



The Swazi Sojournal

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Volunteers celebrate Swazi culture with Incwala

By Kevin Okun

Swazi Sojournal

Hoping for a healthy harvest, the nation gathers at the Ludzudzini Royal Palace, at the end of the king's seclusion with lusekwane, long sticks fetched by boys throughout the country to build a small kraal for the king, inside his royal kraal.



Photo by Rebecca Friedberg

Bobhuti celebrate Incwala with traditional attire and HIV/AIDS red ribbons, bringing tradition together with modern times..

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Guests like Peace Corps Volunteers are invited to participate and help fulfill the Swazi request for good crops.

Living with Zulus for the first six months of my Peace Corps services, my community didn't teach much about Incwala. When the ceremony happened in January 2004, it passed without anyone knowing. So I didn't get to go.

This time, Incwala would be the day before New Years Eve. It changes because the moon doesn't stay with our calendar. I wouldn't miss it this year.

At the royal kraal, *esibiyeni*, I joined a few veteran Volunteers, a bunch of newbie Volunteers and hundreds of Swazis in the dance.

Entering the kraal is kind of like a combination between walking into a church and going to see the president. The police had metal detectors that we had to walk through. Then we were asked to remove our shoes and remain solemn in quiet respect for the sacred ceremony about to begin. Men entered at one end and the women at the opposite.

Outside, Annie Mohr's sister, visiting from America for Christmas was invited by a friendly Swazi dressed in traditional attire called emahiya to "come closer to my leopard skin." She made way for the kraal.

Rebecca Friedberg attended Incwala dressed in emahiya along with Tegan Callahan, Jacque Eisenberg, Luke Fiordalis and Meredith Aggers. She said walking thought the grounds provided excitement.

"It felt like you were walking into a music festival with the vendors. There was a vibration, a sense of energy and anticipation," Friedberg said. "Dressing up and getting ready was the most fun. It was kind of like getting ready for a party."

Michelle Desmond also attended Incwala. "I think it was a beautiful prayer of the people, though slightly anticlimatic," she said.

Friedberg said getting a hold of the dance was difficult. But she enjoyed seeing the Zulu warriors perform.

After an hour of standing in the same spot with the congregation arranged in concentric circles to the perimeter of the kraal and its tree-branch walls, a group of men with the king emerged inside the circle. It was difficult to identify him, dressed similarly to the others, parading around the crowd that cheered, "Inkhosi, inkhosi." Here is the king.

Still, Swazis put on a show that everyone should see at least once. Seeing Incwala can make any Swazi experience more complete.



Photo by Rebecca Friedberg

PCVs Tegan Callahan, Rebecca Friedberg, Marnie Cockrill and Jacque Eisenberg join bobhuti at Incwala.

A word from Doc

I hope 2005 has kicked off well for all of you. From the feedback I have had you all seem to have had a good Christmas break and are now "getting your teeth into" your work. I have just finished visiting all the first years at their sites and everyone has impressed me with their cheerfulness, enthusiasm and desire to get involved. The beginning is not easy (I know some have had bumpier rides than others) but you are all doing very well and look set for a productive two years ahead.

For the second year PCVs I have a few logistical items:

1. Malaria chemoprophylaxis tolerance survey - Thanks to those of you who have handed in your surveys. To those of you who haven't or don't know what I am talking about, please check your mailboxes, complete the forms and get them back to me before Feb 11.

2. Some of you have suggested to me that a grief and loss workshop would be beneficial. I agree and have tentatively scheduled it for the first week of March (probably Wednesday March 2). It will most likely be at Thokoza but just for the day - lunch will be provided. You will be accommodated at Grifters for the two nights (preceding and fol-



lowing). All of the second year volunteers interested should get in touch with Patrick Stonehouse or Teresa Lavagnino so that I can get an idea of numbers. It is not compulsory. I plan to have the new PCMO, Daynese Santos, and the local counselor, Debbie Dadgar, participating. I will confirm the dates and venue with those who plan to attend. First year Volunteers, don't feel left out as we have something scheduled for you at IST and we are working on getting a facilitator from Washington.

Other news - here is some information from the APCMO in East Africa relevant to all women but especially those first years who still have mid-service exams to come.



Hey, Gals, What's the Good News about Pap smears?

By Dr. Patty Ruze, APCMO

News Flash: For many PCVs, a mid-service Pap smear and pelvic exam will no longer be recommended!

Yes, this is great news for those of us who hate that annual Pap smear. Recently the U.S. Preventive Task Force published a national medical guideline, which recommended that healthy women with no prior abnormal Pap smear should get a Pap smear every three years, instead of the once yearly exam previously recommended. This recommendation has been made because in their review of many studies, involving many patients, they were unable to find any difference in death from cervical cancer, or even treatment differences between patients who were screened annually versus those who received Pap smears every three years. These studies found that most women who developed cervical cancer were those women who had never been screened previously, or had Pap smears less frequently than every five years. The rationale for the recommendation is that most cervical cancers are slow growing, so that checking women every three years was frequent enough to detect pre-cancerous changes.

Other respected organizations, such as the

American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology and the American Cancer Society have also come on board with this. They recommend screening every two to three years after three consecutive normal Pap smears. Peace Corps has integrated these recommendations into Peace Corps protocols for your care. For female volunteers this may mean that you get a pre-service Pap smear and a COS Pap smear. When you finish service, your U.S. doctor may recommend another Pap three years later as an RPCV.

All organizations, including Peace Corps, still recommend annual Pap and pelvic exam for women with a prior history of abnormal pap smears or women with high risk (cancer causing) Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) or other STDs. Because of other nationally accepted recommendations, Peace Corps also recommends a chlamydia test as part of the pap smear especially for PCVs younger than 25 years of age. Volunteers older than 65 or those who had a hysterectomy, under most circumstances, do not need a Pap smear.

Feel free to discuss your particular situation with your PCMO.



in brief

Better Health workshop planned

After attending a *Problem Solving for Better Health* workshop in Lesotho, Holly Bullock and Justin Garland have planned a workshop to help volunteers identify the problems in their community and plan positive and achievable interventions. Prior to conducting these workshops for the second group of PCVs in March, they have planned a pilot workshop for Group 1 volunteers to start at 8 a.m. at Grifters on Feb. 9-11. They want six to ten volunteers willing to participate in the pilot. Unfortunately, Peace Corps cannot cover the expenses, so volunteers will have to pay for food and lodging at Grifters. At the same time, though, participants will learn a valuable framework for planning sustainable projects and will also play an integral role in shaping the Peace Corps Swaziland training program. Those interested can call Justin Garland at 618-5655.

NGO manual available

It's been a long time coming, but it's finally complete. The draft of the NGO Manual is available at the Peace Corps office. A print a copy is not available for each volunteer, but a PDF file can be viewed on a computer or printed out. Please be environmentally responsible and only print out the pages you need.

You can find the PDF on a CD attached to each of the volunteer computers. The file, titled "NGO Draft," is also on the desktop of each volunteer computer. In order to see the file, you must first open Adobe Acrobat, then open the file from within the program.

If you have any questions, contact Justin Garland at 618-5655.

Lost and found corner

Amid the craziness that is Peace Corps, we sometimes lose things important to us. Anyone who finds and returns to the PC office, Jill Granberg's blue pocket-sized thesaurus/dictionary or Kevin Okun's blue Buffalo Bills visor with Red Cross pin on the back, would be rewarded handsomely (the Green Room, anyone?). Anyone who has other missing valuables can report them to the Sojo for help.

In other news:

Marula season has begun! Enjoy responsibly.

Photo by Annie Mohr



May Mamba from Ndzevane and her daughter Thuli prepare marula from the fruit that fell from neighbors trees. She will make beer from the fruit and then sell to others, making 60 emalangenis for 25 liters as part of an income generating project.

NEWS & NOTES

From the Peace Corps Web site

Volunteers go to Tsunami raged Thailand

WASHINGTON, D.C., Jan. 12 – To assist those people whose lives were shattered by the tsunamis in Asia, Peace Corps Director Gaddi H. Vasquez announced today that 30 former volunteers will be returning overseas as part of the Peace Corps' Crisis Corps program in Thailand.

The volunteers will arrive shortly after Director Vasquez returns from Thailand, as part of an evaluation trip scheduled to begin on January 23. Currently, the Peace Corps has an assessment team on the ground in Thailand that Director Vasquez will meet with when he arrives.

"When the tsunamis devastated areas of Asia last month, not only were hundreds of thousands of lives tragically lost, but so were the homes and livelihoods of countless more victims," stated Director Vasquez. "As the largest volunteer organization in the world, it is incumbent on the Peace Corps to mobilize a team of former volunteers to assist the victims and work to restore the areas hardest hit in the region."

Following the tsunami disaster, the Peace Corps received an outpouring of support from former volunteers willing to return to the devastated area. Over 200 volunteers completed the Crisis Corps application and many more inquired about how they could help. In addition, the Peace Corps has seen a substantial increase and has also established the Southeast Asia Tsunami Fund. Contributions to this fund will support volunteer-led projects, as volunteers address the social and economic impact of the disaster and focus on reconstruction. As with all donations to the Peace Corps Partnership Program, 100 percent of every donation will be used in the affected communities.

Sojo staff plans March production

The Swazi Sojournal staff will be using the Peace Corps computers on Feb. 24-25. They request other Volunteers plan to use the computer on other days to allow for smooth production days.

Youth misconceptions about HIV & sexual violence

JOHANNESBURG, Nov. 25, 2004 (PLUSNEWS) - A recent study has found that South African school pupils are prone to misconceptions about sexual violence and HIV/AIDS.

The report, a nationwide cross-sectional study of views on sexual violence and the risk of HIV infection among school pupils, canvassed 269,705 students.

Respondents aged 10-14 years "were more likely than older ones (15-19 years) to believe that ... if you know someone, forcing sex is not sexual violence, and that girls have no right to refuse sex with their boyfriend."

The study found that rural male respondents were also more likely to express these views.

About 65 percent of males and 71 percent of females who admitted to forcing someone else to have sex had themselves been forced to have sex, the study found.

They were also "more likely to have views that would put them at high risk of HIV infection - for example, sex with a virgin can cure [HIV/AIDS], [and] condoms do not protect against HIV".

The belief that sex with a virgin could cure HIV/AIDS was reported by 12.7 percent of the participants, and this belief was "more common in youth from rural areas", said the researchers.

Overall, 33 percent of participants thought they were HIV positive, irrespective of whether they had ever had sex.

The authors of the report noted that several studies had already highlighted the "high incidence of sexual abuse among South African youth", and from the results of this sur-

vey it was clear that "a history of sexual abuse distorts perceptions about sexual violence and the risk of HIV infection."

South African youth of both sexes have a high prevalence of misconceptions about sexual violence and about the risk of HIV infection. [But] males were more likely than females to have misconceptions about sexual violence," the report observed.

Sexual violence was probably exacerbated by South Africa's violent past, the researchers commented, and the endemic violence had become highly sexualised and "aimed at the most vulnerable members of society"

Given the misconceptions regarding sexual violence and HIV/AIDS, the researchers noted that "responses to communication about behaviour change may be

less positive than expected".

It was therefore "important that those responsible for educating youth about HIV infection take into account that youth may be changed by their personal experiences and environment", which was likely to "condition their reaction to educational messages."

The classroom setting seemed to be the only source of education consistently associated with fewer misconceptions," the report said, noting that "one in three youth believed they could be HIV positive [but] one in four of these had not even had sex, an indicator of ignorance of the mechanism of HIV infection".

About 65 percent of males and 71 percent of females admitted forcing someone else to have sex or had themselves been forced to have sex.



Versatility, frankness, and friendship create open environment for AIDS education

Natascha Thurber transforms her community one joke; one game; one dance at a time

By Annie Mohr

Swazi Sojournal

Whether it's getting to know the 'real Swazi culture,' playing *unlabalaba*, or hanging out at the shop, PCV Natascha Thurber enjoys spending time with her friends in her community of Ngecina, in eastern Swaziland.

When asked about her favorite part of living in Ngecina, it's not the scenery, not the food, but "the people in my community – my friends – they're the ones that make it fun." She describes Mr. Shongwe, her teacher friend who beats her at *unlabalaba* (a game involving shifting bottle caps around lines on paper), Giggs, Luke, *mkhulu* the shop owner, and Ayanda, her 5-year-old buddy who she likes to "chase around like a little monster."

As an HIV/AIDS worker, Natascha teaches at the primary school, started a peer education training program at the high school, started a support group, and "dances around" with AIDS orphans at the neighborhood care point.

But hanging out at the shop, gossiping with her friends, chasing Ayanda around, and helping to fill *emasnack* bags to sell at the shop make her part of the community, so that she can be an effective AIDS worker and actually reach people with the HIV and AIDS information.

Neighboring PCV Yemi Oshodi praised her for "getting people – youth and adults – to think about HIV and AIDS in a new way."

By spending a lot of time at the shop, Natascha knows everyone who comes in and out or just passes by.

A little discouraged by her repeat losses at *unlabalaba*, she one day decided to start a game of "rock flicking" with her friends to see could flick rocks the farthest. She clearly was the rock-flicking expert, and



Natascha takes a break to enjoy the backyard at the Peace Corps office in Mbabane.

though they indulged her for a round or two, they were eager to get back to business with the bottle caps.

When chatting with her friends at the shop, she gets insight into true Swazi public opinion rather than the superficial exchanges that can sometimes happen between volunteers and community acquaintances. She learns "their idea about love" and challenges them when they argue that a woman's place is in the kitchen or insist that they must take young girlfriends because the other women 'age too fast.'

She notes that it has been much easier forming friendships with the men in her community than with the women, who tend to be a bit more standoffish and shy.

All of these friendships in the community have allowed people to be open to talk about HIV and bring it to the forefront, Oshodi

added. Because of this openness, people aren't afraid to join the support group she and her friend Jerome started. And she, in turn, gets to learn the real opinions of Swazis, and not just the sugar-coated version they sometimes spew to outsiders.

Of course there have been ups and downs, like when the headmaster at the high school didn't especially want her to teach about AIDS, but just wanted her to build a classroom. Eventually, however, she was paired with the career guidance teacher who helped her round up a group of ten students who she then trained to be peer educators to develop their own lessons and teach their fellow classmates about HIV and life skills.

After Jerome approached her to start the support group, they now have a regular group of 8-12 people who come each Tuesday to discuss their issues, write a constitution in order to become an official organization, and listen to her lessons about mother to child transmission and the disease progression of HIV. They are now making plans to start a garden with the assistance of World Vision so they can grow vegetables for themselves and for profit. The group members even decided that they would pay for anybody in the community who wants to go to nearby Siteki to take the HIV test.

Her versatility and ability to create multiple friendships across age and gender lines help her earn trust.

Filling bags of *emasnacks*, starting games of rock flicking, dancing around at the NCP... They're not your typical PCV activities, but Natascha Thurber is proof positive that making the most of everyday situations can do wonders for community integration, and along with a frank and friendly attitude, make taboos like being open about HIV slowly melt away.

Acting Country Director inspired by site visits

By Oghale Oddo

Acting Country Director

I am always inspired when I go to visit Volunteers at their sites. I recently went out to see some Volunteers and came away impressed with the unrelenting efforts and successes of those I visited. In each of the sites I went to, I met Volunteers who were dedicated and focused, with a visible hunger to contribute and integrate more. I have also been impressed with the various approaches our first year Volunteers are using to settle into their communities.

Over the past couple of years, we have worked to put in place the right culture at this post. We feel strongly that the philosophy behind what Volunteers and Staff do is as important as the skills we bring to make the contribution to development. Our number one priority remains to set the tone, expectations and relationships, which encourage independent, responsible and satisfied

Volunteers and Staff, who contribute professionally and enthusiastically to our goals especially as they relate to HIV/AIDS intervention and mitigation and especially to Volunteer integration into their communities. I am very happy to see many of our staff and Volunteers continue to bring in ideas that enable us to move towards these priorities. We have learned so much from the experiences of our group 1 PCVs. Though we have not reached the ideal of what we think this Post could be, I see the positive attitude and focus that will get us there.

The Payoff in Persistence

By Morgan C. Smith

PCV, Gege

with Anneke Mohr

The smallness of Mhlabeni, the rural community Peace Corps Volunteer Jon Mitchell arrived in fourteen months ago, has not offered protection for its residents from the effects of the AIDS pandemic. This tiny community of forty homesteads located in the southeastern corner of Swaziland's Lubombo region has struggled against poverty, drought, and – most recently – the impact of HIV and AIDS among its members. Mitchell's arrival as an HIV educator has offered much needed assistance to residents already waging war against the virus.

"It's been a roller coaster ride," reflects Jon on his Peace Corps experience to date. The smallness of Mhlabeni has allowed for Jon to become well integrated into the community and engaged in a variety of projects related to HIV prevention and impact mitigation. This project diversity has given Jon glimpses of the successes and failures, encouragement and heartache that permeate this village's dusty trails, mud huts, and hope-filled eyes of its inhabitants.

The creation of a generation of orphans has been one of the most visible effects of the AIDS pan-

demic in Africa. Several homesteads in Mhlabeni are home to children who have lost at least one parent to AIDS, generating a growing need for organized support structures to help these children cope and persevere.

Jon's initial response to the needs of area orphans and vulnerable children was to assist in the establishment of a "Neighborhood Care Point" that would serve as a day center for youth to receive food and support services.

Much of his work involved attempts to encourage Goodman Xaba, the community's indvuna, to be proactive in providing assistance to the area's most needy. It hasn't come easy.

"That was kind of my baby all along. It was hard to see it struggling," Jon says of the Care Point.

An attention to the needs of youth carried over to the area primary school where children had little access to water. Jon's solution was to access funds through the US Ambassador's "Self-Help Fund" to have a borehole drilled and "play pump" installed that uses a merry-go-round to pump up water.

He saw water as a human right, a "fundamental thing" essential to a healthy environment at the school.

A belief in the importance of HIV testing prompted Mitchell to



Jon Mitchell has worked with the Swazi Army, Neighborhood Carepoints and AIDS Support groups in his community near Matata.

go door to door in the community, encouraging people to get tested, know their status, and use that information to stay healthy.

After a number of residents utilized the nearby Matata VCT clinic, Jon introduced support groups for people to talk about issues surrounding HIV in their lives. While the concept of support remains fluid among the group's members, the importance of meeting does not. Members now meet in sessions no longer organized by Jon, a fact that alludes to the group's self-sufficiency and doesn't fail to make him smile at the small success.

Testing has also been forefront in Jon's relationship with a nearby Army barracks, and has led to a partnership with FLAS and the military to propose mandatory HIV testing for the country's armed forces.

The mandatory testing, which will allow troops to have access to counseling and their HIV sta-

tus if individuals wish, will "set a great example, break down stigma, and get people to take this thing seriously – testing is a key part in fighting HIV." The proposal has wide spread support throughout FLAS and chief personnel in the military.

While Jon's time as a volunteer has been marked by local victories and national-level innovations, it has not been without the discouragements common to efforts in the war against HIV.

Learning that a high school student had become pregnant, despite her having an HIV-positive sister and family members who have died from AIDS, hit Jon hard.

His strategy for coping with the tough nature of the job is to remain driven and energetic, always keeping in mind the sustainability of his work within the community.

Whether it's going door-to-door in Mhlabeni to encourage testing, or liaising with leaders in Mbabane to adopt forward-reaching HIV policies, Jon Mitchell sees the payoff of his persistence.

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So You Want to Start a Support Group...

Women at the Matata New Start VCT follow Justin Garland (center) as he teaches them yoga techniques for relaxation and healthy living

How can I publicize, create interest, and successfully integrate a support group in my community?

Natascha: After one HIV+ man approached me, I went to the local World Vision office to have them help spread the word. I also asked SASO and RHMs to attend. After finding one interested and motivated person, it's fairly simple to get momentum and interest from the community.

Jon: I went homestead to homestead of people I knew had tested, explained the benefits of support groups, and after awhile, the idea caught on and a group of bomake wanted to start a group. I then put up a sign at the shop to notify other community members.

Annie: After having two people approach me about starting a post test group, we organized a meeting, which I announced at a community meeting and at several homesteads. I also posted a sign at the clinic and invited FLAS to come for mobile testing.

How can I help fight fear of stigma against those who have tested?

N: I do community education, so once everyone is clear about transmission and that anyone can get HIV, then there is less stigma. The founder of my group also talks openly about testing and being positive, which helps.

J: I haven't encountered much stigma. Just a lot of denial in the families...

A: We try to have the meetings fun and confidential. I also work closely with a woman who is HIV+, and we go around to the homesteads together to spread the word about testing, acceptance, and positive living. I also encourage people to speak up when they hear people others making ignorant remarks or perpetuating stigma.

L: I'm planning to have the Hlatikhulu support group come talk to my umphakatsi to educate the community leaders. I'm also starting a Bomake Against HIV group that will work on fighting stigma.

Several volunteers have assisted in the formation of support groups or "post-test groups," while others want to start them, but aren't sure how. Here are some tips from other volunteers:

Post-test groups are open to anyone who has tested, whether positive or negative. The advantage is that people can come without immediately disclosing their status. The disadvantage is that it may inhibit those who are positive from fully benefiting from sharing with others. Post-test groups tend to be easier to start than HIV+ only-support groups in rural communities, where there is more stigma. They also allow those who are negative to continue learning and keep the motivation to stay negative, but also be allies to those who are positive.

How are support group meetings structured?

N: Meetings are organized by the committee. Each week they meet beforehand to select a discussion topic. Meetings start with a prayer, then the committee talks, then I do a short lesson on things like mother to child transmission, disease progression, etc.

J: We read and discuss Life Stories and have guest speakers come from SASO and neighboring communities to discuss things like nutrition, MTCT, and being open with your status.

A: After monthly Matata meetings, those who have gone debrief the others on what they learned and did. Then they read a selection from Life Stories, discuss it, and use the "wheel of well-being" to see how the person from the story attempted to practice positive living, holistically. Then we do yoga (sun salutations) and/or dance to music, do deep breathing, and have a healthy snack.

L: The chair of the group makes the agenda. He'll start the meeting, talking about a topic (like discrimination from nurses), then open it up for discussion, then go around in a circle to share and talk about feelings.

What are the benefits of a support group?

N: It helps those who are positive to be open, helps the community to be educated, and encourages others to test.

J: It provides companionship to the members, gives them more up to date information, and allows them to share coping strategies (how to treat STIs, deal with ARV side effects...)

A: It encourages testing, makes the community proactive, educates them, creates links among community members going through the same things, and makes HIV visible in the community.

L: People have accepted and come to terms with being HIV+. They now have a lot of friends and always have a support system.

Main Points

- After finding just 1 person who is motivated and interested, starting a support group is (fairly) simple
- Don't worry about getting a massive turnout - small groups actually work out better
- Community education helps to reduce stigma and fear
- Using Life Stories is an excellent way to start discussions - the stories bring up a lot of issues and help members to begin to tell their own stories

Resources

- Positive Development*
- an activity manual produced by the Global Network of Positive People (GNP+) that includes activities on group building, disclosing status, fundraising, talking to the media, etc. Available to photocopy from PCV Resource Binder by mailboxes in lounge.
- A Positive Woman's Survival Kit*
- a collection of information and diverse voices of HIV+ women from around the world, compiled by ICW, also available in the binder.



Secret's in the dough...



Tegan offers a variation on veggie pizza.

Dough ingredients:

- 1 cup warm water
- 1 package yeast
- 1 Tablespoon sugar
- 1 ½ tsp salt
- 2 Tablespoons veg. oil
- 1 cup flour
- 2 additional cups flour

Pizza Toppings:

- Tomato sauce/paste
- Herbs/spices
- Onion
- Zucchini
- Can of baked beans
(an extra protein boost!)

Method:

Allow yeast to dissolve in warm water. Mix in other ingredients, using extra flour to thicken. Knead dough for five minutes. Let dough sit for 45 minutes to rise. Spread onto baking sheet or enameled dish. Bake dough for ten minutes before adding toppings. Bake for 15-20 minutes.

the bottom of the pot with sand or flat stones. Place the pot on your handy-gas or paraffin burner. The sand and stones absorb heat wonderfully. The most difficult task will be to safely remove the dish from the pot, but once you achieve this, the range of baking possibilities are endless!

A word about homemade ovens:

Pizza is an excellent dish to test out your homemade oven. Use a pot and lid large enough to hold the baking sheet or dish. Fill



Grassroots group supports disabled in Shiselweni

By Jill Granberg

When Bheki Ngwenya referred to the mining accident that left him partially paralyzed and wheelchair bound, we had been discussing the Shiselweni Disabled People's Organization (SDPO) for some time, and the comment struck me as odd. "You were in a *mining accident*?" I wanted to ask. It was either proof of Bheki's dynamic presence or my own idiocy that distracted me from the disability that changed the direction of his life and inspired him to fill in where the government faltered in assisting the disabled. It's Bheki's combination of restlessness and resilience that roused him to transform a support group of nine disabled residents of the Nhlango area to a 375-strong legion. The group – composed of individuals from throughout Shiselweni – is committed to empowering those of varying disabilities through income-generation projects, donations and other means of assistance. SDPO meets once a month, with additional events, in Nhlango at the Ministry of Agriculture. Members crowd into available meeting spaces and discuss topics ranging from emotional

support to the available benefits within the organization. Currently, SDPO is collaborating with Royal Swazi Life Insurance to offer plans for members and their dependents for 177 Emalangenani annually. With a grant from the U.S. Embassy, the group is launching a nappy-manufacturing project that serves as both as a necessary resource and means of fundraising for the members of the organization. One ongoing venture is the compilation and sale of a monthly organization newsletter. Written by members and edited in part by PCV Alexandra Geary-Stock, the issues cost five emalangenani each and Another monumental resource is the construction of a self-help centre in Nhlango complete with a conference room, vocational work space, swimming pool and other recreational facilities all with wheelchair access and open for members' use five days a week. This resource is quite an achievement for SDPO and may be open for operation as early as April. A partner organization in South Africa hand-picked the Nhlango branch to centre



Bheki Ngwenya leads a meeting of the Shiselweni Disabled People's Organization at the Ministry of Agriculture in Nhlango.

following a competition with similar organizations in Zimbabwe and Botswana. SDPO was chosen, says Bheki, "based on the spirit of the group."

Those interested in joining the organization will find the necessary membership forms at the Red Cross office in Nhlango. There is an eight emalangenani joining fee, and new members are encouraged to submit an application of requests for needed wheelchairs, artificial limbs, crutches, and other mobility assistance. Despite

these assets, Bheki reminds members, "the wheelchair is not the solution." The support of fellow disabled individuals is perhaps the principal benefit of the organization, and all potential members (or family representatives) are invited to attend the next SDPO meeting on Thursday Feb. 17 at 10 a.m. in the Nhlango Ministry of Agriculture offices.

Hot Spot! Victoria Falls & the Zambezi River Gorge

Travel Corner

Adrenaline-pumping adventure-seekers and docile romantics alike will find an extraordinary holiday waiting at Victoria Falls, notable affiliate of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World. Two entirely contrasting perspectives of the Falls are accessible from both Zimbabwe's vantage point in the town of Victoria Falls, as well as Zambia's Livingstone environs. Zimbabwe's worrisome political instability is transforming its sister city across the border into a shrewd alternative, with emerging backpackers lodges, riverfront resorts, and several tour companies offering every activity on the Falls imaginable (Tour the Falls! Raft the Falls! Bungee into the Falls! Safari from the Falls! Helicopter over the Falls! Booz-cruise near the Falls!). With an airport in Livingstone and several highly regarded overland tour companies offering trips from the Joburg/Pretoria area, Zambia's Victoria Falls is more easily accessible than ever. Wagon Trails and Bundu overland tour companies are currently leaders in the industry,

and cater to the young budget traveler. An affordable alternative to the luxury resorts lining the Zambezi River are several lush camping grounds, most with equally pleasant waterfront locales, complete with bars and tour booking offices, and a short taxi ride from the Falls or Livingstone. Some consideration is required in planning which season to visit. While the gorge of waterfalls is quite a spectacle year-round, the full-force of the Falls comes late March into late May. Conversely, the Falls at lower-capacity from November through January allows for the most thrilling rafting conditions and photographs less obstructed by clouds of mist (romantic? – yes, but also pesky to perturbable picture-takers). Viewing the Falls from the official walking paths takes all of two hours, and thus a well-rounded Victoria Falls experience requires parting with large sums of American dollars in exchange for specialty tours and activities... but they may be entirely worth it. Safari Par Excellence, stationed at the Waterfront camping grounds, is just one company offering a full



day rafting trip for under \$100 through the phenomenal cliffs and hanging gardens of the Zambezi River gorge, with up to 23 rapids to test your fortitude. Breakfast, lunch and evening *braai* included. From walking safaris and elephant rides to bungee-jumps from the famed Zambia-Zimbabwe Border Bridge and sunset booz-cruising on the Zambezi, the Victoria Falls vicinity strives to satiate everyone's sense of adventure. Travelers can also leave the Falls with more than a racing pulse and a few good snapshots: craft markets in Livingstone and at the

Falls park eagerly accept American dollars, Rand, Pula from Botswana, and Zambian Kwacha – and if the many activities at the Falls finds you short on funds, bartering is an established option. Prime yourself for the most assertive hawking you've ever experienced, and prepare to bargain ruthlessly. Throwing a few old shirts and pens in your travel bag to trade may be all you need to walk away with all the gifts and souvenirs you need to remember one of the world's most remarkable backdrops.

- Jill granberg, Swazi Sojournal

Running with Scissors



Think you had a strange childhood? Think again.

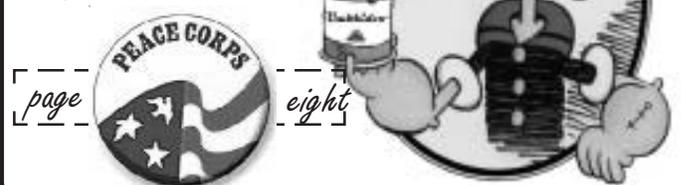
Augusten Burroughs memoir *Running with Scissors* is a twisted tale of his childhood from living with a crazy psychiatrists family to his love affair with a pedophile. This disturbing memoir will leave you wanting to laugh and cringe at the same time. It all starts when at the age of twelve Burroughs is left by his mother to live with her psychiatrist's family, the Finchs. Burroughs enters a world where there are no rules; where the norm is a masturbatorium, poop readings, and drugs.

As the only seemingly normal one, Burroughs is left with no guidance or direction and is forced to find his own way out of the bizarre world the Finch's have created. This novel is bizarre, freaky, weird and funny. If your looking for a quick, quirky read, pick up *Running with Scissors*.

A book
review by
Natascha
Thurber

You know you're
HARD CORPS
when...

- It no longer phases you that your local "supermarket" has weekly win a cow drawings.
- You are offended, not that someone has offered to buy you for cows, but that they only offered 15 rather than the 50 cows you know you're worth.
- You get a sick satisfaction from pressing beetles from your hair and smashing them with your Bible.



Around the world in 730 days

Where Volunteers went and want to go in their two years of Peace Corps service

After most veteran Volunteers took Christmas trips all around the globe and newbie Volunteers await that magical date when three months probation ends and they can leave Swaziland, we thought it was fun to see what trips were the coolest and what trips are in the works?

We asked veterans "what was your favorite vacation spot thus far in your Peace Corps service." We asked newbies "what is your most anticipated vacation spot during your Peace Corps service."

Teresa Lavagnino couldn't decide. "To compare Tofo, Durban and Cape Town is like comparing Kevin, Patrick and Morgan. It just can't be done." Susan Taylor cited inadequate information. "No comment," she said on the phone. Alyson Peel has such high hopes for her trips planned that she refused to divulge information on which could be the best. "You just can't print that," she said.

Had Zanzibar received fewer votes, it could have been declared the most exotic. But 15 percent is not exotic. Instead, Tegan Callahan wins that distinction with Ottawa, Canada. When asked why she chose the capital of our neighbor to the north, she remained adamantly silent. Certainly there must be more than maple trees and royal Mounties, eh?

Contrary to past Sojo polls, there seemed to be no clear winner. We guess there are just too many places to see.



Destinations

Swazi Class 1

1. Zanzibar, Tanzania (4)
2. America (2)
3. Egypt (2)
4. Argentina
5. Austria
6. Botswana
7. Cape Town, South Africa
8. Durban, South Africa
9. Lake Malawi
10. Lesotho
11. Mkhaya Game Reserve, SWD
12. Spain (Barcelona)
13. St. Lucia, South Africa
14. Tofu, Mozambique

Swazi Class 2

- A. Cape Town, South Africa (5)
- B. Kilimanjaro/Serengeti, Tanzania (3)
- C. Madagascar (3)
- D. Zanzibar, Tanzania (3)
- E. Egypt (2)
- F. Victoria Falls (2)
- G. Botswana
- H. Durban, South Africa
- I. Lesotho
- J. Maputo, Mozambique
- K. Mbabane, Swaziland
- L. Ottawa, Canada
- M. Rose City, Michigan
- N. Tofu, Mozambique



A cartoon by Holly Bullock

A Very Hlane Christmas

An exercise in iambs

In other years of midnight mass,
of families feasting full,
I'd welcome winter's ivory grasp
but shiver at the pull

Of distant lands with scorching skies
where drums define life's beat,
where elephants and lions laze
in fields of yellow heat.

I live there now. Where fever seeds
and burrows to the bone.
Where Santa wears a mask of death
for children left alone.

Tonight is bright with new-found friends
but clouds betray the moon,
like the shadows cast by vultures' wings
on Christmas afternoon.

- Steve
Kallaugher

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February 2005 - *Be mine emasweti*

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2 Susan Taylor's birthday	3	4	5 Nana (Swazi version of Macy Gray) at House on Fire E60 8 p.m.
6 Super Bowl XXXIX Patriots vs.Eagles	7	8 New Country director Patricia Austin tentatively scheduled to arrive	9	10	11	12
13	14 Valentine's Day	15	16	17 Shiselweni Disabled People's Org meeting, Min of Ag, Nhlngano, 10am	18	19 Post test group meeting at Matata VCT 10 a.m.
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28 Natascha Thurber's birthday					



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