






Peace Corps Volunteer Reflections on Service

“Learning more about problems in other countries can help students understand other cultures and perhaps encourage them to work on problems they see in their own communities.”—Stewart Mattiesen, Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV), Western Russia

	<p>PCV Beverly Heckel serves in Guatemala as a small-business Volunteer. In “Seeing Through Others’ Eyes,” Beverly talks about her own experiences with service and how the skills and perspective she gained have helped her to be a more effective Volunteer. Read her biography (p. 2) and story (p. 4).</p>
	<p>PCV Mike Roman serves in Kiribati as an elementary education Volunteer. In “Lessons From My Dad,” Mike writes about how his father’s example and performing service have taught him what the “right thing” to do is in any situation. Read his biography (p. 5) and story (p. 6).</p>
	<p>PCV Emily Pearson serves in Latvia as a TEFL Volunteer. In “What I Learned Serving,” Emily elaborates on what she has learned from serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer: “I can do more than I think is possible and every individual has something valuable to contribute.” Read her biography (p. 7) and story (p. 8).</p>
	<p>PCV Amy Maraney serves in Estonia as a TEFL Volunteer. In “Little Gestures Make a Difference,” Amy shares how the little things every person does each day, young or old, can and do make a difference. Read her biography (p. 9) and story (p. 11).</p>
	<p>PCV Christian Deitch serves in the Kyrgyz Republic as a TEFL Volunteer. In “If I Won’t Do It, Who Will?” Christian writes about his first experience performing service in a student council food drive and how that experience served to inspire and encourage him. Read his biography (p. 13) and story (p. 14).</p>

Beverly Heckel

Small-business Development Volunteer, Guatemala, Central America

¡Buenos Días from Guatemala! My name is Beverly Heckel. I was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, on October 14, 1948. I grew up in White Bear Lake, Minnesota, a suburb of St. Paul. My mom is 85 years old and is quite frail, but she keeps on ticking. My dad died in 1994; he was very special to me and I still miss him every day. I have two brothers. My family has been very supportive of my Peace Corps service from the start. This is important to me, being as far from home as I am in Guatemala.

I attended the University of Hartford in West Hartford, Connecticut, graduating with degrees in mathematics and computer science. I worked for a large insurance company in Hartford, Connecticut, for 31 years and enjoyed a successful management career with many interesting assignments and experiences. When I left that career, I wanted a change; that job had ceased to be fun.

During the year that I was going through the Peace Corps application process, I worked as



a self-employed consultant to another insurance company near Chicago, Illinois

In November 1999, I received my Peace Corps assignment, and I left the United States on February 1, 2000 to serve in Guatemala for 27 months. The adventure of a lifetime had begun. I am a small-business development Volunteer. Specifically, I am assigned to a Guatemalan government agency called the National Institute of Cooperatives (INACOP). My work is to help the cooperatives start or improve their businesses and to share knowledge with my Guatemalan counterparts at INACOP.

The cooperatives are engaged in various businesses. About half of them are in agricultural pursuits: fruit, coffee, cattle, corn, sesame seeds, ornamental leaves, and beekeeping. Others are involved in handicrafts, housing, production of things ranging from milk to salt, and in services such as tourist centers or hardware stores. To help the cooperatives, I do training in various business management topics. I also work with them to develop project proposals and feasibility studies that we will use to look for financing. For example, one cooperative wants to begin a project to raise and sell shrimp. They are in a beautiful location on the Pacific Ocean where they will build gates to create and refresh saltwater pools. Three times a year they will buy shrimp larvae, fatten up the little critters for three months, and then harvest and sell them. We need to project expenses and income for 10 years and then look for a loan to get them started. I work with four cooperatives whose business is savings and loan. Among the work I've done with them is analysis of their delinquencies (loans that aren't being paid on time) and their record-keeping. I've made recommendations for improving procedures, and I continue to follow up these points and help implement the changes.

My site is the second largest city in Guatemala, with 104,000 inhabitants. I live just outside the city on a pleasant hillside in a tiny, but quite comfortable, house. It's what you might call a cabin in the woods. The city is perched at an elevation of about 7,500 feet and is set amid many beautiful volcanoes—most inactive, thankfully. We are at a point where three plates on the surface of the earth meet. As a result, we regularly feel earthquake tremors. Some are quite strong.

Although Guatemala is in the tropics, the elevation provides me with comfortably cool living conditions. I do not have indoor heating. When I wake up in the morning, the temperature inside my house may be as low as 45°F in January. During the rainy season, it may be 55°F inside and very damp. This takes some getting used to—it makes you tough! During the day the temperature will climb into the 70s at any time of year. Half of my work is in the area where I live and half is below the mountains in the hot, humid, green, and lush Pacific Coast. It is referred to as the Costa Sur—the South Coast. I see a lot of variety in my work: different businesses, ethnic groups, climates, economic conditions, and different challenges. I love it.

Seeing Through Others' Eyes

By Beverly Heckel, Small-business development Volunteer, Guatemala, Central America

Prior to joining the Peace Corps, my involvement in organized volunteer work was limited—of course, it would seem limited to me now that volunteerism is my life. As a 4-H Club member, I participated in numerous volunteer efforts, ranging from reforestation projects to Christmas visits to nursing homes. I come from a family tradition of helping others. We helped our neighbors and our community in whatever ways we could—shoveling snow, driving people places they couldn't get to alone, and cooking for those who were sick. It was just a part of our lives and we didn't think about it.

During my school years, I regularly visited a family friend who was confined to a nursing home in St. Paul. This pleasant, elderly lady and her friends seemed to appreciate our brief visits, and I gained an appreciation for the wisdom and challenges of seniors.

That may have been one of my earliest experience seeing things through the eyes of someone different from me. I have found that this ability is an essential skill in the Peace Corps. Wherever a Volunteer serves, the people, the lifestyles, the beliefs, the societal norms, and the history will be very different from those in the United States. To function effectively, we must look at things the way they are seen by the people we serve—not the way in which we are familiar. This is more easily said than done, but it is a skill that serves a person well throughout life.

The obligation to serve and to share is deeply rooted in my family. My parents were always lending a hand to someone and working in the community. My brothers are the same way. We don't share money but knowledge, education, abilities, and experience. These are things that multiply when you share them.

The world has become a very small place, in the sense that none of us can ignore what goes on in other countries. We are affected by the health, agricultural practices, politics, and economy of every country in the world. For example, for the United States to sell American products in Guatemala, the Guatemalans have to have enough money to afford them.

Mike Roman

Elementary Education Volunteer, Kiribati, Pacific Islands

Kam na bene ni mauri-o! (Hello everyone!) My name is Mike Roman. I am an elementary education Peace Corps Volunteer on Tamana Island, in the Republic of Kiribati (pronounced KEE-ruh-bas). I've been in Kiribati for nine months. Besides my home in the United States, this is my favorite place in the world!

Growing up, I lived in three U.S. cities: Rochester, New York; San Diego, California; and Cincinnati, Ohio, where my family lives now. Speaking of family, I have a mom and dad, and one sister. I am the youngest. They are a great family! I can always count on them to send me Kool-Aid and M&M's in care packages.

Before I joined the Peace Corps, I was a student at Miami University in Ohio. I graduated in 2000 with a bachelor's degree in elementary education. My last few months in the U.S. were spent student teaching 6th grade in Cincinnati, Ohio. I had a great time with my students, and I would love to see them after I complete my Peace Corps service.

Kiribati is made up of three different island chains. The Gilbert Chain is the most populous of them. The other two are the Phoenix Chain and the Line Chain. Tamana Island is the smallest island in the Gilbert Chain. The Line Chain has two islands that you may have heard of—Christmas Island and the newly named Millennium Island. Millennium Island was the first to greet the new millennium, because it's so far east! That's right, time starts here!



Tamana Island has one church, one primary school, one junior high school, and one clinic. There are three villages: North, Central, and South. It takes about an hour to bike around the entire island and a minute and 41 seconds to bike across it. My primary job on Tamana is to serve as a resource teacher for the local primary school. Here is a glimpse of how my schedule looks:

- Monday–Friday: I teach English to students from grades 3, 4, 5, and 6. Usually I teach from my house, because there aren't enough classrooms.
- Tuesday and Thursday evenings: I teach adult English to the youth group.
- Wednesday and Saturday evenings: I attend exercise class with other teachers and neighbors. The other Peace Corps Volunteer on the island teaches this class.
- Friday and Saturday evenings: I participate in singing class with other villagers. Singing is important in Kiribati. It's one way Kiribatians show appreciation.
- Sunday: I rest!

Lessons From My Dad

By Mike Roman, Elementary Education Volunteer, Kiribati, Pacific Islands

The Peace Corps was not something I thought of, much less knew about, before my junior year in college. Many of my fellow Volunteers tell me that joining the Peace Corps had been a long-time dream. They have told me about commercials they remember seeing on TV and how they knew that they were destined to become Peace Corps Volunteers. I must have missed all those commercials because I just stumbled across the Peace Corps at a local town fair with one of my friends. We were looking for the stage when we came upon a Peace Corps table. The returned Peace Corps Volunteer working behind the table told me about his Peace Corps experience and I was hooked! I had found what I wanted to do after college. What a great surprise!

The biggest draw of the returned Volunteer's story wasn't the travel or the adventure but the idea of serving others for two years. Service has always been a part of my life. It is something my dad taught me when I was young and still teaches me today.

Growing up in Rochester, New York, we had an elderly neighbor named Mr. Frank. Mr. Frank lived by himself in the house next to us. His wife died either when I was very young or before I was born. Besides my family and a few other neighborhood families, he didn't have any visitors. My mom always cooked enough dinner for Mr. Frank and us. After we finished eating, my dad and I would take dinner to Mr. Frank. Sometimes we would meet him at his door and other times my dad would keep him company while he ate. Meanwhile, I would provide the playful entertainment.

When I was older, my dad would take me to church to help load the trucks that were used to deliver Thanksgiving and Christmas baskets to the needy. By this time, I was also volunteering as a teacher's aide in our church's Sunday pre-school room. I did this for the next five years. Throughout high school and college, I volunteered with many other organizations and institutions (e.g., schools, churches, and even a prison).

Everything in my life is a reflection of what my dad taught me when I was growing up. You choose to serve because it's the "right thing" to do. After some time, you learn what the "right thing" is in any situation—it's the voice inside your head; you just have to learn to listen to it.

Emily Pearson

TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) Volunteer, Latvia, Eastern Europe

My name is Emily Pearson, and I am serving as an English education Volunteer in Gaujiena, Latvia. I attended the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs and graduated in 1999 with a BA in English and Spanish.

I grew up in Golden, Colorado, with my mother, father, and older sister. When I was a teenager, I was involved in high school theater, as well as sports. While in college, I became active in photography and the student newspaper. I also started my own blues and rock band, which I plan to return to and develop when I complete my Peace Corps service. My favorite pastimes in Colorado are playing and listening to music, enjoying live music and concerts, hiking and camping in the mountains, spending time with friends, eating out, and watching movies. My favorite leisure time activities in my new home in Latvia include playing my guitar, reading, writing in my journal, writing to family and friends, spending time with new friends here (Peace Corps Volunteers and Latvians), spending time with the Latvian folk dance group and the Latvian singing ensemble, taking walks, and gardening.

I teach secondary level English at a small country school in Gaujiena. The school has grades 1 through 12; in all grades combined, there are fewer than 300 students. I teach grades 8 and 9 twice a week, and grades 10–12 four times a week. During this past school year, I also taught beginner and intermediate English lessons for adults once a week, and I held a weekly English club meeting for teachers. In the second semester, I taught a handful of interested students and teachers beginning Spanish twice a week.



A fellow Peace Corps Volunteer and I organized a bilingual one-day seminar for teachers in my region where my colleague (who has over 30 years of teaching experience) led a discussion on new ideas and possibilities in the future of education. At the end of the school year, my students and I published an English newspaper for the school. This summer I helped organize a one-week summer camp where I taught 40 students (grades 7 to 11) about American folk and blues songs and how to write their own blues songs. I also presented a session on blues music at another Peace Corps summer camp for teenagers from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania (the All Baltic Youth Conference).

What I Learned Serving

By Emily Pearson, TEFL Volunteer, Latvia, Eastern Europe

When I was in high school, I became a member of the National Honor Society (NHS). Each year the NHS organized a community service project. The community service project involved asking students and local businesses for donations such as lunch foods, hygiene products, and winter clothing. One weekend in the winter, we gathered at my high school and prepared 100 sack lunches and hygiene kits. When we completed the kits, we took the food, supplies, and winter clothing to the less affluent sections of downtown Denver, where members of the NHS and our teachers distributed the kits to people living on the streets and at a homeless shelter.

Now as a Peace Corps Volunteer, I realize our community service project could have been better organized and ideally should have included more self-sufficiency components, but the humanitarian gesture of reaching out to those who do not have their basic needs met made a strong impression on me. It helped shape my feelings about the need for service and the importance of helping people to help themselves.

Later, while studying at my university, I was involved in the English Club, also known as the Campus Literary Arts Society (CLAS). The most important thing I learned from helping to organize literary events was the value of delegation: It is impossible to do everything yourself! Being involved in CLAS helped to prepare me for Peace Corps service. Through organizing events, I learned to be flexible and patient, and to keep my mind open to different possibilities, expectations, and ways of measuring the success of an event or project. Serving in a foreign country is teaching me that I have more to offer others than I ever imagined; I can do more than I think is possible; and every individual has something valuable to contribute.

Amy Maraney

TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) Volunteer, Estonia, Eastern Europe

My name is Amy Maraney. Say it out loud and let it roll off your tongue. If you are saying it correctly you will hear that my first and last names rhyme. Say it again. You might find it slightly mesmerizing. Many people do.

I grew up just south of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in the suburb of Bethel Park. My childhood and teenage years were not unusual. I worked hard in school, read novels in my free time, played basketball and ran track on my high school teams, cheered loudly for the Pittsburgh Penguin hockey team, and landed my first real job at McDonald's. I have one sister, Lisa, who is nearly eight years older than I am. She is married and has an eight-year-old daughter and a five-year-old son.

After high school I went to Grove City College in Grove City, Pennsylvania. I graduated from college with degrees in English literature and secondary education. From Grove City, I moved across Pennsylvania to Philadelphia to attend graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania. I also taught English part time at a business school that offered English classes to immigrants. Living in such a large, diverse city gave me the opportunity to meet people from many different countries. At one point during my two years there, I shared a house with one other American, a Mongolian, a Swede, a Kenyan, and a Korean. The experience was both fun and culturally enriching.



I left for my Peace Corps assignment nine days after earning a master's degree in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). Now I live and work in a border town in Estonia. Located in the northeast corner of the country, my town is Estonia's third largest town (pop. 78,000). A Russian town lies directly across the border. The official language of Estonia is Estonian, but I am learning Russian because my town is 96 percent Russian speaking.

I am what's called a TEFL TT. This means that I am an English teacher and also a teacher trainer. My Peace Corps assignment requires me to teach and interact with a wide range of people. I split my time almost evenly between two schools. One is the largest of 13 schools in the town and has approximately 1,450 students from first to twelfth grade. My other teaching assignment is at a local branch of Tartu University, a college. There, I teach American literature, American studies, and conversation courses to first- to fourth-year college students. Most of my students at the college are studying to become English teachers.

I have several other projects in addition to my regular teaching load. For example, I teach an evening English class for in-service teachers and community members. I am also trying to organize what will become an annual spelling bee for high school students. An English club for students and occasional workshops for in-service teachers are other small projects. My biggest project during my second year is planning an American studies conference to be held in the spring of 2002.

Little Gestures Make a Difference

By Amy Maraney (TEFL Volunteer, Estonia, Eastern Europe)

When I was 12 years old, I ran into my mother's room and fell across her bed, sobbing wildly about having been born in America rather than in an impoverished nation. My family certainly was not rich; I did not even have an allowance. But I had more than I really needed, much more than millions of my peers in other countries. As someone aware of the poverty and hunger around the world, didn't I owe it to them to be responsible and generous with what I had? Perhaps that was even why I had been born in America? To be a voice? These and other thoughts tumbled inside my head.

I had dumped my personal life savings from my Tootsie Roll canister bank and calculated that I had enough money to sponsor a child on a monthly basis for a year—if I did not spend my money on tempting frivolities. My mother supported my decision, so I began sponsoring a little girl from Haiti. My sponsorship ended when I graduated from college and Marie simultaneously completed the sponsorship program.

At the time of my sponsorship I could not understand how a small monthly sum could stretch so far. Now that I live in Estonia, however, I have a better grasp of the purchasing power provided by my sacrifice of fewer snacks, novels, and music cassettes. I did not change the world, but I impacted someone's life.

When I was younger, I used to stand atop a particular hill and imagine I could see the whole world spread below me. I would wonder what all the people were doing and feeling. This fascination with the unfamiliar did not come from my immediate surroundings. Until I moved to Philadelphia I had always lived in towns and attended schools that were predominantly white. Nonetheless, I had frequently sought opportunities that would enrich my life experience.

As a teen, I traveled to Trinidad and Mexico to participate in service projects. As a college student, I tutored adults at the local literacy council, taught English in Mongolia part of one summer, and interned another summer with an organization that resettles refugees who have come to the United States.

Later, in Philadelphia, while observing local ESL (English as a second language) classrooms, my classmates and I realized that the students needed more personalized instruction than their teachers could give them. Some of us formed a campus organization called PennTell (Penn tutors of English language learners). PennTell recruited tutors to go to selected local classrooms and provide one-to-one or small-group instruction to ESL students. Our project gave these students extra attention that their overworked teachers could not give them and taught us more about the process of teaching and the reality of being teachers.

On the whole, the projects I have participated in have targeted individuals or small groups. While their scope has been limited, I feel I have to be realistic about what I can

give. I fear I will burn out if I spread myself too thin. My aim is to invest my time and energy selectively. I hope my example then spurs others both to encourage and to invest in those they meet everywhere they go.

Christian Deitch

TEFL Volunteer, Kyrgyz Republic, Central Asia

My name is Christian Deitch and I'm 22 years old. I was born and raised in Matteson, Illinois, a town about 30 miles south of Chicago. I have two siblings: an older brother and a younger sister. Both my parents are 7th- and 8th-grade teachers. I graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign last year, and have lived in the Kyrgyz Republic since June 2000.

I am a TEFL (Teaching of English as a Foreign Language) Volunteer at Chingiz Aitmatov School. The middle students I teach are very diverse: Kyrgyz, Russian, Kazak, Uzbek, Turkish, Kurdish, and Azerbaijani. I teach 12- to 17-year-old students 18 hours a week in a classroom setting, and I also have a series of English clubs for my most enthusiastic students for an additional 15 hours each week.



I live in a village of about 5,000 people in the far northwest corner of the Kyrgyz Republic, on the border with Kazakhstan. The Kyrgyz Republic was once a part of the Soviet Union, and my village, Amanbaev, was the site of a large *kal-hoz*, or collective farm. Because the Soviet government needed many different people to work on the collective farms, my village is diverse, reflecting the numerous nationalities that lived throughout the Soviet Union.



Besides teaching, TEFL Volunteers spend their spare time working on secondary projects. I am working on several secondary projects right now. One I am currently working on entails organizing recordings of Kyrgyz folk music and putting them online in a Kyrgyz music Web page. When it goes online this winter, anyone anywhere on Earth will be able to download and listen to MP3s of Kyrgyz folk music.

Additionally, I am putting together a series of lesson plans called the Talas Democracy Project. It's a tutorial in American history and democracy for high-level students. I'll be finishing that up this month. Together with the other Volunteers in Talas Oblast (my province), we will teach our students about the finer points of American history and government.

If I Won't Do It, Who Will?

By Christian Deitch, TEFL Volunteer, Kyrgyz Republic, Central Asia

When I entered high school as a freshman, my older brother, a senior, was president of our student council. I wanted to spend my after-school hours playing soccer and hanging out with my friends, and I had no desire to join him in the evening as he put together school activities. It always seemed like too much work.

In late fall of that year, he organized a canned-food drive, where students brought canned food and nonperishable food items to the school, and then the student council distributed them to charities that worked with the less fortunate in our area. Because the weather was getting cold and I had nothing better to do, my brother coaxed me into going along with him to collect and count cans. We spent two hours walking the desolate school halls, going into empty classrooms and slowly lifting piles of canned green beans and ramen noodles. It was tiring work—kind of boring too—and it didn't help when he told me we had to count all the cans. Together, in the space of an evening, we counted over 800 cans and food items.

I wasn't too happy about it until I got home. My brother and I both went off and hit the books, and halfway through my algebra homework something dawned on me. All those cans meant someone would have a full meal who didn't have it before. Those cans could feed several families for weeks, if not months. And in some way, all that food came from him—he was the one responsible for it. I realized that if he hadn't put together the canned-food drive, nothing would have happened. No one would have brought the cans to school, no one would have counted all the food, and some people would have gone to sleep hungry because no one had done anything.

That made me understand that making the world a better place was up to me. It's impossible for one person to give away 800 cans, but it's not hard to persuade 800 people each to bring one can. From then on, I started working on the student council. As a 15-year-old, I didn't have much to give, but in a school with a thousand other students, together we did have something to give. With the other students in my student council, I put together blood drives, homeless shelter work shifts, and countless school and community activities. I was busy most nights of the week, and I stopped playing soccer for the team, but I was happy with what I was doing.

I went away to college with no idea what I wanted to do, and at first it was frightening because my university was so large. With 30,000 other students, how was I to fit in, to find who I was, to matter at all to anyone? I had always been interested in writing, and in the first few weeks I started writing for the university's newspaper. Within a few weeks I was writing front-page stories and balancing my job with the massive amounts of homework I was getting. This continued throughout the year, and beginning my sophomore year, I was completely swept up in college. I became an editor at the newspaper, and had no free time for the kind of service and leadership activities I had

enjoyed when I was in high school. When the job ended at the end of that school year, I felt I had worked too much and was definitely missing something.

That summer I worked in a restaurant waiting tables, and in the kitchen the cooks always listened to the local college radio station. Every half an hour or so, the radio station played a commercial for the Peace Corps. I was making a salad once when the commercial came on. One cook said to another, “Peace Corps—you ever thought about doing that?” The other answered, “No, have you?” The first cook responded, “Yeah, I did. I always wanted to do it, but I got too busy. Now I’ve got a job and kids and I wish I had done it when I was younger.”

I had thought about the Peace Corps too, but it never seemed like it was for me. But then I remembered what I had said to myself in high school: If I won’t do it, who will? I already knew it wouldn’t be the cook in the restaurant. I started looking into the Peace Corps because I knew it was up to me. That year in college I looked at my schedule and found out I could graduate that May and be in the Peace Corps in 10 months. I was offered the job again at the magazine but I knew it wasn’t for me. From then on, I put more work into my classes, and stopped other kinds of working altogether.

To fill in my free time, I did volunteer work. Each week I spent five or six hours at a local boys and girls club tutoring students in reading and writing. It was great—all those things I had learned in high school and college were being used to help raise the grades of a few struggling students. I was happy to do it, and as the year went on I spent as much time as possible at the boys and girls club. I had worked at a lot of jobs over the years but when I was volunteering, it didn’t seem like work. I know the students I worked with got a lot out of our time together, but I felt like I was the lucky one. It’s hard to explain, but it made me realize that working for others—not for pay, not for me, but to help them and the world we live in—was the best paycheck I ever got.