

St. Vincent Update



A Sunny Hello from St. Vincent!,

Feb. 15

I've been meaning to get this off for about a week now. But I find that writing a 'newsletter' is a heckofalot more difficult than ~~get~~ just sitting down and typing (which I do rather poorly). Mostly, its a struggle to remember what I've written to about 20 some odd people over the past month and how to avoid duplicating already dated news. To my horror, I can't even remember what I put in the LAST letter so this may well find a home at the bottom of some bird cage. I do plan to copy this one so that the next letter won't be a duplication of this one but for now I'll try to keep my ramblings to the past month.

Believe it or not I think we're finally settling in here. At least, the initial shock of the first month or so has diminished. The homesickness tends to come and go...the gov't supermarket here in Kingstown uses bags that are factory seconds, rejects or just overproduced and so ~~they~~ get them cheap. They were sending people out with "Wieboldts" bags this afternoon (Wieboldt's is a local dept. store chain in Illinois.. for you westerners)... Last Fri. I met a mormon missionary from Kuna, ID (thats a stones throw from Debbie's home town..for you Easterners).. Little remembrances that trigger that pang of homesickness and unexpectedly colour your whole day are the toughest to deal with. The distance and 'incommunicato' feeling are not as overwhelming as they used to be. In all, I'd have to say that we're feeling better about being here for the long haul.

The really challenging part of life in the Peace Corps is learning to deal with 'ambiguity'. Our whole training program in Jamaica (a lifetime ago...) was centered around ambiguity and how to deal with it. Now, in the "real world" I at least have had a chance to learn how to deal with it. My job has been a case in point. I was appointed the "Manpower Development Advisor" to St. Vincent. This title was given to me by my supervisor who was very enthusiastic about my skills and background and very anxious for me to begin developing job descriptions, etc for the Public Service. I'm still waiting to begin. It took him three weeks just to look at, and approve, my goals and objectives. The Job Survey questionnaire I gave him one week after I began in the position hasn't been seen or heard of since. This bureaucratic delay is due to the fact that he is the man that reviews and approves all budget requests and with the fiscal years ending in June, add so many requests, well, you know... I hope to get the questionnaire back by my close of service... Not to be dismayed, I finally went to the Dept. of Labour and offered my services to the Labour Commissioner. Yes, he could use me in any of several projects BUT, they have been having trouble getting the funds released (my supervisor again). Once the funds were avail. there would be lots to do... Having found two dead ends, I had my monthly meeting with the Peace Corps Director who didn't find the situation to be all that dismaying or extraordinary. He suggested that I find a 'secondary project' to involve myself in so that I can vent my frustration.(!) Fortunately, this week I am involved in a top management training program which I got into by making a complete pest of myself. It has proved informative, but it's back to square one on monday. Hope springs eternal that something will come up. Learning how to deal with a vague job environment has become a full-time job in itself. That's what Peace Corps is all about. PC itself is no great 'clarifier' either. Our six month conference (reunion) is "sometime in June". The group of ^{new} PCV's will be here "sometime in May". The PC tends to be unnecessarily vague just to maintain

an atmosphere of ambiguity. Heaven forbid they ever tell us exactly what we're supposed to do. We'd all be struct dumb with amazement!.

Debbie has been having an 'easier' time of it. She is always busy and could make her days longer if she wanted to. Its been a challenge and a blessing to her lately. I've felt her sorrow and frustration at losing a patient unnecessarily due to poor nursing care or lack of proper equipment. But her joy was overflowing when she received 12 pillows and a new Orthopaedics man came from England. I know those were two completely different but invaluable blessings that made her job that much easier. Even watching Deb work with the children is a heartwarming experience. As you can tell, I really like what my 'better half' is doing at the hospital. Her trainee has expanded to two now and probably causes the most consternation (next to language problems). This concern and frustration stems from a persistent problem that plagues most of the work-force here in the EC. That is a lack of initiative. People will simply sit unless TOLD to do something. Even though they KNOW what to do, they need to be told to do it. Deb finds herself tiring of the over-supervision and wishes she could leave her assistants knowing that they would carry on without her being present. Debbie's situation is not unique. You can stand in some stores in Kingstown for a half hour waiting for a clerk to come over to assist you. Its always better to be 'pushy' and ask if you need anything. No one else will. The language problem is also a constant source of exasperation. The language, though english, has taken on such a local 'flavour' that at times its hard to believe that it is indeed, English. Over the years, the influence of the Dutch, French and African has taken its toll on conventional "Queens" English. Its known as "creole", which means mixture, and mixture it is! Thief has become "teef" and is used as a noun "He's a teef", as a verb "I've been teefed" and doesn't always mean stolen. Words like that are numerous and when spoken in rapid-fire succession become a different language. When I listen to a fast conversation between two Vincentians I rarely get it all. It sounds like the stereotypic "Jive" but with a French, British, Dutch twist. You've got to hear it.....

We finally got our garden in. In two weeks the growth of the plants has been amazing! Our Corn is over six inches high. The beans are on their way to the sun (you can almost watch them grow!). We are expectantly waiting for our first produce, which, if it survives the goats and the 'help yourselves' attitude of the local residents, we should have just about everything we need (thanks to Mom and Dad Hein in ID)... Got a wonderful package of surprises from Mom in SLC including a beautiful UTAH! calender and a large box of "Sweet and Low" (can't get that in sugar country). Much, much mail has arrived and we want to thank each and every one for writing. Each letter is such a delight as we eagerly pour over them. One from Hoonah, Alaska gets the long distance prize! We (or I) will answer each one faithfully. You can count on it. With so much free time I often answer them on the same day. Do keep the letters coming. News from 'home' is so very precious.

Well, enough. I don't think I said one thing I had planned to say but got some good info on paper none the less. We wish you all, each and every one, Gods richest blessings. We hope all are in good fiscal, physical, mental and spiritual health (we are). Of course we miss you and look forward to December as the months fly by. Do come visit if you pass this way or just want to see the Caribbean. It is as beautiful as everyone says... Take Care.

Now for a lengthy P.S.... Deb reminded me of so many activities I had left out that I had to include them lest I forget them in the next month. Mostly, our climb of the volcano Soufriere which is at the northern end of the island and gave birth to St. Feb 17th

Vincent million of years ago. We also had the pleasure of visiting Bequia (Beck-way) which is a Grenadine island to the south (9miles). I also had the opportunity to visit and area called the 'Glebe' which is a very poor community on the leeward coast.

In reverse order... the Glebe was a real education on poverty. Time magazine said in an article on the E.C. that it was "fourth world" in some areas of the Eastern Caribbean. The Glebe would be one of these 'fourth world' areas. The opportunity arose to see the Glebe because of the visit of a PCV from Barbados who had been in our training group in Jamaica. He was investigating the completion of a housing project that his organization was involved in. Frankly, I was stunned by the abject poverty that was prevalent in the Glebe area. "Homes" consisted, in some cases, of a collection of lumber fashioned into a lean-to which could not have kept out much weather. The 'little grass shacks' that are a stereotypical trade mark of the Caribbean island, were a reality in the Glebe. Children toddled about with the barest of clothing. Often three or more to a mother. How these children were fed was beyond me. The bloated bellies reminded me of those pictures of Biafra. The area is so destitute because Soufriere erupted in '79 and was followed by Hurricane David....

The volcano climb was something else. We began in a plantation which led into a dense "jungle" of vegetation as we steeply ascended the 3500ft cone. Actually I was amazed that there was so little evidence of the '79 eruption. About half way we began to see the skeletons of trees destroyed in the blast but the vegetation persisted. Only in the last 300 meters or so was there any indication that we were actually climbing a volcano. The upper part of the cone is totally desolate. Just volcanic rock and gravel. The crater itself is a sheer drop with absolutely no warning. It was extremely cloudy (foggy) at the top and the wind must've been gusting at 40MPH. If it hadn't been for the experience of the guide (PCV) we might of marched right off the edge and into the crater. Unfortunetly, the weather was so closed-in that we could barely see the bottom. But you sure could smell it. Whew! It was actually COLD up there. If it hadn't been so windy I might of actually enjoyed the chill. Deb and I plan to return and we hope for better weather so we can bring back some good pictures. It would be awesome.

Bequia was a very rewarding excursion aboard the "PERICA" a very well-used ferry from Holland which transported us and 300 others over the 9 miles of open Atlantic ocean to Bequia. As a 'typical' (or stereotypical) E.C. island, Bequia fits the bill. It is relatively uninhabited, small and very, very beautiful. Its main attraction to 'mainlanders' like us, is beaches. Miles and miles of white sand, which is a change from St. Vincent's black sand. It also is famous for its collection of yachts from all over the world. To see such a collection languidly floating in such a picturesque harbor is too much for words to express. You must come down and see for yourself. We spent most of the day laying around the beach, snorkeling and exploring. We plan to go back for a longer stay soon.

Well, again I'm going to try to stop. Any more stories will have to wait until the March-April edition. The same said before goes again. We love all. Miss you all. Wish you all the best.

God Bless,

Debbie & *Pete*

P.S. - I don't have too much to add as Pete has pretty much said all that's practical (I really appreciate my corresponding counterpart). As this is Thursday it is quite normal for us both to be anxiously anticipating the weekend... all I can say is that this P.C. experience certainly is the toughest job we'll ever love & hate. Hope you're all well!