

The beginning

We ended up in the Caribbean but the journey wasn't smooth

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Oct 26 1982

Just got back from the clinic. Funny how its been what I have dreaded and hoped for for these last 5 months. But it wasn't bad at all. Typhoid, Diptheria, Tenanus, polio and (last, but certainly not the least) yellow fever inoculations this morning given to use by Barbara the Health rep from Washington, D.C. She's a good lady who firmly told us that if we did not show up oon time, the useful life of the Yellow Fever inoculation would expire and someone (who did not make it on time) would also expire as a volunteer. She only had this one batch and after it was mixed she had one hour to inoculate all 77 of us. Deb and I were 3rd and 4th in line. We wanted to get it over with so we could get to the bank and cash our checks. I want to go on, but this journal should have been started 5 months ago. So I am going to back up and highlight some of the reasons and steps it took to join the Peace Corps.

Peace Corps was just another another option is a whole list of where do we go from here? Possibilities. Debbie and I were soon to graduate from the University of Utah and being newlyweds (6 mos) and childless we were anxious to explore those possibilities before getting tied down in the usual 9-5 workday life that most people expect and accept as 'proper'. However, Deb & I felt most blessed by God in having those diplomas, good health, a house, two cars, etc. etc. We realized that there much more to the world than the Salt Lake Area could contribute and, that if we were ever to do something slightly adventurous in our need to share our blessings we'd darn well better do it now.

So, out of the other possibilities of Lutheran World Mission, traditional employment or just following Debbies Physical Therapy skills to wherever they would take us, the Peace Corps called us back. They were interested and they wanted to interview use as soon as possible. Problem was that Deb was in Indiana on a PT affiliation for 5 weeks. So I called the recruitment Rep (Dick Arent) and told him to give us a call the Monday after Deb got home.

He did call and after two hours of trying to generate sincere and well-thought-out answers, Deb and I were nominated to the Peace Corps Eastern Caribbean program. Whew! Step one was complete. Except one thing. We weren't sure what we'd be doing. First I was considered the primary person in our placement. "Well, no we don't really need personnel types but your background is technical so you can teach math". Then Debbie's Physical Therapy prevailed, as I knew it would, and I became the "non-matrixed spouse". (They knew I was part of the package but didn't know what to do with me.) But they'd have something for me by the time we got to the islands.

Step two was a bit more complex and about twenty times more frustrating than being nominated for a program. But, knowing that the U.S. Government thrives on paper and given the seemingly endless forms that needed to be filled outto just apply for the Peace Corps, I shouldn't have been surprized at the paperwork which followed our nomination.

It began with our "medical kit" which followed the letter stating "you should have received your medical kit in the mail, if you have not..." A few phone calls and the kits were there within a week.

We were “under the gun” though. Close of invitation (the date by which we had to have all of our information in) was Aug. We needed to get all the Medical and Dental exams completed by that date and if you’ve ever tried to get in to see a doctor for a non-emergency, routine physical exam in less than three weeks, you can imagine our apprehension. The dental exam was easier but much more expensive. Peace Corps pays for the exam and x-rays but will not pay for treatments. So \$250 later we had our Dental clearance. The Physical was a bit more tricky to schedule, was cheaper but almost lost the invitation for us. Peace Corps pays for the exam and x-rays or you can go to a Gov’t military installation for free. We opted for the latter and anyone who has experienced the assembly line, de-humanizing physicals the army performs will identify with our Sunday morning ordeal. The biggest disappointment they we had was that, upon inspecting the form, we found several important items could not be handled there. Most notably, urinalysis and pelvic exams (for Deb). With a vacation a day away and the deadline falling on a day on which we would be in Minnesota, Deb’s results were still somewhere in California and my “sample” was dropped off at a friend’s house (who happened to be a Med. Tech) My friend, Kay, would drop off my results to my pastor, who would pick up Debbie’s results at Planned Parenthood and put it all in the mail (in a \$9.50 express package) which would immediately whisk it to Washington. With that done, Deb and I took off on our “tour” to see relatives we would not see for two years while in the P.C. and just to relax and wait to hear the “Big News”.

I called Pastor Paul on Tuesday. “Yes” he said “it’s all in the mail. I mailed it last night at 5pm. Should be in Washington this morning if the guarantee is true”. “Great!” I said. I’ll call them tomorrow (just to be on the safe side) that would be Wednesday and give them ‘til Sunday which would be plenty of time to evaluate us and clear us for an invitation. So Wednesday morning I called Washington. “No” the voice tolled “we don’t have it. Could be it’s stuck in the mail room” I explained to him that it was sent to the office direct by express mail and that it should circumvent the mail room. Besides, it was guaranteed. “Well” he replied “nothing was guaranteed”. He went on to explain that the mail, even if sent direct, usually got sent back to the mail room. So even if it did arrive on Tuesday, it wouldn’t escape the mail room until Thursday earliest. “Wonderful” I said and hung up. My \$9.50 had bought me no time. I’d call ‘em on Thursday.

Thursday produced similar results but Friday the tardy package arrived. “Great” I yelled into the phone. “So we made it on time?” “Well,” the voice disinterestedly drolled “we’ve got it but we’re so backlogged that I really doubt we’ll get to see it. Maybe Monday” “But my close of invitation is on Sunday” I nearly screamed into the phone. “Sorry, it’s the best I can do”. The phone went dead and so did my dreams of becoming a volunteer.

By Tuesday of the next week they still hadn’t looked at it. We called them from a phone booth near Bismark, North Dakota. My recruiting rep couldn’t be reached. It was a long drive back to Salt Lake City.

Thursday I got a hold of Rick, my recruiter. He was sorry to put me through it all but he had made a mistake when he had told me the close of invitation date. We still had three weeks before our paperwork was due in. “The bright side of all of this” he explained “is that your stuff is in early so you’ll have an advantage over other nominees”. I didn’t know whether to kiss him or punch him in the face. Step two was done.

The day after close of invitation I called Washington. Yes they said they were happy to tell me that my wife and I were nominated to the Eastern Caribbean program and were to report for staging in Miami on Oct 25th. And so step three began.

We closed on the sale of our house (a risky two months before we even heard about our invitation. We had sold the house to close on Oct 1st) and moved the non-necessities into storage. Notices of our termination went to our employers and we moved in with my parents for the interim. Suddenly this Peace Corps thing was becoming real. We had a thousand things to complete in the three weeks before we left. Power of Attorney to grant, bills to pay, a car to sell, things to pack and store, mailing lists to update. It was nearly endless. The final two days were spent just packing & organizing and trying to be with my family as much as possible. An early Christmas was held and we were given more things to pack and after a very very tearful parting, we were on the plane for Chicago to spend an evening with more of my relatives before flying to Miami the next day.

When we arrived in Miami we began to notice those around us who had that “volunteer look”. Tired confused but happy and looking positive. Several busloads departed for the hotel where we were staying and we met several volunteers on our own very slow bus to hotel. The 20 min trip took an hour and a half and we arrived 15 minutes before the first meeting at 3pm. Barely enough time to check in and drop off our large volume of baggage.

The meeting was a revelation that I’m still trying to assimilate. I was surprized not only at the diversity of backgrounds (which I expected) but also the the ages of the volunteers. It ran from 22 to 78. With a larger number of couples (like Deb and I) than I imagined. Even a couple that had been married a week! But it was an interesting afternoon & evening. It calmed some fears & answered some questions. Exhausted, we went to be at 9pm.

Which brings us back to date. My arm is sore from the shots and writing. More later.

Oct 29, 1982

Things have been moving rather rapidly around here. The two additional days of comprehensive staging here have come and gone. Wednesday was filled with last minute paperwork. Legal hassels, even the most minor traffic violation or unpaid parking ticket, must be taken care of or you can't go. Your NAC (National Agency Check) must be complete or you can't go. If you use drugs you're terminated. If you ride a motorcycle without a helmet, you're terminated. Seems like either you can't go or you will be terminated are the two most often used threats against a volunteer. Seems to work. All of us have been OK'd for Jamaica, save one. Mary.

Mary was a true, strong-willed, stubborn, chain smoking Californian. She must have be about 60 plus years old (although certainly not the eldest). Apparently she was an art major and potter. She had been brought on board because she was to teach pottery skills to locals on the islands. We were having a discussion on culture and, in particular, on local dress when Mary brought up a question on wearing pants. "Well, yes, pants were permissable on women in certain situations" but she could be required to wear a skirt or dress n other circumstances. Apparently Mary's sense of personal freedom was offended and she was agast at the possibility of wearing a dress, for the next day she was no longer attending our meetings. Mary was gone back to California. Flexibility and willingness to adapt to local custom being key traits of a successful volunteer.

Mary's reluctance to give up some of her freedom really pointed up our eager pursuit of bondage. We would give up some of our 1st Amendment rights. Rights to talk politics and religion, with the intent of conversion at least. We always had to provide a disclaimer that it was our opinion and not that of the U.S. Government. We could not involve ourselves in local politics for fear of being interpreted as U.S. foreign policy. We were all required to give up something. Mary was an extreme in inflexibility but a valuable lesson to us all!

With paranoia at going the 'way of Mary', we boarded the plane to Jamaica with as open and flexible attitude as we could muster.

Oct 31 1982

Jamaica was at first, just what I knew it would be: Hot, humid and sunny with showers off and on. Island paradise actually on the surface it was all I knew it would be. I was anxious about what the below-the-surface look would reveal.

My first peek as an eye opener. What it revealed was an obsession with the U.S. currency. The person to approach me first was a lanky Jamaican with an enormous hat on his head. (rostahfarian) He was offering 2:1 for U.S. dollars. Another volunteer was offered 3:1. Our trainers, after giving us a talk on black market tactics and cautions proceeded to offer us 2:1. U.S. currency is very precious to Jamaicans who wish to travel or purchase goods in the U.S.

Nov 1

I was talking about money & currency because I didn't have the energy. Energy is hard to come by also. Whether it be personal energy or public energy. The heat seems to sap you of all strength. It also prevents me from moving because to move generates discomfort. I've been uncomfortable alot lately. The mosquitos seem to come in clouds, the humidity must be 90% and the dogs bark continuously after sundown. Of those things most often mentioned by volunteers it must be the mosquitos, dogs and heat. The heat is an expectation. The humidity also, but the mosquitos are much more fierce than anticipated and the constantly barking dogs are a true surprize. The family that Deb & I stay with has 6 dogs and the probability that one or more of six dogs will bark for 10 mins at least once an hour must be close to 100%. Of all the nights spent here in Jamaica, not one has been without a barking dog or 10. Seems to me that they should eat dogs. It would cut down on the noise and increase the meat supply.

Nov 2

Dogs and more dogs. And things are mellowing a bit. I should say something about our "host" family. Joan is the head of the household and has a daughter Qun (Kwan). Qun is sixteen. Joan also has a sister who lives in. Her name is Angela. Now, of all of them, Angela is the most open & friendly (at least initially) Deb & I went to church last Sunday with Joan and Qun (Angela doesn't go, she is kind of a renegade). Anyway, Joan had said that the service was loud and long. The church's name was "Miracle Church of God" The miracle was that we survived.

Initially it was just the discomfort of being the only white faces in a sea of black. The songs were different and sung in the style of "Southern Baptist" tradition of loud, hand clappin, foot stompn' music. However, as time went on, Deb and I realized that there was more to this church than it's music. People were soon jumping and yelling. Speaking in tongues and rolling on the floor It was really quite a display. The service ended two and a half hours after its beginning. We'll try the community church next week. It, at least, sounds safer.

The training in Sligoville is OK. Not great, just OK. There is a great deal of morale problem. The objectives are not real clear. The presentation is a bit too cold and mechanical. A lot of attention is paid to process but on a rather superficial level. The morale problem should have surfaced by now but the trainers are either unaware or not interested. I don't know. But there is a lot of talk of dropping a "bomb" on them.



All the trainers are quite friendly and for the most part understandable (I find most Jamaicans unintelligible but I'm getting better). Rudy is the most interesting character. He's the only American (though he's black) and I'm glad to listen to him speak with a rather thick American accent. With a full beard and graying afro he is supposedly the most "radical" looking of the bunch. Sensitive and direct, Rudy is my most favorite trainer though he rarely deals with us directly. Winston is the eldest of the staff and his "Queens English" impeccable. Winston used to work for the Ministry of Agriculture before joining CHP. He is a wise, gentle man whos words carry great weight. Especially among "hard core" AG's. Wish I was involved with agriculture projects. I may yet be.

Nov 7th

Went to church today at the Anglican church. 7Am is a bit early to be wanderin around Spanish Town but the service was familiar enough to be worth it. It was nothing like last Sunday.



Went to Ocho Rios yesterday. It was really quite a shock. Ocho Rios is such a pretty area. It was difficult to get used to seeing so many different white faces. I honestly had not seen another white person (outside of the PC trainees) for a couple of weeks. They all looked so awkward and bizarre looking in their tourist get ups. Everything was so expensive. The worst part was the beggars & locals asking (repeatedly) if we had money to change or if we wanted to buy sinsemilla. It was not only the request but the frequency of it that bothered me. I got very tired saying "No". The worst thing is the guilt as if I should be guilty for being American. Sometimes, I think I should.



For the first time, and probably not the last, I've been having a homesick/wanting-to-leave feeling. Culturally, I'm feeling much better. At first the "black faces" made me uncomfortable. But the trips into the market & streets of Spanish Town have quelled most of my discomfort. I'm still not as assertive as I would be with white people, but I'm working on it. My biggest complaint is with the climate. I have been plagued with mosquito bites and sweated many a nite away, wrapped in sheets trying to keep from being bit. The fan in our room has removed some of the discomforts from both sources but, when I think about the house we'll have on our island my outlook is not so gloomy. We brought enough netting to do ten or more windows (if necessary) And I guess I'm more interested in getting settled in than anything else. I want a place of my own again. I can then start to deal with the elements.

The only cultural surprise in Ocho Rios was the discovery of "nudity" here in Jamaica. Actually it could be termed a lack of modesty (in U.S. terms) when showering. On several occasions I observed women bare breasted and washing in the public showers. I was quite taken aback and surprised to have no mention of it in our training. Everyday has been quite an experience.

Nov 9, 1982

The ride up to the training center is quite an experience. The road between Spanish Town & Sligoville is not necessarily in bad shape, but rather it is its narrow design and tortuous route, which it winds up the mountain to Sligoville. Traffic is not very heavy, yet each ride is a new experience in anxiety. More so for the trip down than during the trip up. The vehicle is so busy trying to stay on the road while we wind past the myriad of pedestrians that each time that an oncoming vehicle is encountered the word fear is given a whole new meaning. Fortunately we've had no mishaps, yet.

The training center itself is a thing of beauty. It is perched atop a hill (mountain) which overlooks Kingston and Spanish Town. With the recent rains and cool weather, fog & clouds, often partly obscure the towns & gives a translucent, surrealistic look. It reminds me very much of Salt Lake. It doesn't do much to relieve my homesickness.



The homesickness comes and goes. When the mosquitos are biting, the heat and high humidity high, the dogs yowling at night, I remember the cool, clean quite dry climate of SLC. After living through a hot summer and feel the cool, colorful beginnings of fall just to be plunged into a hot summer again (which is cooler now) is a bit of an environmental shock. My initial reaction was to go home. I have since mellowed, I'd like to go home as soon as practical. Next X-mas seems much too

long, but it will go fast. I just hope we can get the money together.

The training pushes on. It's now week #2 and, with all of our anxieties expressed, we've settled in for the long haul. We continue to be decadent Americans. Constantly planning parties and trips to tourist areas. The Jamaica World Music Festival is coming up in two weeks and several trainees are planning to go to Montego Bays to join in the festivities. The biggest problem is that the American Embassy is having its Thanksgiving Day celebration the same day. We're supposed to be there. Deb and I have volunteered to do some cooking for one of the 20 turkeys. Wow! After so much turkey before I left the states, I thought I'd never want to eat it again...I was wrong.

Nov 12 1982

Even though we learn more & more each day, it becomes less and less distinct from the rest of our experiences. We've adjusted to Jamaican life. At least to where the surroundings & people aren't a constant surprize. Perhaps it is just due to the constant assault of our new experiences. We're just overloaded.

The training routine has become somewhat tedious. Some of the info is new. Some I've seen before. Combine that with anxiety about getting "in country" and you have a general restlessness.

Nov 13 1982

That restlessness is tempered somewhat by excursions into the countryside. Today Deb & I (with Julie and Dan) went to Port Antonio as much to see more of Jamaica as it was to get away from the dogs and pressures of staying at the Waugh's. Unfortunately, they have dogs in Port Antonio too. Some right behind the Montevin Lodge. I'm hoping the dogs are better behaved.

The trip was as eventful as I expected. A well packed standing room only crowd on the way to Kingston "step forward please". Then a 45 minute swelter in a minibus as it was packed for departure. As we waited we were assaulted with a continuous line of vendors hawking everything from Wrigleys chewing gum to sensemilla.


Finally, when the driver decided we were "well-done", he proceeded on through the streets of Kingston. Through the thriving sidewalk markets over the potholes and down one way streets (the wrong way). We were on our way to Hope Bay. The drive was as uneventful (in Jamaican terms) as most rides are here. Except for an encounter with a similar sized bus heading the opposite direction at a very narrow sections of the road, at which the driver exchanged words and it retreated, the trip was fine.

We arrived at Hope Bay about a ½ mile past the point at which we needed to get off. Hope Bay is a small village situated between an extinct volcano and the ocean. The condition of the town was typical of most small, rural Jamaican villages. Everything seems to have been built 40 years ago. There are very few "new" buildings. Most look recycled. The guest house we sought turned out to be a bit more isolated than we wished. Though it looked in relatively good condition. So we packed ourselves into a VW microbus (very suspicious looking) and proceeded into Port Antonio.



Our first encounter was with Benjamin, a local who offered his escort services (for a fee). After assuring him of his worthiness and our poverty, we set out for the Montevin Lodge to set up for our overnight retreat.

Nov 17 1982

The weekend in Port Antonio was well worth the time and expense. The night was cool and very quiet. No dogs or barking. It was wonderful. In addition, we had a chance to take some relaxing
 anja or change U.S. dollars.



I was very glad we went. I was well rested upon our return.

The freq. headaches I had experienced due to lack of sleep (canine induced insomnia) have temporarily disappeared. A mid-training break, well needed.

I'm still not feeling this terrible culture shock I've been anticipating and which has been alluded to in training. Whatever it is, it must be more than just adjusting to food, barking dogs, packed buses the general runnings of this place. If it is more, I am not seeing it. I guess that worries me.

Today we went to UWI to check it out and do some research. Deb went to the hospital then to the PT school. I wandered around campus and went to the library. I'll be going back next week. The most anticipated activity was the afternoon relaxation at the New Kingston Hotel. A little swimming, a few drinks and finally, a pizza for dinner. Its just what I needed to shake off the hot, sweaty, dirty bus rides around. A bit of decadence isn't all that bad. Besides, we found out its only \$98 jai to stay the night. We'll be back next weekend (turkey day) and stay! Hot water and A/C just one more time.

Nov 21 1982

It's peculiar how I've been preoccupied with enjoying "the comforts of life". I'm afraid its culture shock but not quite the kind I had expected. I had guessed, perhaps wrongly, the I would be overwhelmed by how different the Jamaican and the E.C. culture would be. The shock would be in the obvious dis-similarities in lifestyle. Thats definitely not true. The shock is in the subtle differences between the U.S. & E.C. Singly, the differences are not much to sneeze at. But when taken as a whole, its almost too much to deal with. Our need to escape to a lifestyle more "compatible" with our histories, is an indication that we are suffering from culture shock. We tired of living with and indifferent family who doesn't talk to us, tired of being called Jake. Tired of being asked to buy sensimilla or cocaine. I could go on but suffice it to say that we are tired of dealing with those things which go with living as an expatriot in the E.C. Thats the culture shock. It's not the differences that burns you out. Its a very insidious kind of "shock".

Well, anyway, Deb and I are at that point. Where it almost seems easier to go home rather than to stay. Where having to deal with it is much harder than to escape from it. Our host family situation plus our homesickness is enough to break the camels back, almost. I'm not quite sure why we haven't decided to go home. Perhaps its because we hope things will improve when we get in country. Perhaps its because we know that its and expectation that, from time to time, we'll suffer from culture shock. Its all part of the job, the experience called Peace Corps. Mostly, its the knowledge that whatever the reason for joining the Peace Corps, it must've been of greater weight than a few mosquitos & a bunch of barking dogs. At least, thats what I feel now. In the midst of a pack of barking, flea bitten mongrels, its a completely different story.

Needless to say, I am anxious to find "home" in St Lucia, St Vincent, St Anywhere. We have 9 days left. About 7 too many but sooner than I'll know we;ll be sworn in in Barbados and packed off to our respective islands.

Nov 24 1982

Well, I successfully passed my 27th birthday without complications. We had a morning at the UWI and spent the afternoon at the New Kingston Hotel. If it wasn't for this flu bug I've had for two days, my birthdays will I spend lounging poolside in Jamaica. Count my blessing for the day.



Besides with Deb there & a bunch of other trainees

(who bought me a drink) it was a very good time. I was expecting a great deal of depression in not having family around nor the "usual" trappings of a birthday. Actually the day passed as I wished it to. It wasn't terribly painful.

The realities of the morning kind of cast off any possibility of retaining a celebratory state. Joan was raggin to Debbie about using too small of a load in the washing machine. Heck, short of packing it in with a 2X4, we have been overloading it. I would guess that the light bill came yesterday and Joan hit the ceiling. Shes trying to blame it all on us. We are hardly here at all and only use a fan to keep the mosquitos off. My guess is that it is her tube-jocking daughter who is the culprit. Regardless, I resent this woman for her responsibility shifting. She asked us to stay here. If she can't live with that decision, then she ought to tell Pearl (the placement person) to move us. We wouldn't mind moving. With the "silent" treatment plus the resentful looks and accusatory remarks, we would be glad to move. We've only 7 days left. Its almost a lifetime.

Outside of host family problems, were doing OK. I believe I'm settling in (initially) to the West Indian lifestyle. Granted some things are difficult to deal with, but if I can remove most of the environmental stress (dogs & mosquitos in particular) I believe I can handle the rest.

Nov 30 (week to date, Embassy & T-Day, Man showin house)

The last day of training! I thought I'd never see the day. I realized I had been quite remiss in keeping up to date in the Journal. A week has passed and I haven't written. First though I need to review the past week to see where I am at. The training for the rest of the last week was uneventful. We've been getting quite restless to finish up and it was quite evident that most of the trainees would've rather been somewhere else.

Somewhere else is where Deb & I went to spend the weekend. We both went down to Kingston to cook for the PC Thanksgiving Day Party. We went on Friday night to begin cooking and by the time we located the P.C. Office, found lodgings for the night and began to prepare food at the Mutual Life Bldg it was 7:30. We only had use of the building until 8:30. So our assistance that evening was short lived.

We stayed at a volunteers house in Kingston. Her name was Jan and her roommate was gone for the weekend & since their place had been broken into on a few occasions she wanted someone to stay with her. Unfortunately, she had a host of other "roommates" which were in the form of small blackish caterpillars similar to inch worms. There were hundreds in the house which made a peculiar "popping" sound when stepped on. They didn't bite. They weren't th eleast bit aggressive yet it was somewhat unsettling to see these minute creatures creeping along the floors and walls. Jan didn't wear shoes which made the popping noises beneath her feet even more distracting. Fortunately the little beasts were quite harmless. Our mosquito netting tucked beneath the mattress provided plenty of protection from the inquisitive creepers. I slept soundly.

The next day proved busy. We spent hours peeling pre-cooked yams which were slimy & difficult to handle. Since I detest yams in general, the task was less than pleasant. Having survived that ordeal, Deb & I retired to the Pegasus where we were to spend the night. After a brief dip in the pool, we cleaned up and went to the dinner. What a feast! Two heaping plates & about a half a pie later I lay satiated watching the talent show and many drunk trainees stagger about.

Dec. 1 [The end of the beginning]

For the last day in Jamaica, it's been rather trying . Got a letter from Gram saying that Dad was going to have a hernia operation but not saying when. I called this morning to find out that Dad was in the hospital & already had the surgery. I realized that there is an additional frustration to living outside the U.S. Being incommunicado is one of the toughest barriers to face here in Jamaica. Granted a phone call takes only a minute to get through but its expensive. And again, the money is not important if an emergency existed. However its not knowing how serious or whether or not a phone call would alleviate the anxiety. Fortunately, this morning I called from the PC office (for free). I had a long talk with mom & spoke briefly with Todd and Hol Most of the anxieties were alleviated.