



Disco dancing: inferno of love or inferno of pain? <i>Greg Yandl investigates</i> Page 10	Hungry but happy... <i>Mike Mesquita offers some of the less tangible rewards of teaching</i> Page 16	Phil, I'm done with you. <i>You know what you did.</i> Spring break special starts page 19	The sexiest photo ever <i>Spanish tortillas. Dante Sacomani. No shirt!</i> Page 33
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**It's been a long, long lonely winter.
It feels years since its been here.
Here comes the sun.**

by John Sasser

Things are starting to come together for PC Kazakhstan. With the arrival of our new PTO, Paul Butki, we now have three American staff who will all be here for two years or more, so there will be a lot more continuity. The budget problems have been digested, and although we still do not have the funds to do everything we would like to do (PST will still be only 10 weeks), we do not have to cut any more. One example of where we did something new was that Carol found the money to pay for all of the Kaz 20 Education volunteers to attend PDM this year (though not all with counterparts). More good news with the budget: our SPA funds for grants and training next year will be double what they were this year.

Ekaterina is doing great in her new job as training manager, and, with help from Paul and the rest of the staff, she put together an excellent IST followed by an intense PDM for the Kaz 20s. The reviews say most people enjoyed it and learned a lot, though everyone was tired!

I do not foresee more changes in our local staff, and we sure do not plan any more re-organizations. The Regional Managers are getting to know their Volunteers and their regions, and we have the travel funds so that they can continue to visit and do good site development work. Plus spring is coming and the snow is melting, even in the North.

Lost

On the other hand, VAC reported that there was a sense of "confrontation" between some volunteers and staff, and I have seen a few internet exchanges that are interesting reading. All I can say is, all of us in the staff are here for only one reason: to support the Volunteers and to help you achieve the three goals of the Peace Corps. You know we have a lot of policies, but



Who we are

Peace Corps has been serving in Kazakhstan since 1993. Through the Education and OCAP programs, 109 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

I think you can also understand why we have them – and why we will enforce these policies – especially those that relate to safety, like the Whereabouts Policy. When we enforce these policies, you will never know the whole story, for good reasons – privacy reasons – so you will hear only one side, and, I can tell you from reading a few blogs, there is always more than one side of the story. So ignore the rumors; put your energy into your job instead. We are all here to work for the three goals of Peace Corps. Let's do it together.

Friends

On a more sociable note, Paul and I both enjoyed the trip to Nauryz, the Volunteers we visited on the way and the many we saw in Shymkent. Thanks to Vicente, Eric and the Shymkent area PCVs for organizing everything so well. I particularly enjoyed that there were no serious incidents during the weekend, and I thank you all for paying attention to your own safety. And I encourage you, as the weather gets better, the days longer and it gets easier to go out and stay out, to avoid the bars and discos where you can get in trouble, even though you are feeling at home here. As Ben Chapman, our Country Desk Officer and an RPCV Kazakhstan says, "Latent complacency is another factor in getting in trouble. I am guilty of such a thing regularly when I go to Russia and Central Asia – I know the language and culture well and as a result often have a false sense of confidence - and I have been victimized."

There is no question; we live in a tough neighborhood – Kazakhstan has more serious incidents than any other post in our Region. There are lots of politics swirling around us, and being non-political does not isolate us from other peoples' problems.

In closing, I am off to the US until mid-May to have a medical procedure that cannot be put off, and Carol will be Acting CD. The "Volunteer situation of which we do not speak" is looking better, and, I hope that, when I get back, we will be able to fill you in completely. In the meantime, the weather is getting nicer, and someday, perhaps, we will get a new Director of the Peace Corps, and pictures of our new President Obama to hang in the office.

SPA Update

by Ekaterina Matyunina

A Grant Committee meeting was held on the 19th of March and 6 proposals were reviewed. All six were approved and we thus spent \$ 8,012 in Q2 (January, February, March).

The least expensive SPA proposal was a Methodological Workshop (\$ 471) and the most expensive was a Summer Camp Training (\$ 2190).

I cannot stand the temptation to share my thoughts about the projects we reviewed and approved.

The proposals varied in cost and target groups. It is good to notice that two of submitted proposals were for disabled people, the most vulnerable segment of the population. One of them has nothing to do with expensive equipment, thank God! It is a seminar to empower disabled youth to be engaged in community life. The purpose of this seminar is to build skills in seminar participants which will help them to find employment and to utilize skills they already have.

I personally was impressed by the Methodological Workshop whose goal is "to enhance the effectiveness of recent college graduates who will become English teachers". The compilation of resource packets will be followed by a two-day workshop to train pedagogical college graduates how to use them in their future work. These brand-new teachers will come to their work places equipped with very tangible resources! I think it is a great idea which can be replicated by other Volunteers who work at Pedagogical Colleges.

Be reasonable when it comes to the cost of your project! SPA funds small-scale community-initiated and community-supported projects. In many cases I had to call the Volunteers with the request to reconsider the expenses and to reduce the cost. And remember that you cannot include anything your agency/community got from SPA in the past as community contribution!

And the last thought. When you submit your project it competes with other submitted projects. The fact of submission does not guarantee that your project will get approved. Your project needs to be well-written, neatly organized, convincing, and reasonably budgeted. There is only \$10,000 left in SPA funds and 6 more projects to review on the 23d of April.

The request from Washington: when the Volunteers turn in completed projects they are supposed to send photos and/or finished products of the projects: brochures, resource guides, handbooks... Those who have completed their projects or are approaching this stage keep this request in mind! We expect you to do it.



Respected friends and colleagues,

Even though it snowed a foot and a half in Shchuchinsk last week, summer is supposed to be starting soon. We thought it would be nice, with the bounty of Mother Nature exploding all around us, to give a gift of our own. Hence, welcome to the biggest *Vesti* ever!

35 pages, can you believe it? And what a beautiful, informative and entertaining 35 pages it is! Along with the usual news, notes and niceties, we have a full-blown Spring Break Extravaganza. Phil Montgomery wrote a wonderful article on his trip to Thailand; the *Vesti* still seethes with jealousy. Tim Suchsland went west, not far enough for it to really count but west nonetheless, exploring the the rusted shipwrecks in the world's greatest ecological disaster.

While the *Vesti* considers its very existence a success (seriously, you have no idea how tough it is to put this beast together), our PCVs have made more significant strides at their sites. McKenzie Clark reports on using Kazakhstan's nearly limitless supply of talent in order to raise money. Katie Rodgers used International Women's Day to encourage her Karaganda Women's Club in a more politically active direction. And perhaps most spectacularly, Chris Chaplin's student has an article celebrating the election of President Obama (goddamn it is nice to type that).

Thanks to the tireless work of PC Kazakhstan's советники, Jessica Urfer and Mary Couri, we have added a new section: (Не)полезные Советы. Channeling the infinite wisdom of Баба Куа, the spectral manifestation of advice both solicited and unsolicited, these intrepid advisors are here to address your most pressing issues. Is your issue more pressing than what we presented? Send us a line, it will remain anonymous (like that anonymous volunteer who may or may not have had an incident that we are not supposed to be talking about... oops).

As always, any comments, criticism, 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



Submit to the Vesti!

Fellow volunteers, summer is upon us, and with it comes camps, vacations, and wherever the good life 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.

Do not kill the Vesti.

Kaz-19s are finishing their service, it is time for reflection. Kaz-20s are on their first tour of the summer camp classic circuit. 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 keeping most of us on the road, and away from our computers, the next Vesti deadline allows you to take the time and detail your exploits. Write to us as you travel 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 August. 15, 2009.



If only Galina could stock some of these resources

Big news from the RC

by Galina Petrovna

We have been working on clearing the RC for some time now. Last summer the RC collection was weeded with the help of COSing PCVs. We came to have many “give-away” books. Those who were in the office saw rows of books sitting on the floor along the walls of the hallways and kitchen in Building B. Though quite a number of books were taken by PCVs, a lot of them are still screaming to be given away.

Now that Tony Sharp is in the office, he has kindly agreed to help with giving the books away to both you and the organizations with which you work. He has emailed PCVs in the Akmola Oblast saying the books will be delivered to some sites and/or oblast centers in early May by a Peace Corps vehicle. The list of books we plan to donate to organizations was also attached and we got a lot of responses from PCVs requesting books on different topics. Tony has packed books into boxes and rice bags and gotten them ready to go to sites.

You may be asking, “Why only the Akmola Oblast?” PCVs from this oblast are lucky because Paul is going to Astana in the near future with a PC vehicle. He will be able to visit some of the sites in that oblast.

South Kazakhstan and Zhambyl oblasts PCVs will also be able to get books they have requested. Their Regional Managers always travel to their sites by PC cars and will deliver the books to them.

Tony is doing a great job, and I want to say a big “thank you” to him.

World View magazine

You may also remember in March a *WorldView* magazine poll was conducted with the idea to see who and how many of you wanted to get a copy of it. While you were responding, I emailed Headquarter asking about a possibility to increase the number so that each PCV could get a copy.

Here is the reply: “Due to budget constraints, PC will be buying and sending out fewer print copies of the quarterly *WorldView* magazine. Instead, readers will be pointed to the *WorldView* website for the online edition.” We were recommended to distribute it “only to PCVs with internet access once a week or less. All other PCVs, PCTs and staff will be expected to access the online *World View* publication at: <http://www.worldviewmagazine.com/> -- or to share a printed copy.” The next time the magazine arrives, it will be sent to those who responded to the poll. The extras will go to sites at my choice, unless I get more requests for the magazine.

KAZAKHSTAN COUNTRY DIRECTORY			
Name	Position	Number	Importance
John Sasser	Country Director	777 370 8032	Principal Richard Belding
Carol McLaughlin	AO	777 212 9600	Miss Bliss
Paul Butki	PTO	777 370 1002	Zack Morris
Aliya Kassenova	Safety and Security	777 370 8033	Kelly Kapowski
Victor and Nadia	Medical Officers	333 370 8035	Slater and Jessie

Н О В О С Т И



Peace Corps Kazakhstan: classy.

Flawless Victory

by Ekaterina Matyunina

Kaz 20 IST is already history! Thirty-six education and seventeen OCAP volunteers got together for their first conference since they completed PST. First four months at site! Should it not be discussed and shared?! A lot of mesmerizing stories, complaints, surprises (pleasant and unpleasant), first personal achievements... and the relief that you are not the only one who is struggling! It sounds so familiar to Kaz 18/19s, does it not?

My "Thank you" goes to Kaz 19/18 who participated in Kaz 20 IST bringing to the conference their experience and support: Leah Forlivio, Ann- Marie Deignan, Matt Turner, Erin Cirtis, and Perry Teicher. They facilitated the sessions, mingled with the "rookies", and helped the staff in every possible way.

I give credit to Katie Fitzpatrick, Jennifer Speyer, Katherine Burgeson, James Hill, and Christina Baldarelli for having enough guts to facilitate sessions at their first conference! Corinne Huber and Drew Boggs agreed via email to facilitate a session on "What Works Well in the Classroom" and amazed me by the level of their readiness.

They got the handouts ready BEFORE the session by interviewing people and compiling the list of activities. This session is usually one of the most well-received by the Volunteers but the way Corinne/Drew conducted it this time was particularly unique.

PDM was offered to all Kaz 20 Volunteers regardless of the program. The only difference was that all OCAP Volunteers were required to bring their counterparts and there were only 15 slots for EDU counterparts.

OCAP Volunteers/Counterparts had their own training in the Peace Corps office and EDU Volunteers and their 12 counterparts were divided into three groups in which the sessions were conducted by a team (Volunteers paired up with a staff persons). We express our apprecia-

tion to the Volunteers who facilitated the sessions: Chris Reed-Waddell, Susannah Martin, Grag Yandle, and Matt Turner. Though it was not easy to monitor such a huge crowd, the evaluations showed that the training was useful in many ways:

It was interesting to go through the process with a counterpart, the open discussion and the personalized group formats were useful, & great advice from "vets"

The Volunteers wrote very good suggestions on the evaluation forms which are not going to be neglected. We hope to get a broad range of projects from Kaz 20s which will be well-thought through and well-written.



Н О В О С Т И

My door is always open: An interview with Ambassador Hoagland

In April 2009 PCVs Victor Mayorga (Samakol) and Tim Suchsland (Yavlenka) interviewed the new US Ambassador to Kazakhstan, Mr. Richard E. Hoagland. In this email conversation Mr. Hoagland discussed the current financial crisis, his comfort with Kazakhstan and Central Asia – including Beshbarmak – and his gratitude to the hard work of Peace Corps and PCVs in Kazakhstan.

When you first arrived in Kazakhstan, what were your impressions?

I have been visiting Kazakhstan since 2001, and have worked off and on in Central Asia since 1993. I was Ambassador in Tajikistan for three years and, briefly, in Turkmenistan. And so when I arrived in September 2008 as Ambassador to Kazakhstan, it seemed totally “normalno,” very pleasant and familiar. I felt that this was my home away from home.

How is Kazakhstan different from other former Soviet countries in which you have worked?

Kazakhstan is extremely different from the other countries of Central Asia! It's Eurasia, not Central Asia. It's much more developed in many, many ways. The degree of its “human capacity” is truly impressive. It's a regional leader and an emerging world player.

How is Kazakhstan, as well as Central Asia in general, reacting to the current financial crisis? Are there any unique problems or issues which Kazakhstan faces concerning the crisis?

By diplomatic tradition, I should not comment about the other countries, but Kazakhstan – whose banking and financial systems are already embedded in the global economy – is doing as well as can be expected. My staff and I speak to the senior economic officials of the country, to representatives of the International Financial Institutions, and to international private bankers. All, without exception, agree that Kazakhstan is reacting responsibly and flexibly to a very difficult situation. In fact, a senior European banker very recently told me that of all the former Soviet countries, Kazakhstan is doing the best in

the crisis – and you need to understand that includes Russia.

Peace Corps volunteers all know how Almaty and Astana are developing and growing at astounding rates. How much potential do you see for economic and civil development in regions outside these two cities? For example, educational and infrastructural development in rural communities?

As in all countries, the big cities develop first and fastest. Everywhere in the world, the best and brightest tend to leave their villages and small towns to seek their fortunes in the big cities. Think of the differences between New York City or Chicago or San Francisco and the rural, small towns in West Virginia or Arkansas or North

Dakota or Indiana (my home state!). I recently read a report about life in a small town in Kazakhstan, and it sounded very much as if it were still the Soviet Union of 30 years ago. But that is not especially surprising. I think this country is committed to national development to international standards in all spheres and sectors – but it will take time, as it does anywhere. And, as anywhere, the degree of development will be uneven.

What are the most significant challenges this region faces for future economic development? How about educational and civil development?

Again, I should speak only about Kazakhstan. The most important thing is that Kazakhstan should continue to reform its legislation – and, equally if not more important, how it is implemented! – to create an investment climate so that foreign corporations can say, “Yes, that is a place where we can invest and be confident that that rule of law will generally prevail so that we will be able to make a reasonable profit for our shareholders. I honestly think civil development is happening. Across this vast land, people are realizing they can take responsibility to demand that the government acts responsibly. This might surprise some, but I think the government-approved “public associations” are playing a real role in building the fundamentals of democracy. They not only allow but also promote public debate – and that is one of the fundamentals of democracy. Educa-





tional reform will probably come more slowly; but it, too, will eventually happen.

As of now, Peace Corps works in two programs in Kazakhstan, English education and organizational and community assistance (OCAP). Education volunteers work in a variety of settings with students and teachers in village elementary and secondary schools, technical training colleges and city universities. OCAP volunteers work in a number of varying organizations; for example, women and youth organizations, schools and organizations for people with disabilities, ecotourism organizations. Are there any other areas of development in which Peace Corps could expand into?

I don't want to presume to make any specific recommendations. As guests in this country, as respectful partners of Kazakhstan, we always want to consult with them. If in these consultations Kazakhstan comes up with new ideas, then I would certainly want to consider them seriously.

Many Peace Corps volunteers are familiar with American Corners. What other type of "outreach" activities or programs is the embassy coordinating or sponsoring with local organizations? And how can Peace Corps volunteers get involved to help?

American Corners are a terrific resource, but they can't be everywhere. I'll tell you honestly that with falling public diplomacy budgets over the past ten years, we now face a real challenge how to communicate effectively with the public in Kazakhstan, especially since Russia has a monopoly on the electronic media. Here's what you can do: I know Internet connections are not optimal in many places, but I'd really like to make sure that YOU all make sure that everyone you know is aware of our Embassy web site, <http://kazakhstan.usembassy.gov>. There you will find links to Russian-language information. The same is true on <http://www.america.gov> where you will also find Russian-language links. But if any of you have new ideas how to do our job better, I would very much like to hear what you have to say.

What are the major issues concerning US-Kazakhstani relations?

Most broadly speaking, our bilateral interests are based on political progress, security cooperation (and this includes military relations, counter-narcotics, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, border security, and trafficking-in-persons), and economic and commercial partnerships, including – but not limited to! – the oil and gas sectors.

How is your Russian? And your Kazakh?

My social Russian is fine. But I long ago learned from my best mentors, if you want to communicate most pre-

cisely and accurately as a diplomat, always use a highly skilled interpreter to ensure you are getting across your message with exact precision. I would dearly, and ideally, love to be fluent in Kazakh, but I have not had the time or opportunity to do so.

What do you think of the Kazakh national dish, Beshbarmak?

Delicious! No matter where I am in the world, I deeply enjoy learning new cuisines, new customs. This was not new to me, but on my second night in Kazakhstan as ambassador, a most senior official very close to President Nazarbayev invited me to a private one-on-one restaurant dinner. To show traditional hospitality, he ordered a sheep's head; and when it arrived, he carved out an eye and offered it to me. I ate it – not because it was the most delicious thing in the world (I didn't even ask for katsup!), but because I understood the honor he was offering me.

Is there anything else you would like to tell Peace Corps volunteers?

One very important thing: I think what you are doing is terrific! Immediately after college in the United States, I was a volunteer (not Peace Corps) English teacher in an isolated village in central Africa. I have always said that was my first real step toward real adulthood and – frankly – toward the career I now have. I still greatly value that experience and have absolutely indelible memories of that time. Also, my sister was a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Philippines in the late 1970s and managed an agricultural project to develop a mango plantation for a remote village, for small-scale economic development. She is now the most senior air-traffic controller for the Southwest United States. And yet, she always tells me the most important job she ever had was on the isolated island of Bohol in the Philippines, setting up a mango plantation as an economic development project – which the corrupt mayor expropriated, once it became successful. Nu i shto – such is life! Peace Corps is one of the great U.S. people-to-people achievements of the 20th century, now continuing into the 21st century. As the advertisement says, "It's the most difficult job you'll ever love!" And it's one of the most important things we as a nation do all over the world.

Anytime anyone of you happens to be in Astana, please call the Embassy and ask to see me. My door is always open to you. I sincerely want to hear about your personal experiences.

Thanks so much for your service to your country!

H O B O C T I

Call for pictures

Peace Corps HQ

The Peace Corps photo-archives needs field photos from Volunteers or PC Staff with digital SLR cameras for our print and web publications.

SUBJECT MATTER WE NEED THE MOST

PCVs working hand-in-hand with host country nationals, water projects (water wells, water pumps), small business projects, health, efforts in food security, photos with the Peace Corps logo in them (clothing items, posters), PCVs in their houses or outside their house, older PCVs, PCVs of ethnic origins, Agricultural projects/harvests, PCVs at the market (food and goods), photos that depict cold climates (Snow! PCVs wearing warm clothing. Snow!), PCVs in training (learning the language, etc.), or PCVs with their host families.

COMPOSITION

Shots most desired are of Peace Corps volunteers in action, PCVs interacting with host country nationals, close up shots of PCVs in their community and work place.

The use of “props” is encouraged to get the message across. For example, small business can be depicted with a PCV and HCN leaning over a calculator, PCV training can be depicted with PCVs in front of a blackboard with words in the language they are learning, water projects can be depicted by having people physically pumping water from a spout.

Take some long shots and close ups. In close ups, try and fill the frame completely with your subject. Take some long shots where the subject is all the way to the side. This allows us to fill the empty space with text. Vary your images by shooting from a higher or lower angle.

Take both vertical and horizontal shots.

Be aware of the brightest light source. If that light source is behind your subject use a flash to “fill” the light in front of them.

WHAT YOU GET IN RETURN

If your photo is selected for use in our print publications (brochures, catalogs, posters), we will send you copies.

PHOTO FORMAT SPECIFICATIONS

These are our specifications for digital image submissions. Submitting files with these specifications gives the Peace Corps the widest possible range of options for reproduction, including large format and other high-quality printing.

Resolution/pixel size: at least 2500x1500

File Size: 13–60 mb

Preferred: RAW or TIFF

Acceptable: RAW, TIFF or JPG

Media type: Images burned to CD or DVD



RELEASE FORM

Each photographer needs to sign our standard release form. This gives PC HQ permission to include the photos in any Peace Corps materials free of cost. This release form grants the Peace Corps “non-exclusive use,” meaning you can still sell your photos and use them in any way.

CONTACT US ASAP

If interested in being one of our field photographers, please send an email to PC HQ Photographer: Eddie Perry.

Eddie will e-mail you a release form to sign and send with your photos.

eperry@peacecorps.gov Phone: 202-692-2213

DELIVERY METHOD

Please burn your high-resolution images to a DVD or CD and give the disc to your Country Director (along with the signed release form). They will need to send it via Embassy pouch to:

Peace Corps HQ
Office of Communications
Attn: Edward Perry
1111 20th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20526

NOTE: If CDs/DVDs are sent regular mail, do not put them in a plastic CD holder – the radiation screening at HQ will melt it. Put the disc in a paper sleeve inside a padded envelope.

Н О В О С Т И



awareness

THE 1st PEACE CORPS KAZAKHSTAN HIV/AIDS AWARENESS CONTEST

Did you know only that 19% of people aged 15-24 can correctly identify ways of transmitting HIV in Kazakhstan? УЖАС! You wanna do something about that? Here's your chance!

Starting from April 20th till October 25th of 2009, the amazing and beautiful people of Peace Corps Kazakhstan are starting a new contest to get more volunteers involved in HIV/AIDS awareness. Volunteers who would like to participate are asked to train as many locals as possible in HIV/AIDS prevention. Whoever can train the most Host Country Nationals (HCN) in Kazakhstan will win grand prizes!!

1st Prize: Apple™ 12" Powerbook

2nd Prize: Edifer™ Speakers with subwoofer, and a portable color printer.

3rd Prize: Dinner for two in Almaty with John Sasser, Paul Butki and Carol McLaughlin at a place of the winner's choice

To be eligible you must be an Education or OCAP Member of the Kaz-20 Group, must have the minimum basic knowledge about HIV/AIDS (4 bodily liquids that pass HIV, 4 ways for HIV to be passed, ways to protect yourself from HIV/AIDS) to pass on to others, and must conduct trainings in an interactive way with a minimum of two games or discussions about HIV/AIDS. Please read the "Frequent Questions and Answers" section for more information.

The volunteer must have planned or facilitated the training for it to be eligible. Facilitation of a training can be with a community partner (i.e. professionals at the HIV/AIDS Center or HIV/AIDS Awareness NGOs).

If you have any questions please e-mail Elmira Galiyeva (EGaliyeva@kz.peacecorps.gov) or Cho-Yau Ling (choyau.ling@gmail.com).

L I F E A N D D E A T H

A letter on safety

by **Greg Yandl, Taldy-Korgan**

Dear Fellow Volunteers:

As you no doubt are aware, a lot of volunteers have had “incidents” which can range from irritating to downright dangerous. I had the misfortune of being involved in an incident which shook me very badly. However, it started a constructive conversation between me, VAC and the administration. The result of that conversation is the following open letter.

The situation: a week before my wedding, Joe, Kyle and I went to a local dance club to celebrate a miniature bachelor party [MISTAKE 1]. We each had a couple of beers, but were certainly not drunk. The club was familiar to us, we sat with an acquaintance of mine, and it was only about 10 or 11 in the evening. Things appeared safe. About an hour after we arrived, Kyle went home. About 30 minutes later, I was also ready to leave. So I walked through a group of young men in order to collect Joe and go home. While walking through, I stepped around one of the men. When I did so, I was punched in the back and then proceeded to get kicked. Joe ran to my rescue, and we were eventually able to extricate ourselves.

I do not know why I was jumped. I was not dancing with any of “their” girls. In fact, I was not dancing with ANY girls that night. However, it was later insinuated that telling some local boys to stop saying “negre” and other bad words in English may have precipitated the fight.

The next day, I called Peace Corps and had a very curt conversation with Aliya and Dr. Victor. I needed a new pair of glasses, but I was not badly hurt, so I avoided filing a full incident report and dealing with paperwork [MISTAKE 2]. I told Aliya I did not want to go to the hassle of going to the police (there were no police on the scene). After all, I had a wedding and a lot of work to do [MISTAKE 2.5]. The matter seemed settled.

A month went by and my new wife got a call from the immigration police asking us to come by and register. When we went in, the registration turned out to be an interrogation. Joe and I were accused of “administrative misconduct on the part of foreigners” (Yes, it only applies to foreigners), which carries a maximum penalty of 10 days in jail, 10000 KzT and deportation. The alleged bases for the administrative (not criminal) charge were “rude words and gestures.” I immediately should have

called Aliya, but I did not have my cell phone with me [MISTAKE 3]. However, we were assured that this was probably nothing. They just needed a simple statement, and we would probably just have a warning. So I wrote a statement [MISTAKE 4].

I called Aliya and some friends in Taldy-Korgan with some connections. We found out a certain national “security” agency which initials begin with K and end in Badnews sent a memo to the immigration police ordering them to investigate the incident at the club. They even “suggested” the administrative article with which to charge us. Furthermore, my friends-in-the-know said the special “security” folks had already drawn up deportation documents for me and Joe. The suspense lasted for two weeks. Not a great way to spend time after your wedding. Eventually the immigration police felt they did their due diligence and decided not to press charges. This, in my opinion, was largely thanks to Peace Corps – especially Aliya and the CD.

A couple of weeks later, I got a call from PC saying a newspaper in Almaty – which is actually owned by Nur-Otan – wrote an article about the story. (It is attached below.) Some of it is based on the statement I gave to the immigration police. Some of it is pure BS, especially the quote from PC. (No one at the office said anything. The PC’s policy is to never comment on individual cases. In fact, the entire staff was supportive during the ordeal and even righteously indignant for my sake.)



Avoid hitting on women accompanied by men like this.



I made several mistakes, one of which was going to the club in the first place. We thought we were controlling our risks, but we were not. I suggest that everyone avoid clubs. The Peace Corps decided not to make a policy banning us from clubs. However, the official line very strongly advises PCVs not to go to clubs. The Peace Corps administration can seem like they are out to make life difficult for us. However, without them I would probably be in America now, struggling vainly to get my wife through a maze of immigration forms. Sometimes, we get little blips of advice from the office, like “remember to never sign documents without calling Peace Corps.” These and other stories (often passed through gossip) always have a back-story to them, which often cannot be talked about for confidentiality reasons, but nevertheless deserve to be considered when placing credit or blame.

My last point is perhaps the most important. There are people in KZ who do not want the PC here. Some of them work for that “security” agency, which has actually targeted other volunteers. (Of course, there are the less scandalous examples of the drunk and belligerent types who ALSO do not want us here.) Nevertheless, we should not make a big public issue out of the “security” people. Furthermore, I do not want to make an international issue out of what may be simply a few soviet era spooks with a grudge. Instead, I recommend you do as I do now: be careful with whom you associate and where you do so, and most importantly, do not put yourself in risky situations – especially by going to clubs. Lastly, talk to the PC and report everything that happens, even when you do not think it is a big deal. Good luck.

THE NEWSPAPER STORY:

“There is no Peace on the Earth”

by *, Almaty*

In one of night clubs in Kazakhstan American Peace Corps volunteers were beaten.

Peace Corps Volunteers reportedly came to a nightclub, as usual, late at night and ordered spirits. By the middle of the evening, having drunk alcohol, the foreigners began to defiantly conduct themselves, making obscene gestures and expressing themselves obscenely while relaxing.

Probably, such liberties by the foreigners were not liked by local youth. As a result, on the dance floor, there was a fight, in which about 15 people participated.

The night club administration informed the Department of Internal Affairs about the skirmish between local youth and the foreigners.

“We drank two mugs of beer,” later wrote one of the victimized volunteers, Gregory Yandl, in an explanatory statement. “While we sat and had a rest, some unfamiliar guys approached us without an invitation and sat down at our little table. They started to talk to my friend Kyle who is an Afro-American, calling him a negro (nigger). We explained to them that this word is offensive in English to Americans of African origin. But the young men did not understand and continued to offend us and to use obscene words.”

According to staff members, the fight with the foreigners began suddenly when Yandl left to go to the dance floor. By the American’s explanations, the volunteer was at first knocked down, and then immediately when he had fallen, a few local guys began to kick him. A good cuffing was also received by his friend Joe, who hastened to his aid.

As a result, the U.S. Peace Corps volunteers received trauma of various levels of severity. One of the hooligans took Yandl’s Peace Corps documentation, watch and also about 4 thousand tenge, and disappeared in an unknown direction.

To avoid publicity, the foreigners did not give a statement to the police.

Nevertheless, law enforcement personnel interrogated all who were “having a rest” as well as [nightclub] staff members, and then, having warned the foreign visitors that similar cases can end in criminal prosecution, released them to go home.

About the incident which has occurred in a night club, the Americans nevertheless only informed their coordinators in Almaty. Those in turn, after trial (разбирательства) made the [following] official remark. “If a similar situation repeats itself, we will deprive of them of administrative support and we will deport (turn) them from Kazakhstan,” explained the counterpart (куратор, maybe coordinator?) of volunteers for Peace Corps in the Almaty area.

The situation, of course, is far from pleasant to consider, because the arrival of Peace Corps volunteers is directed toward the mutual benefit of our people and strengthening world friendship. The most ridiculous part of this story is that that the Afro-American volunteer, for whom the conflict began, did not participate in the fight and easily left home as soon as he felt danger.

L I F E A N D D E A T H

Food Safety and Nutrition Tips

by Ann Marie Deignan, Ust-Kamenogorsk

Soon many of you 20s will be finding your way into the kitchen. If you have not done so already, here are some pointers to help keep you healthy and fit. I am a cooking fanatic, so if you have questions about where to find it or how to cook it, drop me an e-mail at: amdeignan@hotmail.com or text me at +77773311052. *Приятно аппетита!*

Safe Cooking and Food Storage Temps (in Celsius)

Thermometers (**градусники**) for cooking and cold storage cost about 200 tenge, and can be purchased at any bazaar – usually at stands with random household, sewing and laundry supplies. Refrigerator/freezer thermometers should be hung or taped far back in the unit so that they are not disturbed or broken. Never place them on the door, because this will give inaccurate readings.

Cooking (“probe”) thermometers should be inserted at the thickest or deepest part of the food. Look for a small divot in the metal near the tip. This is where the reading will occur, so make sure that it is in the food. **DO NOT try to use an air temperature thermometer! It will melt, and mercury (the red stuff) is poisonous!** (This warning is based on an actual incident – not my own. DO NOT attempt this at home!)

Hot Temps

(Important: Safely cooked leftovers need to be reheated to these temps as well!)

Water - Boils at 100 degrees Celsius. **Check the thermometer when you make tea/soup on the train.**

Beef - Needs to be heated to 77 C. Ground meat (“farsh”) is the most dangerous. Break it apart and cook until no pink appears in meat or juices. Lamb, mutton, game meats (horse, rabbit, wild birds), and pork also need to be heated to 77 C. Chicken, turkey and duck are germ free at 82 C. *Вареники*, and *пельмени* should be brought to a boil and held for five minutes or more. Eggs should be cooked with a firm yoke, with no liquid. Casseroles, stews, sauces and vegetables should be heated to 72 C (precook the meat). Finally, soups should be treated like water, and

heated to 100 C or more, and held for at least five minutes.

Cold Temps

(Important: Food should never be out of these temperature zones for more than 4 hours!)

All refrigerated goods	7 C or less
All frozen goods	0 C or less

Better Safe Than Sorry

Wash hands after preparing each component of a meal (especially between foods that will be served cooked/uncooked). Avoid cross-contamination by using different cutting surfaces for meats/fish and vegetables. Regularly sterilize surfaces with boiled water or bleach.

Rinse foods displayed in the open at the bazaar before you eat them. You can safely wash dried fruits and nuts – even meat products. However, dry the item(s) by laying them out on a tray for an hour or so. Wash all fresh produce regardless of how clean it looks. Use warm water (running water is preferable) and scrub the skin. Do this even if you do not plan to eat the peel. Do not use soaps or detergent of any kind. It may taint your food. Wash you eggs before cracking.

Avoid dairy, egg and meat products that have not been refrigerated for long periods of time. Use these products





within 48 hours of purchase or freeze. If something smells a bit off do not eat it. If container is swelled or “pops” when you open it, throw it away.

Freezing does not kill bacteria. It only puts it to sleep, so it is well rested and ready to play when you thaw the food. Space frozen foods so that air can circulate in your freezer. In the case of a power outage, consolidate packages by placing the quick-defrosting items in the center (ice cream) and denser items around the edges (meat). Refrain from opening freezer door until a couple of hours after the power comes back on. Do not freeze eggs. If you freeze milk, place it in a plastic bag, as it may expand and break the carton. Examine food for freezer burn. Freezer burn itself is not dangerous. It is a sign that food has been thawed and refrozen. You can cut affected areas off and eat the remaining portions.

Examine canned food, and do not eat it you find:

Sharp dents (dents which form a “V”)

Dents along solder lines (side, top and bottom of the can)

Signs of leakage (If product can get out, bacteria can get in!)

Deep rust (Rust you cannot remove with your fingertips)

Swelling at the top or bottom of the can. (Fun fact: Bacteria can actually replicate to the degree that it can make a metal can explode. If a can “pops” or liquid spews out of it when you open it, discard it immediately. You cannot cook the bacteria out of it.)

Food for Thought

2,000 calories is the value used as a general reference for target calorie intake. However, every person has different needs. (You can calculate your target number at: www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines.)

If you eat 100 more food calories a day than you burn, you will gain about 1 pound in a month. That is about 10 pounds in a year or 20 pounds in the course of your PC service.

Instead of calorie counting or vitamin tracking, try this: divide your plate/bowl into thirds. Foods placed in each third should be a different color – the brighter the color, the better. One third should be carbs (noodles, bread, rice), one protein (meat, cheese, beans, tofu) and one veggies or fruits. You will likely notice a tremendous increase in your energy level within a week using these proportions.

Fats are not the enemy. They are necessary in small amounts. If you do not consume any fat – or if you try to deprive yourself of calories – your body will panic, and you will often retain or even gain weight.

For most people, 30 minutes of brisk exercise per day is sufficient to maintain a healthy physique. (Some people may need as many as 60 minutes.) This is not difficult to achieve here in KZ – especially for village PCVs. If you are a city kid, get off the tram or bus a few stops early. If you go out to eat or “*gosti*” a lot, insist on walking there and back.

If you do not cook, buy prepared salads and add them to your ramen noodles or other instant products. A half-cup of veggies will drastically increase the nutritional value of prepared foods – which have, generally speaking, no nutritional value aside from calories.

Avoid sodas, bottled ice tea, powdered drink mixes and alcoholic beverages. These have more calories than candy and chips per volume, and enormous amounts of sugar. Also read your juice labels. Often they contain more sugar than juice. Look at the ingredients. It will say “not less than XXX% juice.” Avoid anything that says blend, cocktail, mix or tonic.

Buy non-stick (Teflon) pots and pans. No cooking oils are required to fry foods on these surfaces. Make your favorite snacks at home.

Piroshki and *samsa* can be baked in the oven instead of fried. Fat free *kirieshki* and chips can be made by mixing dry bread cubes or thin potato slices in a water/bullion mixture, and baking at a low heat for about one hour.

Make your own flavored yogurt drinks or milkshakes at home so that you can control the sugar content. Even if you are not a fan of *kefir*, it makes a mean smoothie. Try adding whole fruit, fruit juice or dried coffee.

Shop weekly, and keep a stock of healthy foods at home. Each time you enter a store, you are exposed to temptations. Your waistline will be thinner and your wallet fatter if you stock up.

Reserve an hour or two each week specifically for food prep. Full containers of chopped, shredded or diced fruits and veggies will inspire you to eat healthier and will not eat into your lunch break.

Drink 32 ounces of water or more daily. It aids in nutrient absorption, digestion and weight loss. You may not feel it, but this is a very arid country, and it is easy for dehydration to creep up on you.

У С П Е Х !

More than a few new books



Everyone show me your excited faces!

by Michael Quinn, Shchuchinsk

Evgeniya Nikolayeva is lost in a book. In fact, she is so far gone that hardly a word has come from her mouth since we left Astana. For Peace Corps Volunteer behavior, this is not surprising; certainly, more than a few volunteers have shunned their surroundings in favor of a dog-eared copy of *Three Cups of Tea* (or hopefully *The Day Lasts More than One Hundred Years*). Of course, Evgeniya is not a PCV; she is a fifty-something teacher at my Pedagogical College in Shchuchinsk. Nor is Evgeniya reading fiction. She is poring over a copy of Cambridge's *Vocabulary In Use* - the Pre-Intermediate Level to be exact, and she is not reading as much as she is drilling her "Lex-ics." That is right. Seated behind me in a mini-van tearing over the highway is an English teacher with more than thirty years of experience, foregoing conversation during a day trip away from work because for the first time in her life she has a truly exceptional text book in her hands. She is actually excited about learning and nothing will be able to take that away from her.

Happily, I was able to see that same reaction time and time again as my secondary project wrapped up these last few weeks. My students gasped and audibly awed as they turned pages, and complained when the books had to be put away. My counterparts pulled me aside to ask "permission" to take a textbook home and study. Throughout the project my department leader, a very mousy woman who basically got the position by default, grew more and more assertive and independent, even arranging orders and pulling dissenters in line with her. My director proved an incredible amount of dedication and commit-

ment to our program; after the crisis raped our grant funding, she was first in line to offer doubling the college's contribution to make up for the losses. I was lucky enough to witness the complete overhaul of our English program, from materials, to curriculum, to even an English-language center, all of which started because we got sick of seeing our grammar books fall to pieces.

Возможности

My project began in the ashes of another volunteer's, whose proposed resource center flamed out when his college's director essentially fired him for not speaking Kazakh. But that is another story. Although he was not able to see his months of hard work yield results, this volunteer was at least able to pass all of his grant materials onto me. This not only included everything I would need to secure a PCPP grant, but also a complete curriculum, ideas for making a resource center sustainable, and most importantly, an established contact with one of the biggest bookseller's in Kazakhstan, Almaty's Interpress.

I was in the enviable position of having just received \$550 for working with American Councils over the summer. Using that money, matching contributions from my college, and a bounty of in-kind contributions from our community, we were able to design a project that was twelve times as large as our seeder money. Initially, we had hoped to replace only the books that were most damaged, either through age, vandalism, or simple neglect. To our disbelief, the money we were able to secure from PCPP was enough to replace every single textbook used by my English program, as well as purchase an array of materials on methodology, materials to create lectures in a wide array of specialized topics, and enough class sets of reading materials to stock a small library.

While somewhat stressful, mostly due to my own impatience, gathering donations proved to be mostly painless. I owe a world of thanks to generous family and friends in America, especially to an uncle who promised to match the funds of any donation made. In fact, we were able to beat our own deadline for gathering funds, receiving our \$6,300 just in time to see a quarter of it evaporate thanks to the devaluation of the tenge. You win some, you lose some. We lost.

Трудности

"What do you mean you no longer have those books? We've already paid for those. You're telling me they just suddenly up and disappeared?"

Thus began my college's struggle with an Astana bookstore named Kausar, and my discovery that stan-



dards of business practice simply do not exist in Kazakhstan. Purchasing something does not mean that you own it, and just because a certain amount of money is yours does not mean someone will feel obligated to return it. Most of the blame, in the end, is mine; I became restless after the tenge crisis and decided to switch to a more proximate bookseller. Buying the books in Astana would allow us to avoid shipping costs and give us the opportunity to get the books as soon as possible.

There were warning signs. Interpress, although ostensibly tied to Kausar through distribution links, immediately disavowed any relationship with the Astana store upon hearing that we were going to buy books from them. Kausar was clearly overwhelmed by the size of our order, and had to get stock sent from Interpress just to fill it. Most worrisome though, was that we were forced to change textbooks, because Kausar would not sell the workbooks and textbooks for Cambridge's Interchange series separately. How this was possible to this day remains beyond me, but Interpress was able to secure a suitable replacement and promised to ship that to Kausar as well.

Rewriting our order turned out to be the least of our worries. Upon arriving in Astana, the *девушка* working in Kausar informed us that nearly one hundred of the books we had ordered, to the tune of almost 60,000 tg, were no longer there. They decided to sell them, regardless of the fact that the money for the order had been wired to Kausar nearly two weeks earlier. *Ругань* ensued. Cigarettes were smoked with the utmost of fury. Every person with even the least bit of authority was called. When the storm clouds cleared, we secured a promise to have our money returned that day. Displeased but left with no other choices, we placated ourselves with a healthy dose of Shashlyk and hit the road.

The money never came.

In fact, there would be no hint of our money for the next several weeks. Kausar's director insisted that he could not go to the bank before the holiday, which meant we had to wait. Nauryz passed and still no money. After that needless delay, Kausar's director left town for some reason; apparently, he rarely set foot in the actual store. My department leader tracked him down only to uncover another stream of nonsense. He told us that the money could not be sent back to my account because I am a foreigner. He claimed that Kazkommertz bank did not exist and later said that his attempted transactions were being refused. When asked about sending proof of these attempts, he dodged the question and tried to persuade us that it was a burden for him to reach a fax machine. As

the days and then weeks ticked by, a second order, this time from Interpress, became jeopardized. They had already gathered the books and were holding them, but could only do so on the assurance that they too would eventually get paid.

On the exact day my college's director had planned to call our lawyer, the money suddenly appeared. Within hours we closed the deal with Interpress, and my side of the project came to a terrifically anticlimactic conclusion.

Результаты

While economic crises and unscrupulous businessmen have kept us from getting this resource center started when we had hoped, everything is emerging, surprisingly, just as we planned. My college is *Ремонт*-ing a room in the college and arranging an employee to sit there *дежурный*. My counterparts already have a rough outline for redesigning the curriculum over the summer, and purchases are already planned for another 120 books. All told, our resource center should have more than 1000 books in English, including a slew of literature for students to read in their free time, an assortment of CD-ROMs containing extra activities, a variety of DVDs that students will be able to rent and use during clubs, an interactive board, and 16 computers to use all these materials. What started as a simple book-buying project has blossomed into a complete multimedia center.

We plan to keep expanding this through a couple of different fee systems. First, all students in the English program will pay a fee of about 1000 tg for renting the books. Considering that most will receive four different text books, which together cost more than 5,000 tg, this seems fair. Second, students and parents will sign contracts agreeing to replace all materials that may be damaged or lost. And third, community members and students not in our English department will be able to use the resource center after paying for membership.

Needless to say, it is a very exciting time to be working at my college. Only four years ago, my college's English program was cancelled for a year and was in danger of being discontinued entirely. Instead, my college will be able to boast of one of the best pedagogical English programs in the region, if not the entire country. The materials that students will be working with will be second to none. The teachers, who themselves are already incredibly qualified, will be utilizing the most up-to-date methods. Opportunities for all sorts of activities outside of class will be available. We certainly have come a long way. If less than a year's worth of work can yield this much, who knows what the future may bring.

У С П Е Х !

A teacher's rewards

by Michael Mesquita, Petropavlosk

I remember those days in the US when school ended for the afternoon and I looked back on the day and said to myself, "Today was a great day; I accomplished something and kids learned"? I remember days when I teaching kids algebra and after fighting with them to try and giving as many examples as it took, they finally got it. There are a number of times when I noticed a little sparkle in their eye and the half smile they tried to hide

from me, but I understood that it was working- they were learning. Unfortunately those days are far from constant. However, we have a day like this; it pushes us forward and reminds why we chose this profession. Any teacher will tell you that the most frustrating part of teaching is the constant worry that progress is either slow or obsolete. The same is true teaching in Kazakhstan.

There are days when the attendance looks a little thin, completed homework assignments are discretionary, and others struggle to get engaged in class. I spend so much time planning lessons; looking for anything I can use to stir up a debate, introduce information that is not published from outdated books, or find material that a 20 year old would enjoy. It's always hit or miss-mainly misses. Despite the constant struggles that we all experience as educators, success comes in small doses and often when least expected.

One of the lessons that I planned for all of my classes was how to write an essay. I go over the steps of academic writing- brainstorming, outlining, using graphic organizers, introduction, thesis, conclusions, hooks-all of the vital aspects necessary to write an effective essay. We practice these steps in class to the point of exhaustion. Every week, my students write an essay for me. Despite a few moans and some opposition, they do it. This of course leaves me with 120 essays to grade every weekend but I never back down. In the following class, I would



Be careful ladies, for he will still your heart.

provide tips to help them with their writing, like never to start with I want to talk about... I began essay writing at the beginning of the semester and with each passing week my student inch themselves closer to improving their writing skills.

This Monday I went to class to find out that it was cancelled because 4th year students were taken one of their exams. Tuesday I went to class and asked how their exams went. They told me that they felt confident and they thanked me for teaching them how to write an essay. It was a third of their grade. That, of course, put a smile on their face. The next day when I went to another class, they said the same thing! I couldn't believe it. Today, I went to the professor who graded the exams and asked to see the grades my students received. I was truly amazed - As and Bs. They followed the structure I gave them and it was a success. The teacher and I compared the grades of the students who I taught and those who I did not. It was such an incredible difference.

Teaching is a difficult job wherever you are in the world. There are days when every teacher asks themselves, "What am I doing? Am I making a difference?" Sometimes we don't want to hear the answer. Other days we see accomplishments in a student's smile or a simple 'thank you'. Today was my day. I felt like I was a good teacher and it is a feeling I don't feel everyday. I was reminded how lucky I am to teach.

У С П Е Х !

I have a will, I have hope

by Zaura Akhiy, Kyzylorda

In the true spirit of Martin Luther King Jr. and his "I Have a Dream" speech, PCV Chris Chaplin's student Zaura Akhiy wrote this piece in honor of Barak Obama's inaugural address.

Hello to all the citizens of the USA! First of all, let me thank you for electing me as the president of the USA. I will try to do my best and prove true your hope.

These elections were not the easiest ones, as I think there was one question concerning my candidacy: "Can a black man govern the States?" But most people put trust in men whom they think more deserving, more reliable and more responsible for his work. And no matter what color he is all men are created equal. That gives an opportunity for everyone to rise up and reach his goal.

The most important thing is the will. If one has the will to win, the will to be the first, the will to help his people, then he can win – he can be the first.

About half a century ago people just dreamed that one day the sons of former slaves and the sons of former owners would be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I think that this day has come. More than 53% of votes for a black man means that people have begun to understand that a person should not be judged by the color of his skin but by the content of his character.

Beginning today I am the new president of the USA, and I feel a great responsibility for the future of our country. If we look through the past; of course, America reached new summits as well as failures. And now it is time for people to look forward to new ideas, new ways of solving economic, social and political problems. Nowadays, the problem of terror, the problem of war between different countries, and the financial fall troubles everyone. I promise to draw you out from this crisis situation.

Where there is a will, there is a way. We are willing to go ahead, willing to live in a peaceful country, and willing to build new hope! Then why not think of a better life, and do everything we can in order to help our country achieve new heights.



Obama-mania has spread all the way to Kazakhstan.

International Women's Day

by Katie Roders, Karaganda

During the Spring of 2008, the Karganda Gogol Library Women's Club experienced a significant change in it's direction. Adding to our weekly English Language discussion group, the Women's Club and its PCV facilitators began implementing activities centrally focused on women's development and activism.

For International Women's Day 2009, Women's Club took to the streets! In April, 4 teams comprised of 1 PCV and 1 local club member developed leaflets on four topics: Human Trafficking, Women and HIV, Domestic Violence, and Breast Cancer. Then on International Women's Day itself, 15 of the Women's Club participants and 3 of the 5 regular Peace Corps Volunteers distributed leaflets on women's issues to the general public, in tribute to International Women's Day! Reactions varied from gratitude, amusement and general interest/disinterest. Overall, it was a really great experience for Women Club's first street action.

After the street action, all participants and other Gogol Library English Club members came to the library to enjoy a small celebration arranged by the American Corner Coordinator and the remaining 2 PCV's.

Following this, all attendees viewed an excellent and informational documentary on Human Trafficking in Eastern Europe, chosen by one of Women's Club (and the American Corner's) most active members.

This was the first action of its kind by the Karganda Gogol Library Women's Club, and we certainly plan to increase and improve activism like it in the future.

У С П Е Х !

One memorable show



Singing her way straight into your heart.

by McKenzie Clark, Kyzylorda

It is easy, after a year and a half, for a Peace Corps volunteer to think of a single “success” story. After all, with our three-part mission to not only teach English or work with NGOs, but also to enlighten host-country nationals about American life, and educate friends and family back home about life here in Kazakhstan, almost any successful interaction between a volunteer and a member of his or her community can be considered a “success story.” Still, looking back over my last year and a half, one particular event stands out that I felt was not only a very fun and successful community project, but also a great moment of cultural exchange.

Last year Contact Club, the English/Volunteer Club I have been involved with, organized a Valentine’s Day concert to share the traditions of the holiday with the local community through English songs, games, and skits. Several students from the college sang and danced to American pop songs, and played a “Matchmaker” game. In the game, a young man sat behind a curtain and listened to three girls answer questions. He then “chose” his date based on their answers before seeing what they looked like. I must admit that the biggest part I played in the organization of the concert, besides helping think of a couple of games and coaching a few of the less fluent

students in their lines, was finding the right person to help organize it. My star student, Aigerim Kasheikova, coerced that the most talented students from the English faculty into participating, made sure that they were ready to go on the big day, and even wrote a hilarious, very original version of *Romeo and Juliet* in Kazakh. Unlike Shakespeare’s original, the Contact Club version had a happy ending, and it had such a Kazakh feel, that it was obvious that Romeo and Juliet were no longer in Verona. Furthermore, even though I had only been learning Kazakh for a few months at that point, Aigerim insisted that I participate, and so they made me perform the small part of the prophetic “holy man” who sends Romeo and Mercutio to the city to find love and gives them two magic balloons to help them on their quest.

The concert was a huge success. Not only did the audience love it, we also raised several thousand tenge from ticket sales. We then used the money to buy some fresh fruit and small toys for the children at a local orphanage. This worked out a lot better than the original idea of simply giving the orphanage the money as a gift, because we were able to make sure that the orphans benefited, not the management, and gave us the opportunity to spend the afternoon with the children playing with the kids.

Even though it has been over a year since the completion of the project, the Contact Club Valentine’s Day concert continues to stand out in my mind as one of my most successful efforts as a volunteer. The project fulfilled all three parts of the volunteer mission, instructing locals in English, teaching them about American culture, and teaching us about Kazakh culture. Furthermore, it engendered a lot more interest in Contact Club, and participation in the Saturday discussion group remained rose for the next several months. Most importantly though, it provided me with a lieutenant whose help I would continue to rely on for the next several months and who provided the focus and impetus for our efforts to reform Contact Club from a simple conversation club to an important volunteer organization in the community.

Nauryz Kutty Bolsyn!



The Vesti would like to thank of the Volunteers of the SKO for hosting everyone during the Nauryz Holiday. Thanks to you, it was a truly unforgettable experience.

ВЕСЕННИЕ КАНИКУЛЫ 2009

Oreos in a bamboo bungalow



Life is not fucking fair.

by Phil Montgomery, Petropavlovsk

PCVs Phil Montgomery, Mike Mesquita and Aaron Heuth recently spent their Spring Break in sunny Thailand and warm Cambodia. Phil wrote about their action-packed trip. Here are excerpts from his journal.

Friday, March 20: first impressions

After a painfully drab, depressing second winter in Kazakhstan, I have finally woken up. Right now I am sitting in a padded tan swivel chair in an air conditioned internet café in Bangkok, Thailand.

People here smile. I think the first thing I noticed in the restaurant this morning was that when you smile at the waitress, the old woman at the table next to us, or the kid on the back of the motorcycle stopped at a red light, they smile back. After 18 months of living in Kazakhstan, I have grown accustomed to people being straight-faced in public, giving the impression that they are constantly uninterested or mildly irritated. Here, smiles are quick to appear and very easy to evoke. It is a nice change.

Saturday, March 21: tuk-tuks and temples

The population of Bangkok is served by an army of guys driving three-wheeled taxis called tuk-tuks. The driver sits at the steering handlebars of an open air Moped-station wagon hybrid vehicle while the passengers

sit in the cushioned benches in back. The prices are negotiable and cheap... at least when you initially discuss the fare. We left the guesthouse and crossed the Rama VIII Bridge to the main center of the city, where within one block a man stopped us and offered advice and directions about which Buddhist temples were best to see. He told us that it was a special holiday that day and all the temples were free to tourists. On top of that, tuk-tuk drivers were offering an all-day tour around the city for a grand total of 30 Thai Baht (\$0.80). We felt like this was our lucky day.

Our first temple was known as "Big Buddha" where we saw a 30-meter tall golden statue of Buddha standing in the middle of an ornate marble courtyard. Candles, coins, incense and caged birds were for sale and devout locals and pasty white tourists alike were lighting the sweet smelling incense and setting birds free.

"I don't know anything about Buddhism," I said to Aaron.

"Me neither," he replied. "But isn't it cool?"

Monday, March 23: Oreos in a Bamboo Bungalow

I wrote that last entry on the bus from Bangkok to Trat, the mainland city across the bay from the island of Koh Chang where we have been staying for the past two nights. We rented a one-room bungalow made of bam-



ВЕСЕННИЕ КАНИКУЛЫ 2009

boo and palm leaves for \$6 a night. The six dollars I am sure is for the running water and electricity, because the hut itself could not have cost that much to build. The Remark Pu Zi Hut is near the southern pier of the island which is covered with shops selling touristy t-shirts and knickknacks, and just a five-minute walk from the 7/11 convenient store. I should point out that there is something completely satisfying and at the same time wholly incongruent about snacking on Oreos and a cold Coca-Cola in a bamboo hut.

Sunday, March 29: border crossings

Last night in Cambodia. It is gone by too fast. Cambodia in a nutshell: The border crossing was a pain in a few ways... 1) We had to stay a night in a hotel by the border because of transportation timing and the fact that the border closes for the night and you cannot cross after 7 pm. 2) English speaking guys were waiting for us at the visa registration window and took our passports to fill out the forms for us. We thought they worked for the government and would not give us any problem, but they work for tips, asking for money after they have filled out your forms. We did not pay them, partly because 3) the visa cost \$35, not the \$20 we had budgeted and 4) I lost \$17 to a crappy exchange place in a bazaar. Now I know: Always go to a bank and find out what the conversion rate should be.

Phnom Penh was a bit more culturally demonstrative as a Cambodian city. Most service-sector employees speak decent English, the streets are packed with motorcycles and tuk-tuks, and we have become accustomed to the bombardment of sales offers everywhere we walk. We have dubbed tuk-tuk drivers as tuk-tuk attackers because they wait around the bus station and guesthouses and at the first sight of a tourist begin asking, "Sir, you want a ride? You need tuk-tuk?"

"No thanks, we're walking."

They get out of their vehicle.

"I'll take you anywhere. Good price."

"Nope, thanks."

They have started walking with you down the street.

"Three dollars. I know everywhere in city. We go, ok?"

You have realized silence may be the best response.

"Ok. One dollar. Ok? No problem."

They are convinced beyond doubt that you want, you need a ride in a tuk-tuk regardless of what you might verbally convey to them, regardless of the clarity and firmness with which you convey it.

The bombardment reached an excruciating peak today at the temples near Siem Reap. We woke up at 4:30 am in order to see the sunrise at the Buddhist temples built by the Khmer civilization in the 1200s. When we arrived at the first temple as the sun was just beginning to color the eastern sky, a flock of kids swarmed us, trying to sell bracelets, postcards, books and trinkets. They were young and barefoot and they knew how to sell.

Two dialogues

8-year old girl: Hello, sir? You buy bracelets, ok?

Aaron: No thank you.

Girl: Only one dollar. It's good price.

Aaron: One dollar? That's expensive.

Girl: Ok, ten bracelets for one dollar. Buy one for your girlfriend.

Aaron: I don't have a girlfriend. Sorry.

Girl: You know why you don't have girlfriend?

Aaron: Why's that?

Girl: Because you don't buy bracelet!

Different girl (same bracelets): Where you from?

Aaron: The US.

Girl: If I tell you the capital of US, you buy bracelet, ok?

Aaron: If I tell you the capital of Cambodia, you'll go away, ok?

Girl: No. And the capital is Washington DC. Now you have to buy. You promised.

Aaron: No I didn't. And we lied, we're really from Kazakhstan.

Girl: If I tell you the capital of Kazakhstan you will buy.

Aaron: We'll see.

Girl: Astana. Now you buy bracelet.

Aaron: I don't want a bracelet.

Girl: Do you know the capital of New Guinea?

Aaron: No, what?

Girl: I'll tell you if you buy.

Wednesday, April 1: Abu Dhabi

We had a 22-hour layover in Abu Dhabi...



ВЕСЕННИЕ КАНИКУЛЫ 2009

Abu Dhabi is a booming international city in the United Arab Emirates. It lies on the coast of the Persian Gulf, and the airport is a twenty minute taxi to the beach. We withdrew our Peace Corps stipends for April and hit the city. We drove through the wide, landscaped, sprawling streets past large houses, skyscrapers, mosques and convenience stores with Dunkin' Donuts. We walked down to the water and swam in the Arabian Gulf. There we saw a sign outlining all the things you cannot do on the beach, such as play cricket, drink alcohol, listen to loud music, barbecue, camp, abandon your children, etc. We ate lunch in a large mall – identical to ones found in any large suburb in the US, save for the fact that about half of the men were wearing flowing, floor-length white robes and the same proportion of women wearing black hijabs. It was a strange experience. In the same somewhat traditionally conservative Arab city where alcohol and cigarettes were nowhere to be found (and Mike did search), I ate a Whopper with cheese at a Burger King in a mall food court and had a Frappuccino from Starbucks for dessert.

Things I have (re)learned on vacation

- Never exchange your money in a bazaar
- Fried spiders and crickets taste like barbecued shrimp... kind of.
- Genocide did not end with the Holocaust
- Traffic lights are optional, if drivers are careful and courteous
- Red-headed white boys still burn with SPF 30 sunscreen applied every two hours
- A little customer service and a smile go a long way
- A little pepper and curry go even further
- A long walk (even two hours with a heavy backpack) is not an awful endeavor
- Sitting on a beach under the stars is an ideal location for a theological discussion
- Eight-year-olds can be vicious yet effective salespeople
- Things dry much more slowly in high humidity climates
- Trees are more powerful than stones
- 80% of Abu Dhabi residents are foreigners
- Whoppers are delicious
- Always allow at least four hours to cross Bangkok in rush hour traffic

The road to Siem Reap

by Phil Montgomery, Petropavlovsk

The following was an inspired by a trip to the Killing Fields in Siem Reap, Cambodia. In the 1970s, the Khmer Rouge undertook a massive purge of dissidents and intellectuals, turning schools into houses of torture and leaving behind towers of skulls.

My life is scattered with moments I'd like to safely keep
The most recent, the view from a bus along the road to Siem Reap

It's a flat simple route, but the impression is profound
Of the sun setting behind palms rooted in the red soggy ground

The day is slowly ending and in each little village we pass
people sit under stilted houses, the roofs thatched with grass

This highway is lined with property, only one house deep
One thin long village hugs the road to Siem Reap

A man chases a duck in a pond, as the cattle nearby graze
A woman bathes her daughter in a bucket while her naked son plays

His skin shines like dark copper as he splashes gleefully
His smile and his joy beaming boldly for everyone to see

It seems to me here that life is a bit more complete
In the heat and humidity by the road to Siem Reap

It's clear from the tools and the land there is work to be done

But life's pace is slow and there is plenty of time for fun
Little kids play toss with a ball; one throws, another catches

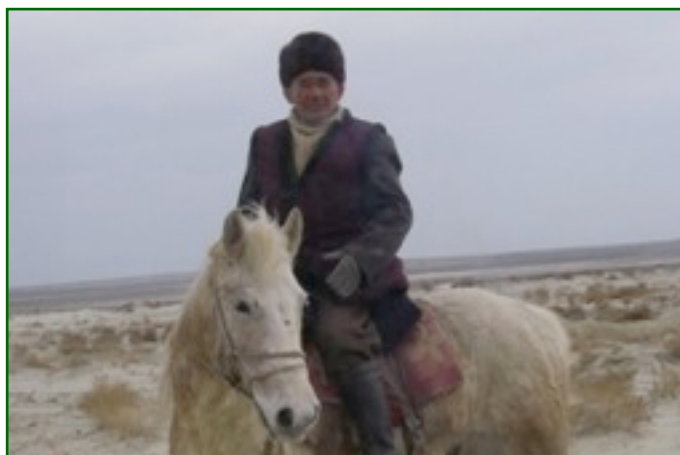
Smiling crowds gather round to watch volleyball matches

I see a world at peace as I drift off to sleep

While the bus tumbles on, down the road to Siem Reap

ВЕСЕННИЕ КАНИКУЛЫ 2009

Ghosts of the sea



Trips to the dying Aral sea offer all kinds of quirky rewards, including decrepit hulls and roaming s.

by Tim Suchsland, Yavlenka

"The Aral Sea was the fourth largest lake in the world. The former seabed is now a salt desert... The dying Aral Sea is one of the world environmental disasters."

- Т. Аяпова, English - Английский Язык: Учебник для 11 Классов

As our Lada jeep sped along the crumbling road to the Aral Sea and the ship cemetery, we passed desolate villages – long ago sustained by the once-fruitful bounty of the Sea. Now, they stood in a state of decay, forever stranded in the middle of the desert.

We eventually arrived to the old seashore, but our car did not stop here. We drove over what was once the beach and continued onto the seafloor. Dry, brown tufts of grass were now growing on the mounds of sand which had once formed below the water's surface. The engine revved with fury over every sandbank we traversed. The loud clatter from the pistons blasting and gears shifting was muffled by bizarre, Arabic-inspired music roaring from the stereo.

As the Lada went on, we came across a grimy, old Kazakh man watching over his herd of camels. He was like a specter from a time long forgotten by the receding waters of the Sea. "Asalam aleykum," shouted our driver, as we slowed down to pay respect to this old gentleman. The man replied with a congenial wuleykum asalam, and we continued on our way.

Across the wasteland of what was once a harbor rested the ship cemetery. Only three boats remained. Like vultures, people had picked apart the hulls and inner mechanics of the ships, selling what scrap metal they

could in China or Russia. Our car stopped at the biggest of the ships, berthed forever in the shifting sands. The wind howled as it blew through what was once the stern of the vessel. What was left of the hull had turned a deep, rusty red. Whatever traces of majesty and dignity this boat once possessed were stolen ten or twenty years ago when the Sea finally receded away from this lonely place.

We pressed on towards the Sea with a maddening fervor. Our driver furiously drove over every hill like a madman. We bounced up and down violently – slightly amused, but mostly frightened for our lives. It was while we went recklessly airborne over one large hill, when we first caught a glimpse of the Sea. There it was stretching out along the horizon – enchanting, yet, unsettling...

Spring Break... the Aral Sea?!?!

Most PCVs in Kazakhstan are familiar with the tragedy and ecological disaster that is the Aral Sea. In fact, most of the EDU PCVs have read about it in our wonderful Ayapova textbooks, and a few OCAP PCVs even work with NGOs closely associated with the Sea. We all know how during the 1950s and 1960s the Soviets began turning Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan into a giant cotton-producing zone – in the process, draining the two rivers which fed the Sea, the Amu-Darya or Oxus River and the Syr-Darya. This caused the Sea to shrink at an almost exponential rate. The Sea's fishing industry collapsed as the fish died off. The former seabed became a huge desert, and the winds began blowing horrible salts and chemicals into the air. Today the people living in the region suffer from different cancers and horrible cases of



ВЕСЕННИЕ КАНИКУЛЫ 2009

tuberculosis caused by the dust storms. As well, with the fishing industry in ruins, the area suffers from high rates of unemployment and poverty.

Though most PCVs know a thing or two about the Sea, few actually venture to this remote, desert region. It is basically in the middle of nowhere after all – far from the majority of Kazakhstan’s population, hence, most of our sites. Some PCVs may have the desire to go to the Sea, but are scared of what they might find out there. And I bet some even doubt if the Sea is even there anymore.

Before Victor Mayorga (Samakol), Alex Bystryn (Balkhash), Lindsey Callaway (Taldy-Korgan) and I joined the Peace Corps and came to Kazakhstan we never imagined we would ever travel to the Aral Sea. However, when we arrived in country some strange, visceral feeling deep down inside of us said, “Go! Go to the Aral Sea while you are here in Kazakhstan! While you can! While it’s still there!” It was a strange desire, I know. We could have gone to all sorts of other fun-filled destinations to take leave... Thailand, China, India, Russia, etc. Instead, we decided to be the small minority PCVs who actually visit the Sea.

The four of us met in Shymkent during Nauryz, and from there we took the trip to the Sea – a journey Victor, Alex, Lindsey and I unanimously recommend all PCVs to take sometime during their two years of service. The trip to the Sea was surreally Kazakhstan – maybe even a little stranger than what is usual for this country. Of the excursion, Victor commented, “The trip was sobering and extremely interesting. It’s definitely worth it if you want a greater understanding of the type of challenges this country faces.” Victor also expressed, “It’s a good way to gain some perspective.”

Ayapova was right, the sea is dying

While the Sea was still remarkable in size, its former self must have been an imposing goliath. To think how the Aral Sea had once stretched for hundreds of miles – from Aralsk in the north to Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan in the south. It is amazing to really witness firsthand the power in which man can alter his environment. Sometimes this change can be for good, but often this power destroys. We can easily turn something that provides us with food, water and life into a barren waste.

So come witness the Aral Sea yourself before it is too late. As Victor reminded me, Alex and Lindsey while we stood at the water’s edge, “Ayapova was right, the Sea is dying!”

Here is what you need to know:

Serik Duisen (+77016627163; serik_duisen@mail.ru) is the man who will get you squared away. He will set you up with a home stay in Aralsk (2,500 tg per night; breakfast and plenty of tea included), driver and car (12,000 tg for the day; four-passenger Lada jeep), and guide (12,000 tg, but this fee might be optional). There is a NGO membership fee for each guest (1,000 tg). Serik is a young, friendly guy. He met us at the train station when we arrived in Aralsk.

Aralsk itself is a dusty, little town of 30,000 people or so. The old harbor has a few boats on platforms. The old cranes, fisheries and canneries are all falling apart and look quite depressing – perfect for your photography needs. Plastic wrappers and bottles blow in the wind like tumbleweeds across the waterless seafloor of the harbor, adding an apocalyptic, Mad-Max-meets-Wild-West feel to the place.

There are plenty of shops and cafés in the town center to buy food. There is also a billiards hall and park here. Many glorious monuments dot the area as well. My favorite was the ironically-sad, empty fish fountain.

There is a history museum near the town center. Supposedly, inside there are pictures of actors Ewan McGregor and Charley Boorman when they passed through Aralsk on their motorcycle documentary Long Way Round.

Tourist information can be found at the Danish-Kazakhstani NGO Aral Tenizi (www.aralsk.net; located near the harbor in Aralsk). Unfortunately, when we visited, the office was closed. Nevertheless, they had interesting maps and pictures outside their door to look at.

Yaksart Hotel is located near the harbor in Aralsk. The façade of the building looks like it survived a fire, but the lobby inside is decent. One and two-person rooms are 4,000 tg per night. And they have swamp coolers for those hot summer days!

You will find the ship cemetery near the village of Zhambil (60 km from Aralsk). The Aral Sea is another 20 km from the cemetery. You will want to buy plenty of food and water for the trip, since the road is a rough and long one and the tour lasts from 5 to 7 hours.

Аралское Море is the name of the train station in Aralsk. To get to Aralskoe More we took the international Bishkek-Moscow train 17 from Shymkent (3,700 tg; 16 or 17 hours). To leave Aralsk we rode the Aqtöbe-Almaty train 24 to Kyzylorda (1,100 tg; 7 or 8 hours). Do not miss the Soviet-era mosaic inside the station’s waiting room.

Ж И З Н Ь

The burning man



Allah only knows what lurks behind the building.

by Casey Meyering, Ust-Kamenogorsk

WARNING: The following contains graphic imagery that some people may find disturbing. Reader discretion is advised.

Every day, weather permitting, I take a walk around my village. I started doing it last year, and over time I began to take it very seriously. Originally, I walked two hours each day – which turned into three and eventually four. I kept extending my route to include evermore far-flung regions of town.

The last part of my route, the half-way point where I turn back, is the graveyard. I used to live nearby with one of my host families, and I have walked through it dozens of times. I came to like the place because nobody was ever there. I also like how the Russians bury people – they put people's pictures on the graves, and the graves have small picnic tables at them so friends and family can come and eat and drink next to the graves. It is interesting walking around, guessing the biographies of the departed and thinking about when they lived and what they might have seen during their lives in the Soviet Union.

I have never bumped into anyone in the back region of the cemetery – not until I found a man burning himself to death. As I walked around in the trench of snow, I had no idea what was going on twenty yards in front of me. I simply walked around a corner and there he was. At first

it just looked like a fire, until I saw legs and arms slowly moving. He was still alive. I ran up to him and started throwing snow on him. This only seemed to stoke the fire. I smelled the gasoline along with the cooking flesh and realized what was going on. There was an anti-freeze container filled with gas sitting next to him.

His clothes were in such a tangle I thought maybe someone had tied him up and done this. I tried to kick the pile of burning clothes off of him, but the fire was too hot so I grabbed his wrists and pulled. The flesh came off like latex gloves slipping off soapy hands. He was so tender it seemed like anything I might do would make him fall apart. I grabbed his wrists and tried again, this time pulling him out successfully. He kicked very weakly as I was doing this. While he did that, a bone started to poke out from his inner left thigh.

Lying in front of me on the snow steaming, I was able to see the full extent of the damage. He poured the gas into his lap for some reason. His arms stuck out like a praying mantis, poking out in the air like they had already gone into rigor mortis. The fire burned most of the meat off his inner thighs, revealing the yellow fat layers covering in some places long stringy muscles that slowly slid back and fourth as his legs moved. His penis was almost completely gone – charred off.

I tried to talk to him. His eyes were open, and he was looking at me. Most of the hair was burned off and the skin was peeling off his face. I asked him what his name was. Stepan he told me. I asked for his last name but he refused to tell me. He just told me to go away. I called my counterpart because my phone did not connect to the cops. As I called he kept telling me to go away again and again. He was not screaming or crying, just talking in a hushed and tired tone. It did not seem like he was in any pain at all. He had been lying naked on the snow for almost ten minutes, and he was not even shivering. He was in shock, not feeling pain anymore.

My counterpart called me back and said that both the cops and ambulance were in the next village, and might not even come. I was stuck with the choice of leaving him to his own devices – which he no longer had the strength to carry out – or keeping him company until he died. I asked him if he wanted a cigarette, and he said yes. His arms did not move so I lit it and put it in his

Ж И З Н Ь

mouth. I squatted and smoked with him and asked him why he did it. He did not feel like explaining. We simply chain-smoked four cigarettes together. He stopped talking to me, but he kept his eyes open. He was still in the same exact position as when I had pulled him out of the fire.

I decided to run to a house to see if they could help in any way. As I was running, I bumped into a cop. He was just moseying along. I told him where Stepan was, but he just smugly told me to calm down like this was a routine traffic stop.

"Did you kill him?" he asked with the same disinterested arrogance.

"Of course not."

"Ok, so he did this to himself?"

"I think so. He told me he doesn't want to live anymore."

"Where are you from?"

-- Insert any "*Как там?*" conversation --

By the time we got back, Stepan was unconscious. The cop was able to rouse him for a bit, but Stepan did not tell him anything.

"Tell us who you are before you die, please," asked the cop.

"*Пашел ты,*" was all he said. The cop gave up and walked off about ten feet to take a piss – snot-rocketing next to Stepan as he walked by.

The ambulance showed up ten minutes later. They were pretty professional: shot him up with morphine, put him on a gurney and lifted him into the ambulance. The cop told me to help the medic put him in the van because he did not want to get his hands dirty. During this process other cops showed up, blocked the only exit and then argued with the ambulance driver about how to get out of the cemetery without making them move their police car. After a couple minutes of this absurdity the ambulance took off, taking Stepan away from the same graveyard in which he would probably soon be buried.

I stood around for another fifteen or twenty minutes with the five joking cops and a young Russian dude who was only brought along in the crammed Lada because they had just arrested him. All seven of us piled into the car and they gave me a ride back to the police station. The chief wrote the report. He was a nice guy and gave me a ride home afterwards. I cracked a few *Девятки* and made a few calls.

Frisbee: let's roll

by Daniel McKenna-Foster, Ust-Kamenogorsk

Are you looking for a good way to bring kids together this summer? Let me recommend one thing: Ultimate Frisbee. Oh no, not the Sunday-afternoon-toss-around-after-church Frisbee you used to play with your dog, but the internationally recognized sport that is played competitively all over the world.

Ultimate is a sport a lot like football, except you cannot run with the disc. (Frisbee is a trademark.) It is a great game to teach kids because it is all about teamwork, athleticism and, most of all, sportsmanship. From the UPA official site: "Ultimate relies upon a spirit of sportsmanship that places the responsibility for fair play on the player. Highly competitive play is encouraged, but never at the expense of mutual respect among competitors, adherence to the agreed upon rules, or the basic joy of play. Protection of these vital elements serves to eliminate unsportsmanlike conduct from the Ultimate field. Such actions as taunting opposing players, dangerous aggression, belligerent intimidation, intentional infractions, or other 'win-at-all-costs' behavior are contrary to the Spirit of the Game and must be avoided by all players." Maybe this is why Ultimate sportsmen and sportswomen have been called the "courtliest of athletes."

In this country a lot of girls never get the chance to participate equally and Ultimate can really be a springboard for open participation for all. It is about as egalitarian and democratic as any real sport can get.

Although thus far I have only played in informal settings, one Kaz 18 before me was able to accomplish a lot with Ultimate in this region. She succeeded in putting together a few Ultimate camps. The training at these camps included the basics like fore-and-backhand throws, pivots and, by the end of camp, the all important "stack" formation. The kids had never seen disc play before, and they absolutely loved it.

Seeing that volunteer engaging those enthusiastic kids really inspired me to get going on my own camp for some competitive, constructive play in my own village. I started last fall with some disc golf and a few ultimate starter sessions and my students have been asking me all winter when we will finally play again. (As soon as the snow melts, kiddies!)

A great way to make Ultimate happen in your community is to take advantage of Discraft's Peace Corps deal. You can get up to 10 official ultimate discs free if you pay for postage.

Ж И З Н Ь

Why am I here?



I love your country too, buddy.

by Ann Marie Deignan, Ust-Kamenogorsk

I was slouching my way home on the bus tonight – still a bit off my game from yet another sleepless Almaty adventure – when I found myself inexplicably engrossed in a poster on the window of bus #3: “2009 Fare Guidelines.” Real edgy stuff, huh?

Much like a proud four year old, these days I read everything I see – billboards, food labels, newspapers – simply because I can.

However, this instance the writing that caught my attention was “concentration camp.” The sign read, “Persons eligible for complimentary or reduced fare: Infants and young children; People born before December 31, 1931; Disabled persons; Veterans; Survivors of the blockade of Leningrad; People who were detained in any con-

centration camp.” The last two points I read twice. Where was I again?

When the bus reached my stop, I stood on the sidewalk for a moment digesting these words. How many people on that bus fell into these last two categories? How many of my neighbors did? The vendors at our markets? Apparently, enough to warrant their own fare category on the bus.

I have been here in Kazakhstan so long now that sometimes I forget where I am. It no longer seems foreign to me. Yet, no matter how long I stay here – and that may well exceed the latest December deadline – I will never be fully part of the collective consciousness of Kazakhstan. I will always be *чужая*. But that is okay.

When I decided to join Peace Corps – which was roughly 22 years before it actually happened – I felt my life was lacking something essential. I could not name it then, and I still cannot. (That was long before I became entangled in working and volunteering for non-profits.) I was a poor kid who wanted to see the world. The few travel opportunities I had were brief and tightly budgeted. I found that each time I left a country I had ten times as many questions as I had before I had arrived. Simply put, I felt unsatisfied. I did not want the nickel tour. I wanted to really see, understand and feel how other people lived. At age 37, I decided to put up or shut up.

Twenty seven months later, an elderly neighbor in Usttobe (himself a transplant from Germany 50 odd years ago) told me, “When you first came, we hadn’t the foggiest idea what you were saying or why you were here. That damned accent of yours, and your grammar! Foo! We all just nodded and smiled. Now the accent is almost gone, and your grammar, well... well... Anyways, we’ll truly miss talking with you. I know what it’s like to be the ‘foreigner,’ but trust me you’re not the ‘foreigner’ any more. You’ve done your time.” I beamed. Was it true? Had I achieved what I set out to achieve?

Three months later I found myself facing yet another milestone, my census interview. The poor interviewer must have thought I was nuts. As he rolled his eyes and dug nervously in his briefcase for the English version of

Ж И З Н Ь

the form, I gushed about how excited I was to finally appear on the roles. Moments later, he found his query. Then just as quickly set it aside, cautiously asking, "I think we can try this in Russian, no?" I nodded enthusiastically. We made it through the interview in 30 minutes. No blanks remained.

So what am I trying to say? I ramble... Oh yeah, my point is this, "live here." You did not sign up for a package tour. You did not sign up for a summer abroad. You signed up to live and work in a different country for 27 months. Do it! You may never have this opportunity again.

In the course of the last three years I have been where you are now. I have been dead-broke, un-showered. I had my doubts about the place(s) that I worked and lived. I clashed heartily with staff, volunteers, co-workers, counterparts, host families, livestock and random bazaar vendors. A person would have to be crazy to sign on for another tour, right? Right?

So why am I wasting your time with all this? I simply want you to acknowledge the value of your time here. Love it or hate it, this may well be one of the most valuable experiences of your life. Let yourself grow and change. Learn the language(s) so that you have one more thing to put on your resume – one more thing to baffle your less-ambitious friends. Spend less time complaining over a beer with your site mates and more time learning about the history of your region. Spend some of your vacation time in Kazakhstan. You may, at this very moment, be standing on the very spot where Ghengis Khan stood. How cool is that? May sound cliché, but we are the masters of our destiny. Do not screw it up.

Do not screw what up? I will give you a few hints. You are not going to find it at the posh nightclubs or the ex-pat bars. (The cost of a single Guinness at the pub costs more than many people spend on groceries in a week!) You are not going to find it at Ramstor – not even at that crazy souvenir kiosk by the cash registers. You are not going to find it in the company of other PCVs. You will only find it when you distance yourself from all of that, even for a few moments. You do not have to cut yourself off from all things American, but one or two steps back will allow you to see. And that is when the real adventure starts.

In times of *кризис*: advice to save money

by Jeffrey Mason, Pavlodar

The first word the Kaz 20s probably learned and the one that is burned into everyone else's minds forever, I dare not even unnecessarily repeat it here. As we read in the previous edition of the Vesti, the tenge has depreciated 25% and prices are on the rise. With cash tighter than ever, here are a few tips to save your hard-earned and tightly-stretched green:

Just like in America, buy in bulk. I buy oil in 5 liter containers, flour in 10 kilo bags, sugar in 5 kilo quantities, etc. This allows one to bargain a little and even if you cannot, the price is definitely lower than a smaller quantity. Ex.: 5 liters of oil for 850 tenge vs. 1 liter for 300.

Can/Preserve/Freeze. Most of you will just be into your new apartments by the time you are ready to start canning food for the winter. I buy the big three liter jars of juice for about 400 tenge. A lot for juice, I know, but the jars are great for canning food. Buy in bulk (see above) tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, etc., and can them for the winter. I made 5 gallons of spaghetti sauce and froze it in zip lock bags (thanks mom!) – fresh, tasty spaghetti/pizza/marinara sauce all winter long!

Make market friends. I get cheese from my cheese lady that should cost 1300 tenge/kilo for 1000 tenge/kilo. My fruit and vegetable lady gives me 50-75 tenge less per kilo usually on produce. My Turkmenistan spice and nuts guy always throws in an extra half cup of nuts or small bag of spices (especially when I buy in bulk).

Plan your meals. Sounds silly, perhaps, and makes you feel old even, but planning your meals allows you to use the same ingredients over and over so that you are not wasting anything. I buy eggs knowing I am going to scramble some, make fried rice with some, and a cake with the others. Same goes with vegetables. Get creative and for those who have the internet, use a website (like www.allrecipes.com) to search recipes with the ingredients you already have.

Simple things. Turn off your lights when you are not in a room. Do not wash your clothes so often. Drink a beer or two less a week. Shut your laptop off at night. Buy a filter instead of buying bottled water. Big apartments are nice, but smaller ones cost less to heat in the winters. Cheap dates are usually better anyways – cook dinner instead of going to a cafe. Keep track of where you are spending money, and best of luck to you all in surviving this *кризис*.

Ж И З Н Ь

Consumer report: juice brands



Careful kids. Science can be dangerous.

by Michael Hotard, Baurzhan Momushu

In addition to language, host families, work and culture, juice selection ranks high on the list of challenges for PCVs in Kazakhstan. How many times have you walked into your local magazine and been paralyzed with the array of choices of juice? Even if you are able to get over the hurdle of deciding between apple, pineapple, orange, apricot, cherry, currant, peach and multivitamin, selecting the actual brand can be even harder. Is it worth the twenty extra tenge to get Goldy or the full 100 tenge for Я? Over IST, six brave volunteers stepped up the challenge of finding out.

An official, semi-scientific taste test was conducted in Kok Tobe Sanitorium on the night of March 25, 2009. Five different brands of apricot juice were purchased at the nearby supermarket and then put to the test. The tasters were sequestered in a different room while a committee poured the juice into unlabeled cups in order to guarantee the validity of the results. The rules were laid out: each taster tasted juices A-E, rating them on a scale of 1-10. There was a cup of water available to cleanse

the palate between tastings. To eliminate possible prejudices, no audible judgments were allowed until all tasters were finished.

The tasters systematically began their test, carefully marking their scores and writing comments when they felt obliged. It became clear that the juices were different from one another, especially in thickness. Comments on the viscosity included “Pulp,” “I like it thick and juicy,” and “Thick, like camel semen.” The other common feature commented on was the difference in sweetness, especially noting when the juices tasted artificially sweetened.

Although priced midrange, the strong favorite going into the contest was definitely Juicy. Juicy has excellent marketing that tells the consumer exactly how many apricots went into the liter (13), and clearly states in English that no sugar, additives or preservatives were added to the juice. However, when the results were announced, the entire audience was shocked.

Not only did Juicy not win, it placed fourth, only in front of the “thin” and “watery” DaDa. The clear winner was the “sweet, but not too sweet” Gracio with an



average 7.5. Second place was the “very good juice” Я at 7. Then the “flavorful” Goldy was third with 6.67. Juicy scored 6.33, and DaDa finished with 5.83.

It is important to note the limitations of this test. First, it was conducted with a very small sample, thus subjecting it to possible bias from outlying scores. A sensitivity analysis was conducted by removing the highest and lowest scores, and the ranking remained virtually unchanged. It is interesting to also note that Juicy had an extremely high standard deviation, meaning the group was truly split on whether it was a good juice or not. The opinions on the other juices were much less divided.

This test was only for apricot juice (my personal favorite). To truly declare Gracio as the superior brand, more tests will have to be done including the large array of flavor choices. For the sake of volunteers now and in the future, I hope these tests will be done and their results widely published.



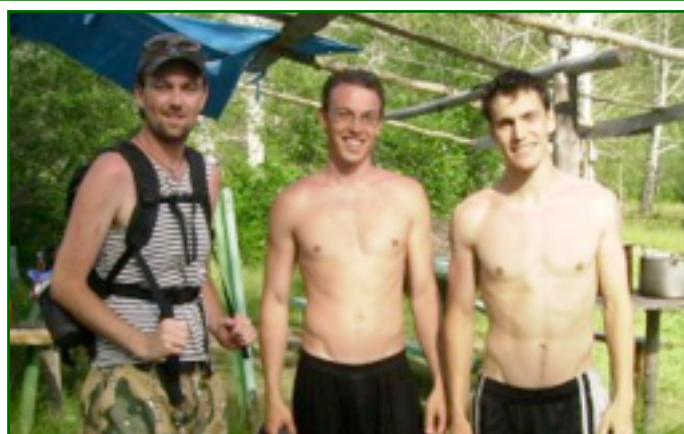
Juice	Price	Average	Standard Deviation	Comments
Dada	180	5.83	1.33	“Thin.” “Watery, hint of cinnamon.” “Delicious, sweet yet subtle.”
Juicy	205	6.33	3.08	“Tangy taste, slightly delicious.” “Nice blend of fruit and water, quality juice.” “Plastic, unnatural flavoring.” “Intrinsic deliciousness.”
Goldy	210	6.67	1.21	“Thick, like camel semen.” “Sugary, artificial?” “Flavorful, thicker.”
Я	340	7	1.79	“Sugar additive.” “Very good juice.” “Too thick, taste is absent.”
Gracio	240	7.5	1.52	“Sweet, but not too sweet.” “Thick, full, tastes real.” “Thicker.”

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Доклад службы

by Tony Sharp, Ridder

Я приехал в Казахстан 22 – ого августа, 2006 года. После трех месячного изучения культуры и языка в городе Талгар, не далеко от Алматы, я работал здесь в городе Риддере, расположенного среди гор в Восточном Казахстане, более двух лет не покидая страну. Я считаю Казахстан моим вторым домом. Большая часть моей работы за последние два года была связана с работой в организации «АК – Кем – Риддер». Организация просила Корпус Мира направить для работы в Риддере волонтера с экологическим образованием. Я недавно закончил университет в штате Оригон, получив диплом управления природными ресурсами из лесного университета города Корвалес штат Оригон. Проекты, созданные более чем за два года, имели целью знакомить и обучать молодежь экологическому образованию, а также развивать эко туризм в горах Западного Алтая. Я помогал строить домики для организации «АК – Кем – Риддер» на Сером Лугу, а также помогал туристам в экологических экскурсиях. Я посадил 500 деревьев на Сером Лугу с надеждой помочь восстановить лес. Я часто приходил в 10 школ и 2 колледжа с беседами об экологии и с целью обучения английскому языку, охватывая 1000 студентов по области. В течение двух лет я знакомил студентов с американской культурой, сравнивая ее с русской и казахской, проводил уроки английского языка в английском клубе три раза в неделю для детей и жителей города. Уроки английского языка были бесплатными, посещаемость круглый год составляла приблизительно 20 человек. Я шесть заездов работал в летнем экологическом лагере в течение 2007, 2008 годов, находившемся на Сером Лугу, работая с 10, 20 детьми в каждом заезде. Я помог организовать очистку вдоль берега реки Ульба и Грамотуха с 50 учениками из школы №17. Я, совместно с моей организацией, проводил уроки по здоровому образу жизни с информационной целью о ВИЧ и СПИД, профилактика наркомании и табакокурения (как предупредить и обезопасить себя от этой страшной болезни) о чем они раньше не знали. На лекциях присутствовали 650 молодых людей. В 2008 году я помог написать грант USAID для организации «АК – КЕМ – РИДДЕР» по организации ремонта нашего офиса, преобразовав его в новый экологический центр по туризму (визит центр). Проводил работы с молодежью по безопасному пребыванию на природе – в тайге. В эти проекты было вложено минимум 25 процентов финансирования и 100 процентов на нужды



В лесу, правила об одежде не существуют!

организации и на утверждения. Я жил и работал в Риддере для того, чтобы помочь организации участвовать в реализации этих проектов. Организация обратилась ко мне с целью оказать содействие в этих проектах. (специфика этих проектов приложена на следующей странице)

Я осознанно принял решение принять приглашение приехать в Казахстан. Я учил русский язык. Я изучил и понял многое о Казахстане, еще находясь и работая в своей стране. Я изучил и понял Казахстан, установив личные отношения и связи с людьми этой страны. Я ел традиционную еду, жил в казахстанской семье 9 месяцев. Я принимал участие во всех сферах жизни вместе с людьми Восточного Казахстана. Я изучил экологию Алтайских гор, ходил в походы, катался на лыжах вместе с моими лучшими друзьями в самых удивительных местах Алтайских гор. Все это – моя жизнь в Казахстане. Это не каникулы или отпуск для меня. Я здесь жил, чтобы познакомиться поближе со страной, которую я выбрал еще находясь в США, а также, чтобы познакомить людей из Казахстана с культурой, традициями и обычаями моей страны.

И самое главное - я посвятил свою жизнь проблемам экологии, так как люблю очень эту область деятельности. Я принял приглашение приехать в Казахстан, потому что знаю, что Миру нужны партнеры, работающие вместе, чтобы вместе решать проблемы возникающие в мире. Я приехал в Казахстан с одной главной целью – работать с людьми другой страны, которые хотят сделать экологию лучше. Я познакомился с людьми, которые говорили на другом языке и имели другую культуру, но я сразу узнавал, что эти люди работали в «АК – КЕМ – РИДДЕРЕ» судя по их отношению к природе, их взглядам на экологию.

Работа, проделанная мной в Казахстане, демонстрирует мое отношение к этой стране

(НЕ)ПОЛЕЗНЫЕ СОВЕТЫ



by Mary Couri and Jessica Urfer

Dear Kia,

I know I should not be complaining when some host families forget to even feed their new PCVs. So instead of talking to anyone, I have decided to write to you. I am at my wits end! I have eaten *бешбармак* for the past 92 meals straight! I am starting to forget what other food tastes like—or even if other food exists at all!

When I first moved into my new host family, they fed me *monty* and *плов* and even fruit, but slowly those began disappearing. Now it is *бешбармак* for breakfast, lunch and dinner. They even give it to me in a plastic bag so I can take it to school. Last week the bag spilled onto my 8th form textbook, and now it still smells like the national dish of Kazakhstan! I do not want to insult the locals but if I get one more "Have you tried our national dish? It means five fingers." I am going to take my five fingers and throw my bag of noodles in their face! I know this is not the best way to acculturate. Please help me!

Yours truly,

"Eyeball Eater" in Uralsk

Dear Eyeball Eater,

I have some bad news for you. It needs to get much, much worse before it gets better. Wait for Nauryz. You will enter a yurt. Inside this yurt ask for the "Seven Components" drink. Drink it all—every last chunky, oily drop. After that, you will be begging for the besh. Until then you can always find Tabasco or Hot sauce in Almaty or Astana. Have a friend pick some up for you. Pour enough of that on the *бешбармак* and you will not have any taste buds left to notice what you are eating anymore.

Dear Kia,

I recently read a story about how a PCV dropped his wallet in an outhouse. Now I am deathly afraid I might drop a shoe—or even worse, fall in myself! I do not know what to do! Dr. Victor asks, "How's your pooping?" But I am too embarrassed to tell him. What should I do?

Sincerely,

"Down and Out" in Dostik

Dear Down and Out,

My most precious personal item is my bicycle-helmet headlamp (minus the helmet). Why? It is completely hands-free. A normal flashlight works too, but outhouse ledges are crooked and the floor is disgusting, and if you are busy doing outhouse stuff, the last thing you want to think about is, "Is my flashlight going to touch the floor? Wait, what was that? A Mouse?" The headlamp is—get this—ON YOUR HEAD! All you have to do is move your head and the light goes there. It is absolutely indispensable. Get one sent to you or be resourceful and make one out of rubber-bands. It is up to you. All I know is I would rather eat an entire sheep head by myself than go into the outhouse without a light.

We all know that feeling: It is 2:00 a.m. and you had too much tea with dinner. And you're laying there looking at the ceiling thinking, "But I don't want to go out there now. It's cold and scary. What if the dog is off its chain?" Just go! Peeing the bed is not an option at this age. Believe me, I have tried. It is just not acceptable. Suck it up, and run out there. You will feel so much better that you did. For inspiration, sometimes I chant things like "We do it this way for JFK!" or sing myself the theme song from *Team America, World Police*. "The Eye of the Tiger" is also an uplifting option.

Finally, never, ever, ever, ever take more into the outhouse than absolutely needed. I do not care how long your journey is, do not bring your MP3 player. No phones, no magazines, no nothing! Have the mentality that if it goes into the outhouse, it will not come out. Unless it is the headlamp of course.

DOWN HOME COOKING

Spanish Tortillas

by Matt Turner, Karatau

6 medium potatoes, diced
2 small onions, coarsely chopped
4 tablespoons oil
7 eggs
1/4 cup milk
salt and pepper to taste

In a medium bowl mix the potatoes and onions. Season with salt and pepper.

Heat 2 tablespoons of the oil in a 10- to 12-inch non-stick ovenproof frying pan. Fry the potatoes and onions on low heat and cover with a lid for 5 minutes to let them soften. Turn up the heat for another 5 minutes until golden brown. Remove from the stove and drain off any excess oil.

Meanwhile break the eggs into a medium bowl. Add the remaining salt and milk and whisk vigorously until frothy. Add the potatoes and onions to the eggs and mix until fully integrated.

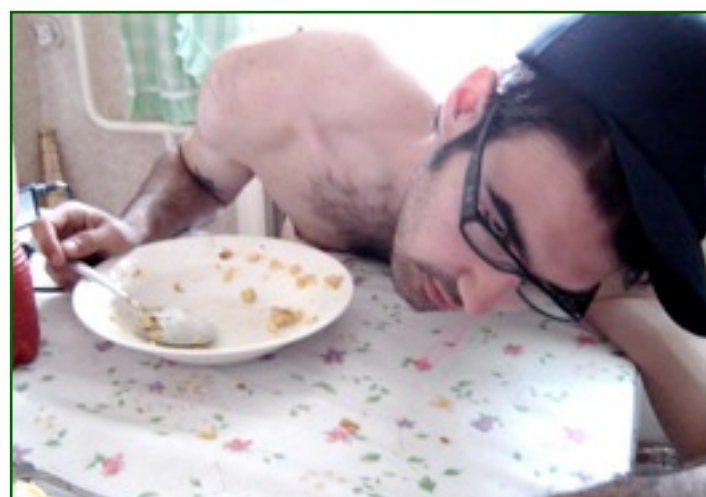
Clean the frying pan and return to stove.

Heat the remaining 2 tablespoons of oil on a high heat and pour in the mixture, moving it around in the pan to help the tortilla to rise. Fry until golden brown, stirring occasionally until it has set. Then turn down the heat to allow the inside to cook. After a few minutes turn up the heat in order to brown the tortilla.

Transfer pan to oven and broil tortilla about 6 inches from heat until top is set, 3 to 5 minutes. Run a spatula between tortilla and pan to loosen.

When it's cooked place a large plate over the frying pan and flip the tortilla onto it.

This makes a great vehicle for all your favorite flavors, just add your own spices; garlic, rosemary, chili powder etc. And to help liven it up try serving with salsa or *кобра*.





ПОСЛЕДНИЕ СЛОВА

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, the Vesti is proud to introduce Peace Corps Kazakhstan's new PTO, Paul Butki.

I arrived in Kazakhstan on March 15th. I have been here for just over 6 weeks. I come to Kazakhstan from DC, where I worked for the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), a macro-development organization. I managed the DC portion of MCC's \$175M Nicaragua economic development program. After working there for a year, I was more than ready to come back to the grassroots side of development, and am excited to be working for the Peace Corps in Kazakhstan.

I was a PCV and a PCVL in Guatemala, where I served 3 years as an Agriculture/Environment Volunteer. I faced many of the common problems Volunteers face; lack of an interested counterpart, initial low level of language, and a low level of technical knowledge in my project field. It took almost my whole first year to overcome these challenges and find a niche for myself in my community and with my counterpart organization. What I learned though, is that if a PCV sticks with it, gets to know their community, looks for opportunities that meet community needs, and uses their skills and training, they can achieve quite a bit. Among other things, I developed and implemented a school garden and nutrition project for my counterpart organization that ran successfully for several years, developed a school based program that planted 20,000 trees, and co-founded an educational support NGO.

I stayed on as a PCVL because after a busy second year, I realized that I could be much more effective in a third year. Post staff asked me to include PCVL duties in my extension. A lasting lesson I learned as a PCV was that Peace Corps is what you make of it. Challenges abound, and while a Volunteer can be trained and receive some support from a PC staff hundreds of miles away, at the end of the day and at the end of serv-

ice – Volunteer success and satisfaction are mostly up to them, and are a direct result of the effort and attitude with which a Volunteer approaches their service.

After my COS I returned to California and became a Peace Corps Recruiter. It was a great transition job. During my year as a recruiter, I traveled to Guatemala several times both to work with an NGO that my site mates and I founded there, and to continue my relationship with Marlyn, an amazing girl I met while in Peace Corps. On one of my trips down, I saw a handwritten ad in the volunteer lounge of the Peace Corps office for a job with the Riecken Foundation, an NGO with offices to Honduras – looking to expand into Guatemala. The Riecken Foundation works with rural communities to build the physical and organizational infrastructure of community learning centers that serve as educational and development hubs for the local population.

After a long interview process, I was hired to open the Riecken Foundation's office in Guatemala. I started with a laptop and a pick-up working out of a small apartment in the country's historical capital. I worked with the foundation for over four years. In that time we were able to develop 9 learning centers. We developed our management and program structures to attract a 300% increase in funding. We implemented five structured programming streams including literacy, youth development, teacher training, democratic values, and "local initiatives."

I left the Riecken Foundation and Guatemala to go to graduate school. I attended Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies where I earned a Master's degree in international development.

I am in Kazakhstan after several years in Latin America because I wanted to experience a different region. Peace Corps Kazakhstan is a good fit because of its focus on NGO development and education – two areas where I have extensive professional experience. Also, Kazakhstan and Guatemala are both multi-ethnic and multi-lingual societies – so I hope to bring some useful experience to bear in that regard as well.

I am looking very forward to my term in Kazakhstan. While here, I hope to continue the improvement of the effectiveness of our two programs. From

ПОСЛЕДНИЕ СЛОВА

what I have read and what I have seen, Kazakhstan can benefit greatly from both programs. My role is to ensure that our programs meet Kazakhstani needs through understanding those needs on a national level, tailoring our programs to meet Kazakhstani needs, and tailoring our PCV training in a way that prepares volunteers to implement our programs. I see the PCV role as proactively gaining an understanding of local needs, and strategically finding areas where their training and skills will allow them to meet those needs.

On a personal note, I am in Kazakhstan with my wife, Marlyn. Like I imagine many of you were when you arrived, she is both excited and nervous to be here. She is still figuring out her role - looking at studying or working, or perhaps a combination. Marlyn is an artisan jewelry maker and has a passion for textiles that stems from her indigenous Mayan roots - so she may be looking for things to do in those fields as well. She speaks three languages fluently, and is looking forward to studying Russian (and perhaps Kazakh).

We both look forward to meeting many of you as you come through Almaty and we get a chance to travel to your sites.

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 a new-fangled fried Вареники recipe, a bag of hickory smoked jerky, enough Tylenol to walk off a sprained ankle, several hours on Skype, 109 volunteers, 4 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 brighter for everyone around you.

