

Sticky Rice

December 2011



Inside this issue: Tortillas, Rabies, Rice Fields, Ribs, Well-Formed Arguments, The *Jai-Di*-ness of your Fellow Volunteers, Bali and more...

Sticky Rice

The Peace Corps Thailand Newsletter
December 2011

Note from the editors...

A new year is about to begin! For some of us, this will be our first New Year in Thailand and for others our last. Here at Sticky Rice as we ring in the New Year we are hoping the world doesn't end next December so we can keep thinking about how to make Sticky Rice even better. We hope you read this edition with this in mind, because we are going to be asking you, volunteers, to respond to a survey after this issue about what you want to read and write about in the upcoming year. We hope you all check out our survey and give us your feedback, because we'll be bothering you soon enough about the next issue!

In the meantime, enjoy this sampling of entertainment, news, information and thoughtfulness while you ring in 2012!

Visiting the Not-So-Distant Past...



Almost two years ago...

Some of Group 122 on Sports Day during PST in Chainat, 2010

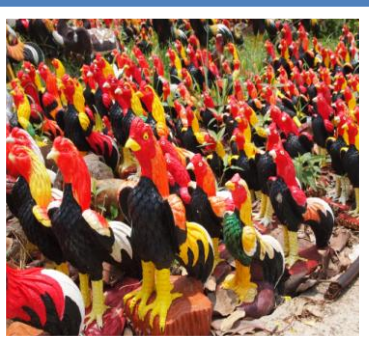
Photo from Kari Greenswag

Almost one year ago...

Group 123 volunteers on cultural exchange day during PST in Ayutthaya, 2011



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Essays:

Why Thailand Needs Peace Corps

By Erica Christia

So here we are, almost one year in. I've heard many discussions and have participated in a number of them, as to whether or not Thailand *needs* Peace Corps. Everybody is entitled to their opinions, but when I hear this I automatically think, "Are we living in the same country?" Don't get me wrong, I've listened to the arguments and understand the points made, but the more I live here, the more confident I am that Peace Corps should not be leaving Thailand any time soon.

I started to look into the Peace Corps directly after college when I was 21 years old. It was one of those 'Sooooo, what do I do with my life now?' phases. There was stuff going on at home and I knew I couldn't leave for two years at that point in my life. So, the natural progression of work, grad school and more work eventually took place and Peace Corps became a distant goal. Despite that, I always wanted to live within a rural community in a foreign country, live the simple life, learn about a new culture and its people and above all else, help people. I'm sure this sounds familiar to many Peace Corps volunteers. So, life happened and seven years later I found myself back at the point of 'Sooooo, what do I do with my life now?' I clicked on the Peace Corps website after leaving it stagnant for years and began the application process immediately.

Whenever I thought about the Peace Corps, I always thought I would go to

Africa as I have a public health background focusing on sexual health and HIV/AIDS and well, because that's where I wanted to go. Not so ironically, I was nominated for a health project in Sub-Saharan Africa to leave January 2011. Yet, due to medical 'stuff', when I received my formal invitation, Thailand was highlighted yellow. I have to admit that part of me was disappointed, but I was also pleasantly surprised and instantly excited. I started to spread the word, and although there was a lot of excitement, I got a lot of the following: "Uh! I love Thailand, the beaches are gorgeous....you

have to go to that place they filmed *The Beach* with Leo! (what?); Thailand is one of my favorite places to vacation (wait - what?); Thailand, really? Peace Corps is in Thailand? (ok, seriously?)" So, I started to get a little upset. This didn't sound like the dream



Photo by D. Silfee

I'd pictured for seven years of roughing it and helping the neediest people in the world. I expressed my concerns to a RPCV China friend of mine and she said: "Erica, I served in China, one of the powers of the world. Thailand and China may not be Africa and your lifestyle challenges may not be what you imagined, but believe me, the language and culture will be more than enough challenge. And c'mon, every country needs Peace Corps, including America which is why we have Americorps." I still carry those blissful and honest words with me.

Countries in all stages of development face a variety of challenges. Some may say that third-world countries have it the worst

because they lack all ‘the goods’ of a developed country. But developed countries lack many of the wonderful things of a third-world country such as resourcefulness, survival skills, no television and all that other technological stuff that is beautiful yet ugly at the same time.

Developing countries, which is where I would categorize Thailand, fall somewhere in between that. Developing countries are working so hard at becoming developed that unfamiliar social, family, gender, economic and health challenges creep up on them without recognition.

Historically, Thai culture is known to be quite conservative, yet many aspects of this are changing. Youth aren’t finishing school - and most PCVs know it’s not to help the family in the fields; 15-year-olds are losing the sense of responsibility to help the family (in a country that values family and everybody playing a beneficial role); youth are using drugs/alcohol and having sex at an earlier age; couples spend their entire marriage in separate cities or countries for better jobs to be able to give their kids opportunities they never had; people are leaving their children to be raised by *Yai* and *Da* (grandmother and grandfather) so they can work in a big city and buy the newest phone, car and/or electric lights for their motorcycle, etc, etc. These are just some social issues – I haven’t even mentioned the health and environmental stuff. I’m not trying to bash on Thailand, as I *jing jing* love it here. But, let’s be honest – after living in any country for a period of time, anybody could make a long list of its strengths and less-than-desirable traits. Thailand, America or Togo, they’ve all got good and bad. I’m sure we could all agree on this, *chai mai?*

Yet, despite these growing problems, some will still argue that there’s no need for

Peace Corps Thailand. It may depend on one’s definition of community development or one’s view of the Peace Corps’ purpose, but.....*jing law?* PCV’s in Thailand may not do the volunteer work being done in Africa because the needs are different – but there *are* still needs. Much of it depends on the volunteer, the community, and the interests of both.

I realize many people join the Peace Corps because they want to make a large and tangible impact – in many ways, I’m one of them. But we must look at the reality of that. I’d say it takes a good solid year for us to be fully integrated into our communities. That would leave us with one year to make this huge impact we all came here for. Community development can take a lifetime - one year is NOTHING.

My parents have given me some great advice since I’ve been here, and it’s simply ‘to plant seeds.’ They told me to just do the things I love to do, like cook without sugar, exercise, plant an organic garden, recycle, empower youth, carry around a pocket book made from plastic bags and carry all the materials to make it so when someone asks, I can show them on the spot how to make one. One never knows who this impacts. And let’s not underestimate the power and beauty of cultural and ‘life’ exchange. It’s largely what PC is about (66% to be exact), regardless of what country you are in. Even if just one Thai person is inspired by anything you do or say, they will have the power to make a change, one we may never be here to see.

As idealistic as I am (and we are all idealistic or we wouldn’t be here) I also realize that nobody leaves any Peace Corps country after two years with their village being totally and completely different. And why would we want that? There is so much to love.

Ribs on Rosh Hashanah

by Kari Greenswag

Back in October, I was lucky enough to be able to take a trip back home. A very dear friend was getting married, and to make matters extra awesome, it was in Seattle where my parents now live and work. This resulted in the wonderful situation of free room and board, and being taken out to eat whatever my heart could desire. Top on my list: ribs.



Well hello, ribs!

While I might have lived in Seattle ever since moving out there to attend the University of Washington, I was born and raised a Midwestern girl. That means I like anything that comes off the grill, and I have high standards. Luckily, my parents knew of a pretty good rib joint not far from their place. I was so determined to have ribs that I even said we would be eating them the very night I landed! I struggled, but in vain. After landing at about 8:30am, and trying to stay up to force my body to adjust, I succumbed and my parents saw only a pathetic heap in one of their comfy chairs. Taking pity on me they shoved some dinner at me along with some Tylenol PM (side note: a great way to make sure you stay asleep when you cross the International Date Line), and sent me to bed like I was five.

But tomorrow, I vowed as I laid my head down upon the soft pillows, tomorrow there would be ribs.

I got up the next day feeling refreshed! I was so excited. I even had enough energy to do some shopping with my mom, getting essentials like new sneakers and comfy pants. When my dad got home from work, my parents looked at me, wondering if I was up to an outing. It was too early for most Seattle-ites to go out to eat dinner, especially on a Wednesday, but I had taken an excellent power nap in a recliner and felt like it was now or never.

Now, the next part is a bit fuzzy, as I was still recovering from a combination of jet lag, a previous Tylenol PM dosing, and a nap, but it was mentioned that night just happened to be the eve of Rosh Hashanah.

Rosh Hashanah, for those who don't know, is the start of the Jewish New Year and one of the holier days on the Jewish calendar. Were my dad and I (the ones with Jewish ancestry, mom being of German Lutheran stock) really going to go eat wonderful, amazing pork-sicles on the eve of a high holy day?



There were muffins, too.

Yes, yes we were.

It was fabulous, but that wasn't the first time I'd broken Kosher knowingly on the eve of a Jewish holiday. Now before we go further let's back some things up a bit.

To start, I'm not even a real Jew. At least not as far

as Jewish law is concerned. See, with my dad being the Jewish half of my genetic makeup it gets complicated. For most Reform Jews, if I were to practice Judaism (which I don't) I could easily be considered a Jew in spite of my apparent dubious heritage. According to Orthodox Jews, however, it would take a bit more than that because of the laws found in the Torah (the Old Testament for you Christians out there, yes my people were monotheists before it was cool). It all boils down to the fact that if I were to ask a Rabbi, I would be labeled Not a Jew.

That said, I still think of myself as Jewish, and I have a Jewish grandmother. I think that should count for a lot.

To me, being Jewish is more about whether or not I go to temple or my mother is also descended of a tribe of Israel. Jewishness is about my family, the shared experience of playing dreidel for gelt with my cousins when we were little, the first time I heard about the Holocaust and knew someone could hate me for just being born. It's about lighting the Hanukkah lights and saying the blessing over the candles for all eight nights. It's about knowing where I came from and about who my people are. Judaism is a religion, to be a Jew is to be a part of a people who have managed to stay more or less intact in spite of five thousand years of human history happening, with all the wars and hate and death and disease that follow our species around like demented helper fairies. To be Jewish is to share a culture, a history, a common thread of identity that keeps us aware of each other no matter how far flung around the globe we happen to be.

I'm just really bad at Judaism. This is not surprising. I'm bad at every sort of organized religion, but I like to think that I'm an okay Jew.



My nana and I.

As I said, my most recent flouting of Jewish law on holy days was not my first. That was when the first night of Hanukkah was the day after Thanksgiving, and instead of eating left-over turkey, my dad, my uncle and I went out for ribs from Jim's Rib Haven. (One of two reasons to go to the Quad Cities, trust me on this one.) Nor will it be my last. I am lucky enough this year to be able to spend the holidays with my family, and I find myself growing fond of eating ribs on Jewish holy days.

The reason for this is simple. I have never been the kind of person to like to take serious things seriously for extended periods of time. When the situation calls for gravity, I can and will drop my tendency for sarcasm and flippancy and do a startlingly good impression of Jupiter, otherwise I'd rather be laughing. I do take my heritage seriously, and as such that means I treat it with as little reverence as possible. Breaking Kosher on holy days has become my own personal means of observance, of taking the occasion and marking it by doing everything wrong. Strangely enough, I feel as though I am more aware of my Jewishness, more connected to my heritage the more I muck about with the traditions.

So in the middle of our Christmas issue, here's my Jewish experience. It's hardly meaningful or full of information about Judaism. If you want that, go to Wikipedia. It is simply how I

have been able to find a way to connect to my people without giving up my secular humanist ways.

That said I hope all the volunteers of Peace Corps Thailand are having a good holiday season this year. I know I will be. Bring on the ribs!

Diary Entry of My Almost Not-So-Much Brush with Death by Rabies

By Denise Silfee

{Based on a True Story}

10:41 pm on a Wednesday

I would like to report that I was attacked by a mongrel dog in my village today, in the off-chance I develop the dreaded rabies disease and die in my sleep, or lose coherent thought when my brain turns to mush and I begin gnawing on people. I would like to make the attack a matter of record... just in case.

The incident of import occurred around 3:45 in the afternoon on Main Street, My Village, in Thailand, as I was leaving my school and heading towards home. I passed a particularly ill-kempt canine specimen lounging in the street, and aside from a sly, lazy glance, I thought the creature seemed harmless enough, or at least crippled enough as to pose no threat, and continued on my way. It was about ten paces after this initial eye-contact that the ambush occurred. My first thoughts after the attack and seeing the wound included, "I should have gone the other way," "That wai would have been pretty good if I hadn't been interrupted," and "Dang! That was sneaky!" Some following thoughts included, "I just talked to the doctor three hours ago, and I'm already vaccinated, so no need to bother him again," and "Oh.

That wound isn't even going to be a good story. No gushing blood, no torn and hanging ligaments. Bummer."

I would also like it to be known that I had instant forgiveness for the perpetrator, a particularly wolfish-looking fellow with only some grey hair on his head and a

scarf of fur around his shoulders. The rest of him is bald and, well, unappealing to the eye. But I do not blame him for his actions; he was raised this way, and I would have begged for mercy when the poor chap was beaten senseless with a log



Contemplating a dinner provided by Peace Corps...

if I knew the words for "mercy" and "animal abuse", but sadly, I did not. Instead I continued on my walk home and thought about writing a story about gang-violence in my village. The gangs would be made up of cats and dogs.

It was not until much later, right around now-o'clock, that I have read the health book chapter on rabies, immediately zeroing in on the words, "Death can occur within a few days," and begun to wonder if maybe my vaccination just didn't take, or if I am immune to rabies vaccinations. I remember a particular authority on the subject of rabies from my childhood—Cujo—and I suddenly feel a little claustrophobic, like I can't breathe with

panic. I am telling myself it barely bled, and that the old dog had worn out teeth, and I'm pretty sure he didn't slobber on me... but I am still haunted by this darn health book, which reminds me that "There are no second chances with rabies." My husband has given me his official rabies test, and after shaking the water bottle in my face and asking, "Does this scare you? Is water scary? Boo! Scary water! Scared yet?" he has declared me rabies free for the moment. So now I am going to try to sleep in the knowledge that I am still in good health and not going to expire during the night.

12:14 am Thursday morning

My life is flashing before my eyes... it is a very long movie, because rabies is a horribly slow death thus there is lots of time to replay the happy moments of life: Mexican restaurants and the magic of childhood... Christmas cookies and living rooms with carpet.... I am wondering how long before my mental faculties fail me... what should I think about for my last hours? Should I write a memoir about the challenges of living, even so briefly, with rabies? Will the rabies hurt? My leg does kind of sting already... maybe it is creeping up my leg and into my arms... my wrist feels kind of funny... It's a shame I didn't even get to post this on Facebook yet... how will the world know of my unfortunate demise?

1:27 am I can feel the rabies everywhere now—the pain is horrifying, on a scale of 1 to 10, it has got to be about a 2—that is a lot for a disease that looks deceptively like a scratch. How could I have been so short-sighted?! How could I have thought it wouldn't be necessary to call the doctor?!? Hubris, I tell you! If I survive this night, I swear to all holy beings that I will not rest until I have warned the world against not calling the doctor! Oh for shame!

2:36 am

I WANT MY MOMMMY! I miss my Dad! And my cat! Oh god! Who will feed my cat?! I should have called the doctor! I should have never thought the rabies couldn't get me! The rabies is everywhere! It's making my vision go darker! It is blinking! NOW IT'S GONE! I CAN'T SEE! Oh—electricity is back on—I feel so small and insignificant! I don't want to die this way! I can see my own body from the ceiling! I can see—wait—what is my husband doing? Why am I watching him hit my dying body with a pillow and tell it to be quiet?! Doesn't he understand that I will never live to see another day?! I will be a rabies zombie by morning, completely gone in a few days! YOU SHOULD CHERISH THIS MOMENT, YOU DIMWIT!

7:30 am I am on a van to the capital to see the doctor. I have survived the night, obviously. I told my husband not to be so dramatic about things. He gets so worked up and blows things out of proportion. Jeeze.

12:24 pm Ahem. I knew there was nothing to be concerned about. The doctor informed me that the vaccine is not a vaccine per-se... just get two more shots and you are fine. He even gave me a high five... well, he gave my husband a high five, for telling me I should have called the doctor immediately, but nonetheless, there was nothing to worry about, which is what I was saying all along. It's amazing what some people will allow their imaginations to do to them.

Heat Indications

By Jeff Jackson

Much like the pace of life, weather can come on slow in Thailand. If it's going to get hot, it seems to take a few days and the same if it should turn chilly. Weather websites hardly seem necessary. If you need a forecast, open the window.

Volunteers from group 123 have been in Thailand for almost a full year and two years for those in 122. All volunteers have a pretty good idea what to expect.

Sometimes looking out the window isn't necessary to get an idea for how hot it is. There are other indications such as how the old Thai ladies respond when you ask them if they're hot ("*rawn mak mak!*"). Volunteers can also count how many times in a day they're asked if they're hot or the number of times they shower.

I prefer the fan situation. When I go to bed, what is my fan doing and where is it?

The fan is off

This indicates lower than regular temperatures which generally means the Thai people are dressed like American Midwesterners in January.

Fan is blowing, but pointed elsewhere

It's cool, but not so cool you don't need a little airflow in the room. You might even be able to wear long pajama pants to bed.

Oscillating fan

Still a bit "cold" for the Thais, but a comfortable night's sleep with a bearable cool morning awaits. You fall asleep welcoming the breeze when it hits you and wake up cursing it.

Fan at foot of your bed on low level

Most Thais wouldn't have it any other way. These are days you can easily get sunburned and the first hour of sleep probably doesn't involve any covers.

Fan at foot of bed on high level

Hopefully you showered before hitting the hay otherwise you'll be sleeping with that layer of dried sweat you've been accumulating all day.

Fan within two feet of your face on low level

It's been a rough day, hasn't it? Unless you have an air-conditioned workplace, men have spent the day cursing the long-pants policy while the ladies are dreaming of the spaghetti-strapped dress they could have worn in the states.

Fan within two feet of your face on highest level

You hit the pillow thankful you're alive. You've drank so much water today that you'll have to get up another three times in the night, but that's okay because you can't sleep anyway on account of the parts of your body not hit by the fan and the fact that the breeze will dry your mouth and throat and you'll likely have a sore throat before your second bathroom break when you'll not only empty your bladder, but possibly take a bucket shower to cool off. I have yet to experience this last level. I've heard from 122 volunteers that the hot season this year was very mild. Last April in Thailand was no worse than August in Washington D.C. I may regret this come hot season, but I didn't sign up for Peace Corps to be comfortable. I'm looking forward to going back the states with some Thailand heat stories.

Rice Fields and Sailing Home

By the Patron

The rice fields are almost back to normal. Normal rice fields, to me, are seemingly endless plots of long-left hay, loose dirt, and the occasional hidden stone or root. If one had never seen them in their transformation, the dividing mounds of earth and grass between the small squares, rectangles, rhombi (shapes dictated by the available land) would appear to be a haphazard maze set above desolate geometry. That is normal to me. The green that came and went with the rain is strange.



Rice fields in Uthai.

I moved to Thailand to serve as a volunteer for twenty-seven months. For three months they kept me caged outside of an ancient capitol to train me for the job they said I would love. I ate foods foreign to me, 7-Eleven spaghetti among them. For all the scraps of meat on sticks and ride I took in as I adjusted, it was some microwaved fried rice and crab (of the third closest imitation thereof) that gave me my first real case of *tong sia*. My belly broken, my night was occupied less with sleep and more with trips to my new least-favorite toilet on earth and the fearful wondering if a poorly washed wiping hand would give me pink eye while I slept. I was in no condition to eat another bowl of *joke* (the real joke its being proclaimed best breakfast cure for diarrhea) and ride my bike the forty-five minute commute to arrive at a midmorning celebration of cultural exchange through food, song, dance and poorly planned presentations.

Yet there I was, sitting in misery, standing in agony, squatting in momentary relief, watching my new friends enjoy one of the worst performances I had ever seen, and all I wanted to do was go home. I wanted out of the country I felt no inclination towards, if not a little hostility. I chewed the bismuth tabs and downed maybe three many acetaminophens and I told myself it was not the country, it was me.

I know that's a line intended for a breakup, and I was in essence trying to avoid that very thing. I also knew that, much like the broken belly, homesickness comes and goes, and no amount of acetaminophen will dull its pain. Still, I did not enjoy the livery. I found it annoying and out of place. The high-noon sun drove my spirits into a shadow that could not exist at such a time. I wondered if I could ever enjoy this country.

After serving my three-month sentence, I was cast into the wild northeast. It was hot. Between the Tropic of Cancer (skin cancer? Is that why they wear jackets and ski masks all the time?) and the Equator, Thailand can only be said to be hot. But this was the season especially so, and rightly so labeled. The mornings were hot, lunch was hot, afternoon was

unbearable until and then directly after a quick bath and *bang* (powdering. I now buy Snake Brand Prickly Heat like an assassin buys copies of *Catcher in the Rye*. I go for classic, but I'll snag that light blue anti-bacterial any time I see a small one). Sometimes, at night, not even open windows and the fan on 3 (what I would have done for a Nigel Tufnel version) could cool me down, so I would sleep as closely pressed to the cool tiled floor as possible for up to fifteen minutes at a time. It was hot. And the rice fields were normal.

Now, the rice fields are almost back to normal. As happy as I am for enduring ten months and ten days so far, my mind is back in that open canteen, watching a bunch of people, some of whom I don't know if I like, enjoy themselves with dance and songs I am more sure about, wishing the acetaminophen in the little black medicine kit was a little stronger and wanting to go home.

I now eat all of the food, I love the land, I can stand much more of the people. I don't worry about the change I once thought would happen overnight. I even occasionally entertain the thoughts of trying to stay.

But the fields are just so dry and confusing to me. Right now, I cannot see how they sustain these people. Once a year they call them to make preparation, and then they tell them to wait. The rain comes and they wait. And they wait. Then they transform into a sea greens, then golds, and they call them again to take it all. And then, the rice fields are almost back to normal.

They tell me it's going to get cold. Of course I don't believe them. I have my sweaters ready, just in case. I bring along with me when I travel, not because I will use it, but because I hope to. What they mean by cold is that it is going to be windy. The Spinal Tap fan I needed when I came to do my job has been turned on somewhere far away, and it is blowing things back to the way they used to be.

On long nights, I wonder to myself, if I had the knowledge to use the winter wings of Thailand to sail myself back across the world to my own land, would I?

I do not know. And for that reason, I sit and watch as the fields are almost back to normal.

Book Review:

The Sex Lives of Cannibals: Adrift in the Equatorial Pacific by J. Maarten Troost

Review by Jeff Jackson

This non-fiction account of the author's time on a small South Pacific island for one year is about as close to being a Peace Corps Thailand memoir without actually being in Thailand. Twenty-six-year-old Troost battles bad local music (the natives love "Macarena"), stifling heat, bad water and natives with hardly nothing in common with Americans. Troost tells the story with great humor despite his poor living conditions. He observes local customs – some interesting and many strange. He even tires of the overpopulated dogs on the island: "We had only recently arrived on the island and still maintained Humane Society-type feelings for dogs. That would change. Very soon I would be pleased with myself when the rocks I flung drew blood."

Three years ago, *The Sex Lives of Cannibals* would be a good read. Today, living among many of the obstacles Troost faced, it's a great read with lots of laughs any Peace Corps Thailand volunteer can relate to.

Out and About:

Travel Notes: Bali, Indonesia

Notes and photos by Liz O'Casey



The Facts:

- We were in Bali/Lombok for 10 days
- The going rate for guesthouses throughout Bali seemed to be: 150,000 rupiah (about 500 baht) for three people/night, including breakfast. It seemed like guys got a lower price/ better deal. But such is life for a single white male in Southeast Asia.
- Plan to spend as much as you would in Thailand if you were heading to the South on a beach vacation.
- Public transportation in Bali is a complete and utter letdown. There are a series of, from what I can tell, private vans that can be hired out to wherever you want to go. But if you're looking for Thailand's amazing van/bus system, you won't find it. Be prepared to barter every single ticket price, and be taken for a few sketchy rides in vans resembling the Scooby Doo cartoon with a cracked-out man well past his prime at the wheel who'll occasionally turn around and say, "Hellllllooooo Ladiiiiesssss". Not. Creepy. At. All.
- The towns:
 - **Sanur:** Quiet resort town. It's a pretty fancy place with beachside resorts lining the coast. It was a great place to chill and lie on the beach. We stayed at a guesthouse about ¼ km from the beach.
 - **Nusa Lembogan:** Surprisingly quiet, culturally-intact island. This was my favorite place because of the traditional Balinese lifestyles of the people. I stumbled upon a seaweed-farming village where the entire town would come to life as the sun rose, pushing off in their small wooden boats to their kelp farms in the bay and beyond. It was a bit more expensive to stay here however, around 180,000 rupiah/night for three people.
 - **Denpasar:** Avoid it.
 - **Ubud:** The place to go if you want to feel like you're an extra in Eat Pray Love. It looked just like the movie scenes. Very unique architecture here and a bit more of an artsy culture feel to the place. I suppose it'd be a bit like our Chiang Mai, but on a smaller scale. There are kilometers of streets selling artisan goods, especially wooden sculptures. I think there are three reasons to

go to Ubud: 1) The sunrise morning hikes to the summit of several of the area's volcanoes, 2) The terraced rice fields and, 3) Poop coffee. The poop coffee is literally just that: coffee beans eaten by a mongoose, then excreted. It's some of the world's most expensive coffee. Something about the mongoose's digestive juices makes it primo-blend. I will say it went down quite smoothly...

- **Padangbai:** This had some of the best snorkeling. There is a small bay here where you can spend hours snorkeling or scuba-diving. It's a VERY small town with not much to offer outside of the water. But if you're looking for a place to relax on the beach or if you want to snorkel/scuba dive, this is the spot. It's also the town to head for if you're looking to go to neighboring Lombok Island and the Gilis.
- **The Gilis:** These are a series of small islands off the coast of Lombok, about a 4 hour ferry ride from Bali. They've got great white sand beaches and abundant snorkeling/scuba opportunities.
- **Kuta:** Reminded me of our Tijuana, except trade in the sleazy population of American frat boys for a bunch of obnoxious, shirtless Aussie frat boys. The only redeeming factor? Kuta is a super easy place to learn to surf.

Eat:

- Gado-Gado. If you're a vegetarian, this is your meal. It's steamed veggies topped with a peanut crack sauce. And if you've never tried tempeh, this dish comes with a few slices of that delicious soybean concoction. Get some.
- Sauces. Bali has some amazing sauces and unlike Thailand's Nam Prink, the Balinese sauces are savory, not spicy.



Interesting Culture:

- Check out people's teeth while you're in Bali. In a coming-of-age ceremony, Balinese will have their incisors filed down. Ouch.
- They bury the afterbirth, seeing it as a twin of the living person.
- Balinese people are Hindu whereas most of Indonesia is Muslim.
- They have more festivals than Thailand. Didn't think that was possible, did you?
- After being there awhile, you may notice: literally everyone has the same name. Females and males receive one of four names depending on their birth order: firstborn: Yan, secondborn: "Made", thirdborn: "Nyoman (Man)" or "Komang (Mang)" and the fourthborn "Ketut".

Memorable Moment:

One memorable story involves my first encounter with a Balinese bidet. After using a less-than-classy butt gun for two years here in Thailand, I forgot about what real elegance is:

a bidet. In a small restaurant one morning, I made my way to the bathroom. En route, I passed a gorgeous blond Scandinavian man-god whose table was located quite close to the bathroom. While in the bathroom, I reached for the handle to flush the toilet (already a foreign concept for me. What? You mean I don't have to pour a bucket of water into the toilet?). Apparently, in the elegant world, toilets not only flush, but they also have multiple handles. Thanks to Bali, I now know, there is one handle for the bidet and one to flush the toilet. Thinking I was pushing the flusher, I pushed the bidet handle. This caused the toilet to spray me in the face and drench my dress. I reached frantically for the handle to try to stop the spray but when I pushed it, the handle broke off. The scene inside the bathroom was



beginning to resemble Old Faithful. Water was spraying across the room and all over me. I looked desperately to the door, thinking I could make a quick escape. Impossible. There was a small crack between the bathroom door and the floor. Water was spraying out the door. I'm sure the Scandinavian god was wondering what I was up to. I couldn't make the bidet geyser stop. I had to find the handle,

which by now had fallen on the floor and was lost in a puddle. After a brief struggle, I located it and tried to reattach it. Success. I then flushed the toilet using the handle located On Top of the toilet, not the handle On The Side (take notes people, this valuable info isn't in Lonely Planet!). I felt pretty good about fixing the toilet, until I looked at my reflection in the mirror. I looked like I'd just been swimming. I opened the door and completed a head-down walk of shame past the Paul Newman look-alike. The man-god stared at me. I know what he was thinking. "Stupid American." Can't really argue with that.

Book Review:

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao by Junot Diaz

Review by Jeff Jackson

Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* is an interesting and unique read, but doesn't live up to the hype. The novel follows the life of an overweight Dominican geek living in New Jersey. Much of the novel is spent going through his family's history which involves much history of the Dominican Republic. The history is eye opening and the characters are believable. The reader follows Oscar, a huge underdog in the romance department, make his way from failure to failure. Despite his lack of success, Oscar's ambition rarely wanes, making him someone the reader can get behind.

Fiction:

Three Spirits

by Spider Frost

“You’re fired!” he said.

“No, you’re fired!” she said, and then *slam!* went the door behind Tammy Toom, and Spider Frost was alone. The tropical heat belied the date: December 24th. Spider stewed in his own anger, annoyance: mostly at her, some at himself.

This is what comes of sobriety, he thought. “Oh, Christmas Eve...oh, Christmas Eve...,” he sang.

“That’s not a song,” proclaimed a voice from the second floor.

“What? Who’s there? ...ah, jeez,” said Spider, for he had just seen the apparition descending the staircase, a thin man in white and gold. He was wrapped in chains and, upon closer inspection, flowers.

“Spiiiiiider Frost,” said the voice attached.

“Stop that. What are you supposed to be anyways?”

“I’m Mr. Singha.”

“What, the *beer*?”

The apparition carried on as if he hadn’t heard: “Tonight, Spider Frost, you will be visited by three spirits.”

“I don’t drink...spirits.”

The apparition shrugged: “That’s neither here nor there.”

“Wait, what does Singha have to do with Christmas?”

“‘Hark the herald angel Singha’?”

“I hate you.”

“‘Singha little bells’?”

“Avaunt, foul fiend, and leave me in peace!” raged Spider, rising to his feet. It departed in haste, leaping from the window and shattering in a thousand pieces on the lawn.

“Spider Frost!”

“Gah!” he said, turning toward this new voice. “What?”

“’Tis I, SangSom, of Christmas Past.”

“If you say ‘tum-tum-a-RUM-tum’, I will punch you in the neck.”

“Oh.”

There was an awkward silence as they both tried to think of anything besides the drummer boy chorus.

“Am I supposed to remember something? Learn a life lesson?”

“You remember when you were at school, and you took that girl to the Christmas Eve dance and then afterwards she dumped mustard on your head?”

“Sure. That was a fun night.”

“No, it wasn’t.” And then Sang Som was gone.

Spider Frost nodded: “Good to know.”

“Behold! Lao 285! In all my splendor. The Present!”

“Yes?”

“We whiskey you a merry Christmas’?”

“That doesn’t really work.”

“Sorry. Remember that what you have is quite good.”

“I’ll try,” Spider said. “I guess? Where’d you go?”

LAO KAO!

“Is *lao kao* actually a ‘spirit’?”

“Technically.”

“Technically?”

“Well, you can’t afford the good stuff after the previous two.”

“Oh.”

“The Future? It sucks.”

“Unless I make up with Tammy?”

The spirit seemed to consult some notes, then: “Nope, still sucks.”

“You’ve been very helpful,” dryly spake Spider Frost.

“I’m dreaming of a White Christmas’?”

“You *son* of a--”

Spider Frost woke up: “I’ll change! Just, please, no more alcoholic holiday puns!”

“Fair enough,” answered the Universe, shrugging.

“So you agree that my new dress is beautiful now?”

“Was that what we were fighting about?”

Upon sober reflection, it hardly seemed worth it.

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Goings On:

Reaching Out to 123 PST Families Affected By Flood: *An Interview with Julia Schulteis*



Ajaan Kitcha Thammawit, 123 volunteer Meaghan Murphy, Ajaan Chaturon Kathong, volunteers Julia Schulteis and Pam Wharton, Pam's mother, and AjaanChularat Inthorn preparing for a day of visiting families.

On December 10 and 18 volunteers from Group 123 and ajaans from Group 123 PST traveled to Ayutthaya to help in a clean-up day and to visit families that had housed volunteers during PST and were now affected by this year's historical flooding. Much of the effort was led by volunteer Julia Schulteis, who shares her thoughts on the process.

Sticky Rice: Where did you get the idea to start raising money? Did you explore other ways of helping?

Julia Schulteis: I had a friend visiting from the States and during the last day of vacation, I received one of

the most heart-wrenching calls ever. My host Mom from Ayutthaya was on the line, sobbing, saying "*naam tuam, naam tuam.*" I asked if it was "*anderais*" and she said "*mais rou.*" Since my Thai is limited, I immediately called Phanuthat and asked if he would call to make sure they didn't need help right away. He called me back and let me know that they had prepared for the imminent flooding, yet it was still difficult as today they were forced to move to the second floor, where most of our families ended up living for about two months. When I got back to site, I knew I couldn't just sit here while my family was facing one of the most difficult times of their lives and knew other volunteers were feeling the same, so I sent an email out to group 123 to coordinate a clean-up day, start a website, anything. Well, responses came back right away and we were up and running with all the above! We also knew that our family and friends wanted to help in any way they could, and we were able to direct them to the website for the Strong Family Surat Thani organization, which raised money for flood victims. Our Ajaans handed out some of the money raised to our PST families on behalf of Strong Family.

SR: Who else helped you and in what ways?

JS: The highlight of this project is how it brought us together. Fellow PCVs had the opportunity to work together. We had the opportunity to reunite with our former PST Staff and then the most memorable was reuniting with the families. Being Peace Corps volunteers, we all know that the power of a group working together far outweighs one person. Our roles in our communities are to get sustainable projects going, which means getting as many people involved and taking ownership as possible. Immediately, Erica Christie, Kelly Peterson, Kyle Livingston, Joel Gerstman (PCV Group 122) and myself got right to work to organizing clean-up day. Joel had done a similar project when his site in Surat Thani flooded, so he was our go-to for everything. We owe him a lot.

It didn't feel like work because we were so excited to get the website up and we energized each other. To answer your question, every PCV Thailand volunteer took part. People posted the link on Facebook, emailed friends and did everything possible to get word out to raise funds for our families. The most fun came when we got together to actually make our first visits. Our former Ajaans – Chaturon Kathong, Chularat Inthorn and Kitcha Thammawit came, too. Making these visits with friends was the best part. We even had Pam Wharton's mom from the states join us on one of her vacation days.

SR: What was your site's reaction to you helping Ayutthaya? Did they help you?

JS: My site was helping Ayutthaya before we got started on this project by collecting monetary donations that would be sent through our *jangwat*. When it came time to write a letter to include with the donations, my Thai co-workers and Ajaan helped to draft and type it up even before I asked. They were constantly asking how my family was doing as many of them had been through this before. Many of my coworkers are from Nakhon Si Thammarat, which saw devastating floods when I first came to site in March. We had watched on TV as my friend's grandmother was air lifted out of her home as the bridge had collapsed in front of her home. Phanuthat had said to me that our group was here during a historic year in Thailand. It's not the kind of history you want to see in the making, but I am grateful our group was here to help.



Above and below, scenes from Uthai.

SR: What does Uthai look like right now? What is noticeably different? Can you describe the extent of some of the destruction, to help those who have not been back to understand?

JS: We didn't know what to expect. The first signs of the flood were on the road from Bangkok to Ayutthaya. It was covered in dirt and lined with so much trash it could have been confused with a dump site. The trash is an obvious issue. Once in Uthai, the first sight was all the water. The rice fields were still inundated, which means they are still not able to harvest and earn income. I remember Kitcha saying he thought we were at the ocean, not Central Thailand. The majority of houses were dry, but not the same. At every home we went to, the family pointed to the water line, even though you couldn't miss it. It was a way of them to say, this is how bad it got. That water line told a thousand stories. There was water damage on any heavy furniture they had been unable to move upstairs as well. What I had not thought about were all the dead trees. Not only were the rice fields lost, but so many of the mango trees had died from oversaturation. I remember seeing my grandmother with piles and piles of mangos that she would gently handle to sell at the market. They will plant new trees, but it will be



years before they mature. Finally, a few houses were still only approachable by boat. We called one family to meet us, and out from around the corner came a woman rowing and smiling, full of only appreciation, no complaints.

SR: How were the families? Was there obvious stress or are they in good spirits? Does everyone appear healthy?

JS: When we visited Ayutthaya, it was still the Land of Smiles. Yet when we asked, "*bpen yang nai baan?*" many would say "*sa bais dii naam tuam.*" They were okay now but letting us know they were still dealing with the aftermath of the flood. Their eyes told the story of the flood. As I had dinner with my family that evening, they asked me if I liked fish. They said they ate rice and boiled fish morning, noon and night during the flooding as the fish was plentiful. I could tell a twinge of sadness, yet they laughed as they said they were bored of fish. I worry about the sewage and chemicals that might have been in the floodwater they were catching their food in, but it's what they had to do. They also sent me with bags of ramen noodles, canned sardines and dried pepper that they were given in their survival kits and had an entertainment center packed full with it. They wouldn't let me leave without taking gifts, the usual Thai way.

SR: Did our families share ways their lives have changed with you?

JS: Besides those who experienced the loss of friends and neighbors, there were also families who have been uprooted due to their jobs as well. Denise Silfee and Carla Arnold both have family members that had to move from working in Uthai and Ayutthaya to Bangkok. Right now, my host mother is able to go to work at her factory, but she spends her days cleaning as the machines are still broken.



Still smiling.

Because the water was so high, they were unable to cremate him (Buddhist tradition) and so he was put in the refrigerator until the flooding was over. That was the worst story by far and a moment that they can never forget. On the bright side, one of the families had just made their home two stories, which offered a place to avoid the floods.

SR: What stories did you hear, both good and bad?

JS: I don't think I was prepared for the stories. We are so used to being with our Ayutthaya families talking about "*gin kaow*" or "*ap-naam*" but not much too serious. At the fifth house we visited, in which there was still standing water, reality set in that these people had been through some horrific moments. At this particular home, the neighbor was trying to

ensure the power was away from water when he was electrocuted.

SR: How are families doing financially?

JS: I asked what financial support they had received and they said the government had provided each family with 5000 baht. I'm glad the government was able to provide some support, but we all know how far 5000 baht goes and these were whole families. I know they will use the donations for daily needs such as food and supplies lost. One of the host mothers we visited was in tears telling us the water came faster than expected and there was no time to save all her farming supplies, including all her fertilizer. It was a huge financial loss and hardship.

**SR: How did doing this impact you?
What are your personal
feelings/reactions/reflections about the
process, about Thai people, about the
time you invested, about the people who
helped you?**

JS: It seems like nothing can get the Thai people down. I remember watching the reports of the floods during *Loy Krathong*, and instead of seeing people sulking as they rowed their boats, there were cheers and smiles and laughter and they were competing in a boat race. They can make something good out of any circumstance. I only hope that I can face my life's challenges the way the Thai people face theirs.



Volunteers Connie Kargbo, Joe Nix and Karen Harrington join Ajaan Chularat visiting with a family.

I am feeling so many things about this experience. I feel pride in Group 123 from the desire to help in any way possible, to working on this during personal time so as not to take away from our new communities to working successfully as a team. It makes me think that we should utilize our nearest volunteers and work together on projects more often to have a greater impact. I feel sorrow for the struggles our families experienced. We will never know what it was like to live on the second level of your home, not knowing how much higher the water would get, dealing with increasing amounts of mosquitoes and depending on food to arrive by boat. They have been through maybe one of the worst experiences of their lifetime.



Where there were once rice fields, now lakes.

The day wasn't about sadness though, but rather hope and this day, the present, something this culture truly lives by. That night, I had changed into my pajamas when my family all shouted for me to come outside. This reminded me of my first night at their house, when since I didn't understand anything, they just pulled my arm to lead me around and I was in my pajamas that night too being led outside, that time to *gin kaow*. I didn't have to be led by hand this time, but I still didn't know what we were doing. They said, "Look!" and pointed to the sky. It was

a partial eclipse. I couldn't believe it. I have never seen a partial eclipse (or full one for that matter). It was a moment that I will remember forever. All the family from all four houses were outside and we were smiling and looking at the moon, shining down on the lakes that were once rice fields around us. We were appreciating Mother Nature, the same Mother Nature that had wreaked havoc on their lives. We were appreciating this moment and the life we have right now and the people we share it with. That is what life is about. Finally, this project reminded me to never limit your ideas. Even though our roles as Peace Corps volunteers are not to raise money, we had this unprecedented traumatic event happen to our very own Thai families and so we had the opportunity to do something different. It cost almost nothing to accomplish. We can do anything we put our minds too. I know that sounds cheesy, but it's true.

Goings On:

Peace Corps Seeks to Improve Support to LGBT Volunteers

By Denise Silfee

"Thai society is under tremendous transformation," Dr. William Klausner reminded everyone at a panel discussion on Thursday, December 8th of Peace Corps staff and current volunteers who met to discuss ways to improve support for LGBT volunteers.

Twenty Peace Corps staff, including Country Director David Claussenius, and current group 123 volunteers Laurie Hacklander, Kyle Livingston, Rick McMahan and Meghan Thomas were joined by Dr. William Klausner, who has spent more than half of his life living and working in Thailand, as they talked about topics such as the challenges LGBT volunteers may have integrating at their sites and what Peace Corps can do to improve support to all volunteers. The meeting was called for by Peace Corps staff to open a dialogue about historic and current perceptions of LGBT individuals in the US and Thailand and to develop strategies to better meet the needs of LGBT volunteers serving in Thailand.



Peace Corps meeting room on the day of the panel discussion.

"In the last two to three years trainees have been more open and express their orientation more. In the past I didn't know who was who," said Rawi Tantayakorn, PC Language Coordinator, when asked why this issue is being brought up now.

Supaporn Boonraksasa, PC Training Coordinator, expressed concerns about unknowingly hurting volunteers' feelings. As an example, she said to Laurie Hacklander, "You are so different from what we've had in the past. How do we approach you? Do we make you feel bad? We want to know how to work with you."

Laurie responded, "I was uncomfortable as well. Staff handled my concerns compassionately and considerately."

Historically, now is an important time in the struggle for the equal rights of the LGBT community in the US. With the recent repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell and the announcement from Secretary of State Hilary Clinton that the US will use its diplomatic powers to promote gay-rights around the globe, David Claussenius impressed upon the room that these historical milestones are important to the Peace Corps and that "what happens in the US affects us. We are a US organization."



Laurie answers a question from staff.

Volunteers on the panel shared some of their own stories about their experiences at site. For Laurie, coming out was relatively easy and occurred within an hour of arriving for site visit when she was introduced to other LGBT members of her village. Since then, Laurie's partner has visited and she feels that her relationship is accepted by her village-members. "They ask me, Has Victoria called yet? When is she visiting again?" When

people tell Laurie she is beautiful, her counterparts will correct them so say

"handsome." "They comment on my dress, like, Oh, that's a nice belt, and your shirt is tucked in; today you really look like a man! I [feel that I] can be myself."

Kyle Livingston only came out to his counterparts one month ago and received the response that "we already knew." He says that he feels like he has a harder time convincing his village that he's American and has white parents than he does feeling accepted. He chose to let his village get to know him first; "I wanted them to know that this is who I am." He wants to impress upon the people in his area that all gay men are not the same, in particular that he is not a lady-boy. "In general, not all gay men are very effeminate looking, not all are like 'katuouys' [lady-boys]. Even though I like guys, I don't dress up in women's clothing and I don't wear make-up."

Meghan Thomas's experience has not been the same. She has not come out at site for privacy's sake and because "the intense negative reactions and comments I've received from men outside of site when I'm with my fan have scared me." She says they come mainly as a result of her not fitting the "tom" stereotype. These interactions have made her question how safe it is to be out at site. Even though she understands the suggestion of a previous LGBT volunteer to "put the job first, it's part of the role," she also commented that it can be a struggle: "It doesn't feel good not to be authentic to myself."

Rick McMahan talked about his experience by saying, "I am from a different time in America. When I became aware of my homosexuality in the 50s, it was considered a mental illness. I came from a time when you didn't declare your sexuality." He is not currently out at his site, but "I would never deny it if asked." Rick expressed a desire to have better language to deal with the constant questions from men and from his male and female coworkers concerning his romantic interests. "I'm 64 years old, I assumed that was a good excuse for why I'm not out there chasing Thai women. But then I look at the geezers out there having relationships with attractive young Thai women and it looks like the older the

better! We need some more plausible responses to use at site.” Rick stresses that he doesn’t want to be viewed as deceitful.

Dr. Klausner acknowledged the difficult position LGBT volunteers may face when deciding when or how to tell their communities about their sexuality. “In not being forthright, am I denying my identity, or denying the authenticity of my identity?” He reminded volunteers of some of the differences between Thai culture and American culture, namely the Thai aversion to conflict, confrontation and the expression of strong emotions. He suggested using different ruses of convenience, similar to the single straight woman carrying around a photograph of a man in her wallet. He suggests that LGBT volunteers spend time with their communities allowing them to get to know each other. “There is usually a negative view to something against the norm. But by and large, Thais will be accepting if you follow appropriate behavior to avoid direct confrontation, avoid being overly frank, assertive. By the time [the community] does know, you as a person will be accepted.” Dr. Klausner also thinks that sooner or later, the communities of LGBT volunteers will figure it out on their own.



Meghan and Kyle listen to questions from staff.

Part of the conversation turned to whether or not Peace Corps should tell prospective host families that they will be receiving an LGBT volunteer. Kyle stated that Peace Corps should not come out for the volunteer: “Coming out is personal.” David Claussenius agreed: “We need to be careful. There is an issue of permission. We can’t decide to do that unilaterally; we need to know how the volunteer feels.” The group instead favored the idea of including the information that a family may be hosting an LGBT volunteer in the checklist that asks if a family can accommodate vegetarians, smokers, etc. There is no guarantee a family will host an LGBT volunteer, but they will be able to check yes or no that they are willing to do so.



Dr. Klausner and Rick.

Towards the end of the three hour meeting the panel discussed whether Thailand could lead the way in allowing same-sex couples to serve together at site. Legal issues in the US aside, concerns were brought up about how to present same-sex couples to their communities and about effectiveness in a patriarchal, hierarchal society. The issue of the Volunteer’s control over how and when to come out was brought up. “If I had a boyfriend who wanted to join the

Peace Corps with me, we would understand there will be consequences

good and bad, and we won’t know until we go through it,” Kyle responded. “We would understand we’d be serving as a same-sex couple and we can’t hide that.” Locating tolerant sites and being viewed as a good role model to Thai parents were added to the list of

concerns. “Welcome to our world,” Laurie stated. “For twenty years some of us have had to constantly think about how I will be portrayed, how will I present myself. Now you have a little idea of what we have to do. What a waste of energy.”

Towards the end of the meeting participants agreed that Peace Corps staff should be more proactive in providing opportunities for LGBT volunteers to express their concerns, ask questions and talk to staff. “The first thing I did when we arrived at staging in Philadelphia is seek out the people who will support me. Peace Corps staff can better present that,” Laurie said. “There are personal issues that can’t be uniformly addressed or predicted. I want to know who will I talk to if there are problems? What reactions can I expect?” Rick reminded everyone in the room that “LGBT is not just one thing, it’s more of a convenience that LGBT interests are consolidated. We can each be good resources, but one of us cannot be *the* resource.”

Peace Corps staff responded positively to the meeting. Paula Miller, PC Director of Programming and Training, said, “I was struck by how unique and diverse each individual on the panel was and provided unique perspectives on what and how volunteers decide to disclose to their community.” She added, “We will continue the discussion and call upon panelists if needed.”

Supaporn Boonraksasa said, “This is our first time. That is why we have this training, to prepare ourselves better for next time.

From the volunteers’ perspectives, Laurie is pleased that “There is a dialogue going, it has officially started.” She feels the volunteers were “received well, heard, and there is still interest to pursue further. The issue won’t be dropped.” Kyle agrees: “Many different points of view were expressed during the meeting.” He feels confident that Peace Corps Thailand will continue to make the coming years “better for handling diversity for all volunteers.”

More on Thai culture from Dr. William Klausner

Over the course of the three hour panel, Dr. Klausner shared some interesting perspectives on Thai culture. Here are some of them:

- There was no Thai word for sexual harassment until 1997, therefore the concept is still new. Even though there are laws against sexual harassment today, they only apply to the business sector, and many cases have not been brought forward.
- In traditional Thai culture, your sexual identification was associated with your karma in a past life. If a person’s karma was not in balance, they would go into the next life as a lady-boy or a homosexual. In this respect, Thai people traditionally did not look down on homosexuality, but viewed it as an “unfortunate state” based on karma.
- Though Thai culture and Thai society is undergoing transformation and many modern Thais that volunteers may work with do not conduct their lives by traditional standards, Dr. Klausner advises that they may still hold an outsider to the traditional standards of conduct. As volunteers, it is wise to still behave according to the more traditional standards until people get to know you better.

Volunteer Profile:

MELISSA BROWN

Thai Nickname: Mae
Hometown: San Jose, CA
Age: 26 years old
Site Location: Surin

How she got her nickname: My Paw-aw gave me the name for the month that I arrived, as the month of April is called Mae-sa-yon. My birthday is also in April, so he said "Mae."

What has she been up to at site:

Recently, I've been working on as many community projects as I possible. For one school we are going to have, within the next month or so, an opening ceremony for a clean drinking water project. The other school just received funding from the Water Charity, and I highly recommend using Water Charity as a funding source. They're really easy to work with and a cool organization. At my site they are funding building a sink for the kids to wash their hands and brush their teeth. And, maybe I'm a little nuts, but I want to do playground projects at each school. We're going to do a training for the project using Kat's model for playgrounds made out of recycled tires. So hopefully in three months we can do the playground projects, but the water projects are already underway.

What does she do in her free time: Just to get out and have some time alone, if I have any free time in the evening I'll ride my bike. I'll go out into the rice fields on my bike, or I'll go jogging in the evening. Other than that I'll just hang out at home with the host family, and sit with my yai and hang out. The evening is usually



workout if I have the energy and then hanging out with the family.

A typical day for her involves: I wake up around 6:30 and finally get out of bed around 7:00. Then there's breakfast. I get to school around 7:45 or 8:00, and then just catching up with teachers, checking email. Then I teach with my co-teacher from about 9:00 until the end of the school day, usually. If we're not actually in class, there's working on materials or other projects. I get home about 4:00, and that's when I usually go on my bike ride or exercise. Lately, it gets dark around 5:00 or 6:00 and my yai will yell at me in Khmer, "Take a shower!" So I take a shower and we'll have rice together. Usually, I'll help cook by chopping vegetables. I try to be active in the family. Then we'll eat together. We always eat together, every night. Then we relax in front of the house, on the tile floor with the families from the homes next to us (we're all relatives). There're cousins, and even a baby I've been able to watch grow. I've

been watching her when she comes over every day, and she's the Paw-aw's first granddaughter. She's hilarious, just a year and a couple of months, and is just starting to talk. Later, I go upstairs, unwind with a little bit of time to myself, read and then go to sleep.

What kind of travelling she's been able to do: I've been able to travel pretty extensively, and I've had a lot of visitors. My family came out twice, my brothers the second time with my parents. We were able to go to Cambodia. I've been able to go Angkor Wat twice, and the first time I was with a Peace Corps volunteer, and we were able to go throughout other parts of Cambodia as well, central and southern, along the beaches, Rabbit Island. I haven't been able to go to Laos yet, but I went to India for two weeks and that was pretty crazy. It's completely different from what we're used to in Thailand. There are so many people and the lack of cleanliness in the country made me appreciate Thailand, because you can see even in rural Thailand how important being clean is to Thais. In India, it smells like poop everywhere. I was also able to go up to northern Thailand during bit-term. One of my favorite places was Mae-sot on the border of Burma and Thailand. It was a really cool area, and you could see the Burmese influence with different types of tea and Burmese snacks, such as tea snacks. Also, in some of the dishes they use tea leaves. It's delicious food! I was able to see the waterfalls, was in Pai for a night, and Chiang Mai for a couple of nights as well. I've been able to travel a lot, luckily.

I think it was a 121 volunteer who said one of her biggest regrets was not travelling enough, so I always think about her when I wonder, "Should I just stay here?" I do make sure I put enough time in the village, but at the same time I remember her and

say, "Okay!" I try to seize the opportunity. Good advice.

What will she be doing when she's done with her service: I will be heading back to California and start teaching in April as a substitute for adult ESL at a language institute. It's the job that I used to I have, so I got it without even an interview. I'll be hanging out with family, catching up with friends. Then in the fall, I go back for my last semester of grad school in Sacramento.

Now that she's almost done, how she feels about her service: In a way, I feel overwhelmed, overwhelmed with everything, specifically all the generosity of Thai people and my family. Overwhelmed in a good way. Overwhelmed with so many good things, just by working with PCVs and seeing what everyone is doing and all the projects people have done and how inspiring everyone is. I hope that I can surround myself with such inspiring people in the States, or wherever I go. It's just incredible to find like-minded people and work with them as volunteers. So overwhelmed from the Thai side, the patience I've been given and seeing the generosity and love they give each other, and the sacrifices they make for each other. They sacrifice everything for others. I guess overwhelmed is the best adjective right now, but it's not an overwhelmed like a sad way. I know that I'll be able to process all these feelings over time, but right now I can't process. I haven't even begun to process these last two years. I look forward to seeing how all these experiences and all these empowering, inspiring feelings sort themselves out for the rest of my life and how they fall into place. And they will for sure.

Stuff Your Face:

Tortilla Happiness

From the brains of Roger Brubaker, Heather Bryson and Denise Silfee

Nothing says home like some mighty fine Tex-Mex. The tortilla is one of those works of art that once you venture out and make your own, you wonder why you ever bothered paying money for them at the grocery store in the past. For those of you not in on the secret, here is an easy do-it-yourself tortilla recipe, plus some ways to use ‘em, ‘cause sometimes all that separates you from The Best Day Ever is a nice, warm, homemade tortilla.

Now, we are what we like to call “approximate cooks.” Meaning, we don’t generally use exact measurements unless it is necessary, and most things in a recipe can be altered or changed according to the tastes of the cook anyway. So, take these ideas and make them your own!

The Tortilla Masterpiece:

The best thing since sliced bread is round, flat bread.



9/10 host families agree: tortillas make everything tastier.

*This is one of those time exact measurements matter!

3 cups Flour 1 cup Warm water 1 ts. Salt 1/3 cup Oil	<u>You will need:</u> Frying pan Spatula Clean, flat surface Rolling pin or pestle
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More flour—dry flour for rolling out tortillas

1. Mix all ingredients in mixing bowl until you get a doughy-pasty ball.
2. On a flat, clean (good luck) surface, spread loose, dry flour.
3. Pinch off a slightly smaller than a golf-ball sized chunk of dough and make flat with hands.
4. Place flattened ball on a flat surface with loose flour. Roll flat and thin with rolling pin or the smooth-surfaced pestle you happen to have lying around. Toss more loose flour on as needed to make rolling out the dough easier. You can make your doughy tortillas as big as the surface of the pan you plan to cook them in, or whatever size you so desire. The thinner the dough is rolled out, the less doughy they will taste when you cook them.
5. When you are ready to cook, place your flat dough in the pan and over the heat. We find it best not to use any oil or anything: The tortillas will cook dry and not stick if there is nothing else in the pan.
6. When the tortilla starts to bubble and you can slide it around in the pan without it sticking, flip to other side. When it starts to bubble again, remove and cook your next tortilla. Don’t turn your back on those suckers—it only take about a minute and a half for one to cook.

Pico de'Gallo: *Even if you have nothing else to put in them, or the tortilla chips you are trying to make still aren't turning out right, you can always go for de'gallo solo.*

Tomatoes Garlic Chilis Small red onion Lime Cilantro Dried red pepper flakes Salt	<u>You will need:</u> A knife
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*All these ingredients can be altered for amount you wish to make.

1. Choose a container. Chop up enough tomatoes in small pieces to almost fill the container to the top.
2. Finely chop garlic and small red onions. Mix into tomatoes.
3. Thinly slice chilies and chop cilantro, add to tomatoes.
4. Add a couple pinches red pepper flakes and a pinch of salt. Squeeze fresh lime juice into the mix.
5. Stir and serve!

Taco Pie: *Taco anything makes my day!*

Uncooked tortilla dough Ground meat (pork, chicken or beef) 1 packet of Taco seasoning Cheese (if you live the high life in Thailand) Tomatoes Yellow onion Cilantro	<u>You will need:</u> Wok or pan Pie tray Oven or toaster oven Rolling pin or pestle with smooth sides
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1. First, cook the ground meat according to the directions on the seasoning packet. Set aside.
2. Slice and dice tomatoes, onion, cilantro.
3. Roll out tortilla dough into two circular tortilla-esque shapes. Instead of cooking each one, use one to coat the bottom and sides of the pie pan.
4. Layer cooked meat, cheese (lucky you), diced tomatoes, onions, cilantro in the pie crust. Cover with the second crust. Use a fork to crimp the edges shut.
5. Bake until the crust is golden brown goodness at an experimental temperature of your choosing.
6. Toss on some pico de'gallo if you so desire and wah-la! Taco pie!

Apple Turnovers: *Or bearing close resemblance.*

Apples Brown sugar White sugar Cinnamon Butter	<u>You will need:</u> A toaster oven Baking tray of some sort
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1. First, prepare the apples. I usually prepare them the day before and let them soak in their own juices all night in the fridge. Skin apples, then slice and chop into small squares.
2. In some sort of plastic container with a lid, add brown sugar, white sugar and cinnamon. Stir so the sugars are covering all the apples. Let sit for a few hours to a day or two, until the sugars have turned a luscious syrupy mess of goodness.
3. Using the tortilla dough, pinch off small balls and roll into 3" circles, or cut into squares.
4. Use a spoon to heap some apple sugar goodness into the center of your chosen tortilla shape. Cut a sliver a butter and toss in there, too.
5. Fold the dough to close up the apples. Use a fork to press into the dough, sealing all the edges.
6. On a baking tray, put in the oven at an experimental temperature of your choosing (around 200 C is fine) until golden brown and slightly crunchy.
7. If you want to be lavish, sift some confectionary sugar over the finished product before serving to your Thai friends.



Above, loading up the apples and sugar and below, fresh from the oven. Umbrella optional.



The Anything Goes Quiche: *Put your creative juices to work.*

Uncooked tortilla dough Eggs Milk Anything else you can find	<u>You will need:</u> A pie pan or shallow baking dish A toaster oven
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1. Scramble up some eggs: the amount of eggs to be scrambled depends on the size of your soon to be delicious quiche (AKA, how big's your pie pan?).
2. Roll out a round, flat tortilla that will cover the bottom and sides of your pie pan.

3. Fill with scrambled eggs, a little bit of milk, and all those other random ingredients you had lying around: onions, tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, chilies, left over pico de'gallo, already cooked meat (mmm... breakfast sausage sounds good right about now...), rice, beans, etc, etc, etc.
4. Bake in toaster oven until you can insert a knife and comes out clean. Enjoy your own creativity.

Chicken Caesar Wrap: *The hunt for Caesar.*

Chicken Black pepper Flour Milk Oil Creamy Caesar salad dressing* Lettuce or leafy cabbage Tomatoes	<u>You will need:</u> Wok or pan Fork *We have not seen for sale in Tesco, but can probably purchase at a import food store in BKK or have mailed to you from your loving mother/father/significant other/easily manipulated into mail fees friend in the USA.
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1. After you have your tortillas warm and ready, slice chicken into strips.
2. Pour about 1 cup of milk into one bowl, set aside. In another bowl or plate, about 1 cup of flour.
3. In a bowl of milk, dip the chicken and then immediately dust with black pepper. The more pepper, the more kick. Then roll the still milky, peppery chicken in flour. (I learned this from my Italian roommate, whose idea of communication involved only eyebrows and a gesture that I took to mean, Now you see it, now you get it. Hopefully from this sparse description, you also get it.)
4. On the stove, heat up a pan with about 1 inch of oil.
5. Once oil is hot, use a fork to put in the chicken. Flip chicken 1 or 2 times, until each piece is a golden-y brown.
6. Now assemble your wrap: add chicken, fresh lettuce or lettuce-like leafy vegetable, sliced tomatoes, Caesar dressing, and any number of additional 'stuff' you might have lying around: cheese, chilies, assorted vegetables.

Space to Fill...

Hey there... notice how this textbox nicely fills the empty space at the end of this article, allowing for a smooth transition to Holiday Horoscopes without having to confusingly cram together two unrelated topics? We need you to help out with space-fillers! That is, short, little things that we all want to see and read but that maybe don't need a whole page. Book reviews, photographs, comics, a little blurb about how to make sandals out of rubber bands and toothpicks, anything. Even if writing a whole page only brings to mind a resounding blank, put your thoughts down and send them to us anyway at stickyrice.newsletter@gmail.com.

Only YOU can prevent empty space.

Horoscope:

Holiday Edition Horoscope

Profound wisdom and uncommon insight from Laurie Hacklander



Capricorn (22 Dec. – 19 Jan.)

Balance. Division. Wedge. Halve. That's what came up to me for you this month, my Capricorn friends: a curious group of words with related meanings. I'll let you determine what it means for yourself as you know well enough without me elaborating. Do yourself a favor and ponder the meaning with sincerity.

Aquarius (20 Jan. – 18 Feb.)

Hands. Feeling. Texture. Do you have some physical project or a project requiring physical exertion you've been itching to start? Or some delicious ahaan Thai you've been curious to get your hands into to create?

Timing is on your side and beneficial forces conspire to help you in your endeavors now. Be creative! Be brave! Chok dii!



Pisces (19 Feb – 20 March)

Movement. Graceful. Crowd. Hmmm... Viewing a dance performance or participating in one? Yoga class? Walking or driving carefully in icy traffic conditions during rush hour? Sounds a bit silly living in Thailand, but metaphorically speaking, definitely appropriate for you during the next couple weeks. Physical activity is a must for you now. Not as a new year's resolution (3 new years are too much to choose from anyway) but as a commitment to yourself for good self-care.

Aries (21 March – 19 April)

Benevolence. Open. Light. If you are light on funds because of buying and shipping those unique Thailand-made gifts back home, don't be stingy here. Another view to take: receive others' gifts openly and easily.

You'll do yourself a favor as well as show much needed appreciation.



Taurus (20 April – 20 May)

Lead. Follow. Get out of the way. Paths. Know when it's best to instigate, facilitate or back off an idea or proposal. You might be watched, as someone is waiting for you to make the first move. Put your best foot forward and the rest will follow.

Gemini (21 May – 20 June)

Reflection. Reflection. Reflection. In a house of mirrors, your reflections multiply, seemingly going into infinity. Likewise, your words and actions have far-reaching effects which may not come to fruition for you to see or experience here. Nothing is ever for naught. Keep at it. Suu suu!





Cancer (21 June – 22 July)

Allow yourself the gentle prodding by those around you. That which you most fear now is that which you must do. As the tea bag tag says, “Discover the power within.”

Leo (23 July – 22 August)

You don’t need to go it alone. In fact, solicit support and advice from others willing and capable of helping. Another time, forging bull-like ahead will be the necessary tactic, but current circumstances dictate acceptance.



Virgo (23 August – 22 Sept.)

Take advantage of the cold season to add some (extra) exercise to your routine. You’ll notice immediate effects and will ward away aches and ailments. Make a slight adjustment to your eating habits too. (Less sticky rice? More fruit? If that’s even possible!) Encourage someone near you.

Libra (23 Sept. – 22 Oct.)

At one end of my street lives a balat and a paw-aw. At the other end, a few cattle. And of course, I’m somewhere in the middle – literally and figuratively. And, I rather like that. How about you, Libra? Where do you want to be? Take aim and go!



Scorpio (23 Oct. – 21 Nov.)

Keep your emotions in check. You’ll be misunderstood anyway. Use the ol’ noggin to make the significant decisions. Someday you’ll be recognized for your adroit leadership and level-headedness and will be a major player in negotiations.

Sagittarius (23 Oct. – 21 Nov.)

It’s the end of another year. How’d you score? The great thing about the end of a year is that it’s followed by another year. Make your new determinations, or re-new your old ones and celebrate. You will engage people around you by your festive and jolly energy!



A last note from the editors of Sticky Rice...

We hope you can contribute to the next issue of Sticky Rice scheduled for February 2012 with your own personal stories, your recipes, your travel notes, and your insight about what’s going on around Thailand. You can send your contributions to any of the email addresses below. Until then, keep up the good work and welcome to the New Year!

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