

The Unbroken Chain

by Christian Tscheschlok
(Slovakia, 1996-99)
Fellow, Western Illinois
University

Moses Timah's journey began in 1968 as a barefoot child trekking to school with a backpack made from palm leaves and a lunch of roasted yams. That walk eventually took him to Peace Corps Volunteer Rosalie Stanley's humble abode in Okoyong Mamfe, Cameroon, where he helped her after school by cleaning up around her house and running little errands. The growing friendship with Stanley would eventually open up a world of opportunity for a poor boy whose roots began in the small African village of Anong.

As a seven-year-old, Timah had never thought much about the world outside of his village, much less about Stanley's home in the United States. "She could have been from out of this planet as far as I was concerned," Timah commented. "All I knew is that Rosalie was a black woman from 'mukala,' which is roughly translated from Moghamo as 'white man's land.' Where that land was, I certainly didn't know."

Timah smiled wide as he de-

scribed his village and some childhood memories. His home consisted of a two-room mud hut, where his mother occupied one room and he and his three siblings slept in the other. Cooking in the same room where the children slept was a true family affair. "My two brothers, one sister, and I would all gather around mom and help her cook everyday," Timah added. "I can still remember the wooden dishes and clay pots brimming with beans and yams."

While the tribal ruler's palace stood at the geographic center of Anong, it also served as the social nerve center. Locals would discuss village development issues, resolve problems between individuals, and bring their newborns for the Ruler's blessing. Around the palace stores sold local food and spirits, and farmers sold their goods. While children played at the market square. Mud homes with grass roofs and no running water rounded out the village's appearance.

"We would have a campfire in the evenings, around which we would tell folk tales, various other stories, and play musical games with our voices and sticks," said Timah, as he demonstrated campfire music by using his tongue to create rhythmic clicking sounds.

In return for all his work around the house, Stanley helped Timah out by purchasing necessary school supplies and tutoring him in English and math. His visits to her home became more frequent as the friendship grew ever stronger. Stanley posed the question of adoption to Timah's mother. "Mom was hard working and taught me good values like respect for elders, honesty, and the ethic of giving your best," he recalls, "She recognized what a chance 'Auntie' Rosalie could provide me to give my best to the world; she didn't step in the way of my future."

Timah's journey eventually led him to the "white man's country" of his childhood imagination. The airplane

A note to our readers -

In this issue of Fellows, Editor Beth Allgood presents a particularly rich selection of articles written by Fellows (and one award-winning Fellows alumnus). We think that you will find the stories of their paths to the Peace Corps and Fellows/USA, and the accounts of their work in the Fellows Program remarkable. Read and enjoy!

*Michele Titi,
Director Fellows/USA*

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was like a spaceship for him, taking him to a totally different world where even the rain came down in white flakes. "I was just beginning to grasp that the world truly is a complex place," he remarked. "While there was hot weather in Africa, there was this cold white dust in



WIU Peace Corps Fellow Moses Timah and a few native Amerindians welcome friends to his former village and Peace Corps site in Corentyne, Guyana (1996-98).

America that turned into water when you touched it." With the cold weather of Nebraska settling in, his first days were also marked by his first glimpses of snow.

Timah knew that someday he would come back to Africa to make things better for his homeland, but he realized that he first had to better *himself* with an undergraduate education at the University of Nebraska. He laughed as he related one of his first encounters with U.S. culture on campus. "I had trouble getting used to the fast pace of U.S. life," he related. "I bought a frozen pizza at a gas station, unwrapped it right there, and took a bite. I just couldn't figure out why the store attendant was



Moses Timah and a community member work at the grill during the Kiwanis club's 47th annual Pancake Breakfast in Annawan, IL. Moses was one of eight Fellows who traveled from around the state to join PCF Heather Atkinson who serves in Annawan for her internship.

laughing at me." He had assumed that the pizza was just another one of those packaged and ready to eat meals that he had heard are

bountiful in America's "now culture."

Today, certain aspects of American culture continue to mystify Timah. His boyhood experiences in Anong taught him that the notion of family overrides nearly any other life consideration. He feels that Americans define families too narrowly in terms of husband and wife because the African idea of family encompasses the whole community.

That sense of obligation to a global village is what inspired Timah to get involved with the Peace Corps, this time as an American citizen serving in Guyana, South America. Despite the daily challenges of isolation, bats, and poor water quality, he found his health education work at three clinics to be personally rewarding. "I can never forget the smiles I put on all the babies' faces at the clinics," he added, reminding himself that sometimes the "simple" things become our greatest accomplishments.

The Peace Corps and Community Fellows Program at Western Illinois University seemed like the next logical step in Timah's life. He reported being attracted to the program because of the way he was received by staff during the application and interview process. "I really felt like I was at home here,"

he said, "and I have to say that Carolyn Lawrence [Fellows Administrative Liaison] was instrumental to that."

"My only concern with joining the program is how I will be received by rural communities during my internship as a Fellow from another ethnic background," he stated, "If I'm not well-received, it could make it difficult for me to function." According to Timah, the support of the Fellows Program staff was crucial to his decision to attend Western Illinois University and the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs. Equally important was the clear sense that he belonged there.

Timah continues along his remarkable journey, but now he carries a different kind of backpack and has a whole new sense of perspective to guide him. He says his approach to life is captured by the old proverb, "To whom much is given, much is expected."

Therefore, he suggests that it is our duty to continue to uphold that which life has given us. "We are all a part of an unbroken chain," he asserts, "and it is our duty to support a segment of that chain to keep it from breaking. That's how this child from Africa sees his role in life. It has, after all, brought me this far."

Community Planning at Work in Pittsburgh

by Jason Sullivan
(Paraguay, 1998)
Fellow, Duquesne University

I am a Peace Corps Fellow in the Graduate Center for Social and Public Policy at Duquesne University, where I am studying public policy with a concentration in conflict resolution and peace studies. As part of my fellowship, I work in a community organization, applying the knowledge and skills I acquired both as a Peace Corps Volunteer and as a graduate student at Duquesne University. This past semester, I began working at Community Technical Assistance Center, better known as CTAC. CTAC is a small nonprofit organization that provides technical assistance to nonprofit and community-based organizations in the Pittsburgh area.



Top photo: members of the Tri Borough Planning Initiative identifying planning priorities on a "Mindmap" at a Future Search Conference, in Braddock, PA, October 1999.

Bottom photo: Residents and community members of the Tri Borough Planning Initiative write their history on a timeline at a Future Search Planning Conference, Braddock, PA, October, 1999.



At CTAC I work on an innovative community development model called the Neighborhood Planning Initiative (NPI). My primary focus is working on the Greater Braddock Planning Initiative (GBPI). The goal of GBPI is to jointly develop a comprehensive grassroots community plan representing the interests of the communities involved—the Boroughs of Braddock, North Braddock, and Rankin. This is done through a step-by-step process intended to identify and incorporate all key stakeholders inherent in the development of any community plan.

Greater Braddock Development Forum is responsible for monitoring this process. The Forum is a coalition of over 60 organizations representing all aspects of the three communities—politicians, businessmen, residents, social service providers, nonprofit organizations, and educational institutions.

The Forum brings together a variety of people from the three boroughs, all adding great enthusiasm and ideas to help strengthen the communities. My work at CTAC is reminiscent of my Peace Corps work, and I enjoy the interaction and stimulation of working with such a wide variety of people. As a community development assistant with the GBPI, I am

responsible for supporting the lead consultant on the project, CTAC Executive Director Mark Fatla. My duties involve identifying residents organizations and business people in the area and soliciting their input on the GBPI, guiding and advising the GBPI Planning Team and committees through the NPI model, coordinating with consultants and other professionals, and assisting with logistical support.

The Forum meets monthly and has recently formed four committees, which focus on the core topics of government structure, education, employment and business development, and health and safety.

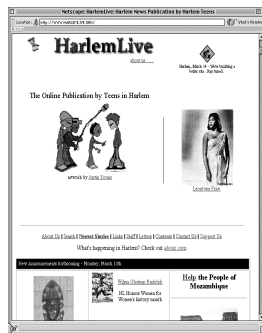
I attend committee meetings facilitating discussions when necessary and providing appropriate information and data. Forum meetings are used as report and feedback sessions, to keep everyone up to date on committee efforts.

Much of what I have been doing the last few months has been collecting and summarizing a variety of reports written about the three communities.

The goal of the Development Forum is to develop a plan that addresses issues that affect all the committees and reflects the major concerns of the community.

HarlemLive and the Digital Divide

by Rahsaan Harris
(Uruguay, 1995-97)
Fellow Alumnus, Teachers
College



As Larry Irving of the Commerce Department reported in "Falling Through the Net," a widening gap exists between the "haves" and "have-nots" in the Information Age in which we live. This digital divide is putting African Americans, Latinos, and the poor at a disadvantage as they try to keep pace with their counterparts. This gap is due in part to a lack of access to technology. Non-participation on the Internet threatens to leave the information "have-nots" without the necessary skills and resources to compete with those who have greater access. It is for that reason that I decided to devote my time to the development of HarlemLive.

HarlemLive, a technology-based after school program, features an Internet magazine (www.harlemlive.org) produced by inner-city teens. Since 1996, HarlemLive has grown to include approximately 60 students from public high schools located in the

Bronx, Brooklyn, and Manhattan who develop and maintain this award-winning journal on the World Wide Web. HarlemLive's substance and style have received attention from people within and beyond cyberspace. In 1999, the journal received over 45,000 hits and was recognized as a hot Web site by the *New York Daily News* and Yahoo; it has received several awards in the United States and abroad, and was featured on CNN. The site continues to receive letters of praise from readers in countries as far away as Germany, Italy, and Brazil.

The primary goal of HarlemLive is to train students in the production of a high quality, content-rich, on-line publication. In addition, an all-volunteer adult advisory staff seeks to help students develop journalism, writing, editing, photography, Web design, video production, and social skills. Once students leave HarlemLive, they

should be able to create Web pages, communicate effectively, and professionally interact with people from all walks of life. Participating in HarlemLive activities has made me realize that it is a vital resource for the community. I began volunteering with the organization to aid students in the production of the Web site. After a year of volunteering, I received a Community Fellowship from the Open Society Institute. This 18-month fellowship has allowed me to work full-time at HarlemLive to create and implement a plan for the organization's growth and sustainability.

This is a program that anyone could do in the school or community in which they work. All it takes is energy, creativity, and a desire to want to make a difference.

Rahsaan Harris is the one of 12 African-American RPCVs to receive the 2000 Franklin Williams Award. This award is named in honor of Ambassador Franklin H. Williams, an early architect of the Peace Corps.

A New Appreciation

by Lolie Camacho
(Mali, 1989-92)
Fellow, New School University

I was one of eight children, the only college graduate in my family, and raised in a single-parent household supported by the welfare system. After college, I needed to really understand who I was and who I could become as a Puerto Rican woman. The three years I spent living and working in a small village in Mali, West Africa, as a community development Volunteer turned out to be the most positive learning

experience of my life. I learned that my background had everything to do with my success as a Volunteer. The ability to adapt, be culturally sensitive, learn new languages, improvise, and persevere was not new to me. I discovered a new appreciation for who I was, where I came from, and my value to society, particularly to poor black and Latino youth.

As a Peace Corps Fellow at the Milano Graduate School of Urban Policy Analysis and Management, I want to erase some of the limitations placed on people of color from poor communities. With the community development experience I gained as a Volunteer and the skills I am developing through this program, I am preparing myself to more effectively combat discrimination and poverty.

From Togo to Baltimore

by Heidi Hartsough
(Togo, 1995-98)
Fellow, Johns Hopkins University

At the end of a workday here in inner-city Baltimore, I return to my apartment with the feeling I felt as a PCV returning to my thatched-roof mud structure in central Togo, West Africa. I am tired from the excessive stimulation of the day, exhilarated by the energy of the women with whom I work, and hopeful for the potential for change that I witnessed over the course of the day.

In Togo, I was a Volunteer in the Maternal Health and Child Survival program, which aimed to improve the health status of families through education about nutrition and infant growth monitoring, reproductive health/family planning, and STD and HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention. After working for three years with rural community health workers, as well as government-trained nurses and midwives, I felt I was lacking the clinical skills that could help me become a more effective public-health agent.

I found out about the Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing (JHUSON) Fellows/USA Program, which provides exactly the theoretical and practical knowledge that I had been seeking. In addition to the clinical curriculum, the Hopkins

program has a significant volunteer community outreach program which allows student nurses to take their skills out into the community—into city schools, churches, neighborhood fairs, community clinics, and private homes. We provide primary health services to the Baltimore community with an emphasis on health education.

As in West Africa, what prevents women and children from accessing proper health care here in America's inner-cities is a poverty of resources, not a poverty of motivation. Neglect is the result of barriers in accessing health care services. The main barriers to health care experienced by at least half of Baltimore city residents are a lack of transportation and telephone, lack of funds for medication, illiteracy, long waits for appointments, language barriers, and homelessness. The complexity of our health system in the United States makes the task of seeking care a very daunting one.

A small group of Fellows, with the backing of the JHU Alumni Foundation, have joined efforts with an innovative inner-city maternity clinic to provide maternal and child

health care to pregnant women who abuse drugs and alcohol. The Center for Addictions and Pregnancy (CAP) is both a drug rehabilitation program as well as a well-mother/well-baby clinic run by a team of midwives, doctors, and social workers. As a member of the group of JHUSON community outreach workers, I have helped create a health education program to complement the mental health group education that JHU provides to these women. Our goal is to enhance self-awareness and self-esteem. By increasing the health knowledge of this group of women, they will be inspired to take charge of their lives and will be able to better support one another to live healthily in what can be a very hostile environment. We are able to do this work through group discussions, focus groups, and interactive health education at the CAP inpatient and outpatient center.

This direct application of our nursing studies is perhaps the most rewarding part of our education here in Baltimore. As we all experienced in our respective host countries as PCVs, the most valuable lessons definitely come from the community itself.

Si, Se Puede in South Carolina

by Wendy Sellers Campbell
(Nicaragua, 1995-97)
Fellow, University of South
Carolina

Ten years ago, the supermarkets in South Carolina stocked boxed tacos, bottled salsa, and canned refried beans. Today, the stores carry *tortillas de maíz*, *chile seco*, and *tarjetas telefónicas*. A growing Hispanic/Latino population is crossing the borders into South Carolina. The University of South Carolina's (USC) Fellows/USA Program welcomes our new neighbors.

Addressing the issue of language barriers in the provision of services, the USC Fellows are participating in a Spanish translation/interpretation project. The USC College of Social Work houses the Peace Corps Fellows/USA Program. Four returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) currently participate in the program. The RPCVs collaborate in a project dedicated to providing language services to the growing Hispanic/Latino population. Currently, the



Fellows at the University of South Carolina

RPCVs are working in conjunction with the South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS), providing Spanish translation of documents, telephone/hotline services, in-person interpretation, and DSS staff training.

Fellows typically earn a master's degree in social work or a dual degree in social work/public health. As part of their degree, they conduct fieldwork in Latino communities. I spend my days traveling down hidden tobacco roads, presenting health education classes to female migrant workers. I work in rural Lee County, where I collaborated with the Adult Education Center to turn a gutted bus into a mobile classroom. With a driver, two Spanish teachers, and a child-care worker, I travel to the migrant camps, providing English classes and health workshops. I have arranged for the county to contract with a Mexican worker, Sylvia, to provide *tamales* and *salsa verde* for each class.

Not only do the Fellows work with state agencies, but they also immerse themselves in Hispanic/Latino communities. RPCV Carl Maas (Costa Rica, 1994-97), calls the urban New Haven community in Greenwood, S.C., his second home. He spends weekends with the Mexican and Honduran families, interpreting Spanish at the health clinic, teaching English, working in their bi-weekly *pulga* (flea-market), playing basketball with the kids, and selling hotdogs with community members.

The DSS HABLA program also provides interdisciplinary opportunities to other RPCV graduate students. Andrew Chandler (Dominican Republic, 1993-95), works with the South Carolina Appleseed Legal Justice Center on affordable housing and immigration issues, both of particular concern to migrants and immigrants in South Carolina. This summer he gathered information to present to the South Carolina General Assembly regarding a change in the drivers license requirements. Instead of using a social security number (which most migrants do not have, at least legally) the state would use a tax I.D. number (which many migrants and immigrants do have). A law school graduate student, Andrew brings the added value of legal training to the translation process, providing DSS and DSS HABLA with his expertise.

New Fellows, like George Dyer (Dominican Republic, 1994-96), get right into the act. George works with *Acercamiento Hispano*, a statewide victim's assistance program serving the South Carolina's Latino/Latina population. He also has extensive knowledge in medical interpretation, bringing a strong background in crisis interpretation to the DSS HABLA program.

New Peace Corps Director Launches Initiatives for Volunteers

RPCV Mark L. Schneider (El Salvador, 1966-68) became the Peace Corps' 15th Director on December 23, 1999. A native of Walnut Creek, California, he came to the Peace Corps from the U.S. Agency for International Development, where he was the assistant administrator of the Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean for seven years. Schneider brings many years of distinguished experience in public service to the agency. Prior to 1993, he served as chief of the Office of Analysis and Strategic Planning and senior policy advisor to the director at the Pan American Health Organization. Schneider also served as senior deputy assistant secretary for human rights at the Department of State from 1977 to 1979.

During a speech at the Kennedy Library in Boston on March 6, Schneider launched two new initiatives that will expand the scope of Volunteer development work in the 21st century. The first initiative will support Volunteer efforts to bring information technology, Internet access, and computer skills into their communities to develop small businesses and help reduce poverty. Through technology, Peace Corps Volunteers can help micro-entrepreneurs explore new markets, work with farmers to improve agricultural practices, help local health workers monitor immunization programs for children, and bring the Internet into local classrooms.

"This technology will, in my view, simply give Volunteers the green light to innovate, in bridging the digital divide,

while remaining true to the core mission that President Kennedy set out for the Peace Corps—to help the people of the developing world help themselves," Schneider said.

The other initiative will address the dramatic spread of AIDS in Africa by helping Volunteers incorporate HIV and AIDS education and prevention information into all Peace Corps programs worldwide.

"The spread of AIDS is inflicting a terrible and devastating toll on millions of innocent people and preventing many countries from consolidating their gains in economic and social development. There is no greater humanitarian crisis. There is no greater development obstacle," Schneider said.



Fellows brought the world home on March 7 for Peace Corps Day 2000. Through a variety of programs and events, they shared their overseas experiences with colleagues, students, faculty, and others to celebrate the 39th anniversary of the Peace Corps.

Peaceworker Fellows at the University of Maryland's Shriver Center organized an evening panel discussion. RPCVs from Eastern Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean, dressed in clothing

from their country of service, brought cultural artifacts and discussed the role of the Peace Corps in each country. Following the program, they hosted a reception with cuisine from their host countries.

The Peace Corps Fellows at Illinois State University converged on Metcalf School in Normal, IL, to share their experiences in the Dominican Republic, Sierra Leone, Paraguay, and the Kyrgyz Republic with students.

In New York City, the Fellows at Teachers College (TC), Columbia University prepared for March 7 by devoting their January/February newsletter to Peace Corps Day, offering tips on making presentations to classrooms and memories of Peace Corps Days past. In addition, the TC Fellows program hosted an open house for the university community to learn more about the Peace Corps' mission and efforts from the more than 20 Fellows who participated.

For more information about Peace Corps Day, the 40th anniversary of the Peace Corps, or other Peace Corps programs, check the agency Web site at www.peacecorps.gov or contact Lisa Ward, Peace Corps Day Coordinator at (800) 424-8580 (press 2, then 1, then ext. 1422) or at eward@peacecorps.gov.

Closing Notes



Please join us in welcoming Dr. Cary Ballou, our new program specialist, to the Fellows/USA staff. Dr. Ballou comes to us from American University where she served in a variety of capacities for 14 years. Before starting her career in higher education, she worked for the U.S. Congress for 11 years. She has experience in developing, managing and securing funding for a variety of programs. She can be reached at (202) 692-1432 or cballou@peacecorps.gov.

Fellows, join the Fellows/USA listserv and have an open forum for communication with your peers. To join, send an e-mail to: pcfellows-subscribe@eGroups.com or visit www.peacecorps.gov/fellows.

Visit the newly redesigned Fellows/USA Web site and see updated listings for the programs as well as sections for program news and Fellows activities in the field.

Please address all comments/suggestions for the newsletter to the Newsletter Editor, Beth Allgood, (202) 692-1434, eallgood@peacecorps.gov.

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