

V E S T I K A Z A K C T A H

A Kaz 18 who cannot stop giving back

RPCV Colin Flanagan discusses extending. For life.

Page 14

Swimming in Siberia

Sagar Gondalia, swimsuits and flip flops hit the icy rivers of Petropavlosk

Page 17

Dying for mutton?

Short on friends? Katy Fitzpatrick took the road less traveled to befriend her sheep.

Page 19

Need a better half?

Michael Quinn breaks down marriage in Kazakhstan for all the lonely volunteers out there.

Page 22

Father, father, we don't need to escalate. You see, war is not the answer for only love can conquer hate.

by John Sasser

We live in an interesting part of the world, and history is being made right in front of us. Just recently, Kyrgyzstan closed the US airbase at Manas, Russia allowed the transit of US military supplies through its territory, the tenge is devalued by 25%, stores closed across the country to raise prices, and the KNB checks up on Peace Corps volunteers. Wow. There is certainly a lot happening all at once, and it probably will not be clear what it all means for years. But since we all have to live through it, it helps to know as much as possible about “what’s going on”.

The Tenge

On February 4th, the National Bank of Kazakhstan let the tenge devalue from 120 to 150 to the dollar, or by 25%. In the future, the price of the tenge should remain relatively close to the current rate and future devaluations are not expected. While the reasons for the devaluation are complex, one this is certain: this means a jump in inflation for Kazakhstan.

Prices at your sites are going to rise dramatically, if they have not already. This is because Kazakhstan imports just about everything we use here from Russia, China or Europe. Something that once cost one Euro (or one dollar, or one ruble) now costs 25% more in tenge terms. Similarly, oil, priced in dollars, is now 25% more expensive. There will be a strong temptation for local producers to push up their prices for eggs, milk or tomatoes as well. Everything they buy will cost more, and they will be feeling the pinch themselves.

The devaluation hits Peace Corps Kazakhstan in three major ways. First, we know that everything our volunteers buy is going to cost more, and we expect that many of your host families will want more money for



Who we are

Peace Corps has been serving in Kazakhstan since 1993. Through the Education and OCAP programs, 105 volunteers serve the interests of Kazakhstani schools and small businesses. Volunteers serve 2-3 years in their communities, learn the culture, help others to understand America, and help America to understand Kazakhstan.

The Vesti is a quarterly news journal focusing on the multifaceted lives of PCVs and of the people who make their service in Kazakhstan possible. The opinions expressed herein are those of individual volunteers and staff members and do not reflect the opinions of the Peace Corps as a whole.

THE STATE OF THE SERVICE



housing and feeding you. As the Kaz-19s know, and the 20s are going to find out very soon, we have a Living Allowance Survey process that we need to go through before we can request more money from Washington. We are going to expedite that process. If you have not already heard from Carol about what needs to be done, it is guaranteed that you will soon. We promise, we are working on this as hard and as fast as possible.

Second, our employees are paid in tenge. They did not get a raise this year because of a freeze mandated by system-wide Peace Corps budget problems. They are now worse off by whatever the inflation turns out to be just like everyone else in the country. We are also addressing that with Washington, hoping for some mitigation.

Finally, everything we do is going to cost more. This includes buying gas, traveling to your site, and putting on trainings. I hope Washington will work with us on these costs too, so that you will not notice any changes.

On the bright side of things, all of the expenses listed above are tenge expenses. Peace Corps Washington can buy 25% more tenge with the same dollars they had budgeted to send us originally. Although the seemingly simplest solution would be to send us 25% more tenge, the problem is a little bit trickier. They need to help us with the effects of inflation, not the change in the value of the currency. It is not clear yet what inflation will be. It could be much more than 25%; it could be less. Anyway, we are discussing this with Washington. They have seen this problem before in other countries, and they are willing to help. But after only two days, all the details are not clear yet.

The KNB

The KNB (*комитет национальной безопасности*) is Kazakhstan's version of the FBI. Several of you, or your organizations, have had visits from them in the past couple of months. This should not be surprising. In the US, if a planeload of Kazakhstani volunteers spread out across the country, started working with our schools and NGOs, and sent detailed written reports back to their

headquarters, the FBI would probably come around and ask exactly what they were doing. Although there is some stuff you should worry about (see below), do not worry about routine visits and questions. You have nothing to hide. Show them your documents if they want to see them. If anyone wants to see your report on how many people came to summer camp or English Club, they are welcome to it. After all is said and done, let us know how it went.

Politics and the Peace Corps

Note: The following is my personal opinion and should not be considered Peace Corps policy.

Does the Peace Corps care about Airbases in Kyrgyzstan or the US shipping military material through Russia? The answer is obviously no. We are a non-political organization that has always had the same three goals: to bring skills and knowledge to the Kazakhstanis who want it, to let Kazakhstanis know more about the United States and to learn more about Kazakhstan. Non-political or not, we do operate in a political world. We have to pay attention to the politics of others, and we are clearly at the crossroads of some very interesting affairs of state.

There are many people in Kazakhstan – you work with them every day – who love what you are doing here. There are also many people in the Government of Kazakhstan who feel the same way. As someone from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs told me last month, “Peace Corps is doing a fine job. We like having you here.” But you guys hear the rumors that we are spies; you see the occasional anti-Peace Corps or anti-foreigner articles in the newspapers. You also know that Peace Corps was thrown out of Russia and Uzbekistan recently. It is no surprise that we hear them here. This aspect of politics is real and important. Non-political as we are, we are caught in the same forces that you see in the headlines about airbases. You need to take this very seriously. There are some people in this country that would love to see us screw up.

What can you do? As Ekaterina says, the best thing we can do is keep doing good things. Sharpen up your sense of self-preservation. If someone proposes something that sounds problematic, pass on it. I never want to have to scream “Condition Red,” or even orange or pink or whatever the colors are. As always, do not give the gift of propaganda to folks who do not like us. You are on stage 24-7. If you cannot print it on the front page of the Herald Tribune, you probably ought not to do it. In fact, try and go the other way, getting more stories in Kazakhstan's newspapers about the great things you guys are doing. And of course, let us know. We will pass it on and see if we can generate even more great positive press!

THE EDITORS



My Kazakhstan, a painting by Mary Couri, Bayanaul.

Submit to the Vesti!

Fellow volunteers, the spring thaw is upon us, and with it comes Nauryz, IST, and wherever Spring Break Kazakhstan takes you. Take pictures! Write stories! And then? SEND pictures and SEND stories. Without volunteer submissions, the Vesti will die. And, ladies and gentlemen, this is the Peace Corps not Death Corps.

Don't kill the Vesti.

New to this Vesti is the section on success stories. With Kaz-19's wrapping projects up, and Kaz-20's just getting started, success stories will inevitably abound. Write to us with your triumphs and tragedies, your trials and tribulations (actually, stick to the triumphs and keep the tragedies, trials and tribulations for the PSN; the Vesti does not have time for that crap).

Finally, with summer on the horizon, write to us with opportunities you will be creating, both to spend enriching the lives of Kazakhstan's youth, as well as traveling the beautiful and seemingly endless Kazakhstani countryside to avoid using those precious vacation days.

Please send all submissions to pcvesti.kz@gmail.com. Our next deadline is Apr. 13, 2009.

Respected friends and colleagues,

Winter's forced inactivity does a lot to an individual: some go mad and unleash at Nauryz, some fall in love, some swear love off (we shudder), some lose weight, some gain weight, and some retool to take spring and summer by storm. The Vesti is definitely part of the latter category. We have added new sections, *успех* (success), and reformatted others, *жизнь* (life), in the hope that we can come closer to "reflecting volunteer life" in all its aspects.

We are especially proud of the success stories that have been published this month. While the Vesti has often shied away from discussing volunteer work, this was a mistake. Work, both during good times and bad, forms the most significant part of volunteer life. Hearing about people succeeding should also be inspirational, because all of us, no matter how much we think we are working, can do more for our communities. So please, be proud of your work and keep sending your stories in. We will be more than happy to publish them.

To all of those who submitted this month, thank you. To those of you that submitted but were not published, thank you even more. The Vesti is dealing with an embarrassment of riches right now. We have more submissions from staff and volunteers than we really know what to do with. Cuts, both to article length and in the number of articles published, are painful to make but are made with serious considerations in mind. Hopefully, the final product will speak for itself.

Thankfully, the high quality of the writing this month more than alleviates the Vesti's publishing dilemmas. Every single person that sent in an article deserves considerable praise. The same goes for photos. The Vesti has become so much more than just a newsletter, and we are confident in saying that your photos make the Vesti a real pleasure to read. Finally, we would like to thank Mary Couri for her gorgeous painting. If the Vesti had a mantle, My Kazakhstan would definitely be hanging over it.

As always, any comments, criticisms, concerns, or compliments are welcome. For better or for worse, this is our paper; any ideas on making it better would be greatly appreciated.

All the best,
Matthew, Michael, Sagar, and Tim

FROM THE OFFICE

Renewed resources

by Galina Petrovna

Library building

“**Sources of Free Periodicals and Databases**” is an updated and recent acquisition for the RC. If you are involved in a *library or resource center project*, I would strongly recommend that you have a copy of this publication. Many of the periodicals listed could be of use to both you and your counterpart as well as useful additions to a local library or resource center.

Two additional available publications to assist with library projects are: “**Libraries for All! How to Start and run a Basic Library**” and “**Setting Up and Running a School Library**”

I have also ordered an updated version of “**Sources of Donated Books**” which helps identify organizations that can provide books and other educational resources for your communities. It provides contact information and guidance on how you and your community partners can submit requests and receive donations from the organizations listed. I expect copies to arrive in 3-4 weeks.

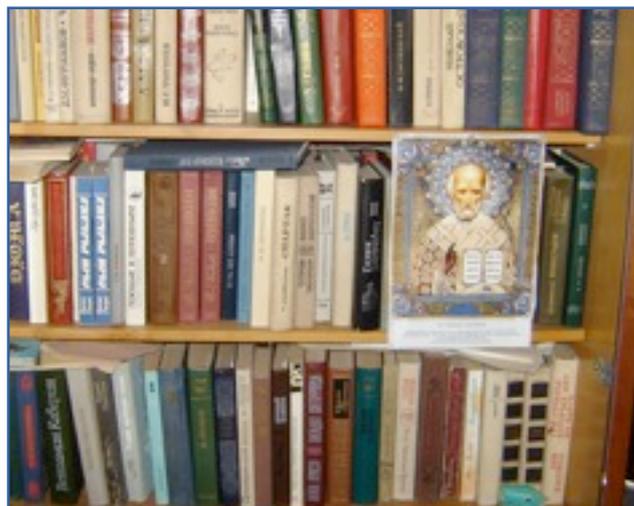
Teacher training

Volunteers involved in *teacher training* are welcome to the new teacher training resource “**Shaping the Way We Teach English: Successful Practices Around the World.**” It is a 14 module **video** with a supporting manual and additional materials. It incorporates authentic classroom scenes with teachers from different countries. In the video, you will observe other teachers’ practices in classes ranging from the primary level to the post-secondary level.

English Teaching Forum

The latest issue of the *English Teaching Forum* magazine (Volume 46, number 4 2008) carries the following articles: “Adbusting: Critical Media Literacy in a Multi-Skills Academic Writing Lesson,” “The Intercultural Approach to EFL Teaching and Learning,” “Using Guided, Corpus-Aided Discovery to Generate Active Learning,” “VolM-Mediated Cooperative Tasks for English Language Learners,” “Using Mobile Phone Technology in EFL Classes,” and “Chicago, Illinois: The Windy City.”

As usual the last article of the magazine is a Lesson Plan. This time the theme is: **Sharing You Vacation – Send a Postcard** by Meryl Siegal.



An anonymous bald man suggests you read more.

If you have become anxious about your classes growing somewhat dull, this lesson plan will allow you to add fun experiences to your literacy lessons. Reading the information about Chicago (see the previous article) will help you draw on new vocabulary and authentic material to use in the lesson.

Please let me know if any of the articles attracted your attention and I will send you either a magazine or a copy of the article.

Grad school info

Are you already thinking about graduate school after Peace Corps? Do you wish you had information about Fellows/USA schools?

Upon completion of PC service, Volunteers become eligible for educational benefits from Peace Corps Fellows/USA—a fellowship program that offers reduced-cost graduate study to returned Volunteers who wish to earn professional certification, master’s or doctoral degrees in various subjects. As a Peace Corps Fellow, you can use the skills and experience you have acquired during your service overseas to complete an internship in an under-served U.S. community where you will gain valuable on-the-job experience.

A package that contains brochures, fliers, applications, and other materials from many Fellows/USA schools has been sent to us. All of this material is in the Volunteer Lounge. More information on the entire Fellows/USA program is available on their website at www.peacecorps.gov/fellows, or by phone +1-202-692-1440 or email: fellows@peacecorps.gov.



FROM THE OFFICE

Update on SPA

by *Ekaterina Matyunina*

In the fiscal year of 2008, twenty-one volunteers (eight EDU Volunteers and thirteen OCAP volunteers) applied for and received funding for SPA projects.

This year Peace Corps received \$ 33,300 for grants from USAID. Each proposal needs to meet all necessary requirements and will be carefully reviewed by the SPA Committee. Only well-thought through and well-written proposals will be approved. It is your responsibility to design a project and to put it into writing. Follow the SPA proposal submission checklist to keep track of all necessary documents and sections of the proposal, and do not forget to read the SPA manual!

Before applying to SPA think if your community is REALLY interested in the project, if your community can contribute 15% of the total project cost, and if skill transfers will take place. For your own sake try to avoid the following proposal errors: unclear goals and objectives of the project; a weak monitoring and evaluation plan; miscalculations in the budget; equipment or material requests without supporting programs; and, of course, different amounts of money listed in the abstract, budget, and agreement (they have to be the same!)

Two Kaz 19 Volunteers have already applied for SPA funding this year and got their proposals approved by SPA committee: A career and resource center (\$ 2,221) and a youth center (\$1,223). Both projects will contribute a lot to youth development in Kazakhstan if locals will be actively involved in the implementation and maintaining phases of the project.

SPA committee members plan on using Sharepoint for reviewing proposals and publishing bi-monthly updates—how much money is left, and which projects have been approved. The SPA committee will meet every month (on the 20th) to review proposals. This means you need to submit your proposal in the beginning of every month to give SPA Committee members time to read them.

PEPFAR and VAST

by *Elmira Galiyeva*

PEPFAR/VAST grants are not OCAP specific grants. They are available to all of you!

PEPFAR/VAST grant funds come from USAID via PCHQ to cover HIV/AIDS prevention activities and outreach. The activities funded by PEPFAR include development of information and educational materials, training and other capacity building activities. Activities led solely by volunteers, that involve a large number of volunteers, or give-away items (mugs, t-shirts) are not covered by PEPFAR/VAST grants. Travel costs are also not covered by PEPFAR but we have been able to secure a small amount of funding for travel within the framework of PEPFAR projects. Since the funding is limited, it will be allocated on a “first come, first served” basis. The recommended level of community contribution is between 10-25%. Please send your applications by the 20th of each month.

As you know, this year we have combined the existing application forms for PEPFAR/VAST project proposals to simplify the application process. The new application form, as well as the grant guidelines, and liability and report forms are available on PC Sharepoint: <http://kz.peacecorps.gov> in the PC Grants section.

In January the PC Grant Committee approved a project proposal developed by David Whitsett (Pervomaika) and the Community Fund for Life-long Education. The project titled “Peer-to-Peer Health Education against the Spread of HIV in Rural Communities” will be implemented in March-May 2009 at a cost of \$2,415. “With the help of community doctors and local school teachers, the Peer to Peer Health Education program will establish informed teams of Peer Health Educators (PHEs), between the ages of 14-18, by equipping them with the skills to provide ongoing health training to rural students in local schools, orphanages and community centers.”

As of today, we have \$26,880 in PEPFAR grant money, and we look forward to supporting your excellent projects! Questions? Please contact Elmira Galiyeva.

FROM THE OFFICE

There is more than one way to extend

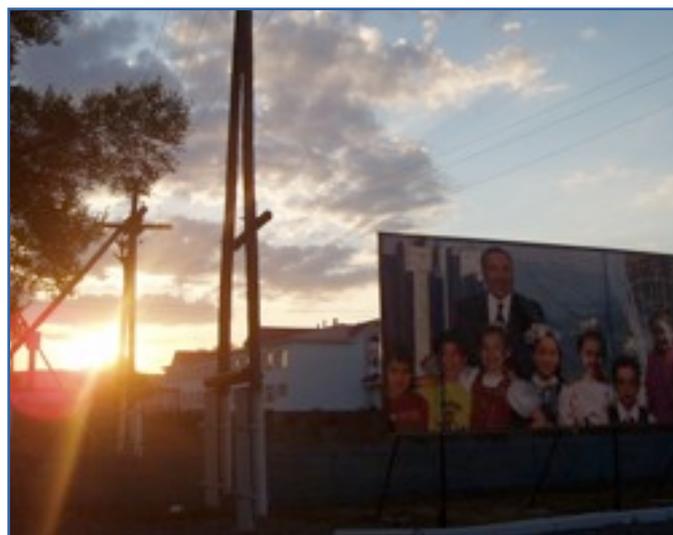
by **Natalia Kotova**

The time has already come for Kaz 19s to decide whether or not they wish to extend their service. Extending volunteers, after spending 30 days on paid home leave, will receive the opportunity to continue and complete the variety of community projects that they developed during their first two years of service. Having the continued support of their communities and host organizations, improved technical skills, and advanced levels of Russian and/or Kazakh, extending volunteers are able to make a significant and lasting contribution to their community. While the commitment of another year is certainly great, the majority of extending volunteers would agree that it is worth it. Those volunteers interested need to speak with their Regional Managers before September 1st.

Other than simply extending, there is another option available to volunteers wishing to stay in Kazakhstan for another year: become a Peace Corps Volunteer Leader. The PCVL program began last year, and Kaz 18s Leah Forlivio (Kokshetau) and Ann- Marie Deignan (Ust-Kamenogorsk) were selected to assist the programs in many ways. Beyond their preexisting duties as third-year volunteers, PCVLs are enhancing and extending staff capabilities to conduct site-development and host family checks without significant budget increases. They are serving as a liaison between staff and volunteers in the field. And they are helping resolve problems in the field by working with PCVs. We are looking for 5 PCVLs to assign to each region. Deadline for applications is June 30th. A competitive selection process will be finished by July 31st.

Who can be a PCVL?

The PCVL must be an outstanding volunteer who has excelled in his/her service. The PCVL must demonstrate maturity, flexibility, and the ability to serve as a liaison among volunteers, host country supervisors and Peace Corps staff. Candidates should have technical skills in their program field, should have strong Russian or Kazakh language skills, strong people and facilitation skills, and good organizational skills. The PCVL should have successfully adapted to the host-country environment and



Think of the children. Well...Nazerbayev and the children.

will consciously understand the knowledge, skills and attitudes that have made this adaptation possible. In addition, PCVLs should have counseling and listening skills that enable him/her to support and motivate other volunteers.

How will PCVLs work?

PCVLs will not perform any inherently governmental functions and will not fill staff positions. They will serve for a period of one year and will be third year extension volunteers serving in their originally assigned project. The PCVL position will be a minimum one year extension plus a one month home leave. Medical clearance is required for the extension.

The PCVLs will report to and coordinate closely with the Regional Managers. First and foremost, volunteer Leaders will remain volunteers, and their volunteer assignment at their site is expected to take up to 70-75% of their time. They will need to maintain a flexible schedule in order to accommodate travel, but it is crucial that PCVs continue to work as volunteers and serve as role models through their volunteer service.

Volunteer Leaders will continue to receive the living allowance for their tier. To help cover travel for site development or host family inspections, phone and e-mail communications, Peace Corps will pay PCVLs an additional 15,000 tg each month. This will be included in the monthly living allowance payment.

If you are interested, please, talk first to your Regional Manager. They will be able to help you begin the application process.

LIFE AND DEATH

What is a common cold?



Now is that not the most adorable thing ever?

by the Medical Staff

Colds are probably the most frequent malady here in Kazakhstan. They are caused by a virus infection located in the nose, sinuses, ears and bronchial tubes.

The symptoms of a common cold include sneezing, runny nose, nasal obstruction, sore or scratchy throat, cough, hoarseness, and mild general symptoms like headache, feverishness, chills, and just generally not feeling well. Colds last on average for one week. Mild colds may last only 2 or 3 days while severe colds may last for up to 2 weeks.

How colds are spread

Cold viruses grow mainly in the nose where they multiply in nasal cells and are present in large quantities in the nasal fluid. The highest concentration of cold virus in nasal secretions occurs during the first three days of infection. This is when infected persons are most contagious. Cold viruses may at times be present in the droplets that are expelled in coughs and sneezes.

Nasal secretions containing cold viruses contaminate the hands of people with colds as a result of nose blowing, covering sneezes and touching the nose. Also, cold viruses may contaminate objects and surfaces in the environment of a cold sufferer. Young children are the major reservoir of cold viruses and a particularly good source of virus containing nasal secretions.

Experiments have demonstrated that a cold virus readily transfers from the skin and hands of a cold sufferer

to the hands and fingers of another person during periods of brief contact. Also, cold viruses transfer to the hands after touching contaminated objects and surfaces.

Virus on the fingers is transferred into the nose and eye by finger-to-nose and finger-to-eye contact. Virus deposited in the eye promptly goes down the tear duct into the nose. Once in the nose, a cold virus is transported by mucociliary action to the adenoid area where it starts a cold. In some instances, cold virus, which is expelled into the air in coughs and sneezes, may land in the nose or eye and cause infection.

Treatment

Since there is no cure for the common cold, treatment has two goals: to make you feel better and to help you fight off the virus. You'll be most comfortable in a warm, humid environment. It's also important to drink lots of water (8-10 full glasses). This makes mucus flow more freely and helps with congestion. Get plenty of rest, eat a well balanced diet, and take aspirin or Tylenol for fevers and aches, Cepacol lozenges for a scratchy throat, and Sudafed for congestion.

Taking care of yourself

Simple precautions can be taken to help protect you from catching a cold. Limit contact with known cold sufferers, especially during the first three days of their illness. Practice preventive measures which keep the cold virus from entering the nose. Wash your hands after contact with cold sufferers and objects and surfaces they may have contaminated. Hand washing removes cold viruses from the skin of the hand and fingers. Keep your fingers out of your eyes and nose. Avoid having cold sufferers cough and sneeze on you or in your direction.

Most illnesses you will have—colds, flu, sore throats, diarrhea—will be due to viral infections and will resolve on their own. Rarely will you need to take antibiotics for any of those conditions. Do not take antibiotics for an illness unless prescribed for you by a Peace Corps health care practitioner. If you are not seen by the PC Medical Unit then you must contact the Medical Unit before starting any medication prescribed for you.

It is extremely important that you take the entire course of antibiotics even though you may feel better by

LIFE AND DEATH

the 3rd or 4th day. This lessens chances of a recurrent infection for which that antibiotic would then be less effective. Take precaution: know what you are taking; know what you are allergic to and never take a locally prescribed drug before talking to the PCMO!

Women who are on oral contraceptives must use a back up method (condoms and or spermicide) during the course of antibiotics and for the two weeks following because antibiotics make oral contraceptives less effective. Talk to the PCMO if you have any questions in regard to this or need additional contraceptives and/or the Morning After pill.

All injections, especially antibiotic injections, are to be avoided unless authorized by the PCMO!

Update from the PSN

by **Katie Roders**

Kaz 20s interested in the Peer Support Network will soon have an opportunity to flex those supporting muscles. The Peer Support Network is looking for a small group of motivated and qualified individuals to add to our PSN collective. Future PSN members will be expected to help supplement already existing social networks in Kazakhstan, giving volunteers an opportunity to speak with an interested listener, free of charge. While PSN members maintain a relationship with medical staff in case of emergency (extending confidentiality only with the volunteer's permission), the majority of calls deal with loneliness, getting adjusted to site and problems at work.

If you feel you are up to the challenge, plan to sign up for the peer support sessions at your IST! Current PSN members will lead training sessions on listening skills and protocol for using the PSN. Contact Leah Forlivio (leahforlivio@gmail.com) or Ekaterina (EMatyunina@kz.peacecorps.gov) if you have any pressing questions. Otherwise, get ready for some PC/KZ-20/ IST/ PSN March Magic.

Peer Support Network

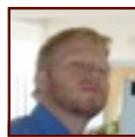
Providing confidential, objective and non-judgmental support to Peace Corps Volunteers and Trainees.



Joe Deignan
Taldy Korgan
8 777 165 0249



Vicente Escriva
Shymkent
8 777 165 5605



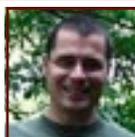
Aaron Hueth
Atbasar, Akmola
8 777 471 0098



Leah Forlivio
Kokshetau
8 701 616 9747



Scott Simmons
Zhetysay, South Kazakhstan
8 777 150 6679



Jim Riggs
Kostanai Oblast
8 777 635 4885



Michael Quinn
Shchuchinsk, Akmola
8 777 119 1538



Justin Kimmons-Gilbert
Koilyk, Almaty Oblast
8 777 348 9436



Katie Roders
Karaganda
8 777 165 0236



Lindsey Dyan Callaway
Taldy Korgan
8 777 348 9501



Marianne Midwinter
Karaganda
8 777 145 9738

LIFE AND DEATH



Scorpion Wins! FATALITY!

Three crimes were committed against Volunteers in the period of December, 08 to January, 09.

Physical Assault in Zheskazgan

Three male Volunteers were hassled by two young Kazakh men as they were walking on a main town street at around 8pm. The two local men followed the Volunteers, getting in their faces and grabbing them by their shoulders. The Volunteers tried to walk away, but it culminated when one of the two punched a Volunteer in the face.

Burglary in Aktobe

A volunteer's host family's apartment was broken into during the daytime when no one was in the house. Some property was stolen.

Robbery (confidential)

A broader perspective

by **Aliya Kassenova**

So that you are informed and have a broader picture on criminal situation in the country, I would like to share with you some information recently released by the U.S. Embassy in Kazakhstan on the subject

Several inquiries regarding crime directed against expatriates in Kazakhstan were received in the Embassy. However, the Embassy has received no reports of any crimes against American citizens and has no indication that Americans are being targeted. Nevertheless, U.S. citizens in Kazakhstan are encouraged to monitor media reports, and are reminded to maintain a high level of vigilance and to take appropriate steps to maintain their security awareness.

Identification checks by the police are common practice. Police are not required to demonstrate probable cause or reasonable suspicion to initiate ID checks.

Be wary of persons representing themselves as police or other local officials. It is not uncommon for Americans to become victims of harassment and extortion by imposters, genuine law enforcement and other officials. A genuine police official should always present his own credentials when approaching someone on the street. If the officer cannot produce identification, he is most likely an

imposter. Never voluntarily hand over your wallet to a police officer. If pressured, tell the officer that you will report his behavior to the U.S. Embassy and his supervisors. **SSC note: in our case it may as well be Peace Corps** Authorities are concerned about these incidents and have cooperated in investigating such cases. Try to obtain the officer's name, badge number, and license plate number, and note where the incident happened because this information assists local officials in identifying the perpetrators. Report crimes committed against you by persons presenting themselves as police or other governmental authorities to a police station. **SSC note: in our case it will also be the Peace Corps**

The Embassy has received reports from American residents and visitors being victims of violent, late-night muggings. Americans are advised to travel in groups or pairs. Lone individuals often make easy targets for muggers. At night, try to remain in well-lit, populated areas. Visitors are encouraged to leave restaurants or bars if fights break out.

Corruption by public officials, including law enforcement, has been reported frequently, especially at the airport in Almaty. Some foreigners have been told by customs or border guard officials that they must pay a \$50-\$500 fine for violating an undisclosed local regulation, despite the fact that the foreign citizen has fully complied



LIFE AND DEATH

with local laws. Some Americans have reportedly been asked to pay a large fine upon exiting Kazakhstan. When encountering such irregularities, U.S. citizens are advised to seek clarification from supervisory airport officials or contact the U.S. Embassy before paying.”

SSC note: Unfortunately, a few Volunteers have also become the victims of harassment in Almaty airport on several occasions. Normally, when this happens Volunteers call Peace Corps/ the SSC for clarification. My advice for the future, if you will ever become a victim of extortion in the airport, never rush to give a bribe when you are asked to do so. Remember, bribe giving as well as bribe taking is a crime. Specifically, you may seek clarification from the Duty officer in the Consulate office in the Airport, and/ or as always call me.

Volunteers planning for Nauryz,

There are a lot of great reasons to go to Shymkent for Nauryz: to see the city, meet your PCV buddies, experience the festival and soak up the Kazakh culture. Sure, you should have fun, but, as a Peace Corps volunteer, you are not here to “party”.

While you are enjoying Shymkent, please remember that it can be a dangerous place for foreigners, especially after mid-night and around the clubs. I repeat the helpful hints from the Travel Warning I issued on Shymkent:

- Don't go out late alone. Go with local friends if possible. Go with other PCV s at a minimum. But on the other hand, don't go in a mob of twenty Americans—that's just going to attract attention.
- If you are out late, take a cab, even for short distances (This is a key precaution!). Volunteers say there are always cabs available.
- Don't stay in a club until it closes and everyone pours out into the street. Leave earlier!
- Moderate your consumption of alcohol.
- Sign out—and back in—on leave log.

Stay safe, enjoy and remember: 24/7.

See you there,

John

Moving into individual houses and Housing Checklists

by *Aliya Kassenova*

It will soon be the time for the Kaz 20 Volunteers to decide if they want to move out of their host families and live on their own. Hence, I would like to remind you all the PC Kazakhstan requirements regarding the selection and move in PCV individual housing.

The requirements for PCV individual housing are listed in the “Independent Volunteer Housing Checklist”. The checklist may be found in PCV Handbook, Appendix 9, page 97. (You may also request the electronic copy of the checklist from your RM or me)

- PC Kazakhstan requires that Volunteer housing must meet all of the criteria listed in the checklist.
- Volunteers must complete the checklists and return it to their RMs for review and approval **prior** to moving into a new housing. (Recognizing the fact that some of you may not have a consistent access to internet or fax to get in the form to your RM quickly, the other option may be to contact your RM on the phone to discuss the house, terms& conditions and go over the required criteria and the checklist.)
- Volunteers **may not** move into a house without prior approval from the RM.

As apartment search can be a complicated process due to the high rental costs and sometimes lack of decent places. I recommend to start the search early enough to avoid the stress of the last minute rush.

H O B O C T I

President Obama picks a familiar face to lead PC

**Washington DC
January 16, 2009**

Dr. Jody K. Olsen was asked this week by President-elect Obama's transition team to serve as acting director of the Peace Corps, effective as of noon on Tuesday, January 20, 2009. Dr. Olsen will assume the role of acting director until President Obama's Administration selects an individual to assume the role of director.

"I am honored by the trust the transition team has placed in me, and grateful to be representing the Peace Corps, one of America's finest agencies," said Dr. Olsen. "From the time I served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Tunisia up until now in my role as acting director, it has truly been a privilege to serve the agency."

Dr. Olsen has had a long and distinguished career with the Peace Corps, beginning as a Volunteer in Tunisia from 1966 to 1968, teaching English and developing community health programs. In 1979 and 1980, she was Peace Corps country director in Togo, a program which focused on education, health, and agriculture.

Between 1981 and 1984, Dr. Olsen served as regional director for the Peace Corps, managing operations in 17 countries. She returned to the agency in 1989 to serve for three years as chief of staff, during which time the agency expanded into 25 new countries. Dr. Olsen returned to the agency again in 2002 to serve as the deputy director, a position she has held until becoming acting director. In 2008, Olsen was also acting country director for Peace Corps Kazakhstan.

Dr. Olsen holds a bachelor's degree in sociology with a teaching certification from the University of Utah, a master's degree in social work from the University of Maryland, and a Ph.D. from the University of Maryland's College of Education.

Dr. Olsen has received numerous awards for her leadership and public service including: the Alumni of the Year Award from the University of Utah; the Alumni of the Year Award and Alumni Hall of Fame distinction from the University of Maryland's College of Education; the Marita Houlihan Award (for outstanding efforts and commitment to fostering international exchange) from NAFSA; and an honorary doctorate in International Sustainable Development from Michigan Technological University.

Peace Corps establishes "Core Expectations"

by Ron Tschetter, former PC Director

Everyone at the Peace Corps has been working very hard to clarify what we expect from applicants, trainees, and Volunteers. We have been doing so through a wide variety of means, including Peace Corps Volunteer stories chosen for the Web, local General Information Meetings (GIMs), calls from placement officers to nominees, post welcome letters, and post Volunteer Advisory Committee (VAC) and staff working groups.

Based on an expressed and growing need, and drawing from and guided by your examples, we have now created a list of 10 Core Expectations for trainees and Volunteers. Many of you have said a clear understanding of what is expected depends on focused, clear, and consistent messages throughout the recruitment, training, and service cycle.

The list of expectations on the following page is presented to help provide that clarity. To ensure success, we need to use them frequently and consistently from the time applicants first see our recruitment materials to when they complete their Close of Service (COS) conference almost three years later.

The Peace Corps' mission and three goals have been consistent since 1961, and our commitment is to ensure that Volunteers have the preparation and tools to achieve these goals. Our written and spoken communication towards Volunteers should reflect that consistency and commitment. Methods and mediums for communicating the Peace Corps message have multiplied significantly over the last decade, creating confusion for both those applying to the Peace Corps and those of us trying to articulate the responsibilities associated with Peace Corps Volunteer service. Those applying to the Peace Corps have many other volunteer opportunities, both in the United States and overseas, and are trying to determine how the responsibilities of Peace Corps service might be different.

Peace Corps' "Core Expectations" are printed on the following page.

Core Expectations For Peace Corps Volunteers

The mission of the Peace Corps is to promote world peace and friendship by:

- Helping people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women
- Helping promote better understanding of Americans on the part of peoples served
- Helping promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans

In working toward fulfilling the Peace Corps Mission, as a trainee and Volunteer, you are expected to:

1. Prepare your personal and professional life to make a commitment to serve abroad for a full term of 27 months
2. Commit to improving the quality of life of the people with whom you live and work; and, in doing so, share your skills, adapt them, and learn new skills as needed
3. Serve where the Peace Corps asks you to go, under conditions of hardship, if necessary, and with the flexibility needed for effective service
4. Recognize that your successful and sustainable development work is based on the local trust and confidence you build by living in, and respectfully integrating yourself into, your host community and culture
5. Recognize that you are responsible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for your personal conduct and professional performance
6. Engage with host country partners in a spirit of cooperation, and mutual learning and respect
7. Work within the rules and regulations of the Peace Corps and the local and national laws of the country where you serve
8. Exercise judgment and personal responsibility to protect your health, safety, and well-being and that of others
9. Recognize that you will be perceived, in your host country and community, as a representative of the people, cultures, values, and traditions of the United States of America
10. Represent responsibly the people, cultures, values, and traditions of your host country and community to people in the United States both during and following your service



H O B O C T I

Taking a breather, taking stock: a report from MST

by Phil Montgomery, Petropavlovsk

Thirty hours on a train does not really feel that long anymore. This past December I, as well as all Kaz 19 PCVS, did the now-familiar trek to Almaty to participate in Kaz 19's MST conference. Organized by our lovely PC staff in Almaty, the conference gave all Kaz 19s the opportunity to take a week off from work in order to re-evaluate, re-focus, re-lax and re-juvenate.

This was the first training for Kaz 19 in which both EDU and OCAP volunteers lived and trained together—meaning that I saw some volunteers which I had not seen since Swearing-In last November. This change in PC protocol is mainly due to a restructuring of the Regional Managers (RM) which was spurred by a tight budget and a need for higher efficiency in staffing. For example, my oblast had one RM for the 6 EDU PCVs and another for the lone OCAP PCV. Now, all PCVs in the area are under one RM, thereby saving money for site visits and hopefully increasing our collaboration across program lines. All this abbreviation-laden PC jargon aside, this year will be a bit different—and hopefully more efficient—than last.

In more concrete terms regarding the result and effect of MST on one PCV in particular, I found the conference to be very helpful. The conference gave us the much needed chance to digest and synthesize the first year of service, and to brainstorm, plan and prepare for the second. We received further training on subjects including grant writing, promoting volunteerism, teaching primary students, organizing and maintaining English Clubs, and many more. We were also treated with guest speakers who lead roundtable discussions about diversity, history and violence in Kazakhstan. All the seminars and workshops gave us bits and pieces of information and skills to use and share in our last twelve months in country.

MST also gave us a chance to spend some quality time with other PCVs from all parts of the country and participate in some “extracurricular activities.” These activities included shopping at the *Зеленый Базар*, reenacting *The Amazing Race* episode filmed in Almaty, playing capture the flag at the hotel complex, playing guitar live on stage at a night club (our band was called Spaghetti),

running into a Petro University teacher and trading stories, experiences, movies and pictures with PCVs.

Some of the sessions at MST were geared at acknowledging our first year's achievements, projects and challenges, as well as setting personal and professional goals and plans for the second year. Mine are as follows:

Accomplishments:

- Learned enough Russian to feel comfortable.
- Found a successful team-teaching balance with my CP.
- Taught many students—at least some—English.
- Gave motivated students a reason and possibility to improve their English.
- Conducted/Helped lead several conferences and camps.

Challenges:

- Staying positive in a culture in which many things still “just don't make sense” (Focusing on what I can change, and letting go of what I cannot)
- Keeping motivated through “Senior”-itis.
- Continuing Russian tutoring.
- Planning for Post-PC options while living in the present.

Personal Goals:

- Travel to more PCV sites to help with conferences and projects.
- Plan for Post-PC (Grad schools? International teaching programs?? Real job???)
- Participate in *Крещение* (the January 19th dunk in frozen river blessed by Orthodox priests).
- Study more Russian, Kazakh, Spanish, GRE-prep (i.e. be more productive in free time, play less Freecell, watch fewer movies).
- Cook with the Host Fam.

Professional Goals:

- Write a grant to get some English teaching resources for my school.
- Scan/print/compile a grammar resource notebook with worksheets and handouts not found in local textbooks.
- Preserve and organize current materials made in the past year (activities, magazine pictures, visual aids).
- Host a teacher training conference at my supporting institute in January.
- Actively search for new village EDU and city OCAP sites for suture volunteers.

H O B O C T I

A lifetime commitment

by **Colin Flanagan, Kaz 18, Taraz**

To some, the title of RPCV may seem just as ordinary as some of the other naming conventions in the Peace Corps (COS, RM, OJDA, PST, MST, etc). However, as I am beginning to discover with greater frequency, few things are ordinary about the Peace Corps. The concept of the returned Peace Corps Volunteer does not suggest an end, a retirement or a finality at all. Rather, the title suggests that the process from trainee, to PCV, to RPCV continues. Coming home, I anticipated being asked questions about “Kazakhstan,” as well as sharing pictures and souvenirs with friends, family, and senior citizens. But when I started experiencing how being a RPCV can shape your future career and life in the U.S., my Peace Corps awareness went to an unexpected level.

It all sort of hit me the other day while attending a dinner event organized by the Center of Afghanistan Studies at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. The organizer and Dean of the International Studies Department, Mr. Tom Gouttierre, a RPCV who served in Afghanistan, is by no means a “Retired PCV.” After learning more about Tom and his activities, it dawned on me that his service never really ended. He literally made, in all senses of the word, a career out of his Peace Corps experiences. To this day, Mr. Gouttierre tells stories about his Peace Corps life in Afghanistan. I knew the Peace Corps founding fathers were on to something special in that 3rd goal, but I never thought that being a PCV or RPCV could last a lifetime.

Another thing I have noticed about being back in America is that despite some Americans being weak in geography or world affairs, people here respect and understand volunteer and non-profit work. They may not know much about the ‘Stans but they do recognize the work and what it stands for. Volunteer work is an integral part of American culture. There is a lot of respect not just for the Peace Corps, but for the fact that you are trying to help people.

The distance and time aspect of Peace Corps service cannot be ignored. Coming home, you are different to a shocking degree. You have changed, your family and friends have changed, and so has just about everything else. I have found the transition to be challenging, much more so than being a trainee or PCV. A few months back I was having lunch with a family friend and the main



, easier to find in Kazakhstan than America.

topic was Kazakhstan. She understood that some things about me had changed, but she could not grasp why I was struggling. I did not know where to begin, so I just started listing. I am 28, I am unemployed, I have little money, I do not have a car or phone, I live with my parents, I have no independence, I do not have health insurance, I am not sure what to do, I am looking for work in arguably the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. Even though Americans may understand a thing or two about volunteer work, most will not understand that.

For PCVs soon to be RPCVs, probably the best advice I can give is to lower your expectations of finding the perfect job when you return home. The job market is really bad right now and that is not going to change anytime soon. I did not fully understand the magnitude of this recession until I was home, and times are tough. Think about extending, graduate school, or traveling, but most of all give serious thought to what your situation will be like when you return to America, especially financial.

Planning your return should begin with a series of probing questions. Where will I be living? How long can I live with my parents or can my parents live with me? Will I be able to afford “necessary” expenses, food, cell phone, car, gas, etc on my own? Will I need to move to a new city, other than where my family is? What international organizations and businesses are located in my city and how can I leverage my Peace Corps service with these places? What value can I provide provide educational institutions? Can I teach, do research? While this list is by no means exhaustive, these are the kinds of questions that you should not be afraid to ask yourself. Even if some of the answers may be difficult to answer now, just asking will help you get the ball rolling.

У С П Е Х !

Volunteerism in support of people with disabilities



Smile or I take the grant away! CHEESE!

by Perry Teicher, Aktobe

The "Society for the Protection of Paralyzed Citizens of Aktobe" serves over 500 citizens registered as disabled in Aktobe through a wide-variety of programs and activities. These programs include large annual events, such as a New Year celebration with all of the disability organizations of Aktobe, a beauty pageant for paralyzed young women, and an art competition for local children, as well as regular events such as free legal aid, Kazakh lessons, a table tennis club, other sports activities, and political activism to ensure better conditions in the city and country for paralyzed citizens. The organization has a staff of four, including the director of the organization, Kurulai Baimenova, as well as a Peace Corps Volunteer. Currently, the organization receives its funding from the support of local businesses and the local government.

The organization's mission is to create an environment empowering paralyzed citizens to be an active part of the general community rather than living separately, only in the confines of their home, and that the general population embraces the disabled community as equal members. Accomplishing these goals requires more than just the support of members; it also requires the buy-in from the broader community. The foundation for this shift in mentality has already been built by the many years of the organization's work as well as the initial positive

shift in the legal framework, partially as a result of the organization's work.

I have helped the organization to achieve a number of tremendous results in promoting its mission, among which are: the receipt of an \$84,411 grant from the Japanese Embassy to establish a Wheelchair Factory, the development of the Volunteer Club with 100 local students help disabled children and adults, a the creation of a two-day festival for twenty-six disabled children and their parents with twenty-eight local volunteers from *Золотое Сердце* (Golden Heart), and a horse therapy program.

Volunteer club

On December 5, 2008 I assisted the "Society for the Protection of Paralyzed Citizens of Aktobe" (a public association) to create a Volunteer Club: "DAR" (*Доброта, Альтруизм, Радость* - Kindness, Altruism, Joy). The Club's activities are being funded by the Public Charity Foundation *Меценат*.

The club operates in Aktobe city, and its main goal is to involve students, young people with disabilities, family members of the disabled, elderly people and housewives in organizing public charity events to support paralyzed community members. In addition, the Club promotes the idea of volunteerism in the local community – raising awareness about the needs of people with disabilities and the necessity for their psychological rehabilitation and re-adaptation into society.

Currently, there are over 100 volunteers in the club. They are drawn to volunteerism for various reasons: desire to help the needy, opportunity to acquire new skills, be among interesting people and organize public events.

The club organizes various entertainment and sporting events with and for disabled people, helps disabled children study and develop skills, writes letters on behalf of the community members with disabilities, helps to clean their houses and runs errands, and much more. Before becoming active community workers, volunteers go through training to acquire knowledge and skills necessary for effective work.

Volunteerism in support of people with disabilities has never been practiced in Aktobe before. The Volunteer Club is unique and much needed. The club helps not only the disabled people but also its members – through collaborative work the members and beneficiaries get support and care, gain experience and valuable social skills, improve their self-esteem and become more responsible members of society.

У С П Е Х !

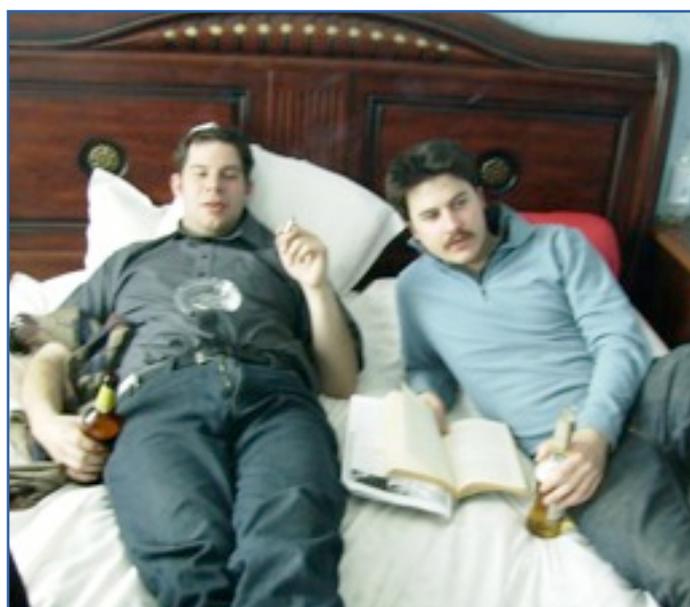
From Chaco sandals to babushka socks

by Daniel Mckenna Foster, Bobrovka

In 2007 – right around the time when I was ordering my discounted Chaco sandals in preparation for the Peace Corps – many people asked me, “Why are you doing it? Why don’t you stay here and lend your talents to electing the first black president?” And I told every one of them the same thing: The events of September 11th, 2001, affected me very personally. In the aftermath of this horrific tragedy I was immediately convinced that I would have to shelve my plans for a prestigious MBA/PhD program; there were more pressing problems elsewhere. As college drew to a close, the Peace Corps called to me, and I answered.

I live in a small, bucolic Russian village in the Eastern Oblast near the industrial city Ust-Kamenogorsk. At this point I feel very good about my work at site. Currently, I am coaching 10 FLEX candidates (four more than I did last year!) and their chances look really, really good. On the one day a week I do not work at my school, I go to the city and lead challenging discussions about things like democracy, abortion and gay marriage. Not a Sunday has gone by when at least one person has not come up to me after the talk and said to me: “Your presence here has really challenged my thinking and opened my *глаза*.” To answer your question, oh yeah, it feels good. My counterpart, though unfortunately not selected for the coveted “Best PC Counterpart Worldwide” award, was recently inducted into the Kazakh Academy of Arts and Letters. My village is really proud of her, and so am I (especially since I taught her how to read!).

Secondary projects? How about tertiary and quaternary? The “slow pace of life” is a limiting mindset. A lot of people do not see the nascent racial tension between Russians and Kazakhs, but I sure did. With my “Building Stronger Communities” open forum series, the gulf between these people has narrowed. Where once there was suspicion and wariness of new families moving into my



Ladies and gentlemen, we are here to change the world.

neighborhood, now Russian and Kazakh *деду* play together on my street. Even my adjacent neighbors, who had not spoken to each other in over ten years, have now started “going *зосту*” to each other!

Another exciting success story is my “*сухая бобровка*” project. With the help of the local *akimat*, I started a coalition that successfully lobbied all the *магазины* to stop selling alcohol before 5pm. Not only has absenteeism decreased, but employment has actually increased! You will understand the feeling I have every day the first time a random *бабушка* walks up to you with tears in her eyes and says simply, in her grateful, waver- ing voice, “*спасибо*.”

Finally, this summer we are at last going to break ground on our village women’s center, where otherwise underemployed women can come and meet and manufacture crafts and trinkets (the building will be entirely solar powered). Thanks to all the members of my church back home for help and support to send that PCPP sailing! They just cannot buy enough of these “*сделано в Казахстане*” (made in Kazakhstan) socks. This all may sound impressive, but do not worry. Everyone eventually reaches a point in their service when things really start to click. You will get there too. Good luck to everyone and keep up the hard work.

У С П Е Х !

Befriending my food



Look! I chopped it off especially for you.

by Katy Fitzpatrick, Kobda

Awright now, raise yer hands and raise ‘em high: who can beat my personal record of six sheep’s heads in three days? I thought not. I know for a fact there are even some of you city volunteers that ain’t even *seen* a sheep’s head, let alone become intimately acquainted with the ears, the eyes and the brains. And no, live ones attached to necks out the train window do not count.

The “lunch” my school prepared to welcome me during site visit should have tipped me off to the familiarity with which I would soon know all – and I mean *all* – parts of an animal I never really ate in America, except maybe at middle eastern restaurants and then it was young and tender and went by the succulent-sounding word “lamb” instead of the tougher, chewier mouthful that is “sheep.” After the giant platter of *бешбармак* topped with the sheep head had come and gone in the school *асхана*, my counterpart suggested I try the sausage-ish things on white circles of...something solid. I had a bite – not bad. “It is from the sheep, you know,” she said.

“What part of the sheep?” I asked. (Please note my failure to adhere to lesson number one of the cultural manual: never, never, never ask what the meat is.)

“It is the end of the sheep.”

I paused, and stared down at the half-eaten sausage-ish thing on white solid stuff.

“You mean the tail?”

“Yes.” My counterpart hesitated, searching for the perfect English equivalent. “The end.”

Suffice to say that I have now eaten everything, beginning to end, of God’s greatest gift to humanity, the humble, bug-eyed sheep. This accomplishment stems primarily from the fact that out here alone in Kobda, down a road that destroyed my regional manager’s car when she came for site visit, my host family’s social life is my social life. And their social life revolves around sheep’s heads: holidays, birthday parties, *зость*-ing for any random reason, and of course, “the festival of the slaughter” celebrated this year on December 8-10.

On the first day of *Курбан Айт*, when they said we were going to a neighbor’s house for “tea,” I made gigantic error number two from the cultural manual: I took “tea” literally. I did not expect, being accustomed to my Kazakh world of brown and white and gray, a near-luminescent rainbow of fruits and candies and juices and cakes and jellies and ten kinds of bread. I did not expect, after eating my fill, to be served a platter of *бешбармак* topped with the head of a sheep that had eaten its last breakfast a few hours before. I did not expect, after again eating my fill, for all the women to set the tea table for tea – again.

And I did not expect to repeat this elaborate procedure at two more houses before finally stumbling home to my bed where I collapsed into deep, sheep-head-induced



У С П Е Х !

slumber. “Lord have mercy,” I prayed, “this is only day one of *Курбан Аум*.”

On day two, as we sat over our morning tea, my host father announced that after breakfast he was going to kill one of our sheep for all the guests coming today. “How will you kill it?” I asked.

“With a knife,” he said, pulling a hand through the air across his throat.

“May I watch?”

“Yes. How do you kill sheep in America?”

“We don’t eat sheep in America.” Then through a series of disconnected Kazakh words and emphatic gestures I managed to communicate that in America we kill animals by shooting them between the eyes.

He laughed, and my host mother cracked a joke about how if he had a gun, he would miss the sheep and get her instead. I looked at the knives on the counter, the ones we use to slice bread and apples in the kitchen, and did not think they looked big enough to kill one of the critters we kept out back.

I need not have worried.

Not long after breakfast, I stood watching my host father, brothers, and an uncle do what they have done so many times before. I found it a sacred and beautiful thing to stand there in the chill of a winter morning and watch an animal give its life so that we might come together a few hours later with all our friends and family and affirm the ties that bind. I found the fingerprint of the animal’s blood on my forehead an apt symbol of the mystery of life and death. I found it all a solemn yet joyous celebration of the bounty of our world. I found it a perfect expression of gratitude for the condition of our existence.

A few hours later, nothing left but bones emptied of their marrow piled high in our kitchen, I washed dishes with one of my host aunts and mused at the bones hidden inside my own body, my own life so sustained by and – I can only hope – sustaining to others.

Suffice to say that by day three of *Курбан Аум* I had made friends with the sheep’s head when it joined us for “tea” at two more houses. We are certainly pals now. And if you would ever like to be introduced, just come on down “the worst road in Kazakhstan” for the feast of a lifetime.

Do you play table tennis?

by **Matthew Turner, Karatau**

During classes last week, the gym teacher came in and motioned that she wanted to speak to my counterpart and me. The gym teacher asked her to explain that this Saturday there was going to be a table tennis tournament and if I wanted to I could play. This was a proud moment for me because I was invited to a school event, a sign of being fully integrated into my community, but also because I understood everything she was saying. Without waiting for a translation I agreed to play.

Now I’ve played some Ping Pong in my youth and I was pretty good in my hay day, so I don’t mind saying that I was pretty sure I was going to bring home a trophy for the U.S.A. When Saturday came I was loose, determined, and wearing my Kazakhstan track suit like a champion. There were five tables set up and a lot of people there. This was a big event with students and teachers from all the schools near by, and I’m pretty sure some of the men were just table tennis enthusiasts who didn’t want to miss out on the tourney. The games were broken up by age and gender, first the girls, then the boys, then the women and finally the men. I was naturally in the last category even though I’m pretty sure I could have dominated the girl’s competition, which is so unfair.

Since the men’s competition was last I had some time to kill, but no one was certain how long. It was tough waiting for that long but when my time finally came I was still loose, determined and yes, still wearing my rockin’ Kazakhstan track suit. But none of that seemed to matter much since I was playing against a middle aged man who had clearly been playing since before I was born. It was embarrassing how fast and how hard I lost. You know even if you are competing with someone, if they are clearly weaker than you, you should still go a little easier on them just to show some gentlemanly courtesy, especially if that person is a guest in your country. It’s a sign of good sportsmanship and mercy. I guess when national pride is on the line, there is no quarter offered, none given. I lost two games in ten minutes and I lost my last game scoring no points at all. So I probably got ranked last in the entire tournament. I’m not sure because I certainly didn’t wait to find out if I got last place.

I wish I could say I was proud to compete and that I represented the hopes and dreams of Americans everywhere. But I did not... I lost, I lost bad. But sometimes cross-cultural exchange means getting your ass handed to you in table tennis, and isn’t that what Peace Corps is all about?

Ж И З Н Ь

Illuminatio, Manifestatio, Declaratio



Allow it for now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness . Matthew 3:15

by Sagar Gondalia, Shchuchinsk

In the Eastern Christian Churches, which still operate on the Julian Calendar, Epiphany is observed on January 19th. The holiday (*Крещение* in Russian) is celebrated as the shining forth and revelation of Jesus Christ as the Messiah as he was baptized in the rivers of the Jordan by John the Baptist. It is also one of only two instances in which all three aspects of the Holy Trinity manifested themselves together on Earth: God the Father speaking through the clouds, God the Son being baptized in the river, and God the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove. Although the holiday is predominantly celebrated with a large feast, various regions of the world have local customs to commemorate their second biggest holiday of the year. The following is an excerpt from a longer piece by Sagar Gondalia, covering *Крещение*, Volunteer seminars, and the inauguration of Barack Obama.

As our throng of Americans leaves the once brimming bus almost empty, we begin our walk to the river. Walking alongside the traffic jammed road and across well-worn paths through the snow, Joe's tape recorder is making a record of his incredulity. "This is Joe Deignan and on January 19th 2009. Where are we? What are we

about to do?! How the hell did this happen?"

Fifteen minutes into our "short walk to the river," more doubt begins to spread. We have been bundled up in all of our winter gear and the cold is already starting to seep in and sting fingertips and toes. As we crest the last hill and enter the parking lot it begins. From a few larger trucks a massive PA system has been constructed, projecting an eerie Russian Orthodox Chorus across the frozen river ahead. Approaching the end of the parking lot, the ground drops off and below us lays the bed of ice, water flowing meters beneath. To the right, and in the distance, sits a gray steel bridge. To the left, and only a stone's throw away, stands a fifteen-foot cross, constructed from cubes of ice the size of bibles fused together. People stand in line to kiss the feet of the icon hanging from the cross. Below us stand two tents and a mass of people clumping together like penguins. "For warmth?" I cannot help but ask myself. The first group of us leaves our cameras behind and makes a dash for the men's tent.

I was raised a Hindu, became an Atheist and was scared into donning a St. Christopher medallion, which I now remove along with the rest of my clothing. The river ice under my naked feet quickly transforms them from simply cold to entirely numb. With our group looking ready for the sunny beaches of Jamaica, we sprint out under the tent flaps and through the group of onlookers

Ж И З Н Ь

who, much more intelligently, realize this is not Jamaica and are wearing a great deal of warm winter clothing. I am now standing in a line. If that is not surprise enough, ahead of me lays an eight-foot long hole that has been cut into the river. Only about three feet wide, the hole looks like it could fit a coffin rather snugly. It is lined with wood and has an entry and exit platform with handrails. The entirety of the wood, however, is encased in *inches* of solid ice. Ahead, an overweight Russian in a Speedo crosses himself. Three fingers held together like he is gripping an invisible pen. Up, down, right left: Russian Orthodox. Once, twice, thrice he crosses and down the icy wooden steps he walks, now waist deep in river water. In the dead of winter, in the heart of Siberian Kazakhstan, he submerges his entire body. He erupts from the water gasping from air and again plunges into the depths. Gripping the iced-over wooden holds on either side, he surfaces again, this time sporting less enthusiasm and, by the looks of it, a vacant pair of lungs. After gasping for another frigid gulp he dives back under the surface a third time. This time his surge out of the water is angled at the exit and he stumbles over the steps and back onto the ice to waddle back to the tent.

Jesus Christ.

Thank God today is warmer than it has been lately. It is only about twenty below zero. I am now third in line as Phil, the first American, takes the dunk. Three crosses, three steps down into the river, three dips and Phil is off. Mike steps up to the plate. Three crosses. A slip and he splashes over the iced steps and into the water. At well over six feet, with a cleanly shaven head and a tattoo of a bison skull shaded in red, white and blue across his back, the water does not quite make it to his waste. No matter. Three dunks and Mike is on the other side. My heart is racing as I step up. One cross and I hear massive Michael let loose a squeak from the other side: “Здорово!” Healthy. Right. And at once my mind is completely clear. Three steps down and I dunk once. My

hands have locked tight onto the holds on either side. Under again and I can feel my hands losing strength. My feet are numb and I am not sure if they are slipping around underneath me. Thrice. Every step out of the water and into the freezing air is excruciating. The only thoughts racing through my mind are attempts to blaspheme at how cold it is. All that I can manage is a whimper. “That’s cold.” My jaw has locked up and my face does not seem to be working. I am not looking for my friends or looking back to see how Joe is doing behind me. Tunnel vision. Straight for the tent. Every step my feet seem to be sticking to the ground. I am confused. Disoriented. Did I step in gum?

Into the tent, with Mike and Phil, and the adrenaline hits. Hard. The screams of pure elation erupt and as my already freezing bathing suit hits the ground I realize my feet have started to freeze to the ice. I stand on a piece of my towel and start drying off as fast as I can. The clothes come on fast. The only breaks between articles of clothing are to exchange high fives. The squeaks and whimpers are gone, replaced with hyper masculine cheers as warmth returns to most of my body, now clad in several layers of socks, long underwear, pants, gloves, a scarf, a hat, a down coat and a St. Christopher medallion. I still cannot feel my feet.

Futilely stomping feet back to warmth, we tread out of the tent to watch our fellow comrades dunk. Eight very cold volunteers later, I am severely regretting my decision to go first. The tufts of one volunteer’s hair, sticking out from under his hat, have frozen solid. Last to go are our three women. Strolling out of their tent in two pieces that have no business being anywhere near this frigid part of the world, they manage their dunks and run with Jesus on their heels into their tent. Thirty minutes later, we have warm *шаушук* and are on a bus heading back towards the city. I have not felt my toes in hours.

The banya tonight is going to be epic.



SOUTH KAZAKHSTAN OBLAST PROUDLY PRESENTS

NAURYZ 2009

Schedule of Events:

March 21 Daytime (Choose option A or B.)

A) *Turkestan and Otrar. You can visit holy Turkistan for camel spotting, and a tour of the mausoleum of Ahmed Yasavi, which is a holy site of pilgrimage for Muslims. It has the largest dome of any mausoleum in Central Asia and is probably the single most impressive architectural site in Kazakhstan.*

Price: Approx. 2700 tenge per person.

B) *Shymkent (cheaper and no travelling).*

We'll provide you with a map and you're free to roam to do your own thing.

March 21 Evening

After the day activities, we'll all reconvene in Shymkent for a night of dancing

March 22 (All day): Nauryz!

Nauryz offers an eclectic mish mash of cultural events such as horse games, shashleek/pots of plov, dancing, beer and vodka drinking, national costumes and warm weather, plus a full day of



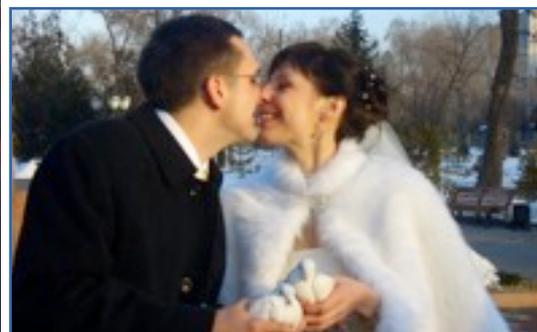
local horse events consisting of bareback horse racing, wrestling on horse back, girl chasing/man whipping (upon horseback), feats of dexterity, and grown men fighting over a headless goat carcass.

Apartment costs per night will be emailed to all who RSPVed once we find out the costs. Last year was around 400-500 per night, but due to inflation, prices are likely to have changed.

**Send RSVP's to nauryz2009@gmail.com
And don't forget to CC your RMs as well!**

Ж И З Н Ь

Влюбился, как мыш в короб ввалился



Statistically speaking, more than five Kaz 20s will have married before COS. Boys, camels are an acceptable form of dowry. It is never too early to get something like that squared away.

by Michael Quinn, Shchuchinsk

What counts in making a happy marriage is not so much how compatible you are, but how you deal with incompatibility.

- Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy

Most Russians consider a wedding without a fight a success, but Benjamin Chapman (Kaz 7, Kostinay) uses a different rubric. True enough, there were not any fights during his wedding to Natasha - an accountant Ben met while helping a local business start a microfinance project, but Ben is proud of something a little more uplifting. As he recently explained, "those that came single did not leave single."

This probably had something to do with the amount of vodka consumed. As usual in the former Soviet Union, the banquet hall provided all of the food for the reception, even the glasses, but alcohol was the wedding party's responsibility. This had hidden benefits: anything not finished at the wedding could be taken home afterwards and drunk the next day. Plus, Ben, Natasha and the rest of the wedding party knew beforehand exactly how much would be drunk during the reception.

While many of the details of Ben's wedding could be left to underlings, Ben's future *мечть* thought it was urgent that he attended to the alcohol himself. Scanning the guest list, he gave some calculations, "we have seventy

guests. Well, OK. A bottle per person, we'll get seventy bottles."

Staggered by the amount, Ben was uncertain how to respond. "Wait," his future father continued, "is that not enough? Because we can get more." Being sure to cover all the bases, Ben's *мечть* thought it would be best to "up the ante on the wine," just in case some of Ben's volunteer friends were not interested in vodka. "But we'll just stick with the seventy bottles. How does that sound?"

Ben never imagined that seventy bottles would run short. But sure enough, when the pandemonium of the wedding finally died and the last of the couples, old and new, snuck and stumbled their way home, Ben's *мечть's* calculations were not far off. "We had like two dozen bottles of wine left over, and only two bottles of vodka left." A better Russian blessing could not have been bestowed upon the new couple.

Since becoming the deputy regional director for Peace Corps' Europe, Mediterranean, and Asia Region, and therefore an active participant in Peace Corps Stagings, Ben's experience as a volunteer is often paraded as a paragon for the soon to be departing trainees. True enough, it is difficult to find ways that Ben's service was not successful: he diligently served his two years, clearly became integrated into his community, and continues to have a vested interest in Kazakhstan. But as Ben himself often points out, the course his service took was far from

Ж И З Н Ь

unique. In spite of the tangible language gap, in spite of the dramatic differences in culture, and in spite of the mountain of problems inherent in moving from one continent to another, nearly 10 percent of PCVs fall in love and marry during their service. For these volunteers, Kazakhstan is not some stepping stone or break from the "real world," but the beginning of a journey, one that tests the depth of personal character, the limits of faith, and the strength of the binds of true love.

Unexpected beginnings

Few volunteers begin their service expecting to undergo any life altering changes during their time abroad, let alone one as significant marriage. Many get to Staging having just broken off a relationship or made the difficult decision to try and stay together while living half a world apart. Possessing almost no familiarity with the culture of the host country, let alone a modicum of language skills, dating other PCVs often seems to be the only serious possibility for romance.

Matt Turner (Kaz 18, Karatau) was more concerned with simply making it to the end. "I joined the Peace Corps not knowing if I could survive two years outside the US," he remarked. Certainly the challenges of service seemed great, and Matt confessed that he may not have been the exact Peace Corps "type." Unpretentiously, Matt described himself as "a pretty laid back guy who loves his cartoons and videogames."

Matt's life in Kazakhstan was typical for most PCVs. While living in Karatau, a former factory town outside of Taraz that has been all but abandoned since independence, Matt spent most of his time like any other PCV: coping with the grind of work, organizing summer camps, dreaming of America, and running English clubs. That is, of course, until Marina stumbled into his life two years ago.

"She came to my English club one day," Matt said, "[and] we hit it off immediately." Sooner than expected, they were another Kazakhstani couple, cooking together, taking long walks, and annoying others with their "cheesy romance novel love." For Matt, dating could not have

been simpler. "We both just really enjoyed spending time together," he explained, "and were happy as long as we could do that."

Greg Yandel (Kaz 19, Taldykorgan) also owes his English club for introducing him to his wife Tanya. While Greg spends most of his time at site assisting a disabled services organization and "plugging in flash drives for [his] coworkers who can't find the USB ports," last year he, along with several site-mates, had the opportunity to visit a private school to organize an English club. Tanya, a teacher at the school, was assigned the honorable duty of being a liaison to the club, i.e. forcing the students to attend and serving the Americans' every beck and call.

They hit it off. English clubs led to flirting, which led to ice-skating, which clearly hinted at something more.

With Valentine's Day soon approaching, Greg decided on something a little audacious. "I asked her out in front of the English Club," Greg said with relish. With a six-stanza limerick in hand, a garden of butterflies in his stomach, and the pressure of the fast approaching holiday at his back, Greg went for broke. Lucky enough, she accepted. One year later, no doubt with the memory of that English Club still in mind, they married.

Peace Corps' biggest open secret is that romance between

host country nationals and PCVs are an inherent part of the service. In fact, every volunteer interviewed for this piece met their partner through work. While Peace Corps' abstract, bureaucratic language speaks of a PCV's "integration," "skill exchange," or "visibility in the community," most of the work of a PCV is about establishing and maintaining personal bonds: at work, at home and in the community at large. Often, these relationships, professional or not, serve a purpose much different than initial appearances. Intentionally or not, strong connections with counterparts certainly improve their language and professional skills as well. Inevitably, this process and the skills it requires eventually carries over into romantic life.

The State Department may joke that "the best way to learn a language is in bed," but old adage holds more than a shred of truth. A volunteer that establishes signifi-



Ж И З Н Ь

cant relationships during service is invariably more successful than one who does not. A volunteer that understands the culture, is visible in their community and speaks the language well is far more likely to get married in country, just as a volunteer who decides to get married almost always understands local culture better, is more visible in the community and has a stronger grasp of the language. More often than not, integration and romance go hand in hand.

С утра до утра

Rayna Farnsworth (Kaz 18, Taraz) used one word to describe her wedding to Roma Bronnikov: fabulous. It is hard to disagree. Few things compare to a Kazakhstani wedding. Lasting several days, weddings in Kazakhstan are raucous extravaganzas, covering entire cities, devouring mountains of food and guzzling rivers of booze.

Most receptions last until dawn, only to start up again once everyone finally rouses from their collective stupor. Even cleaning up afterwards held a special pleasure for Rayna, as her family used the opportunity to welcome her as the new *келін*.

Officially, the wedding begins the morning of the civil ceremony. Before taking the bride to ЗАГС (*запись актов гражданского состояния*) the groom must pay a ransom for the bride (*выкуп невесты*). Families handle the ransom in different ways: through challenges, riddles, obscure questions, jokes or cold, hard cash. Even after the ransom has been paid, it is possible for the bride to be kidnapped again, at any time during the wedding. This is known as the *кража невесты* and requires the groom to go through the ransom process again.

The ЗАГС ceremony (*бракосочетание*) is a mostly tame affair, and resembles its western counterpart. The couple is interviewed by a ЗАГС official and exchanges vows. The ceremony culminates in the signing of the registry, which is greeted with a champagne toast and Mendelssohn's ubiquitous "Wedding March."

Afterwards comes the *прогулка*, i.e. the horn-blasting, traffic-stopping tour of the city. Ostensibly a way for the newlyweds to pay their respects to their forefathers, most couples use the *прогулка* to get as many wedding photos in as many locations as possible. It is not rare to see several cameramen and videographers indecorously crowd around the couple while they solemnly pause beneath memorials for the Great Patriotic War.



From then on, the wedding is nothing but a party. A *тамада* runs the whole show, encouraging the guests to dance, leading each group through the mandatory toasts, and organizing different games. At any time during the celebration, the audience can begin the chant of "ГОРКО, ГОРКО," (bitter) which the happy couple must sweeten with a kiss. The first toast always ends with the smashing of glasses. Russians claim that the number of shards equals the numbers of happy years the couple will have.

Bread and salt, the traditional Russian symbol of greeting, also plays a crucial role in the wedding. While usually a measure of an individual's hospitality, giving rise to the colloquialism *хлебосольство*, the wedding presentation of bread and salt is also an opportunity to size up the couple. It is said that whoever takes the larger bite of bread will be the more dominant partner.

The wedding's second day is less formally structured. Sue Mikhin (Kaz 17, Kokshetau) had a "mock *баня*." Unfortunately for Sue, the "mock" part was lost in translation. "I had told all the PCVs to bring *баня* stuff," she mentioned. "When my in-laws found out, they made sure to have a good laugh about it." The second day is when most couples celebrate the religious aspect of the wedding as well. Called the *венчание*, the Orthodox ceremony gets the name from the crowning of the couple and the following procession, which leads them around the church three times.



Ж И З Н Ь

By the end of it all, the newlyweds are exhausted. They have endured months of planning, negotiations with a stream of unscrupulous officials, and an emotionally and physically draining ceremony. As Ben recollected, "I've never kissed Natasha so much in my life, still to this day. It was absurd." When the storm of celebration finally clears, not much is left to do except pack up the Volga and roll off into the sunset.

Coming home

The decision to get married is one of the most important of any person's life, but the finite nature of Peace Corps service definitely forces volunteers to act. Sue may have decided to marry Yura before she was entirely certain, but it was a not a decision she regrets. As she explained, "I was in love. I wasn't sure I was ready to get married, but I knew I couldn't do long distance, and I didn't feel I could leave Yura."

Unfortunately, the one group of people not prepared for the decision was her family. "It was a big shock to hear that I moved away and was now getting married," she said, and "they were not able to come for the wedding." Initial resistance from the family is common for most volunteers getting married in Kazakhstan, but rarely does it persist. True, it usually takes some time. For Sue's family, the first step was recognizing that she was, in fact, married. "My parents did not really believe it had happened," she observed. "After Yura came home, they saw what a great guy he was, and it was suddenly real to them. From that point forward, they realized it was a reality, and they love him now."

The challenges of culture shock are real and arduous for both partners, but especially for the spouse who decides to immigrate. A PCV returning to America goes home; their spouse essentially leaves theirs behind. No doubt, the first few weeks in America are euphoric, but eventually the cycle of cultural adaptation kicks in, bringing with it both disenchantment and frustration. An immigrating spouse has nothing like the support available to PCVs. Loneliness can be a serious problem, especially when their American spouse is suffering from many of the same problems. Definitely in the beginning but most likely for the rest of their lives, newlywed volunteers can expect a significant amount of their budget dedicated to international phone calls.

The language gap is real, even for those couples who both speak Russian, English, or both fluently. Misunderstandings can be frequent. While it will always be an issue, Greg likes to look at how differences in language force him to be a better communicator. As Greg explains, "in a lot of relationships, you assume a communication problem is inherent to a person, rather than to a situation, a mood, or something else. This drives people apart be-

cause they think that they are not compatible or bad communicators, when really the difficulty and more to do with modes of communication, moods or time." Greg and Tanya deal with misunderstanding by always examining the situation first, avoiding blame and personalization. They also address the language gap like any other communication issue, focusing on the fundamentals: using eye contact, repetition, examples, patience, and of course, love.

Most importantly, Ben emphasizes that their only road to success is through cross-cultural understanding. No PCV should expect their spouse to abandon Kazakhstan, and they should do everything in their power to build a home that is both American and Central Asian. Those weird habits and superstitions, which are so easy to mock and dismiss while living abroad, are not going anywhere. To this day, Ben keeps the windows closed, takes off his shoes at the front door, and does not dare whistle indoors. Every newlywed PCV should anticipate their spouse taking frequent trips to and from Kazakhstan as well, whether or not they will be able to accompany them. As Ben assertively puts it, "send them back. That is the key to a successful relationship. They need to recharge their batteries. They need to do the *no-русский* thing. This is what it means to be Russian. They have to go back to their homeland. And if they don't, it's a recipe for disaster."

It takes an exceptional person to travel halfway around the world, leaving everything familiar behind, all for the sake of love. After marrying Ben in Kazakhstan, Natasha Nesterenko immigrated to the United States in 2001. She spoke almost no English, learning the language, as her husband puts it, "the hard way." While she was a successful businesswoman in Kazakhstan, even owning her own business before leaving with Ben, the only job she could find in America was at a grocery store. Times were hard, and no doubt she questioned why she came to America in the first place.

Over the last eight years, through good times and bad, in sickness and in health, Natasha stuck it out with Ben, flourishing in spite of the obvious challenges. She is now a Project Manager for the State Department's Housing and Urban Development program, and is currently in the process of becoming a naturalized citizen. "Her job has nothing to do with the former Soviet Union; it, doesn't use Russian, not one iota; and she speaks English fluently," Ben remarked with pride. She and Ben have become, in so many ways, a typical American couple. They have two sons - Kiril and Elijah Benjaminovich, the suburban house and even the picket fence. In every way, her story is the epitome of the American dream, one that is all the more extraordinary due to its humble Kazakhstani beginning.

Ж И З Н Ь

Almaty amazes American audiences on the *Race*

By Tim Suchsland, Yavlenka

Our very own Almaty has joined the hallowed ranks of the few cities featured on the Emmy-Award-winning reality show *The Amazing Race*. Episode 8 of the show's 13th season, "I'm Like an Angry Cow," brought the five remaining two-man teams of the *Race*'s thirteenth season to Almaty. Airing on CBS in November 2008 to an American audience of vast proportions, the episode highlighted the great nation of our Peace Corps service in a way PCVs never could have accomplished. Amazing sheep heads, *Камаз* trucks, Mongol warriors, green bazaars, strange dairy products and crazy Kazakhstani cows all made their amazing première to amazed Americans on this amazing episode.

Upon learning of their Kazakhstani destination, most of the contestants made some sort of hackneyed reference to everyone's favorite Kazakh journalist Borat. Making their way from Delhi, India via Moscow, Frankfurt and Dubai, the contestants had few problems arriving at the Almaty International Airport. Each team hired a taxi driver to make their way to the *Race*'s "Roadblock," a poultry farm on the outskirts of the city.

While three of the teams geared up to search for golden eggs among the thousands of chickens, the leading teams – siblings Nick and Star and dating couple Terence and Sarah – were allured by the chance to secure an early win of this leg of the *Race* by taking advantage of the all-important "Fast Forward." The teams still remaining at the "Roadblock" easily found their golden eggs and received the next clue. The clue told the teams to hop on a giant *Камаз* truck and make their way to Kok Tobe, the TV-tower-topped hill looming over the city.

Meanwhile, the "Fast Forward" group arrived at the restaurant Alasha. The contestants had to eat the meat dish *курыдак* – sheep intestines and heads included. For most PCVs this task would have been no trouble; however, for the racers this chore was excruciatingly painful. The culturally insensitive Americans gagged and choked down the mutton feast before them. Terence, an ardent vegetarian, struggled to even get the tenderest piece of meat into his stomach and eventually forfeited. With the

competition of Terence and Sarah out of the way, Nick and Star easily finished their banquet.

As the monumental *курыдак* battle unfolded at the restaurant, the battle to find Kok Tobe was developing on the traffic-jammed roads of Almaty. The mom and son team effortlessly navigated the streets of city, and were the first team to find it. There, the duo encountered eagle-bearing Mongol warriors as they received their next clue, the mystifying "Detour." Players were given two options: "Play Like Mad" or "Act Like Fools."

The husband and wife team arrived to Kok Tobe in their *Камаз* truck, while the frat brothers were hopelessly lost. The frat boys went in circles as they called the Kazakhstanis "zombies" and "horrible people" for not catering to their overbearing, English-speaking demands. Of their translation woes, Dan later stated, "(Almaty) was definitely one of the toughest cities to communicate in, because there weren't a lot of English speakers there."

Having won the "Fast Forward" challenge, Nick and Star were the first team to be greeted by a jolly, bearded Kazakh man at the "Pit Stop," winning this leg of the *Race*.

The remaining teams eventually arrived at the children's theater, "acted like fools" in cow costumes, drank some milk and circled a dozen times around Silk Way looking for the *Зеленый Базар*. As the integrity of some teams buckled under the pressure off the *Race*, others stepped up to race with a maddening cow-like fervor. A repentant, cow-clad Terence expressed this zeal best when he heroically stated, "I'm like an angry cow."

Although the episode proved to be an overall success in regards to entertainment value, a few things could have been improved to make the content of the show better. The show did some disservice to Almaty and Kazakhstan by not highlighting some of its more beautiful and magnificent monuments and places it has to offer. While Kazakhstanis were further pigeonholed into Borat-like stereotypes by the editors of the show, the American racers reinforced negative stereotypes often bestowed on American travelers. Stereotypes of the ignorant and rude American abounded in this episode. The contestants were crass toward the locals, undereducated about Kazakhstan and its customs and vulgar in their behavior and comments. But maybe that is what sells best in Hollywood.

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Humor in Kazakhstan: laugh or cry



She said it was HARD boiled!

by Adam Kesher

This post is part of *Neweurasia's* survey of humor in Central Asia. The complete series can be found at: <http://www.neweurasia.net/2007/09/24/cross-blog-survey-humour-in-central-asia/>

The humor here is rooted deep in the centuries when Kazakhs were nomads. Despite a rather tragic history, Kazakh folklore is stuffed with easy-going characters playfully coming out of troubles with smile on a face, such as Aldar Kose, Zhirenshe and Yer-Tostik. The 20th century was even more dramatic – famine, repressions, war, nuclear tests... No fun, of course. But if people endure serious challenges, their sense of humor should not disappear. It just gets reshaped.

Nomadic Experience

Historians say that humor and satire were a big deal in Kazakhstan's ancient times. Since the nomads spend most of their time moving from one pasture to another,

almost the only places they could get together and practice their wits were different kinds of celebrations – in the first instance, certainly, weddings – and at the trade-fairs where they bargained the products of their year-round roaming with the cattle

The so-called *ku's* (“sly guy” in Kazakh) were the folk comics-jokers, who amused the people at the festivities. Their arsenal included jokes, pranks, humorous songs and sketches. For example, at the nuptial *betashar* ceremony (when the bride's face is about to be unveiled), a *ku* presented the young lady's new family (usually very big in Kazakhstan) by jokingly parodying their habits, and “extorting” gifts for the bride from them.

Besides, the *akyns* and *zhyraus* (bards, who sang lengthy edifying, moralizing or satirical songs accompanying themselves with a *dombra*, a two-strings musical instrument) performed regularly at the *aitys'* (competitions of bards from different parts of the country), which were attended by the aristocracy, including khans. The most brave and civilly conscious of the *akyns* were outspoken enough to satirize social and political issues.

Today both of these arts are practically forgotten.

Since the times of great humanist Abai, Kazakhs speak – bitterly or jokingly – about their “nomadic” vices as a lust for easy life, like in this funny story. “A Russian, a Ukrainian and a Kazakh found themselves on uninhabited island. One year later, a Russian builds a house and a bath-house. A Ukrainian sets up a farm and a spirits distillery. A Kazakh was enjoying idleness, but when he saw the neighbors' success, he came to them and declared that since now he will serve as their tax officer”.

Language Tricks

A punning humor is widespread among the people of Kazakhstan, provoking smiles from almost every repre-



LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

sentative of the multi-ethnic society. Several years ago, one of the most entertaining jokes was to find Kazakh roots in foreign words, mainly in geography. They usually started with an intro: “When Kazakhs were great seamen”. For example, two brothers Parakbai and Orakbai discovered Paraguay and Uruguay. *Argyns* (a large Kazakh clan of tribes) gave the name to Argentina. And the equator was named so because in the middle of ocean two warriors (eki batyrs) met in a deadly combat.

The most elegant joke, however, lies apart of geography. Jesters claim that karaoke, a Japanese invention, is based on two purely Kazakh words, which perfectly describe its principle: kara and oku, meaning “watch” and “read” respectively.

Laughing at oneself

“The best jokes that Kazakhs do are about themselves”, says Maria, a PR-expert. Indeed, it is true. For instance, “it has been long time that the Kazakhstani runners with balls are struggling for the right to call themselves footballers”. A couple of years ago, one of the most popular e-humor disseminated through email were the lists of characteristics.

The whole country laughed at a resident of mountainous Almaty abroad (“you will know where is “up” and where is “down”, even in the flattest city on Earth”), an Almatian in Moscow (“you think there are too few Uighurs and Koreans here”), a foreigner in Atyrau (“now you know for sure that mosquitoes are not insects, but birds”), a Shymkent man in Astana (“you are convinced that the most beautiful girls live everywhere”).

Olga, a journalist and editor, tells a joke she saw at a local standup show: “A man stands on the stage in a robe, which symbolizes a map of Kazakhstan. Other guys ask him: Hey, what’s that wet spot? – Oh, it’s Aral (a huge salty lake that has dried down in an extreme ecocatastrophe), nevermind, it will dry out soon. – And what’s this gaudy patch about? – It’s Astana. Earlier it was a complete hole!”

The two cities – Astana and Almaty – are, perhaps, the most magnetic topics for jesters. Astana residents are known for creative nicknames they give to new buildings and sightseeing venues – a huge apartment house on the riverside is called “Titanic”, the monumental Baiterek tower – a “lollipop”, the giant ministerial skyscraper – a

“cigarette lighter” (ironically, last year there was a fire there), and so on.

Almaty, a regional megapolis, is more ridiculed as a city where the wealthiest men of Central Asia live. Most of the people asked to tell a joke about Almaty go on with this one: “A drunk Almatian takes taxi in Paris and asks to take him to Samal, a luxury downtown area in Almaty. The cabman says he has no idea where it is. The Kazakh says he’ll pay \$5,000, and the driver immediately specifies: “Should I better drive along Lenin Ave. or Furmanov Str.?”

“Show-biz” humor

While the Russian television – which has top rating among the viewers in Kazakhstan – features numerous shows of humor, including Soviet-style concerts, westernized standup shows and TV-series (many of them are adapted versions of the American ones), there are only few of them in Kazakhstan. And those existing are not too amusing for the public.

“Good jokes don’t reach the viewer. I have a feeling that humor is censored”, says Olga. Maria agrees: “I don’t watch those shows on our TV channels. Their jokes are exclusively banal”. The Yellow, Black & White Standup Show, a copy of mega-popular Russia’s Comedy Club, whose authors have become millionaires, according to “Forbes Magazine”, did not appear to be a good adaptation on the Kazakh land.

“As a rule, it leaves much to be desired. Usually, their humor is trivially “below the belt” with the excessive use of foul language, which, in their opinion, should be funny in itself, if pronounced from the scene”, comments Aizhan, disappointed after the show.

Probably, this is why the most ambitious Kazakh humor activists aspire to come to the Russian show-business. KVN is a popular competition survived from the Soviet times, in which student teams from various universities exercise their wits, has now transformed in a glossy TV show with the teams having wealthy sponsors and professional script-writers. The Kazakh team “Astana” performs rather well there recently.

Dauren, an oil sector professional and amateur writer of satire stories, says there is no real humor industry in Kazakhstan, because the market is small, but there are many talents in the country, and – among them – especially gifted people. Probably, one of the brightest of

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

them is “Zhantik”, Zhantemir Baimukhamedov – a musician, a prankster and an entertainer. He gives live shows with his band (gigs are booked several months ahead), hilariously re-scores blockbuster movies with Kazakh specificity, and even plans to shoot a “revenge” movie called “Borat’s Brother”.

“My live shows are usually an improvisation. I have plenty of jokes; they are new and different all the time. I never repeat. I am brand new every single time. My shows usually go very easily and merrily – as we call them, “Perky contests and ardent fun with Jantik”. I believe that if an entertainer tells anecdotes from the stage, that’s a bad entertainment he does. It is a sign that the guy has nothing to say”, says Zhantik in a brief interview.

Asked why the Kazakhs joke so much about things that are not actually funny – the Aral Sea, corruption or language degradation – Dauren opines that it’s a kind of protection mechanism: “The political inferiority complex of our people gets sublimated into irony, sarcasm and black humor about the reality they live in”.

Basic net slang (same for Russian and Kazakh)

Reductions:	
ака, ака	- Also Known As
але	- Are you there?
бай, сию	- Bye, See you later
З.Ы., ЗЮБИЮ	- postscriptum (without switching to English)
имхо, imho	- In My Humble Opinion
К\$	- Kilobucks, \$1,000
лол, lol	- Lough Out Loud
ЛС, ли´чка	- private message
сабж, субж	- subject
10x	- Thanks
хи, хай	- Hi, Hello
хз, х.з.	- I don't know

English-Russian compilation	
броди´лка	browser
инфа´ (feminine)	information
комп	computer
ма´ма, ма´мка	motherboard (main board)
мы´ло	mail (box)
месса´га	message
оффтопик	off topic
Woman names:	
а´ська, Ася, Asya, As'ka	- ICQ number or program MirabilisICQ
и´рка, Irka	- chat IRC
кла´ва, Klava (from Russian «клавиату´ра»)	- keyboard

A RPCV’s impression

by Susan Wunderink

A lot of Kazakh humor is short, oblique comments or questions. A woman got on the bus and the driver asked her for her fare, she said to him, “I got on at the hospital stop. Do you expect me to have any money?”

Hands-down, one of the most popular shows on TV is “Tamasha,” which is a bit Lawrence Welk-ish. The sketches are often about cuckolded and alcoholic husbands. There was one the other day, where one man was trying to convince his friend that everyone was Kazakh. He said that an Apache was a Kazakh whose grandmother had given him tea that was too hot. So he waved his hand in front of his mouth and went “awooo wooo wooo wooo.”

He said that the Beatles were Kazakh and played “yesterday” on the dombra, and used words that sounded like the English “yestidim . . .” (I heard . . .) But, in my opinion, Tamasha is not nearly as funny as my students. What they say in English is usually blunt humor, like the girl who always uses flying saucers in her homework sentences. But they can say things in Kazakh that make the other students roar.

DOWN HOME COOKING



We all know how beneficial it can be to have a nice home cooked meal. Nothing helps defeat the coldest days of winter like something hot off the stove. It is with this in mind that we at The Vesti would like volunteers to submit their favorite and most innovative recipes. Share your culinary skills and special ingredients. Do you you're your own unique twist on traditional Kazakh recipes? What do you cook and how can we cook it too? So we don't repeat ourselves please limit your submissions to recipes not found in the PCV cookbook.

All recipes can be submitted to pcvesti.kz@gmail.com.

Roasted Red Pepper Hummus

by *Lindsey Dyan Callaway, Taldykorgan*

1/2 bag black-eyed peas
 2 large garlic cloves
 2/3 cup tahini
 1/2 cup lemon juice
 1 roasted red pepper,
 Salt & black pepper to taste

Drain chick peas and save liquid.

Place all ingredients in a blender (or mash with fork) until smooth.

If it's too thick, add some of the reserved liquid.

Either way, the process starts the same. If you have a gas cooktop or other open flame, you can place the pepper right over the flame. Hold it with tongs or just rest it on the burner grate. If you cook with electricity, put it on a baking sheet under the broiler. Turn the pepper frequently. You want to blacken the skin all over, but you don't want to char the flesh.

Once it is black, put it in a bag and close it, or cover it with a kitchen towel for a few minutes. Then rub off the blackened skin, and core, cut, and seed the pepper, if you like.

“Taldykorgan” Indian Dahl

by *Lindsey Dyan Callaway, Taldykorgan*

1 cup yellow split peas, uncooked
 2 cups water or vegetable broth
 1 tsp turmeric
 1/4 tsp red peppers
 1/2 tsp salt
 1 tbsps butter
 1 onion, diced
 1 1/2 tsp cumin
 dash pepper, to taste

In a large pot, place the peas and water or vegetable broth, and bring to a slow simmer. Add the turmeric, cayenne and salt, and cover. Allow to cook for at least 20 minutes, stirring occasionally.

In a large skillet or frying pan, heat the onion, cumin in the margarine. Cook for 4 to 6 minutes, until onion is soft. Add the onion and spices to the split peas, and allow to simmer for at least 5 more minutes.

Add a dash of pepper and more salt, if desired, and serve hot with rice or alone in a soup bowl.

This recipe is vegan.

П о с л е д н ы е С л о в а

While Vesti-sponsored communication is usually a one-way street (from our keyboards straight into your brains), we like to think that is just because none of the streets have yellow lane lines down the middle. Or pavement. At the very least, we like to pretend we talk to each from time to time. This month, Michael Quinn asked one of our beloved PCMOs, Dr. Victor Britcov, a few questions about his life away from the office.

Dr. Victor, what was life in Moldova like when you were growing up?

My childhood was very safe and protected socially. I lived in a village. Both of my parents were school teachers at the local school. The villagers worked at the collective farm. Everybody had all essentials for a decent life. The education was free of charge for all children and the quality of the education was good. During the school break we (the school students) worked at the farm, helping to harvest grapes, vegetables, and we enjoyed very much working at the fields. The best students of the school were always awarded with the possibility to travel all around the USSR (free of charge). Health care was free for all citizens, and the cost of the travel very affordable.

What made you decide to become a doctor?

I think because I was one of the best students at the school. I graduated from the high school with the best grades and was awarded a gold medal. Therefore, in my mind, it was important to choose the most difficult path, which was to try being admitted to medical school. The exams and requirements for the admission were very challenging.

How did you become a doctor for the Peace Corps?

Being a military physician (LTC, Internal medicine specialist) in Moldovan Army (after the collapse of USSR), I was sent to the US Defense Language Institute in San-Antonio, Texas to learn English. After that I went through medical observer courses in Madigan Army Medical Center in Tacoma, Washington.

Being there I learned about the Peace Corps. When I got back to Moldova from the US, I was asked by PC Moldova to work part time for the Medical Unit. One year after that, I got a proposal to start working as a permanent Moldova Peace Corps Medical Officer.



It's obvious to the volunteers that you really enjoy your job. Why do you like working with Peace Corps? What are your favorite parts of your work?

I like learning a lot. I always mention during my PST presentations that I am learning from PCVs, who are young, middle aged, or adults, from different backgrounds and with different experience and characters.

I am proud that so far, the majority of Volunteers are satisfied with my service. I also appreciate very much the Ideals of the Peace Corps. They are similar to the ideals I learned when I was young. I think what you are doing is extremely important for your country and for each and every PCV.

This is why I feel that I am proud and honored helping you making your mission meaningful and successful.

I like clinical work the most. Fortunately for the Volunteers, the majority of them are healthy, but I periodically miss the clinical part of my job.

However, I do not regret a lot, because in the Peace Corps I learned more about management of the US Health Unit, US medical guidelines, about the communication with the staff members and Volunteers, Mental Health issues and support.

How is working in Kazakhstan different from different places that you've worked?

П о с л е д н ы е С л о в а

Over different lengths of time, I have worked with the Peace Corps in Moldova, Russia, Bangladesh, Kyrgyz Republic, Madagascar and Kazakhstan.

First of all the difference depends on the dimension of the country, the weather, the possibilities to travel, since those are the most important indicators for PCMO who must organize the Emergency Medical response for the Volunteers. The country also makes us design a policy of having or not having a lot of contacts with the local health providers. It also influences the Site Visit Policy.

Besides that, on a personal level, some of the countries are more “colorful” and more “enjoyable” to leave and work.

The same applies for the Volunteers. The living conditions are harder in some of the countries; more sun and warm weather makes PCVs’ life more stable.

Where do you think you and your wife will travel to next, after you finish working with the Peace Corps?

If my contract with the PC is finished I will try finding another job in order to support my family. If no luck, I will go back to Moldova, the place I was born and where my old mother is still living. I still have my own apartment there. If I have a chance to travel, I will do so, visiting my children.

Are you aching to hear more from Ekaterina? Wondering where John bought his grill? Need English lessons from Natalya? Need to publicly proclaim your undying love for Ufilmalik? Submit your questions for any PC staff members to pcvesti.kz@gmail.com



The Vesti was edited in a small room located in the “Pearl of Kazakhstan.” It required the help of an unmentionable amount of spaghetti, 1000s of complaints about a financial crisis, the power of brown and its face-melting curry, several hours on Skype, 105 volunteers, 3 editors and John F. Kennedy.

Thanks to all those who contributed, and to the rest of you who make living in the steppe just a little bit warmer for everyone around you.

