



The Swazi Sojournal



Issue 2, Volume 3

February 2006

Caught With My Pants Down...Literally

by Derek Vohs, Mahhashini

I never guessed, on the morning of January 17, that the next 24 hours would be more frightening than anything I'd ever experienced. The day started out early, as usual, around 6am. On this particular morning, it seemed that I would need to make one of my, as of late, rare latrine appearances.

My latrine has two sides, one for Gogo and Sisi, and the other reserved for my use. Just inside, above the door, is a support plank. The plank is just wide enough to use as a shelf where I put toilet paper, hand sanitizer and yes, baby wipes (what can I say, I like to avoid that "not so fresh" feeling).

Anyway, when I finished up, I reached for the baby wipes which sit in the upper right hand corner. Once I had the bag open and got what I needed, I felt some water splash on my face. My first instinct was to look above my head to see if the roof was leaking. It wasn't, so I proceeded to seal up the bag, at which point I had more water splashed at me, but this time in my eye. It still hadn't hit me what was happening until I got the third and final splash, in the other eye... and then I knew.

As I grabbed for my eyes, which were now burning, I heard very distinctly a loud and not so distant hissing sound, which was exactly what I had feared. Upon hearing this worst possible of sounds, I instinctually dropped to the ground, knees to chest, assuming a position similar to that of a toddler who has filled their diaper. Luckily, I had already taken care of that part. Squatting, shorts around my ankles and justifiably terrified, I was afraid to look up so I didn't. Instead, I slowly reached for the latch on the door and in one big gust, pushed the door open and shuffled out on my hands and knees while reaching to pull up my shorts.

By now, my eyes are burning something fierce, which was soon followed by sharp pain, swelling, extreme redness and what I was afraid would be a permanent fog or even blindness. As I yelled, my Sisi ran out of the house to see what the noise was. I promptly explained to her what had happened and she immediately sent for the neighbor who would eventually kill what turned out to be a South African Rinkhals or "Hooded" Cobra, Swazi style, with a traditional spear. Apparently the little guy decided to make himself a home for the night and I disturbed his sleep by grabbing for the wipes that were concealing him.



photo by *Jacque Eisenberg*
PCV Derek Vohs recovers from a blast in the eyes from a South African Rinkhals Cobra.

So, trying my best to think straight, I first went inside to grab the eyewash from the PC medical kit. Having flushed my eyes a bit, which seemed to hurt even worse, I took a few Sudafed (antihistamine), in case I should start to have breathing issues and then went back to the latrine where I tried to assist the slaying of the snake, which proved too challenging considering I couldn't see very well. I'll spare the details of the actual slaying and just mention that my latrine now has a lot more holes and missing pieces than it did before.

We then put the still-writhing snake into a plastic container and covered it, at which point, I decided out of anger, that it would be a great idea to slam the container against a wood post. The container shattered, leaving the snake writhing around on the ground. So now, my anger level begins to reach new heights; enough so that I grab the snake off the ground and by the tail and begin to beat it over a flat rock in a fashion similar to cracking a whip, only faster and slightly more violent.

Once I got the snake contained again I gathered it with my essentials and headed toward the road where I was sure I was going to have to walk a minimum of a half an hour to get transport. On this particular day, like so many other days post rainstorm, we had no network at site, which to me meant that I might either die or go blind trying to get transport to Mankayane, a minimum hour trip.

As luck would have it, a bread truck happened along just at the right time, but it seemed he didn't want to stop. I wasn't going to die because a bread truck didn't want to stop, so I stood in the road with my counterpart's brother, who had accompanied me to the station. Reluctantly and not without negotiation, they agreed to take me to the nearest station where, in 5 minutes time, I caught a kombi to Mankayane.

My eyesight grew worse as did the pain, the swelling, and the running nose I was experiencing. I got to the bus rank 40 minutes later, where and when Daynese called me, but I needed to alight from the kombi to hear what she was saying because the music was too loud.

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Safety and Security w/Mfanafuthi Vilakati, SFS

A very big "SANIBONANI" to all PCVs out there! Its good to have everyone safely back from holiday and I hope great memories were made over these past holidays.

As we start the year, I wish to formally inform all PCVs that PC Swaziland has a new transportation policy which was approved by PC HQ at the beginning of January. This new transportation policy is post specific and seeks to address transportation safety and security issues. Copies of the transportation policy will be made available to PCVs on February 15th, during the Avian Flu briefing at Emafini with a briefing on the EAP to follow.

On another note, I wish to advise PCVs to make an effort to buy SIM cards for countries that they visit. Visiting PCVs were involved in a kombi accident in Mozambique in December and could only call for help because one of them had bought a Mozambique SIM card. PCVs may seek help of the PCMO of PC countries they may be visiting should they run into life threatening situations whilst visiting those countries. Contact numbers for PCMOs, SSCs and Duty Officers of various PC countries will be distributed to PCVs at Emafini on February 15th.

SNAKES are very much a part of Swazi summers and I wish to advise PCVs to be weary of them. Keep away from bushy areas and keep the grass around your houses cut. Use a cloth or even a piece of wood or old newspapers to close openings at the bottom of you door. It is also advisable to buy Cape Aloe Lump crystals at the chemist, mix it with water and spray/ sprinkle the solution at the edges of your family compound. This serves to repel snakes from your home and house.

I am also in the process of fitting lightening rods for Group 2 PCVs. I have asked PCVs to assist me in finding out if their families are okay with PC installing a lightening rod on their premises. Some people have responded and others have not. I wish to make a final request to the Group 2 PCVs to give me the responses from their families Please advise your families and livestock to keep away from the lightening rod when there is lightening activity in the area.

Asiphephe emnyakeni lomusha!
Lets be safe in the new year!

In Brief

FOREIGN SERVICE WRITTEN EXAM

The Foreign Service Exam will be given on April 8, 2006. You MUST REGISTER on line by March 1. Registration materials can be found @www.careers.state.gov.

SWAZILAND VOLLEYBALL

The Swaziland National Volleyball Association would like to help you bring volleyball to your community. Send a letter requesting support and how your community would benefit to: Swaziland National Volleyball Assn. P.O. Box 1818, Mbabane H100 (268) 404-7583

MCAT

Online Registration for the April 22, 2006 MCAT is open. You can only get the fee waived if you submit your parents' last year tax returns through AMCAS.

NEW OFFICE SECURITY PROCEDURES

Office security has been upgraded. At the office entrance, you must ring the door bell and the receptionist will open the first outside door. Remember to sign in!!!

Miss Coog's Monthly 'Horror'scopes

Aquarius (Jan 20-Feb 18)

Drama is your forte, but this month leaves a lot to be desired in the days of your lives. So remain Young and Restless! Happy birthday!

Pisces (Feb 19-Mar20)

You are a water sign so try and stay cool this month. Don't evaporate! Remember to Hydrate! Hydrate! Hydrate!

Aries (Mar 21- Apr 19)

When it comes to information you are a sharer but don't be too loose lipped or it may come back to bite you in the butt!

Taurus (Apr 20-May 20) All you desire is to live life at a slower pace but be careful what you wish for; keeping busy keeps you sane!

Gemini (May 21- Jun21)

You are an air sign and your mood may change with the wind so be prepared cause this is Storm Season!



Cancer (Jun22- Jul22)

You love life at home this month, especially bantswana bakho. Treasure your time with these kids. Phatsela emasweeties!

Leo (Jul23- Aug 22)

The year may have started out rocky but its gonna be a great one so fasten your seatbelt (if one is available) and hold on for dear life.

Virgo (Aug 23- Sep22)

You are an earth sign, so while the rain is still upon us embrace the soil and plant a garden. It's constructive! Don't forget your sunscreen! PS eat something!

Libra (Sep 23- Oct23)

You have tons of energy this month so do all you can before a funk sets in. Oh yeah put down those trashy novels and pick up something nonfiction for a change

Scorpio (Oct 24- Nov 21)

You are loved by all but they won't admit it. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Rock!

Sagittarius (Nov 22- Dec21)

Seemingly comfortable situations are becoming turbulent in 2006. Embrace the rough waters and grab your life vest!

Capricorn (Dec 22- Jan19)

Your misleading exterior has kept some from knowing the real you, but soon most will discover your personality is much more complex.

Director's Chat w/Pattie Austin, CD

Hi to all PCVs. I hope that you are all aware of the Valentine's Day reception at the CD Residence to meet the new APCD Susan Olson and to have some sweet treats. I am also inviting Ambassador Lucke, the US government HIV/AIDS coordinator Christine Stevens and USAID Behavior Change Specialist Daniel Halperin so you will have a chance to speak with them as well. The reception is from 2-4 PM on Feb. 14 with transport from the PCO beginning at 1:30. Volunteers are asked to overnight at Emafini and stay in the morning for a required medical session as well as PST, SS, admin updates.



The upcoming months will be busy as we plan for PST in June. We have lots of PCV trainings ongoing in February such as Warden training, CHAPS, and continuing Life skills and Girls Mentoring Program activities.

I have been participating in planning and writing the US Government 5 year strategy for HIV/AIDS prevention, mitigation and care and support in Swaziland. This document will lay out the challenges in SZ and the program efforts that US government agencies will undertake using funds from OGAC (Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator) and PEPFAR. The Peace Corps portion may be expanded to include moneys for small grant projects administered locally thus cutting out delays in request/receipt of moneys. I will keep you advised of any news regarding increased funding.

The 45th Anniversary of the Peace Corps will take place on March 1. As part of the celebration, I have been talking with the Public Diplomacy Office at the Embassy and hope to arrange radio and TV interviews with PCVs to discuss their experiences/activities while in Swaziland. Many of these interviews will be in Siswati. I will be asking volunteers to participate but if you are interested please let me know. If anyone would like to write an article for the local press, I invite you to do so but please speak with me first.

NEWS & NOTES

From the Peace Corps Website

Peace Corps Announces Top Volunteer-Producing Colleges and Universities

Every year, thousands of college graduates travel across the globe to assist those they have never met as Peace Corps volunteers. For the 20th year in a row, the University of Wisconsin at Madison takes the top spot with 104 volunteers serving in the field, making it the No. 1 producer of Peace Corps volunteers. However, the University of Washington is not far behind with 102 alumni located around the world as Peace Corps volunteers. Among medium-sized schools, the University of Virginia again claimed the No. 1 spot with 80 volunteers. And for the first time, Dartmouth College takes the top spot for small schools with 37 alumni currently serving as volunteers.

"The willingness of so many people to use their degrees and life experiences to share with other cultures is a commitment no one should overlook," said Director Vasquez. "There is no single path to success. But those who leave a legacy in a rural village in Madagascar or a city in Ukraine know the impact that Peace Corps can have not only in that community but also on the remainder of their own careers."

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

By Cliff Okada, PCV

This month's topic: What's it like to be a married couple as PCV's in the Swaz?

Desiree and Lewis give us an insight into their marriage with my interview titled: "The Pro's and Con's of being married (in Swaziland)"

Pro: "I get to shaya (beat) her seven times daily!" -says Lewis, proudly.

Con: "Seven beatings a day..." -says Desiree, with a (fake) sigh.

Pro: "When you have a hot dream, you can roll over and act on it." -says Lewis to my delight.

Con: "Fighting over money, making financial decisions as a couple" -says both.

Pro: "There is always someone to talk to" -says Desiree

"Psychosocial support" -says both, in synch

(This is where I say this is getting too serious; back to the beating stories, I say.)

Con: "We wrestle in bed and I always get my butt kicked." -says Lewis

(So the truth comes out. We see who does the beatings...)

Con: "Umfati wami uyavilapha!... 'why doesn't your wife wash your clothes?'" -a stupid comment that Lewis says he has to deal with.

(In which my response would be, why don't you wash your own clothes to begin with...)

Pro: "It's easier to cook for two" -says Lewis

Con: "Lewis doesn't cook!" -says Desiree

(Lewis' s reply is, "I do cook!...popcorn sometimes...")

Pro: "I have a surefire answer to 'why don't you find more wives?', I answer, 'one wallet, one heart, one umfati (wife)!'" -says Lewis

Con: "No romance..." -says Desiree

(Okay, I say, one last pro and one last con.)

Pro: "hmm...how about, I am overwhelmed with temptation." -says Lewis

(Um, how is that a pro?)

Con: "I can't get laid." -says Desiree

A Fun Poem for the SOJO according to Julie Zollman (our very own Zombie)

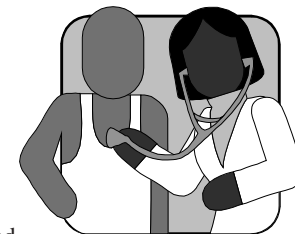
(No Title) by Philip Appleman

Okarma, Dharma, pudding and pie gimme a break before I die: grant me wisdom, will, and wit, purity, probity, pluck and grit. Trustworthy, loyal, helpful, kind, gimme great abs and a steel-trap mind, and forgive, ye Gods, some humble advice-these little blessings would suffice to beget an earthly paradise: make the bad people good-and the good people nice; and before our world goes over the brink teach the believers how to think.

Keeping you Updated and Healthy w/Daynese Santos, PCMO

FOLLOW-UP MID-SERVICE EXAMS

Unfortunately, most lab results had not been reported by the time most of you had completed your mid-service exams. By now, however, lab results are ready and you can check your results next time that you're at the Peace Corps office. I will personally contact all volunteers with abnormal lab results to discuss appropriate follow-up. Keep in mind that all medical problems do not require immediate action. In those cases, follow-up may be deferred until after Close of Service.



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THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Ok so you thought that you'd have accomplished lots by now but in reality, it's going slow. Now may be a good time to establish a new end point, say you set things up and the volunteer that replaces you will run the next relay. You may have to invest more time and energy in motivation and sharing information, but those are essential elements in bringing a project to fruition. Remember that at your sites, hearts have been shattered, hearts have been silenced, and hearts have lost hope. In order to be effective, manage your expectations. Anger and frustration can easily immobilize most of us. Contact your PSN rep or PCMO; get the support that you need. We're here for you.

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MEDICAL SUPPLIES

Due to a mix-up, our main medical supply order had to be resubmitted. We anticipate delivery within 4-6 weeks. This will not affect volunteers requiring prescribed medications as whatever we don't have in stock we will obtain from a local pharmacy. I am requesting, however, that you put off restocking med kits until after the med shipment has arrived.

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RATS, BATS and SNAKES

If these critters are entering your house, eradication may require a two pronged approach. First, identify the point of entry and seal it off. Heavy rainfall and electrical storms may damage housing, particularly older structures. Check for the appearance of holes and cracks in the walls and ceiling after storms. Gaps around doors and windows also provide easy access to snakes and rodents. Caulking material and weather stripping will quickly remedy these problems. Once you're air tight, you're ready for phase two, fumigation, (using commercial products), or extermination by means of traps. Approach these animals with extreme caution, even if you think they're dead, remain well out of striking range. Rodent bites may be toxic and snake bites may be lethal. In addition, contamination of food and water by rodent feces and urine carries the risk of Leptospirosis a highly infectious disease. It's ok to commune with nature but it's not ok to allow your personal living space to be inhabited by vermin. If you've got a mess, clean it up

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PCMO SITE VISITS

As promised, I'll be conducting long overdue site visits during February to see each volunteer in Group 2. I'm looking forward to seeing you out there in your element and welcome the opportunity to discuss issues that may be affecting your health and well being. Don't forget to contact the med unit if you will not be at your site for your scheduled visit so that it can be rescheduled.

<u>DATE</u>	<u>SITE</u>	<u>PCV</u>	<u>TIME</u>
07-Feb	Sitsatsaweni	Vincent D'Agostino	9:30am
07-Feb	Makhewu	Jacque Eisenberg	11:30am
07-Feb	Lukhetseni	Caitlin Coogan	2pm
10-Feb	Nzameya	Julie Zollmann	10am
10-Feb	Khubuta	Marisa Harrison	12pm
21-Feb	Sibetsamoya	Alyson Peel	9am
21-Feb	Mahlalini	Tegan Callahan	12:30pm
21-Feb	KaDlovunga	Sarah Coffey	2pm
23-Feb	Luhlayeni	Brigid O'Brien	10:00am
23-Feb	Nkonjwa	Kate Menninger	12pm
24-Feb	Ethuzini	Arlene Shaffer	9:30am
24-Feb	Nsingizini	Francie Picknell	12pm
24-Feb	Matsanjani	Michelle Desmond	2pm
28-Feb	Zombodze	Cliff Okada	9:45am
28-Feb	Engoleni	Meredith Aggers	11:30am
28-Feb	Enkhungwini	Stephanie Sauer	2pm

WHO: All Peace Corps Volunteers

WHERE: Country Director's Residence

WHEN: February 14, 2006

TIME: 2 PM to 4 PM

WHY: Meet and Greet new APCD Susan Olson

HOW: PCV Overnight at Emafini Conference Center Feb.14 Dinner and Wed. Breakfast included. Feb. 15 Morning Inservice Program 8:30-11:30am (Required Medical) Transport to/from CD residence-departing PCO beginning 1:30PM

**SWEETS
TREATS
and
GREETINGS**

Pants Down (continued from page 1)

Never fear though, my regular kombie driver, Babe Jele, saw me and quickly raced me to the hospital.

I'll also spare the antics at Mankayane Hospital because simply they aren't shocking. Nearly every Swazi from village to clinic gasped at the site of my dead Cobra; some even shuddered/shrieked and ran. Basically I was given saline and asked to stand over the sink so I could use my hand to splash saline solution from a bedpan into my eye (efficient and sanitary). I couldn't have been happier to see (cloudily) Daynese arrive with the paramedics. Finally, I knew I was in good care. They started the proper irrigation process in the ambulance and administered some topical anesthetic eye drops.

Once at the clinic, I was given a variety of medicines for pain administered orally and by injection, eye drops, followed by eye patches that would cover my eyes for the next 12 hours.

I started to get a small taste of what it's like to be blind: not knowing who was standing in front of me or walking around me. In addition to Daynese, fellow PCV and friend Jacques showed up, and the two of them shared the task of feeding me dinner.

Throughout the night, every 2 hours to be exact, I was given more eye drops and fresh patches. Before noon the next day, I was given permission to try having the patches off to test my vision, which proved, thankfully, to be just fine aside from some tenderness and a "bruising" type pain. The next day, Swaziland's only Ophthalmologist located in Siteki, predicted "no permanent eye damage."

In the great words of Napoleon Dynamite: "Lucky."

The African Rinkhals Cobra, it turns out, has a potentially fatal bite. They tend to give three warning venom "sprays" before they strike, with a spraying capability of up to 3 meters (10 feet) and are instinctually able to hit their antagonists directly in the eyes. I'm thankful now for my eyesight. It was such a freak occurrence, one that's unlikely to happen again in the next 1.5 years (hopefully).

Great thanks to Daynese, Jacques & the amazing paramedics and Mbabane Clinic staff, all of whose help were amazing and so appreciated!



**Cultural Mountains,
Cultural Molehills**
by Michelle Desmond, PCV

If you're like me, you may have found yourself wondering about the changes that have enveloped you since coming to the Swaz. In coming here, I had dreamed of simplifying my life and saw it as an opportunity to "become my best." Sometimes, though, I find myself wondering if this experience has been having the opposite effect on me by exposing faults I never even knew I had.

Among the multitudes of stresses of Peace Corps Swaziland, I have developed an edge I didn't know I was capable of. I know from talking to other female volunteers that this new form of self-defense rears its ugly head as yet another man proposes to you or tries to touch you. Sometimes even you are surprised at the depth of your rage. Maybe it comes when, for the 50th time someone says, "Ngcicimali." Or you've been waiting for an hour in line at the bank and they close for lunch and slam the window in your face.

As volunteers we are constantly torn between being culturally sensitive and giving a taste of American culture; by being true to ourselves or compromising because it makes life easier. It's confusing and exhausting. It's not black and white but a choice we make everyday, in nearly every situation.

I have no easy solution but I am trying to monitor myself on the days I am more likely to blow. Avoid the discussion about women's roles on those days or just avoid public transport. Maybe it's okay to blow up at the 300 lb. make that just called YOU fat.

These are issues we all face though. They consume our time here and I think it's time we start talking about them. Share your stories, talk about your frustrations, and ideas about how to deal. Let's use the Sojo to have a dialogue and a forum where we can discuss these issues and gauge our reactions, and also to laugh at the small things that seemed huge to us at the time.

Life Skills Update

The Peace Corps Life Skills project is nearing completion! We are now asking for help getting feedback on the draft curriculum, so it is perfect before it goes to the printer. Group 3 has already been roped into involvement as part of our official pilot, but we are asking Group 2 volunteers who might be interested to also help us out.

If you are teaching or know someone in your community who might be able to give us good feedback please help us get them involved (example ideas: a rockin' youth group member, an interested nurse, a bucofho or traditional healer in your area who can give constructive input).

We will put ten copies of the Life Skills curriculum and feedback sheets on top of the paperwork boxes (where you find leave forms and such) in the volunteer lounge on the 18th of January. Pick up your copy and return it to Marissa's box by May 1st. Contact Marissa, Tegan, Caitlin, or BLIA with questions or if you want a manual and there are none left. Thanks for all your help!



DIVERSITY COMMITTEE

Diversity Committee is having their first quarter event, a viewing of the movie "Crash" on Feb 14 at Emafini after dinner. A discussion will follow, and the D.C. will provide food! (Note: All volunteers will be staying at Emafini that night for the all-volunteer-conference). PCVs who are interested should RSVP to Will (631-6006) or Marisa (615-2604).

Also, please remember to use the volunteer Travel Log in the lounge at the office to record your experiences on your trips.



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staff profile

Bringing Color to a Blank Canvas

by Justine Spisak, PCV, SOJO

I recently had the chance to sit down with Peace Corps Swaziland's new Assistant Director Susan Olson. We nestled into her office to chat, the white walls still bare, retaining the marks of fixtures from former APCDs: a canvas on which to reconstruct this long vacant position.

Immediately upon entering Susan's world, one not only gets a sense of being in the hands of someone competent but also someone who considers the conversation at hand, your conversation, to be of primary importance. This could be the direct result of Olson's 13 years of experience with Peace Corps. With disarming laughter, she describes her involvement that has included service from the angles of both volunteer and administrator.

An RPCV from Mauritania in the 1980's, Olson served for 2 years as an Agriculture/Nutrition volunteer setting up community cooperative gardens. This was also where she met her husband Bruce, a fellow volunteer, who has accompanied her on this transatlantic career move. During their service, Bruce lived 30 km away, but in the golden days of Peace Corps (that being when they actually issued volunteers mopeds!) he would simply put-put over the incredibly hot and dry terrain to visit.

"My site was better than his. My site had food," she jokingly recalls, summoning memories of gritty rice and dried fish.

Originally born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, she attended Albion College in Michigan as an undergrad and post-Peace Corps grad where she earned a Master's degree in public administration with a concentration in health and human services management. After graduate school she served as an assistant desk officer and eventually applied for the position of full desk officer for the southern African Peace Corps countries of South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, and Zambia.

Also accompanying Susan, Bruce, and their electric keyboard to Swaziland are their two children, Kevin (12) and Nick (10), who have just been enrolled in schools in Swaziland, who have, in an apparent act of love, safely shuttled their game cube across the ocean. Among other essentials making their way to the Olsons' new home is a basketball hoop which will arrive in March. Yes, volunteers are invited to come over and pick up a game.

Olson is mindful that there has been a long gap between APCD's and a good amount of unexpected turnover. While she is aware of the lack of continuity this has created within the program, her service in Swaziland will last until August 1, 2008, which will include an overlap period where she will train the next APCD and see the arrival of Group 6. Among her goals as APCD, she hopes to improve volunteer support, an issue that has been raised in recent months. Exactly what is included under this umbrella term has yet to be defined.

"Volunteer support means different things to different people," she explains, although she does intend to visit all volunteers within the next several months to become acquainted with them and to help her identify what issues they consider important.

The blank canvas is looking more vibrant already.



Susan Olson in her new office photo by Justine Spisak

Christmas in Malawi by Cliff Okada

I wake up in the middle of the night. The head lights of the bus guide us through a cave of monstrous trees. They loom over the road as if to engulf us, the bus and us, whole. The only light for miles, I convince myself, is coming from the front of this bus. Inside, it is dark and the mind-numbing hum of the engine rocks us all to sleep. I look over at Brig, and despite the darkness I catch a familiar sight; eyes closed, head rolled back, mouth agape, zzzz. Me and my girl. Somewhere in Zimbabwe, on a bus to Malawi.

This would be our first night on the bus, and I thought to myself; life is truly about the journey, not the destination. Though it helps when the destination is as beautiful as Malawi. (next month catch the full inside scoop on their romantic honeymoon getaway trip)

“Don’t Cha Wish Your Girlfriend Was Hot Like Me...”

By Blia Yang

Make, Coogs, First Mate, Green Mamba, Gogo, IJ sidekick, Big Booty Giraffe – some of the names you may know Caitlin Coogan by. She was born in the “Windy City,” thought to be switched at birth because she looked Asian, with pitch black hair & almond shaped eyes. However, after 23 years she’s 6’1” with brown curly hair and resided in Sante Fe, New Mexico until moving to Swaziland. She’s the oldest of 4 with supportive & loving Irish Catholic parents. Caitlin graduated from Seattle University with a degree in Biology and played Division II basketball.

She is Mrs. Popular and has had many visitors from her best friend D and D’s mom, her dad and her sister, and even her Uncle Tommy who is an RPCV from Gambia. Her best friend so happens to be her bhuti, 13 year old Sandile. She’s known as the popcorn chef; she uses a special recipe only for her friends. She is well integrated; perhaps too integrated (she’s been given a chicken by her mkhulu and a baby calf from her family).

In her community, Lukhetseni, she is known as Siphesihle Matse (“Beautiful gift of Saliva”). She is well-known for her many Chicken Income Generating Projects that she has started with families in the community. Caitlin teaches Life Skills at Tikhuba High School, and recently has discovered her “Bill Gates” hidden talents, by now becoming a Computer teacher too. At Intfutfuko Primary School, she teaches Life Skills & Net Ball. She loves working with the Lukhetseni Youth Group because they are her most reliable activity she has been involved with. Their weekly meetings are leading up to income generating projects for the youth of Lukhetseni! She also assisted and facilitated in raising funds for the completion of a Pre-School for 25 orphans & vulnerable children.

Along with all these activities that she does in her village, she is a regular at Good Shepherd Hospital in Siteki, and is known as “Mother

Goose” in the Pediatric Ward. Caitlin communicates better with children than she does with adults, so she spends many hours rocking the babies (we don’t call her Make for nothing). She is also known to have the most extensive “Anne Geddes” collection of Swazi baby photos and is deciding on publishing a calendar for the Swaz.

Caitlin loves to jog with her little sisi, Samu (AKA: “Peanut Butter thief”), has planted vegetables and flowers with her make on the homestead, loans out her extensive collection of celebrity magazines, along with educational books, herds the cows with her bhuti, and is a regular at the diptank on Monday’s in Lukhetseni.



In addition to her contributions in her community, Caitlin is involved with the Peer Support Network (PSN) & the creation of the Life Skills manual. Caitlin has 4 paths after Peace Corps: she would like to be the lead singer of the Pussy Cat Dolls (Vincent is her arch nemesis by responding, “Girl, you better start working on 3 hours of pilates & yoga.”), or due to her last read of “Memoirs of a Geisha,” she is contemplating about becoming a Geisha. Otherwise, she would like to go to medical school, or if all else fails she would like to be an actress.

“I’m all alone on the plateau now, because all my PCV neighbors have gone home, so please come visit me. I also want to send a shout out to Jennifer Anniston, you are one classy girl & Vince Vaughn is so much funnier,” Caitlin warmly expresses as she flips through the latest *US* magazine.

The UnBreakable

By The Pussycat Doll Sisters

- Number of sites she’s had...3
- Number of Siswati name’s she’s had...4
- Number of cellphones she’s had...6
- Number of broken bones and stress fractures she’s had...10
- Brigid’s “Amerie” dance moves...priceless.



Our corn fed Iowa girl of Group 2 is none other than Brigid O’Brien. Brigid is known for her ingenious dance moves, her ability to “misplace” all items she owns, but most importantly, her warm character. A middle child of 5, Brigid went to Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington to study Biology & German. Now a Peace Corps volunteer, she is not only helping her community in many inspiring ways, but she is also encouraging others to join Peace Corps, namely her older sister Erin who visited Brigid last September. If you ever need anything out of Brigid, just offer her sweets, then she’ll be putty in your hands.

I remember one day during training when I was outside in the blistering heat of an October month when I saw Brigid walking down the dirt road next to my homestead in her straw hat and milkwhite skin. I eagerly called out her name, waving my arms and

hands, trying to grab her attention. After a few failed attempts at wailing her name and flailing my limbs in midair like a crazy woman, I didn’t understand why Brigid in her straw hat and milkwhite skin wasn’t responding to my friendly calls. It wasn’t until my sikoni came up to me that I understood why. My sikoni tells me, “Oh, sisi, that’s not your friend. That’s an AL-been-O.”

15 months later, Brigid is now teaching at Lavundlamati Secondary School at Luhlanyeni (place of the crazy people) and is also volunteering at the VCT, assisting with the ARV program at Sithobela Clinic. In addition, she assists the Sithobela Support Group in facilitation of meetings and activities. One of her favorite activities is playing with the children at the Neighborhood Care Point, teaching them some of her infamous dance moves. Brigid has an amazing counterpart, Sisana, who is an advocate for HIV positive living. She has been assisting Sisana with information outreach in her community, focusing on STI’s. In her spare time, Brigid loves spending time with her counterpart, her family, her bosisi via dance party, and sitting with gogo under the jacaranda tree.

In the remaining 10 months she plans on starting a Drama Group in her community, teaching Life Skills at Sihlangweni Primary School, facilitating a Grief & Loss Workshop with the caregivers at the NCP, and organizing a Girls Camp in April. After Peace Corps, Brigid plans on attending medical school in the Carribean. While in medical school, she plans on flying to Blia’s B&B in Florida on weekends to be a part-time chef preparing all the desserts, including her favorite Scotcharoos. “Snaps all around!”

“When all else fails, just dance.” -Brigid O’Brien

You know you're **HARD CORPS** when...



...you've begun to resemble Quasimodo after 17 months of Peace Corps service in Swaziland after battling with a pyscho make, changing three sites, losing six cell phones, changing her name four times, and being mistaken for an ALB-eeen-O by her best friend. Word of Advice: You have ten months left, try to take it easy on yourself. And God sakes, take a look in the mirror before you step outside.

You know you're **Soft Corps** when...

(brainchild of the Japanese Stallion)



...you've been your match in a latrine with your pants down and come out looking like some thing out of an Alfred Hitchcock movie or even better yet a fly and you get spoon fed by Daynese.

Anna's Literary Box

The Poisonwood Bible
by Barbara Kingsolver



Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* is a classic piece of African historical fiction, chronicling a missionary family's move to the Belgium Congo during the 1960's and 70's. Set on the backdrop of Patrice Laurent's Marxist revolution, the CIA's successful coup, and the installation of figurehead president Kabila, Kingsolver tells the poignant story of a family and country facing their own demons.

This book encapsulates the essence of why I read. I read for motivation and inspiration — eager to be pushed out of my comfort zone and challenged by social injustices and society's inequalities. Kingsolver, herself has written, "art is the antidote that can call us back from the edge of numbness, restoring our ability to feel for another." The power of (good) fiction is its ability to create empathy, lifting you away from your chair and stuffing you down inside someone else's point of view. Novels differ drastically from newspapers, which impart information while allowing you to remain rooted in your own perspective. A newspaper could tell someone that millions have been raped and slaughtered over the course of the bloody Congolese civil war, and that someone may think to herself, "what a tragedy," and then turn the page to check the ten-day forecast. But, a story tells you more; it brings you into the fold of someone else's reality, dropping you at the intersection of the mundane and the humane. And sentence-by-sentence, paragraph-by-paragraph, you begin to feel the sorrow in your soul of a father burying his daughter. Page by page, chapter by chapter, you begin to feel the ache in your bones of a mother rebuilding her pillaged hut. Stories give shape and substance, meaning and understanding to the heartbreaking wars and conflicts in Africa, not newspaper statistics. And, it is this storytelling, which Kingsolver has excelled and which *The Poisonwood Bible* becomes the masterpiece.



"You're a nobody unless you've made the SOJO gossip column!"



Gossip Column

In the Land of Swaz

- Vincent had a snake in his house
- Jabu has a dead tooth
- Muzi is no longer employed by P.C.
- Blia & Caitlin went to Mozambique for PSN
- Gavin does naughty things in chapels
- Caitlin had a snake in her pink rounduval
- Grifter's is hiring a new manager
- Stephanie & Kate are hosting a wine and cheese party
- Jacque's mom missed her flight back home
- Cliff had a surprise CCU Braii
- Sarah Hunt ran into Amber at the New York Metro Station
- Brigid's friend back home is getting a lecture on HIV by Justin Garland
- Jabu & Sarah Hunt hung out for an afternoon in California
- Will met a hot South African
- Oghale's wife had a baby
- Jabu posts statios on her windows that say: "Don't knock on my door. Come back another day, i'm sleeping"
- Vincent's bottom teeth are rotting
- Jabu had a rendezvous with a Parisian in his one man tent
- Lindsay had scabies
- Justine suspects she had scabies
- Justin Knox is paying a visit in May
- Blia's dog had seven pups but all died
- Uncle Tommy is paying a visit in Feb.
- Everyone was stranded in Manzini on Friday at the ATM because they didn't get paid and didn't have enough money for their return trip home
- Caitlin dropped her phone and broke it
- Angela's no longer hallucinating about squirrels

Back Home in the Land of OZ

- Jewel's next album comes out May 2
- Madonna's going on tour this summer
- Coretta Scott King past away
- NY-bound puppies are drug couriers
- Full House star addicted to Crystal Meth
- New planet bigger than Pluto
- New Supreme Court justice sides with Missouri Death Row inmate against being lethally injected
- Suicide Bomber kills 5 in Afghanistan
- Saddam Hussein boycotts trial
- Britney Spears will guest appear on Will and Grace

The Not So Diversity Committee

by Will Treese, PCV, Diversity Committee Member

Currently serving on the diversity committee, our group of six represents both male and female, Afro-, Asian-, Indian- and Biracial- Americans. We are gay, straight and bisexual, our religions stem from devout Christians to atheism and we come from all parts of the US. Through us, we represent the majority of the minorities of Peace Corps Swaziland (PCS). This is the diversity we all share.

Conversely, it will be argued that we are not that diverse. Generally speaking, even for the entire Peace Corps program, PCVs are young, college graduates that come from middle class families who have had the *privilege* of giving two years of their life to serve in the Peace Corps. That being stated, this is one of the reasons we have to celebrate our racial, sexual and cultural differences. Without focusing on these differences, we would have the Republican Party, Swaziland.

Think about it. We aren't diverse. Peace Corps represents a homogeneous group of Americans to promote the US Government's agenda of global peace (while a US led war rages on in Iraq). Many Swazis see the US as just being a large group of Caucasians with a lot of money. And to look at PCS, they're not too far off base.

Even though we do not have the GOP here in Swaziland, I sometimes wonder if there is something a little more sinister to the PC's values. The majority of our job is to promote cross-cultural exchange, only lastly do we focus on producing skilled labor to developing nations.

So, we 'white,' educated, middle-income, young individuals are sent to tell host country nationals about America, while they share with us their own culture. I can't help but think that innately we are spreading 'whitey's' agenda: "America is not bad." Also are we training Americans to think, "We can't bomb these people, they're our friends." Embrace the country that is only willing to give you skilled labor only as an

afterthought. One out of three is bad. Is the majority of our job unjustly focused on; doesn't cross-cultural exchange happen naturally?

It would be a fair question for someone to ask about my intentions for being here. Honestly, I believe in 'the cause,' not necessarily the PC's cause, but that of fighting HIV/AIDS. If I'm able to stop one child from losing their parents to HIV, my PC time will have been worthwhile.

I've tried to combat this idea of 'rich whitey' and I'm being shot down...by myself! I've thought about my own situation and have even told Swazis that, "I'm not rich" and, by American standards, I'm not. Even though I am an American, I, for the moment, do not live in America and when I go back, I will have a free flight to the airport closest to my parent's home. I have glasses and my body percentage of fat is higher than that of most Swazis my age. I have visited four different continents, studied on three of them and been in more countries than US states. Yet, I am not wealthy; I am a volunteer. Who should I be selling this idea to: Swazis or myself?

It's difficult to explain to Swazis that there is diversity in America when they can't see the diversity in the people that have been flown here to represent it. Even I am not able to let them know that "I am a minority" for fear of being ostracised. We take our group of white people and repackage them with a token _____ (insert minority of your choice) and say, "Look! Over here! We're diverse!" Gavin mentioned this in December's SOJO. He also mentioned that he didn't have the answers, nor do I. I give only one suggestion of how to push PC in a different direction. Get an inner-city high school drop-out who has to sell drugs to feed his child and send *him* to do the same work that we are doing here. Chances are they will be able to relate to the situation here better than any of us can. Besides, 66% of this position is only cultural exchange and, in most schools in America, that's passing.

[This is Will's first article, so be easy on him. His PC dream is to see the development of PC Vatican City; where he would like to focus on Family Planning.]

REMINDER! REMINDER! REMINDER!

Please (sicela) submit all kinds/types of submissions from poetry, short stories, journal entries, gossip, soft & hard corps, news stories, hints, tips, recipes, reviews, etc...anything and everything you could think of that is SOJO worthy!

February (Ndlovana)-Cupid's on Strike!

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2	3 DJs Oskido Admiral & Jah Seed @HOF	4 Jabu Khanyile @HOF
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13 PSN Staff Quarterly Meeting	14 Meet and Greet Party at Pattie's <hr/> Valentine's Day	15 All Volunteer Conference @Emafini	16	17	18 Freshly Ground @HOF
19	20 President's Day	21 <hr/> Elliot's Bday Lewis and Desiree leave for Capetown	22	23	24 Kelly's Debate Competition at Shewula High School <hr/> Musa's Bday	25
26	27	28				

SOJO POLL

Love is in the air, and Cupid's taking aim. In honor of Valentine's Day, this month's poll question is:

Who in Swaziland do you wish was your secret admirer?

- The King . . . who else?! -Nwando
- Myself, or someone like me-Vincent
- Random dude who came to my homstead to do govt. census...he was sooo HOT!-Justine
- Kind of glad I don't have one...no one-Julie Z.
- Jessica Oya-Kelly & Alex
- No One -Kate & Sarah C.
- To answer questions like this would give these polls validity -Alyson
- Gavin-Andi
- Constance Simelane-Will
- Lady Diana-Craig
- Babe Norman Thwala-Anonymous
- Sibusiso-Caitlin
- My Vet and My Dentist-Jabu
- Vincent-Derek
- Will-Lindsay

The Swazi SoJournal

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