

# SOMA

Stories, Opinions, Messages, Art

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Cover photo: Peace Corps GLOW camper Barbara Umutesi Kalisa is lifted up by other girls during a trust-building activity in Gitarama, December 2010.

Photo credit: Malcolm Cunningham

# CONTRIBUTORS

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## **Jed Augustine**

Jed is an education PCV in Kinazi in the southern Province. He is from Atlanta, Georgia and graduated from the University of Chicago, where he studied comparative human development. Jed misses M&Ms painfully.

## **A.J. Bisesi**

AJ "Mahoro" Bisesi is a health PCV who hails from the coolest place ever—Cleveland, Ohio. A.J. went to Grace College in Indiana where she earned a degree in social work. She currently works at a health center in Mushaka in the western province. Her current project: brainstorming innovative ideas on how to justifiably create a job out of road tripping upon her return to America in 2012.

## **Malcolm Cunningham**

Malcolm, a health PCV, was born in the post-industrial town of Toledo, Ohio. He studied psychology at Ohio State and works in a health center near Kigali. He likes to take pictures with his Pentax camera. While he didn't think much of Jonathan Franzen's new novel, *Freedom*, he did appreciate its predecessor, *The Corrections*.

## **Janelle Fann**

Janelle, an education PCV, is a writer aspiring to live with the kind of honesty she writes with. Originally from Michigan, she attended university in Tennessee. She will live in the great city of New York after her stint as a Peace Corps Volunteer primarily because she has a free place to live there.

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Avery is an education PCV who lives in the mountain village of Muramba in Ngororero district where she works at a secondary school. She comes from Morris Plains, New Jersey and went to American University where she graduated in 2008 with a degree in International Relations. Avery likes dancing, reading, hiking, and writing.

## **Kelly Miller**

Kelly is a health PCV from Ocean City, New Jersey. She lives in Bugesera district in the eastern Province. Her primary assignment is working on the USAID/Higa Ubeho project, and her secondary activities include: working with a youth performing-arts group, gardening projects, and helping a mothers' group with IGAs. In her spare time, she likes hanging out with her neighbors' kids, trying to convince them that you shouldn't rub mint candy on your teeth like toothpaste, and flying paper airplanes.

## **Nora Nunn**

Nora, a health PCV, lives in Kigali where she works with Akazi Kanoze, a youth livelihoods project. She grew up in Atlanta, Georgia and went to the University of Virginia, where she studied English and French and learned everything she did (or didn't) want to know about its founder, Thomas Jefferson. In her free time she savors short stories and good Rwandan coffee.

## **Camille Simpson**

Camille, a health PCV, was raised in Johnsonville, South Carolina and later relocated to Dover, Delaware. She attended Delaware State University, a HBCU (Historically Black College/University), earning a B.S. in Community Health. Camille lives in Nyamagabe district in the southern province where she works for Caritas Rwanda. On weekends, she enjoys trying new recipes,

# So Long, Fare Well

## Reflections from a Departing Health PCV

By Anna Montgomery

coloring and hand-painting with the local children of her *umudugudu*, and teaching English to just about everyone.

Farewell. Have you ever really thought about that word? Usually, we simply use it as a synonym for goodbye. Recently, however, I've been thinking that its meaning goes beyond the obvious. This is especially true as, we, the first group of PCVs back to Rwanda, prepare to leave. I've changed the word a bit though, from farewell, to fare well.

To my fellow group 1s: You will very soon be Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, RPCVs! May you fare well under your new title. May the lessons you learned and the experiences you had as PCVs be more than just memories. I hope they become a springboard of sorts, sending you off with a flying start to a wonderful future. Close of Service time is here. But as Mara said during our conference, COS also means *continuation* of service. Don't give it up when you return to the States! Lots of things are about to change; reverse culture shock is in store for us. You'll have hot water (any time you want), avocados will seem ridiculously expensive, it will be ok to smell your food, and please remember that it will no longer be ok to pick your nose. However, I hope one thing stays the same. Service. Keep reaching out to others, invest in your communities wherever you

are, change the world, and fare well.

And to all you PCVs still in service: I say the same to you, farewell, fare well. Your service won't always be easy, nor will it always be enjoyable, but it will be worth it. During our COS conference a Ralph Waldo Emerson quotation was shared with us. It's a definition of success that lined up so perfectly with Peace Corps service that I wanted to share it with you guys as well. "To laugh often and much, to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children, to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends, to appreciate beauty, to find the best in others, to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, a redeemed social condition, to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived. This is to have succeeded." So I say farewell, fare well, I know you are going to succeed!



Group 1 Health PCVs at their Close of Service Conference in Gisenyi, January 2011.

Photo courtesy of Ahmed Naguib.

# The New Normal

## Thoughts from a New Education PCV

By Jed Augustine

On January 3, 2011 sixty-five trainees became the newest Peace Corps Volunteers in Rwanda after eleven weeks of training in Nyanza. We are the second group of Education Volunteers since the reestablishment of the Peace Corps Rwanda program in early 2009. To introduce the group, allow me to share a Swear-In story that captures our spirit.

Ten minutes into the ceremony, United States Ambassador W. Stuart Symington stood to speak. He complimented the musical acts and ordered an impromptu performance from the trainees, explaining, "The only thing more important to me today than your becoming Volunteers is the health of the Rwandan people. So, in the words of the old television shows, 'We'll be back after the break!'" As he turned and walked into his home to take a call from the Minister of Health, the unexpectedly offered responsibility hung over us. This sensation, unfamiliar when we first arrived in Rwanda, now no longer surprised us.

Soon, Genevieve Williams and Gelsey Hughes, who had already given an excellent ukulele-enlivened mash-up of The Beatles "In My Life" and Todo's "Africa," honored Ambassador Symington's request. They once again took the lawn to perform a reprise of their talent show number, Ingrid Michaelson's "You and I." With the Ambassador still occupied, Jeff Monsma, having already performed "Rock Me Momma" with LCF Valens Hasubinzimana and the stunning dance talents of Dan Serwon, Patrick Malone, and Thais Fournier, took up the musical mantle and began strumming the opening chords of The Flight of the Concord song, "The Most Beautiful Girl (In the Room)." Though the

reason still escapes me, Jeff insisted that I sing with him.

Rather flustered and panicked, I replied, "Not *that* song, Jeff." If you know the song, you know it isn't one for regaling dignitaries. ("You're so beautiful, you could be a waitress.../an air hostess in the 60s.../a part time model. / You're so beautiful, like a tree, or a high-class prostitute). But Jeff played on in spite of my increasing anxiety. "NOT *THAT* SONG, JEFF!"

Jeff kept playing, but he mercifully switched to a different song. That is, he switched after I sang the song's opening lyrics. But we learn from failure. Unaware of the averted comedic crisis, the crowd enjoyed Jeff's serenade, the ceremony went on, and we were soon Volunteers.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, this situation sums up the disposition of our group fairly well: flexibility and good humor are the tools to manage frequent and unexpected challenges. A few more examples illustrate this attitude:

During our field trip to Nyungwe National Park in mid-December we discovered that most of our Rwandan IDs were invalid. We would be considered foreigners and pay accordingly. Grumbling, we paid and split into groups to enjoy walks which differed in scenery yet shared torrential rain and grape-sized hail. The hail was the first frozen thing we had seen in two months, so we greeted it with excitement. Who expects ice to fall from the sky so close to the equator? Back at the park headquarters, we pooled our communal calories (bread, peanut butter, and Nutella) and laid our soaked clothes and selves in the tropical sun.

Arriving in Butare for our second banking day, we were greeted by the news that the government body in charge of transferring funds to the Peace Corps had, in fact, failed to do so. We took the little money we had and left, our accounts empty but our stomachs full of Butare burgers and bowls of ice cream.

In addition to communal conundrums, we have each had our own personal problems: illnesses, bike accidents, hacked accounts, identities and money stolen. We have all faced a myriad of resource family challenges, such as the “Are You My Mother” problem of an ever-changing cast of characters every visit. We’ve also confronted the chronic question of “What am I eating and how do I politely stop eating it, *right now?*”

More than anything, Peace Corps Volunteers share a dream, and our group is no exception. Firstly, of course, we all dream of transforming our communities. A very close second is more a nightmare than a dream, namely the kaleidoscope of diseases that movies and hearsay have taught us to fear deeply. Fortunately for all of us, we had the pleasure throughout PST of listening to the gloriously French Dr. Laurent Clerc assuage our ailment anxieties. After his excellent health and wellness sessions, we are all happy to be in his and Dr. Elite’s capable hands. After Dr. Laurent’s stories of Niger, we are also very happy to be in Rwanda and *not* in Niger.

Favorite hyperbolic examples of his tales include:

- “How many of you do I expect to get amoebic dysentery? In Niger, you would already have had amoebic dysentery, if the Ebola didn’t get you first.
- “In Niger, the sun is black.”
- “In Niger, all the plants are carnivorous.”
- “On the Peace Corps’ Mental Health and Wellness Scale, 1 is ‘healthy and happy’ and 10 is ‘Crippling Depression.’ In Niger we had to add 30 more points.”
- “Niger is where all of your missing socks go. In one giant, filthy pile.”
- “In Niger water sanitation is simplified because there is no water.”
- “In Niger, they’ve weaponized children’s affection. That’s not snot they’re wiping



Group 2 Education PCVs at their Swear-in ceremony in Kigali, January 2011

Photo courtesy of Jerome Ndayambaje

on you.”

These tales, and the real life examples that inspired them, reminded us to put our PST difficulties in perspective. Going forward, the ability to remember that, “At least we’re not in Niger” may just save us from ET. The pleasures and pains of PST are now fading into the background. As we come to the end of our first month at site, many of us are realizing that PST is not the same as Service, and Service remains a nebulous, ever-changing concept. At the dawn of our two years in Rwanda, our goals seem as attainable as the horizon.

For many of us, this slow, uncertain time offers a chance to reflect on the questions that the fast pace of training suppressed: What is the value of education? What is our role here in Rwanda? How can we help? What is needed? How will we know that we are actually helping or addressing needs?

I feel I speak for many when I say that those of you have faced the same difficulties we face now and persisted through them provide us with great comfort. We have begun the first chapter of a story lived by 50 years of Volunteers who have found order in the chaos and found a route through the briar patch.

Our doubts are ensconced in the daunting promise of two years; the promise that two years from now we will look at Rwanda—and life—with very different eyes. Indeed, our perspective transformed the moment we landed in Rwanda back in October 2010. As our plane descended through the wood smoke and trash haze of Kigali, the constellations in the sky faded and the city’s white fluorescent lights rose from the horizon to replace them. Thirty minutes later we rested in the airport parking lot, bags in hand, trying to make sense of having awoken in Philadelphia, having eaten lunch in New York, breakfast in Brussels, and now standing dazzled under the full African moon. As the day’s heat dissipated into the night, all around us the artificial lights shimmered on the city’s hills like mounds of stars, as if fallen from the broken, once familiar sky.

Only when we returned to Kigali in January 2011 for Swear-In did we realize just how much we had already changed. The overwhelming experience of the new, the

strangeness of being strange, the sensory onslaught of burning sun, smoldering trash, roaring radios, beeping motos, vast poverty, burns and blisters from the charcoal stove—the whole Rwandan arabesque—had become our new normal. The foreign had become familiar. As we once again search for and unexpectedly discover new routines and habits, we will live as and for the Rwandans we serve, and who, whatever our experience, give us purpose as Volunteers.

# Camps: GLOW & BE

Photo essay by Malcolm Cunningham

Text by Nora Nunn



GLOW camper Beatrice Mahoro leads PCV facilitator Camille Simpson during a ropes course.

## **GLOW**

Rwanda's Parliament ranks first in the world in terms of the representation of women (56.3%). Given this extraordinary statistic, it seems a natural place to host Camp GLOW, which stands for Girls Leading Our World. The purpose of Camp GLOW is to encourage young women to become active citizens by building their self-esteem and confidence, increasing their self-awareness, and developing their skills in goal setting, assertiveness, health, and career and life planning. When the first group of Peace Corps health volunteers arrived in Rwanda in 2009, they hosted Camp GLOW

at the Red Cross in Kigali in December of that year. Encouraged by the first camp's success, Peace Corps welcomed 98 girls to its second Camp GLOW in collaboration with the Institut Catholique de Kabgayi from December 8-13, 2010 in Gitarama, located in Rwanda's southern province.

Camp GLOW began in Romania in 1995. While various Peace Corps countries use a similar GLOW curriculum, the lessons are presented in a culturally sensitive and specific way. Each PCV facilitator is paired with a host-country national facilitator to instruct a group of 12-13 campers. "This pairing creates



GLOW campers participate in an icebreaker exercise called “Chief.”

an amazing bond . . . that helps us learn as PCVs and also passes on the information in sustainable ways,” said PCV Emily Dubois Hollander, one of the directors of Camp GLOW. Facilitator Jeanne Mukangenzi echoed this sentiment, also noting the importance of the junior counselors, girls who participated as campers in 2009 and were selected based on their outstanding leadership. “It was a strong team. We all worked together,” she said.

The 98 campers, aged from 15 to 20 years old, were selected from a pool of 1,000 applicants and chosen based on the strength of their essays, which were written in English—the language of instruction at Camp GLOW. Camp GLOW, which was funded by PEPFAR, was free of charge to its participants. The regional diversity of the campers enriches the experience, said Shaida Kamali, a junior

counselor from Kigali whose goal is to help others by being a doctor. “My favorite experience was knowing new people and learning how things are perceived by others,” she said.

Learning at Camp GLOW took place both inside and outside of the classroom. Girls and their facilitators explored topics such as goal setting, the immune system, HIV transmission and prevention, gender roles, and self-esteem. Each group of campers was named after and learned about a strong female leader such as Mother Teresa, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, and Rosa Parks. Career panels, belly dancing, creative writing, team-building activities, and a talent show were among the myriad of other activities in which the girls participated. During most any tea break, many campers could be found in the “affirmation room,” where

girls could write affirmations, or positive messages, about anyone at Camp GLOW and then place the encouraging note in the person's individualized envelope. One facilitator compared the wall of envelopes stuffed with handwritten messages to a type of non-virtual "facebook."

We as PCVs hope that the knowledge, skills, and attitudes imparted from Camp GLOW will travel beyond the walls of the campgrounds; based on campers' testimonies, they will. Camper Grace Uwamahoro, who dreams of being a neurosurgeon, plans to teach her class at school what she learned at GLOW. "The condom demonstration opened my eyes," she said. Camper Beatrice Mahoro, whose goal is to become a tailor, also intends to share new ideas with her friends at home. "I learned how to protect myself from pressure from boys," she said. "We have changed . . . and we will plant the seeds of change," attested junior counselor Grace Mushimiyimana.

During Camp GLOW's closing ceremony, the campers listened to the sagacious words of Rwandan Honorable Member of Parliament Euthalie Nyirabega, who encouraged the girls to use their time efficiently in order to achieve their personal goals. "I am sure that we will be hearing from ladies who are Rwanda's future leaders that have participated in Camp GLOW," said Shaida Kamali. While Camp GLOW exhorts its campers to set ambitious personal and professional goals, one the camp's strongest themes is that true leadership starts within. "We would love if someone becomes the leader of Rwanda," said Emily Dubois Hollander. "But the most important thing is that girls become the leaders of their own lives."



PCV Ashley Williamson advises a GLOW camper about interview skills.



Camp BE facilitators and campers

## BE

If Rwandan girls are leading our world, Rwandan boys will be beside them, working as a team. BE, Peace Corps Rwanda's leadership camp for boys, stands for Boys Excelling. Camp BE was held for the first time in Rwanda in the week following Camp GLOW from December 15-20, 2010 and it hosted 64 boys whose ages ranged from 15 to 20.

"We hosted Camp BE because boys are an equally important part of female empowerment," said PCV Meredith Lu, one of the Camp BE directors. "You can open as many doors for girls as possible, but their male peers help bring female development into something tangible."

Certain BE participants seemed to echo Lu's philosophy. "Our own country wants men and women to be equal," said camper Julius Mwesige. "Gender balance is needed in Rwanda," he said. The BE curriculum included lessons that discussed traditional and modern

gender roles in Rwanda. Its themes, which included leadership skills, career counseling, HIV prevention, and life skills, were similar to those of Camp GLOW.

One lesson involved learning how to say delay or say no to sex. "This lesson was especially important for boys," Lu said. "Often, it's the girl who needs to learn to say 'no,' but it's just as important for a boy to learn how to respect her opinion. Sometimes, the boy says 'no.' It's not just the girl's role. Boys and girls can be partners in delaying sex," she added.

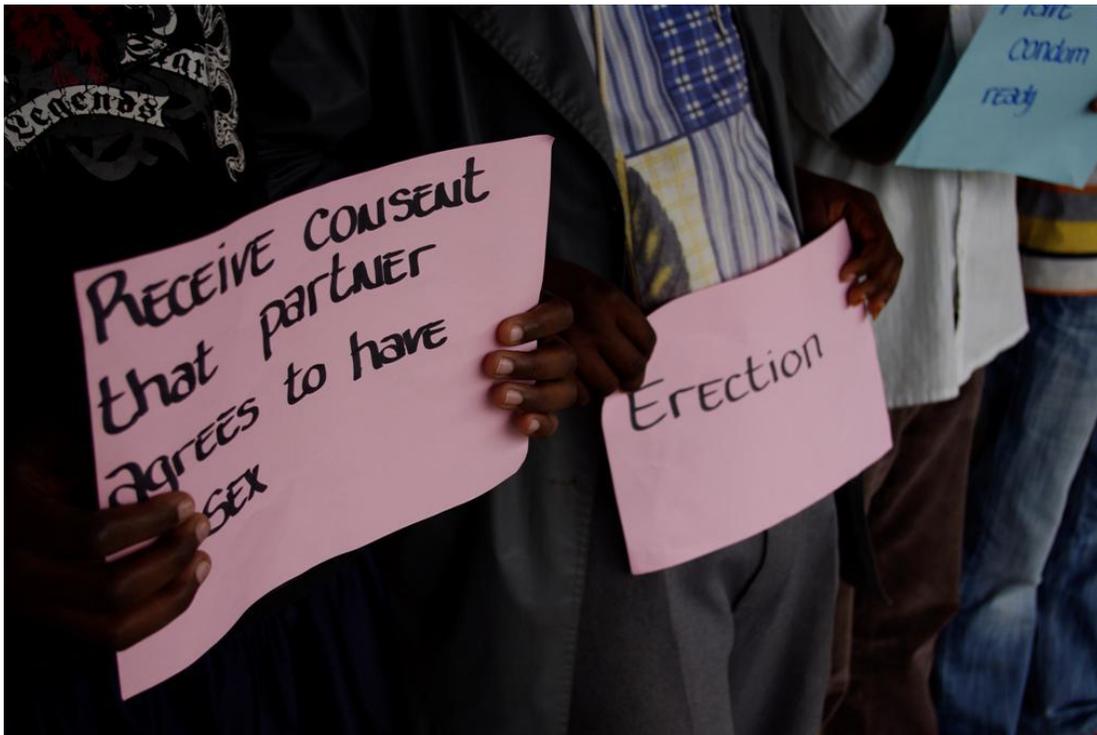
Camper Jimmy Gaston Ndagijimana considered his most valuable lesson to be a health-related one. "I learned how to use a condom and also the difference between HIV and AIDS," he said. Jimmy, who plans to be a computer engineer, also realized the value of setting goals. "What you think, you can do, and you can be. What you dream, you can do, and you can be."

As in Camp GLOW, PCVs and Rwandans worked in tandem as facilitators. PCV Avery Karlowich attested to the powerful

combination of cross-cultural teamwork. “Working together was a way to connect with someone who grew up in this culture who was trying to instill confidence in these boys that they are future leaders,” she said. Likewise, Rwandan facilitator Remy Dusange appreciated the chance to work with Americans. “PCVs care about their campers . . . they use jokes and humor to show them that they are close to them,” he said.

Domicien Ndayizeye, a camper who wants to be a doctor, plans to share what he learned at Camp BE with his village. “I live in the countryside, and I want to teach my community how to use condoms in our English club,” he said. “Then, they can teach the skills to their own families.” Similarly, Julius is determined to impart his knowledge to friends back home. “I want to keep on advising people, as there are so many people who don’t know where they are going, they don’t dream; they just live. It’s better to continue to teach others.”

**Note:** in 2011 Camps BE & GLOW will be held on a regional instead of a national level. If you would like to be involved, please contact [campglowrwanda@gmail.com](mailto:campglowrwanda@gmail.com).



BE Campers participate in an HIV-prevention activity

# NARRATIVE

## The Nature of Rain

By Janelle Fann

-Because Penny Baby told me to write it

It disrupts life and things are not able to go on as simply as before. It can wash away tracks or mire down lives. Unquestionably powerful, it is feared and needed. To want to place shields before us is an instinctual action but how does it feel when you are immersed? When you are saturated? Intoxicating.

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I feel the nap of the carpet under my feet for the first time in days. A heightened sense of the here and now belongs to me and will pervade the time we spend together. You are soon to arrive. My heart beats faster and I walk a bit quicker around my space.

Life is long and this day is another loop in the rope that binds me here. So are you. I make no move to freshen or straighten myself or my surroundings. I hope that when you lean near me, close enough to feel the heat my heart beats out you smell me. Not perfume or deodorant, sweat or earth. Me, my essence, my skin my breath; not covered or disguised shameful though it may be but whether you

find it sour or sweet you stay and inhale. Whether I am sour or sweet you stay.

Our language isn't perfect and when we talk we still have to use words to communicate the important things. It is a crude arrangement but we are children. We learn as we go with the patience and curiosity that is inherent is a child's way of doing things.

And do we love? Why yes, of course. But love is so little and we don't recognize the 'duty of love'. We do more; we trust and that perhaps is the basis of the nature of rain. It rains and we may love it for many reasons but we don't trust it for many more. Ah, trust is by far the sweetest honor intimacy affords. You trust that if asked I would give all that makes life worth the trouble of breathing. I trust you never to ask me to. Has there ever been anything more enthralling than complete abandon to that dangerous animal that is trust?

# SAFETY & SECURITY

## Playing with Fire

By Malea Hoepf

Over the summer, my host families suffered a terrible tragedy. A candle fell over in the bedroom, which led to the destruction of their house, and the death of a really great kid. It was a completely preventable accident, and it has made me think a lot about fire safety here in Rwanda. At Peace Corps Safety and Security Officer Gloriosa Uwimpuhwe's suggestion, I'm sharing some information with all of you.

First of all, even though houses are cement and brick, fires can still be incredibly destructive. The mattresses we have here are extremely flammable, "like petrol," someone told me. So are the nylon curtains that most of us have, which can catch the wooden ceiling panels on fire. I have also seen a least one child at site that was seriously burned from a mosquito net that caught on fire. While the following safety tips may seem obvious, they bear repeating.

- Don't leave candles or fires unattended.
- Never bring a candle into the bedroom – bring a lantern if you must. Gloriosa says that the rule in her household is that when the power is out, the bedroom should be for sleeping only.
- Don't put candles directly on the surface of your furniture; always use a sturdy candle holder (i.e., it's not enough to use a drop of wax to keep the candle upright, no matter if it's what everyone else in Rwanda does).
- Don't leave candles by the window where the wind can knock them down, or they can catch the curtains on fire.
- For those of us with electricity, we know

that it's unpredictable, so be careful about leaving things plugged in, especially overnight. PCVs have had electrical fires with kettles and power strips that were left plugged in, even when they weren't being used.

I'm sure that there are lots of things I'm forgetting, but I just wanted to share this with you, especially because I am guilty breaking almost all of those rules at some point. Also, for those of you with health clubs or otherwise work with children, fire and electrical safety can be an important topic for people in any age group, but especially children and their parents. Following and sharing simple precautions can prevent injury to ourselves, as well as help protect our friends and neighbors.



# WELLNESS

## The PC Rwanda Peer Support Network

By Kerianne Hendrickson & the PSN Development Team

### **Introduction to the Peace Corps Rwanda Peer Support Network**

#### **By: PSN Development Team**

The chance of someone having some difficulty adjusting to life in a new country and culture is pretty high. Most would argue that someone who is dealing with this adjustment alone is bound to have more difficulty than someone who is able to share those difficulties with others. Groups provide people a way of connecting to others, which is a vital part of the human condition.

Peace Corps Volunteers in Rwanda are like a family. Groups of us lived together during our Pre-Service Training, which facilitated the formation of strong bonds. Beyond that, we all share common successes and challenges. As challenges arise, we are most likely turn to each other for support when needed.

Here in Rwanda, Peace Corps Volunteers are working to establish a formal support program called the Peer Support Network. The mission of this program is *to support Peace Corps Volunteers and Trainees by addressing their emotional needs in a confidential, structured, and accessible format by promoting communication, facilitating effective stress management, and encouraging a positive and healthy environment.* The Peer Support Network is a way to encourage Volunteers and Trainees to be there for each other in a time of need.

All Peace Corps Volunteers and Trainees make up the PSN. Throughout their service, Volunteers and Trainees will be given continuous information and training of the basic skills necessary for providing emotional, social, and practical assistance. It is realized that Volunteers and Trainees are going to provide support to one another whether or not there is a program in place; however, having a program that provides basic peer support skills will likely increase the effectiveness of the help given. It can also be a resource used to direct Volunteers on where to go for more professional help if support needs are too great.

Once regional meetings begin to take place, PCVs are encouraged to use those as a place to begin addressing support needs. Volunteers can help build the PSN program by developing and locating support resources that meet their specific needs at a regional level.

Please be on the lookout for more information on how to become involved with this program. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact a member of the development/training team.

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### **Advice from the Peer Support Network: how to be a good peer supporter**

Dear Fellow PCVs,

I want to address you an idea that I feel strongly about: the importance of acknowledging the emotions of others in a supportive manner. I really believe it is our responsibility as PCVs to take care of one another. We experience a lot during our service. Everyone understands the ups and downs one goes through. It is important to be able to share those experiences with the people who understand best—our peers. I feel myself to be a resourceful person on this matter. I would like to share with you all some knowledge I have regarding tools and "ways of being" a good peer supporter.

It is important for peer supporters to possess the following qualities: empathy, respect, warmth and caring, and genuineness. When you empathize with someone, you have the ability become involved in this person's feeling world. This means that you really feel the same emotions as the person you are speaking with.

Respecting someone means that you communicate your belief that a person has the capacity and right to choose and make his or her own decisions. It is also a receptive attitude to embrace the feelings and opinions of others.

Displaying warmth and caring behavior towards another person provides a sense of personal closeness. This can be done through both verbal and non-verbal communication. Someone who has good verbal communication,

but lacks in "warm" non-verbal behavior is likely to be perceived as someone who is cold and does not care.

To be genuine means to have the ability to present oneself in a sincere manner. When you are genuine you show people who you truly are when connecting with them. You are being real—not acting or role-playing.

I feel that good peer supporters do the following:

- Provide emotional, physical, and spiritual support in a safe, non-judgmental environment
- Allow people to explore their thoughts and feelings, keeping in mind that thoughts and feelings are neither right nor wrong
- Offer opportunities to learn new ways to approaching problems
- Make a referral to someone else who can meet that person's needs if there is a mismatch between the situation and your own ability
- Respect confidentiality (unless someone may harm himself or herself or others)
- DO NOT gossip

*Active listening* is tool that can be used in everyday relations with others. When you actively listen to someone, you are not only hearing the words being spoken, but also understanding what is being said. It is also a way to make a person feel like they have been heard both verbally and emotionally. The basic techniques/strategies used to display active listening are as follows:

***Keep focus and attention on the person you are talking to.*** This is the time when you as the listener do not talk. Do not interrupt, even to agree with what is being said. Just listen.

Watch the speaker's body language. Is the person nervous? Is he or she maintaining eye contact? Listen to tone of voice and rate of speech. Pay attention to what is being said and what is not being said. You want to remove all distractions (cell phones, other people, etc.). If there is a silent moment, respect it.

***Without interrupting, show the speaker you are listening to him or her by using non-threatening verbal responses.*** Responses such as "uh huh", "hmmm", "I understand" or "I am sorry" (if something is sad) can be used. You must make sure the responses are sincere. This provides encouragement to the speaker to continue talking. This is the time when you convey genuineness, warmth and caring, respect, and empathy.

***Restate some of the speaker's key points in your own words.*** Phrases such as "What I hear you saying is...", "Let me see if I understand this correctly," or "You said the experience made you feel..." are good phrases to use show the speaker whether he or she has been heard correctly. They can also clear up any misunderstandings or misinterpretations.

***Ask questions in order to seek more information.*** Sometimes you need to clarify what is being said and get background information about the situation. This technique eliminates assumptions, encourages elaboration, and encourages discovery.

***Reflect.*** Share what you perceive to be the feelings of the speaker. An example of this type of question would be: "It sounds as if the experience made you sad. Is that true?"

***Offer feedback.*** Share with the speaker your feelings and reactions to his or her experience.

When I think of supportive techniques, the one that stands out the most in my mind is Doctor Alan D. Wolfelt's idea of "companioning."

Although this idea comes from a grief support philosophy, I feel it is an important tool that could be used for people providing any kind of support. "Companioning" is all about being present during a time of need. Some phrases regarding "companioning" that I like to remember when I am supporting someone include:

- "Companioning means to walk with someone on his or her journey, not to lead him or her."
- "Companioning is about curiosity, not expertise."
- "Companioning is about listening with the heart, not analyzing with the head."
- "Companioning is about respecting silence, not filling every moment with words."
- "Companioning is about being present to pain, not taking away pain."

Listen folks, I understand that this is a lot of information. I do not expect everyone now to have the ability to be a good peer supporter after reading this. I believe supporting someone is an art, not a science that can be taught. I hope that you can use this advice as a platform to help you discover your own "self" and methodology for supporting those in need. I advise you to review this information and use it to try to understand your strengths and limitations. Strive to awaken your imagination, creativity and uniqueness to bring out your own supportive style.

Sincerely,

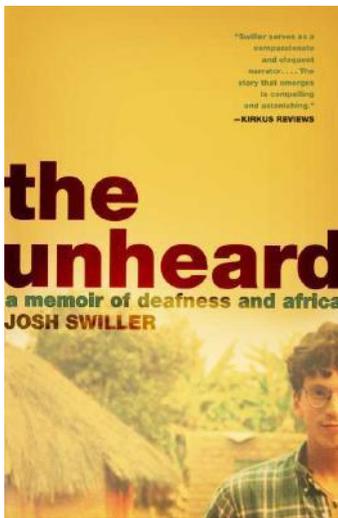
Kerianne Hendrickson, PCV

# BOOKS

## The Unheard: a Memoir of Deafness and Africa

Review by Kelly Miller

Image courtesy of Better World Books



### The Unheard: a Memoir of Deafness and Africa

By Josh Swiller

Josh Swiller's poignant memoir describes his Peace Corps service in a remote village in Zambia, a place the locals call "Gomorrah." As a member of the first group of PCVs to serve in Zambia in the early 90s, Swiller arrived enthusiastic, idealistic and ready to do "Great Works of Development while learning Great Lessons about Humanity." Oh, yes, and he is deaf.

The book opens with Josh and his counterpart sitting on the floor in a dark room, clutching homemade weapons and waiting for an imminent death at the hands of an angry mob who are throwing rocks through the windows. Josh backs up to the beginning of his story to explain the events that led him into this situation.

Written in a captivating narrative, Swiller's book is brutally honest in describing

the challenges, successes and frustrations that he encountered in his village. Corruption, violence, disease and a series of cultural faux pas make his story seem unbelievable at times. Although placed in a site where ambulance drivers turn away sick patients so they can transport more fish and a bar fight leads to a man stripped naked, dragged to death and left for the dogs, the book is also full of hilarious and heartwarming anecdotes that help us understand how Josh could come to love such a place.

The fact that Josh is deaf and is searching for a place in the world where his deafness doesn't marginalize him adds another element to this memoir. He can read lips and has hearing aids, but having grown up in Manhattan, he seldom found himself in the optimal conditions for feeling "normal." In Zambia, there is less background noise, people look at him when they speak and they aren't annoyed when he asks them to repeat. Ironically, at times he feels more at home in his village than he ever felt in America.

As PCVs, there are parts of Josh's memoir that we can relate to, such as being overwhelmed by hoards of children, the beauty of Africa, the slow pace of projects, and the strength of banana beer. But Josh's multiple encounters with violence and his communal "judging" (for "ruining" the virgin daughter of a respected tribesman) are parts that we'll hopefully never experience firsthand. I highly recommend this look into an unforgiving world where beauty and horror are intertwined and a PCV struggles to find his place in it.

# Postcard from Egypt

(December 2010)

## Cross with Bravery

By Avery Miles

In early January I returned from one of the most amazing vacations I've ever taken. On December 13 I boarded an Ethiopian Airlines plane destined for Cairo. By way of Addis Ababa, my two companions and I made the near six-hour flight over Sudan and straight on for the Egyptian capital where our other friends awaited us. Having paid \$670 for the flight, I was happily surprised by the low price tags I found tagged onto souvenir memorabilia and entry fees. As six Egyptian pounds (LE) amounted to one U.S. dollar, the cost of things seemed delightfully low. For two and a half weeks I explored the myriad of sights and activities throughout the amazing city of Cairo, as well as other places like Alexandria and the Sinai Peninsula.

From the perch in our comfortable apartment near downtown Cairo, my group and I ventured out to enjoy the city. The first day we hailed a cab (which only cost about five U.S. dollars, so if you are able to mime or pick up some Arabic taxis are an easy way to travel). We then traveled a few kilometers west outside of the city to see the renowned pyramids. In person, they seemed a lot smaller than I had imagined; the scene in which Aladdin and Jasmine fly over the Sphinx of Giza is a bit misleading! However, they were still magnificent and definitely merit a visit for those interested in seeing one of the world's ancient wonders. Afterward we dined in a modern fast-food restaurant that served up huge servings of **koshari**, a tasty mixture of noodles, rice, and lentils covered in tomato sauce and caramelized onions.

That night we grabbed a cab over to the eastern side of the city where we watched the

dancing **Sufis**. This is truly a sight to see: as a line of men plays the **tublah** drums, each dancer takes a turn displaying his musical talents. Then, the main performer arrives and begins to spin. And spin. And spin. And continues to spin until you think you may be sick simply from watching his non-stop twirling. He spun for an hour without stopping. All the while he was able to stay in one spot, untie his decorative skirts, and lift them over his head!

One day we took a stroll through the older part of the city, observing the noble churches. Then we took a jaunt over to one of the world's oldest Universities at **Al Azhar** mosque. If you are inclined towards museums, take a peek in at the **Egyptian Museum** before embarking on a breezy ride on a **felucca** boat along the Nile River.

We indulged in some more frivolous activities mixed in with the scholarly trips. On Christmas day, Katy and I went to see the Egyptian Premier League play for only 70 pounds each. The game was good but not as interesting as the fans—they got just as riled up as American fans do during football games!

Long deprived of a big screen movie in Rwanda, we journeyed to the city's multiplex cinema to see the new Harry Potter movie for the unbeatable price of three U.S. dollars. Before going into the theater we stopped at an outside vendor's stand and purchased some juice boxes. I know that tradition dictates that we should have picked up some candy to snack on, but we were already stuffed with chocolate-covered peanuts thanks to the cheap candy store right below our apartment. Coming from Rwanda, we all went a little crazy with the amount of junk food that we consumed.

We simply couldn't resist the mesmerizing packages of Doritos and potato chips at each store we passed. Only two shops down from our apartment was the cutest old man who welcomed me with an easy smile each time I ordered a falafel.

In general, we walked everywhere or crammed into taxis. Christmas Eve, however, proved the exception when we boarded a train headed for the northwest coastal city of **Alexandria**. The standard price was about five U.S. dollars. I recommend taking the "express" train, which only lasted two and half hours (versus the "French" train that tacked on another hour). Our first stop was at the fortress where the entrance fee was 25 LE. This grand structure, which stands overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, served as protection for this historical city centuries ago. Next we stepped inside the magnificent **Library of Alexandria**, which at the price of only 10 LE is certainly an architectural masterpiece to behold. Ravenous after our site seeing, we sampled the delicacies of a local fish restaurant. I'm no fish connoisseur, but the others raved about the cuisine, so that's something to consider when visiting this seaside town.

Have I mentioned the traffic yet? As one local man cheerily declared to my friends, "The traffic is crazy—you must cross with bravery!" Each time you thought about taking a step off of the curb, you had to prepare for the torrent of cars in every direction. Cars constantly zoomed around corners and sped along the highways, much to the peril of pedestrians. Needless to say, we were not about to charge into such madness, especially when

there was six lanes of it, so we took a taxi (right?)! Once we were safely on the other side of the highway from hell, we walked into a large shopping mall. It was grand: carnival rides, a movie theater, and hundreds of shops filled with glorified products. I didn't need time to deliberate; I made a beeline for the Cinnabon. Such a sugary, delectable mess was perfect for ringing in the holiday!

With only three days left to savor our holiday, fellow PCV Chris Maiorano and I took a spontaneous overnight excursion down to visit **Mount Sinai**, one of the holiest places on earth. Legend has it that Moses first heard God speak to him and received the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai and is also the origin of the Ten Commandments. For the price of nine U.S. dollars and the duration of eight hours the bus jolted us down the peninsula (we reveled in the fact that we were technically on an Asian continent!). We arrived in the valley town of **Al Milga** where we shivered for about four hours before we began hiking at one o'clock in the morning. We followed the guidebook's advice and paid 80 LE for a Bedouin guide who accompanied us along the fierce climb. (We later discovered that the mountain was not much higher in elevation than the ones back at our own sites in Rwanda!!) This trip was a perfect finale to the whole vacation. I would urge anyone to look into embarking upon this hike, as it was not only tourist-friendly but amazingly beautiful as well!



PCVs Christa Pugh, Avery Miles, Karen Moy (a friend from the U.S.), Katy Heerman, Christa Maiorano, and Rob Navarro at the Pyramids of Giza in Egypt, December 2010.

Photo courtesy of Rob Navarro.

# MURYOHERWE

## Cheesy Pasta Tuna Melt

By Camille Simpson

### Ingredients

1 can of tuna fish, excess water drained  
1 bag of curly rotini pasta (elbow macaroni noodles will work also)  
½ wheel of shredded cheese  
½ to 1 teaspoons of salt  
Pinch of ground pepper  
½ green pepper, finely sliced  
½ onion, finely sliced  
2 ½ tablespoons of Mayonnaise  
1 bunch of cilantro or any other fresh herbs, finely chopped \*optional for added flavor\*



### Preparation:

Bring 4 cups of water to a boil  
Add 2 cups of dry pasta  
Let pasta cook for 10-12 minutes  
\*Optional to add in a pinch of chopped cilantro or any other fresh herbs to cook with the noodles for added flavor\*  
Add in ½ green pepper, finely sliced while pasta cooking  
Add in ½ onion, finely sliced while pasta cooking  
Once pasta is fully cooked, remove pot from heat  
Drain all excess water from pasta, keeping the pot off the fire  
Add in 1 can of finely chopped tuna fish  
Add 2 ½ tablespoons of mayonnaise  
Sprinkle in ½ wheel of shredded cheese  
Add ½ to 1 teaspoon of salt  
Add a pinch of ground pepper  
Mix all ingredients together  
Put pot back over heat for 3 minutes and mix continuously until all ingredients are mixed well and cheese is melted.

\*The tuna melt can also be prepared with rice instead of pasta. Use the same 1: 2 rice: water ratio.

# ARTS & CRAFTS

## Modge-Podge

By A.J. Bisesi

When I first arrived at site, I found myself being given a humble-sized room amidst nuns. Nuns, in honor of the Virgin Mary and purity (I'm guessing), love white. Sheets, walls, dinnerware, linens, fake flowers – everything is white. I needed color. Enter modge-podge. For those who have never heard of this, a quick definition: modge-podging is the process of using watered-down glue and random materials (usually old magazines pictures or scraps of fabric) to create awesome things. You can stay small with journals or vases or you can decide to tackle a whole bookshelf or chair or 3-foot lizard wall decoration. It's fun, easy, and, in all honesty, who doesn't love peeling dried glue off of his or her hands.

Some Simple Steps:

1. Gather materials you will use (pictures, igitende, string...).
2. Lather a small area generously with modge-podge (i.e., watered-down glue),
3. Put the pictures/string/cloth/materials on that area in the way you want them,
4. Smear modge-podge on top.
5. Let Dry!

It's truly a messy act of experimentation, so experiment away!



Examples of modge-podge creations by A.J. Bisesi

# NTUBIZI?

## Tips, Facts, Advice, & Miscellany

- You can find all of your favorite new and used books online—and raise funds for literacy and libraries at Better World Books. Great “bargain bin deals;” books arrive within an average of four to five weeks. Free international shipping worldwide—no minimum purchase!  
[www.betterworldbooks.com](http://www.betterworldbooks.com).
- Looking to expand your culinary horizons beyond rice and beans? Check out the Peace Corps Rwanda cookbook on the google group: <http://groups.google.com/group/peace-corps-rwanda>. Highlights include (but are not limited to) carrot-cake pancakes, faux-fettuccine alfredo, and falafels.
- Feeling nostalgic for furniture with names like Ektorpe, Odde, and Tromsö? Create your own IKEA-style house by printing out furniture models from [www.ikea.com](http://www.ikea.com). Take them to your local *umubaji* with your own dimensions and measurements.
- If a recipe calls for buttermilk, make your own. Add one tablespoon of white vinegar to one cup of milk. Wait one minute—presto.
- Low on MTN minutes? Go to [www.0.facebook.com](http://www.0.facebook.com). This site offers free facebook, which does not use modem minutes, as long as you have MTN. This also works on data internet phones with an MTN sim card, free internet!
- At the time of publication, the Rwandan post office is still not sending mail to the United States. When asked when sending letters might be possible again, the employee at the Kigali office simply shrugged.

**How to reach us:** send your comments or submissions for the next issue to somarwanda@gmail.com. Or you can snail-mail them to Nora Nunn, B.P. 4675, Kigali, Rwanda. Letters should include the writer's name, email address and telephone number.

**Enquiries:** send your enquiries to Peace Corps Rwanda, PO BOX 5657, Kigali, Rwanda; Attention: Mary Abrams

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