

Peace Corps Uganda

NOTES AND
MUSINGS FROM
AMODING

Days spent in Uganda: 767
Homesick level (1-5): 4.0

Issue No. 7
Sept. 2012



Peace Camp: The Best Thing I've Done

The best thing I did during my service was help to coordinate a weeklong Peace Corps-sponsored Peace Camp Greater North Uganda for former abductees and child soldiers of the Lord's Resistance Army's atrocious campaign.

The camp, which ran from August 12-18th 2012, brought together 80 youth from 4 tribes traumatically affected by the decades-long rebel violence. The purpose of the camp was to offer them an open and inclusive arena for establishing internal peace, engendering inter-tribal reconciliation, applying positive communication techniques, and embracing themselves as leaders of violence-free community change. We challenged them to look at themselves as peace builders and to not define themselves by the tragedies they endured.

The war affected northern Ugandan youth so deeply. Many people and things they loved were lost. Yet, their post-conflict lives are

an inspiration. These youth are so much more than the bad things that happened to them.

- Atim Esther Ruth was held in the bush for over 3 years. She was forced to do unspeakable things but you would never know if you looked at her. Atim has an illuminating smile and gracious spirit.

- Ojara Denish is a parapalegic. During the war, no one wanted to hide with him from the rebels because of his disability. At camp, Denish was one of our stars. He did the zip line and climbing wall at the ropes course as well as a headstand during the yoga session!

- A few campers were abducted from the same place on the same night only to be reunited at Peace Camp. A night of terror took them from the homes and families. A week of peace and forgiveness helped them to heal.

- One of the most active Peace Campers from last year, Ogu John Bosco, was in the bush for over 2 years. In 2003, at the age of ten, he was taken by rebels and forced into the grueling life of a child soldier. While in captivity, he learned that his father had been murdered by the LRA. Recently, he discovered his father's auto-mechanic tools in a forgotten box. Next year, Bosco will go for a course in mechanics so he can put to use what his father left behind.

As empowered peace makers, they will carry lessons learned at Peace Camp in their hearts forever. Several youth have started peace clubs in their communities. Just a few days ago, I took a trip into the rural district of Amuria to visit a few of the budding Peace Clubs. I was blown away by the young peacemakers and their great hopes for the future.

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The Amuria High School Peace Club organized an evocative drama about reconciliation. After the performance, we talked about aspects of peace building and how to make the club run better. We even shared local proverbs about peace to demonstrate that tolerance, love and forgiveness are a part of the Iteso culture. Through the inspired actions of John Bosco, Julius, Gilbert, Susan and many others, a scarred generation are learning to live purposefully with a peaceful future in their sightlines.

Peace Camp and its outcome has been one of the most challenging and remarkable experiences of my life. Check out Embassy Kampala's write-up on this year's camp:

http://kampala.usembassy.gov/peacecorps_peacecamp_guluyouth.html

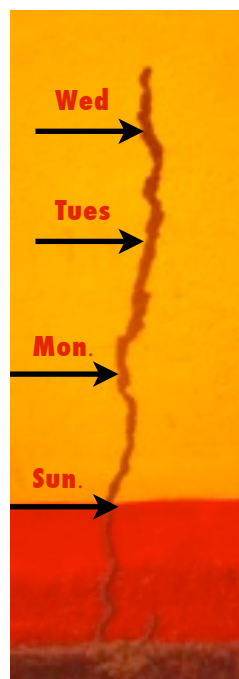


Visiting Peace Campers in Amuria

To serve is beautiful,
but only if it is done
with joy, a whole
heart, and a free
mind. — Pearl S.

Paralympic Hopeful Making Us Proud

Faster than you can say 'cockney rhyming slang', the 2012 London Olympics have come and gone. Some of you may have heard about the Ugandan marathoner who won an eleventh-hour gold on the last day of the games. Stephen Kiprotich, of the Sabiny tribe who dwell in the fertile montane of Mt. Elgon, brought home Uganda's first gold medal in 30 years. The Olympic fever did not end there. **Akullo Christine**, one of our students from St. Francis Secondary School for the Blind, represented the Ugandan differently-abled community in the London Paralympic games. Her 1st place win at the 2011 All African Games in Mozambique guaranteed her a spot in London. After training for several weeks with the Ugandan delegation in England, Akullo competed in the 400m and 600m sprints against females in her vision impairment category. Although she did not medal, we are still tremendously impressed with her accomplishments!



Ugandan people are pretty industrious but not nearly so as the insect population. When I recently came home from a conference, I spotted this termite passageway inching up the wall. Yeah, there's a saliva and dirt highway forming next to my bed. Out of curiosity, I will let it remain for a while longer so I can chart its progression. This is what happens when you don't have TV, folks.

Moving On Up...to the Northwest Side!

In glutton-for-punishment fashion, I've officially re-upped for a 3rd year with the Peace Corps. On October 2nd, I will bid farewell to my community of Madera, Soroti and saunter on over to work with a Catholic-founded radio station in the northwestern town of Arua. The station is called Radio Pacis. In 2007, they were recognized as "Best New Radio" at the BBC Africa Radio Awards. Check out their website:

www.radiopacis.org. During my visit in March, I was really impressed with their morale and operations. My work will consist of community-based programming and developing radio serial dramas for behavior change communication. I will

be living on the radio compound in a house equipped with solar power, hot water showers, sit down toilets, sink, oven, electric mixer, toaster, juicer, and many more dangerous amenities. Steppin' up the game! The station is only 8 km and 40 km from the DRC and South Sudan borders, respectively. It's going to take all my might not taste the forbidden fruit of those hinterlands. Anywho, this is going to be a good fit for me as radio has been a passion of mine since I was a teenager. I'm super duper jazzed about this new professional opportunity. See all you Vegas homies in mid-November for 6 weeks of R&R in Las Vegas! Whoop to the the whoop!

In August, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton briefly touched down in Uganda. I was invited to meet her as representative of Peace Corps. Here I am rehearsing for my future job as The Hillz' successor.



If Ugandan food was featured at a Vegas buffet, these would be the choices:

Posho
Atap
Beans
Rice
Chicken

Eboga
Esukumwiki
Cassava
Matooke
G-nut Sauce

Cabbage
Salads
Chapatti
Pineapple
Bagoya

Ateso Morsels

Ican ekingok = I wish upon you the poverty of a dog

Toto kon = your mama (grave insult...and of course I accidentally used it once)

Nangiirit = a toothless woman

Longotol = scar-face

Kwic = sound of vessel getting filled completely

Kilar = sound of bald-headed person falling on their head

Inimokok = having tiny and shriveled buttocks

Ewunyot = one who raises the nose in contempt

Etaala = a hurricane lamp OR genital syphilis (how would you know the difference?)

Esingingir = a wrinkle on the forehead showing anger, seriousness, etc

Thanks everyone for your packages! Since I'm moving to Arua then visiting the states for the holidays, I won't be in need of anything. If you feel like sending a letter or a poster of David Hasselhoff, please use my new address.

Chelsea Milko

Radio Pacis, Arua Diocese Media Centre

P. O. Box 454, Arua, UGANDA

To deter tampering: Write only "educational materials for the blind" on the customs form, "par avion" on the outside and cover package with Christian symbols.

Get Ready for Some Feelings

Next month, I graduate with my...wait for it...deep breath...Masters in Public Administration in International Public Service and Development from Rutgers-Camden. Whew, got that out in one breath. The program gave me a decent theoretical and practical background on development issues affecting countries like Uganda. It was a blend of classroom learning and on-the-ground experience gained from working on green jobs creation in blighted North Camden, NJ that I carried with me to Uganda. But I really had no idea what I was getting into. Perhaps, I still don't.

Nothing prepared me for this. Blocks of long, listless days, 9,000 miles away from home and hearth, watching two unidentifiable insects mate on my ceiling. spurts of doggone toughness. A persistent longing to be useful. Most days are a motley mix of bizarre happenings, cross-cultural chuckles, teachable moments, a burst of energy, a few bruises, trip ups, endless greetings, reflection, a few chapters of a book, a nap, cockamamie frustrations, doubts, something discovered, and something altered. All those moments seem to roll into a monolithic Peace Corps service. Seconds become spans, spans become epochs, and then you realize you've been in country for 25 months. Tiny flints and filings of time magnetically clump together while the big breakthrough moments manage to define the experience. The monumental moments, such as such witnessing a light bulb moment in one of your counterparts or seeing hard work pay off in tangibles, do cut away at feelings of grievance, fatigue and homesickness. But those won't be my only memories.

My time here has been about the small stuff as much as the big for the small is just as weighty and gratifying as the big. The sound of the sisters singing in the chapel. The smell of the sigiri fire lit by the house girl Adongo. Opening up curtains to a blazing sunrise. Peddling my bike through a herd of big-horned cattle, prodding them with my front wheel. A woman bending in jack-knife position to cook as a pint-sized papoose is held to her back with nothing but a *kitenge* wrap. Hearing shouts of "Amoding!" from the small mouths of pot-bellied, dusty foot children. Cramming 30 people under the shade of a mango tree for a meeting. Drinking innumerable cups of spiced tea to pass the time. The sound of the school hand bell. Long greetings in Ateso. Hitching a ride into town on the back of a livestock lorry. Sitting in an overstuffed armchair while stuffing yourself on millet porridge with sour milk. Dancing to music in the Indian supermarket while the merchants call me 'Shakira'. Painting toenails of the little nursery girls next door. Walking up to the sound of a machete slashing grass. The sound of the blind kid's marching band tuning up. Waiting for a taxi to leave as the woman next to you pulls out her teet to full-frontal breast feed her babe. Watching tots roll around tires or homemade tin toys for amusement. The laughs of men as they drink local brew and play chess with bottle caps. Sweet interactions with blind kids that readjust my attitude. Watching the soft breeze rustle the nuns' habits drying side-by-side on the line. The rains.

I didn't intend to romanticize this experience by trimming it in doily lace and casting a nostalgic blush around it. But I have. I am taking leave from 2 years of wonder and truth and growing. It's really tough saying goodbye. I know I'm not leaving Uganda for good yet. And I know all those things won't come to a halt in my 3rd year...but it will all be so different. Though I can't believe I survived this, I can't actually see myself doing anything else. My whole life has led up to this.