



Fall 2013

EL CLIMA

Peace Corps Ecuador

HASTA LUEGO

Dear Volunteers:

Wow, my time here is up and it doesn't seem completely real yet. This morning, Kristin, Shannon and Kerry left off a really nice memory book from some of you, and I've poured over the photos and notes with such emotion, reminding myself again how much I love my job and how much I have loved working with Peace Corps Ecuador. Sigh.... I will be heading out on November 23 with my spouse (yep, we did it) Aquiles and off to Peace Corps Peru. We're leaving here with a heavy load of emotions and so many good memories of Ecuador and of working with all of you.

I came in with Omnibus 103 and will just miss Omnibus 111. A part of me wants to be able to hang out here long enough to see them get off of the plane. I love that moment; big smiles, nervous eyes, expectations and a whole future ahead.... What I can tell you all is that you, Volunteers, really are what make this job so great. It is so nice to see you all grow and develop in this challenging role we put you in. And it is equally enjoyable to see you all do such good work and see the lights turn on in your heads when you realize that all those little things you do make a big difference, bigger than sometimes you will ever know. My biggest pleasure, having worked in Peace Corps for so long, is that I get to see the results long after Volunteers leave. You may have heard us say that you never know how you may affect one person. That is true and really important. But each time I take a look at our annual report and our project status reports, it is clear what impact you are having in each of your program areas. Never doubt yourselves... what you are doing is amazing.

I can't leave without mentioning how much I learn from you. I so enjoy the opportunities to talk with you in my office, in the field, or in the training center – and some of you have become pretty regular email conversationalist with me. Your ideas and thoughts carry me through all kinds of decisions and changes in both my work and in my life. You know, I'm the guy who grew up using a typewriter. Most of you have never used one and you can run circles around me with technology. This is so important today. Development work is changing and grassroots has technological extensions today that we never dreamed of. You not only have a world of information at your fingertips, you know how to access it. I'm overwhelmed and impressed by your abilities and your worldly perspectives. It is inspiring to see you put it to work and as I have learned from you, I have come more and more to believe in the old adage that you can teach an old dog, new tricks.

If I can leave you with a few suggestions and advice, let me start with keep up the good work and don't be hard on yourselves when things seem slow. It really does take 6 months to a year to get settled in, get your feet on the ground and build trust. All of that is part of the job.

Another piece of advice is to build a strong relationship with staff and in particular, your program staff. They work so hard to support you. You can trust staff. We sometimes make mistakes but when that happens, talk with them about it. There are so few situations that cannot be resolved when we work together. It is true that we must uphold policy but we all know that policy is in place for good reasons and all of us have to make a few minor adjustments to be a part of the Peace Corps. So don't let policy get in the way of your relationship with staff. They are doing their job just as you are doing yours.

Finally, and you've all heard this from me before, put on your anthropologist hats when sorting through all those cross cultural adjustments. Cross cultural understanding and good communication are the bedrocks of our work. Without these, our work will get nowhere and life will be much more challenging than it needs to be. When things are just not understandable, adjust that hat a little and look inward to consider why you think the way you do AND why something in particular is so challenging. You'll usually discover that once you realize why you believe what you believe, you can better accept that others think and do things differently. Somewhere along the way you and your new support network find a middle ground that works for you. Enjoy this experience. It really is the toughest job you will ever love – so cliché! But it is true.

Again, I have to sigh. There is so much I can still envision doing here but I have to let go. You are in really good hands with your new director, Alexis Vaughn and your new DPT, Greg Jacobs. They will take good care of you and take good care of them. We are, after all, all in this together.

I'm not going to say good-bye. Please do feel free to contact me anytime to say hi and when you travel to Peru, make sure you stop by. I should have the scoop on the best places to visit. Good luck to all of you and THANK YOU so much for being a part of this great experience I have had.

Con mucho cariño,
Parmer Heacox



EDITOR'S NOTE

It is with dissonance that I bring you this Fall 2013 edition of *El Clima*. A bittersweet moment because it will be the last edition published while Parmer Heacox and Joshua Cuscaden are with us in Ecuador, but exciting, nonetheless, because of the all the great volunteer stories that were submitted for this edition.

Unbeknownst to many, *El Clima* was started in early 1983 by PCVs Heather Hanson, Susan Morosoli, and Parmer Heacox. As a part of Omnibus 40, Parmer was an Agriculture Extension Volunteer serving his first two years in San Rafael Bajo near Baños where he worked in large animal husbandry, and his third year in Ambato where he worked in special education.

Since then, *El Clima* has grown into a mechanism for sharing the many different aspects of the volunteer adventure. This edition, volunteers gave accounts of their first hand experiences dealing with diversity, conquering boredom, learning from adversity, maintaining fitness, and sharing happiness.

I hope that you enjoy reading these stories as much as I did. I encourage you to contact those volunteers and express to them how reading about their volunteer journey has affected you, as well as contact Parmer wishing him the best in his future endeavors, and thanking him for starting the publication that 30 years later still continues to serve as a volunteer support tool!

Richard Castello

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Joshua's Farewell.....	Page 3
You've Adjusted to Ecuador When... ..	Page 4
9 Great Things About Serving in Ecuador ...	Page 4
Endorphins Make You Happy.....	Page 5
Why We "Second Goal" It	Page 6
News from Ibarra.....	Page 7
My Peace Corps Heroes	Page 8
The Avacado Thief: A Lesson in Diversity ...	Page 8
Support Group Corner	Page 9
Want to Join the Peer Support Network	Page 9
VAC Grant Recipients	Pages 10 & 11
7 Ways to Use Boredom	Page 11

JOSHUA'S FAREWELL

Hello dear Volunteers:

It is time for me to say goodbye. I leave November 7th with the great privilege of messing up a post from the very beginning. Yup. I am one of the folks opening up a PC program in Kosovo. It's a great challenge and opportunity for me, and I'm very excited about all the new things I shall experience. The first group of twenty Volunteers are set to arrive in the Spring, which means I need to get my act together and hire staff, find an office, arm wrestle the local police, have consecutive Sunday sack races, weather permitting. Interesting Kosovo fact: they are among the top three countries in the world with highest smokers per capita. Excellent.

And now to the less serious part (or more serious if it makes you more or less comfortable). Thank you for your service to Ecuador, the United States, and Peace Corps. It really is an inspiring thing you all are doing, and it truly has been an honor to work with you all. I know it (the inspiring part) may not seem that way at times (especially outhouse times), but your impact here will be both immediately visible to some and largely invisible to many, including you. It won't be until years later, perhaps, that the true impact of your presence will hit you and those whose lives you've touched. I carry my own PC experience with me every day, and although it is one of many things I have had the privilege to do, it remains a significant part of my life and always will.

So if you are passing through Kosovo one day (you know, take a wrong turn in Greece or Bosnia-Herzegovina and wham! You are in Kosovo!), please don't hesitate to contact me. By then, maybe, I can actually unseal the state secrets of my own Volunteer service which I can compare and contrast with your own PC stories. I'll bet you I'll win!

Good luck my friends.
Joshua Cuscaden



YOU'VE ADJUSTED TO ECUADOR WHEN...

...You grow vegetables and fruits, and then sell them all but do not eat any yourself.
...You decide to open the same kind of *tienda* as six other people on your street.
...You beep your horn to tell people that you are either going forward, or going to let the other person go. It is up to them to tell which one you mean.
...You eat rice, potatoes, and pasta with a side of bread for your meal.
...You drink coffee at night.
...Any herbs you put in your food is considered to be your vegetable intake for the day.
...The *Cumbia* shuffle is your best dance move.
...Your child is permanently attached to your back in some form, most likely with a blanket though.
...You eat peanut butter with foods like potatoes but gag at the thought of eating it on a sandwich with jelly or a banana.
...You play volleyball with a *fútbol* and in teams of three.
...You export cocoa and coffee beans, and import Hershey's and Nestle.
...You consider pasta sauce to be the same as ketchup.
...You consider guinea pigs as food, not pets.
...You have more brightly colored lights on and in your car than a Christmas tree.
...You buy a snack sized bag of chips but still have to pass it around your group of 20 friends.
...You drink from the same cup as your 20 friends as well.
...You keep the windows closed while riding in a hot, stuffy bus or car. The air outside might make you sick after all.
...You carry toilet paper with you because you never know when a public bathroom will have any.
...You arrive an hour late to your meeting and yet are still the first one..
...You do not return a call or message because you "ran out of *saldo*."
...You feel that everyone should listen to the latest music you have on your phone, too.
...No matter where you are or what you are doing, it is a must that you answer your phone.
...In your eyes, there is no waiting line; people are just standing around in a somewhat formal fashion.
...You prefer to give out ten pennies instead of one of the many dimes you have in your pocket.
...The bank gives out 10s and 20s but you cannot ever make change that high.

Written by Nicolina Trifunovski

9 GREAT THINGS ABOUT SERVING IN ECUADOR



We often take for granted just how great it is to be serving in Ecuador. Great weather, abundant amenities, and solid infrastructure are not conditions that Peace Corps Volunteers generally serve under (or at least it isn't what comes to mind when you think Peace Corps).

So the next time someone asks you about your country of service, you can share with them these 9 great things about serving in Ecuador:

- 1. Growth spurts.** You became a giant as soon as you arrived in the country.
- 2. Popularity.** When was the last time that you were the most interesting person in your community?
- 3. Cheap Food.** 3lbs of fish for \$3! What's the catch? (I know, corny right)
- 4. Fresh Food.** It's very likely that your chicken dinner was crowing only a few hours before you ate it. (You can tell people you ate your alarm clock)
- 5. Spanish.** A language that is rapidly growing into America's second tongue, although it's very likely that the world will be speaking Mandarin by the end of your service.
- 6. Wealth.** You likely have more money than most of the residents in your community. Enjoy it while it lasts because once your return to the U.S. it could be ramen for a while.
- 7. Internet.** There are still extremely rural parts of the world without access to this resource, like West Virginia.
- 8. Assets** Just the fact that you are an English speaking American makes you valuable to your community. And to think that you had been doing this for free your entire life.
- 9. People.** Ecuadorians are very kind and friendly people. Most won't tell you how poor your Spanish is, or get angry because you used up all their lukewarm water. Then again, it's a bit intimidating to yell at a giant.

Written by Richard Castello

ENDORPHINS MAKE YOU HAPPY

A very wise, very blonde law student once said: "Exercise gives you endorphins. Endorphins make you happy. Happy people just don't shoot their husbands!" As a PCV, I feel like I can just replace the word "husband" with any number of other people in my life: counterparts, host family, PC staff, a stranger catcalling me on the street, or that neighbor who just refuses to turn off his *reggaeton*.

Exercise, indeed, is a stress reliever and even though I sometimes wish I had a punching bag to relieve some frustrations, other forms of exercise can accomplish the same thing. I exercise more now as a PCV than I did before I came to Ecuador, not just because I have the time, but also because I feel better afterwards.

Here is my problem: I can't exercise the way I used to, doing the things I want to do. Back in the states, I loved to swim laps and do hot yoga. Here, my options are pretty limited. Even if I enjoyed jogging (which I absolutely do not), there is nowhere for me to do it in my little campo community where I can walk from one end to the other of our only road in less than 5 minutes. Sadly, there is no *bailoterapia* nor is there a gym nearby. Forget about a pool or yoga studio. So, to borrow Peace Corps' favorite word, I had to be *flexible!* Here are a few things I found that I could do in the 5' X 2' space available to me in my bedroom:

1. **Yoga:** It's not heated, per se, but at the height of the afternoon I would say my cement room with a tin roof does get a bit steamy. Even so, I find that the stretching is relaxing and holding certain postures is certainly strengthening. For a more cardiovascular workout I increase the speed of my flows.

2. **Jogging in place:** It sounds dull, and it is, but it's also very effective. I recommend putting on an episode of your favorite TV show and by the time you have finished a 21 minute episode of *Modern Family*, you might not remember you were even exercising! Add in 1-2 minute periods of high knees or jumping jacks to mix it up. You can also use a jump rope for an even more intense workout.

3. **Burpees:** I can only do a few before my face turns *bien rojita*, but after a few weeks of regular practice you can really see the difference in your strength and endurance. Jump up and reach your hands high, down to a plank position, do a push up, and jump back up with whatever strength you have left to a standing position.

4. **Prison cell workouts:** Prisoners and I have this in common: we have not much to do, and lots of time to kill. All the classic small-space workouts apply: crunches and leg lifts, pushups, lunges, etc.

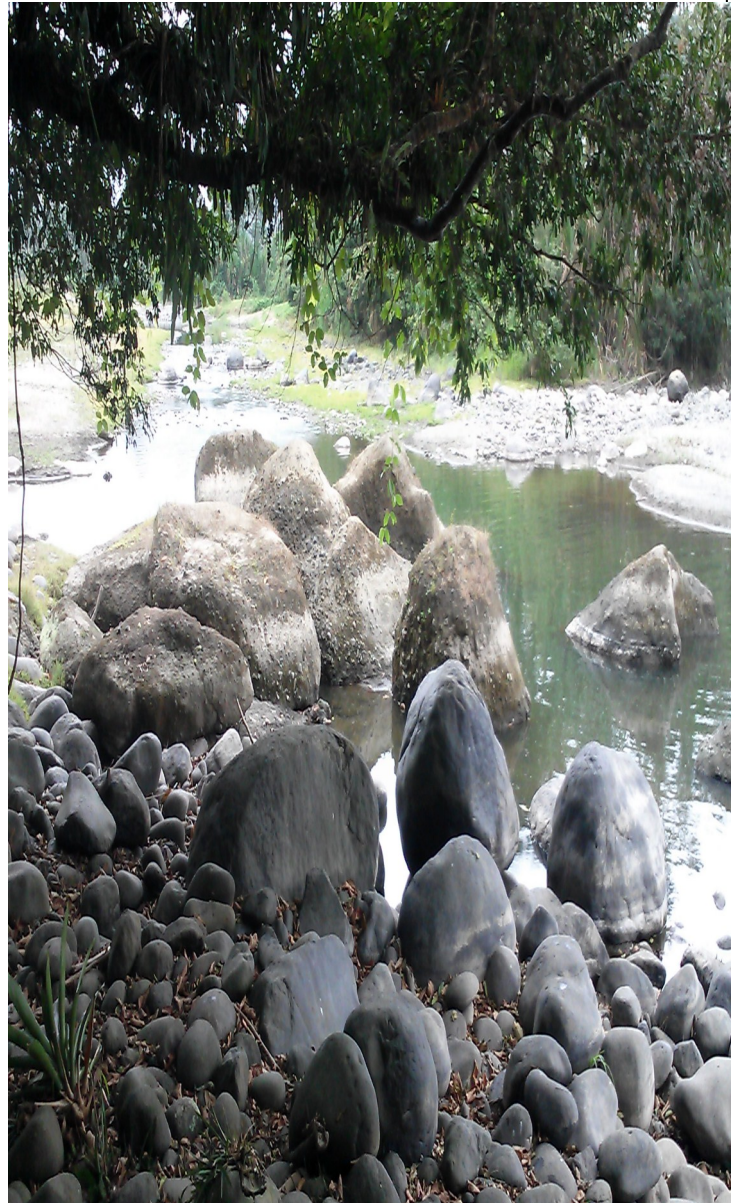
5. **Resistance bands:** You can buy them or make them yourself with a bungee cord. Mine have an extra appendage that I can shut in my door to keep them in place. You can always challenge yourself by increasing reps or resistance.

6. **Dance party:** Who needs *bailoterapia* when you have an iPod? Putting on my favorite jams (and thereby blocking out my neighbor's *reggaeton*) and dancing it out for 20 minutes works up a sweat and gives me an excuse to listen to terrible pop music. Ke\$ha, anyone? (Hint: Even a 10 minute dance party on a chilly, overcast day is the perfect way to work yourself up to taking a cold shower.)

Aside from being good for your physical health, exercise can help improve your mental state and relieve stress. If you are lucky enough to have a gym nearby, or a safe area where you can run, or a local soccer team to join then *siganomás!* However, for the rest of us struggling to find space and motivation to exercise, hopefully the above-mentioned options are helpful. Remember: always warm-up, drink plenty of water, and start slow! I would prefer not to have Nurse Kelly calling me in one month to inform me that this little column has been the cause of several sprains and strains.

Now let your endorphins flow!

Written by Dani Garcia



WHY WE “SECOND GOAL” IT

It didn't take long for me to realize that my host brothers, 8 and 16, like movies, so I decided, in my overzealous quest to have education play a bigger role in their lives, that we might as well try to watch movies that are informative. There was not a moment of hesitation before the first film came to mind: *Schindler's List*.

Being that Peace Corps' second goal is, verbatim, "Helping promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served," I might have been lying to myself by claiming I was "working," or upholding this goal when I got a crack copy of the holocaust movie in Guayaquil for fifty cents and sat down to watch it with the 16-year-old. After all, it's not even a remotely an American story.

But then again, with our massive economy--and film industry--we can basically buy any story and make it (feel like it's) ours. This may be more of an American *Jew* experience, but as one, growing up, I can certainly say that the holocaust felt like it was *our* story.

I feel that way because I was bombarded with *American* literature on the subject as a child (willingly--I found the subject fascinating); admittedly, the fact that my grandparents were refugees sprinkles in a pinch of justification, but it was the same for other kids at my synagogue whose families arrived even a century earlier.

Alright, this is probably true for Jewish children around the world, making this more of a "Jewish" than "American" cultural phenomenon. Perhaps the fact that we talk about it was exemplified best by holocaust survivor and philosopher Emil Fackenheim, who insisted that not giving Hitler a posthumous victory was the 614th (11th) commandment. He was Canadian.

(As a quick aside, does anyone else feel a bit icky that we say "American" when referring to only ourselves, despite the fact that we're living in a country in the Americas?)

So, what it comes down to is that we Jews are big into remembering. About the holocaust, we constantly are telling each other to "never forget." But why?

In addition to "never forget," I've often heard the phrase "never again," which is a bit unfortunate if you consider that there have been a considerable number of racially based genocides since 1945, so it's not entirely clear what we're saying and to whom.

And if we're talking about why I, personally, felt the need to force the holocaust into my host brother's life, there was some selfishness at play that is all too ironic. I think part of me wanted to say, "Look at what my people have been through." If only he had said to me, "Look at where you're living right now."

But, perhaps the not terrible part of me was trying to say, "Never forget," not about the holocaust specifically, but about the past in general. "Promoting a better understanding" means education, and a popular component of education is history, which aids us with understanding where we are today.

For example, many people in my site talk about how the politicians don't do anything. Regardless of whether

there's any truth to that, I do speculate that people are frustrated that their environment isn't "developing" faster, especially now that there are so many available mediums--movies being one--that put much higher standards of display right in front of them.

Historical education isn't an exact science, but it can at least give us an idea of why things are the way they are. An Ecuadorian could learn about the centuries of exploitation and possibly feel more dignified about certain discrepancies between here and the United States.

Many adults in my site, though, seem to have left school before the sixth grade, so it's quite possible that many have no idea of any possible reason that people in movies have so many more amenities than themselves. Without any connection to the past, the discrepancies may just seem like accidents or luck.

Living without any understanding of where we we came from, I imagine, could be much like living in an abyss. It's no wonder that central components of many religions are their explanations for the universe.

So, what I'm getting at is that for me, "second-goaling it" is about forming connections, whether it be between people who are currently on this planet or not. I will educate people about the American people of the United States, but only because it's part of a larger goal that is more important to myself. This is why I watched *Schindler's List* with my brother.

Oh, and in case you're wondering, my host brother did the farthest thing from say, "Look at where you're living right now." He watched attentively, eyes glued to the screen, cringing but not turning his head from Amon Goeth's terrible offenses, with what I detected to be an immense interest in the world around him. He sat with me by the computer after the film so I could show him endless photos of the real life atrocities. Unwavering in his patience, he sat by me until I said I was ready to go to sleep, at which point he told me it was a beautiful movie, one he'd never forget.

Written by Zach Borenstein



NEWS FROM IBARRA



What made my host family decide to welcome a PCV into their home? I'm sure that it was not an easy decision. There were family members who thought this was a terrible idea. After all, we are foreigners, certainly not family, maybe even dangerous. But reason prevailed and they find that they have a volunteer living with them; a volunteer who often does not understand their customs and who has some pretty strange customs of her own. For 109'ers here in Ecuador, we have survived the 6 months. Some of us have decided to move on and get our own apartments, some are still trying to decide, and some of us are happy where we are. For all of us, from the beginning, we had ideas of how this would work, hopes about what might happen; certainly illusions and maybe even dreams about who the family would be and what it would be like living with them.

My fellow 109-ers have told me more than once that I won the lottery of families. They are right. My family is modern, young, professional, educated, caring and active. My host dad, Rhovani, is actually 3 years younger than my own son, who is 41. Rhovani calls me "hija". Rhovani's mother, who is 5 years younger than I, calls me "nieta". I have a 15-year-old brother, Rodrigo and an 11-year-old sister, Domenica. And of course, there is my host mom, Yadira.

From the point of view of the family, I'm sure that they also had ideas, hopes, dreams and some illusions. I asked them why they took in a volunteer. Yadira told me that when she was younger (the daughter of 2 teachers), they had had exchange students in their home and it was a wonderful experience. She wanted to share that with her children. Also, maybe the volunteer would speak English with the family and help them practice speaking. She told me that they had discussed it and decided to treat the volunteer like another child in the family. Imagine their surprise when I showed up! Older than anyone else.

On an intellectual level, I realized that there would be adjustments to make, compromises to find, and some difficult moments, to be sure. But until I was actually part of the family, I didn't realize just how much effort that might take: some days more, some days less.

One of the first adjustments we had to make was over the food. Here in Ecuador we eat a lot for *almuerzo*, including a lot of potatoes and rice. I ate what I could and left the rest. One day Yadira told me that Rhovani, my papi, was upset with me. The "other children" had to clean their plates and I wasn't doing that. The "other" children. After some discussion, we decided that I would fill my own plate with what I could eat and leave a clean plate. Easy problem; easily solved. Not all problems have been that easy, but with discussion we have solved them to some degree of satisfaction for all. (I am still chuckling over the "other children" thing.)

My point, and you will be happy to know that there is a point to this, is the following: Those of you who are the 110-ers here in Ecuador, and who are new with your families, I hope that you keep in mind that the families are probably struggling, too, to make this work. They do not have the same challenges that we do, but there are challenges, just the same. Remember that sometimes we even have issues with our families in the US, the ones we have lived with our entire lives, the ones who share our culture and habits and customs. If we approach the new situation as an adventure and not take ourselves or the situation too seriously, it will probably be easier on everyone.

On a final note, I designated Wednesday as English Day. It is a very quiet day in my house, with me speaking English and them not speaking to me. On the plus side, if things get too noisy with too much conversation, all I have to do is say "English Day" and peace is restored.

Written by Linda Smalley



MY PEACE CORPS HEROES

During my last excursion, I was sitting around a campfire drinking beers with other PCV's. Starting out, our conversations focused on how much we wanted another flavor of beer besides Pilsner. As the night progressed we began chatting like little schoolgirls about our Peace Corps experience. Throughout the night I began to notice that if a passerby were to overhear our stories they might think we were one-upping each other. Topics included: who had the most projects, who had an Ecuadorian girlfriend (the winner), who can drink the most Pilsners; you know guy stuff. Fortunately, none of us thought of it as one-upping. It was not a competition; it was only three PCV's having a long deserved talk (in English).

Now do not mistake my words, competitions can be great. They lead to Payton Manning throwing +2100 yards in only 6 games (Go Broncos, boy do I miss football) or they put Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin on the moon first (Go USA). But, competitions also make one person the last to be chosen in dodgeball (sorry Todd Hemelstad).

This can also happen in Peace Corps. Competitions can help motivate some volunteers and it can cause some people to feel like they are losing. However, the way I see it, all Peace Corps volunteers are winners. Some are focused on 2nd goaling it all over Ecuador. Some want to accomplish personal goals. These volunteers are the ones that I would like to call My Peace Corps Heroes.

I would like to first start off by saying all of you are My Peace Corps Heroes. If I had more than 700 words, and I knew all of you, everyone would be in this article. But, I do not know everyone and only have 700 words. Sorry!

Nine months of Peace Corps service has taught me one thing, Peace Corps is about growing personally. This includes: reading, learning a new skill, completing goals, and learning about yourself. Some volunteers are taking this to the max and this is why they are My Peace Corps Heroes. My first Hero hails from Cuenca and her name is Lesley Meza (108-YAF). Lesley learned how to swim while she was in Ecuador and this is why she is one of my heroes. Swimming is a life skill that she will be able to use for the rest of her life and maybe even teach to her children. It is amazing to see volunteers that improve their lives during their service.

The next three volunteers live in the Loja cluster. In nine months of service, Matt Wood (109-NRC) has read more than 60 books. If he continues at this pace he will finish 180 books! Some volunteers (myself included) will not read that much in their entire life. Imagine the amount of knowledge he is going to possess by the end of service. Watch out Trivial Pursuit, here comes Matt Wood. Goals are great for Peace Corps Volunteers and one PCVL (Caroline Baylor-105-NRC) has nearly reached her goal of climbing 10 mountains in Ecuador. She has 9 down and is planning on finishing up on Cotopaxi. I recommend everyone cheer her on with a Facebook message. Last, but definitely not least, is Ali O'Neal (109-NRC) who is volunteering in Vilcabamba. (I would like to say that it's a miracle that Ali is doing anything in Vilcabamba,

because if I was there all I would only eat the amazing food they have and go hiking). But, getting back on topic, Ali is learning how to play the guitar. I cannot even play a flute-a-phone and Ali is learning the guitar. Way to go Ali.

On top of all the neat things these Heroes are mastering, they are still working on Peace Corps' three goals. Peace Corps is about growing as a human being and helping the less fortunate. If it is a competition, we are all winners.

If you liked this article, send me a Facebook message, because I can do a new one every *El Clima* with new Heroes. If you hated it, please do not hurt my feelings with a Facebook message. Send me an email instead: devin.yeoman@gmail.com.

Written by Devin Yeoman

THE AVOCADO THIEF: A LESSON IN DIVERSITY

Audre Lorde once said, "It is not our differences that divide us, it is our inability to recognize, accept and celebrate those differences," and I for one believe this is so true. No matter how uncomfortable the subject of race, ethnicity, skin privilege, sexism, and gender inequality is, we must address it. Being a part of the Peace Corps has shined light on Audre Lorde's words more than ever.

Coming from Atlanta, Georgia, where the population of African Americans is more than half, I never actually felt discriminated against due to the color of my skin. Indeed, I knew racial tension still existed around the world and in parts of the United States, but as the world moved forward into a more global community, racism was becoming a thing of the past. To sum it up, racism was being seen as whack!

On a regular day in my community two other young ladies and I decided to go in a store to do some shopping. A store employee thought I needed to be fiercely watched and decided to "escort" me (without me knowing of course, or so she thought), around the store. Wherever I went, she went. Apparently, I looked like an avocado thief because I noticed that she was not following the other girls who were the stereotypical Americans.

Noticing that the avocado watcher was following me, I decided to go down every aisle in the store. I walked really slowly at times and then suddenly sprinted in the store. She eventually concluded that I was crazy, and probably too crazy to steal any of her precious avocados. She then went back to the front of the store.

Before coming to Ecuador, I truthfully didn't think the color of my skin would have such an impact on my Peace Corps experience. I find a great number of Ecuadorians not as interested in me as they are in other Peace Corps volunteers. However, I am taking this experience as a way to help people learn about how diverse America is.

Written by MiaJenell Carroll

PEACE CORPS ECUADOR SUPPORT GROUPS

VAC

VAC is a liaison between the Peace Corps Staff and PCVs. Its purpose is to enhance productive problem solving and communication between PCVs and staff. Representation is by omnibus and program, and members are elected by their peers during PST. They meet with the Country Director 3 times a year to discuss issues brought to them by their constituents. VAC sells calendars and t-shirts as a way to raise Money, which it then gives out as small grants to PCVs in the field once a year.

SPEQTRUM

SPEQTRUM is Ecuador's LGBTQ support group. It is comprised of self-identified lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and queer PCVs as well as allies. We meet quarterly and are focused on providing support and friendship among LGBTQ PCVs and providing a safe space to discuss LGBTQ challenges while serving in Ecuador. Further, we aim to train Peace Corps staff and volunteers on potential issues that LGBTQ volunteers face to promote sensitivity and a supportive environment. For more information, feel free to email us at speqtrum.pc.ecuador@gmail.com. Also, feel free to join our Facebook group!!

FREE

What is FREE? It is a working diversity group that allows its members to offer support to one another. FREE is an acronym that stands for Fomentando Relaciones Étnicas y Éticas. Our mission is to promote understanding, respect, and acceptance of the ethnic and religious differences that exist within the Peace Corps Ecuador community and the country we serve. During training, we work with staff and volunteers to address the different needs of volunteers that arise from belonging to a specific ethnic or religious minority group. FREE was formed by volunteers serving in Omnibus 106 when they realized there was a need for a diversity support group. With the permission and support of the Country Director, FREE was born. If you have any questions about FREE or are interested in joining our quarterly meetings, please send us an email at pccuadorfree@gmail.com.

PSN

PSN stands for Peer Support Network. It's a network of PCVs who are committed to providing support to the PCV population. There are many issues that come up throughout a PCV's service, and a lot of volunteers would rather talk to a peer about them than to PC staff. Whether it's brainstorming, planning, or venting, PSN is a network of PCVs who enjoy and are trained to lend an ear to a PCV in need.

WANT TO JOIN THE PEER SUPPORT NETWORK?



PSN is now accepting nominations for 2014-2015!

How does it work?

PCVs nominate other PCVs by **December 1, 2013**.

Nominees are contacted immediately and must submit an application by **December 20, 2013**.

PSN members are chosen based on their qualifications and applications, as well as availability and regional location by **January 10, 2014**.

Because supporting other volunteers is fun!!

Keep an eye out for nomination forms via email!

Questions? Contact PSN at ecuadorpsn@gmail.com or Lauren Wagner at 0981472893

VAC GRANT RECIPIENTS

VAC is proud to announce the passing of a successful grant season!

VAC grants serve as a small source of funding to kick start or enhance sustainable projects in your community (grants are awarded at a maximum of \$100). VAC raises money for grants through t-shirts and calendar sales.

This year we received 20 applications for grants. It was wonderful reading about all the different PCV projects. PCVs applied from the coast, sierra, and oriente, which made for a very diverse list of projects.

We would like to recognize the following applicants who received full or partial grants for April 2013:

Lindsay McGeehon, NRC 105 – Grant to build a greenhouse and composting system, give environmental classes, and to print an environmental education manual for teachers at the schools where she teaches in Archidona, Napo.

Heather Parker, NRC 107 – Grant to buy materials to start a school garden and hold an Earth Day event to initiate the project and begin teaching the children and their mothers about gardening and nutrition in Sigsipamba, Imbabura.

Amanda Brinton, NRC 107 – Grant for her community of Campo Cocha, Napo to build trash and recycling bins to be placed strategically around the community to teach people to separate recyclables, organic and inorganic waste.

Peter Bobbs, TEFL 107 - Grant for his colegio in Machala, El Oro to build a giant Scrabble board to be used during classes and at the after-school English club so the students will have a fun way to practice and learn English.

Nikki Rowley, TEFL 107 - Grant to fund a workshop day with her English teachers in Cuenca, Azuay to make classroom materials they can share and use among themselves to improve classroom methodology.

Chloe Pete, CH 106 – Grant to start a women's income generation project in Chalaguan, Chimborazo making traditional Kichwa jewelry while also teaching the women business skills.

Cherith Chapman, NRC 107 – Grant to print informational tourism brochures to place in the tourism information center in Bucay, Guayas. The brochures will also be used to teach the locals how to distribute them at a tourism center.

Rich Flowerday, NRC 107 - Grant to buy a router to make new wooden signs to promote community tourism in Bucay, Guayas.



We would like to recognize Cherith Chapman and Rich Flowerday for the exceptional work they are doing in their site. Cherith and her husband Rich are business volunteers helping to develop tourism in the Canton of Bucay, in the province of Guayas. They received funding for two grant projects and acted very quickly to use that funding for their tourism/map project to promote tourist attractions.

Rich and Cherith assembled a group of 11 business owners who all work in tourism, and helped facilitate conversations with them about projects they could do together. The group applied for a VAC grant to help fund the creation of 1,000 tourism fliers for their community. Each of the 11 business owners chipped in some money as well. The fliers they created have a tourist map and the contact information for the 11 participating business owners.

On the weekend of June 14th and 15th, the group set up a table at the Tourist Information Center (which previously had never provided any tourist information) to distribute the fliers. Cherith and Rich reported that about 15 tourist cars each day stopped and asked for information. The group also made a schedule so that each weekend from now on, a different business owner will take responsibility for distributing the fliers.

When asked how the project is going, Rich and Cherith responded very positively. They say that the group is very proud of their work and keeps coming back to meetings week after week. They have been planning for this project for a long time and are excited to see the final product.

Like all PCV projects, Cherith and Rich did experience challenges. It took a long time to identify who was really interested in helping the group (and not just saying so). Rich and Cherith also had to budget their own resources to be able to get to/from the meetings and stay in constant contact with the participants. They also say that running efficient meetings was a challenge because people often got off topic or did a lot of complaining, but they eventually learned how to get the group refocused and on task.

(continued on page 11...)

(VAC Grant Recipients...continued from page 10)

Cherith says she also had to learn how to communicate in “Ecu-style” in order to improve attendance at meetings. She learned when to send initial invitations (Monday before the meeting) and when to send reminders (the morning of the meeting) and who to call and who to text. Cherith also says, “I have become more confident because I had to. I was petrified to organize such meetings and to stand up and talk in my mediocre Spanish, but they kept coming to meetings so I thought something must be going ok.” She credits the relationships she built in the first 9 months in site for enabling her to do successful work with this group of business owners.

Cherith says that one of the most positive results of this project so far is that the group seems to still be interested and excited about their project. They continue to show up for meetings and they are learning that as a group they can do many things they could not do as individuals. They are realizing they can take responsibility for their lives and are proud things are changing.

When asked to share any funny stories regarding their project, Cherith shared “One time I had to borrow a bike to go to a meeting... Luckily I left plenty early because I ran into a cow or a bull (not sure which....it had horns!) in the road and I thought it was coming after me so I spent 30 minutes trying to get up the guts to pass it. I made it to the meeting just in time and the campo folks thought it was quite funny that I was scared of the cow, of course! I got head butted by a sheep a few months before so I didn’t want a second encounter with an even bigger animal!”



Thank you to Cherith and Rich for their great work and quick feedback about how their grant project is going. We look forward to highlighting a few more grant recipients and their projects in the next issue of El Clima.

VAC would also like to thank all applicants for their submissions this year. It is clear that PCVs all over Ecuador have great ideas and are undertaking a huge variety of meaningful projects. Please be sure to buy VAC t-shirts and calendars to support VAC grants for the coming year. If you have any questions about VAC grants, t-shirts, or calendars please contact your VAC representative!

7 WAYS TO USE BOREDOM TO YOUR ADVANTAGE



Every Peace Corps Volunteer goes through periodic bouts of boredom. Those times often cause me to question my decision to join the Peace Corps and to think whether my time could be better spent elsewhere (meaning the U.S.)

I recently accepted that boredom is part of the growth experience and that service is much better off because of it. There is as much potential for development in these moments of boredom as there is during moments of service activity. Of course, the key is using this time productively.

Here are 7 ways to use boredom to your advantage:

1. **Read** a book, a newspaper, a magazine, or even a dissertation, but now is as good a time as any to catch up on those reads you’ve been meaning to.
2. **Write** a letter to your mom, brother, grandma, friend, or teacher thanking them for writing the recommendation letter that got you into this mess, or saying how much you love them.
3. **Daydream** about the great things that you hope to achieve one day and how you hope to achieve them. This was often where the greatest achievers in history started.
4. **Reflect** on the positive things about your service, what you’ve learned so far, and the powerful relationships that you’ve made.
5. **Meditate** by completely clearing your mind of thoughts and emotions, while focusing on deep breathing. This is also great for relieving stress.
6. **Move** your body by taking a long walk, going for a run, or jumping rope. Use this time to treat your body to some fitness.
7. **Connect** with your friends and family back home. Skype, Facebook, e-mail, and other social media have made it easier to stay connected with family even though you’re on the other side of the equator. Why not try sending one of those letters that you wrote?

Written by Richard Castello

