



Friends of Fiji News

Fall 2009 Vol. 18 Issue 1

A NEWSLETTER FOR RETURNED PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS, STAFF & ALL FRIENDS OF FIJI



FOF: STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR OUR FUTURE

At the beginning of the year, the Friends of Fiji Board of Directors formed a Strategy Task Force to consider important issues related to membership, communication, programs and fundraising. Task Force members included Tom Cooke (Fiji 27), Anne Baker (Fiji 56), Paul Nuti (Fiji 53), Rob Salerno (FRE 4) and Rob Bartel (Fiji 79). One of the group's key proposals was for the Board to organize a retreat to build on its discussions and set priorities for implementing operational changes. So in May, the Board convened a day-long retreat in Bethesda, Maryland, where Task Force members presented their findings. The retreat was graciously hosted by FOF Vice-President Rob Salerno at the DAI corporate offices where he is a Manager in their Global Health Sector.

The retreat marked a transition for FOF in that the FOF Board is composed of members who span the history of Peace Corps in Fiji – from Fiji 1 to Fiji 79 to Fiji Re-Entry 4, along with Fijian expatriates and a former ambassador to Fiji. Further, starting with the service of Becky and Dana Trytten (FRE 4) as in-country liaisons, FOF has enjoyed real-time input from current volunteers who have been excellent ambassadors for FOF. Things have indeed changed since most of the original Fiji service groups were in-country. Soon, Friends of Fiji will celebrate its 20th anniversary and the Board is considering how to commemorate this occasion, while continuing to grow and strengthen our support of Peace Corps Fiji.

The Board considered the mission of the organization, the core groups it serves, the needs of current members and the expectations of new members. What follows is a brief synopsis of the discussions held at the retreat.

Membership: FOF was founded as a Peace Corps volunteer and staff alumni group and this is still the largest segment of the membership. While the membership roster includes approximately 275 paid members as of May, this represents less than 20 percent of Peace Corps Fiji alumni. At the same time, we are pleased to have family, friends and Fijian expatriates as members and have benefited from the generosity of the Fijian ex-pat community in supporting our fundraisers.

Membership renewal has traditionally been dependent upon returns from newsletters and membership appeal letters. This is somewhat problematic because recently returned PCVs tend to move frequently and we often lose them to bad email addresses, so we end up paying for snail mail to nowhere! FOF is hopeful that members will take advantage of the PayPal option we added to the website last year for renewals and donations.

More generally, FOF is keen to offer opportunities for members to become actively engaged in our activities. We invite you to let us know how you would like to be involved, and there are many possibilities: serve as a mentor for new volunteers preparing to go to Fiji, be a contact for recently returned volunteers, learn about Peace Corps Partnership Projects that need funding, serve on a committee, organize an event, and so many others.

Communications: Historically, our primary methods of communication have been biannual newsletters and our website. FOF is eager to enhance the value of newsletter content and to more regularly post updates on activities, status reports for funded projects and links to relevant content on our website. *(continued on page 3)*

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Dear Friends of Fiji,

When my group, Fiji 79, closed our service in December of 1997, Peace Corps/Fiji was shutting down operations. It seemed a bittersweet end to three decades of Peace Corps in the Republic of the Fiji Islands. So it is with great joy that I have followed the Fiji Re-Entry (FRE) groups as they tackle the familiar challenges of navigating the languages and cultures of Fiji during pre-service training, and reveled in their accomplishments as they strive to fulfill the mission that we all embraced as Peace Corps Volunteers. Over twenty-two hundred PCVs have shared their minds, hearts and souls with wonderful country. Volunteers, staff, family, friends and supporters have shared something with the people of Fiji that is uniquely ours. These shared experiences are the glue that binds us together as the Friends of Fiji.

I am especially pleased that our Board continues to have representation from RPCVs who served in each decade of Peace Corps/Fiji, and that we currently have an active in-country volunteer liaison. It is tremendously helpful to know firsthand what is going on in Fiji. Such information helps guide the organization as we contemplate new ways to support volunteers entering Pre-Service Training, active volunteers seeking support for projects, and returning volunteers looking to ease back into life in the U. S. and elsewhere.

Service, Teaching, Lifelong Learning and Cultural Exchange are important themes to all volunteers. Perhaps for you, your service continues in both new and familiar ways. Friends of Fiji is dedicated to supporting and continuing the work that we all started when we began our service in Fiji. We sponsor educational and charitable activities that promote mutual understanding between Americans and the people of Fiji. We inform and educate our members and the general public on matters relating to Fiji, primarily through our newsletter, website, and events. And we support small-scale development projects in Fiji, many of which involve current PCVs and the communities they serve. I urge you to think of Friends of Fiji as an important way to extend your involvement in service to Fiji and to the U. S. Peace Corps.

Staying connected can sometimes be challenging. As one of my cohort of RPCVs commented last year, "It's nice to know that someone is trying to keep track of us." Active membership in Friends of Fiji is an excellent way to stay connected to fellow RPCVs, to the ongoing work of Peace Corps/Fiji, and to the people of Fiji. If you haven't already done so, please renew your membership and join our social networking groups on Facebook and the National Peace Corps Association's Peace Corps Connect. These platforms provide a great new "coconut wireless" through which we can stay connected and advance the goals of Friends of Fiji.

Robert C. Bartel, Fiji 79 (1995-1997)
President, Friends of Fiji

Friends of Fiji Incorporates!

Friends of Fiji has always operated as an unincorporated association, but this year the Board of Directors decided to incorporate in order to limit the liability of individual Board members and to provide the organization with other benefits of non-profit corporate status. The Articles of Incorporation were registered with the District of Columbia on May 15, 2009. They define the purposes of the Friends of Fiji as:

- a. To be the alumni association of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers and staff who have served in Fiji;
- b. To undertake and sponsor educational and charitable activities designed to help assure realization of the educational and charitable goals for which the United States Peace Corps (the "Peace Corps") was created;
- c. To inform and educate its members and the public on matters relating to Fiji;
- d. To develop a community to assist in accomplishing the foregoing purposes; and
- e. To undertake any other lawful purpose. In pursuing this purpose, the Organization shall operate exclusively for educational, scientific and charitable purposes within the meaning of section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as the same may be amended, supplemented or superseded from time to time.

So, it's official – Friends of Fiji has incorporated!

NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Several new members of the Friends of Fiji Board of Directors commenced their service to the organization earlier this year. We'd like to introduce them to you:



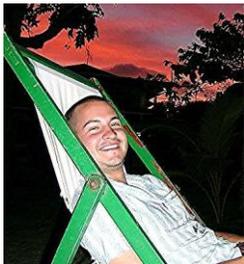
Tom Cooke

Tom was in Peace Corps Fiji education group XXVII, arriving in-country in October 1976. He was lucky enough to be assigned to Nadarivatu, in the central highlands of Viti Levu – in the shadow of Tomanivi (Mount Victoria), in fact. After extending for a third year teaching at Nadarivatu Junior Secondary School, Tom married Alesi, who is from Nadrau, in the very centre of the island. In 1989, Tom and Alesi had the opportunity to return to Fiji, where Tom taught at Niusawa Methodist High School in Taveuni, before taking a position at the Fiji School of Medicine in Suva. In 1993, family matters brought them back to the U.S. East Coast again.



Paul Nuti

Paul was a member of Fiji 53 and served as a secondary school teacher on Rabi Island, home of the Banabans, from 1984 to 1986. Halfway through his Pre-Service Training, Paul was pulled aside and told that he would be serving on an island where neither Fijian nor Hindi was the primary spoken language. Not only was that hysterically funny after weeks of Fijian and Hindi language training, but it was the beginning of a unique and unforgettable adventure as a Volunteer, sort of in Fiji and sort of in Kiribati. Since those heady, kava-fueled days, Paul has enjoyed a varied career in international development that has taken him to the Marshall Islands, West Africa, the Balkans, and eventually back to the U.S. At present, Paul is a Senior Speechwriter at AARP, and lives in Washington, DC with his wife Elizabeth, toddler son Daniel, and two sibling cats – Lucy and Zeke – rescued from the streets of Skopje, Macedonia.



Rob Salerno

Rob ("Ropate"), FRE4, served as an agribusiness / organizational development volunteer at Aglow Lautoka, working with women and vulnerable children to improve their livelihoods, generate income, and build capacity in a struggling organization. As a volunteer, Rob was very active on the Peer Support Network, Voluntary Advisory Committee (VAC) and engaged in gender and development activities. Returning to the states early in 2007, he traveled around the US and finally returned to Washington, DC where he began working in the private sector. Still working in international development, Rob currently serves as a manager in DAI's Global Health Sector, designing and implementing projects at the interface of animal and human health. In his spare time, Rob enjoys outdoor activities, reading, traveling, and spending time with his family and friends.

Strategic Planning *(continued from page 1)*

The website was largely built and has been maintained by Jim Reiersen (Fiji 20), and he welcomes suggestions for new content and for updating the site.

Newsletter readers have likely noted the frequent content overlap with the website. Going forward, FOF would like to see content that isn't necessarily tied to reporting on time-sensitive events, but more geared to human interest stories about members, current Peace Corps Fiji activities, and updates on the impact of the development projects FOF funds.

FOF must do better at communicating the benefits of membership. As most members admit that they join to stay connected with their fellow RPCVs, providing opportunities for members to do so is central to our mission. FOF's FaceBook group and our group on NPCA's *Peace Corps Connect* provide easy and efficient ways for FOF to facilitate communication between members and the organization. In addition, we encourage individual groups of Fiji RPCVs to establish subgroups. Wouldn't it be great if each subgroup could organize reunions by simply posting a message on the FOF website without having to search for long lost friends? *(continued on page 4)*

NEW PROJECTS FUNDED BY FRIENDS OF FIJI

Friends of Fiji continues to support development projects in Fiji with contributed funds and the proceeds of our biennial fundraiser. The following projects, all proposed by current PCVs through the Peace Corps Partnership Program, have been funded since the fall of 2008. Note that the Peace Corps no longer identifies the geographic location of volunteer assignments as a security precaution.

Compost Toilets

The Great Sea Reef near Mali Island is home to 12 species listed on the IUCN red list of threatened species. One of the easiest ways to help preserve this habitat is to construct dry compost toilets that eliminate the sewage runoff into the sea that cripples the reef ecosystem and reduces the fish population. This project will introduce the first two ecologically-smart, functioning compost toilets to the island, as well as be an instructional tool for the dramatic benefits of having compost toilets, likely expanding future latrine construction. The broader goal is to reduce the impact of the expanding population on the reef so that fish stocks, which these villagers rely on for subsistence, remain for future generations.

Rain Catchment

This project will construct a rain catchment system at a local school, replacing severely damaged and unsanitary cement tanks with four 5,000-liter plastic tanks. The new tanks will provide potable water, improve overall health and help to prevent and treat diseases. The water will be used by children, teachers and teachers' families living on the compound as well as by all community members who do not have rain catchment systems or water tanks at their homes. This village receives very little rain and is often ignored by the government due to its remote location.

Kindergarten Building

A community, realizing the importance of early-childhood learning, started a kindergarten seven years ago, but the program lacks a proper structure to allow consistent education. The kindergarten now meets in the school hall and is often cancelled due to primary school events, group meetings, and other school functions that take precedence. This project will construct a separate building and a consistent daily meeting place for the kindergarten class. The project will also teach unemployed village youth basic carpentry skills and those with basic skills more advanced techniques. The project will also increase community participation in education goals and planning. All labor will be supplied by villagers of the community, including carpenters, plumbers, and laborers.

Compost Toilets for Primary School

A primary school in Fiji that lies on sandy coastal flats with limited fresh water wants to replace toilet facilities which have fallen into disrepair and are leaking raw sewage with a set of six composting toilets to solve water and sanitation issues at the school and to provide valuable materials for soil improvement and farming. Because the compost toilets don't use water, they will reduce the strain on an already limited resource. The design also includes a new water tank for rainwater collection. The school can provide timber and cement supplies but needs funds for materials to build a foundation and housing for these new toilets. Construction will be carried out by a volunteer community carpenter with support from school families. Many of the workers will be local youth who have left school early and who will learn valuable masonry and carpentry skills applicable to maintenance or future employment.



Strategic Planning *(continued from page 3)*

Programs and Services: FOF will continue to inform members of Peace Corps activities in Fiji and fundraise to support development projects. Informal networking and mentoring services have been supported by Board members, but ideally we would like to build a broad network of members willing to participate in these activities. As noted above, we see the value of facilitating connections among members and view the social networking groups as an excellent way to support this activity. In addition, a membership database could be a valuable resource for those who are not inclined to join Facebook or *Peace Corps Connect*. We have a great track record in funding a range of development projects ranging, from upgrading water catchments to building composting latrines for schools and villages. *(continued on page 8)*

COUNTRY DIRECTOR DISPATCH

Dear Friends of Fiji,

Bula Vinaka, and thanks for all your support in the past months!

We are near the end of PST (pre-service training) now, and have really enjoyed getting to know the new FRE 7 Trainees. As you may know, last year, we had to make budget cuts that eliminated the FRE 6 Trainees' visits to other Volunteers during training. This year, we were fortunate to put it back in place, and they were all able to visit Volunteer sites around Viti Levu. They came back full of excitement from their adventures in the various towns, villages and settlements.

We have some new staff: Grace Wise has replaced Waqa as training manager and is working with a USPSC (US contractor), Janeen Dorsch, to make the training better than ever. Janeen is a veteran of PSTs in Kiribati, China, and other PC countries, so she is bringing lots of innovative ideas. Grace just started working with us during the training of trainers, so she is transitioning in. She is a Fijian trainer with background in several other agencies, and we are looking forward to her taking over at the end of PST.

Other staff changes: You may know that we have gained both an Admin Officer (AO) and Program and Training Officer (PTO) from the Burkina Faso post. I don't think this was planned, but just happened, at two different times last year. Rose (PTO) has been here nearly a year, and Sheila (AO) has just been here for a couple of months. Asaeli (Training Assistant) left during the past year, and Filipe has taken over the Training Assistant position. We are just about to replace him in the Program Assistant, Health position. All the others whom you probably know are still continuing with us.

I have been busy meeting our colleagues at JICA (Japan Volunteer agency, similar to PC), AUSAID (Australian volunteer agency), WWF (World Wildlife Fund), Friends (a local NGO that does health and social welfare work), as well as some of the Ministry officials. We were happy to meet recently with the new Permanent Secretary of Public Service Commission, Parmesh Chand, very soon after he took office. This government agency is the one we go to to learn the official needs of the country. He approved our current programs, particularly the business program, with "encouraging saving" on the top of his list. He also has some interesting ideas on how PC could work with Fiji, including working with the squatter settlements and helping Fiji implement a volunteer program, especially for those over 55 retirees who are anxious to keep active. That's a big order, but it's good that they are challenging us.

I have also been out in the field, visiting all the FRE 5 and FRE 6 Volunteers except the two on Kadavu (because one of them has been on leave and then in Suva on a project). My goal has been to visit everyone before the FRE 7 Volunteers go out to their communities, and I think I will just make it. Last week, I was up in a village near Raki Raki that is only accessible by boat and got to see a wonderful video of the Volunteer's water project. It included scenes of 20 of the village "boys" rolling huge water tanks off small boats and carrying them up a steep hill to the spring that will feed them. You can imagine how much the village enjoys showing that video to all visitors!

I have been trying to get to the "Center Days" at training to see the presentations by the FRE 5 and FRE 6 Volunteers. I really learn a lot from those. One of the Volunteers, on the West side, has been given a huge survey project by the Sangam she works for--to study the health issues of over 500 people in the Indo-Fijian community. It was wonderful to hear her talk about how she has learned to do this, engaging so many of the Fijian agencies and government offices.

This is probably enough for now. I hope to be able to keep in touch with you in the future to send updates. Thanks so much for staying involved. We always tell the Volunteers about you and your ongoing interest and support, and we all appreciate it!

Moce mada!

Ruth Larimer
Country Director

LIFE IN PEACE CORPS FIJI: *Introducing Keondra Bills*



division of Time Warner.

In this and every subsequent issue of the FOF newsletter, we will profile current a current Volunteer in Fiji, describing his/her background, experience, and, well, whatever else we think readers would find interesting. First up is Keondra Bills!

Hailing from South Central Los Angeles, Keondra Bills, a business volunteer, is serving as a volunteer in a bustling town on Viti Levu. Her passion, knowledge, and experience in marketing compliment her volunteer service at a local school that exists to be a model provider of formal and informal education. It contributes to the social and economic development of its members and target communities.

As a student at Fordham University in New York, Keondra studied and received her Bachelor of Science in marketing, specializing in communication and media management. During this time she was also a member of Omicron Epsilon Delta Economics Honor Society. She received recognition for outstanding community service and graduated with GLOBE International Business honor. Keondra has worked for several magazines including Essence, Teen People, Spin, Vibe, and People. In the two years leading up to her Peace Corps service, Keondra did market research for the largest magazine publisher in the world, Time Inc., a

During her time at Fordham University, Keondra was accepted into an HIV/AIDS awareness program that sent her and a select group of students to South Africa for three weeks. This was her first experience in international service, and the longest time she'd ever spent away from home. Keondra states, "volunteering in South Africa opened my eyes to the complexity of global issues as well as the derogatory portrayal of developing nations in media. It was an extremely challenging and humbling experience that caused me to reexamine my understanding of community and my role in it." Her experiences in South Africa empowered her to take an even bigger step. After graduating from Fordham, she completed her Peace Corps application and consummated her commitment to improving the quality of life for people both at home and abroad.

Keondra identifies her biggest success as a Peace Corps volunteer as her counterparts' newly demonstrated understanding of the necessity for not only economically sustainable projects and programs, but environmentally sustainable ones as well. In everyday discussions of their aquaculture, apiculture, and agricultural projects, Keondra is intentional in addressing environmental issues. She has provided her counterparts with examples of short and long term economic benefits to using environmentally friendly practices, which has increased their interest and contributed to the accomplishment of Peace Corps Fiji's goal of improving environmental friendliness and sustainability in their income generating activities. One example of this is regular water testing for toxins and nitrogen output levels in the school's fish/prawn farm.

Outside of her primary project in capacity building of the administrative staff at the school, Keondra also enjoys working directly with the teachers and school children. As necessary, she works with the teachers to develop interactive environmental studies curriculums with primary school students. Every morning after practicing yoga, walking through her neighborhood to the school, and speaking in Hindi to the office staff, she starts her workday by co-teaching in the kindergarten before working on various projects with the administrative team in her office. On occasion she visits the class 5 career classes to do special sessions on entrepreneurship, goal setting, economics, and other similar topics. If this weren't enough for one volunteer to take on, Keondra also meets once a week with the business club she helped to initiate with staff members at the school.

Keondra says that her biggest challenge in Fiji has been accepting that the results of her work may not be tangible. Though the work she is doing may be difficult to measure, she is certainly making an impact on her counterparts and the students in both informal conversations, as well as clearly defined projects.

THREE QUESTIONS ***For Ambassador Winston Thompson***

In late May, Fiji's new Ambassador to the United States, His Excellency Mr. Winston Thompson, presented his credentials to President Barack Obama at the White House. Ambassador Thompson is a seasoned diplomat with wide-ranging experience in both the public and private sectors. An agriculture graduate, Ambassador Thompson began his career as an extension officer in the Fiji Department of Agriculture, where he eventually rose to become Permanent Secretary. Following stints at the Ministry of Finance and the Public Service Commission, Ambassador Thompson served as Fiji's top diplomat at the United Nations as well as to Canada, before retiring from public service in 1994. Subsequently, he held the position of CEO at Telecom Fiji until 2005. Ambassador Thompson and his wife, Mrs. Queenie Thompson, have four children.



With a view to getting acquainted, Friends of Fiji offered Ambassador Thompson an opportunity to respond to three questions, which he gracefully agreed to do. Friends of Fiji looks forward to meeting with Ambassador Thompson on other occasions, and we wish him well in his new position.



FOF: Previous ambassadors have focused their attention on different goals, such as improving business connections between Fiji and the U.S., bolstering political ties between our countries, or building the cohesion of the geographically diverse Fiji community in the U.S. What goal do you plan to prioritize during your term as ambassador? How would you define success in achieving that goal?

AMB. THOMPSON: My goal here is to extend a better understanding of the situation in Fiji, in order to promote a return to democratic government. Another goal is the business side, like trade links and activity. This is important in this time of economic difficulty.

FOF: During these past several weeks since your arrival in North America, you have visited many parts of the continent. What has most impressed you here: what has been your most positive impression, and what has been your most negative impression?

AMB. THOMPSON: The complexity of distribution of political power here is my most striking positive impression – such as the system of checks and balances. I am also impressed by the dynamism of Americans. Even in these tough economic times, people are not sitting around moaning; rather, they're working actively to better their personal situations. And the new President has introduced a milieu of optimism. I don't really have a strong negative impression. There are too many positives, and they drown out any negatives.

FOF: What would you like everyday Americans with an interest in Fiji to know about you?

AMB. THOMPSON: That I'm still happily married at 69 years old, with wonderful children and grandchildren – especially grandchildren.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS & NOTES

New Members

Welcome to all our new (and recently returned) members! \$15 a year is not much but it keeps us running. For those of you unsure if your membership has lapsed, look at your mailing label for your expiration date. The membership form is on the back page of this newsletter.

Reunions

Over the past couple of years Friends of Fiji has assisted RPCVs organizing service group reunions. We have sent notices to members on behalf of the organizers and have posted notices in the newsletter. Using our web site and the new NPCA Connect web site there are additional options. Please let us know if you are interested in organizing a function. We do not give out members addresses but will contact people on your behalf. One RPCV group, Fiji 76, held their reunion on the same weekend of the FOF fundraiser. This enabled them to gather at a prearranged venue where there was authentic Fijian food, music, and dancing. The next fundraiser will be in spring of 2010.

If you have any news of a reunion we love printing photos and brief write-ups of such gatherings. Please send your article and photos to Paul Nuti. Contact information is on the back of the newsletter.

In Search Of

Have you lost touch? Write a short note and we will post it here. If we already have contact information we will send it along sooner.

Life Events/Transitions

Have news on yourself or others? This is the spot. Send your notices to Paul Nuti and he will see that it gets in the newsletter.

Obituaries

David D. Wetherbee: A longtime Oregon resident, David passed away on May 26, 2009. Born December 1, 1926 in Grangeville, Idaho, David attended school in Corvallis and served in the U.S. Army from 1945 to 1946. He married his sweetheart, Jackie Van Loh, on April 28, 1950, and they lived in Salem for many years while raising their three children. Dave and Jackie served two tours with the Peace Corps in Fiji from 1983 to 1985, and 1986 to 1988 working with the Fijian small business administration.

Strategic Planning *(continued from page 4)*

Fundraisers and Fundraising: FOF has enjoyed fairly stable revenues from membership dues and fundraising activities. The Gala Fundraisers held in Washington, DC every other year have been the primary source of revenue for supporting development projects. The Board recognizes that social activities could be more frequent and more varied in location (Continued on page 8) around the US. Discussion has centered on the possibility of hosting an event in California. Key to doing this is identifying members who would be willing to organize it.

Most of the projects funded by FOF have been supported in conjunction with the Peace Corps Partnership Program. We have generally funded each project at a modest level of \$1000, occasionally augmented when a smaller amount of money is required to fully fund a project. FOF may be able to increase support of these PCP activities if additional funds are raised. In fact, if sufficient revenues can be raised, FOF could establish its own funding program.

Branding & Merchandising: Members are proud of their connections to Fiji. It is natural, then, that we would want to have tee shirts, ball caps, travel mugs and other merchandise that celebrates our experience. To this end, Danica Coneely (FRE-4), now settled in the San Francisco Bay area, participated in the retreat via conference call to discuss ideas for creating a Friends of Fiji logo and for branding our organization. She shared several appealing initial designs and is continuing to work with the Board to develop a few finalists. Details on the selection of a logo are forthcoming and, in time, a line of products will be launched enabling you to proudly display your connection to Fiji and establishing a new source of revenue for supporting development projects.

In sum, FOF is busily laying the groundwork for reinventing itself as a more inclusive, forward-looking, and innovative organization. We look forward to your involvement!

50th ANNIVERSARY UPDATE

Peace Corps is turning 50! From October 2010 through September 2011, the Peace Corps community will be marking 50 years from when President Kennedy asked Americans to give two years of their lives to travel abroad, help others help themselves, and bring our experiences home in ways that serve the country. At the same time, Friends of Fiji will also be celebrating its 20th year!

Peace Corps, National Peace Corps Association and Friends of Fiji are already planning for these global celebrations! We invite you to join in.

Already many years in the making and with hundreds of events planned at home and abroad, we will celebrate Peace Corps' many accomplishments and recognize the nearly 200,000 who served and the tens of millions of lives influenced. This milestone anniversary provides the chance to consider in what ways Peace Corps might be modified to realize more of its potential, be part of a constructive U.S. role in the world and respond to the heartfelt desire of so many to serve.

As we both look back over its 50-year history and launch the next 50 years, the National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) developed these principles to guide our planning:

Ownership: Peace Corps belongs to the world - not to the federal agency, not to the National Peace Corps Association or its network of groups, staff or volunteers. It belongs to anyone who understands the power of individuals to contribute to a better world.

Participation: These events will be designed so that people everywhere where Peace Corps is valued can join the celebrations.

Purpose: These events must be more than looking back. They need to advance the essential work of Peace Corps, promoting human development, peace and prosperity.

Aspiration: These events will help realize the Peace Corps community's long-held dream of having a national focal point to share our stories, meet and remember.

Both NPCA and Peace Corps have landing pages dedicated to the 50th anniversary on their websites: www.peacecorpsconnect.org/content/50th-anniversary-campaign and www.peacecorps.gov/50, respectively. As Friends of Fiji develops plans, we'll update our website (www.fofiji.org) and our Connected Peace Corps group (<http://community.peacecorpsconnect.org/group/friendsoffiji>) as well.

What should you do to prepare for the 50th anniversary?

- Help organize and attend events planned around the country and around the globe, as outlined and regularly updated on the websites listed above. These events start on the steps of the University of Michigan in October 2010 and continue throughout the year, but be sure to reserve September 22-25, 2011 for a culminating celebration on the National Mall in Washington, DC.
- Join our Connected Peace Corps group to stay on top of announcements of plans and updates.
- Share your stories and photos in our Connected Peace Corps group, in our newsletter and on the Peace Corps digital library.
- Support development projects in Fiji, such as those found on <http://www.peacecorpsconnect.org/oceania/fiji>
- Interested in a trip to Fiji for the 50th? Perhaps even in conjunction with a service project in country? Let us know at rhsalerno@gmail.com, especially if you are willing to help coordinate it!
- Stay in touch with the Peace Corps community through your membership in Friends of Fiji.

Let's get ready for 2011!

THEN & NOW

We are always interested in what former Fiji PCVs are up to these days, not to mention what they look like! So, we thought it would be fun coax Fiji alums out of the woodwork and spotlight them – their time as Volunteers in Fiji and where they landed in life – in a feature we are calling “Then & Now.” Happily, we had no trouble at all landing our first intrepid victim to kick things off. Thanks, Jeff!!

Jeff Heimerman, Fiji 53



Then: I was a freshwater fishery volunteer billeted at the agriculture station in Lomaivuna, but covering a broad area in the eastern interior. This was a new program in Fiji, so much of my early time was spent visiting villages and farms scoping out viable opportunities to construct ponds and teach villagers the basics fish farming. Pond construction typically consisted of work crews of 10-30 villager with 5 spades, a pitchfork and sack to carry dirt – it was a sight to behold. I built 5-6 single ponds my first year each in a different village. My second year, I was led to a beautiful spot with a natural spring near the village of Waidracia. By the time I left, we had constructed 5 ponds at that site each being fed through a series of pipes from one 6-foot spring and were awarded a \$5000 grant from US AID buy materials to build a 3-pen piggery, storage shed and chicken coops to complete a mixed agriculture/aquaculture operation. Harvest days were always a spectacle. Spending as much time as I did eating, working, sleeping in the villages I ended up conversationally fluent in Fijian.



Now: Upon returning to the U.S., I convinced a few fellow Fiji 53 RPCVs to embark on a road trip to and ultimately settle in Washington DC. Mike Phelan, Guy Railey, Api Qaranivalu and I ended up as flat mates for nearly two years, five blocks from the U.S. Capitol. In those early years, we had more than a few bilos of yagona with frequent Fiji 53 visitors. Nearly 25 years after heading to Fiji, I still live and work in Washington, DC. On New Year's Day 1988, I married Sarah, a childhood friend and became an instant dad to Kelly (then 7) and Paul (then 5). We had two more children, in 1989 (Max) and 1995 (Tess). Both Sarah and I work from the U.S. EPA. She works in the Office of Research and Development and I manage a Division in the Superfund Office. Our kids have grown. One is married, the second gets married in August, the third is a junior at the U. of South Carolina and our youngest enters high school. Nicknamed Gepetto by Paul Nuti (Fiji 53), when not at work I construct/remodel, garden, build furniture, and am trying to be successful trading options. I just finished designing and building a residential rain water collection and distribution system.

If you have a Fiji RPCV in mind (even yourself – this is no time for modesty!!) for a “Then & Now” profile, contact Paul Nuti, at pnuti61@yahoo.com.

BOOK REVIEW

Okay, the FOF newsletter would never pretend to be the Times Literary Supplement, but we'll take on the occasional book review. To wit, here is a review penned by one of our very own, FOF Board Member Tom Cooke. Enjoy!

Americans Do Their Business Abroad – The Peace Corps Latrine Reader

Edited by Jake Fawson & Steve McNutt, 2007

A good bathroom book has short chapters. It needs to capture the reader quickly, distract his attention, and then let him get on with his business – entertained, educated, inspired, but not hindered. So is that what a “Peace Corps Latrine Reader” undertakes to do? Or does that subtitle suggest instead some kind of how-to book? After all, Peace Corps Volunteers are called upon to do all manner of tasks, community sanitation prominent among them. And nobody really calls their powder room a latrine. A john, a restroom maybe, even a loo. But only the military has latrines. And Peace Corps project descriptions do, of course.

When I ordered this book, I was anticipating a compilation of amusing anecdotes from returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs), and even considering some of my own to submit for Volume II. I figured that most would be a couple of paragraphs long – short enough for even an in-and-out bathroom break. I was surprised, then, to find actual short stories. And when I began to read the stories, I was even more surprised to find them to be actual literature. These were not jottings on flattened toilet paper tubes, or hasty transcriptions of funny stories told after a few beers with friends. These were stories by twenty authors who really could write. Already I was intrigued!

But with the longest of the stories running to fifteen pages, some of them were destined to leave rings impressed into my butt. I am not a fast reader. I truly enjoy the mechanics of writing, the choice of words, and their placement in order; and when I read, I do so conscious of the writer's labors. So I read slowly, savoring the melody in the words in addition to the story they tell. Moreover, several of these stories include adventures with international sanitary facilities, typically outhouses. So I felt that reading in bed, comfortable, *about* latrines was warranted, and less likely to leave marks. These are actually accounts of twenty Peace Corps adventures.

As an RPCV myself, I'm a natural audience for *Americans Do Their Business Abroad*. Sometimes I recognized myself: wondering anxiously what this adventure would become, struggling to adapt to difficult new realities that I had actually (foolishly?) chosen to substitute for the easy realities I had grown up with. (Sanitary plumbing was prominent among them.) But many of the stories have nothing to do with my own Peace Corps experience. Roderick Jones' harrowing encounter in Nicaraguan *contra* territory thankfully had no counterpart in my pastoral life in the mountains of Fiji. And trekking across the beautiful uninhabited center of Fiji's largest island was nothing like enduring Argentina's La Yunga in Betsy Howell's account – even if we did get lost, having to sleep one night in the middle of the crude trail on mats of ferns as close as we could endure to a small campfire (for warmth, insect control, and possible repulsion of critters). At least it didn't rain – for nine consecutive days, no less!

But *Americans Do Their Business Abroad* has a much broader audience than RPCVs. Almost anyone will enjoy reading these stories. Many of them will make you laugh. (The newly-arrived American trapped in a collapsing outhouse with his pants around his ankles while his host family waits outside is just too funny to read about without taking a laugh break.) But not all of the stories involve bathrooms. They're just all amusing stories to read, in a latrine or in bed. This would even be an ideal travel book, perfect for reading during odd intervals of time. The stories may be read in any order, fitting their varying lengths to the varying wait times encountered during travel. And don't forget to read the short author biographies at the back, too – they enhance the delightful stories.

I have only two criticisms with this book. First, it needed slightly more careful editing. All the authors have genuine talent in writing, and the editors selected the stories well. But not all authors can spell. Nor, apparently, can all editors. A misspelling in the middle of a sentence is equivalent to a screechy off-note in a violin concerto. There are several through the book. The other is that the cover photograph is appropriate to one of the stories, but has nothing to do with the other nineteen. I personally would have drawn the guy trapped in the collapsing outhouse and used that for the cover; at least it relates to the title. But neither of these shortcomings is reason to deprive yourself of the pleasure to be had from reading the book. Now I need to work on my manuscript for the story of how I caused a spontaneous evacuation stampede from my classroom with one nasty, horrible, accidental garlic-fritter-fueled fart, for inclusion in a hoped-for sequel Volume II.

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