

SOMA

gusoma (v.) : to read



STORIES | OPINIONS | MESSAGES | ART

FEATURING

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF CYCLING IN RWANDA

BY CASEY TEMANSON, EDUCATION 4

BEAUTIFUL CYANGUGU: RWANDA'S HIDDEN GEM

BY CLAIRE BROSNIHAN, HEALTH 4 & TIMOTHY PRESLEY, EDUCATION 3 RPCV

POETRY: THE OTHER SIDE

BY LUKE SMITH, EDUCATION 4

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Contributors

Casey Temanson is an Education 4 Volunteer who likes bikes, holding Rwandan babies, and not eating meat. He used to be Vietnamese. He became a sociologist from C.U. Boulder. Now he lives in Rutsiro District in his 8 room mansion.

Claire Brosnihan is a Health and Community Development Volunteer currently serving in Rusizi District, Rwanda in a convent with six nuns. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, hiking, and trying to fight the losing battle of keeping her shoes acceptably clean for Rwandans.

Megan Haggerty Foster was a Health 3 PCV from Oregon. Her site was Kitabi in Nyamagabe District, right outside of the rain forest. She likes macaroni and cheese filled packages, taking an excessive number of pictures, and wandering.

Timothy Presley was an Education Volunteer serving in Rusizi District. He spent his spare time tending to his adopted children: his jalapeno garden.

Luke Smith is an Education 4 Volunteer from Missouri. He studied English at a really cruddy state school. He currently lives in the Rusizi District with his wife, the most beautiful, magnanimous, generous, and voluptuous woman he's ever had the undeserved honor to know. He proudly serves as the Secretary General of SOMA.

The Peace Corps Rwanda STOMP Team includes: Jacqui Stewart Bah, Beth Braaksma, Claire Brosnihan, Dan Kieselstein, Bob Viglietta, Joey Anchondo, Tamika Honeysucker, Christina Titus, Judi Stalter, Sarah Olsen, Betsy Dewey, Alex Whitcomb, Lauren Wright, Miranda Hyslop-Garza, Dametreea Carr, Justin McDonald, and Cait Hughes.

The Peace Corps Rwanda Peer Support Network includes: Judi Stalter, Elisabeth Turner, Luke Smith, Ashanty Cruz, Christina Titus, Todd Laudino, and Colleen Berger.

In This Issue

STORIES

The Ups and Downs of Cycling in Rwanda.....	Pg 4
Health 3 COS.....	Pg 16
Beautiful Cyangugu: Rwanda's Hidden Gem.....	Pg 21

OPINIONS

Luke's Book Corner.....	Pg 9
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MESSAGES

STOMPING Out Malaria in Rwanda:	
 Why you should care and What you can do.....	Pg 7

ART

The Other Side.....	Pg 28
Power Playlist.....	Pg 31

The Ups and Downs of Cycling in Rwanda

By Casey Temanson, Education 4

Riding bicycles in Rwanda is not easy. I've learned this pretty much every time I've taken my U.S. government issued steed out for a ride. I'm in Rutsiro District where the imisozi are steep and plentiful. Hailing from Colorado, where mountains and elevation are a part of our daily lives, I figured riding in Rwanda wouldn't be much different. I was wrong. Cycling in Rwanda is difficult for a multitude of reasons, which I have been learning buhoro buhoro.

One of the main reasons that bicycling in the land of a thousand hills is difficult, is that we simply don't have the nutritional amenities that we have in the states. There are no bars, gels, or chews to grab at the nearby iduka. We don't have any fancy drink mixes that help us komera. We have biscuits. And we have lukewarm Fanta; two items that would be near the bottom of my list if I were in the sweet, sweet land of independence.

Another reason why riding bikes here is birakomeye: Peace Corps rides.



Now don't get me wrong. I greatly appreciate having the ability to borrow a bike for two years, but you're not gonna see Lance on any of the bikes we have to choose from at the Case any time soon. They all seem to have multiple ibibazos that can be quite difficult to gusana once you're at your site. And sometimes you find some of these problems once you've biked yourself 5 miles from your house. Ego ko.

Also, it's not culturally acceptable to wear shorts. So that sucks.

But the main reason why cycling here is not for the faint of heart is simply that Rwanda is one of the most geographically intense countries to ride bikes in, maybe on the planet. It is truly world class cycling here, which is why people like Jock Boyer (first American to ride in le Tour de France) have invested time and money in Rwandan cycling, why Tom Ritchey helped start Project Rwanda, why there is a Tour of Rwanda, why there is a documentary about the Rwandan cycling team (Rising From Ashes), and why I have been offered some of those most humbling experiences on a bicycle that I have ever experienced.

To give you an idea of the extremes of long (ish) distance riding here, I decided last break to ride from my inzu to Gisenyi, basically along the Congo-Nil Trail (from near Kibuye). Google maps told me about 40 miles, which I thought ntakibazo. The next 4.5 hours of my life would prove to be some of the hardest on a bicycle. After 43 miles with 4,100 feet of climbing, 4 fantas, 1 pack of biscuits (Nice), and 1 plate, I made it to my dorm bed in Gisenyi, tired and defeated.

. I stayed for 2 nights before returning to



site, which involved 5,600 feet of climbing, 5.5 hours in the saddle, and a similar amount of food and Fantas.

Cycling in Rwanda is a great way to see a lot of this country. It's excellent exercise and the abana are good motivational fuel when stale crackers aren't cutting it. But if you plan on going out for a long ride, be prepared. Rwanda can beat you and your mediocre PC igare up. If interested, check out Project Rwanda, volunteer with the cycling team in Musanze, go watch the Tour of Rwanda, or come watch Rising From Ashes with me once I finally get my hands on it.

Check out these sites for more information on cycling:

Official Site of Team Rwanda | <https://teamrwandacycling.org/>

Rising from the Ashes Documentary | <http://risingfromashesthemovie.com/>

Official Site of the Tour of Rwanda | <http://en.tourofrwanda.com/>

STOMPING Out Malaria in Rwanda: Why you should care and What you can do

By Claire Brosnihan, Health 4

You've heard about malaria. You know it's a problem in Rwanda. But maybe you're convinced malaria isn't a problem at your site. Maybe you don't know much about it. Or maybe you want to help combat malaria in Rwanda, but you're not sure where to start. Luckily, that's what the STOMP Rwanda Team is here for!

Malaria is a problem in every single district, and Rwanda is currently working towards eliminating the disease from the country. Malaria is a very costly, yet preventable disease. Malaria is an ideal issue for Peace Corps Volunteers to work on because there's a lot of room for cross-sector collaboration, and there are very real, very effective steps that we as volunteers can take to reduce the toll of malaria in Rwanda. (Encourage proper net usage and care! Promote early testing and treatment!). It is possible to eliminate malaria from Africa in our lifetime. As a PCV in Rwanda, you have the opportunity to be part of the solution to one of the world's biggest international public health challenges.

Sometimes it can be a little intimidating. Maybe you don't know the right vocabulary, or don't have the time to create malaria lesson plans. We get that. That's why STOMP Rwanda is working on making it easier than ever to plan and implement anti-malaria activities. Every Super Region now has a team of volunteers ready to provide you with ongoing training and a malaria kit filled with resources to help all PCVs put on successful events. We have translated a lot of the vocabulary into Kinyarwanda, and we have access to a ton of lessons that make putting on a malaria event a snap. You can work with your Regional Malaria Volunteers to plan events and get support; if we're available we can even come to your site to help you with your activity.

So what can you do?

- Host a Malaria Day, Carnival or Parade at your school or in your community. Work together with other people in your region to put it on at every site in your region; there's strength in numbers!
- Add malaria lessons to your GLOW/BE Camp
- Get bed nets for your community using grant funding or working with the STOMP Rwanda Team
- Incorporate a malaria lesson into your classes
- Conduct a community survey about malaria
- Paint an anti-malaria mural at your school or in your community
- Conduct a training session at your health center or with community health workers
- Host a net care and repair day at the market; encourage youth to volunteer
- Ask the officials in your sector to allot 5 minutes during your umuganda meeting for a short malaria prevention lesson
- Host a soccer or volleyball tournament and incorporate malaria lessons into the halftime show
- Put together a theater/music/art showcase asking youth to make art or sketches about malaria
- Talk to your local radio station about the feasibility of doing an anti-malaria radio program, or even just a short spot or two a month reminding people to use and care for their nets.
- Take pictures of people using nets and display them in a public place; make a village wide photo contest
- Implement the Night Watch Curriculum at your school to help kids learn that by protecting themselves from malaria and sleeping under their net, they are also protecting their dreams

After you've completed your malaria activity, call or email your Regional Malaria Volunteers to let them know how it went, and make sure to include the activity in your VRF so we can get a better idea of malaria prevention efforts in Rwanda. Happy STOMPing!

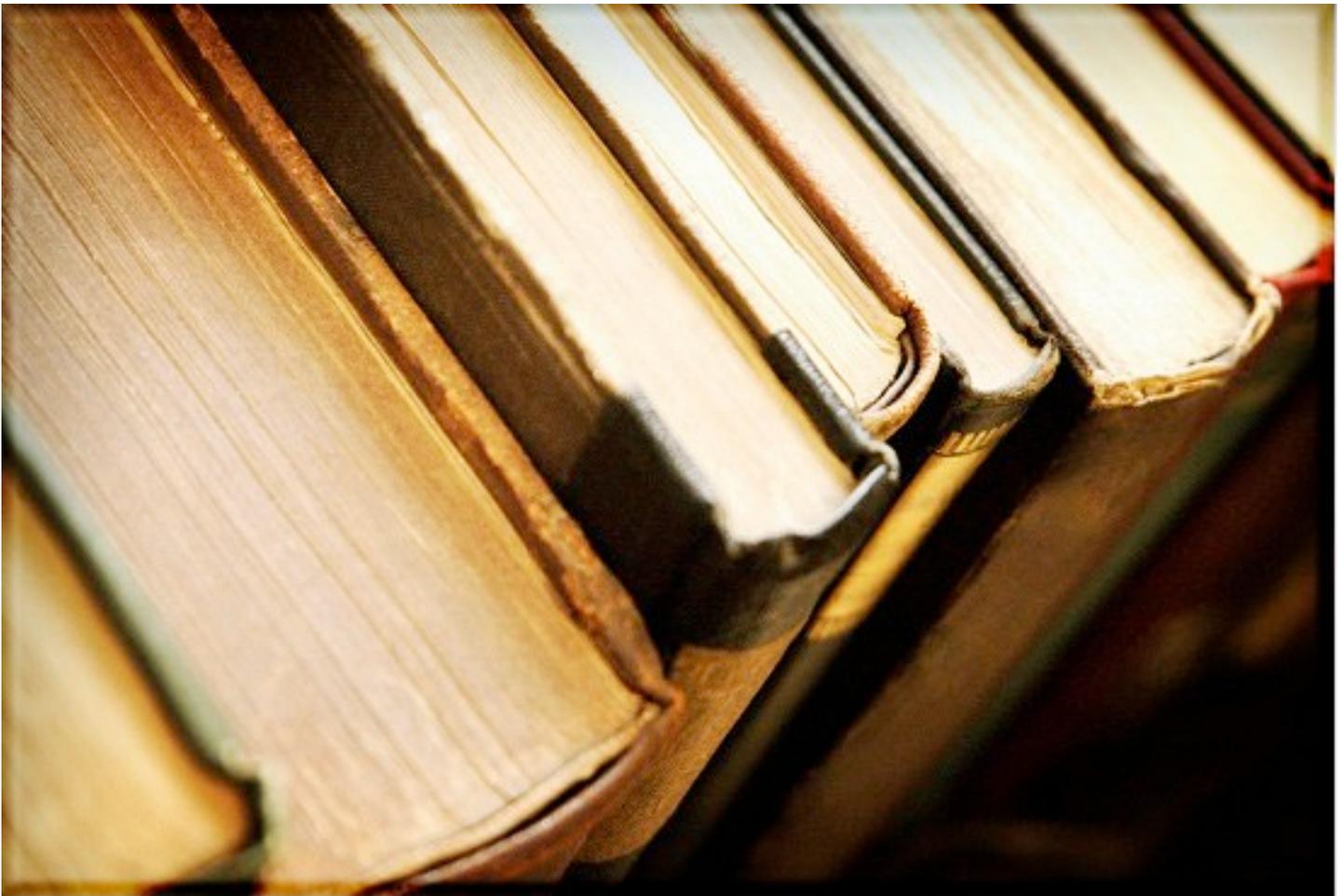
And check out the Stomp Rwanda Facebook page to receive updates and support in your malaria work.

Your STOMP Rwanda Team,

Jacqui Stewart Bah, Beth Braaksma, Claire Brosnihan, Dan Kieselstein, Bob Viglietta, Joey Anchondo, Tamika Honeysucker, Christina Titus, Judi Stalter, Sarah Oldsen, Betsy Dewey, Alex Whitcomb, Lauren Wright, Miranda Hyslop-Garza, Dametreea Carr, Justin McDonald, Cait Hughes

Luke's Book Corner

By Luke Smith, Education 4



Like most PCVs in Rwanda, having an abundance of time on my hands has led to a somewhat unhealthy consumption of literature. With this consumption, a goal eventually came into view: 100 books by the end of service. This idea, however, began to consume me to such an extent that I started devouring literature, and, in the throes of belligerent literature binges from which I would wake, sprawled in my trash pit, scraps of pages stuffed in my clothes with ink-smearred hands and a bloody lip, the plots and purposes and characters of the books I'd consumed would be erased before the hazy hangover even began. Thus it was that I determined to begin writing a review for each book, or not really a review so much as a brief synopsis or analysis or praise to remind myself of whether or not this book was worth reading. This format

of review, I soon found, could encompass numerous works into a paragraph or two, or in some cases into a single sentence. I realized, after several conversations with PCVs about the best books they'd read in country, that my paragraph reviews could in fact be useful to these same PCVs in determining what book to read next in lieu of lesson planning, and so the following paragraphs and sentences are these lists for a period of three months.

August:

I read ten books in the month of August. Books I read this month that I would never recommend are as follows: Neverwhere by Neil Gaiman (Literally one of the worst books I've ever read, one of those *man gets thrown into a crazy world he never knew existed, and no one ever explains anything but instead acts like he's an idiot* kind of stories. Also Gaiman loves descriptions and costume for no other reason than that he thinks it's cool, stating something to the effect of "it is because I say it is" in an interview excerpt epilogue. This, as anyone with half a brain knows, is a trademark of wretched writing and pointless detail), and I Drink for a Reason by David Cross (Not a real book so much as stand-up routines that have been adapted into print. Also, Cross is a jerk).

Books I read this month that were awesome are as follows: The Andromeda Strain by Michael Crichton (Probably the most intelligently written of his books except for the constant narrative asides of "This was their first mistake," "That was where he went wrong," and "It would take ten hours for him to realize his error"), Packing for Mars: the Curious Science of Life in the Void by Mary Roach (If you ever wanted to be an astronaut and are disappointed that you aren't, this'll help you

to chuckle at those who committed to the dream while still admiring them), Oryx and Crake by Margaret Atwood (Post-apocalyptic and dystopian, but still hits so close to home that it's painful. Well-written, modern, and accessible), and I Am Legend by Richard Matheson (Although it's about vampires, this was the work that inspired the mythology of zombies, starting with Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*. It deals with every cool zombie motif you've ever seen, including the philosophical dilemmas

of a survivor. It's similar, at times, to Crichton's work due to its scientific approach, but debunks most vampire mythology into a somewhat believable disease. While reading, you'll be reminded of The Zombie Survival Guide by Max Brooks, every zombie movie you've ever seen, and even the vampirism film *Daybreakers*. Seriously better than the movie, too and vastly different, including the fact that the main character is white rather than Will Smith), The Bonfire of the Vanities by Tom Wolfe (Not as good as I thought it would be as both Ian Ross and Tim Presley told me it was one of the best books they'd read here. The plot was a little too similar to Crime and Punishment for me to be impressed by the suspense, although it did make me nervous. I spent most of a day finishing the last 300 pages not because I couldn't put it down, but because I wanted to finish it), and Sphere by Michael Crichton (I went on somewhat of a Crichton binge this month, but this book is well worth the day or so that it will take you to read it. Suspenseful, methodical, and beautifully sci-fi, it's entertaining to the end, especially if

you saw the movie as an eight-year-old, were terrified, and remember that the character 'Harry' is played by Samuel L. Jackson in the film adaptation, and thus imagine all of Harry's lines delivered in classic Jackson one-liner style).

If you're counting, you noticed that that was only eight books, so I suppose the last two would fit into the category of "Mehh" or "If you've got nothing better to do" or "if you just feel like a Crichton book" or "I was worried mentioning this would damage my credibility": Mockingjay by Suzanne Collins (Obviously I didn't just read the conclusion of The Hunger Games trilogy, but the other two were in the month of July. Collins is no Orwell or Huxley or Atwood, but the themes in this dystopian trilogy cover those in the aforementioned authors' works and beyond. They are young adult novels and thus the writing style is somewhat young adult as you would expect, but at the end of the day they're just cool books), and Timeline by Michael Crichton (Definitely his worst of the three I read this month and also the longest. I'm pretty sure he just wanted to set a story in Medieval

times and so made a plot involving time travel and archaeologists. Also the science behind the time travel wasn't really clear to me, but perhaps Crichton is in the same echelon as Stephen Hawking and, although Timeline was written for the layman audience like A Brief History of Time, the

September:

In the month of September, I read eight books. Two of these were from the African Writer's Series (AWS) included in the Mobile Library, Beyond the Horizon by Amma Darko, which I read mostly because her last name is Darko, and The Clothes of Nakedness by Benjamin Kwakye, which I read because I wanted to know what the title meant. Darko and Kwakye are both Ghanaian authors, and both stories included the tragic lives of women who are treated as second-class citizen by their husbands, although Kwakye's book was more about an individual man's moral decline because of the influence of a powerful and manipulative drug dealer. Darko's focus was the mistreatment of a wife by her selfish, misogynistic, loathsome husband, a truly tragic and devastating tale. Kwakye's story, although similarly tragic at least has some humorous parts. A reader however constantly questions why the main character continues on his descent even while questioning his own vileness. I never quite figured out the meaning of the title, but I think it has something to do with the lies people tell themselves and those around them, to cover the evil they bring upon themselves when giving in to the flesh.

On a similarly depressing note, I read Candide by Voltaire, as edited by Norman Turrey. Though the copy didn't say, it may have been abridged as it seemed rather short, and Turrey took the verb 'edited' rather than 'translated'. Candide is basically Voltaire's response to the philosophy of optimism, or the idea that regardless of what happens, things had to be this way because God is in control of everything, so why be upset. In the book lots of terrible things happen to lots of people for no reason.

science remains incomprehensible to the layman. Still, an entertaining read in the "Oh Michael Crichton..." kind of way, but the plot drags along because absolutely everything that could go wrong does goes wrong to an irksome extent).

I also read several books that were not depressing and were worth reading, not to say that the aforementioned aren't, but personally, I find life depressing enough without wallowing in it too much: The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald (A good, quick read and much more interesting than I'd imagined it would be. Also, the reader gets major literary props for reading it, so why not pick it up?), Dracula by Bram Stoker (I read this after reading I Am Legend as I felt like getting to the origin of vampire mythology. It's entertaining in a 19th century horror kind of way, but it's not exactly a page-turner. Furthermore, Stoker tends to tell rather than show, an attribute exacerbated by the narrative format, which isn't explained until more than halfway through the book, most of which is spent convincing characters in the story that vampires might exist. Van Helsing is in it though, although not nearly as much of a B.A. as you want him to be, and Stoker tries

October:

October was a seven book kind of month, and it went a little like this: David Foster Wallace's Consider the Lobster and Other Essays (I read this book after Dan Kieselstein praised a hundred page essay within it about a usage dictionary, which was actually awesome.

to make him sound like a foreigner, as he's Dutch, a fact that screeches in the ears of a PCV already living in a world of broken English and made all the more obvious by Stoker's periods of amnesia regarding Van Helsing's foreignness, at which points he speaks in perfect English), Slapstick by Kurt Vonnegut (A quick and hilarious read well worth the afternoon it will take you to read it), A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens (Read as a remedy to an evening of Christmas nostalgia set off by a Christmas episode of *Glee* [yeah, I watch *Glee*]; this book is far better than any film adaptation, and no film adaptation truly captures it. Read it if you're in a Christmas mood or feel like feeling depressed about not being home for Christmas. It works for both motives), and finally 50 Essays: a Portable Anthology as anthologized by Samuel Cohen (Lots of classic and modern essays in here to inspire, outrage, and entertain).

However, Wallace is one of those authors whose style, vocabulary, and meticulous attention to grammar make anyone reading him feel like an inept troglodyte), Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North (This book is part of the AWS like Darko and Kwakye, and, as I read it at the beginning of October, just off of Darko and Kwakye closing out September, I had to put away the AWS for a while as they collectively, overwhelmingly depressed me [also, this one wasn't as good as Kwakye's or Darko's]), David Sedaris' Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim (Though I was originally attracted to this book because of a preternatural love for Corduroy and those few disciples who wander lonely, muddy roads after expulsion from villages refusing to listen to the corduroy gospel included in this book's title, it's also a hilarious read like all of Sedaris' books that I've had the spleen-busting pleasure of consuming and boasts a few deeply emotional and moving passages as well), Max Brooks' World War Z (Brought to you by the author of The Zombie Survival Guide, this is one of my favorite books read

in country; it boasts phenomenal zombie fights, a global zombie plague with in-depth knowledge of military history and context in several countries around the world, and a format based on Studs Terkel's seminal work Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do [seriously], and I'm pretty sure that, though most people would like to believe that Brooks is simply a creative if not ridiculous author, he actually suffers from an irrational fear of a zombie apocalypse and has written these books in order to educate the masses as to what they ought to do should it occur, so, for the sake of Brooks, educate yourselves. Also, even if you're not on Mefloquin, you can expect epic zombie dreams for as long as you're reading it), Philip K. Dick's Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep (A pretty legit sci-fi read and the inspiration for a lot of movies you may or may not have seen including *Bladerunner* and some others that I can't remember at the moment but may later when I have internet), Michael Pollan's The Omnivore's Dilemma: a Natural History of Four Meals (Pollan covers the epic journey

from field or forest to dinner plate of processed, organic, beyond organic, and hunted and gathered food, along the way discussing the ethics, history, and philosophy of each dish and entertaining each discussion [including vegetarianism and veganism] with a cool and non-self-righteous head, simply asking ‘why?’ and following it to its logical end), and finally Fritz Fischer’s Making Them Like Us:

Peace Corps Volunteers in the 1960s (As you may have guessed by the title, this book discusses the challenges faced by PCVs in the 60s and the politics of Peace Corps creation; however, Fischer is not an RPCV, so his conclusions about PCVs’ attitudes can be annoying. Additionally he offers no advice about alleviating the issues of Peace Corps or PCVs, almost all of which are still a part of Peace Corps today).

Health 3 COS

By Meghan Foster, Health 3 RPCV

Two years ago, Cinco de Mayo 2011, 19 other potential future Peace Corps volunteers and I walked off of the plane into the muggy Rwandan night.

Ten of us made it to our close of service conference in Kigali, meant to prepare us for saying goodbye and whatever is supposed to be coming next. I do feel more prepared, yet somehow less prepared as well, maybe more overwhelmed with what is to come.

The conference was successful, although strange to be sitting at the u-shaped tables with only a few of us listening on as we discussed what this whole thing has and will be. It was strange to look upon these people whom I have come to know and understand in a way that will never be shared with people outside of this experience, yet really not know that much about them. It was a strange finalizing experience. So in this time of reflection and subtle panic, I found that I want to share some of the things that I've really loved and am going to miss immensely about Rwanda... So here goes.

I love sitting on my door stoop and watching the sky change over the mountains in Nyungwe, the sun setting and having a giant cup of tea in my hand, playlists that inspire the world around me echoing from my one room house. I love the way the eucalyptus trees' blue leaves contrast with their coniferous counterparts, how the oily leaves smell when you rub them between your fingers, and the sweet smell of their smoke when being turned into charcoal. I love the giant flowers that bloom outside my house in bright red and white, and the tree that stands outside my old house with huge flowers on it inciting the buzz of hundreds of bees. I love the steep hillsides covered in bright green tea plants, spotted with workers carrying big woven baskets on their heads with today's pickings. I love my one room house that I have somehow turned into a home, US national park pictures hung on the walls, and a Christmas tree up year round. I love that Rwandans paint bricks red and the mortar lines between them black,

creating a wonderfully weird cartoon version of a house. Scaffolding made of wood scales buildings being constructed everywhere in this constantly growing country, eliciting respect and awe over their successful craftsmanship.

"I love learning how to dance with my host sisters..."

I love learning how to dance with my host sisters, and the way we've developed to distinguish between a boyfriend and just a

friend. These women, my four host sisters and host mother, are so inspiring, enlightening and informative on what it is like to be a woman in Rwanda, how to become a woman, and the immense power of being a woman. I love simply being with them, sitting, having a pea fight when preparing dinner, sitting over the fire, listening to my host mother as she hands me corn on the cob pulled straight from the fire.

I love speaking Kinyarwanda and walks with Immaculee. I love that I put in the time of going to church almost every Sunday for a year, and the warm reception that it elicits from random villagers walking through the hills. The full body hugs and strong slaps on the back, high-pitched happiness squeals, and huge beautiful smiles. I love how proud of me my community, my village has become, how they tell me that they don't want me to go, how they tell me that I am a good person. I love that I feel the same way about them, no matter how different are our cultures or beliefs. I love my counterpart, who was rightfully suspicious of me for so long, and somehow became one of my best friends in Rwanda, full of life, intelligence, motivation, drive, and laughter, she has been the saving grace of my "days in the office."

I will always remember the time I woke and heard singing in the distance, not unusual singing, as the sounds of song are heard so frequently here (another thing I love). The singing echoed from the valley where a creek had been dammed and hundreds of colorful people were singing with all their spirit as many more joined the ranks of the baptized. Each birthday I spent here in Rwanda, the first buying pineapple with my host sister eight days after I met her and before I knew how to talk to her, the second with my mom arriving with me in my village and at my brand new house, the third with anticipation. I will always remember International

Women's Day, being pulled into a mob of beautiful, brightly dressed women and forced to "cow dance" with them, being surrounded by love, openness and acceptance. My favorite shopkeeper, and participant in my animal husbandry project, sharing with me, talking over the vegetables about struggles, hardships, the similarities of our worlds, and smiling, always smiling, hugging, happy to see me, beautiful. Peace Corps conferences, seeing my group mates dwindle and stay together and come together after lengths of time; seeing us change, seeing us not change, being a part of something, and understanding each other. Meeting new groups, faces, people from all over the United States, and the world. Ice cream at Inzizi Nziza and foreigner food in Butare, the day I first had Meze Fresh, in Kigali.

I love walking along the dirt roads of my sector, seeing how fast the landscape changes and how often it has changed in two years. Walking to the sounds of the village kids playing – rolling rings of metal down the hills and roads using a stick, people working, men chatting at the banana beer bars, singing, too loud radios with too much static, motorcycle taxis. I love blue bars, bars painted completely in the color schemes of African beers – Primus blue, Mutzig red. I will miss ordering barbecued pork by the kilo, and it arriving on a literal silver platter and just digging in with forks. The markets; seeing all the fruits and vegetables laid out, and smiling women greeting me, remembering me, lowering their prices because we have become friends, cauliflower, green beans, peas, carrots, tomatoes, onions, potatoes, green peppers. Eating three pounds of passion fruit in one sitting, or two pineapples in one day. The biggest and most delicious avocados I've ever seen. Bags of hand roasted peanuts for about six cents. Chickens wandering everywhere, across the road, through the shops, into the maternity ward. Sheep that look like fuzzy goats, and goats that sound like yelling children.

I am going to miss all the singing, dancing, and celebrating, the love of secret Santa parties, and the love of excessive outfit changes for weddings. I will miss my co-worker singing my name as he walks through the health center, and my co-workers laughing every time someone says "sinzi byose" (I don't know everything) or "tuzareba" (we will see) as these are my catch phrases. I love that my co-worker refused to name his new son Sawa but calls him that

regularly because it is our joke. I love that everyone has some connection, and although they may not know everyone, Rwandans live in one big village, they help each other, they are together. I will miss my site mate, and his school, where I always forget that they speak English and I have had such impassioned conversations about gender equality, the future of the world, and why the copier still isn't working. Letting me come use the US-like internet they boast, and standing at the top of the college stairs for the millionth time seeing the tea fields slip right into the jungle.

I will always remember having tea with the director of the tea factory, and learning how tea is made. I will never forget helping out in maternity, and learning the differences between Rwandan healthcare and US healthcare and learning in a new way the value of good health and equality. I will always remember the five camps I participated in and teaching young boys and girls how to put condoms on wooden penises. Listening to the girls give their potential answers to someone pressuring

before they're ready.

Gangham style and

Butare weekends,

my own culture, and

village, quiet, relaxing,

Hours of television

have never ever watched if I didn't have so much time alone. Reading books by candle light every night. So much time for introspection and all the things I learned about myself, who I am, where I want to go, who I want to be, and what I want to mean to the world. Implementing surprising, successful projects in my village and earning the respect of my community.

In my last two years, I climbed to the top of Africa with my 60-year-old father, and shared this world with those back home, and I was welcomed into this world by everyone here. I will miss being greeted by everyone I pass on the street by name, children telling me "good morning" at any and every time of the day. Explaining what freckles are, and that the sun

"...I learned about myself, who I am, where I want to go, who I want to be, and what I want to mean to the world."

them to have sex

The camp talent show.

Call me maybe.

being with people of

weekends in the

and rejuvenating.

and movies I would

“hurts” me if I am in it for too long. I have learned about and immersed myself in a truly amazing place with truly amazing experiences, however tedious it might be at times. It’s so easy for me to focus on the negative, the things that I let exhaust me and take over my mind and heart for stretches at a time, but there are so many reasons that I am still here, and so many reasons why I am happy. I’ve seen some of my highest highs and my lowest lows. I have become a part of this community and this world is such a part of me now. The time has come for this piece of my journey to end, and my heart will ache when it does, but I am happy to be moving forward, taking all of these amazing things, and so many more, with me into the rest of my life.

It’s all a part of who I am now and who I want to be, and I feel immensely fortunate that this experience is one thing I will never have to miss or long for. I feel immensely fortunate that I am able to see the beauty in those lowest of lows, and the perfection in the highest of highs. I couldn’t have predicted this, any single piece of it, but it has been a beautiful journey with wonderful people in a surprising world, where I have found and experienced and relished in its unique and frustrating love for over two years.

Beautiful Cyangugu: Rwanda's Hidden Gem

By Claire Brosnihan, Health 4 and Timothy Presley, Education 3 RPCV

Cyangugu. It's a name that refers to the two southwestern districts in Rwanda, Nyamasheke and Rusizi. It's the land beyond Nyungwe Forest, and affectionately referred to as the Gug (pronounced "Goog"). Some might call it the most beautiful place in Rwanda, but few brave the 7-hour bus ride from Kigali to witness its grandeur. Others refuse to believe it actually exists. Read on, as this little guide to the sites of Cyangugu may just convince you to make the trip off the tourist map to visit the land of the Gugunauts (you know, if seeing us wasn't a big enough draw already).



First, decide on how you'll get to Cyangugu. You have two choices: either take a bus from Kigali to Kamembe (5,200 francs), or take the boat from Gisenyi (6,000) or Kibuye (2,500). Impala, Sotra, Kigali Coach, and Omega bus lines all offer trips to Kamembe, although you'll need to take a bus leaving no later than 11 am if you want to make it to Kamembe before dark. As you go through Nyungwe Forest, keep your eyes open for adorable monkeys outside the bus, and for your fellow passengers barfing inside the bus. Restocking on your meclizine supply before making the trip is highly recommended.



The boat runs from Gisenyi/Kibuye to Kamembe on Sundays and Wednesdays, and returns on Tuesday and Friday. It takes about 6 hours to get to Kibuye and 9 hours to Gisenyi from Kamembe (call 0788870308 or 0722069594 to confirm its schedule). Although the boat isn't

the speediest vessel on Lake Kivu, the boat is relatively comfortable, it serves some food, and it has some amazing views.

On a geographical note, you might hear Kamembe confusingly called either Cyangugu or Rusizi. Generally the city on the hill, where the bus park is located, is called Kamembe, and the area down by Lake Kivu and the border with the DRC is called Rusizi or Cyangugu; it's about a 10 minute, 400-500 franc moto ride from the official Kamembe town.

After arriving in Kamembe, get a budget room at Isimbi Lodge near the Mosque (safe and simple, but sometimes there's no water or electricity; ensuite bathroom and shower; no hot water, 6,000 or 9,000), or at Home St Francois (shared bathrooms/showers, no hot water; 6,000) near the DRC/Rwanda border. If you have guests who are aren't on a Peace Corps stipend visiting, the Hotel des Chutes (rooms from 15,000-60,000; hot water) and the just-opened Kivu Emeraude Resort both offer nice rooms and fine dining (0787010900 or emeraudekivu@gmail.com; rooms from \$120-210).

Enjoy the amazing views of Lake Kivu and mansions on the DRC side while enjoying some brochettes, fries, and Primi at Ku Bagore, located right on the lake near the DRC border (take a moto from town), or head to Kwasa's/La Seule Adresse near the Obama Shop on the main road in town for a great omelette speciale and soccer matches on the TVs. Motel Rubavu also offers a good Rwandan buffet.

The Hotel des Chutes near the DRC border offers a bigger variety of food, and most of it is still affordable on a Peace Corps stipend—the veggie burger and fries for 2,000 francs is delicious, and their pea curry is great for when you've tired of ibirayi and brochettes. A number of places also offer pork (akabenzi); check out Kwa Monica near the bus station, or Hotel Umucyo in town.

Take in the beautiful sunset over Lake Kivu while watching the fishermen head out in their boats and pull in their catches. At night, you can often catch some live music at Motel Rubavu in town, a pool table and music at Kwasa's, or check out the nightclub and some waragi at Ku Bagore while looking out over Lake Kivu and the DRC.

As fun as it can be, there's more to the Gug than just Kamembe. In Rusizi District take a hike to the DRC/Rwanda border from Mushaka/Gishoma (take a bus from Kamembe in the direction of Bugarama). In just two to three hours of hiking, you'll be rewarded with one of the most gorgeous views in all of Rwanda. Dramatic cliffs plummet down to the Rusizi River, which forms the border between the two countries. Don't forget to bring plenty of water!



Continuing your trip through Rusizi District, make sure you visit the hot springs of Cimerwa, near Bugarama. Take a Sotra bus straight from Kamembe; the trip takes about 1.5 hours. It will drop you off in Cimerwa town, and then it's about another 20 minutes walking to arrive at the hot springs (amashyuza), with lovely views of the cement factory on the way. The water ranges from comfortably hot to scalding, and from a foot or so deep to about five feet.; unlike the Gisenyi hot springs, the Cimerwa hot springs look more like a lake.



Relax by wading or paddling around in the warm water while being stared at by Rwandans bathing themselves in various states of dress. Extra points if you photobomb a Rwandan wedding shoot. Not that we've done that. Or you can do as the Rwandans do and bring some soap to switch up your normal bucket-bath routine. When you've had enough hot water and staring for one day, head back to Cimerwa for some Primus, brochettes, and potatoes at the bar across from the bus stop. The last bus back to Kamembe leaves at 4 pm, or you can take a moto to Bugarama and catch a taxi back to Kamembe, although the latter option is more expensive.

Nyamasheke district forms the other half of the Cyangugu, and offers some stunning views of Lake Kivu. Perhaps one of the most obvious things to do in Nyamasheke is to hike part, or all of the, Congo-Nile trail. Maps are available at RDB, and the trail is pretty obvious, with little green signs pointing the way.



One hidden gem along the Congo-Nile Trail is the Kumbya Retreat. It's located near the town of Nyamasheke, on a little peninsula on Lake Kivu; take a bus to Nyamasheke town and then a moto. It's secluded and peaceful, and there are rooms available for 10,000 (two people), or you can camp. There are swaying palm trees, fire pits,

a swimming area complete with diving board and a floating island (swim at your own risk!). Bring your own food and cooking equipment, some music, and enjoy a relaxing couple of days.

Yet another Cyangugu hotspot is Nyungwe forest, as well as the “annex”, Cyamudongo, where you can go Chimp trekking. (Yeah, we have chimpanzees. Jealous?). Most of the hikes start at the Uwinka visitors' center, although some start from Kitabi on the eastern end, and others start from Gisakura on the western end of the forest. If you're looking to save a bit of money while still getting the Nyungwe experience, get off at Uwinka, and then walk downhill on the road until you reach a sign saying “Kageno.” The road is free to hike on, and goes through the forest to a little village called Banda/Kageno (which is currently a Peace Corps



site!). You can see monkeys and the beautiful forest along the way for free, without paying the steep prices of the official Nyungwe hikes (which start at about \$60; most hikes leave at 9am or 1pm). It's about 2 hours to walk to Banda and 3 hours back to the road; you can also camp there overnight.

See you in the Gug!



BUS INFORMATION

Kigali Coach

Kigali 078 934 4633
 Rusizi 078 958 8911
 Departs: 4:00, 6:00, 7:15, 8:00, 9:00, 10:00, 11:30, 13:00, 14:00, 15:30

Impala

Kigali 078 840 8545
 Rusizi 078 840 8454
 Departs: 3:00, 6:30, 8:00, 9:30, 11:00, 12:30, 14:00, 15:00

Omega

Kigali 078 880 8795
 Departs: 6:00, 7:00, 8:00, 9:30, 11:00, 12:30, 14:00, 15:00
 Rusizi 078 841 2155
 Departs: 6:30, 7:30, 8:30, 9:30, 11:00, 12:30, 14:00, 15:00

Sotra

Kigali 078 656 0006 / 072 296 0006
 Rusizi 078 656 0007 / 072 206 0007
 Departs: 3:00, 4:00, 5:00, 6:00, 7:00, 8:00, 9:00, 10:00, 11:00, 12:00, 13:00, 14:00, 15:00

The Other Side

By Luke Smith, Education 4

Let me tell you about the time I lived on the other side of the planet.

(Airplane Sounds)

This is where a lot of people find themselves who have ideals and dreams and a loud mouth. A part of you expects to step off of the plane and into a classroom filled with adoring children who can't wait to learn English from the exotic, white teacher. This is not true, as well it shouldn't be, especially for me with my degree in writing. I could and would gleefully instruct anyone in the art of cutting excess verbal fat, but, unfortunately, this instruction little profits pupils incapable of constructing even a simple sentence.

So first, training takes place for three long months in which you learn to hate yourself, question your motivations and determination, and lose weight from habitual diarrhea and a diet of foods you never thought you'd eat. Somewhere in there, you learn some of the local language and have a couple of sessions about teaching techniques.

Next you're "installed". That's double speak for an unceremonious cutting of the umbilical cord in which you're thrown into a village with your handful of possessions and only one or two artificial contacts that were assigned to you by the higher-ups.

Now it's time for integration. This means sitting in your house reading books, watching movies and TV shows that you swapped with other trainees, and learning how to cook lasagna with only the ingredients found in an African village. Somewhere in there, you meet a shopkeeper or two and learn their names.

During the rainy season, you learn about mud.

During the dry season, you learn about water shortage.

During the holidays, you learn about loneliness,

and, when you leave your site, you remember the time you were backpacking in Europe and started to think that you could live in an alien culture for two years.

Because in Peace Corps, you're not backpacking. You're living in a village.

You wanna know what the best thing about the developed world is?

- Movie theatres*
- Bowling alleys*
- Bars with a plethora of beers*

Cause here on the other side of the planet, you've only got banana beer in a Jerry can, and, although that might sound like a nice, refreshing beverage, it looks like mud, is served at room temperature, and can sometimes be chunky. No. It is not sweet.

But there are sweet moments, like when you play football with your students and get schooled by a seven-year-old again, and, as everyone laughs at you, you look up, an idyllic African breeze ruffling your sweaty hair, and remember the ad you saw in a magazine of the same scene with kids playing football in a grassy field with the caption "For dreamers who do."

You start to wonder, after the ecstasy of seeing your dreams wear off, if you're still a dreamer, or if reality has crushed that naivety and hopefulness out of you.

"Really?" you think, "My dream was to play soccer? How is that supposed to help anyone? I'm

not even helping my own team.”

But you realize that what you really dreamed was of relationships, friendships that mattered, the feeling of international togetherness, and, when you think back to your dream, that hopeful part of your soul that's been put to sleep by bureaucratic regulations and disappointment wakes up and remembers the savory flavor of hope that seasoned all of your days until staging and led you to stand out on the porch, looking at the stars, wondering what waited for you on the other side of the planet.

Power Playlist

By Peer Support Network

Music is power, it can heal us, give us energy and get a party started... As Peace Corps Volunteers music can be a great stress reliever. The following Power Playlist has been submitted by your PSN representatives, try guessing the PCV to the song. What's on your power playlist?

PSN Members:

*Judi Stalter, Elisabeth Turner, Luke Smith, Ashanty Cruz,
Christina Titus, Todd Laudino, Colleen Berger (answers below)*

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| a) Avicii-Wake Me Up! | k) Superchick- Stand in the Rain |
| b) Katy Perry-Firework | l) Animal Collective- Reverend Green |
| c) Tegan and Sara-Alligator | m) Florence & The Machine- Only if For One Night |
| d) Luciano Pavoratti- Nessun Dorma | n) Sade- Kiss of Life |
| e) Les Nubian- Princesse Nubienne | o) Cat Stevens- The Wind |
| f) Barenaked Ladies- One Week | p) Hall and Oates- You Make My Dreams Come True |
| g) Ingrid Michaelson- Be Ok | q) K'naan-Take a Minute |
| h) Vampire Weekend- Horchata | |
| i) Beyonce- Grown Woman | |
| j) Philip Phillips- Home | |

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How to reach us: Send your comments or submissions for the next issue to somarwanda@gmail.com.

Enquiries: Send your enquiries to Peace Corps Rwanda, BP 5657, Kigali, Rwanda

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