

# KHOTSO September 2011

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## Message from the Country Director



Tom Maresco & students

Congrats to the CHED 11s who swore in on August 7th! They worked hard during PST and did great. In fact, their average Sesotho score was higher than the last 3 PSTs, and no one received lower than an Intermediate Mid. We wish them lots of success over the next two years. Thanks to 'me Masechaba, 'me Mamokola, the LCFs, the technical trainers, ntate Peter, ntate Tsele, the host families, the resource Volunteers, Charles, 'me Selloane, 'me Jimi, all the PC staff, and everyone else who contributed to the PST. Your hard work was greatly appreciated!

We also welcomed and swore in Lisa Dold, a Peace Corps Response Volunteer who will be teaching at Thuso E Tla Tsoa Kae in Butha Buthe (where Greg Viola worked). Lisa is a special education teacher by profession and served as a Volunteer in Belize. She'll be in Lesotho until next June.

In August, we held the COS conference for the ED 10s. We hope they enjoy the remainder of their service and don't stress too much about the next chapter in their life! It seems a few aren't quite ready to move to RPCV status: We're happy to announce that Rusty DeLucia and Andrea Holmen will be extending for a 3rd year in Lesotho. Erica Rossi has not yet set her COS date but plans to extend for a couple of months. And Nathan Birhanu will be transferring to Ethiopia where he'll serve another 2 years.

In last month's Khotso, I mentioned that I recently provided an update to the Director on progress made towards implementing the recommendations of the Post Operations Support Team that visited last October. One of their recommendations was to "deter excessive Volunteer travel to the capital" as Maseru is where most crime incidents against Volunteers occur. I'm happy to report that since we closed the

training center in January of this year and instituted other measures to deter travel, there has been a significant drop in the number of overnights in Maseru by Volunteers. Check out the stats for the period January - June for 2009, 2010 and 2011:

2009: 1084 overnights (74 for medical)  
2010: 843 overnights (41 for medical)  
2011: 101 overnights (54 for medical)

These figures were taken from bookings made by PC at the PC training center (2009 and 2010) and the Anglican Training Center (or other Maseru accommodation) (2011). Figures do not include stays in Maseru not arranged by PC or day trips to Maseru. Also, the 2009 and 2010 figures are likely lower than they should be as very often Volunteers called the duty phone on weekends for permission to stay at the training center, but these stays were not officially "booked". I believe the dramatic drop in the frequency of Volunteers coming to Maseru has contributed significantly to the decrease in incidents of crime and thank all of you for working with us to improve the safety and security of Volunteers in Lesotho.

Finally, I would like to remember Tom Maresco. It is almost unfathomable that Tom left this Earth one year ago this week. Over the past year, I've had a chance to talk to several people about how Tom touched their lives. He clearly was a special person who stood out in the crowd and genuinely cared about others. His kind, fun and giving spirit lives on in the memories on those fortunate to know him. To honor his memory, on September 7th, the US Embassy will dedicate the Thomas C. Maresco, Jr. American Corner at the State Library in Maseru. As Ambassador Bond said in a message to Tom's family, "With its emphasis on young people and their families, education, community service, and creating lasting connections between Americans and Basotho, the American Corner will embody the ideals that inspired Tom and thousands of others to join the Peace Corps."

Khotso, Kathy.

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All other staff and PCVs who contribute

## From the Editor

Articles must be received by the 4th Monday of the month to be included in the following month's edition of the Khotso. **When submitting articles, please provide the name of the person making the submission and a contact person for follow-up questions.** The Newsletter will be emailed and a hardcopy made available in the office on or about the 1<sup>st</sup> of each month. Please make sure that your email address is on file with Peace Corps. Remember that it is your responsibility to read the Khotso Newsletter for updates from Peace Corps Lesotho.

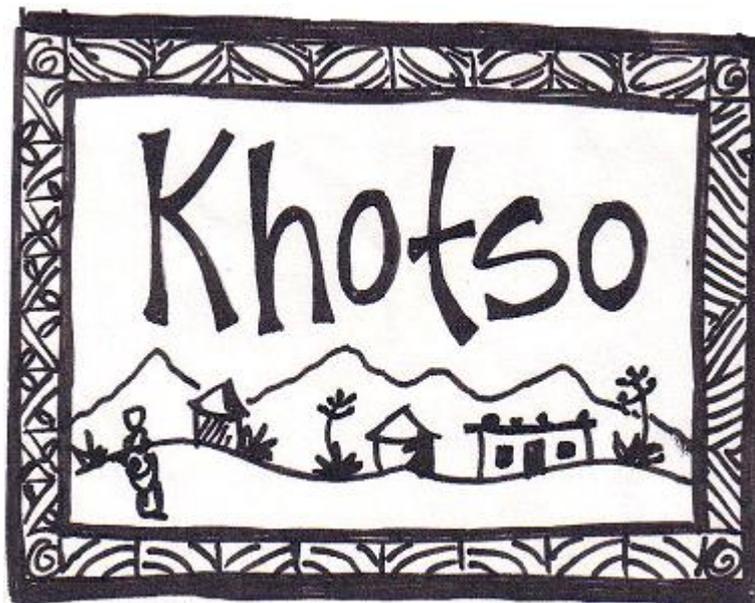
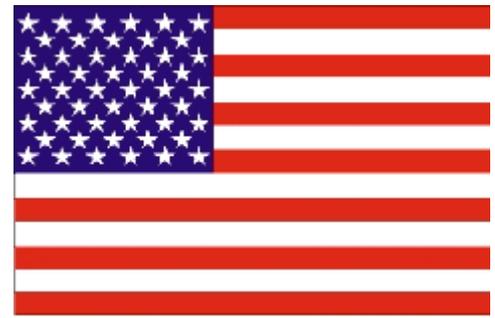
The editorial staff would like feedback from PCVs regarding the content. It is our desire to provide you with information that is useful, helpful, and encouraging. We would appreciate receiving constructive feedback from you.

By submitting articles, you are providing Peace Corps Lesotho with the right to reprint your article in full or part in any publication.

Deepak Pullanikkatil, Editor



Editorial



### PCV Birthdays

Birthdays greetings go out to the following PCVs. The Peace Corps Lesotho staff sends you greeting and hope that you have a very prosperous year.

#### September

Ryan McClaine – 1  
Cassie Biron – 29  
Jesse Schofield – 30

#### October

Chanté Liggins – 12  
Jennifer Cain – 16  
Brandi Helm – 19  
Leeza Salen – 23  
Katie Shepard – 26

### Staff Birthdays

#### September

Majimisi Machai – 14  
Jim McCormick – 30

#### October

No staff birthdays this month.

### Peace Corps Lesotho Holidays

(PC Lesotho remains closed on this day)

#### September

Sept 5— Labor Day (US Holiday)

#### October

Oct 4— Independence Day (LS Holiday)  
Oct 10— Columbus Day (US Holiday)

### Calendar of Events and Staff Travel

Aug-Sept	ED Site development
Aug 28—Sep 1	Nt. Nthoalo at SS workshop in Rwanda
Aug 28—Sep 4	Nt. Clement at SS & FITU workshop in Rwanda
Aug 29—Sep 2	M'e Victoria on leave
Sept 12—13	CHED Mid-Service Workshop, Nazareth
Sept 15-16	50 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary Event, Morija and Mazenod
Sept 16—Oct 10	Deepak at OCIO training at PC HQ
Sept 19—23	ED ToT, Maseru
Sept 25 – Oct 1	Dr. Victor at CME in Tanzania

### Duty Officer Schedule

Sept 5 – 11	PA CHED
Sept 12 - 18	SSC
Sept 19 – 25	ITS
Sept 26 – Oct 2	FA

### STAFF MEMBER OF THE MONTH



**Ralintoane Majara (Driver)** – During the winter months, Ntate Majara's participation in site identification and preparedness was superb. On two occasions, he was snowed in yet willingly headed out again, even to the most remote locations. He made multiple trips to see that Volunteers' houses had burglar bars. His patience and persistence was what helped to ensure sites and houses were ready for the CHED 11s.

### ADMIN CORNER – By Jim

For those of you that were convinced that the pictures I have on the wall behind my desk were just photos of people I cut out of a magazine I am happy to report that my wife and daughters finally arrived in Lesotho on August 4th. I seriously underestimated the amount of time it took to get rid of all the empty beer cans (and the full ones) laying around the house but at this time they have settled in and are really enjoying the people and culture of this wonderful country.

**RPCV Health Insurance:** We were recently informed that Seven Corners will be providing health insurance coverage for COSing volunteers, starting on September 1, 2011. The new insurance program is called After Corps. Seven Corners will be sending out e-mail communication with more details about the new plan soon. We are working with them to set up a system so that volunteers who want to pay for additional coverage (beyond their free 30 days) will have the option to have funds taken from their readjustment allowance. Once we receive the Seven Corners brochures, we'll give them to COSing Volunteers.

**VRC:** Just to repeat, on September 1st we will be doing a "thorough" cleaning of the VRC. All assorted clothes, games, shoes, etc. will be donated to local charities.

**Auction:** Sometime in the next several weeks we will be holding a public auction of used IT equipment. As soon as we set the date, we'll let you know in case you know people or organizations that might be interested in bidding on any of the items.

**Recycling bins:** Garbage is still being dumped in the various recycle containers outside the VRC. We are not pointing fingers because we, the staff, are responsible as well, but please be aware that the containers are clearly marked as to what should go inside them, and it is a lousy job for Ntate Bernard to have to separate "wet" garbage from the recyclables.

**ATC:** We have finally put up maps to the Anglican Training Center in the VRC and Medical office. Just a reminder about staying there: you need to bring your own towel and drinking water. Also, please be aware that it is a church organization. The cleaning crew there recently brought to our attention that the garbage that PCVs leave in the rooms (empty beer bottles, pizza boxes and even used condoms) is often excessive. There is a dumpster near the entrance. Please use it to dispose of items (like the ones listed above) before you vacate. Please remember that individual Volunteers' behavior reflects on Peace Corps as a whole and we expect everyone to act professionally and respectfully to be able to continue to use this facility.

## EDUCATION CORNER By— Nt. Clement & M'e Malitaba

### Gold Star Activities

**Dustin Tamsen** – One of my biggest success stories would be a recent teacher-driven workshop. This was many months in the making. First a teacher (Ntate Hae at Lekoatsa Primary) and I developed a math club. Over the course of two months we planned the club, including how we would motivate students to join and how we would have them apply. Once we had settled on the plans for all of the club logistics we pitched it to Ntate Hae's class 7 students. The club has since been running successfully without my having to be involved as it was always slated as a Ntate Hae's club, outside of my assistance. After this, Ntate Hae and I planned a hour long workshop for the staff of Thabana Morena and Linotsing primary, which Ntate Hae gave (more or less) entirely on his own, with me acting only in a supporting role. The meeting was success, with lots of questions and comments about how the clubs can be later used to start inter-school competitions.

**Kali Bechtold** – There is a teacher in my school who has been in a marriage that is abusive and has come to me for help. I tried to help her the best I can, but I had a hard time because I am an outsider and marriage here works much differently than in America. I struggled with what I could do to help her and I could best support her. I gave her contacts of people who I thought could help her. During International Women's Month, she came and attended my classes on Women's Equality. She told me that it was my classes that gave her the courage to take legal action against her husband so she could take better care of herself and her husband.

## MEDICAL CORNER By—Dr. Victor & 'M'e Itumeleng

- The medical unit now has a different brand of condoms (Durex) in stock. This is in addition to the previous brand, which we have been issuing to Volunteers. Both brands are of good quality. Volunteers will have the option of choosing between the two.

- Requests for refill of medications and supplies should be submitted at least two weeks in advance whenever possible. It is the PCV's responsibility to call or SMS the medical unit in advance for refill of medications. Otherwise, your refill request may not be processed on time.

- Volunteers are reminded that, except in extraordinary circumstances, they need to schedule appointments or notify the medical office in advance before coming to the medical unit for medical consultations. PCVs should always endeavor to contact the medical office for an appointment or authorization to come to Maseru for medical reasons. This is in keeping with the Health Unit's policies and procedures.

- In situations where a PCV has to access health care at a local private or public hospital/clinic, prior authorization should be sought from the PCMO.

- Volunteers issued with mosquito nets must return them intact to Peace Corps at COS. PCVs who destroy or cut up their nets will be required to pay for them at COS. Each net costs about R200.

- To order meds and supplies or schedule appointments, contact us on 6286-6050.

Medical duty phone: 6285-1003 (business hours only for non-emergencies, but 24/7 for emergencies).

## IT CORNER By Deepak

### Facebook Security Best Practices

#### Introduction

ID fraudsters target Facebook and other social networking sites

to harvest information about you. Here's how we recommend you set your Facebook privacy options to protect against online identity theft.

#### **How to adjust your settings**

This guide walks you through Sophos-recommended privacy settings in Facebook, and shows you how to set more secure levels of privacy and reduce the chance of becoming a victim of online identity theft.

#### **General security tips for Facebook:**

- Adjust Facebook privacy settings to help protect your identity. Unlike some other social networking sites, Facebook provides some powerful options to protect you online — but it's up to you to use them!

- Read the Facebook Guide to Privacy. At the very bottom of every page on Facebook, there's a link that reads "Privacy." The linked page is "A guide to privacy on Facebook," which contains the latest privacy functions and policies. For example, with the latest changes in May 2010, Facebook discloses information that it sets as visible to everyone and that you cannot make private. This information includes sensitive information like your name, profile picture, gender and networks. When in doubt, use the "Preview my profile" button on any privacy settings page to check how your information appears to others.

- Think carefully about who you allow to become your friend. Once you have accepted someone as your friend they will be able to access any information about you (including photographs) that you have marked as viewable by your friends. You can remove friends at any time should you change your mind about someone.

- Show "limited friends" a cut-down version of your profile. You can choose to make people 'limited friends' who only have access to a cut-down version of your profile if you wish. This can be useful if you have associates who you do not wish to give full friend status to, or feel uncomfortable sharing personal information with.

Disable options, then open them one by one. Think about how you want to use Facebook. If it's only to keep in touch with people and be able to contact them then maybe it's better to turn off the bells and whistles. It makes a lot of sense to disable an option until you have decided you do want and need it, rather than start with everything accessible.

#### **Phishing**

Phishing is a term used to define the process of a criminal fraudulently gathering information from a person (victim) by falsely leading the individual to believe that the information is being disclosed to the victim's trusted service provider. An example would be receiving a telephone call from someone claiming to be from your bank and asking you for your credit card and CVV number just so he/she could "verify your account". Phishing is rampant all over the world and Southern Africa is not behind. Please be aware of this fraudulent activity and never disclose your banking or personally identifiable information to anyone via telephone, email or online unless you are sure of the source. Best idea would be to call your bank and ask about the phone call or email you got. Below is a warning sent out by South African Airways to its customers. Please be aware that several companies are warning their customers of phishing scams lately. Thank you, PCV Jesse Schofield, for sharing the letter below.

Dear SAA customer,

We would like to advise you that there is currently a phishing scam underway which, amongst other companies, targets SAA customers as a way of getting to your credit card and Voyager log-in details, as well as personal information.

The scam involves e-mails with the subject given as: PASSENGER ITINERARY RECEIPT, "thanking" customers for their purchase, stating that their booking is confirmed, giving a booking reference number, as well as the credit card charge and then asking the customer to follow a link.

Please be advised that these e-mails are NOT from South African Airways (SAA), or our Customer Care department as is wrongfully stated in the e-mail.

If you receive such an e-mail, please delete it immediately. Do not click on any links, as they will take you to a fraudulent website where your banking details, including your personal details and PIN may be compromised.

If you have acted on such an e-mail, please contact your bank immediately. If you are unable to access your Voyager account, please contact Voyager at 1-800-359-7220.

Kind Regards,  
South African Airways

### IRC CORNER By 'me Makhauta, IRC Manager

We received several hard copies and DVDs of the "Teach English Prevent HIV" teacher's manuals. This is a resource that a Volunteer in Cameroon developed several years ago and recently updated by PC/W. It's designed to enable Peace Corps volunteers to teach English while also providing students a safe space to learn about HIV/AIDS and develop life skills that reduce their vulnerability to infection. The curriculum focuses primarily, though not exclusively, on speaking and listening skills and aims to achieve a measurable impact on students' knowledge, attitudes, self-efficacy, intentions, and behaviors. If you're interested in a copy, contact your APCD or PA.

### 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Corner

#### District Events

One of the great 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary events that took place over the July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend was the Qacha's Nek district AIDS ribbon painting. Volunteers and community members commemorated Peace Corps anniversary by giving the rock ribbon a new coat of paint. (See photos). Volunteers report that it's much more visible now. Nice job!



#### September Event

September marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the swearing in of the first PC Volunteers in 1961. On September 15<sup>th</sup>, Peace Corps Volunteers, staff and invited guests will commemorate this event with a feast at the Morija Museum. The event will begin at 11am and will include speeches, swearing in of the CHED 11s, traditional dance performances by students from Eric Pierce's school, musical performances by Volunteers and lunch. If you would like to invite your Supervisor or Counterpart, we welcome them but need to know ASAP. Unfortunately, we will not be able to cover their transportation or lodging.

Once the "feast" is over, staff and Volunteers will continue the event at the Mazenod Conference Center with an All-Volunteer conference that afternoon and the next day through lunch. **We will send specific logistical information by September 6.** Sessions at the All-Vol include among other activities: sharing of best practices and project ideas, a chat with Ambassador Bond, and a talent show (start practicing!).

**Dress is formal!!** The King and media will be there. Men should wear a collared shirt, tie and jacket (if you have one). Women should wear a dress or skirt (nothing revealing). Clothes should be clean and ironed. If you have Seshoeshoe, this would be a great opportunity to wear it!

#### Peace Corps Digital Library 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Photo Contest!

The contest is open to Volunteers, RPCVs, and staff. **The deadline for submission is September 8, 2011.** To enter the contest and submit photos, please go to: <http://collection.peacecorps.gov/addphoto.htm>

## WINNING PHOTOS

First-place winners will receive a framed official Peace Corps certificate. All winning photos will be:

- Exhibited September 21-24, 2011 in Peace Corps headquarters during the Peace Corps reunion weekend in Washington, D.C.
  - Featured throughout the Peace Corps website, social media sites, and a Peace Corps press release
- Added to the official [Peace Corps 50th Anniversary Timeline](#)

## JUDGING CATEGORIES

- Entries will be evaluated based on creativity and impact in the following categories:
  - Providing technical assistance
  - Sharing American culture overseas
  - Sharing overseas culture with America
- Photographic technical merit

## PCV Corner

### Into Every Life, A Little Rain Must Fall



Submitted by Amy Jo Carson, CHED 10, PSN Member

As we are approaching the one year anniversary of Tom's tragic death and remembering everything that was so incredibly special about him, it is also important to take note of how we cope with such a loss. Everyone has their own time and process for grieving. There are emotional adjustments necessary for healing and getting on with life and you might ask yourself a few questions like the following - "Have I come to

terms with the fact that this person is not coming back?" "Have I allowed myself to feel and live through those feelings?" "Have I reached out for help from friends, family or a mental health professional when I need it?" and "Have I learned how to get on with my own life?" Reflection on your own personal grieving process is a necessary component for moving forward, building on your own strengths, resilience and healing.

I have shared this story once before with some of you, but I would like to share it again. I only knew Tom briefly, but the impact he made in a very short time was profound. I got to meet him and stay at his home during my PST site visit. He was the ultimate "hostess with the mostess," to say the least. Having not had running water - much less hot, a bath tub, electricity or time to just "chill out," Tom came to the rescue. He knew just what I needed. "Yes," I got the nice long hot bath with bubbles and candles - those wonderful little treasures I longed for from home, but it was more than that. It was the little umbrella he placed in my Hawaiian cranberry cocktail. I stared at it the entire time I was soaking in that oasis. I can't remember everything that I was thinking about during that time, but one thing stood out that I remember very well, that we all need an "umbrella" in life sometimes. I needed that umbrella that night. I have needed an umbrella many times since that night and will need plenty more in the future. I may not always have someone to give me one, but I sure won't hesitate to ask for one. I guess the message I am trying to send here is this - during the stormy times find your umbrella or be the umbrella that Tom was to so many.

## FOL-funded TAP Scholarships

We were remiss last month in not congratulating the Volunteers whose Peace Corps Partnership Projects (PCPP) for Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) scholarships were approved. Due to the generosity of Friends of Lesotho (FOL) and assistance from PCPP, this is the largest one-year outlay of TAP scholarships in recent memory. Thanks to Kali Bechtold and the rest of TAP committee - Parker Bryant, Matt Deakin, Melissa Hill, Nate Landrum, and 'me Malitaba; Dyann Van Dusen from FOL; and the PCPP folks for all their hard work to facilitate the TAP process this year.

Volunteer	LCL Amount
Phillips, Shanathi	5,816.00
Santos, Adam	7,811.00
Shepard, Katie	2,417.00
Landrum, Nathan	2,939.00
Rossi, Erica	6,310.00
Ebata, Kimiko	7,378.00
De Lucia, Rusty	3,256.00
Bechtold, Kali	5,633.00
Liggins, Chanté	12,704.00
Carson, Amy Jo	4,946.00
Bryant, Parker	5,633.00
Anderson, Kelly	3,328.00
Salen, Leeza	916.00
Waggoner, Haley	916.00
Sanni, Danielle	5,954.00
Simons, Ariel	7,048.00
Birhanu, Nathan	6,106.00
Holmen, Andrea	2,961.00
Pierce, Eric	6,646.00
Pulvino, Rory	5,445.00
Fulton, Juliana	5,842.00
Deakin, Matt	3,574.00

**As a reminder to PCPP awardees, following are the steps you must follow to successfully implement your PCPP project.** If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask!

1. Ensure that the funds are in your account. If they are not, contact Financial Assistant **Victoria Mofolo** ([vmofolo@ls.peacecorps.gov](mailto:vmofolo@ls.peacecorps.gov)) immediately.
2. Withdraw funds and give cash to the students' school(s). Obtain a signed **Notice of Liability Form** (attached) from each school with the school's stamp on it. Send the form(s) to the PC office, **attention: Malitaba Hlabana** immediately. If the school wants to provide its own receipt in addition to the Notice of Liability Form, that can be submitted as well.
3. Take **photos** when students are awarded their scholarships and obtain **thank you letters** from the students. Send photos and thank you letters to **FOL representative Dyann Van Dusen** ([dyvandusen@yahoo.com](mailto:dyvandusen@yahoo.com) or 5708 Silva Road, Mariposa, CA 95338). FOL would like pictures for their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary reunion in September so please send them as soon as possible!
4. Monitor the progress of the students throughout the term.
5. Include a summary of this activity in the next VRF. See instructions below.
6. At the end of the term (i.e., November/December) complete the highlighted sections of the **PCPP final report and survey** (sent to you by email). Send an **electronic** copy of the report to **'me Malitaba** ([mhlabana@ls.peacecorps.gov](mailto:mhlabana@ls.peacecorps.gov)). Send her the pages requiring signatures in hard copy. The M6.87 exchange rate should be used in the final report budget. Staff will review your report and send it back if there is any missing or incomplete information. The project will not be closed until all documents are received and cleared. COSing Volunteers will need to have everything cleared in

order to COS.

**VRF Reporting Instructions: (thanks to Parker for developing these tips)**

1. Do we need to write anything under "Secondary Project" on the final tab?

Since the TAP activity doesn't technically match any of the goals or objectives of either project, it should be noted under secondary projects. Unfortunately, you have to select an objective in order to put something in the secondary project tab. Given that, EDs should check Objective 3.2 and CHEDs should check Objective 1.1, which most closely relate to TAP. Since the indicators for these objectives really don't relate to TAP, however, nothing should be noted in the # Achieving and Total # columns. Indicate the number of people participating in the Activity Participants tab. "TAP is a secondary project funded by Friends of Lesotho through PCPP" should be noted in the "Secondary Project" tab of the "Other Questions" tab.

2. Should we check off the "Youth Development" box?

**Yes – The Youth Development box should be checked.**

3. Do we need to mention FOL anywhere?

**The mention of FOL in the "Secondary Project" tab is sufficient.**

4. Should we check off the box for "Worked with Another Volunteer" or just leave it at No and say we all kind of did it individually?

**These are individual PCPP projects so "worked with another Volunteer" should NOT be checked.**

**MESSAGE FROM DYANN VAN DUSEN (Friends of Lesotho)**

Rea leboha haholo from The Friends of Lesotho to the following PCVs who were able to send pictures of their TAP Scholarship grantees.

Amy Carson  
Ariel Simmons  
Chante Liggins  
Danielle Sanni  
Katie Shepard  
Leeza Salen  
Matthew Deakin  
Rory Pulvino

We at FOL know how challenging it can be for you to get access to reliable internet and very much appreciate your efforts. The attendees at our up-coming Peace Corps and FOL Anniversary celebrations are certain to enjoy seeing all those smiling faces.

For those PCVs who have not been able to send pictures yet, please keep trying. Even if they do not arrive in time for me to use at the Reunion, we will create a special TAP page on our website. So, send your pics and thank you letters if you can to: [dyvandusen@yahoo.com](mailto:dyvandusen@yahoo.com). Dyann Van Dusen, Vice President, Friends of Lesotho, 5708 Silva Road, Mariposa, CA 95338

**NEWS FROM AROUND THE PEACE CORPS WORLD**

**Portraits of Mashai**

Tam Weiss (ED 10) recently wrote us and reports that she's been painting portraits of people from Mashai. In November 2012, a small gallery in Maryland called the Yellow Barn Studio ([www.yellowbarnstudio.com](http://www.yellowbarnstudio.com)) will show her work. A little taste of the exhibit is in the PDF version of the *Khotso*. Beautiful artwork, Tam!





### **50 years of Peace Corps: A Message for soon to be Volunteers**

By Meleia Egger, RPCV Malawi 2008-2010, Peace Corps Recruiter, Mid-Atlantic Regional Recruiting Office

The 'slam poem' below was recited by Meleia Egger at a Senior Staff meeting at Peace Corps Washington.

Peace Corps is a twenty-seven-month-long-commitment,

Little do you know, you are in it for life...

It all starts with that spark from someone, "Uncle Dave served in Peace Corps and he loved it", "Do you know they work in Thailand?" or the best and the most simple, "You would be great in the Peace Corps."

The highest compliment, the deepest calling.

And then the paper trail begins, blazing a path through a dense bureaucratic network of uploaded dreams and poorly stated ambitions.

We trace every spark believing that it will one day lead to a full fire of intention.

Really, it's your first endurance test, and it is not a smooth process-believe me.

When volunteers start, their minds are wrapped around 1,000 different words for help, ....empower, assist, aid, facilitate, uplift,

yet no idea how to use them in a sentence. Let alone in life.

Yes, we open borders, but more importantly, minds and hearts.

Winning them, earning them with the skills of our training and the purity of our efforts.

This is something those who are new to the family realize, and eventually, eventually, 9-12 months eventually....

You will go forth from this time, and this place, toting all that you can carry of your past life and loved ones.

And then,

you serve.

Never, will you feel more alive - it will surprise you.

It is a progression of connection...

at first, you are in your head and it's

American, meets other.

Then you get more grounded, and

volunteer, meets villager or teacher, meets student.

And then, if you are lucky, the simplicity settles in, and it's

human meets human,

heart to heart.

It's all right there. It's tucked into the humble corners of each day.

Two years- will fly by.

Watch carefully or you might miss it.

Blink twice,

and it's gone....

And then,

you will leave those same coveted, carefully packed objects turned artifacts in the fault lines of all your cultural earthquakes.

And then,

you come back.

You are returned volunteers, never former, and you try to trace the patterns of home and you stumble, and get dizzy, and people from the place you once knew ask ....

How was Malawi? Ecuador? Mauritania? Poland?

How was Nicaragua? Mali? Panama? Vanuatu? Romania? How was Tanzania?

And what did you do there?

Well,

and you will pause...

I changed the world.

I changed myself.

It's been 50 years of sweat and smiles, moments and memo-

ries, adventure and admiration, respect and realization

and waiting and waiting and waiting,

It's been 50 years of imagination and inspiration.

Fifty years on paper,

but we are a part of so much more.

We bring hope to the forgotten corners of the world,

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### **Coping in the Peace Corps**

By Ross Szabo, Peace Corps Volunteer serving in Maun, Botswana, featured on [www.huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com), 8/2/2011

I am a big fan of the saying, "No matter where you go, there you are." I have found it to be true personally, as well as in those around me. Peace Corps reminds me of this adage frequently. The experience of moving to another country to volunteer has a way of stripping you naked, forcing you to look at yourself without as many distractions or escape routes that are present in the States. Fortunately the experience also provides a ton of downtime to work on any issues a person wants to change.

I think it's important for me to start with some full disclosure. I am a huge fan of coping mechanisms! What? You haven't heard that before? I really am. Sometimes I obsess over where coping comes from, what parts of the brain are at play, and why people react the ways they do. I develop large sociological theories on coping and try as hard as I can to psychoanalyze myself as much as possible. This topic is always a huge hit at parties!

There are a lot of changes to deal with when serving in the Peace Corps. During the first 2-3 months volunteers go through pre-service training. This training includes meeting all of the other volunteers, living with a host family, going to school 8 hours a day, trying to learn a new language and adjusting to someone else making the schedule. Volunteers often get homesick for a myriad of reasons. After training, volunteers leave their new friends to be alone. They have to adjust to a completely different job, house, village, a regional culture, making new friends and missing everyone back home. Towards the end of service there are more worries about what's next, adjusting back to life in America and leaving the place you lived in for 2 years.

Throughout the 27 months of service there are a lot of ways a volunteer can cope with these changes. Some negative examples would be constantly complaining about challenges rather than taking action, drinking, drugs, isolation, obsessing over negative experiences, fanatically watching American movies or shows on a computer instead of being social or focusing on everything being missed back home. On the converse side there are positive examples like building friendships, learning about the culture, talking to friends/family when times get tough, exercising, writing, painting, or being active in the village.

Luckily I started learning about coping mechanisms early. It was kind of a necessity for my survival and later became a career choice. I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder with anger control problems and psychotic features when I was 16. During my senior year of high school I was hospitalized for attempting to take my own life. I took a leave of absence two months into my freshman year at American University due to a relapse with bipolar disorder and was hospitalized again. Over the next 4 years I battled major alcohol abuse, severe anger control issues and immense self-hatred. Eventually I found a way out of the dark-

ness and was able to return to American U. to finish my degree.

Thus, for a long stretch of my life I was pretty much incapable of handling change. During my late teens and early 20's my brain was hard-wired to follow really unhealthy coping mechanisms. Anxiety-packed nights filled with mind-racing thoughts would flow into periods of sleeplessness/mania for 4-5 days at a time. I turned to alcohol as my steady coping strategy to shut my brain down and try to sleep. Soaking my emotions with liquor usually drove me into depressive episodes that inflamed my self-hatred. Anger would poke its head out occasionally to add to the storm. I lived in this steady pattern of hell until I realized how close I was to killing myself.

I stopped drinking and for the first time took an honest look at my life. My sobriety stripped me of the avoidance pattern that had become a dangerously comfortable habit. I put myself in a very disciplined pattern to better determine how I was coping and why. When I say disciplined, I mean it. I woke up and went to bed at the same time every day. I stopped drinking caffeine, starting exercising regularly, and ate as healthily as I could (I love cookies a little too much). I worked with a therapist and found support from the people closest to me. After a couple of years, the old pattern wasn't as necessary. I was able to love myself, relax, sleep, and drink socially. I was able to enjoy parts of my life that I never thought possible.

Needless to say, Peace Corps is interested in these parts of your life during the application process. Transition can often be one of the biggest triggers for mental health issues. For my medical clearance I had to submit letters from mental health professionals that treated me, an examination from a psychologist who had seen me last and provide written answers to 8 questions on coping mechanisms. Some people think this is a bit tedious/invasive, but I get it. Peace Corps wants to ensure that the people who serve will be ok and have access to help should the need arise.

As I prepared to come to Botswana I tried to mentally plan for the changes that would happen. I made it through the 2-month training period filled with adjustments that in the past would have been major triggers. During this process my brain surprised me. The first chance I had to drink alcohol, all of the new pathways I had built years ago put up their little red awareness flags. It was like they were saying to me, "Hey idiot, this is a big change. Stay aware. Adjust the way you need. Don't mess this up." I listened to them.

Although I thoroughly thought about the challenges I would face in Botswana, I wasn't prepared for changes at home. About 5 months into my service my dad called and told me that my mom had breast cancer. The old pathways that were ingrained in my brain for so long made a mad dash to the forefront. I immediately wanted to drink. I pictured myself putting my hand through a door. But, I didn't do either. I sat down. I cried. I held my wife. I talked to my brothers. I wrote an e-mail to my friends who immediately called or sent their love. I talked to new friends and co-workers. The lessons I learned mixed with the support from others guided me to the healthy coping I needed.

It's unfortunately common to get depressing news from home during service. My mom got treatment and the cancer went into remission, but a lot of volunteers deal with death and terminal illness. It can be hard to do that from so far away. I am lucky to be serving with my wife, but let's be honest, Peace Corps service strips an individual to their core – think about what it does to a marriage! That's a whole different blog. Let's get back to the individual.

Whether a person joins the Peace Corps with some experience of trying to learn about him/herself or begins that process during their service, coping mechanisms are vital. During my time in Botswana I have been faced with difficulties at work and in my personal life that have led me to grow in ways I didn't think possible. Some experiences will take years to process. At times volunteers want their challenges, thoughts, and emotions wrapped into a nice little bow of understanding. However, acceptance and self-understanding take a lot of time. It's a constant work in progress. The beauty of Peace Corps service is having the time to change and grow personally, while working in a village and inspiring those life-changing lessons in others.