

# PEACE CORPS

Times

Winter 1998-99

## Volunteers Help Central America Recover from Hurricane Disaster

*PCVs, Crisis Corps Volunteers to Help Friends and Communities Rebuild in the Wake of Hurricanes Georges and Mitch*

In late October and early November, hundreds of Peace Corps Volunteers in Central America were affected by one of the worst natural disasters to hit the region in modern times—Hurricane Mitch. The massive storm activated the Peace Corps' emergency response networks, resulting in Volunteer evacuations and the activation of the Peace Corps' Crisis Corps program.

Packing winds of up to 180 mph, Mitch battered Central America for six straight days, dumping up to two feet of rain per day in some places. In most areas, Mitch cut off electricity, phones, and virtually all forms of transportation. It caused floods and landslides, which at times combined to wipe out entire villages.

Because of the devastation, Peace Corps Volunteers across the region were relocated for safety and security. All 200 PCVs in Honduras were temporarily relocated to Panama and 47 Belize Volunteers were moved to Miami. About one-half of the Volunteers in Nicaragua and El Salvador, as well as about 15 percent of Guatemala PCVs, were temporarily brought to the capitals.

Hurricane Mitch came on the heels of Hurricane Georges, which soaked the Eastern Caribbean, Haiti,

and the Dominican Republic, and it left much of the region in rapid response mode. Volunteers were put in unfamiliar but important roles, helping their host countries in any way possible. As a story in *The New York Times* reported, Volunteers in the Dominican Republic dropped food supplies from airplanes, while Volunteers in Nicaragua distributed food, clothing, and medical supplies at the local airport. And the Crisis Corps program expects to send its first Crisis Corps Volunteers (CCVs) to the field in late January.

In all, about 10 percent of the 6,500 Volunteers serving in the Peace Corps were affected in some way by Hurricanes Mitch and Georges. By early December, all Volunteers had returned to their original sites, while many were able to go back to their original sites, some Volunteers found their villages and projects washed away.

### Volunteers Respond

Like most Volunteers in the western region of Honduras, Marc Wolf didn't think much of the rains that continued to fall day after day. It was the rainy

► See Hurricane Mitch...page 7



*A group of women from Malacatoya, Nicaragua, carry some of their belongings down a flooded road. Hurricane Mitch has left thousands homeless.*

## PCVs Get Increase in Readjustment Allowance, More Health Coverage

In December, Director Mark Gearan announced that PCVs will receive a 12 percent increase in the readjustment allowance they receive at the conclusion of their service. Starting on January 1, 1999, readjustment allowances will increase from \$200 to \$225 per month of service. This means Volunteers who serve a full 27-month tour will see their allowance rise from \$5,400 to \$6,075 at their COS.

"I know that the readjustment allowance is important to Volunteers who are finishing up their time in the Peace Corps," said Gearan. "An increase was long overdue, and I hope that this will make it easier for Volunteers to make the transition to life after Peace Corps service."

Volunteers also will no longer need to be concerned about maintaining medical insurance when they complete their overseas service. As of spring 1999, returned Volunteers will be automatically eligible for up to 19 months of health insurance coverage from the moment they leave the Peace Corps. "While we still have a few more steps to take, when this program comes on line later this spring it will be of enormous help for RPCVs as a bridge from their COS to the start of their new careers," said Dr. David Gootnick, Director of Medical Services at the Peace Corps.

Here are the details: All Volunteers will be automatically enrolled by the Peace Corps for one month at their COS. RPCVs enrolled in the plan are covered for major medical conditions up to \$1,000,000, with no pre-existing condition exclusions. RPCVs can maintain their health insurance coverage under the new plan for an additional 18 months, and disabled RPCVs can continue their coverage for another 29 months. In addition, the plan offers guaranteed enrollment to all Volunteers, spouses, and minor dependents, with worldwide coverage including all 50 states and U.S. territories. While the Peace Corps will pick up the first month's tab, premiums for RPCVs who choose to continue coverage will be around \$95 a month—about one-third the cost of other health plans.

## Peace Corps Receives Largest Budget in Agency History

*Congress Approves \$240 Million to Fund More Volunteers*

Peace Corps received much deserved recognition this fall in Washington—in the form of a major budget increase. Congress approved a \$240 million budget for the agency, the largest in Peace Corps history. The increase will be used to give a boost to

the number of Volunteers serving overseas.

"The big budget increase is a strong reaffirmation of the support that the President and many members of Congress have for the Peace Corps and the work of Volunteers" said Director Mark Gearan. "And the biggest difference will be felt out in the field."

The new budget is an increase of \$18 million from last year's budget. The additional funding means that another 400 trainees will have the chance to serve overseas. By September 1999, about 7,400 Volunteers will be serving in the field, the highest number in 25 years. In addition, the new budget will also fund 40 more Crisis Corps Volunteers.

Since the increase was announced, Peace Corps staff have been working on programming ideas to ensure that the new trainees will be placed in sites where their skills can be best utilized.

Director Gearan emphasized that resources will be available to maintain a high level of support for the new and existing Volunteers.



*Girl Power! Camp Glow spreads across Central Europe: A leadership camp for girls is taking off with the help of a few enthusiastic PCVs. Above, GLOW participants in Moldova head out for a hike. Read more about it on Page 4.*



Dear Peace Corps Volunteers,

Over the last year, I had the chance to visit some of you in China, the Philippines, Mongolia, Panama, Jordan, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and several other Peace Corps countries. On each of these trips, I saw again—as I have on every visit I've made to Volunteer sites in more than 25 other countries—why the Peace Corps remains one of the world's most successful service and development programs. The impact that you are having on the lives of people is an inspiration, one that I talk about every chance I get here in Washington and in cities across the U.S.

The contributions that you are making to sustainable development, cross-cultural understanding, and peace around the world are the main reason why the last year has been such an exciting one. Here are a few highlights: President Clinton used his first radio address of 1998 to announce our initiative to expand the Peace Corps to 10,000 Volunteers, a goal we hope to reach early in the next century; Congress approved the largest Peace Corps budget in history that will allow more people to serve as Volunteers; we opened new Volunteer programs in Mozambique and Bangladesh and signed a formal agreement to solidify our program in China; and we expanded the number of Crisis Corps projects, giving Volunteers and RPCVs the chance to help out in the aftermath of natural disasters.

I know that for all of you, the readjustment allowance and the need to maintain health insurance in the months after your service in the Peace Corps are important issues. So, I'm delighted that beginning this year, we will increase the readjustment allowance to \$225 for each month of your service and make available an excellent health insurance plan for the first 19 months of your status as an RPCV.

These are just a few of our accomplishments, but the last year also saw its challenges. Volunteers in Lesotho were evacuated temporarily to South Africa due to internal violence; hundreds of Volunteers in Central America and the Caribbean were evacuated or relocated in the aftermath of Hurricanes Georges and Mitch; and we all were deeply saddened by the tragic deaths of five Volunteers. Yet in the face of each of these challenges, Volunteers demonstrated an extraordinary spirit of understanding, care, and determination that should make all of us proud to be associated with the Peace Corps.

In November, Life magazine published an article that listed the "100 Best Things About America Now." Number 84 on the list was: "There are currently 6,500 Americans working in 80 countries. The number of workers is up 25 percent since 1987." This is just one of the many examples of how people here at home respect and appreciate what you are doing in so many communities overseas. We are developing a new agenda for this year, and I will report back to you on our plans.

In the meantime, I thank you for your service and hope you will write to me with your ideas on how we can continue to strengthen the Peace Corps.

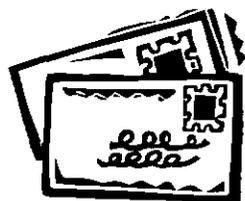
Best wishes,

Mark Pearson

## Letters

### Banking in Mali

Since the article "Mali's Cultural Bank" appeared in the "Notes from around the World" section of *Peace Corps Times* (Volume 19, Number 1) and on the Peace Corps Web site, I have received numerous inquiries from Volunteers who would like to replicate



the cultural bank project in their own communities. I would like to inform these Volunteers that a manual is available through the Information Collection and Exchange (ICE) office in Washington, D.C., regarding the creation of the cultural bank of Fombori. "The Culture Bank—Saving Mali's Cultural Heritage" is a 100 page manual which explains the philosophy and loan/documentation system of the Culture Bank and details the processes the village followed to create the first Culture Bank. It is available in both French and English.

Readers might also be interested to know that five other Mali Volunteers are presently working on culture bank projects, with many more villages requesting intervention. Moreover, for the past year I have been working with local cultural preservation experts to create an NGO which will provide technical and

financial assistance to village associations wishing to create Culture Banks in Mali. Although my service ended in November, I plan to remain active in the Culture Bank initiative. I can be reached at the following e-mail address [kerry\\_crosby@hotmail.com](mailto:kerry_crosby@hotmail.com).

Todd Vincent Crosby  
Bamako, Mali

### Natural Inspiration

I was really pleased with your article on The Nature Company founder Priscilla Wrubel. It not only encouraged me—it inspired me and gave me renewed gratification to be part of the Peace Corps.

Pat C. Lutz  
Nowy Sacz, Poland

### Correction

Dominican Republic Peace Corps Volunteer Chad Nettesheim's cause of death was incorrectly attributed to asthma in the last issue of the *Peace Corps Times*. In fact, Chad's death was caused by complications related to a heart condition. We apologize for the error.

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## PEACE CORPS TIMES



A publication for Peace Corps Volunteers serving worldwide.

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# off the Wire

## PEACE CORPS NEWS

### A New Home in Washington

First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and Queen Noor of Jordan joined the Peace Corps in gearing up for the 21st century by officially dedicating the new Peace Corps Building on September 15, 1998. "This building, newly renovated and open to all, is a symbol of the indomitable and idealistic spirit of this pioneering organization," said Queen Noor. Peace Corps Director Mark Gearan hosted the dedication celebration and was joined by Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala (RPCV, Iran), Senator Christopher Dodd of Connecticut (RPCV, the Dominican Republic), Senator Paul Coverdell (Peace Corps Director under

President Bush), and several members of the U.S. House of Representatives. The highlight of the celebration was the dedication of Shriver Hall, in honor of Sargent Shriver, the first Director of the Peace Corps. His daughter, television journalist Maria Shriver, her husband, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and other members of the Shriver family were on hand for the festivities. Mrs. Clinton, who has visited with Peace Corps Volunteers in more than a dozen countries, reminded the crowd of the contributions Volunteers are making around the world. "The Peace Corps has already made a very tangible and real contribution to making clear that America is seen as we would like to be seen around the world—as people who want to bring tools and opportunities to



Peace Corps Director Mark Gearan, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, Sargent Shriver, and Her Majesty Queen Noor dedicate the new Peace Corps Building in Washington, D.C.

those who can then build a better life for themselves," she said. PCV Ursula Hawe flew back to Washington from her village in Jordan for the honor of introducing Queen Noor. The Queen told the audience that as a young girl growing up in the United States she always dreamed of being a Peace Corps Volunteer. But while she never signed up as a Volunteer, she was instrumental in inviting the first of group of Volunteers to serve in Jordan in 1997.

### Worldly White House Holiday Tree

At the invitation of First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, some Peace Corps Volunteers helped decorate the White House for the holiday season. A tree decorated with more than 400 ornaments from Peace Corps countries was on display in the East Colonnade of the White House. With the help of Volunteers, RPCVs and staff, ornaments from more than 65 countries were displayed on the Peace Corps tree.

This was the first time in the Peace Corps' history that the public could view a tree decorated with handicrafts from around the world, reflecting the diversity of the countries where Volunteers serve.

Many of the ornaments were made from locally-available material, such as banana tree leaves, shells, gourds, and beads. Students, village chiefs, women, and members of handicraft cooperatives created musical instruments, masks, dolls, baskets, jewelry, and hats for the tree.



Sargent and Eunice Shriver, Mark Gearan, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, and President Bill Clinton at the Peace Corps holiday tree in the White House.

### Volunteers Depart for Mozambique and Bangladesh

In October, the Peace Corps opened two new programs in Mozambique and Bangladesh. The Volunteers in both countries will be working on projects in education and developing ties of cross-cultural understanding.

Sixteen years of civil war destroyed half of all the schools in Mozambique. Over the last six years Mozambicans have worked to rebuild their country, and now they need Peace Corps Volunteers to work in the new educational system. "It's an exciting time to be in Mozambique," said Shelby Bond, one of the first group of 24 trainees who left in late October to begin service in the former Portuguese colony. "The people are ready to move ahead, I'm really looking forward to being part of that process." After they complete their three months of training and are sworn in, the 24 new Volunteers will be working with Mozambique's Ministry of Education, as well as the United Kingdom's international volunteer organization, Voluntary Service Overseas. They will help Mozambican English teachers improve their teaching skills and establish English language resource centers for teachers and students.

A week after the trainees left for Mozambique, another 24 trainees departed from San Francisco for the South Asian nation of Bangladesh. This group of trainees will be the first to serve in Bangladesh since the Peace Corps left the country (then known as East Pakistan) in 1964. Bangladesh is one of the world's most densely populated countries—approximately 130 million people living in an area the size of the state of Wisconsin. Because Bangladesh will soon require English for students beginning in the third grade, there is plenty of work to do. The Volunteers will work in a Primary Training Institute to enhance the English language skills of Bangladesh's primary school teachers.



### Coming to Times Square & Blockbuster Video...

The Peace Corps has arranged for Volunteers to get some high-profile attention here at home—in Times Square and Blockbuster video stores. A Peace Corps public service advertisement is now appearing 18 times a day on the giant Panasonic video screen in the heart of New York's Times Square. Hundreds of thousands of people can see the ad, which features RPCV Javad Mashkuri, who became a doctor after serving as a health Volunteer in Mali.

And in December, the Peace Corps' new 15-minute recruitment showed up in 4,400 Blockbuster video stores. The video, which was shot last summer, stars more than a dozen Volunteers in Ecuador, South Africa, Uzbekistan, and Mongolia, who talk about their Peace Corps service. While Peace Corps recruiters use the video on college campuses, people across the country can check out the video free of charge and learn more about what it's like to serve as a Volunteer.

# Notes



## Free Clinic Opens

IF IT WEREN'T FOR SISTER LOUISA AND Sister Terzicija, Radovo, a village of 1,000 people in the Strumica Valley of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, might not have any adequate medical care. For the past 10 years, the two Catholic nuns had been giving free medical care out of their home, until the villagers got together and built a clinic.



"Most of the residents live on small farms and have low incomes from crops or sheep-herding,"

FYROM

says PCV Carol Partridge.

"There is no doctor or clinic in Radovo, nor in four other nearby villages. If the people of these villages need a hospital, they must travel up to 18 km to Strumica, usually by horse drawn wagon." So having a clinic in town really made a difference. The only problem was, the new clinic needed to be stocked. Enter Carol and her colleague Christina Cekov. The two joined forces to tap Western European humanitarian organizations for donations, and now the clinic has the right amount of supplies and medicines to serve its community. "Together, we make the contacts, send photos and descriptions of the clinic, pick up the medicines and deliver them to the clinic," explains Carol. "Often we are thanked with fresh flowers or vegetables from the large garden the busy sisters still find the time to maintain."

## Cool Idea

ECUADOR PCV DANIEL SAMMON IS HELPING a farming community rebound in the aftermath of El Niño. After the storms hit, the Areneles, a forest community of 35 families, realized they would have to search for an alternate source of income. Bad weather made it nearly impossible to transport timber, their main source of income, across the country and local markets became saturated with timber. Families watched prices for wood drop and their earnings dwindle. In reaction, the Areneles women's group developed a product: a collapsible fan made



The Areneles women's group making fans and reaping the benefits.

from bamboo. It was a hit locally, so Daniel helped the women expand their enterprise through a Partnership grant. "This income-generation project helps to contribute those funds necessary for health care, food and other material needs," Daniel notes.

ECUADOR

"Perhaps just as important is the project's underlying result—a mechanism which functions to unite this group of women to meet their basic needs as a cohesive whole." The women plan to sell the fans to neighboring communities, hotels and restaurants in Borbon and San Lorenzo, as well as at the local store and within their own community.

## Building Bridges

SINCE RECLAIMING ITS INDEPENDENCE IN 1992, Latvia has been making big transitions, both economically and culturally. But some of the ethnic tensions between the Latvian majority and the Russian minority still remain. "How can you build bridges between peoples?" a group of Latvia PCVs asked. They came up with an answer: start with the young. "Latvia is forging a new national identity for itself on

a world stage," says Latvia PCV Erin Hess, "and it is the youth who will guide their country down a new path by working cooperatively, sharing their talents across ethnic lines." PCV Tiffany Gilmartin and her colleague Liva Biseniece organized Latvia Youth Conference '98. Students from varying backgrounds and towns throughout Latvia converged on the Krimulda secondary school for sessions on the environment, conflict management, mass media, gender roles, human rights, NGO development—and to learn to see beyond their differences. The conference put Latvian and Russian students who would otherwise never speak to one another in direct contact. "Instead of focusing on conflict, they were receptive to other points of view," says Erin. "And people were having fun finding out about each other. It no longer became an issue of 'This is Vitaly, and he is Russian,' but 'This is Vitaly, a student like me.'"

LATVIA

## In the Cashew Business

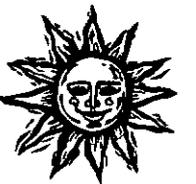
AFTER HAVING RUN A SUCCESSFUL REAL estate business in Madison, Wisc., PCV Tom Brodd had a lot to bring to his service as a Volunteer, and he did. Tom recently supervised the planning and installation of the first community-owned cashew processing center in Ghana. "The Nsawkaw cashew coop society members, who are made up of 55 area cashew farmers, raised over a million cedis of their own money and also donated their time and skills in the construction of the factory building," explains Tom. Once the facility was up and running, they could hardly keep up with demand and had to expand their work force. The plant employs 16 people and processes around one-half metric ton of raw nuts a month. He has been successful in promoting the planting and care of cashew trees; this was instrumental in locating the processing center at his site. "The experience has been fun, interesting and sometimes frustrating," says Tom. "Helping to bring better business knowledge to the society so that they have been able to create jobs—we are the second biggest private employer in the Nsawkaw area. The employment of women has allowed them to have disposable income, which was made clear to me when one Monday morning all the women came to work with new hair styles."

GHANA

## A Glowing Success

IN POLAND, A GROUP OF TEFL and environment Volunteers decided to organize a leadership development camp for young women. The camp took on the name of GLOW. It stood for "Girls Leading Our World," and was fueled by a mission to ensure equal opportunity in Poland's work force and athletics. For one week, girls between the ages of 15 and 18 had the chance to learn about building self-esteem, personal growth, individuality, women's health, and career opportunities. The girls were even coached on how to run elections and campaigns, and then use their new skills for their own elections for Camp GLOW officers. PCV Kerry Tepedino, one of the camp's organizers, said that "the camp had a very positive effect on the girls, and many offered to help in upcoming GLOW camps and as mentors." Indeed, the camp was such a success that it spread to Romania and Moldova. PCV Susan Derby recently held Camp GLOW in Moldova with funding from the Loret Miller Ruppe Fund for the Advancement of Women. "Sixty-two girls had the opportunity to learn more about themselves and others, gain new knowledge, and enhance skills necessary to become tomorrow's

MOLDOVA





PCVs Sandy Konando, Stacia Nordin, and Ivy Dick joined forces with Habitat for Humanity and seven of their high school students to build a house for a needy family in Lilongwe, Malawi.

Unfortunately, debris from both land-based and marine sources represents a serious threat to this marine environment, clogging wildlife, posing health risks and compromising the continued development of tourism," explains environment PCV Jane Bacchieri. She recently joined with youth groups in Vava'u and community youth PCVs Lindsay Little, Kerby Vincent, and Laura Sargent to coordinate Vava'u's participation in the 1998 International Coastal Clean-up. Sponsored by the Center for Marine Conservation, the coastal clean-up involves 90 countries and more than 5,000 clean-up sites. During Tonga's shoreline clean-up, 61 Volunteers collected 109 bags of trash, comprised mostly of the ubiquitous aluminum can, disposable diapers, and plastic packaging.

"Like most small Pacific island countries, the effective management of solid waste is a growing problem and concern in the Kingdom of Tonga," Jane notes. "Environmental efforts, such as participating in the International Coastal Clean-up, not only make a difference to the amount of rubbish polluting the waters and shorelines of Tonga, but also serve to increase public awareness about the problem of solid waste and provide hands-on opportunities for people to be involved in a solution."

## Spotlight On: Kenya PCVs



COMPUTERS WERE INTRODUCED for the first time to the Loitoktok community recently in Kenya by PCV **Ellen Brady**. Working with the NGO, Catholic Mission, Ellen was able to obtain a donation of 14 computers and one printer from the chocolate makers the Nestle Company. Several school children and community members are benefitting from the new computer classes taught by Ellen. She has also been teaching basic typing skills to her eager students.

**KENYA**

OBTAINING CREDIT IS ONE OF THE chief impediments to business growth in Kenya. Realizing the plight of many small business owners in the town of Nakuru, PCV **Frank Craig** worked closely with government officials to bring together local artisans and helped them form a cooperative and credit society, called the Nakuru Peace Corps Jua Kali Association. To qualify for membership, an artisan must first complete a business management course. The course itself has attracted hundreds of local traders from Nakuru and surrounding areas. So far, about 200 people have graduated, about 50 percent of which are women. Now the business owners have something they used to only dream of: access to credit which will allow them to expand their businesses and earn more income.

"LIKE SO MANY PCVS, MY MAJOR CONTRIBUTION to Kenya came from work peripheral to my primary assignment," explains PCV **Andy Cohen**. Andy, an agroforestry Volunteer, worked with the chairman of the Environmental Management department at Maseno University, Dr. Godfrey Anyumba, to design an innovative curriculum in environmental science and management. The curriculum includes six academic concentrations and 54 courses. "The department now holds ecosystem management and participatory methods as its two guiding disciplines," notes Andy. "It is hoped that this department will produce future environmental leaders."

Send us info  
on projects  
in your  
country,  
and we'll turn the  
Spotlight on you!

leaders," reports Susan. "As a Peace Corps Volunteer who has worked in Moldova for two years, I can say without hesitation that Camp GLOW was the most valuable, worthwhile project I have been involved in."

## Family Habitat

PCVS **IVY DICK, SANDY KONANDO, AND Stacia Nordin** brought seven of their female high school students into the Malawi capital of Lilongwe for a special project. By the time they left, less than

**MALAWI**

10 days later, the women had learned the meaning of the phrase "getting your hands dirty." They had also learned the thrill of doing something no one believed they could—build a house. In partnership with Habitat for Humanity in Malawi and with guidance from a local contractor, the Volunteers and their students built a two-bedroom house brick-by-brick. When they were finished, the Volunteers then turned the new house over to a local woman and her five children. "The work was hard, but it was incredible to see how much we had accomplished everyday," said Ivy. "This project is great because we started with nothing, and by the end, there was a house and a happy family."



PCVs Jane Bacchieri and Lindsay Little with members of the Tonga Visitors Bureau and the Holonga Youth Group after the Coastal Clean-up.

## Debris-Free World

"THE VAVA'U ISLANDS IN NORTHERN Tonga are surrounded by crystal blue-green tropical waters and fringed by reefs abundant with a diversity of marine life.

## A Hit in PNG

PAPUA NEW GUINEA PCVS **LANCE AND LINDA LOVICK** RECENTLY found out how a good idea can be contagious. Following a severe drought in PNG last year, caused by the ill effects of El Niño, the two community development Volunteers, who are stationed in Tari, Southern Highlands Province, came up with water catchment system. The system is

**PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

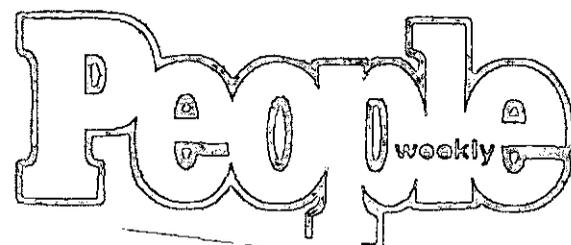
comprised of a piece of plastic tarp strung over wooden poles. The tarp collects the water and funnels it into a nearby tank. The Volunteers premiered the system to people in their area, and it soon became a popular item. The Lovicks then showed it to other Volunteers, who shared it with their communities—and several adopted the system. The catchment system was recently featured at a cultural exhibit in PNG and viewed by over 15,000 people. To top it off, an NGO where a Crisis Corps Volunteer is stationed has picked up the idea. The NGO is planning to erect about 50 systems in the care centers set up for victims of a disastrous tidal wave that hit PNG this past summer.



**Quote from the field...** "As a PCV, you learn not only to see the glass half full, you look at it and think: 'Hey, I can bathe in that.'" — Tanzania PCV Jason Leong

# Ron Arias

*From the Peace Corps to People Magazine*



As Ron Arias tells it, he doesn't know exactly why he joined the Peace Corps. "I saw it as a chance to go into the unknown. Life abroad, with

some good Samaritan work thrown into the mix, sounded pretty attractive. Also, Peace Corps, especially in those early years, was seen as idealistic, doing something noble, heroic even. I don't think anyone ever joins the Peace Corps for one reason only. I certainly didn't. And then I got lucky. I got to go to Latin America."

When Ron Arias signed up in 1963, he was sent to the Peruvian Andes where he developed a nutrition program and established a summer camp for campesino kids.

"It's a long time ago now," says Arias, "over 30 years, but I still think about Peace Corps, almost every day of my life."

What also happened to Ron Arias in Peru is what happens to many Hispanic Volunteers in Latin America: he learned a great deal about himself and his ancestors.

"In Peru, the food, music, customs, racial mixtures, all paralleled my own Mexican roots. In the end, those two years made me less parochial, less ignorant of the world outside of my own Los Angeles neighborhood.



*Fresh off the plane: Ron Arias arriving in Peru to begin his Peace Corps service.*

"When I returned from Peru," Arias explains, "my sense of cultural identity was stronger than when I had left. My Spanish had improved tremendously, and I knew so much more about my Hispanic ancestry."

After his Peace Corps years, Arias earned a masters degree in journalism at UCLA. He then traveled and studied in Latin America and Spain before

beginning to teach English full time at a junior college in San Bernardino.

It was during these years that he wrote *Tamazunchale*, a comic novel set in Peru and Los Angeles. "A lot of this novel came out of my own Chicano background, my Mexican family, the Los Angeles I grew up in, and my Peace Corps experience in the Andes." First published in 1975, the book was nominated for the National Book Award and is still in print.

According to Arias, the Peace Corps also directly related to his successful career as a college teacher. "It helped me become a more creative, less judgmental teacher. No one job could have given me such sustained contact with so many people living on the edge-of-life, living as probably two-thirds of the world lives their lives. Such a 'classroom' was invaluable."

In the mid-1980s, Arias left teaching and went to work for *People* magazine, where once again his Peace Corps experience helped him.

"As a journalist, I've been sent to Ethiopia, Somalia, Haiti, Brazil, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Panama, Colombia, and of course all over the U.S. I've covered earthquakes, riots, famines, wars, death, and destruction. I'm one of the few writers at the magazine who knows their way around the world's poorer countries. Peace Corps teaches you to fit in anywhere, be ready for anything, be flexible, be undeterred by roadblocks, be sensitive to your hosts and listen well. All of that is great training for any journalist, or for that matter, for anything you do in life."

"There's no doubt that I have been influenced by the people I worked with in Peru," says Arias. "As a senior writer at *People*, I think I see stories that others might not see because of my experience. And when I write some tight, moving, human-drama in miniature that's emotionally wrenching to me, I know that about 30 million people will read the piece, and I might be able to do some good with my prose. That's what happens when you are a Volunteer. You're always trying to do good."

One of Arias' *People* stories did just that, and it became the subject of his second book, *Five Against the Sea*. It was a survival book that grew out of a 1988 cover story called "Miracle at Sea."

"I was in Medellín, Colombia, at the time," recalls Arias, "doing a drug story for *People*, when I got a call from my editor in New York to drop what I was doing and catch the first plane to Los Angeles to interview five Costa Rican fishermen. They had just been rescued south of Hawaii after spending five months adrift in the Pacific—a world record for such survival feats. So I met them in L.A. after they had flown from Honolulu, and then followed them back to Costa Rica. One rea-



*Ron Arias, on assignment for People magazine in Sydney, Australia, in 1992.*

son I pulled off their story, I believe, was that I had lived among people like them in the Andes. I knew what was important to them. I understood their background and their culture."

Arias' account was later optioned by a movie company and he arranged for the fishermen to be paid for their story. The book was also bought by Reader's Digest Books and published in hardback and paperback by New American Library.

Looking at the success of this book, Arias believes it was because of the grand theme: survival. "It was successful," he says, "because it was about the basics of life: work, hope, sustenance, pain, and death. Having lived as a Peace Corps Volunteer among the very poor, I understood what these fishermen were all about. Now, as a writer, it is these basics which I look for in a story. I suppose my Peace Corps days were the first time I started looking for what really matters in life."

*By John Coyne. Coyne was a Volunteer in Ethiopia (1962-64) and is the manager of the Peace Corps' New York Regional Recruitment Office.*



*Arias during Peace Corps service at the Inca ruin of Viracocha near Sicuani, Peru, in 1964.*

season and a little rain wasn't unusual. He had been in the capital, Tegucigalpa, attending to an injured arm when Hurricane Mitch was said to be hovering in the Caribbean Sea, expected to move north and hit land off the coast of Belize. Mark left the capital to make the long trek back to his site, Concepción, not knowing the hurricane was blocked from moving north by a powerful front over the Gulf of Mexico. As it crept closer to the coast, the winds and rain combined to deluge coastal and mountain areas, as well as large cities.

"When I first returned to my site, I had no idea that Mitch had changed its course," Marc explained. "It was raining, there was some flooding, but it was the rainy season. I didn't think about it." But the rains grew harder, the electricity went out, buses stopped running, roads were rumored to be washed out, and food staples were sparse. Marc decided he should head back to Tegucigalpa and make contact with the Peace Corps office.

PCV Jason Stadler, who helped coordinate the evacuation of Volunteers in a portion of the western region of Honduras, said the Hurricane was a test to both staff and PCVs. "Personally, I think we did an excellent job considering the number of people involved and the complete loss of communication lines," explained Jason.

Fortunately, there were a few satellite telephones, and a dedicated team effort among indigenous and international development agencies. "Everyone was working hard to account for Volunteers," explained Jason. "We even had town mayors helping out."

#### Rebuilding for the Future

Now that Volunteers and Trainees have returned to their countries, Peace Corps staff members are developing post-disaster recovery plans and evaluating reconstruction opportunities. A small number of Volunteers in Honduras chose to close or interrupt their service instead of returning to their sites. Peace Corps Inter-America & the Pacific Regional Director, Patrick F'n'Piere, estimates that approximately 40 to 50 percent of PCVs in the region are working on water and sanitation and related projects as a way to help communities get back on their feet.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch, however, PCVs, especially those in Honduras, are returning to a place that will take years to rebuild. Vice President Al Gore's wife, Tipper, visited Central America, and in her report to President Clinton, stated that the people of the region "suffered a disaster of Biblical proportions." Mrs. Gore urged the President to make use of the Crisis Corps Volunteers in the recovery effort. "We need to draw attention to this unique resource and encourage its full use," she said.

Several hundred RPCVs have already contacted the Crisis Corps in Washington and offered assistance. The Crisis Corps is designating coordinators for the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua to work with in-country Peace Corps staff, host country agencies and non-governmental organizations to develop Crisis Corps Volunteer (CCV) assignments. "Given the scale of the disaster and the magnitude of the need, these first Crisis Corps Volunteers will be followed by many more over the course of the next 12 to 18 months as these countries begin to rebuild," explains Joan Timoney, Crisis Corps Director.

"If there's anything good that came out of this for me," PCV Marc Wolf reflected, "it's how impressed I am by the dedication Hondurans have to each other. When I was working side by side with the Hondurans, digging cars out of mud slides and clearing debris, I felt a real sense of community. Hondurans really pulled together and worked as a team. No one went on alone."

By Jamy Bond. Bond was a Volunteer in Bulgaria and is a Country Desk Assistant at headquarters.

## Crisis Corps Volunteers Lend Experience to Communities in Times of Need

Central America isn't the only place where Crisis Corps Volunteers are helping out. Earlier this year, when El Niño turned worldwide weather patterns upside down, causing both flooding and drought in Latin America and drought in the Pacific, some dedicated RPCVs jumped in to assist. Some were getting ready over the summer to start graduate school, while others had just finished their regular Peace Corps assignments. All of them became Crisis Corps Volunteers.

The Crisis Corps is a rapidly growing Peace Corps program that allows Volunteers who are completing their service and RPCVs to provide short-term assistance in response to natural disasters and humanitarian crises. Since it was first established by Director Mark Gearan in 1996, the Crisis Corps has sent more than 90 Volunteers to 13 countries around the globe. During the past year, for example, Crisis Corps Volunteers have worked on refugee assistance projects in Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, and Thailand, as well as on disaster relief projects in Bolivia, Chile, Nicaragua, Papua New Guinea, the Cook Islands, Montserrat, and Antigua. Nine Crisis Corps Volunteers worked on a health project in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which, unfortunately, had to be suspended last summer after an outbreak of civil unrest. Plans are also under way to send Crisis Corps Volunteers to the Caribbean and Central America to help people overcome the devastation caused by Hurricanes Georges and Mitch.

One of the largest Crisis Corps projects of the year was in Paraguay, where the rainstorms of El Niño displaced some 20,000 people from their homes. Fifteen Crisis Corps Volunteers worked with the Paraguayan health ministry and other organizations on water sanitation and health education projects in temporary "flood camps" set up throughout the capital city of Asunción.

Vikki Stein was one of the Volunteers who went to Paraguay. "Going back to Latin America with the Crisis Corps gave me the chance to use all the skills I'd developed as a Peace Corps Volunteer," said Stein who worked on water sanitation projects as a Volunteer in Honduras from 1994-96. "It was so easy to go in as a relief worker already knowing the language, culture, and social structure. I felt like I had a head start."

Arriving in Asunción, Stein and the other Volunteers were faced with a critical problem: the camps, set up on high ground to accommodate people fleeing their homes in the floodplains, were overcrowded and lacked adequate sanitation and sewage systems. Because of limited toilet facilities and poor hygiene conditions, many people in the camp had become ill.

The Volunteers' initial task was to construct and repair public shower and toilet facilities in the camps. Later, they distributed medicines and taught camp residents how to prevent intestinal parasites. "I came home from Paraguay with a great deal of satisfaction. We pitched in wherever we were needed, and in the end, we accomplished what we had set out to do," Stein said.

Who is eligible to participate in a Crisis Corps project? Just about any RPCV or COSing PCV. Crisis Corps Volunteers have come from a variety of backgrounds. Crisis Corps assignments average four to six months, and shorter-term assignments are sometimes available. In general, Crisis Corps Volunteers are placed in the region or country where they served as Peace Corps Volunteers. They are assigned to work in partnership with non-governmental organizations, international relief agencies, the United Nations, or host country governments.

If you would like to learn more about becoming a Crisis Corps Volunteer, contact your Country Director or write to Peace Corps/Crisis Corps, 1111 20th Street NW, 7th Floor, Washington, DC 20526.



## Volunteer Q & A



Jeff Ogren, of Chicago Heights, Ill., has a distinct honor as a Peace Corps Volunteer. He serves in Ghor el Mazara-a, skirting the Dead Sea in Jordan. The village is 400 meters below sea level, making Jeff the "lowest-serving" Peace Corps Volunteer in the world. He has been a flight attendant, an English teacher in Japan, and, ironically, a diving instructor. Now, he has traded in his diving gear for a cement house and a job working at an all-boys school teaching English in Jordan.

**What is it like serving at the lowest point on earth?**

It is so hot it feels like you are walking on the sun—in November! In the summer, it feels as if you are inside the sun. In fact Dante wrote the *Inferno* here. *Inferno* is Greek for 'Mazra'a', which is the name of my village.

**Does being so low ever...uh...get you down?**

Not really. It's getting up that is the problem.

**What is the funniest thing that has happened to you so far?**

The locals caught me fishing in the Dead Sea.

**Is there any truth to the curative powers of the mud of the Dead Sea?**

When I arrived I had ski slope for a nose, ears bigger than Prince Charles, and...well, yes, actually the mud works wonders.



## Give Us Your Best Shot!

Listen up, shutterbugs! We know you've got about twenty rolls of film stuffed beneath that stack of old Newsweeks. Well, isn't it about time you saw those pics in print? Peace Corps Times will be honoring the best photos from the field with a little...er...exposure. Exceptional PCV photos will be featured each issue in a new section called "Your Best Shot." So send us your glossies and slides. One gig with us and your job with Rolling Stone is just around the corner! Address photo submissions to: "Your Best Shot," Peace Corps Times 1111 20th Street NW, Washington DC 20526. Color photos, black and whites, and slides will be accepted.



From top, left: PCV Kamila Alexander takes five with a member of a local youth group in Ecuador; PCV Lisa Dolezal shares recipes with her friends in Guatemala; a child pauses for the camera in Mongolia.

## Notices

### Ruppe Fund for Women

Through the Loret Miller Ruppe Fund for the Advancement of Women, the Peace Corps Partnership Program has available over \$30,000 per year through the year 2002 for women in development projects. Projects funded to date have spanned many types of women in development efforts, including education, agriculture, water and sanitation, income generation, and youth development initiatives. The fund was set up in memory of the late Loret Miller Ruppe, former Director of the Peace Corps. Volunteers access the fund through regular Partnership Program procedures. For more information, please contact your staff members at post.

### Peace Corps on the Web

If you have access to the Internet, check out the Peace Corps' new Web site at [www.peacecorps.gov](http://www.peacecorps.gov). The site features photos of Volunteers from around the world, and a section is devoted to Volunteer stories. If you'd like to be published on the Web site, send your story and photos to [webmaster@peacecorps.gov](mailto:webmaster@peacecorps.gov) or Peace Corps, Office of Communications, 1111 20th Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20526.

### Y2K and You

How does the millennium computer bug (a.k.a. Y2K) affect you? Talk to your Country Director or find out in the next issue of *Peace Corps Times*.

## Remembrances

### Kathryn MacGillivray

"Malawi is weeping for Katie," said a staff member at the SOS Children's Village of Malawi Trust, upon learning about the death of Teacher Trainer Volunteer Kathryn MacGillivray. Katie, 25, drowned on October 17 while vacationing with friends on the shore of Lake Malawi. A strong current pulled her underwater just days from the end of her two years of service. After graduating from Michigan State University in 1996 with a bachelor's degree in education, Katie began her service in Malawi that September. She served for two years as part of a child survival project in Lilongwe, where she introduced a Teacher Training program that included conducting in-service training during class time in addition to several workshops. But Katie was most proud of her work founding a library at her primary school—the first library ever in the village she worked—which she managed to stock through her own resourcefulness and the generosity of friends and family in the United States. In her honor, the national coordinator of the project Katie worked for has decided to establish the "Katie MacGillivray Memorial Library" at the school, to be maintained through donations by those who knew Katie in Malawi and in the United States.

### Victor Verloo

During a life of service and international concern, Victor Verloo served as a guide to his family and friends, teaching them the excitement of adventure and the importance of helping others. As an experienced 64-year-old senior Volunteer who worked in business development, Victor continued trailblazing all the way through his final assignment. In the town of Chernihiv, Ukraine, Victor was helping a social services organization with public relations and advertising, skills the native of Belgium learned during years with the California Department of Transportation Aeronautics division. Victor was killed September 14 during an apparent robbery in his home. United States Ambassador to the Ukraine Steven Pifer said of Victor: "Mr. Verloo was a valued member of the Peace Corps business development team in Ukraine—an American who left his home in the United States to assist Ukrainians in their transition to a market economy." Earlier in his life, Victor spent time as a bush pilot in Congo after serving as a fighter pilot in the Royal Belgian Air Force. He married an American in 1964 and came to the United States in 1966, later receiving an engineering degree from California State University, Long Beach, and a master's in business administration at California State University, Sacramento.



### Robert Bock

An experienced fishery expert who was known for his commitment and work ethic, Volunteer Robert Bock was killed on August 12 in a roadside robbery that also took the lives of nine Filipinos. Robert, 32, had served as a coastal resources management Volunteer in the municipality of Concepcion, Philippines, since April 1997, where he was helping the Iloilo provincial government in fisheries management and the conservation of coral reefs. During his time in the province, Robert touched the lives of many with whom he worked and lived. After learning of Robert's death, residents of his town in Iloilo burned candles at their doors in a sign of mourning. "He will sorely be missed," said Vice Mayor John Arcosa of Concepcion, where Robert lived. "He was very much a part of Concepcion. He was well-loved by the people." Robert received a bachelor's degree from Old Dominion University in 1991 and went on to work as a marine scientist with the Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences, studying the effects of agricultural runoff on water quality of local fish hatcheries. Before joining the Peace Corps, he was also a hatchery manager at a shellfish farm in his hometown of Chincoteague, Virginia.

### Thomas and Eileen Lonergan

After three years of service in the Peace Corps, Thomas and Eileen Lonergan had left their mark on two different islands in the South Pacific, Tuvalu and Fiji. "They cared deeply about the communities where they lived and taught, and they often went above and beyond the call of duty," said Eddie Stice, the Peace Corps Fiji Country Director. Both had served as teachers at three different schools in the two countries, including time at a remote village in Tuvalu, where Thomas, 33, served as the head of the science department, and Eileen, 28, as head of the math department. In addition to teaching duties, Thomas and Eileen made it a point to be involved in their local communities. Eileen worked with a women's group to develop a health-focused cookbook that the group sold to pay for their activities, while Thomas helped organize educational displays and presentations to raise student awareness about coral reef conservation activities during the "International Year of the Coral Reef." Thomas and Eileen disappeared during a scuba diving excursion off the coast of Queensland, Australia, on January 25. Queensland was the first stop on a planned trip around the world.