

## Joan Heberger, Peace Corps Volunteer, Honduras (2002–2004)

### Biography

In Honduras, my name is pronounced Jo-AHN, Yo-HAN-nah, Jo-AHN-ee, or any other combination of similar sounds. The English pronunciation of my name, Joan, now sounds odd to me. Living in



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another culture has changed not just the way I pronounce my name, but also the way I identify myself. People in the U.S.

tend to describe themselves based on their work and where they live, but people in Honduras describe themselves based on their families, their roots, their beliefs.

I am 28 and have smile wrinkles around my eyes. I practice yoga, at least a little bit, every day. I love to dance, and luckily, I love the always-playing merengue music. I prefer pie to cake, windows open instead of air-conditioning. I grew up in rural South Carolina making mud pies, playing in creeks, and selling pumpkins from the garden in the fall. I studied English and Spanish at the University of South Carolina and enjoyed a year as an exchange student in Leeds, England.

After graduating I moved to San Francisco, California, and worked as an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer and for a nonprofit organization called CompuMentor, providing technology support to schools and other nonprofit organizations. I am blessed with two parents, two sisters, one nephew, one niece, and one fat cat named Ms. Kitty.

### Site Assignment

I live in a mid-sized town in the middle of a coffee-producing region. How big is mid-sized? That depends on whom you ask, but my best guess is that there are about 7,000 people in town, and 8,000 more in the outlying rural communities, or *aldeas*. Because coffee-farming was lucrative five or six years ago, my town is wealthy, compared with many other Honduran towns. In town, almost everyone has electricity and running water, and many also have telephones and cable TV. My town borders Celaque National Park, which is the home of Honduras's tallest peak. I am assigned as a water and sanitation technician and educator and spend my time teaching kids to wash their hands and chastising friends and strangers for throwing trash in the river. I have worked to plan a water system, form an environmental club, and help a youth group that educates about HIV and AIDS risks.



Joan Heberger with Honduran children