

# Peace Corps Uganda

NOTES AND  
MUSINGS FROM  
AMODING

Photo taken at the colonial Portuguese holding of Fort Jesus in Mombasa, Kenya. The warm, inviting Indian Ocean is behind me. Yes, my hair has taken on a ginger tint due to a botched highlight job and 13 months under the equatorial sun.



## 13 months in Peace Corps. And very few updates. 'Bout time, sistah!

### The enigmatic wonders of African life

Uganda is a shifting, boggling terrain of colors, smells, and sounds. Women glide like ballerinas with big tushes, balancing piled-high bundles of sticks on their heads, baby #5 strapped to their back with a tether of bold fabric, and the fortitude and long-suffering determination that African women possess in spades. Men stroll off to the market, field or office, often stopping to hold a lively chat with a neighbor about the televised football match last night or the fact that their has been no power in the village for 3 days.

Outside each small mud and grass-thatched hut is an amojong (old lady) stirring the contents of a pot simmering on the sigiri (charcoal oven). The

enticing smell of roasting ground nuts battles the miasma of burning trash for dominance. Goats amble along well-worn paths, pecking at scraps like unofficial garbage collectors. Craftsmen cart their wares on the back of a rusty bicycles. Small girls carry their smaller sisters on their hip. Wiry boys play with hub caps and sticks or prod a herd of big-horned cattle through a field. School children skip off to school in colorful uniforms that their mothers miraculously manage to keep clean.

The stage for all these players is hard red earthen footpaths edged with tall elephant grass and small gardens ripe with subsistence vegetables. The sun blazes through the sky at 6:30am. And with its hypnotic pink blades cutting through dark, ominous clouds, it sets at 6:30pm. Uganda does not adhere to

Western notions of time. It has its own ancient mechanical rhythm. Ugandans are not enslaved to time like we are. They manipulate it. Or they ignore it altogether.

This is the ubiquitous description of East African village life. And I live it every day.

Yet, I found you cannot succinctly generalize this experience.

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### In Numbers

Days spent in country	802
Kilometers I bike to Soroti town	5
Lions seen in East African parks	56
1 kilo of tomatoes, cost in cents	50
Cost of one beer, USD	1
Times I've crossed River Nile	30+
Books I've read in country	40

### Groovy factoids

about

Peace Corps



**Peace Corps officially established: March 1, 1961**

**Current number of volunteers: 8,655**

**Total number of volunteers to date: 200,000**

**Average age of a volunteer: 28**

**Total number of countries served to date: 139**

### 3 Goals of Peace Corps

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

Madera Girls Primary School students. Their school sits adjacent to my convent.



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Because there is no universal African or Peace Corps experience. But there are universal truths.

Here are a few I have gathered: 1) If you come here with no expectations then you have the chance to be pleasantly surprised. 2) No one is going to hold your hand. 3) You have to use whatever talents you possess and all resources at your disposal to make the most of your assignment. 4) If you truly want to help, don't assume you know what the problem is. 5) If you want to change the world, change yourself. 6) Keep a ton of irons in the fire. 7) You will learn more than you give. And finally 8) There is no "us" and "them". Human beings are the same everywhere.

## Um, like, what do you do?

Peace Corps work defies all conventional understandings of what work should be. I don't have an office cubicle. I don't have to clock in at a certain time. Heck, I don't even have to show up if I don't want to. Now this may sound like a bloody waste of the almighty tax payer dollar. I assure you it is not. Flexibility and creative freedom are the strengths of Peace Corps service.

To satiate your need for further illumination, I will frame my work and lifestyle description like a Q & A.

Q: *Where and how do you live?*

A: I live in a medium-sized village in the eastern part of Uganda called Madera. It lies 5km NE of Soroti Town, the capital of the Teso sub-region. The language spoken here is Ateso. I live in a convent with 2 gregarious nuns and a house girl named Sarah who cleans my house and does my laundry for \$2 per week. Sarah and I are as close as sisters. I have running water and infrequent electricity. Most nights I dine by candlelight!

Q: *What is your primary assignment?*

A: I work at St. Francis School for the Blind as an economic and staff advisor. I also teach life skills lessons to the students. My big project with the school is the development of a turkey income generating activity (IGA) to make the school more financially self-sufficient and teach the students about raising poultry. We will be building the turkey house with used plastic water bottles in place of bricks.

Q: *What other secondary projects are you involved in?*

A: I have a weekly radio show on 88.4 FM Eporoto lo Teso where I speak about all manner of development issues ranging from HIV/AIDS prevention and family planning to crop production and composting techniques.

I also do consultant work on the side for local community-based organizations (CBOs) and conduct trainings for a few  
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## Word Up

### Statements from the village people

"Amoding, now that you have a new bed, I'm going to pray God brings you a man to share it with".  
- Sister Maurice, who lives in the convent with me

"You should marry a local man and take your Obama baby back to America as a souvenir". - nurse at the health center

"My family and I listen to your radio show every week. It helps our lives become better". - Herbert, a waiter at Soroti Hotel

### Second-hand t-shirts as seen on the street

"Ian's Bar Mitzvah"

"Laughlin, NV. Where the good times roll"

"O.B.A.M.A: Only Born African to Manage America" (look out, you birther movement conspirators!)

"I support single moms" (silhouette of a stripper)

"Darth Vader was framed"

F.Y.I: What you give away to Goodwill winds up in Africa

### National Anthem of Uganda

Oh, Uganda. May God uphold thee.  
We lay our future in thy hands.  
United free through liberty together  
We always stand.





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non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

One of my biggest and best projects this year was organizing a Peace Camp in August. We invited 80 former child soldiers and abductees affected by Lord's Resistance Army's rebel campaign that scourged the greater north Uganda for 20 years. The week's activities including peace building, leadership development, forgiveness and reconciliation exercises,

and inter-tribal cultural exchange. It was a profound experience. And exactly why I joined Peace Corps.

Q: *How much longer will you be in Uganda for?*

A: October 21st will mark one year that I was sworn in and sent to Teso as an economic development volunteer. I officially COS (close of service) in October 2012. I may extend another year or transfer to another country. I love Africa and I may never want to leave! •

## Pictures (Aputosia)

For more, please visit the following:

My vacation to Massai Mara, Kenya

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.702649832178.2167123.23709207&l=fa35bc38db&type=1>

and Lamu, Kenya

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.702654822178.2167124.23709207&l=1eeb4afd73&type=1>

Russ and Earlene's Visit to Uganda

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.690801092148.2163928.23709207&l=43fa88d814&type=1>



Hangin' on airfield fence

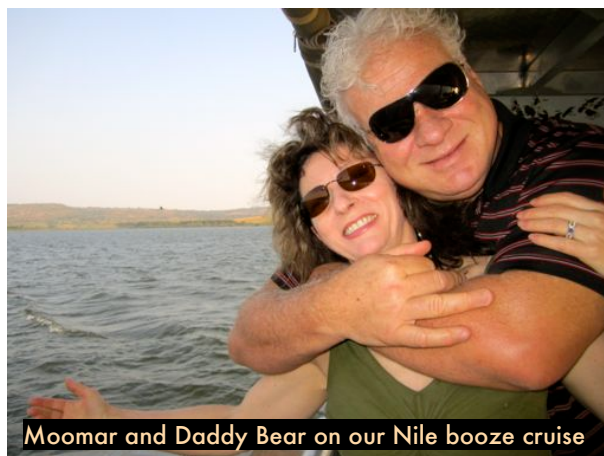
Post-election inked thumb against a backdrop of local Teso beer called ajon



Rusty teaching nursery kids a tune



Pumping water at the bore hole



Moomar and Daddy Bear on our Nile booze cruise

## Morsels of Ateso

Hello

Yoga

How are you?

Biai bo ijo?

I'm fine.

Etamit

What news?

Akiro inyo?

Where are you going?

Ai bo alosi ijo?

Thank you for your work

Eyalama aswam

We meet again

Awanyunos bobo

"Africa can stun you in an instant. It can throw floods and drought and disease at you, sometimes all at the same time. In the next moment, it will tease you with its magnificent beauty, so even if you don't forget, you can find a way to forgive. Ultimately, it keeps you coming back for more."

from *The Blue Sweater* by Jacqueline Novogratz

My Iteso tribal name is Amoding. It literally means "girl born in the desert where the wild things live" ...Las Vegas

## Mailing Address:

Teacher Amoding  
St. Francis School for the Blind  
P.O. Box 603  
Soroti, Uganda  
Please write only "educational and religious materials" on the customs form. Write "par avion" on the outside and cover with Catholic symbols to deter tampering. I do share some contents with the villagers!