Or the practiced routine of the mundane
The banal choices that left us here, and left them there
Heartbroken equals, separated only
By the skewed luck of living's foolish disregard

This still life, this still life
How to greet it
This confederacy of eggshells
Limber-lean
The body sewed into your nerve and muscle pitch
And the flaky ivory of your skin floats
Above your downy grass
And the eggshells rotting
Sizzling the hardened decay over your fingertips
Even as you break their fall

They never asked you to move for them
Never asked you to be guilty for your taste
And, in fact, if only you had stayed cooped inside
The cocoon of blanket heat
Scenting body grease and soot from a long night awake
Becoming your hello as you peek salty eyes above Prussian blue
To take in the wintry delight of a sought-after chill, of a yearned-for frost
And pull tightly the blue till only your earthly cream is bared
Unbound and unseen
Between the hollowed corners of your Spartan room—
If only you had stayed... then.
But then, o then,

You'd only pretend to dream.

Cruel Time
Always faster in forgetting
Always winning the race between our selves
But to stop moving
And to let the immensities crash over us
Letting the books burn
Letting the leaves wilt

How to be
If not in constant motion
To go forward
Obstinately
Unwilling to watch our faces grow their dying masks
Unwilling to let anything burn but our own lives
In the act of forever remembering, forever collecting, forever preserving
All which is torn apart
All which will burst at the sight of the great Light
All the savagery
And all the rage

And all this heart
And all this passion
All to save the book in you
A book only we will remember.

How to be
Saving ourselves for our selves
And when we open the index
What else do we dare find?
If not the proof that even at our base
Even in our excess
We are
All of us

...The refusal of an unwritten life.

MANNY is a wordsmith who has returned to Florida, where he will channel Hemingway and hopefully not drink himself mad.





THE RAINY SEASON

BY KRISTIN FARR

Under my mosquito net dressed in the bare minimum late at night trying to fall asleep but finding it difficult to find a comfortable position. The sheets stick to my balmy skin, my pillow smells like decaying plant matter and the air is so thick it's almost drinkable. Finally, Pachamama decides the suffering has gone on long enough and allows the overcast sky that darkened the afternoon to release its waters.

Rain thunders on the zinc roof drowning out the usual nightly sounds of barking dogs, confused roosters crowing and toads chirping. The air becomes easier to breathe in and the smell of clean earth fills the room canceling out the smell of

fungi-infested fabric. The temperature drops and sleep finally comes.

The next morning after dining on over-priced American cereal and instant coffee, it's time for me to properly greet the day. Which shoes to wear? The flip flops or the boots? Flip-flops are most comfortable but no Ecuadorian looks favorably at muddy feet even if they belong to a *gringa* living in the *campo*. Boots keep feet clean but the humidity and heat paired with suffocating boots spell out an uncomfortable day. Will it rain later? Umbrella or rain jacket? Umbrellas look silly in the *campo*, rain jackets are hot. Tempting fate seems like the best option but the thought of having wet cloths makes

the rain jacket more alluring. Clothes take at least three days to dry in this weather.

Walking down the long dirt road poses a challenge. My flip-flops slip and slide in the newly minted mud and sling cappuccino colored water all over the back of my pants. Puddles turn the typical straight-shot into a maze. Passing motorcycles are a mortal threat to my newly clean jeans. Roadside trash that could be good material for recycled art looks too disgusting to pick up. Dogs sip water from shallow pools looking particularly unkempt with their muddy legs.

The sun makes a new appearance bright and in full force making my sun-screened skin sweatier than normal. Sweat collects around the nose piece of my cheap sunglasses causing them to slide down and the fear of having a "sweatstache" forces persistent face wipes. My hair becomes a nuisance and shaving it all off becomes a serious option.

The nearby hills are verdant and jungle-like. Birds and insects are more numerous adding a sense of biodiversity and life to the ambience. Water cascades visibly down the parts of the hills that aren't covered in vegetations giving the idea of being in an exotic paradise. The small stream is now a river carrying blooming hydrangeas down its current providing even more of a picturesque view.

Locals sit in the shade or rock in their hammocks using the heat, mud and imminent afternoon rain

as an excuse to take it easy. The Bacahata and Salsa music they're blasting tie in perfectly with the heat and tropical backdrop. The *tiendas* are stocked with local sweet corn and watermelons dethroning the mangoes. The dried beans in large sacks out front take on a chalky texture and the *helados* look ever so enticing even though it's mid-morning.

Mosquitoes reclaim the title as the most annoying creature on earth trumping that loquacious rooster near my bedroom window. Insect repellent, the last resort, makes my balmy skin sticky and provides an unpleasant chemical perfume that's reserved for those who aren't from these parts. Every mosquito bite is followed by a short prayer that that particular one was dengue-free.

Home provides a temporary refuge from the slippery mud but the floors are covered in crusty dirt. Sweeping is a never-ending job this of the year. Water is coveted and consumed in copious amounts and my cold showers have become a benefit. Early evening gives cause to take refuge under my mosquito net as the mosquitoes come out in search for sweet *gringa* blood. The air is thick again, clothes become a burden and the rain is impatiently awaited.

KRISTEN was recently appointed PCVL and will be spending another year in Ecuador, where she will continue to make observations about her sweat levels and mosquito bites.



SPIN AROUND THE WORLD

BY BENJAMIN NIESPODZIANY

Over the holidays, my girlfriend gave me a book that she told me would discuss third world countries through psychedelic bursts of prose. A "road movie of the mind," the cover promised me. I finished *Dastgah: Diary of a Head Trip* a month ago and I'm still thinking about it.

Mark Mordue is an Australian journalist who, prior to *Dastgah*, most often focused on music back in Sydney. This makes sense while reading his travel diary, a lyrical masterpiece about a man and a woman twirling around the world for a year. Mordue and his lady don't visit Rome and Hollywood. They say farewell to the "beaten path" and find themselves in new worlds: places like Turkey, Iran, Scotland, India, Nepal. Rough areas full of cross dressers and junkies and burning bodies. Wild adventures involving traffic jams en route to the Himalayas, thieves in Paris, and sensual Michael Jackson addicts in Iran. Good tea, French graveyards, and lightning storms, this book is a beautiful mess of a journey through the eyes of a saddened poet, upset and intrigued at the same time by the world around him. One of my favorite parts is when Mordue visits Edinburgh for a music festival, heartbroken and unsure where his

relationship might go. All alone, he writes, "*We had skated through the city after that fatal conversation like low clouds, fading into ourselves over the next few days. At the Café Graffiti we'd watched a young group called the De K-Band do something jazzy and sweet, flower-power rock 'n' roll that didn't dominate you at all – just drew you in.*"

A trip around the world, but at a cost. Throughout the book, our narrator is incredibly vulnerable, scatterbrained; troubles with his wife, airport tears, his age, it all spirals into a roller coaster of words, a spiral staircase of emotions in under 300 pages. This is great for ambitious travelers and backpackers and lonely knowledge seekers. Published in 2004 and written in the late 90's, explore the world before 9/11 changed the game, with unrest still very much alive.

Take *Dastgah* for a ride. Throw it in your backpack. Squeeze it in a funda while you ride to a city in the mountains. Read it while you explore. Dive head-first.

BENJAMIN is reading a really riveting book in Machala, quit texting him!



FIVE FEARS

BY ANDREA GESUMARIA

I've always been a neurotic person. I think it's in my genetic code, as I come from the same tribe as Woody Allen and Fran Drescher. My people seem to have anxiety coded in their genes, always on the lookout for the latest outbreak of genocide or cruel pharaoh. We are bonded by deep neurosis.

While my service hasn't led me to enlighten an entire village or teach every kid in my colegio perfect English, it has, to my surprise, helped me to conquer several fears that previously had me coiled up on the floor, running from the room, or frantically calling my father. For that, the Peace Corps has made me a tougher broad, better able to take life's knocks to the ground.

The top five fears that I've now conquered are:

5. Cockroaches

Who in their right mind is NOT terrified of cockroaches? Their smooth brown backs, their alien-like faces, their creepy antennas? The features make them look like a lobster and an alien mated during a drunken one night stand, giving birth to the ugliest creature on Earth. Their bodies keep moving once decapitated, they eat everything from dirt to toenails to food, and they are possessed with incredible escape tactics. Cockroaches used to make me shriek and run out of the kitchen in fear. I used to climb counters to avoid their path. But, thanks to my two years in Ecuador, cockroaches no longer bother me in the slightest. Be it the cockroach that likes to hang out on my bathroom door or the baby cockroach that climbed across my computer screen last night, they no longer are feared foes. Disgusting looking, yes, but tolerable. And hey, they'll be here when every other life form fails, so they're going to have the last laugh.

4. Living all alone

In college, I always felt bad for people who lived in single dorms. Who did they have to muse over their latest romantic interest with? Who did they have to eat pizza with at 3:00 am? What did they DO? My whole adult life, I've avoided living alone

out of a deep fear of solitude. But, as most volunteers who live alone quickly find out, living alone is simply fabulous. Want to walk around the house in ratty old sweatpants and a stained Backstreet Boys T-shirt? Great. Want to type up an El Clima article sipping a Budweiser in your kitchen at 11:00 pm at night? No problem, no one else is around. Living alone provides me with the ultimate freedom to do whatever I want, whenever I want. At this point, living with another human in a cramped apartment seems terrible. As does marriage—living with another human for an entire lifetime. Which brings me to the next point.

3. Being single at 25

Society hammers into us the bliss of hetero-normative coupling. Since we were little, we watched Cinderella become complete only when she finds her Prince Charming. Sleeping Beauty awakens from Maleficent's curse only by the kiss of a handsome, Aryan prince. As a young girl, I thought that by the old age of 25, I'd already be in the "happily ever after" stage of life. Many of my friends are already married, some have even reproduced. While they are Facebook videoing their baby's first steps, I am watching my cat chase moths while I eat ice cream out of the carton. But this doesn't scare me the way it once did. Maybe it was hearing one too many neighbor children screaming or seeing former students forgo college for child-rearing at eighteen years of age, but now I fully appreciate the single, childless life, and all of the freedom that being 25 and unattached affords me.

2. Being considered weird

I've always been weird, but have tried to keep it closed deep inside of me. No longer. The freak flag is flying, and flying high. Maybe it is because everything I do here is weird. It's weird that I don't like empanadas. It's weird that I am not married. It's weird that I live alone, with only a cat. It's weird that I don't wear heels or makeup every day. It's weird that I am not actively seeking a novio despite my old-maid status at 25 years old, with ovaries that



are shriveling up by the minute. Since everything I do is weird, being weird is no longer scary. So many famous figures were weird; Lincoln liked to sit on the White House lawn naked, Einstein liked to sit by himself for hours upon hours studying light, Luna Lovegood was in a constant search for a Rumpel-horned Snorfbac—look at what they’ve done for humanity. Embrace the weirdness.

1. Thinking everything is going to kill me

While I still have hypochondriac tendencies, my mind has calmed down considerably about the health calamities in the world. Once you’ve had a few good parasites eat away at your digestive system, and felt the familiar rumble of oncoming diarrhea after eating suspicious lettuce, once you’ve

broken out daily for a month from the mold that grows on your clothes thanks to the rainy season, you realize that you can get through more than you thought. And the little voice in your head that says “I’m sick! I’m sick! I’m sick!” gets quieter each time.

“The only thing to fear is fear itself,” said the sage Franklin D. Roosevelt on the eve of World War II. While we don’t have to fear all-out annihilation like the Allies did in the 1940s, the quote still resonates today. Fear is overrated. Thank you, Peace Corps, for proving that to me, one cockroach at a time.

ANDREA is slowly turning into a crazy cat lady down in Zaruma. Stay tuned for next issue where she tells us all about it. Also, look out for an upcoming poem.



THE STYLE OF THE COAST

BY PETER FRANK

COASTAL STYLE GUIDE

For us to work effectively as volunteers, a large part of our cultural integration relies on us being able to look and feel like part of our community.

Volunteers tend to over analyze getting to know their communities and understanding the people around them, overlooking the importance of looking the part.

Are you feeling fashionably lost in your site? Follow the coastal style guide for tips, Avoid faux pas and learn how to better look the part of an integrated volunteer.

It's whack in the US but you can do it here: amongst other things, jean shorts in all forms! Short jean shorts, baggy jean shorts. Frayed and non-frayed!



THREE DO'S & DON'T'S

Do not wear shorts, wear Ecu-apants. Do not wear your LeB-ron jersey, wear a Barcelona jersey. Do not wear sandals, wear Crocs. I am just kidding. Do not wear Crocs.





If you can pull it off...

...wear T-shirts with sassy American expressions.

Fashion Forecast: the sun and the mosquitos are back, but so is the short-sleeved button down. SSBD.

How to work it: wear a short-sleeved shirt to work and you will be comfortable and work appropriate all day long. Afterwards, head straight to the club looking super casual but make sure you leave the top three or four buttons undone. Wake up in the same outfit and unbutton the rest, grab a bottle of *pedrito coco* and *coger* a bus. Wear the shirt like a *boracho*. Do not sweat that *encebollado* spill, it only enhances the effect. *Avisame* if you have any other questions.

Peter Frank is being a boss in Santa Elena, slam dunking over *niños*, and giving *jovenes* swirlies for *batido* change.

PCV STYLE INSIDER LOOK: UP CLOSE WITH TOM WYN BELLHOUSE

Nickname: WynTom

Site: Guayaquil, Guayas

Style Icon: Lady Gaga, Bradley Cooper

Fun Fact: Some people think I look like Matt Damon.

Go to outfit: Jeans, t-shirt, sneakers, heavily worn but freshly curved baseball hat.

What is the one look you wish you could pull off in Ecuador that you tried but didn't work? For New Year's, I tried cross-dressing at a company party. I was really excited, but it did not flow.

What is the one things that has changed most about your style since coming to Ecuador? All my clothes are much sweatier now.



NEXT ISSUE? One PVC's 3 secrets to getting rid of camel toe...

BASEBALL: AN EXERCISE IN COMPARATIVE CULTURE

BY WYN BELLHOUSE

A few months back I found a website for an organization based in Guayaquil that purportedly educated Ecuadorian youth about our great American pastime, baseball. Upon further review, I found that the office for this organization was in a fairly accessible location, and decided to pay them a visit, having all the grand dreams and *ganas* to possibly even start a secondary project involving baseball. When I arrived at the address where the office was supposedly located, I was disappointed to find not even the slightest hint of an organization or business in the surrounding area.

The actual practice of baseball in Ecuador is only slightly more real than the organization for which I was searching. Larger cities like Quito, Guayaquil and Cuenca boast a handful of baseball fields and probably even a couple of kids that play baseball on them. The Ecuadorian national baseball team's great claim to fame is losing in the qualifying rounds of the 2008 Olympic Games.¹ Unlike the majority of its Latin American counterparts, Ecuador has never had a player make a big league team in the MLB.² In fact, the most famous Ecuadorian



Jaime Jarrin, Quiteño and Spanish-language announcer for the Los Angeles Dodgers, giving a check to a couple of kids who would much rather be playing soccer.

with baseball ties never even played a game. When Jaime Jarrin, Quiteño and award-winning Spanish-language announcer for the Dodgers, moved to America at the age of 20, he had never even seen a baseball game. Along with a 55-year career in broadcasting, he has also been one of the strongest supporters of baseball programs in Ecuador.

In 1973 Ted Turner and the Turner Broadcasting System (TBS) began nationally televising every Atlanta Braves baseball game.³ Even before TBS brought live baseball into every American home for the first time, the game had been deeply rooted in American culture. From Babe Ruth and the 1927 Murderers' Row to the dominant New York teams of Mickey Mantle and Willie Mays in the 1950's all the way up to the transcendent performance of Ken Griffey, Jr. in the 1990's, baseball spent the 20th century as a dominant cultural force in the USA. Today, 95 years after the Chicago "Black Sox" scandal threatened the existence of the game and only eight years after Congressional hearings on steroid use threatened its credibility, baseball is more popular than ever.⁴ A new generation of young emerging superstars like Bryce Harper and Mike Trout continue to grow the game's national and international popularity.

But baseball in America is more than a game now. References abound in everyday language, with "three strike" policies, getting to "second base" with your girlfriend, and rampant imitations of Will Farrell as Haray Caray providing further evidence of the pervasive influence of baseball in our culture. With the baseball season beginning once again, take time to think about what the game means to our culture and take the opportunity to share our national pastime to your community.

¹ After the 2008 Olympic Games, the sport of baseball was removed from Olympic competition, robbing Ecuador of a chance to not qualify for the 2012 games.

² Neighbor Colombia has had 13 major-leaguers.

Ecuador's kindred spirit of the Latin world, Venezuela, has had 286 big-league ballplayers. The significantly smaller Dominican Republic has 128 active players *this season*.

³ In 1976 the boisterous Turner bought the Braves and quickly became one of the most active and intriguing owners in recent history. In 1977 after a prolonged losing streak, Turner sent then-team manager Dave Bristol on a "scouting trip" and took over management of the club until overruled by the Commissioner of Baseball Bowie Kuhn.

Turner also authored one of my favorite quotes when he was asked at a press conference, after firing Bobby Cox in 1981, who he wanted as the next manager of the team, to which he replied, "It would be Bobby Cox if I hadn't just fired him. We need someone like him around here." Cox was hired by Turner as General Manager for the team in 1985 and eventually resumed his career as a Hall-of-Fame manager for the Braves in 1990.

⁴ Major League Baseball blows away every other sports league in the world in terms of attendance. Last year over 73 million tickets were sold to American baseball games, with the next most popular sport, with only 21 million tickets sold, also being baseball - the Japanese variety. The leader for average attendance at games is, unsurprisingly, the NFL, with around 67,000 fans attending the average American football game. However, the MLB baseball is fifth among world sports in terms of average attendance at roughly 30,000 per game, while maintaining this level of fan participation over 2,421 games per year, compared to a mere 254 NFL football games.

WYN TOM is big city living in Guayaquil, playing baseball with himself, singing "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" to an audience of one.



BY PORTIA
BOYKIN

HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

Oprah Winfrey, Jerry Rice, and Spike Lee are all alumni of Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCU). What exactly is an HBCU you ask?

Until 1837, African Americans could not attend institutions of higher education because of Civil Rights preconceptions. Teaching descendants of Africans did not quite catch on until after the Emancipation Proclamation and with the help of land grants from the federal government. This was the founding vision of all HBCUs: education. Today, there are more than 100 public and private HBCUs. These universities range from as far west as Texas and as far south as the U.S. Virgin Islands.



Often described as having a rich heritage, hundreds of Peace Corps volunteers have continued to

be a part of the HBCU legacy. Back in 2008, HBCUs were the top producers of PCVs serving around the world. Bringing this statistic closer to home, Rebekah Clark (Omnibus 106), a graduate of Howard University (1867), serves as a Community Health volunteer in Colimes, Guayas. She says that the "rich and diverse student population" made Howard University stand out to her. Many people think that because HBCUs were founded for African Americans, other ethnic backgrounds are prohibited to attend. This is completely false. African Americans are the majority at HBCUs because of its history, but you will find virtually every ethnicity on its campuses, even international students. When asked to name one very influential Howard alumni, Rebekah gave me a whole list of prominent people in our society including Justice Thurgood Mar-

shall, P. Diddy, and actress Phylicia Rashad. Wow, no wonder why Howard University is the number one producer of PCVs from HBCUs!



Continuing to lead as a Morehouse Man, Thomas Laxton (Omnibus 106) serves as Youth & Families volunteer in Guaranda, Bolivar. One of the things he loved about attending an HBCU was the presence of black professors. Tom says, "until college, I had never had a black teacher. There was something comforting about having someone that could relate to my life experiences being able to educate me in the classroom. This was something that I really valued during my World and US history classes. These professors brought a different perspective to some of the lessons that I otherwise wouldn't have been exposed to." Morehouse College (1867) is the only all-male HBCU, also being the number two producer of PCVs from HBCUs. One of the most famous Morehouse Men was Dr. Martin Luther King

Jr. I'd say Tom has some big shoes to fill, but he is taking it one step at a time by serving his community in Guaranda and his alma



mater. Oh, and did I mention that President Obama will deliver their May 2013 commencement speech?

Well, the third largest producer of PCVs from HBCUs is Spellman College (sister school to Morehouse College). Unfortunately, I did not attend this college. I wish I had; it would've made for a nice sequence. However, I am an Alabama A&M University (1875) graduate, home of one of the best marching bands in the land. As a former student of "The Hill", I too felt the same way as Rebekah & Thomas. Loving the diversity on campus and having professors that looked like me made my educational experience one that I would never want to change. Black History Month has past, but I wanted to mention something about it in El Clima. HBCUs are the perfect topic, especially since they are so strongly related to what we do as volunteers. With mottos like "Service is Sovereignty", "And there was light", and "Truth and Service" there is no doubt that HBCU alumni will ever stop serving the country through

Peace Corps.

If there are any other HBCU graduates in country, please let us know. We would love to hear your story. To find more information about HBCUs, please go to: <http://hbcudigest.com/> or <http://www.uncf.org/>. Or just ask one of us!

PORTIA is continuing her run as Classiest Lady in Imbabura, where she works as a health volunteer and keeps warm by dancing.



Wander down the indigenous streets of Riobamba.

Stumble upon a store filled to the ceiling with watches and reasonably priced coffee makers. Peer at preserved churches, the locals doing a Sign of the Cross as they pass.

Love notes and heart shapes tattoo the concrete walls that form the city.

Blue buildings, newly painted.

Open rusted, creaking doors that lead you down a brick alley, the mundane mystery of a normal life.

Gaze at holes in the wall stuffed full of junk: a loose tennis shoe, a cabinet, a red bandana, a wooden stick wrapped in plastic bags and rope.

A woman on the street is hidden within the warmth of the alpaca, shouting to the walkers with pockets full of money, delivering her special sale on brooms and brushes of every color.

A wrinkled man walks slowly down the street, a wooden table strapped to his hunched back.

A tiny woman carries a massive amount of rice, double fisting her children, one of whom is feeding from her breast. She marches onward, past the faded Coca-Cola sign and the dull fire hydrant.

Trash cans with clown faces stare at you, a laugh if you throw away your trash, a shout if you litter. A sanitation attempt forgotten from the 80s.

Family members sell backpacks and rulers and calculators, hanging them up for display outside along the green graffitied wall.

See infinite belts on display next to a painting of the Seven Dwarfs, no one seeming to mind.

An old basketball court is overrun with a lively food market. The basketball hoops are rusted over, covered in presidential propaganda. Underneath

the rim sits old brooms and cardboard boxes from yesterday, someone's misguided treasure. The market sells flowers, motivational to-go bags telling you Yes, you can. It sells incense and exotic fruits, rabbit parts and cow tongue. The market stretches fabric for miles.

A handicraft store sells miniature animals made out of clay. They sell clown magnets for fridges, small cowboy boots for drinking liquor, and a bite-sized patriotic marching band, trumpets and drums and trombones and silence.

Touch Christmas lights all year long that line the city.

Look up to domino churches as flat as cardboard, standing up straight for centuries, aching to be pushed over.

Order greasy food from brightly-lit *comida* carts. Burgers, *cevichochos*, hot dogs drowning in mayonnaise.

Buy a grill on sale from a clown and a lion, shouting deals into a microphone over a reggaeton Sunday morning.

On a clear day, see the snowcaps in the mountains while kids with holes in their shirts try their best to make your wallet their own.

A taxi drive compromised with a dollar coin, your pocket full of them, each step sounding like a million bucks.

Only two beer brands for sale, but the whole city is okay with it, glass pieces finding their ways to their street corner drains.

Wait for rain.

BENJAMIN is in Machala, wondering if you prefer giraffes or elephants.

BY BENJAMIN NIESPODZIANY

RIOBAMBA



SERENITY Now! BY JANE PEZUA

Small communities. Counterparts. Host families. Pollution. Crime. Poverty.
Thoughts of home. Close of Service. Relationships. Projects.

As Peace Corps Volunteers, we experience a plethora of stressors that can take their toll on us. We may not always have the resources to work through stress in the healthiest of ways or make the best choices about how to process it.

I propose a solution: Yoga!

Yoga and meditation can help us to fight stress and find serenity. We can deal with emotional distress in a healthy manner. We can find stability physically and mentally. We can improve our body awareness, inside and out. We can improve our immunity. We can learn to be attentive to the present moment. We gain the opportunity to have a clearer

perspective on our situation, to experience our emotions without proliferating them, and to cultivate a better understanding and more compassionate view of ourselves, others, and the world.

And if the more spiritual aspects of yoga elude you, worry not! Practicing yoga offers enough physical benefits to make it worth anyone's while. After reading about the benefits of yoga, you just may decide to give it a try.

Yoga improves flexibility, strength and posture.

As we lengthen the muscles and tendons of our bodies, we reduce strain on our joints and expe-



rience fewer aches and pains. Through weight-bearing exercises, we build strength and increase bone density. All that bending, flexing and twisting serves to get synovial fluid into every crevice of our joints, aids circulation, helps lymph drainage, and increases oxygenation of cells all over the body (including brain, internal organs, heart, and lungs). Meaning, our bodies become suppler and better able to fight infection, dispose of waste and toxins, and even destroy cancerous cells.

Yoga increases aerobic capacity.

Our cardiovascular conditioning and endurance are improved and our blood pressure and resting heart rate are lowered. We learn to breathe more effectively and efficiently, maximizing our lung capacity. Yoga also lowers cortisol levels. Cortisol, the body's stress hormone, is linked with compromised immunity, depression, osteoporosis, high blood pressure and insulin resistance. Practicing yoga can boost your serotonin levels (this can affect learning, mood, sleep). Blood sugar and LDL ("bad" cholesterol) are lowered while HDL ("good" cholesterol) increases.

Yoga improves our awareness.

It helps us focus on the present. This can improve problem-solving abilities and memory. It can also help us stop the distracting playback of regrets, concerns, anger, and fear that occupy our thoughts. We gain the ability to step back from the drama of our lives. Yoga also encourages us to slow our breath and relax, shifting from the sympathetic nervous system (think "fight or flight") to the parasympathetic nervous system (think "relax and restore"). We improve body-awareness. This helps us to increase our awareness of where we hide stress in

the body (neck, shoulders, face, jaw). Noticing these unconscious habits can help us break them.

Yoga connects us.

If practiced with an intention of self-reflection and betterment, yoga improves our sense of interconnectedness. Our hamstrings connect to our backs. We connect to our communities. Our community connects to the world. This can help us feel gratitude, sympathy, compassion, and forgiveness toward ourselves and others.

The beauty of yoga is that it can be practiced in small spaces and requires nothing except body and time. Of course, you can perch upon a yoga mat and don some fancy yoga pants, but it can as easily be done in your pajamas on your tile floor.

If you don't know where to begin, I have a website to recommend. Yogadownload.com generously offers a Yoga for Peace program in which they make their entire catalog of downloadable classes available free of charge exclusively to Peace Corps Volunteers and American troops overseas. They offer classes of various disciplines and levels of yoga. (From the homepage, find the tab "Community" and select "Yoga for Peace".) If you have trouble accessing the link I provided, you can send an email to help@yogadownload.com for more information.

And should you happen to pass through Riobamba on a Tuesday afternoon, feel free to join us for one of my community yoga classes.

Namaste.

JANE is a super flexible volunteer in Riobamba, who works constantly, hikes faster than you, and removes aches and stress by twisting into peaceful positions.



VOLUNTEER OF THE QUARTER: AMANDA MONROE BY SARAH REICHLER

VOQ (Volunteer of the Quarter) is a VAC initiative to help us all get to know our fellow PCVs a bit better and to commend the great work that volunteers are doing in their communities. Know about a PCV working on a successful project, one who is really integrated in their site, or someone who is just being a superstar volunteer in general? Let us know: e-mail VAC at EcuadorVAC@gmail.com.

Amanda Monroe (Mandy) is VAC's Volunteer of the Quarter and is a Natural Resources Conservation volunteer from Ithaca, New York, representing Omnibus 105. Why did Mandy join Peace Corps? Everything about it, she says, but her experiences at Warren Wilson College located in the Swannanoa Valley of the Blue Ridge Mountains, North Carolina probably had something to do with it. Warren Wilson is different than your typical university experience in that the school is committed to emphasizing environmentalism and localism. "You complete all your credit hours like any other accredited university, but you are also required to complete 100 hours of community service (off campus) and

work on campus for 15 hours a week. Students run the place, really. The work assignments vary from janitorial duties to cafeteria workers to gardeners, landscapers, ranchers, accounting wizards, plumbers, locksmiths, auto mechanics, journalists, and artists."

Mandy spent time doing various environmental jobs during her time at WWC. She worked on the Recycling and Solid waste crew, where she began dabbling in recycled art. She also worked as an assistant for a Botany professor, collecting flora and fauna samples around campus. She says WWC definitely had an impact on her decision to apply for the Peace Corps. "The service part was a gem - I did all kinds of different and fun volunteer work. Ultimately, I guess Peace Corps had always been something I'd wanted to do for indefinable reasons. After Wilson, I spent a year in the AmeriCorps Watershed Stewards Project as an environmental educator in Northern California. It's been a great lifestyle—finding unique opportunities that the government is willing to pay for. I'm looking at grad school in the

fall and the chances of securing an assistantship are looking good."

In Ecuador, Mandy's site is situated in the coastal splendor of sunny Las Tunas, Manabí. Describing her site, Mandy says it is "an awesome teeny fishing village on the beach just fifteen kilometers south of Puerto Lopez." "The men fish or harvest tagua or coffee seeds," she says. "The women wash clothes and take care of beautiful children and prepare out-of-control seafood soups. Everyone seems to love me - must be because I love them? People are generous,



food is too delicious, and the beach is pristine. Life breathes beautiful."

In addition to Mandy's typical site activities like learning to surf, working on her rocking tan, and feasting on some delicious *encebollado*, she has also done plenty of impromptu wildlife and nature monitoring with groups of juvenes. They have followed bird species along the Rio Ayampe, sea turtles nesting on the beach, and even observing the health of a small stand of mangroves.

Along with her nature-stalking skills, Mandy is known as a bit of a recycled art guru. She attended a Brigadas Verdes IST over a year ago, which she says was, "without a doubt, the best training Peace Corps provided [for her] community." During the session, she learned how to make *monederos* from chip bags and bottle labels. She made some herself after the training and shocked the women in her community with her homemade handicrafts. Afterwards, Mandy began going house to house in neighborhoods around Las Tunas teaching small groups of women. "My integration sky-rocketed!" she says.

The *monedero*-making business soared from that point on, too. Mandy is currently working on selling them locally in Puerto Lopez and the surround-

ing tourist areas with a group of women from Las Tunas. "Some of the ladies have restaurants or *cabañas* where they can sell their product directly to clients. I often do a purse round-up and then act as an intermediary taking them to a small artisanal shop in Puerto Lopez (or to the States or to Peace Corps events)." This system is not as sustainable as Mandy would like, but it has shown the women that they have the ability and skills to make a desirable, sellable, and unique product. As a group, they have set goals to sell their craft (as a team) during *feriados* and at Los Frailes. They are beginning to mobilize and take charge of the project with the hopes that it will continue to *sigar adelante* after Mandy's COS in April.

When asked what advice she has for the newbies in Omnibus 109, Mandy says, "Laugh it up and love it. Even the worst moments are there for a reason." What will she miss most about Ecuador? "*Licra, ya les dije.*"

SARAH is watching sunsets and relaxing by the water in Tonchigüe, Esmeraldas, where she tells everyone she sees about the wonderful volunteers of every quarter



PEER SUPPORT NETWORK REINVENTS ITSELF BY LAUREN WAGNER

Who: The Peer Support Network (PSN). We are a group of Peace Corps Volunteers who are selected and trained to provide support to our peers in concert and cooperation with the Peace Corps staff. Oh, and we are your friends, too.

What: The new PSN crew just got sworn in (passing of the torch and all) in February and we are excited about what 2013 has in store. In the past, PSN was sometimes interpreted as a last resort, panic moment type of thing. Although PSN members are trained in dealing with crises and stressful situations, we want to make sure that people know we are more than that. We are good listeners who have probably been through many similar scenarios. Give us a call before things get bad.

When: *Ahorita*. Any time you need us. Also, when we come hang out with you in your site and then stay in touch via phone, email, Facebook, interprovincial *chisme*, etc.

Where: Mainly your site. We come to you and you show us the best *batidos*, the coolest *campo* spot, and the nicest *abuela* in town. Basically, we get to know you and your site so that we can continue to support you throughout your service.

Why: PSN exists in order to provide quality support that enhances the well-being and effectiveness of

the Peace Corps Volunteers of Ecuador. Also, because we know that sometimes it can be hard to find the right person to talk to this far away from home.

How: Each PSN member is assigned a small group of PCVs from the newest omnibus to visit and work with, starting with visits to OMN 109 in May 2013. We should be visiting you before your official PC visit from your Program Manager, and it is a great time to show someone what your life is really like in site.

THE LATEST: Here is your introduction to the new crew!

PCV Lauren Wagner- PSN Chair

PCV Maggie Moore- PSN Vice Chair

PCV Danielle Garcia- PSN Training Coordinator

PCV Peter Frank- PSN Pre-Service Training Mentor* (new position)

PCV Heather Parker- PSN Member

PCV Lesley Meza- PSN Member

PCV Jonathan Yoe- PSN Member

LAUREN is a community health volunteer in Paján, Manabí, where she roughs the coastal flow one smile at a time.



The new members of the Peer Support Network; Dani Garcia, Lauren Wagner, Peter Frank, Heather Parker, Jonathan Yoe, Maggie Moore, and Lesley Meza

PSN 2013 MEMBER BIOS

LAUREN WAGNER (PSN CHAIR)

Omni & Program: CH 108

Site: Pajan, Manabi

Favorite Food: Indian food.

Reason she joined PSN: To help improve volunteer effectiveness and happiness.

Fun Fact: Lauren can't cook rice.

Hobbies in Ecuador: Watching the sunset from her hammock, counting her mosquito bites, eating tropical fruit and *ceviche* with *mani*, and getting chased by the duck in her backyard.

Contact Info: laurenw.wagner@gmail.com

Cell: 0981472893



Fun Fact: In college, Dani had a pet rabbit named Professor VonFlophenopp that used to ride in the basket of her bike.

Hobbies in Ecuador: Hunting octopus with her host mom to make ceviche, scavenging through the trash for various recycled art projects, reading in her hammock, and drinking coco batidos.

Contact Info: danielle.nicole.garcia@gmail.com

Cell: 0959987743

PETER FRANK (PST MENTOR)

Omni & Program: Y&F 108

Site: Santa Elena Peninsula

Favorite Food: Choclo tortillas

Reason he Joined PSN: To help volunteers improve their own experiences.

Fun Fact: Peter loves playing Settlers of Catan but has never won.

Hobbies in Ecuador: Running, reading, dancing, and watching soccer.

Contact Info: pfrank197@gmail.com

Cell: 0985418712



MARGARET (MAGGIE) MOORE (PSN VICE-CHAIR)

Omni & Program: CH 108

Site: Santo Domingo

Favorite Food: Ice cream.

Reason she joined PSN: To support others.

Fun Fact: Maggie has gone skydiving.

Hobbies in Ecuador: Running, making a fool of herself in *baileterapia*, and improving her bargaining skills,

Contact Info: magmoore@gmail.com

Cell: 0989282330



LESLEY MEZA

Omni & Program: Y&F 108

Site: Cuenca, Azuay

Favorite Food: Nutella ice cream and brownies.

Reason she joined PSN: It seems like a great way to help other volunteers during their transitions and overall experience.

Hobbies in Ecuador: Long walks along the river, looking for places to eat a good brownie, listening to bachata (especially Prince Royce and J Alvarez), and watching telenovelas.

Contact Info: lesmez83@hotmail.com

Cell: 0981476525



DANIELLE (DANI) GARCIA (PSN TRAINING COORDINATOR)

Omni & Program: NRC 107

Site: Galera, Esmeraldas

Favorite Food: Camarones en cocado

Reason she Joined PSN: To support volunteers and hopefully make their service a less stressful and more enjoyable experience.



HEATHER PARKER**Omni & Program:** NRC 107**Site:** San Francisco de Sigspamba, Imbabura**Favorite Food:** Watermelon.**Reason she joined PSN:** I know from difficult times in my own service how helpful it can be to talk through situations with a peer, so I want to offer that support to other volunteers!**Fun Fact:** Heather once witnessed a sloth "surgery" on her kitchen table.**Hobbies here in Ecuador:** Hiking, cuy wrangling, and teaching community members to pronounce her name correctly (they still do not have it right after almost a year).**Contact Info:** heatherdparker@comcast.net**Cell:** 0959007031**JONATHAN YOE****Omni & Program:** Y&F 108**Site:** Puerto El Morro, Guayas**Favorite Food:** Camarones apanados**Reason he joined PSN:** I want to do all I can to support PCVs.**Fun Fact:** Jonathan has lost 80lbs since coming to Ecuador on May 17th, 2012.**Hobbies here in Ecuador:**Reading in Spanish (always pushing to get better), playing with the kids in site, biking, and walking around his *barrio* over and over again.**Contact Info:** jonathanyoe@gmail.com**Cell:** 0981471151

BEST BANANA BREAD

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 cups all purpose flour
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1/2 tsp salt (if self rising flour-no soda and salt)
- 2 cups sugar
- 4 medium bananas
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 2 eggs
- 3/4 cup oil
- 1 cup chopped pecans (optional)

DIRECTIONS:

Mix dry ingredients. Add remaining ingredients. Mix to blend well. Pour into 2 greased 8x4 inch loaf pans, cake pans or cupcake tins (it's good enough to be called a cake).
Bake at 350 degrees for 25-35 minutes or when springs upon touch.

Liz is a TEFL volunteer living in Latacunga, where she hopefully visits Quilotoa on a weekly basis, taking along wonderful homemade food wherever she roams.

BY LIZ SYPHER!

FOOD!

CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 cups all purpose flour
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1 stick butter (salted or non-salted)
- 1/2 cup white sugar
- 3/4 cup packed brown sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 1 – 1 1/2 cups chocolate chips

DIRECTIONS:

Mix together butter and sugars. Add vanilla and 1 egg. Mix dry ingredients separately and then add to the wet mixture. Fold in chocolate chips. Bake on cookie sheet for 10-12 min at 350 degrees or until golden brown.

THE GRINGO REVIEW

BY KIM PEEK

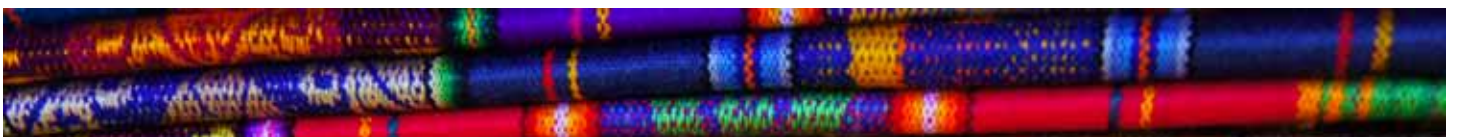
I am an unapologetic book snob. You will never catch me reading *50 Shades of Grey* or chatting idly about the *Twilight* series. I'd much rather settle down with a good classic or a novel by the latest acclaimed fiction writer. However, a few weeks ago, I found myself sitting down to a different type of book: *The Gringo* by RPCV J. Grigsby Crawford. Before coming to Ecuador, I'd never read a Peace Corps memoir and certainly hadn't intended on doing so. Nevertheless, *The Gringo* grabbed my attention. Hand to hand, Kindle to Kindle, *The Gringo* is making the rounds among Peace Corps Ecuador volunteers. PCVs country-wide can't stop talking about Crawford's account of life in Ecuador. The more I heard, the more I wanted to read the book. Before I knew it, my own curiosity had gotten the better of me and I found myself clicking the "Download Free" button on Crawford's Amazon.com page.

The bar was set high before I even cracked the cover. The book boasts endorsements by Chevy Chase and other lesser known sources calling Crawford's tale "the *Moby-Dick* [sic] of Peace Corps stories," "a sobering record of this world's complexity," and "what... Hunter S. Thompson would have written had he lived a life of service." In Amazon's review section, readers lauded the book for being "refreshing," "informative," a "great insight to human nature" and laugh-out-loud funny.

I sped through the book in 3 days; neither the writing nor the content is complex. *The Gringo* describes Crawford's entire Peace Corps journey: his initial interview in Washington D.C., his training in the tiny Sierra town of Olmedo, his turbulent 8 weeks in the coastal town of La Segua, and his eventual site change and remaining service in the jungle village of Zumbi. Additionally, Crawford recounts his ominous interactions with the people of La Segua and their supposed plot to kidnap him,

the constant frustrations and setbacks he faces in his new site, his turbulent relationship with his host family there, the debilitating prostate pains that leave him bedridden for part of his service, and his eventual success in procuring grant funding and building a school greenhouse in his community. All in all, it has everything you would expect from a Peace Corps memoir: adventure, sickness, disappointments, and successes. However, what it does not have is any scrap of respect for the country and culture that hosted him for two years or the organization that enabled him to work abroad. I'm surprised any writer or reader would soil the good name of *Moby Dick* and the works of Hunter S. Thompson by comparing them to *The Gringo*. If I had to describe this book in one sentence, I'd call it self-indulgent navel-gazing and shameless culture bashing masquerading as memoir.

Let's start with the culture bashing, of which there is plenty. Who, exactly, is Crawford's audience? If he's writing the book to a Peace Corps audience, there certainly isn't much novelty in his experience. Who among us hasn't suffered from debilitating sickness in our time here? Who among us hasn't been woken up by a counterpart or a host family member or a neighbor at 4:30am? Who among us hasn't experienced setbacks, disappointments, and frustrations during our service? Crawford's experience isn't new or original. It's the everyday life of Peace Corps volunteers worldwide. The difference is that Crawford didn't seem to experience much of the benefits that Peace Corps volunteers, especially those in Ecuador, usually experience—fulfilling relationships, professional or otherwise, with host country nationals, enriching cultural experiences, the thrill of learning and mastering a new language, and exciting travels. If Crawford is counting on former and current PCVs to buy up his book, he's overlooked the fact that for us his experiences are





ordinary and not the makings of a memoir

Of course, Crawford isn't writing specifically to Peace Corps volunteers; he's writing for the wider reading public. Despite writing for an audience that would naturally be unfamiliar with the ins and outs of Ecuadorian culture, he leaves out important cultural context that is integral for the reader's understanding of Ecuadorian people and his own experiences. Crawford chooses to portray Ecuadorians as people who mindlessly reproduce, rather than explaining that Ecuadorians view the family unit as the core of their society. Crawford chooses to describe Ecuadorians as a people who are generally vicious, money hungry, and cruel rather than explaining how poverty and stereotypes about Americans seen through movies and television affect how Ecuadorians view volunteers. Crawford chooses to portray all Ecuadorian men as violent cheats and all Ecuadorian women as promiscuous baby manufacturers rather than explaining how a *machista* culture reinforces a society's views on gender roles and family in general. (In fact, I dare you to find one woman in the book, American or Ecuadorian, who isn't treated as merely a source of derision or as a sexual object. Maybe Crawford isn't all that different from the Ecuadorian men he describes.) Given that Crawford provides absolutely no background regarding his knowledge of Spanish, I also doubt whether the conversations he relays really happened as he describes them. Unless Crawford was fluent in Spanish before coming to Ecuador, misunderstandings on the part of the author and his Ecuadorian counterparts are likely. How much of what was said did Crawford really understand? If the author had any intention of telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth—as a good memoir should do—then he would include cultural context. Instead, Crawford leaves it out so as to paint himself as the all-wise American volunteer with nothing but a heart of gold and who was terribly treated by those he was merely trying to help.

Maybe I shouldn't fault Crawford for the book's lack of cultural context. It doesn't seem that he ever got to know or understand Ecuadorian culture much at all. At one point, he describes Guayaquil as "one of Ecuador's richest cities" and claims Sier-rans refer to *Costeños* as monkeys because of "their huge consumption of bananas." Indeed, throughout the book and apparently his service, Grigsby "others" Ecuadorians even as he complains that Ecuadorians are constantly making him "the other." At one point, he complains that his host sister, who has a "*gringo* fetish," kept "flirting with [him] and would just happen to walk through the kitchen seminude at odd hours of the day when [he] was eating alone...." Did he ever have a real conversation with her about why this behavior made him uncomfortable? The book gives no indication that he did. At another point in the book, he criticizes his Ecuadorian counterparts for asking him for bus fare to and from a meeting in a neighboring town. He portrays his counterparts as swindlers, only interested in conning him out of a few bucks. But did he ever talk with his counterparts about his role in the community or the fact that despite his American heritage he was receiving no more than an average Ecuadorian living on minimum wage? In his two years of service, did he ever talk to Ecuadorians like real, feeling human beings? Maybe, but again, the book contains no evidence or indications that he did.

In addition to criticisms of Ecuadorian culture, Crawford fills the pages with endless self-indulgences and superficial self-reflections. The result is chapter after chapter of insufferable navel gazing. Chapter 29 is one of many examples; for sixteen unbearable pages, Crawford describes a bad trip on San Pedro and the horrifying discovery that the volunteers he's tripping with "aren't funny." I personally found this chapter so intolerable that I skipped it entirely. The chapters in between—detailing his 11 hour journey to have sex with a volunteer "he didn't care for" and his romantic misadventures, among





other things—aren't much better.

Finally, Crawford levels a number of contradictory criticisms at Peace Corps. As volunteers, we can make our own judgments about the inner workings of Peace Corps as an organization. However, Crawford's complaints don't match up. In one chapter, Crawford complains that Ecuadorians have become too accustomed to receiving an endless line of American volunteers, then criticizes Peace Corps for being "obsessed" with sustainability in the next chapter. Towards the end of the book, Crawford negates Peace Corps's reason for existence in Ecuador all together, asserting that "five decades, or two generations—or more—of Ecuadorians being treated to the worldly generosity of the white man" is ridiculous. (As a country with a booming immigrant population, when has the United States ever been considered the home of "the white man"?) In the end, it is unclear if Crawford truly feels that the Peace Corps should have a better exit strategy or if he's merely using this complaint as an excuse to gripe about how badly he was treated as a white man in a Latino country.

By the end of the book, the author's message is clear. As a volunteer, Crawford was always in the right, and as such, he will have his revenge on those ignorant, ungrateful, and unworthy Ecuadorians who mistreated and abused him for two years. Crawford practically states it himself in Chapter 26: "I fantasized about someday telling those people [his Ecuadorian counterparts] what I really thought of them after I'd stayed quiet like an abused child, bottling it up day after day because I was scared of the consequences." Empowered with first world opportunities and resources, that day has finally arrived for Crawford. This book is his tasteless and condescending way of telling his former Ecuadorian coworkers, host families, neighbors, students, and enemies exactly how he feels about them and the country they live in.

I know what some of you will say. "But wait a min-

ute, Kim. You're being unfair. The book is supposed to be humorous. Lighten up." If picking on the impoverished and the disadvantaged is funny, then this book is hilarious. But last I checked, no one can control where they are born and privileges are privileges because they're unearned.

If Crawford lived in Ecuador for over two years and never met a single kind, generous, and warm person, then we didn't live in the same country. Am I saying that the people Crawford describes don't exist? No. I'm only saying that describing an entire culture one way is unfair and shortsighted. As one of my PCV friends said, "Crawford never understood what Peace Corps meant, at home or in Ecuador." After reading *The Gringo*, I think he's exactly right.

KIM is down in Loja, befriending the rain, eating horse, and aching to read a good book after such a horrible memoir.

EDITOR'S NOTE: While reading *The Gringo*, I noticed that he mentioned he was the founder of *El Clima*. I remember hearing Parmer talk about *El Clima* pre-2000s, so I sent him an email, asking him about this authenticity. Parmer's response:

He actually did not [create *El Clima*]. When I got here, the *El Clima* had been suspended by a previous director. I was approached by some volunteers to see if I would approve of it getting started again and I was all for it. They wanted to know if I was wedded to the name '*El Clima*' because I had told them I was one of the founding members with Heather Hansen and Susan Morosoli in 1983. I told them they were welcome to change the name, but they decided to keep it. And he was the editor while he was here.

From a current editor to a past editor, why make the bold claim of being the founder? It would have been equally as cool if you would have written, "*El Clima* was dormant and I revitalized the greatest Ecuadorian quarterly magazine of all time." Why not write that? Be honest with your audience.



THE MANY FACES OF VOLUNTEER SUPPORT

BY PARMER HEACOX

MANAGING CROSS CULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS

Hello everybody. There are so many things I could write about right now, but this one topic is fresh in my mind because it was brought to me as an issue by volunteers and staff members have also grappled with how to handle volunteer relationships. We, in fact, sent out a survey about relationships with the design help of PCV Chloe Pete and RPCV Lori Black. We got 105 responses, indicating to us that this topic is important to people. By the way, the responses for the relationship survey outnumbered by a long shot the responses to the All Volunteer Survey in 2012. But that is another topic I will jump on at some point in the near future.

Recently, volunteers who have struggled with relationships in Ecuador have asked if we can better cover this in PST, asking us to be available to provide more support for volunteers in order to ward off potential challenges, for volunteers to better know how to handle challenges so that they can 1) improve the quality of their relationship, 2) know how to effectively end their relationship in a culturally safe and respectful manner and 3) better be able to complete their service.

We get into relationships for a whole variety of reasons and the survey points this out. Some people enjoy the companionship, some fall deeply in love, some like the perks of having a boyfriend or girlfriend, some enjoy regular sex. I'm not inclined to question motives and I'm happy to have been able to facilitate a number of marriages since I have been here as director. In fact, we have even made changes to our policy that enables couples to live together. I'm generally very supportive of relationships and still, I too have seen the impact of some of the not so successful relationships on our

program and on the lives of some volunteers. To that end, I'm hoping we can take the results of this survey and put it to some use in helping volunteers better manage cultural differences, to know how to deal with challenges, to know when to ask for help.

As somebody who is currently in a cross-cultural relationship, I am very aware of both the excitement and the challenges we face when we date and maybe fall in love with somebody from a different culture. In many ways, our cross-cultural relationships play out just the same as a relationship at home might, at least in the beginning. But as we grow more into the role of a couple, we may start to realize that there are subtle differences that can turn into big differences. Sometimes, most times, we can work this out. But that may not always be the case.

Talking about relationships is tricky and we run the risk of generalizing about Ecuadorian culture when trying to "train" people about how to be in a relationship during their service. Yet, statistically, we have had a high number and wide range of culturally-related issues come up in my time here. A number of those cases included violence. In a couple of these cases, the volunteer had to leave the country in order to remain absolutely safe. A fairly high number of respondents also indicated that their relationship had a real impact on their ability to serve as a volunteer. **There were a number of volunteers who felt they had been coerced into having sex when they did not want to and several volunteers mentioned having to deal with violence. Unfortunately, a high percentage of these individuals also said that they did not report the domestic abuse for a number of reasons but mostly relating**

to the fear that Peace Corps would either make them leave their site or leave the country. While all of these issues are concerning and perhaps not surprising, given the way the rumor mill works, I am concerned. Some of you may need some assistance and are not getting it (because you fear or mistrust us in some cases). At the end of the day, your mental health and well-being are very important for you to be happy and to be able to serve and make the most of your Peace Corps experience.

As a result, we are working with volunteers and staff to put together some training about cross-cultural relationships and we will be rolling it out during Omnibus 110 PST and during IST events. We are also working with staff so that they are potentially better prepared to support you in this area. And naturally, we will be working with the Peer Support Network so that they can also be in the loop and ready to be of assistance. To that end, I do want to provide some guidance to all of you, policy related, so that we can communicate better, avoiding the rumor mill, and enabling you to get assistance if you need it:

- **Reporting violence in a relationship does not mean you will have to move from your site or that you will be sent back to the United States.** This rarely happens and would only happen if, after talking to the volunteer in depth, it is agreed that the volunteer is at risk. Even then, our first

choice is to find a safe site for you. You should never forget that your safety comes first and nothing is worth risking your health or safety.

- **We just might be helpful!** Believe it or not, we've been dealing with situations involving volunteer adjustment for a long time.
- **It is okay to make mistakes and you shouldn't be embarrassed to ask for help!** As mentioned earlier, relationships are a tricky thing, even more so when crossing cultural boundaries. Most of us who have lived overseas have gone through it. So don't be embarrassed or afraid to ask for assistance, please.

The bottom line is that you are important as a volunteer. You support our mission. You support our program. And you have invested a great deal of your life and energy to be a volunteer. It is in our interest to support you to stay here. We think prevention is always the most effective, so we are going to try to bolster our cross-cultural training to help volunteers have healthy relationships, if they do choose to be in a relationship in Ecuador. And when we need to help you to respond to a situation of domestic violence or abuse, we really do want to help you work it out and find a solution that keeps you safe, healthy, and effective.

Country Director PARMER is in Quito, handling volunteer problems like a boss, keeping his door open for a quality chat, and playing with his dog.

