

# SOMA

Stories, Opinions, Messages, Art

A quarterly journal publication by Peace Corps Rwanda Volunteers



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# Experiment in Living

## The Week of the Rwandan

By Jen Olsen

Peace Corps preaches that we as volunteers live at the level of the local community, and on some points, we really do. But even by the minimal monthly living allowance Peace Corps gives us, it's still a far cry from what the typical Rwandan lives off (probably because they're also accounting for our letters home, phone credit, toilet paper and the occasional relapse into western life by splurging on an egg sandwich and coffee at a café once a month. Mmmm...).

But my neighbors don't have such luxury, and the girls in my village don't take the bus, go to town, or contemplate buying tree tomatoes even though they're out of season. Every day I walk the four miles to town out of the mountain with my neighbors. They're mostly heading to the markets, but doing so with baskets of maize balanced on their heads.

This means of carrying things had lost its shock value until I saw a woman walking down our mountain carrying a full-sized school bench, a chair, a market bag, and a basket of produce, all balanced on her head. There was also a baby on her back. She also had the forethought to cover the baby with a shawl to protect him from the sun. And the mountain's not a small decline by any means. I still feel like I'm in boot camp every time I go up it and I almost fall once a day going down. These women are malnourished, usually pregnant, usually with a baby already strapped to their backs, and they move jugs of water, vegetables, or benches, apparently, up and down the mountains like mules. No complaints, no hesitance.

When I walk with their kids, they're always excited: excited to play with their friends at the water pump; excited to kick a football made out of banana leaves; excited to tell the

*muzungu* they're going to look for food. Small children chew on sugar cane or unripe tree fruits, and stumble their chubby legs over to me, arms stretched out for what feels like hours waiting to get close enough to touch the mysteriously white-skinned, fine-haired girl who lives god-knows-why in their village. And I feel guilt at the empty water bottle in my bag, at the prospect of bread, eggs, maybe even juice and other luxuries of having more than 500 rwf a week to spend.

Being confronted by these images moment by moment, acknowledging the women who carry one jerrycan strapped to their heads and the other to their waists, and I wonder how they aren't still scoffing at me. One woman tried to carry my hoe for me, amongst all the other stuff she had on her. I told her I had strength and could carry it, and she laughed. The children gossip about me. A little girl I walk down the mountain with sometimes told me how other children tell her rumors about me, and she refutes or confirms them (since she has ACTUAL CONTACT with the *muzungu*). *And this one girl, she said that you never take lifts from passing cars, and you always walk, always! Even though you could have a ride!* (True. My rigorous dedication to walking is paying off because people notice, thank goodness. Plus, my legs look awesome.) *And the other kids, they tell me that you have a fiancé! And that you won't take a Rwandan husband!* (Also true. I don't think that requires an explanation . . .)

We are both quite the paradox, I think. I look absurd to them and likewise, they boggle my mind on a regular basis: movements, facial expressions, emotional expressions, dress, work, contemplation, everything. We blink at each other and sometimes I'm not sure who the zoo

exhibit is. Okay, that's not true. I know it's me. I actively try not to stare while they actively embrace the impulse.

But they've started to accept me. They've let me in to their lives for, I don't know what reason.

We (Americans) pulled out of Rwanda in 1994. Not only did we pull out but we pulled every other white person out, too. We left friends and colleagues to burn themselves out, to smolder until all the flames had scorched the land and a million people had died. And now they welcome me into their village? I walk home with friends and neighbors, marveling that everyone knows my name, that the mothers bid me hello, that the older boys and girls cast casual remarks as I pass, and the children ambush me with hugs as we approach my house. I feel a little like a rock star; exhausted, but riding a high on the cycle of adjustment; I've just hit the gold star on rainbow road and can now just sit back and enjoy the ride. I don't feel like I deserve this, but I'm grateful.

No one should take such a gift without a second thought. I felt I owed it to my village to get a little closer to their world. Living in the village isn't enough if I can still have all the comforts of change in my pocket and American dreams on the edge of my vision.

So I spent a week like a Rwandan. I ate one meal a day; beans, rice, cooked bananas, so on and as much water as I could afford to boil and carry with me during the day. The beans I cooked came from my own garden, and the 2000 rwf I budgeted for the week was spent only in the markets on produce from the people I call my neighbors.

It was just an experiment, really. We can all acknowledge that it isn't their way of life that's confusing to the senses. They live the best they can. They are farmers, or mothers, or workers, and that's no different from us. It's the millions of moments in between life, in between active decision making about how to live that confuses me. I just wanted to get in touch with them, to understand their mannerisms and movements. To quiet my curiosity at things I see but don't have an explanation for [which is

most everything]. They'll still think I'm a *mu-zungu*, that I'm hiding my baby-pool of money and riches in the closed door of my bedroom. But at least I would understand more. Maybe I would have answers to the millions of unfamiliar moments I experience each day. Or just one. One answer would be enough for now.

It took until day five of this lifestyle for me to have a delusional urge for bagels, day seven to dream about pizza, but it only took until day three or four to start to feel the effects on my body. My lips shriveled and my skin broke out in an unfamiliar dryness. My motions were slow, deliberate, which I only realized while I tried to swish my head around in a bucket to wash my hair; I became instantly disoriented and nauseated. I also realized that a mannerism I'd noted, particularly in men, of walking (moseying, almost) slowly, with the arms lingering out to touch things, meandering side to side, in what had appeared to be a very random and erratically slow movement, had an underlining malnutrition to it. I found myself reaching my arms out unintentionally to touch passing objects, and then realized it was because I was so dehydrated that I couldn't be sure where my feet would be landing. I had reached my fingertips out to graze the surface of an electrical pole, a plant, anything, because it gave me a sense of depth, grounding me to my current location and giving an awareness to my surroundings that I wasn't able to comprehend anymore on my own.

Anyhow, I made it to day seven before I bought eggs and some bread to make an obscene amount of French toast (a compromise with myself, for not deliriously going to look irrationally for expensive Kigali-city bagels). I felt like Hermann Hesse while researching *Siddhartha* but with much less clarity than he had. That also might just be the hunger talking.

How do you even begin to even the score? Not only are my neighbors hungry and poor, but they've accepted it as a standard of living. At the same time, they've opened up their arms to me, accepting me as one of their own despite every indication of being dramatically different. Even trying to live at their level for a short period of time, there are some things we

can't understand without having lived it the last 16 years. I've only lived through the past seven days with notable consequences and because of that small, relatively insignificant experience, I count myself lucky for every day I feel accepted here, because I'm not sure, what with so many other things to worry about (food, water, illness, shelter), I'm not sure I'd ever let the zoo exhibit convince *me* it were human. And yet here I am (here we all are), the doors to our cages have been opened, and we're peeking our heads out to mingle with our communities, a little less foreign than we were yesterday.



Learning how to cow dance  
Photo courtesy of Jen Olsen

# KOMERA

## Celebrating 50 Years of Peace Corps

By Matt Beamer



Well, it was no Boston, but that didn't stop 29 PCVs and Peace Corp staff members from running hard and having fun at this year's Kigali International Peace Marathon on May 22, 2011. It was the seventh edition of the annual event, and the theme was something that John F. Kennedy, an athlete himself, might have endorsed: "Sport is Life". It was in celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kennedy's Peace Corps that PCVs and staff put forth an extraordinary effort to participate in the race.

The weekend kicked off with the quintessential carbo-loading dinner on Saturday night, the eve of the marathon. The Peace Corps athletes (marathoners, half-marathoners, and marathon relay runners) were graciously hosted by D.M.O. Brooke Hopper. Brooke, perhaps drawing on her own Peace Corps experience, led a group of PCVs on the official support team in the preparation of food which more than a few of us had begun to forget even existed. There was delicious pasta with fresh vegetables, garlic bread, fresh green salad, fruit salad, and a delicious chocolate zucchini rum cake with raspberries on top (see recipe on page 38), not to mention the assorted raw vegetables scat-

tered throughout the dining area. For hydration needs, cases full of a rainbow of Fantas were on hand, kept cool in a dedicated beverage refrigerator.

As runners and support crew members fueled up for the race, there was a palpable feeling of excitement in the air. For most of the relay runners, it was the first time meeting their teammates, and excited discussions about the team order were taking place in every group in the happily crowded front room.

Halfway through the evening, Dr. Elite made one or two hearts thump a little faster when he handed out bib numbers and timing chips to all of the runners. And, as this event was to celebrate Peace Corps' 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, each participant received a khaki Peace Corps Rwanda hat and a Peace Corps Rwanda t-shirt in either blue, black, or white, on the back of which was the apropos imperative "KOMERA".

After leaving Brooke's house, most of the runners called the *case de passage* home for the night before the marathon, and the whole building seemed to be alive with the pre-race jitters. Sometime around midnight the occupants of the *case* finally fell into a fitful, uneasy sleep, aware that in six hours the buses would come and race day would begin.

On Sunday, May 22, race day, the athletes started stirring around 5 AM. Breakfast was a continuation of the paradisiacal dinner of the night before, and nervous runners quietly ate plates of pasta, bread, and salad or paced and talked more than they ate, anxious for the 8 AM start.

Finally, around 6:15 AM, the buses arrived to take all of the participants and the support team to Amahoro National Stadium, where the race would begin and finish. Upon arriving at the stadium, we were greeted by the sight of hundreds of other athletes preparing themselves for the competition. A couple of the more adventurous PCVs joined a large group of Rwandans in a very dynamic warm-up, replete with squats, jumps, and some frantic waving of arms and legs in an effort to jump-start their muscles. Those who declined to take place in the early warm-up stood or sat around the track soaking up the at-

mosphere.

As with any race, there were a wide variety of runners on hand: lithe professionals and semi-professionals, weekend runners, and everyone in between. And, as the emcee of the event told those in attendance several times, there were participants from all over the world, with a solid contingent of runners hailing from Rwanda and the rest of the East African Community. A large number of Europeans, Asians, and Americans represented a variety of governmental and non-governmental organizations. There was even a special guest brought along by the Peace Corps support crew: Flat Kennedy, a two-dimensional JFK reaching down to shake a supporter's hand with a smile. After being unrolled from his tote bag, he patiently posed for photo after photo with runners of all ages and nationalities. Shortly before the scheduled 8 AM start, there was even a group picture of the visionary and his vision as PCVs and staff gathered around the poster at one end of the track.

After the commemorative photo, all of the runners were ushered outside of the stadium. There was some confusion, however, as to when and where the start would take place. Indeed, after standing in a dirt parking lot near the stadium for several minutes, there was frantic action from one of the marathon officials as he waved the full-marathon and first-leg relay runners back into the stadium. Not everyone made it to the starting line on time, but the starter counted down, and, with a loud "GO!" the marathon began at around 8:25 AM, followed by the half-marathon about five minutes later and the 5-kilometer fun run five or so minutes after that.

The day was heating up nicely, so those who were awaiting their leg of the relay took shelter in the shade in the upper reaches of the stadium, waiting and watching for signs of the first runners.

It didn't take long for the first marathoners to come through, and before long there were loud cheers every few minutes as each Peace Corps runner ran around the track in the distinctive Peace Corps t-shirts. Those doing the relay were free to collapse on the infield after handing off their timing chip to the next runner,

but those in the half-marathon and the full marathon had to once again exit the stadium to brave the heat and the deceptively hilly (although flat for Rwanda) course. PCVs Kayla Ahrens, Joey Young, Jennifer Olsen and Kelly Miller were the brave half-marathoners who set out for a second lap. The lone wolf in the marathon, committed to four tortuous laps, was Steve “Charles” Cahill.

There continued to be a steady stream of runners in and out of the colorful Amahoro National Stadium throughout rest of the morning and into the early afternoon. Each time a Peace Corps runner was on the track, there was a great swelling of support both from the official support team and from the other runners, and before long those blue, white, and black shirts were crossing the finish line, collecting a finisher's medal as they did so.

The first male marathoner to cross the finish line was ILPCITIROCHIR KAMBIE Felix of Kenya in a time of 2:17:04, and the women's marathon champion was J RUTTO Beatrice, also of Kenya, in a time of 2:51:45. For the Peace Corps, Steve finished the marathon in 4:41:33, placing 83<sup>rd</sup> overall. The top Peace Corps finisher in the half-marathon was Kayla Ahrens in a time of 2:11:42, placing 281<sup>st</sup>. The top Peace Corps relay team crossed the line in 3:55:03, placing 9<sup>th</sup> among relay teams.

After the race, there was a general feeling of accomplishment among the Peace Corps athletes. When asked about his full marathon experience, Steve responded, “I felt good about it. I didn't walk a step, and I thought I was going to die, but I didn't. I'll do it again next year.”

Overall, the marathon was a great way to celebrate 50 years of Peace Corps. Thanks must be given to the help of the support team, who prepared the last supper before the race and cheered on runners both in the stadium and in front of the Peace Corps office as runners passed by twice on each lap. Also, the work done by Mary, Brooke, Dr. Elite, and all of the Peace Corps staff who participated on the relay teams made the event a resounding success. Just remember, “Sport is Life” and *komera*.

# Things We Do To Each Other

By Lucy Sung

Peace Corps' no-fee passport application in hand, I skipped up the steps of the federal building that housed the post office with passport services. Before I went through the doors, I asked the security guard a simple question to confirm if I had the right place.

"Do you know if the post office here has passport services?"

"Are you applying for an American passport or international passport?"

"What?"

"You can't do international passports here. You gotta go somewhere else."

"I'm an American citizen, you naïve, assuming moron. I can't believe I'm about to join a federal agency that represents Americans to foreigners even though there are fools like you."

Well, I wished that's what I said. As soon as the word "citizen" left my mouth, I was allowed inside the building, where I found myself feeling confused, angry, and quite frankly, sad.

Now in Rwanda, I find myself explaining to other people not who I am, but *what* I am. America is already a foreign concept to many people. When I tell Rwandans that I – in my brown eyed, black hair, round face glory – too, am an American, I blow their minds. I wish I could take their reaction as a compliment, but I cannot with the barrage of words that usually follow.

"Nooo! You are CHINA! Look at your eyes!"

"You lie! She lies!"

Having your identity invalidated hurts. It stings, like *pili pili* in your eyes.

Of course, not everyone starts to chant

"China!" or "Japan!" when they see me. Sometimes, they furrow their eyes in deep concentration before saying, "I think you are Chinese." Occasionally there is someone who says, "I think you are Korean," to which I give a high five (for knowing the country) before going into my spiel. "My parents are South Korean, I was born in American so I have American citizenship. Do you know Peace Corps?..."

Mimi, a fellow Asian American PCV, also experiences similar annoyances: people on the buses do not believe you, they call you "liar," and they continue to harass. Mimi found that it took other PCVs, who happened to be white, to confirm that she is American. "Only then Rwandans would nod and agree. But you can still see they are not completely convinced."

Recently, President Obama released his long-form birth certificate to stop allegations that he is not a U.S. born citizen. I feel like I need my birth certificate and a world map by my side just to make things easier, to make things make sense to those who do not understand. But I am not a machine. I get tired, fed up, and the goals of the Peace Corps take a backseat. I cannot stay angry long, for these unfortunate interactions happen everywhere. I hate speaking so slowly with my students. It is necessary, but it echoes painfully close to the cashiers, landlords, and neighbors who enunciated each word in growing volume to my mother because she spoke English with an accent.

I'm still trying to mediate my thoughts on how race and my role as a PCV play out. I cringed when I overheard a PCV saying, "We volunteers are all Americans; we are all the same." The beauty of America is that we're *not* all the same – throw away the old school "melting pot" theory. We are a mixed salad with croutons scattered throughout.

“Whatever you do, don’t engage in discussions on ethnicity.”

Over and over again during our trainings, we were reminded by PC staff not to discuss ethnicity with Rwandans. Understandably so – the scars of the genocide still mar our communities as proven by the stories, reburials, and tears shed during Genocide Memorial Week. The *abaturation* at my site tiptoe around the words “hamburgers” and “tootsie rolls” as if the military will jump out of the bushes and take you away. Putting labels or being put in a label can be dangerous. I am plagued by a question with no clear answer: how can I continue the conversation on diversity in America while avoiding a Rwandan bringing up their past divisions of Hutus, Tutsis, and Twa? How can I talk about being a Korean American (*not* Korean in America) without it sounding similar a Rwandan who is Tutsi or Hutu? The ethnic relations are too deeply rooted for me to even try.

It is a challenge that demands being open-minded, understanding, and most of all, respectful. In a country still recovering from the genocide and getting their exposure to other countries through kung fu movies, I must *ihangane* – be patient. I must remember that no matter how much I master the language, or perfect the cultural expectations of someone my age and gender, I am an outsider. I can only be myself and represent myself. The person who calls me *umuzungu* or *umushinwa* does not mean the next person will call me the same. Instead, I focus on the opportunities to share stories and find the similarities that don’t make us so different from each other.

# GLOW: So You Want to Start a Club

By Christa Pugh

When I arrived at site last year, I was excited to find that eight of my new students had attended Rwanda's first Camp GLOW in 2009. These students returned to our school motivated and eager to start a club with the help of my site-mate, health PCV (now RPCV) Tricia Vannatter. I was recruited somewhere along the way to serve as the club's co-coordinator, and since that time, working with the GLOW Club has become one of my favorite activities at school.

Helping students start and maintain a GLOW club is a very rewarding secondary project for teachers. To start a GLOW club, begin by identifying student leaders and meeting with them to discuss club leadership and topics for meetings. Talking with girls at your school who have attended Camp GLOW is a great place to start. Ask them what they learned at camp, what they want to teach their peers, and who can fill leadership positions.

Even if these girls aren't interested in starting a club, or you don't have students who have attended Camp GLOW in the past, you can still start a GLOW club. Choose a few girls from your classes who are smart, motivated, and good leaders to help you get started. Once the club is established, you can hold an election to fill leadership positions, but I would recommend choosing at least a president and vice-president whom you already know

and with whom you can work. The Peace Corps Life Skills Manual can help you come up with topics – download it at [http://www.peacecorps.gov/multimedia/pdf/library/M0063\\_lifeskillscomplete.pdf](http://www.peacecorps.gov/multimedia/pdf/library/M0063_lifeskillscomplete.pdf). or you can get a copy off the SharePoint (it's big though so be ready).

I see my role in the club as providing support to the student leaders and helping them access information and materials. It's important to me that the club is student-led. By leading these meetings, the club's president and other officers are developing their own leadership and public speaking abilities. Plus, I think that students are more receptive to information when it comes from a peer rather than a teacher. With that in mind, I attend every meeting, but I try to stay as hands-off as possible. If necessary, a PCV could provide more support by meeting weekly with the club's leaders to help them prepare for the general meeting.

At my school's first GLOW Club meeting, returned GLOW campers shared their camp experience and talked about the meaning of

GLOW. Now, a typical meeting consists of the club president sharing information and activities from Camp GLOW about goals, decision making, safe sex, HIV/AIDS, and other topics. The meetings often start with an icebreaker activity they learned at camp, or by singing a club anthem my students wrote



Christa's GLOW club decorating notebooks

Photo credit Christa Pugh

about why they love GLOW (writing a club anthem, pledge, or slogan is a great club activity for one of your first meetings!). I'm on hand to answer questions the club president can't answer and correct any misinformation, and I usually wrap up each meeting with a closing statement as the students always want to know my "advice" about whatever topic we're discussing. I sometimes help the students with ideas and materials for creative projects (see the end of this article for some ideas).

Last year, our most successful meetings occurred when Tricia and I asked our students to come up with a way to teach the ideas of GLOW to others. All by themselves, the students wrote a skit and songs in English that touched on ideas about sugar daddies, being empowered to say "no", setting goals, and family planning. They gave a presentation first at our school, and later at the sector office for students from a neighboring secondary school. The presentations included community speakers about HIV/AIDS, gender-based violence, and child rights. This project encouraged club unity by giving students from Senior 1 to Senior 6 a project to work on together; increased their self-esteem by allowing them to see a project through from beginning to end successfully and receive positive feedback from our headmistress, sector officials, and their peers; gave them an opportunity to practice presenting in front of a large group of people with confidence; and presented a valuable message to about 1,000 students from my sector! Watching these presentations is one of the highlights of my service thus far, and I feel fortunate and proud to be able to continue to work with these girls on a weekly basis.

### **Here are some ideas for creative activities.**

*Disclaimer: My club has already done some of these activities but some are in the queue for the next two terms. Some are my own ideas and some are based on a GLOW Club curriculum written by an unnamed PCV from Sabina, Uganda. Also, even if a project idea comes from you, try to give the students opportunities for leadership as much as possible – for example, explain the activity to a few students and let them communicate it to others, or simply suggest an activity and then step back and let them take over.*

Bring in speakers from the community. For example, three women from the HIV/AIDS group at Tricia's hospital presented about living with the disease and allowed the girls to ask questions. You could also host female business or government leaders.

Friendship bracelets are a fun project if you can get someone from home to send you embroidery floss! I used a pattern from [www.makingfriends.com/jewelry/bracelet\\_klutz.htm](http://www.makingfriends.com/jewelry/bracelet_klutz.htm). Using this pattern, one skein of floss (about 9-10 yards) is enough for about three bracelets. Teach a small group of girls how to make bracelets ahead of time, and allow those girls to teach their peers.

Have a talent show – either within your club or your club can host one for the entire school. Use it as an opportunity to talk about expressing yourself (encourage them to write their own poems, songs, and stories!) and speaking loudly and confidently in front of a group.

Ask the girls to anonymously write down any questions they have about sex, sexuality, or relationships. Answer the questions yourself, help the club leaders answer them correctly if they feel comfortable doing so, or bring in a guest speaker to answer (this is a great opportunity for Health and Ed PCVs to collaborate!).

Teach the girls to journal. Buy a cheap notebook for each student and allow them to decorate the covers with stickers and markers, if you have them. Talk to them about what journaling is – a way to remember experiences and think through problems and ideas in writing. Stress that a journal is private, and that there is no right or wrong, they can write about anything they want, in any language. One good starting activity is to ask the students to spend 10 minutes writing sentences starting with “I want”, “I think”, and/or “I feel”. Other journal topic ideas:

- What is leadership? What are the qualities of a good leader?
- What are your goals for the future?
- Describe a woman you admire.
- What do you like most about yourself?
- What are the qualities of a good friend? Write about a time when you were a good friend to someone.
- Write about a time when you had a problem and found a solution to that problem.

Give the students situations and have them role-play to practice being assertive, making good decisions, and giving good advice to their friends. For example, have the girls role-play insisting that a sexual partner uses a condom.

**Note:** Be on the lookout for the upcoming GLOW & BE clubs manual within

the next month or so. Questions? Contact [camp-glowranda@gmail.com](mailto:camp-glowranda@gmail.com).

# April Days

By Janelle Fann

“40,000.”

I feel my eyes go wide.

“In this parish?”

I want to grill Father Valens about that figure, feeling that he could not possibly be correct. Only a thin understanding of the culture and of the man holds me back.

“Yes,” accompanied by a rather vigorous nod, a bobble head priest.

I sit back in my chair, weak with incomprehension. Depending on who you ask almost a million people died here in just under one hundred days. In addition to the general slaughter thousands were murdered in churches. There are stories of priests who drew up lists of people to be killed. Churches with Swiss cheese roofs from grenades and bullets. For a while after the genocide religion was ignored. But now Christianity (Catholicism in particular) is truly back in full force. I do not know how to respond to such faith.

Shakespeare wrote (and I take liberties with the man’s words here) that it is foolish to weep for dead men. If they were evil and went to Hell, it was no more than they deserved. If they went to heaven then they surely were in a better place than the weeper. Being no Shakespeare, this situation looked like divine abandonment to me.

I turn to look out the window mulling over my heathen status. My already weak faith was obliterated by my mother’s long death and I have only made feeble efforts to reconstruct it. For an entire country to have faced what this one did and still be able to turn to religion afterwards at any point is almost inconceivable to me.

We finish breakfast and I walk around

the parish. Rwanda is struggling to find an economic foothold, in the meantime people struggling up Mount Poverty. The arduous journey is documented in the hands, eyes, garments, and habitats of her people. It is then, glaringly obvious, how nice the parish (and by extension the priests’ living space) is: clean, well kept, equipped with solar power. I marvel anew at my surroundings.

Three priests serve the parish where I live: Valens, Paul, and Edward. Valens is very much a jovial sort, Willie Loman—Rwanda style. He keeps giving me warm yogurt and walking away as I struggle to eek out what is supposed to be ‘lactose intolerant’ in Kinyarwanda. Paul is . . . interesting. Please be aware that I’m already not in love with living with three priests (even if it’s only for a short time) when Paul and I have this exchange.

Paul: Are you married?

Me: Oh No. I’m single, just like you.

Paul: I am not single. I am married to the church and when (!) you become Catholic I will be married to you too.

Me: Uhhh. . . (Because really, what *do* you say to that?)

Valens is the oldest and well, fatherly. I don’t eat much in general and even less in the face of continuous pots of boiled potatoes, boiled rice, boiled foliage, and. . . well boiled everything. On a night when I’d managed to unearth my appetite, I tried to explain hunger to Father Valens by pointing to and rubbing my stomach. It was at this point Valens got up and rounded the table in order to rub my belly. Discomforting. Later at the same meal, he decided it would be fun to tickle my twenty-eight year self.

Willie, My New Husband, and the Stealth Stomach Rubber, are basically good

guys.

Paul and Valens do not join Father Edward for lunch, leaving Edward and myself to enjoy the afternoon's selections of boiled delicacies.

I pick at my boiled something as Father Edward peppers me with questions in halting English:

"Have you talked to your family?"

"Yes, they are very well. How're yours?"

"I don't have."

"You are an orphan?"

Edward belly laughs. "Me? Yes, an orphan."

"No. . ." I pause. "No cousins, brothers, sisters?"

"Ah no. No one. You have?"

"No, my mother and father had me only. Your mother and father had you only, too?"

His face is glassy in its smoothness. "My mother, brother, sisters, and father. Everybody in 1994 was in the church that bulldozer destroyed."

\* \* \*

As Sister Marie Grace and I stood looking into the pit, something fluttered down into it. At first I think one of the ragged children who followed us threw something in. I start toward them threateningly but I notice the wind is picking up and scattering small green leaves about. I move back to Marie Grace's side not touching, not talking. She rubs her forehead with three fingers and abruptly begins a jerky circuit around the pit.

There is no "Never Again" sign or commemorative banner here as in other places in Rwanda. How you find it is by asking, if you're a stranger. Then you are directed to a straggling dirt path and about one hundred and fifty feet from the road there it is. But Marie Grace does not need to ask.

On the right side there's a field of almost ripe corn. On the left, a tight stand of eucalyptus trees where five or six goats are placidly grazing. Looking down you see the opening, just a small thing maybe two feet across. Beyond the

opening, the size and depth of the pit is reminiscent of a swimming pool and you realize that it's shaped like an upside down funnel. The little sun that reaches the bottom reveals mud and decaying plant matter. But your mind works to find skulls and femurs, shredded clothes and naked teeth.

Marie Grace catches my hand and tugs me away this April 7<sup>th</sup>. I go as placidly as any goat because I am leaving the children there. Though a few follow us, two or three of them, puzzled and reverential, remain at the lip and are still. I turn and follow Marie Grace because the children are there at the hole in this place, filling it, quelling the echo of loss with the resonance of life. I can not think of a more appropriate way to negate death.

# POETRY

By Annan Henry

I.

At night when the blood  
Swells in my ears for want  
Of something out of silence  
And my beating heart  
Is measured by the rush

When I cringe and quail and quake  
And fold my heaviness inward  
And so clenched gain traction  
In trepidation's heightened avidity

Then, are exhalations whispers  
For want of home  
Then, is 'alone' a word  
I know all too well beyond  
What I have shown

II.

As for my transgressions, forgive me them  
May they remind you that I was bereft and bur-  
dened  
And that I ached for your embrace  
That I, having been dismissed once more  
Felt never again able to bear it  
And cried out at the world against you

Please remember that I bled hope  
That I smiled for the blessed sweetness  
Of stars and sky and the rest in your company  
And how mysteries unfolded before my tearful  
eyes  
And how that struck me utterly down  
So that I was certain, as I've read  
That the abyss must be all flowering and blue  
beneath  
And that you must have authored it all.

# Inshallah

By Michele Hernandez

I can't cry. I've been called a liar, cold-hearted, traumatized. Whatever. I just know I can't, even if I really want to.

The last time I cried was when I had to call my host mom in Tokomadji (say it: toe-koe-MAH-gee) to tell her I wasn't coming back to our village because Mauritania had become unsafe for Peace Corps Volunteers to continue living there.

The 75 of us arrived in Mauritania on June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008. About a week later the number-two man in the government overthrew the President in a bloodless coup-d'état. We should've known then that we were doomed.

In the capital, Nouakchott (say it: new-OCK-shot), and on the border near Mali, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) had begun targeting white people and foreigners in general: killing an American missionary, , kidnapping aid workers, etc.. Because of severely limited communication systems in the country's infrastructure, we had almost no idea that these other things were going on in the country. In our villages, PCVs were just fine, plugging along at our jobs and integration.

Late June 2009 we were offered Interrupted Service: the opportunity to Close our Service and go home. Of our 74 that swore in (no ETs), 23 took this option. This means they can be re-instated or re-enrolled later and (I think) still receive the benefits of an RPCV (Returned Peace Corps Volunteer).

Of course, in the village we were fine; totally safe and protected by our villagers. I could picture it if a threat came to Tokomadji, and I *know* every single person would line-up in front of me and do whatever it took to protect me from harm. No question.

July 25, 2009, on my way to a PCV's ex-

tensively planned "Eco/Health Camp" for young girls, I got a phone call from my APCD saying I need to be in Nouakchott in 3 days' time and I need to pack my things for going home. After immediately freaking out because of this out of the blue phone call, he assured me I wasn't going home, but I just needed to pack as if I was.

Because Mauritania has all of four paved roads in the entire country, travel is really difficult (it took me two days to get from my village to Nouakchott, and anywhere from three to eight hours to go from my village to Kaédi, the nearest regional capital). I got to my village and had one day to go around to all 1,000 of my neighbors and explain that I was going to Senegal for about two weeks because we're not sure if Mauritania is safe. But I'll probably be back; we all agreed that Mauritania is safe, and I'll be back in no time.

All 51 Peace Corps Volunteers from Mauritania were pulled into Senegal while a Safety and Security Team evaluated the viability of continuing in Mauritania. They bused us to the PC training center in Thies (say it: ch-ez),



Michelle with her community members

Photo courtesy of Michele Hernandez

Senegal where we were treated very well, bonding like you'd never think possible, and enjoying the similarities in Mauritanian and Senegalese culture.

Then Mauritania's first ever suicide bomber attacked, injuring two guards at the French Embassy and 1 random jogger (as reported by NY Times).

I love that no matter where we are in West Africa the people are (generally) warm, open, interested, and talkative! A local jewelry maker, a woman named Adama (say it: Adam-ah), came to the training center every day to sell her stuff to us; she also started calling me "Bobine" (say it: BOW-bine, rhymes with pine, meaning "daughter") and invited me to her amazingly artistic house. She, her painter husband, and nine artistic children paint, sculpt, sew, and make jewelry for sale to the public. They gave jewelry to everyone who bought from them, and even gave me some paintings. Samba Ly, Adama's husband, has a website with some of his work. Just like in Mauritania, the people are willing to give whatever they have to a friend (and everyone is considered a friend) and treat you to some of the best hospitality I've seen in the world (not that I've been everywhere, but a fair amount).

On a Thursday, then Peace Corps Deputy Director Jody Olsen came to Dakar to break the news: we couldn't go back to Mauritania. Not even to say goodbye (unless you weren't planning on continuing with PC and could get yourself there, otherwise policy states that a PCV would be putting him/herself in deliberate danger, against Peace Corps regulations, and would be Administratively Separated). It was great having such an experienced and important person there with us: Mrs. Olsen was an incredible resource and source of information, hope and compassion for us in our situation. By Sunday we had to write our DOS (Description of Service, a standard PCV document that summarizes your experience and work), fill out a form to get our belongings gathered and sent to us from our villages, and decide if we wanted to: 1- COS (Close of Service, ending our contract as PCVs

and becoming RPCVs), 2- Re-enroll at a later date for a different program or 3- Transfer to another program directly.

She contacted country directors, explained the situation, and about 14 directors offered us a place in their program. We just had to choose the one we wanted based on the positions available and our personal skills and interests.

I was totally torn, but as I was walking into one of the bathrooms, fellow PCV Marta was on her way out and asked, "Hey, you comin' to Rwanda with us?" and I just said, "Sure."

24 volunteers transferred programs; 14 of us came here to Rwanda to finish our second year of the two-year contract. We did have almost two months from the time we left Senegal until we began Pre-Service Training in Rwanda, so we were able to go home for that time. Four volunteers have extended, showing their dedication to the people we serve: Mark (for four months with the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda), Ashley (for a full year working with Rwanda's Justice Strengthening Program, organizing and connecting Education PCVs to judicial employees to learn English and as the Malaria Initiative Coordinator), Matt, and me (both for a full year working at CHF International, a development organization).



Michelle at work in the garden of a women's cooperative

Photo courtesy of Michelle Hernandez

# Notes on Culture

By A.J. Rikli

The Peace Corps wants all of its volunteers to assimilate well, getting to know the culture of the host country. One of the nice things about culture is that it's made up of people, just regular folks, and regular folks are fun to hang out with. Every day I get a chance to meet these supposedly mysterious "host country nationals," and every day I make a new friend or two to kick it with.

A visitor who attended our Pre-Service Training in Nyanza actually told the group that Rwandans are difficult to become friends with. I've actually found the opposite to be true. My tendency is to make friends with the people around me, granted, but these people are some kind of friendly of a totally new type, in my mind. Yesterday I met a couple new dudes over a cold beer, and they both wanted to be homies. One of them called me *umusore mwiza*, or a nice young, single gentleman, and the other guy invited me and my Rwandan pal to a nearby town to eat some pork one of these weekends. Pork is expensive here; we will definitely honor the invitation.

I think the tendency of my peers is not to look past the difficulties of meeting a new type of people in general. Maybe they even pass judgment a little too quickly on folks. How exhausting.

A decently attired and seemingly well-meaning store owner in town yesterday approached me with a handshake and said "Good afternoon." Immediately I thought, Aha, this guy speaks English. (Any Rwandan that knows the appropriate salutation for the time of day is more advanced in *icyongereza*, as we all know.) I'll have fun getting some practice in speaking slowly, and maybe I'll teach him a new word or two. After a few sentences of the usual niceties – Where are you from? What do you do there?

Why are you here in Rwanda? – he asked me how he could get someone to sponsor his kids in school. I don't really know much about sponsorships, and I'm not about to give my money towards something like that since my chump change wouldn't help much, so I told him to seek information at the US embassy in Kigali. Truth be told, he might be able to find some help there.

When things like this happen, the tendency of many is to run away and become mentally introspective, if not physically leave the scene. Ideas that occur to people in uncomfortable situations get ugly right away. I've heard some harsh things come out of the mouths of my peers, on occasion.

Folks like me can choose to remove themselves from the issues at hand and really separate themselves from the society around them, but that's really only a temporary fix. It might work for people who are just visiting, but our two-year stints are no vacation. Every day you still have to get up and see all the people around you. They're not going anywhere.

One way or another, you can either choose to smile or mope about it. I'm of the smiling variety.

The best way to get to that point is to view these people as, well, people. What if you had almost nothing? Wouldn't you want something? And when everyone is telling you these foreigners have what you want, wouldn't you ask them for it? Well, yeah. Of course you would. And so would they.

At that point of realization, one can really appreciate Rwandans (and maybe everyone) objectively. Continuing, you start to realize how people here are so exceedingly friendly.

They say hello to each other on the street, taking time out of their often very busy days to figure out where their acquaintance is coming from, where he's headed, and inquire as to how the baby is coming along (Is he strong?).

Here, if one of your buddies is short on money by the end of the month, he might just go ahead and tell you he's hankering for some meat. If you're Rwandan, you know what you do? You buy a round of brochettes. From time to time, people just show up at my house around meal times. My roommate is quick on giving up her plate and finding another one so we can all eat together. The common greeting out here in the countryside is “Komera!” or “Mukomere!” Wishing someone to be strong while climbing one of these steep hills is just downright nice, in my mind. The soccer team borrows my ball (possession of which secures my position as their manager), but when it comes back, it's clean after a kid returns it to me, the ball-brandishing hand accompanied at the elbow by his other hand, showing respect for his superior. These examples go on and on, for real.

Cultural assimilation is difficult, though, but that's what we all signed up for. And keeping a positive attitude is just so much easier and less emotionally demanding than getting upset.

I have faith in all of my peers that you can find the good in people. Find a way to relate to everyone. Take advantage of your openness, positivity, and adaptability, and have fun with the cultural differences. After all, Rwandans and Americans have a lot in common – we're all just people.



Photo courtesy of A.J. Rikli

# KWITEZA IMBERE

## Paving the Way to Progress

By Avery Miles

A year ago I attended a ceremony on the first day of Genocide Memorial Week. During the course of the service several speakers gave testimonials about the terrible events that occurred 16 years ago. Every single speaker, including the president whom I heard on a radio broadcast, mentioned the word “kwihuta.” Afterwards when I asked a community member what this meant he explained that it refers to the word “progress” and literally means “to go quickly.” As I heard this I had to pause and realize how appropriate that word is to the atmosphere here in Rwanda. Traveling around in this country illustrates this perfectly.

I live in the western province, in the district of Ngororero, where the Chinese are currently working on the main road which runs from Gitarama to Mukamira (a small town that meets the road to Gisenyi). Every time I leave my site I am excited to see the new work which has been done since the last time I ventured out onto the road. A couple of weeks ago when I returned home from a trip to Tanzania, I was astonished to see how far the blacktop had traveled in my absence. Whether a crater-sized hole has been filled, or the tunnel that allows water to flow from mountain to village has been completed; each time

I travel I encounter some kind of improvement on the road.

In January 2010, when I first made the journey to my village of Muramba, located at the end of a mountain ridge, I thought my teeth were going to be jarred out of my skull



from all of the bumps and dips in the wide, muddy path that had yet to take the shape of an actual road. To my surprise, I learned from other travelers (who had had a similar experience on the same pathway) that the conditions used to be much worse. My eyes bugged out.

What could be worse than slushy mud covering the entire expanse of the road?! But they enlightened me with tales that resembled a ride from a theme park- the one that jerks you back and forth to the point that you think you may lose your breakfast and you seriously question the safety of such a ride. Only, their story was reality and the idea of safety was probably something they did not want to contemplate until they were standing on two feet again. Fortunately, that image is now safely tucked away as fond nostalgia. Now, when I want to travel in the direction of Gitarama I can hardly imagine those stories having taken

place only a few years ago, let alone a couple of months ago! That same path is increasingly flat and smooth, with only a few minor lumps along the way. As the bus, taxi (*matatu*), or car winds its way around the mountainous countryside, I love trying to guess where the road will next reach.

When I first arrived to Ngororero district last year, the tar stopped several kilometers from the center of Ngororero town (or roughly, the middle of the district). I knew that as the taxi descended from the solid feeling of compact road to the loose gravel strewn across sand I had entered a whole new dimension. Ngororero town is not very large but it does have a fairly substantial bus depot. In the past 19 months it has expanded to include some nicely decorated buildings which advertise restaurants and shops inside. Not only has access to and from this town been improved but there are also new and impressive walkways and stairwells lining its perimeters. And since my arrival to this district, the road has made its way up to the town center and beyond! Deep ravines that used to border the wide, dirt path have been filled in and covered with tar to construct a proper road. In addition to easing the passage for the large Onatracom buses and smaller taxis that now rumble by the edge of my village, it alters the overall landscape. On my last trip, as I came round the last bend into town I noticed a latticework of grass etched into the hills beside the road. While this practice is used primarily to protect against erosion, it certainly makes the overall area look very smart also.

With all of this in mind, there is still much more work to be accomplished. In various sections of the road, there are sizeable gaps in the pavement and cars must make allowances for the drastic change from the sleek black top to gritty gravel and slushy mud. Passing

through on a taxi the other day, I could not help but suck in my breath for the 2 foot deep trenches that have developed from heavy rains. As we skirted around the severe dips and anaconda-size ditches, I was reminded of off-roading with my friends back in the states. Then, we would actively seek out those rough and undeveloped trails in the wilderness; whereas, here in Rwanda this stands as the only means of transportation between otherwise isolated villages and towns.

And now, a year later, as I wind my way through the rolling hills of western Rwanda, I notice a country that, having decided to make something happen it does so with assiduous determination. Only yesterday there was a dirt path that served as a main road and now there is a long stretch of pavement that continues north, carrying people and goods with ease and success. It's already starting to become more and more convenient; instead of paying 2,500 RWF for a moto ride home today I climbed into a *matatu* taxi for 500 RWF!! In such a short time, the road has become something that one could only dream about a year ago when it was no more than an idea of the future. In the 16 months I have lived in this area, I have observed the rapid progress that has taken place, finally understanding the full meaning of *kwihuta*.

# WELLNESS

## Taking Care of Ourselves Overcoming Stress and Burnout

By Kerianne Hendrickson

*The following information is intended to provide a clear understanding of stress and the way that it presents itself, its relationship to burnout, as well as to provide tips and strategies for coping with stress from the PCV perspective. By learning how to take care of ourselves and maintain wellness in our own lives, not only will we benefit, but we will be of best help to others.*

Taking care of ourselves is no easy task. As PCVs, we are constantly having to adapt and adjust to situations. It is inevitable that we will be overwhelmed and have feelings of stress, low moods, strains, etc. from time to time.

Stress is caused by an imbalance between the demands upon an individual and his or her ability to cope with those demands. The demands are perceived as challenges. Everyone has their own personal beliefs that influence their feelings and actions against such perceived or real challenges. Thus, individuals differ from each other in their responses to stressful events.

**The way stress manifests itself is different for everyone. Some common manifestations are:**

- Irritability over small things
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep
- Queasy stomach
- Desire to run away
- Constant feeling of tiredness
- Psychosomatic illness
- Excessive criticism of others
- Poor work performance
- Difficulty making decisions
- Unusually introspective
- Feelings of guilt, worry, anxiety

**The following are manifestations of stress that are cause for some concern:**

- Staying in bed 12-14 hours per day
- Staying in your living quarters all day
- Eating excessively
- Resorting to heavy alcohol or substance use
- Escaping into sexual relationships
- Avoiding friends and neighbors

**The following are manifestations of stress that are cause for serious concern:**

- Prolonged depressions
- Marked changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- Excessive anxiety that interferes with the ability to function
- Self-destructive or violent behavior
- Alcohol or substance abuse
- Failure to comply with medical recommendations

It is important as individuals and peer supporters to be mindful of stress and the reactions to it in ourselves and others. We must use our judgment when identifying stress and address it before it becomes a problem--before it becomes prolonged and interferes with our lives and our service in negative ways.

When stress is a cause for concern, seeking support is necessary. Supporters can help others feel that they are not alone and provide a reflective listening ear. They can help others realize that to experience stress is as a PCV "normal." Peers can offer encouragement and provide advice about healthy coping mechanisms that might assist in bringing stress levels back to a healthy state. They can continue to help monitor stress levels and make referrals if they become prolonged.

When stress becomes a serious problem, individuals are at a point where they are very vulnerable to

making dangerous coping choices. Their needs are too great and require professional intervention. It is important at this point that Volunteers seek out help from the PCMO. As part of the Peer Support Network, Volunteers need to take care of each other. When intervention is necessary, Volunteers need to be held accountable for their peers and make sure they receive the help they need as PCVs and peer supporters, we must remain vigilant regarding burnout in ourselves and others. This Burnout Questionnaire provided by Peace Corps is a tool that can be used to check in with ourselves on occasion and help us recognize when intervention is necessary.

*To use this tool, rate each of the following items in terms of degree to which the symptoms were representative of you for the last month.*

- 0 = Never
- 1 = Occasionally
- 2 = Somewhat often
- 3 = Frequently
- 4 = Almost always

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Do you tire easily? Do you feel fatigued, even after having gotten sufficient sleep?
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Do you get annoyed by people, their demands and stories of their daily activities? Are you irritable or impatient with others?
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Do you feel critical, cynical, and disillusioned?
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Do you feel a sadness you can't explain? Do you cry more than usual?
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Do you feel you are more forgetful of appointments or deadlines? Do you feel absent-minded?
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Do you avoid seeing close friends or family members? Do you want to be alone more than usual?
7. \_\_\_\_\_ Does doing even mundane things seem more of an effort than usual?
8. \_\_\_\_\_ Do you suffer more than average from physical complaints like headaches, upset stomach, general aches and pains?
9. \_\_\_\_\_ Do you feel at a loss when the activities of the day end?
10. \_\_\_\_\_ Have you lost interest in the activities you used to enjoy?
11. \_\_\_\_\_ Do you feel a lessening enthusiasm for your work? Do you feel depressed or negative about your work?
12. \_\_\_\_\_ Are you less efficient than you think you could be?

13. \_\_\_\_\_ Are you eating more (or less), smoking and/or drinking more or using drugs to cope with the demands of your life?

**Understanding your score:**

**0-15** suggests you are coping adequately with the stress you are experiencing

**16-25** suggests that you might be suffering from stress; it is advised that you take proactive, preventive action.

**26-35** suggests possible burnout

**35 and above** indicates probable burn out

According to [www.helpguide.org](http://www.helpguide.org), burnout happens when we have become overexhausted due to prolonged and excessive stress. Being in a constant state of stress can cause you to feel helpless and worn out. When you are burnt out, problems seem difficult to overcome. You have trouble finding the energy to care about your situation and do something about it.

Burnout may be the result of unyielding stress, but it is not the same as stress. One difference between stress and burnout is that stressed people can still imagine that if they are able to get things under control they will feel better. Burnt out people, on the other hand, feel empty, have no motivation, and are beyond the point of caring. Stressed people feel as though they are drowning while burned out people feel all dried up. Another difference between stress and burnout: While one is usually aware of being stressed, one does not always notice when burnout happens.

It is important to be proactive when addressing burn out, especially when we notice our stress levels going up. Addressing burn out early on will enable us to better protect ourselves and help us to maintain some balance and wellness during our service and throughout our whole life.

As we know, well-being is essential to most areas in our lives – relationships, work production, integration at our sites, etc. It particularly improves our abilities as peer supporters, because it helps ensure that we have perspective on a situation.

Although we do not need to seek perfection, as peer supporters we should all seek to model an attitude and behaviors consistent with taking care of ourselves – mentally, physically, cognitively, emotionally, and spiritually. The following is a list of self care tips and strategies that was compiled by current PCVs serving in [Rwanda](#) :

- Limit demands on your time and energy
- Learn to say "oya"
- Set goals and have a plan
- Plan trips/vacations during service
- Develop and maintain a sense of humor
- Watch television shows (good ones going around PC community right now are *How I Met Your Mother*, *Big Bang Theory*, *Glee*, *Big Love*, *Entourage*, *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, *The Office*)
- Make/buy healthy snacks to bring with you to work (e.g., granola, carrots, peanuts, biscuits, etc.)
- Talk on the phone with other friends, colleagues, and other PCVs
- Buy *igitenge* and have dresses made
- Use Kinyarwanda, use French, practice African English
- Read both good and bad books (suggested books by Volunteers include *Eat Pray Love*, *A Gift From the Sea* by Anne Marrow Lindbergh, anything by John Grisham)
- Make to do lists and check things off
- Write and send snail mail (should be possible now, and let Mary know if your Post Office turns you down – she continues to track this for the Embassy)
- Try new recipes
- Write emails
- Study for the GRE
- Plan post service trips (never too early to start)
- Try to name all 50 states (very hard and a super funny Friends episode)
- Decide what to buy as gifts/souvenirs for people at home,
- Dance and sing around your house
- Rearrange your furniture (it is like getting all new stuff)!
- Garden
- Write to your World Wise Schools class
- Write letters to other PCVs
- Invest in an animal (chickens are great pets to have in Rwanda)
- Listen to “Border Crossings” on Voice of America (send requests because the Zambia PCVs are crazy and make requests like everyday)
- Take time to make yourself appear nice (painting your nails, bathing, wear make up, soak/scrub your feet until they are actually clean, wear clean clothes, wear smelly good lotions, shower)
- Decorate your house to fit your personality (paint rooms with happy colors!)
- Color with kids
- Make cookies (it can be done using *imbabura*)
- When people stare, give them a show (greet them, have a staring contest)
- Laugh and smile
- Focus on small successes
- Review previous successful problem-solving
- Break larger tasks into smaller ones
- Make small daily decisions
- Essential oils
- Exercise (hiking, running, stretching,)
- Do yoga ([yogadownloads.com/itunes](http://yogadownloads.com/itunes))
- Meditate (see yoga videos being passed around by PCVs for tips)
- Find a special spot to go to
- Find people who share your spiritual beliefs
- Get fresh air
- Get enough sleep (but not too much)
- Eat nutritional variations of food (eat greens!)
- Consult the Doctor when you are ill
- Give yourself time to reflect
- Cry
- Drink a lot of water
- Take time to relax
- Find a local person with whom you can talk to
- Do things in moderation
- Remember you have choices
- Find happiness in the things you can control
- Accept the things you cannot change
- Minimize caffeine

Peer support often involves helping others with problems that can affect us all. Thus, as Volunteers, there may be times when issues arise and need to be explored. During these periods, it is better to devote energy to ourselves, rather than trying to support others. Remember, there is no problem or shame in focusing on yourself, especially because it makes you a better, more integrated peer supporter in the long run.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the self-care tips and strategies list. If you have strategies that work and would like to add to this list, you can e-mail me at [keriannehendrickson@gmail.com](mailto:keriannehendrickson@gmail.com).

Take care.

# NUTRITION

## Eating Healthy in Rwanda

By Deanne Witzke

We need protein, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, fat, and most importantly water. Living in a culture where food is (let's be honest) not a highlight and where water is scarce it is important to be extra aware of your daily intake. One quickly notices the Rwandan diet to be particularly carbohydrate heavy. While carbohydrates are a necessary part of our diet, it is good to be aware of and mindfully add other necessities into our meals.

Suggested items to splurge on to maintain nutrition (found in Kigali or other big cities):

- olive oil
- oatmeal
- peanut butter (there are some local, natural peanut butters found in Rubengara or Kigali)
- wheat flour (called Atta flour, or chapatti flour at the stores)
- real butter (it will keep for at least a month in an air tight plastic container, it is much more nutritionally beneficial than Blue Band, and tastier)
- lentils
- chickpeas
- wheat
- berries
- raisins
- nuts

- sesame seeds
- brown rice
- coconut milk
- yogurt

Items you may be able to find in your village that are good to incorporate regularly:

- avocado
- eggs
- peanuts
- honey
- bananas
- colorful vegetables: *lenga lenga* (leafy greens), carrots, tomatoes, squash/pumpkin, fresh peas, green beans, green peppers
- variety of fruits
- real milk, if your body is tolerant to it

*Tip: when you travel try to visit other markets and bring back some items that are not available at your site. \_*

### Recipe ideas

Breakfast:

- Banana/Pumpkin/Squash Bread
- Whole Wheat biscuits Whole Wheat
- Chapati/tortilla

Lunch/Dinner:

- Omelets [add lenga lenga, tomato, onion, garlic, green pepper, peas, etc. load it up!]
- low carb Lentil/bean burgers/meat loaf/meat balls
- Squash Soup Guacamole w/ wheat chapatti
- Brushetta on wheat chapati

Snacks:

- carrot sticks/bananas and peanut butter
- fresh fruit
- sliced tomato/avocado sandwiches

### Lentil Soup

*Serves 3-4*

1 cup lentils, rinsed

1 large onion, chopped

3-4 carrots, chopped

*Lenga lenga* (leafy green vegetable), chopped

4 cups water (veggie/chicken broth work also)

3 cloves garlic, minced

1 green pepper, chopped

3-4 tomatoes, chopped

Lemon/lime juice (if available)

Salt and pepper

Begin by sautéing the onions, garlic, greens, and carrots in a little olive oil, but if you are short on time you can throw it all in a pot and let it cook for about 30 minutes. You can season with Italian spices (basil, thyme, sage, parsley, oregano, cayenne) or with curry blends (cardamom, cori-

ander, garlic, ginger, cumin, paprika, etc.). You can use the leftovers to make lentil burgers!

### Lentil Burgers/Meat balls/Meat loaf

*Serves two ... or one hungry PCV*

1/2 cup cooked, drained, cooled lentils

1 egg (if you have no eggs you could also use 1 tbs mayonnaise)

1 onion, chopped

1/2 cup oatmeal or bread crumbs

1-2 Tbs flour (whole wheat works)

Any other veggies you have on hand- carrots, green peppers, garlic, corn, lenga lenga or nuts/seeds (sesame, sunflower, chopped cashew, etc.)

Salt, pepper and spices to taste (you can go Indian and make a delicious curry burger, or add chili powder, cumin, paprika, and cayenne for a barbeque/southwestern taste, BBQ rub would also be good)

Combine all ingredients, except egg/mayo, in a bowl, and mix well. Try some and adjust the seasonings. Lastly, add the egg. Let mixture sit 10 minutes to thicken. Make into patties and cook like hamburgers in a little hot olive oil. Serve on toasted buns. You can also make meatballs or meatloaf. For meatballs add Italian spices [basil, oregano, sage, thyme, parmesan if you have it] roll into balls w/flour and cook in olive oil. For meatloaf add spices and then fry with ketchup on one side. You can use the same recipe to make bean burgers!

# REFLECTIONS

## Losing Yourself to Find Yourself: Challenges, Successes and Strategies

By Daniel Serwon

The other members of the second education group and I attended our in-service training (IST) in mid-March.. On the first day of IST we sat in a large room where there were some profound quotations on the wall by Benjamin Franklin and some other famous teachers. One sign read: “To truly find yourself you need to lose yourself in the service of others. – Gandhi.” Whoever wrote this one made a few errors that throughout the week were corrected by someone who cared enough to go and mark the change on it. But to me the greatest error is giving credit of this quote to Gandhi (I’m sorry I mean *Gandhi*) rather than to Jesus. Jesus said, “Die to yourself and live for others, only then can you truly live.” Gandhi was an amazing man and he deserves a lot of credit, but when he is quoting Jesus, then this fact needs to be acknowledged. I realize that the wording is a little different, but they spoke different languages (neither one of those being English), and I think we all know how things can get lost in translation. Yet for all I know, someone else said this before Jesus and therefore there is no reason not to credit Gandhi with this philosophy.

On that first day of IST we had three sessions on releasing our frustrations. We talked all day about successes and strategies that we had experienced in our daily lives as volunteers. PCV Allister Stanton described his fear of being attacked by wild animals (I feel for him because nature is scary, but I couldn’t help but laugh at this idea). A considerable amount of us are worried that we will be poisoned. I especially liked something that A.J. Rikli said about how Rwandans are people and we need to

treat them as equals. At the end of the day Andrew Udelsman jokingly said that his challenge was having to sit inside all day discussing challenges when the weather is so beautiful outside.

I absolutely sympathize with all of the challenges that we are facing living in a completely different culture. At the same time, however, I think that it is very important to recall how difficult our lives were in America. I find that we often develop the same mentality as many Rwandans: the belief that life in America is extremely easy. A lot of us are coming here straight out of university. College is of course a lot of fun for many people, but I don’t know many who also consider it easy. After pre-service training a lot of us were saying how we wouldn’t want to go through that again, but I don’t think that attitude is any different for most graduating college students. All of the long nights cramming for finals or starting papers the night before they were due (or maybe the hour before they were due); the anxiety that test taking brings and the constant fear of failure; the competition that is waged to get the higher grade point average so that your resume can show that you are a little better than someone else. We also forget how difficult it was when we started college to make friends and to adjust to being away from home let alone the pressures that we put on ourselves to perform in our social lives. We are more willing to accept all of these problems as part of life than not being able to communicate with a stranger who is carrying a 100 pound bag of potatoes on her head on a dirt road and is staring at you as you walk by. And that is why this session was necessary.

If we are not coming right out of school, then we are coming from the “real world.” If you had a job, I am sure that you had problems there. You may have hated your boss or what you were doing and Peace Corps was a valid reason to escape the corporate grind and do something that you always wanted to do. Out of all of the jobs that I have held in America, the only one that I enjoyed working for is the U.S. Census. I loved going around to people’s houses telling them they needed to fill out that form. For me Peace Corps sounded like such an exciting adventure and every other career choice sounded boring.

The story I am about to tell is one I have been telling recently to people to justify why my life in Rwanda has been easier than when I was in America. I’m definitely not saying that my life has been hard or bad because it has been good. I have had every opportunity available to me to succeed living in the upper middle class in an affluent neighborhood. Last year I got my taste of the “real world” and honestly I am not in a rush to get back to it.

If you know me then you might be surprised when I tell you that I have been shy for most of my life and telling a story like this one has never been one of my strengths. Another thing is that this is my account and even though you may see things differently, I trust that you can respect who I am enough not to argue with me over things that I did experience, but to you may seem impossible. I have similar problems to the rest of the second education group that I complain about. My spirituality is how I am able not only to cope with them but also to understand them.

Before coming to Peace Corps, I was an American. I was lucky that my mother took it upon herself to continue to feed me even though I wasn’t living at home, but other than that I had a very hard time. This started when I returned home from a vacation to Hawaii and found 90% of what I had in my apartment had been stolen. I had just gone from a lavish family vacation where we were blowing all of the mileage and hotel points my dad had built up to being as upset and pissed off as I have ever been.

The next week I was scammed into buying a sound system that was supposed to cost \$1800 for \$250 but was really worth about \$100. So right after I lost most of the things that I had spent my money on I wasted more with the idea that I could get them back (I was hoping to sell the sound system on the internet to make some kind of profit). I soon after applied to the Peace Corps when I realized how selfish I was and how prideful I was of the things I had. But I was by no means done learning this lesson.

After graduating from college that May, I could not find a job as an engineer. I did, however, get a job working as an independent contractor for a man named Dan. Though I hated roofing, I liked working for Dan. This streak of good luck lasted for three weeks until Dan dropped a downspout that sliced into my thumb. This is when I found out for real that my health insurance was gone—and how much I use my thumb. When I returned to work three weeks later, I told Dan that I no longer had insurance so he fired me. The money that I made working for Dan held me off from July till September when I found a job working for another contractor, Rich who didn’t care that I didn’t have insurance. I worked on and off for him for about six weeks. At the same time I had met Cara at a training to do volunteer mentoring who told me that they would hire me to tutor math at a high school not too far from my apartment. All that I had to do was receive child abuse clearance—which took three months—before starting to work. Lacking my own transportation, I was at the mercy of the Pittsburgh bus system (which even though you have more room on these buses, they are surprisingly less reliable and a lot harder to catch than Rwandan buses. I haven’t had to wait in the freezing cold for three hours to catch a bus out of my village, although I have never felt like I was going to die on a Pittsburgh bus like I have here, but I have been afraid that I would be mugged or pick pocketed even though it never happened) and the kindness of friends and roommates.

I felt like such a loser when I couldn’t pay the rent because my tutoring job didn’t pay me for two and a half months. I remember when my bank account hit zero was when I was

paying for my vaccinations to get medically cleared to join the Peace Corps. I went into the bathroom of the clinic and cried. Then I walked to the office of my friend Greg and prayed and cried some more. My life was so filled with uncertainty. I was counting on the Peace Corps to accept me, but everything they sent me just made me more uncertain that I would ever get my invitation.

The following Sunday I went to the church where I attended Bible study. I was sitting in the pew with about \$27 in my pocket and negative two on my credit card and \$25,000 in loan debt and no income to speak about. And I felt God speak to me. He told me to put the money in my pocket into the offering. I then convinced myself that I shouldn't do that. So God told me to go home to my parents' house and break my piggy bank that I had completely forgotten about. I finally got over my pride and counted the coins inside. There was nearly 600 dollars in it that I had been collecting since I was in elementary school, so I could settle at least most of my debt with my friends all in quarters, nickels and dimes. Once I was finally paid by the tutoring organization, I didn't just sit on it like I had done for all of the other jobs I have ever had. I tithed immediately because I felt bad that I hadn't given when God told me to. I also called up friends that I hadn't seen in a while to get lunch with them and tell them I had gotten my Peace Corps invitation. The next thing I knew I had gotten that job working for the census, which paid well. I only worked for them for seven weeks but that was enough for me to ride on until I left for Rwanda.

I was living in fear and I hated it. I imagine that this is a lot like what many Rwandans go through. I had a lot of people who bailed me out of my misery by either taking my word that I would pay them back or by giving me handouts out of the goodness of their hearts. These handouts include the time given by amazing friends and of course my family, who continued to buy me food.

I remember a conversation that I had with Matt, who was my roommate through all

of this, right before leaving for Rwanda. He said to me that he knew how hard this time was for me, but he hoped that I would remember all of the fun we had together, and while I was unemployed he could always count on me to be home to hang out or talk to. He more than anyone had noticed a change in my behavior and maturity. It was then that I realized what Jesus meant when he said that you cannot serve two masters and to not worry about tomorrow. This is why I think that I like it when Rwandans say be patient to each other. I know that God put me through this period of suffering so that I could become more of the person he wants me to be. Difficult periods are parts of life, and all we can do is be patient because for everything there is a season. Life is good, but it is also hard wherever you are.

I have found what Gandhi said and Jesus before him to be very true. If you can lose yourself, then you will find yourself. I don't know what else Gandhi may have said about this, but Jesus goes on to say that that we need to "die to ourselves daily," and to "bear your cross daily." I know that for much of my audience I am getting too spiritual, but Jesus' words serve as an important reminder to me: no matter how much of a better person I think I am, I still need to constantly be serving others. Serving others will always have its challenges and successes. I really hope that I am not coming off as I think I am better because I have suffered, because I really don't consider myself to be better than anyone. If anything, I consider myself extremely lucky to be able to experience Peace Corps with so many other amazing people. Again, I really liked A.J.'s strategy of treating everyone as equals, but I would like to take that idea a step further. I would like to challenge you to treat those you are serving as superiors. I know how difficult and even ridiculous that may sound, and I am always failing to do so myself, but that is exactly what Gandhi and Jesus are telling us to do. That is how we truly live.

# BOOKS

## Right of Thirst

Review by Jen Ambrose

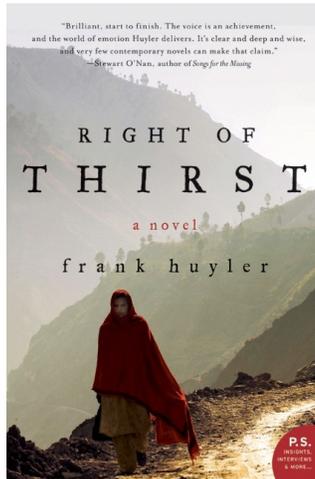
*“I wanted to go home, and I didn’t want to go home. I wanted the idea of home. I wanted an end to my loneliness, and I wanted to be left alone.” – Frank Huyler, *Right of Thirst**

When I came across Frank Huyler’s novel *Right of Thirst*, I immediately wanted to read it – the description calls it a “*tour de force* about one man’s desire to live a moral life,” which explores “the tensions between poverty and wealth and the ethics of intervention.”

About an American doctor who volunteers at a refugee camp in an unnamed country based on Pakistan following his wife’s death, this book is perhaps the opposite of *Three Cups of Tea*. In this story, the humanitarian operation ultimately fails and may even cause more harm than good. *Right of Thirst* is an interesting read, full of characters, situations, and themes that will resonate strongly among Peace Corps Volunteers.

Charles, the protagonist, encounters extreme poverty, harsh physical conditions, corrupt government officials, and local hierarchies. At various times, he grows impatient, loses sympathy, wonders whether he can trust locals, realizes he may not follow through on his promises, and fails to create sustainable impact. I think that PCVs will identify with both his experiences and his reactions to them.

PCVs will also recognize the character of Scott, the founder of the organization that set up the camp. He exudes superiority and self-righteousness from the beginning, and he makes a point to differentiate himself and his work from all those “other relief organizations.” We later find out that he has been dishonest about many things and begin to see him as unreliable. Essentially, he thinks his work will make him a savior, but, in reality, he has little understanding of the situation and fails to provide much actual help.



One of the things that really resonated for me was the recurring discussion of Charles’ motivations for going to the camp and his expectations for his experience there. He wanted to get away from his life, his problems, and, ultimately, himself. He is particularly drawn to Scott’s description of life at the camp as “a reduction to the essentials,” which, when it comes down to it, is probably what many PCVs are looking for. Charles realizes, however, that travel and new experiences do not allow people to escape themselves. There is also a discussion of looking for meaning, significance, and something larger than oneself. At one point, Charles says flat out, “This trip needs to mean something. Otherwise I can’t go home,” which, I think, is a sentiment that motivates us as PCVs to stay here and keep trying.

Charles’ motivations reveal Westerners’ tendency to see events and circumstances, par-

ticularly catastrophic ones, through the lens of their effect on themselves. The book's Western characters see situations that cause suffering for others as an opportunity to achieve what they want for themselves. This phenomenon comes out multiple times through Charles' internal dialogue, but perhaps the most poignant example is when Scott calls a devastating earthquake the "best thing that ever happened" to him.

Other scenes that particularly hit home for me involved the behavior of local children and the feeling of being a circus attraction. "When they stepped up close, pulling at my clothes, with their flowing noses and red-black hair and grubby fingers, the desire to shove them off with inappropriate force was difficult to resist." What PCV can't relate to that? Later, when he falls ill and is forced to go to the bathroom in the middle of a field, the children follow and watch him. "With all those eyes upon me as I crouched there, caught up in the indignity of the act – I felt entirely like an animal, revealed before everyone and everything." While I certainly hope nothing of this magnitude has happened to any PCVs, I think that we can all relate to the feeling of being exposed and of seemingly being treated like an animal.

PCVs will also recognize Charles' encounters with the dilemma of giving people things. He faces the problems of creating expectation, causing people to continually ask for more, and inciting conflict when only some people get things or some get more than others.

Finally, upon returning to the city, Charles realizes that his close bond to Rai, a local colleague, existed only out of necessity in an extreme situation. "In the valley, we'd been close enough to one another, but now, in just an instant, the gulf between us had revealed itself again." PCVs become close to people at site, out of proximity, out of loneliness, out of the obligation to "integrate," but, removed from that isolated situation, the gap between us and our Rwandan friends may become more obvious.

*Right of Thirst* also briefly touches on several basic ideas about aid that many PCVs may have discovered to be true: some relief organizations are useless; short-term volunteers accomplish little; unskilled volunteers cannot offer much to a developing country; aid workers and volunteers must be serious about their work; fundraising is an essential (if fairly mundane) part of development work; and, lastly, "It is always better to earn things than to be given them."

Though not exactly uplifting, *Right of Thirst* is honest, and it offers an interesting and entertaining look at aid and humanitarian intervention. I would definitely recommend it, especially to Peace Corps Volunteers.

*"I had expected to lose myself in my work, in a foreign land, freed from the burden of the familiar. Instead I felt as if I was gazing into a clear pool, bottomless, searching for signs in the depths, and all I found was the ghost of my own face, and the faces of all the others, in imperfect reflections."* – Frank Huyler, *Right of Thirst*

# TRAVEL

## Conquering Sabinyo

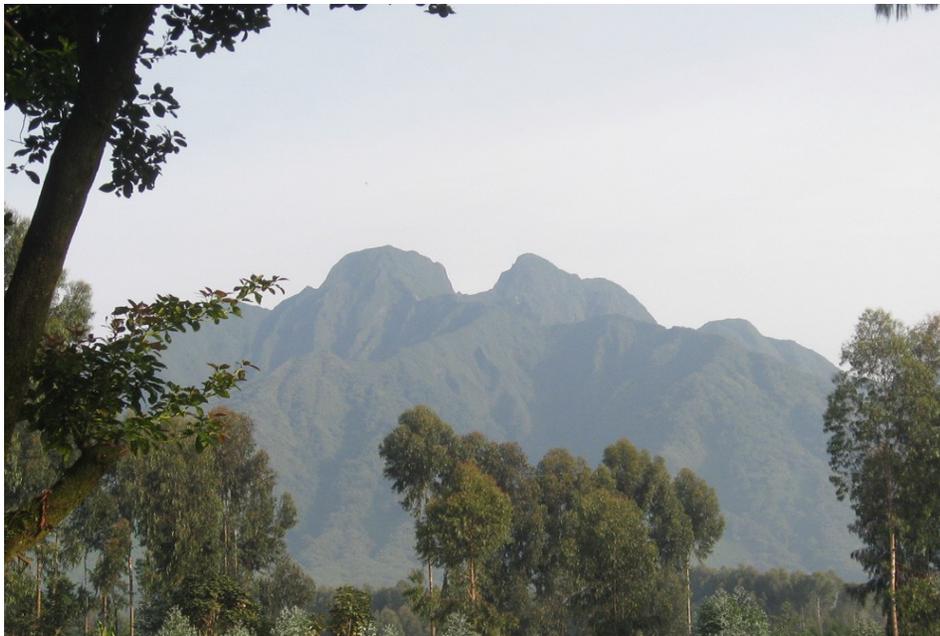
By Trude Raizen

Because its third and highest peak is situated at the point where Rwanda, Uganda and Congo come together, Sabinyo has long been alluring to me. Its appeal grew when I learned it could be summited only from the Ugandan side, with a system of crude ladders that sometimes stand completely upright. In Kinyarwanda, Sabinyo means bad/old teeth, an apt name for the volcano with the jagged tops of three or four peaks, depending on the viewer's angle. I finally conquered the beast on Easter weekend.

It's quite simple to get to Uganda's Mgahinga Gorilla National Park from Rwanda. It's best to cross the day before you climb the volcano, especially because Uganda keeps time one hour ahead of Rwanda (albeit with the same tendency for tardiness). Look up the Ugandan Shilling (ush) exchange rate ahead of time if you

are planning to change money at the border, or be prepared to get ripped off. To get to the border, take a Virunga local bus from Musanze to Cyanika (400RWF). Once you've paid the \$50 Uganda visa fee, you may bask in your ability to use English, but ignore the men who insist they have a "special car." Instead seek out a taxi to Kisoro, the nearest town. On the Uganda side of the border, a taxi is generally a normal 5-seater car which you may share with up to 7 other passengers (you will need local currency to pay the 4000ush fare).

During the taxi ride, note what a difference a border crossing makes. There are still hills, but they are less compact. Less dense also are the people, their dwellings and their fields. More wood is used in construction because the cutting of trees is less tightly regulated north of the



A view of Sabinyo's peaks  
Courtesy of Trude Raizen

border.

You'll need to be at the park by seven am, so your best bet is to stay at the entrance, almost an hour from Kisoro on a very rocky road. Transport to Mgahinga is 7000-8000 ish/person. Although the language just over the border is supposedly identical to Kinyarwanda, some of the numbers are different. Still, Kinyarwanda is fairly effective in this region for negotiating transportation, asking directions or impressing people you meet.

About 20 meters from the park entrance is a comfortable guest house operated by a local community cooperative. 10,000/night (\$4) buys a hostel bed; bandas and camping are also available. Food, beer and water were all available at the hostel; they will also watch your bags while you hike.

Get up bright and early (an hour earlier, remember!) the next morning, because if you are going to catch the overnight bus that night you really should start hiking by 7:30 AM. The guy taking the payments moves like a sloth, but gives Rwanda PCVs the PC discount (from \$50 to \$40) if you present both your PC ID and passport. Bring two liters of water and plenty of food (Cliff bars you keep telling your family to stop sending come in handy here). Note that if any other hikers are joining you, you should stress that you have a 7pm bus to catch and you need to be able to ascend and descend at your own pace; the park should provide an armed guard and guide for your party as well as the other. Otherwise, if the other hikers are slow, you may have a close call catching your bus. While this can lead to memorably frantic moments, it is not entirely advisable, nor is it comfortable to spend the night on the bus still wearing wet and muddy clothing.

But I am getting ahead of myself. Climbing Sabinyo is an unforgettable experience, rewarding particularly for masochists and those who get thrills from climbing precarious ladders with no safety equipment and severe drops on either side.

Before you get to the ladders, you pass through grassland, bamboo, and several different altitude zones featuring unique types of forest vegetation. There will be evidence of buffalo and elephants in the form of giant footprints and droppings; with luck you might see these animals, or gorillas and other monkeys. Along the way up, the Ugandan countryside regularly peaks through the trees. These splendid vistas provide convenient points to stop- allegedly for a photo op but really to catch your breath and to vow to redouble your workout efforts when you return to Rwanda.

The guides will inevitably alarm you by claiming you have two hours to go until you reach the first peak when really you have an hour and change. This tactic is used by guides on Rwanda's volcanoes as well; it's a neat psychological trick. As you near the first and lowest summit, you'll begin to encounter ladders. Don't be disappointed: angling at most 45 degrees from level ground, these are just the warm-up. They are made from tree branches nailed to each other and laid across steep parts of the trail; further up they will be secured to the rock-face with dubious means.

Reaching the first peak brings with it a fleeting feeling of accomplishment. Fleeting, because you realize that you have two more peaks to reach. Still, you can leave some of your gear and water here if you'd like. As you set off for the second peak, any relief in heading downhill for once is tempered by the knowledge that for every meter you go down, you must later go back up, and then some. This is why Sabinyo is a volcano particularly well suited for the masochistic. It will take forty minutes to reach the second peak and still longer to get to the third.

It is on the ascent to the second peak that the ladders begin to take prominence in your climb. The guide thrusts his walking stick into the mud at the side of a ladder: from here on out, you'll need both hands.

Utilizing different muscle groups, ladders represent welcome respite for your tired legs and a chance to shift some of the burden to your

arms. No rest for the weary at the second peak; the guides push you onwards, towards the third. You begin to descend again, and it's here that you encounter steeper ladders.

Until this point, you've been lamenting the fog. All this work, four hours of climbing, and no view! But now, the fog comes in handy. To either side of the ladders, there appears to be a pretty severe drop-off, but all you can see are scrubby tree tops and the inside of a cloud. And the ladders! Why is there no safety equipment? This would never be allowed in the developed world! Watch out for the rotted out portions of this ladder and keep three limbs in contact with its rungs at all times. They wouldn't let tourists on these things if it were actually dangerous, would they?

You cautiously climb upwards, grateful for the slight warmth and protection of your muddy gloves. You notice the grass growing from the cliffside behind the ladders, inches from your nose. Little dewdrops cling to the end of each blade. A little colder and the dew would be frost. You're wearing a sweatshirt, a fleece and a raincoat; bringing a hat was a good call. Stop to rest, perched in the crook of a rung of a ladder, and the cold drives you back into motion.

At last, after perhaps a half hour of ladder-climbing, you reach the collection of rocks that represents the third summit. There, on one rock, is a distinct mark: the point where the three countries come together. Don't tell Peace Corps, but you just may have set foot in Congo for the photo op.

The guide tells you that on a clear day, you can see not just Kinigi and Musanze in Rwanda, but the outskirts of Gisenyi, as well as Congo and Uganda. Still, on a clear day, your latent fear of heights and precarious edges may have prevented you from reaching this third peak; the views down would have been a curse on the completely vertical, completely terrifying ladders.

What goes up must come down, and vice

versa: you'll be retracing your steps unless you want to call in an airlift to get off the third peak. This means you will actually summit Sabinyo five times, with the accompanying kumanuka and kuzamuka and fatigue. The vertical ladders are even more frightening on the descent. Indeed you must be a masochist, your legs tell you. Are they shaking from exhaustion, from cold, or from fear what lies on either side of this ladder you're attempting to climb down?

You'll reach the first peak with enough time to collect the extra weight of your belongings and hurry onwards: it's well past 2pm! The way down from the first peak is a wet muddy slog. Sometimes it's easier just to slide down on your butt than to fight to stay upright.

Upon reaching the bottom, on gelatinous legs and with shoes oozing muddy water with every step, you might look back and see that the fog has cleared. You might imagine that the toothy, bottom-jaw grin this vista presents is the face of Sabinyo, taunting you: now there would be views. But no matter, you got the best of the volcano and all three of its peaks, and when you next pass it on a bus in Rwanda, you can look at it and think, "I was up there!"



The closest PCV's will get to the DRC  
Photo courtesy of Trude Raizen

# MURYOHERWE

## Chocolate Zucchini Rum Cake

From The Sunset Cookbook

*Peace Corps Rwanda D.M.O. Brooke Hopper kindly shared her recipe for the tantalizing, sumptuous dessert served at the pre-marathon Peace & Pasta dinner. A great chance to test out your Peace Corps oven!*

### Chocolate Zucchini Rum Cake

This boozy, tender, and very chocolaty cake from reader Andee Zetterbaum, of Modesto, California, gets some its moistness from the zucchini, but otherwise the vegetable is undetectable. Health food it isn't, but it sure is delicious.

Makes 1 tube cake; 16 to 20 servings \* Time 1 ½ hours

- ¾ cup butter, at room temperature
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 3 eggs
- 2 cups loosely packed shredded zucchini
- 1/3 cup rum, brandy, or water
- 2 ½ cups flour
- 1 cup *each* semisweet chocolate chips and chopped walnuts
- ½ cup unsweetened cocoa powder (not Dutch processed)
- 2 ½ tsp. baking powder
- 1 ½ tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. salt
- ¾ tsp. cinnamon
- ¼ cup milk

Rum glaze (optional)

- 1 & 2/3 cups powdered sugar
- 3 tbsp. rum



Photo courtesy of [chocolate-chips-cookies.blogspot.com](http://chocolate-chips-cookies.blogspot.com)

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Generously butter and flour a nonstick 10-cup plain or fluted tube pan (angel food cake pan). In a large bowl, with a mixer on medium speed, beat butter and granulated sugar until smoothly blended. Beat in eggs, one at a time, until fluffy. With a wooden spoon, stir in zucchini and rum.
2. In a medium bowl, mix flour with chocolate chips, walnuts, cocoa, baking powder and soda, salt, and cinnamon. Stir flour mixture and milk into egg mixture until well blended. Pour batter into tube pan and spread evenly.
3. Bake until cake begins to pull from pan sides and springs back when firmly pressed in center, 55 to 60 minutes. Invert cake onto rack and cool.

Make glaze if using: In a medium bowl, mix powdered sugar and rum together until smooth. Drizzle glaze over cake.

Make ahead: Up to 2 days, at room temperature: up to 1 week, chilled.

# DIY

## Koga

### Build Your Own Bucket Shower

By Andrew Udelsman

There's an art to taking bucket baths, and I never learned it. I tried! But I couldn't get clean, and I spent the first three months at my site stinkin'. Students held their breath when I came near their desks. Cows and goats fled before me. Neighbors stopped visiting. No doubt about it---my stench was interfering with my successful integration in the Rwandan community.

Then one day a friend came to visit. I told him my woes, and he gave me a brilliant suggestion: "Dude, why don't you just like build a shower or something?" Blessed be you, wise friend, for you have changed my life! Yes, friends, I introduce to you: The Bucket Shower.



Photo by Andrew Udelsman

... Ok, it may not look like much, but it works. Especially good for washing hair and the back area.

How to build a bucket shower:

1. Buy an *ibase* (i.e., basin or bathing bucket).
2. Heat up a knife in a fire and drill a little hole in the bottom
3. Find a way to keep the *ibase* suspended in the air. This is the only difficult part--- I drilled four little holes in the top and then used rope to tie it to the roof of my "bathroom"

That's it! When you want to shower, just pour as much water as you need into that bucket, and voilà, you have a nice 5-minute shower. For an extra-luxurious bathing experience, use warm water.

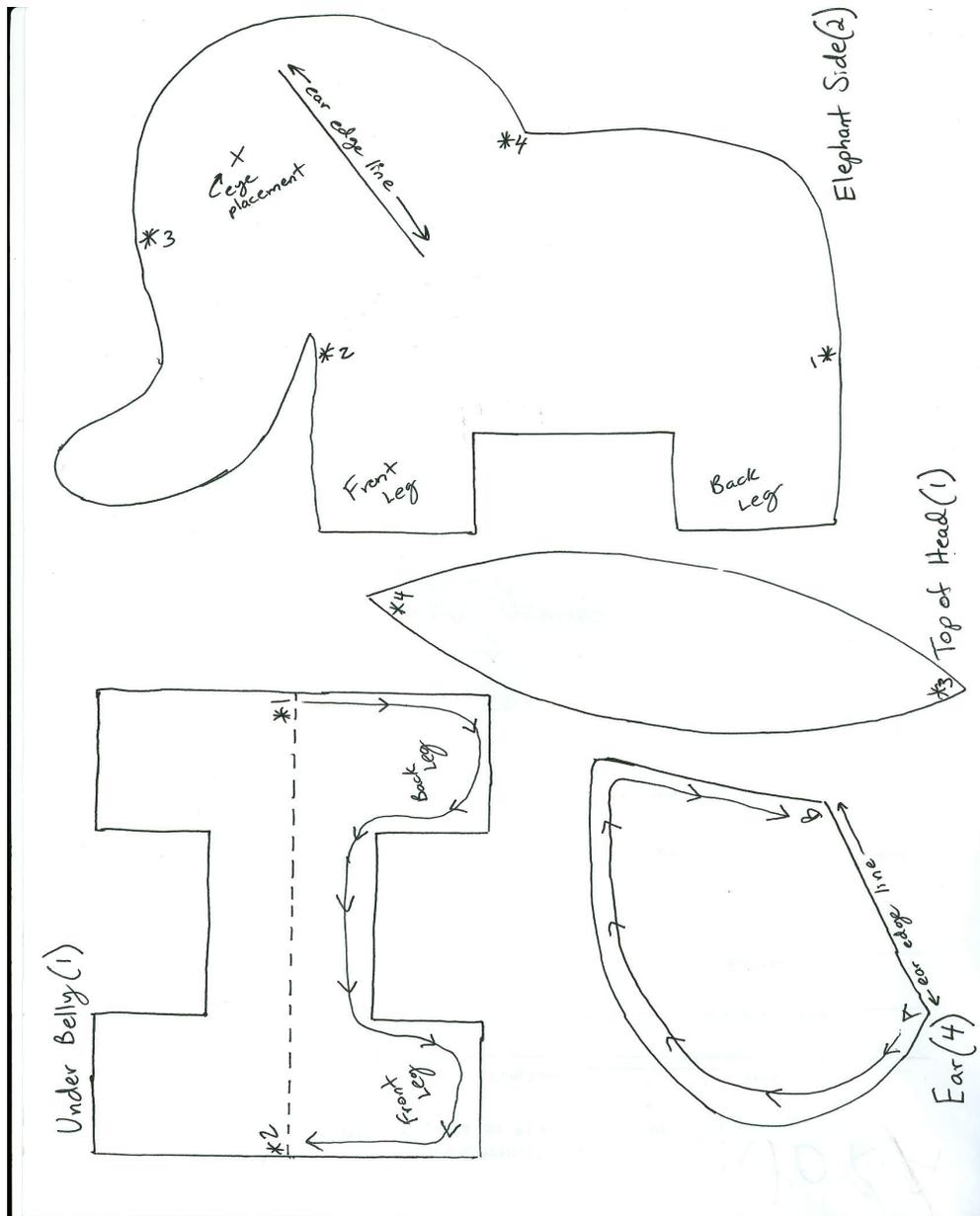


1. Top: Banana Republic 3,000 Frw (Kimironko) 2. Shorts: H&M 1,500 Frw (Musanze)  
 3. Boots: brown leather 1,000 Frw (Buhanda) 4. Top: Forever 21 500 Frw (Cyangugu)  
 5. Dress: 300 Frw (Buhanda) 6. Scarves: 1500 Frw (Kimironko) 7. Earrings: 500 Frw (Kimironko) 8.  
 Purse: Coach 2500 Frw (Musanze) 9. Under Armor Fleece Jacket: 2000 Frw (Gitarama) 10. Dress: 3,000  
 Frw (Kimironko)

# ARTS AND CRAFTS

## Igitenge Elephants

By Sally Dunst



### Stuffed Elephant Sewing Instructions

Materials needed:

- Igitenge
- Sewing needle, thread, & scissors
- A couple of index cards or other pieces of stiff paper
- Rice
- Beads, fabric, or other material for the eyes

## Steps

1. Trace all of the pieces on igitenge and cut them out. Quantities are in parentheses on the pattern sheet next to the piece names. You should have 8 pieces.
2. Take 2 **Ear** pieces and match them up, one on top of another. Sew from point A to point B in the direction the arrow indicates. Turn this inside out. Cut out the ear shape from an index card, but make it slightly smaller so it will fit inside the ear you have just sewn. This paper will make the ear stiff! Repeat to make the other ear.
3. Take an **Elephant Side** and sew on an **Ear** at the *ear edge line*. Sew on an eye on the X. I used a row of tiny beads but you can use different material. Repeat on the other **Elephant Side**, but put the **Ear** and eye on the opposite side of the fabric.
4. Place one **Elephant Side** so the **Ear** and eye are face down. Take the **Under Belly** piece, fold it where the dotted line is on the pattern, and place it on one **Elephant Side**. Make sure you match up the *Front Leg* and *Back Leg* on the **Elephant Side** and on the **Under Belly**. Sew from \*1 to \*2 following the direction of the arrow on the **Under Belly** pattern. Repeat with the other **Elephant Side**.
5. Continue sewing together the 2 **Elephant Sides** by sewing from \*2 to \*3.
6. Match up \*3 on an **Elephant Side** with \*3 on the **Top of Head** piece. As you did with the **Under Belly**, place the **Top of Head** so it is in between the 2 **Elephant Sides**. Sew from \*3 to \*4 to join the **Top of Head** piece with an **Elephant Side**. Repeat with the other **Elephant Side**.
7. Exciting part! Turn what you have completed inside out. You should have an elephant that is sewn together except for his butt. Up until this point the only stitching you should be able to see is on the **Ear**

along the *ear edge line*. All the other stitching disappeared when you turned the elephant inside out. To finish the butt, you will have to sew so the stitching is visible on the outside. Just fold the fabric so you're sewing the edges inside. Before you close up the elephant completely, fill it with rice. Don't forget to give your elephant a tail— simply place a scrap piece of fabric between the fabric of the butt while you're sewing it up.

8. You can give you elephant some personality by sewing accessories for it. My little sister is graduating from high school this year so I made her an elephant with a graduation cap!



# HOROSCOPES

BY THE GREAT MENTOK

**Aries - March 21 - April 20:** MICHAEL leaving 'The Office' was the first of a series of emotional lows for you. Chin up. Stay strong. Where there's a WILL, there's a way.

**Taurus - April 21 - May 21 :** Counting the days only makes them seem longer. Count the seconds. There are more of them, but they pass quicker.

**Gemini - May 22 - June 21:** You know that thing that you've always wanted to do, but never had the time to do it? Make time. It will be worth it...trust me.

**Cancer - June 22 - July 22:** Unless I am reading this wrong, which I NEVER do, things are REALLY heating up for you. (Stay away from open flames for a while, though...just in case).

**Leo - July 23 -August 21:** I see money in your future...whether you are making this money or losing it is still unclear. However, considering that you bought large shares of stock in a company that manufactures a product called 'kitten mittens,' I wouldn't get my hopes up.

**Virgo - August 22 - September 23:** You have a lot of emotional strength to share with others. Don't be afraid of holding anything back, but don't take on too many projects either. Your friends do not need a 'Superman,' just a brave one.



**Libra - September 24 - October 23:** The opposite sex is really responding to you this month. These responses will be mostly negative unless you phrase your questions just right. Remember, 'Interested is Interest-ing.'

**Scorpio - October 24 - November 22:** Rome wasn't built in a day, right? Well, neither will your new latrine. Be patient and invest in some buckets for the time being

**Sagittarius - November 23-December 22:** Pride generally comes before the fall. In order to stay on cloud nine you are going to have to eat some humble pie. Chew well.

**Capricorn - December 23 - January 20:** You will have a rash... sorry. I'd go into more detail, but you'll find out about it soon enough

**Aquarius - January 21 - February 19:** Fear is holding you back from achieving your true potential. Fear has always held you back. It is time to punch fear in its stupid, smirking face.

**Pisces - February 20- March 20:** It is important to note...\*text missing\*...with peanut butter and jelly, but don't...\*text missing\*...turns purple, then call the hospital...\*text missing\*...of this and you will do just fine. If you don't...well...don't say I didn't warn you



**How to reach us:** send your comments or submissions for the next issue to [somarwanda@gmail.com](mailto: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.

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