



Western Montana RPCV News

December 2008

VOLUME 17 NUMBER 4

Upcoming Events

SATURDAY, DEC. 13
6 PM Christmas Party/
Potluck, Jim and Melissa's
525 Fairview Ave.

SATURDAY, JAN. 24
6 PM Potluck at the home
of 'El Presidente', 1729
North Ave. West

MARCH 1 - 7, 2009
PEACE CORPS WEEK

JUNE 12, 13 & 14 2009
Goat Chase Retreat



Halloween party at Mary Younger's

From the President

Dennis C. Bangs, (Ecuador 70-72)

Happy holidays everyone. I want to thank the generous hosts of our recent potlucks. Mary Younger (Cameroon 74-76) hosted the Halloween gathering and as you can tell by the above photo we enjoyed the evening. In November Scott and Reggie Spaulding (Fiji 93-96) hosted the monthly potluck. They began the evening with a "traditional" Kava Ceremony. For those of you who didn't make it I found a description of the ceremony on Google and included it on page 5.

Our calendar sales have been going pretty well. We have a few left, so if you need any please contact me soon. The next big event is the annual Christmas Party/Potluck at Jim and Melissa's on Dec. 13th. Remember it is also a 'White Elephant' gift exchange. If you have any questions about that you can contact me.

The campus recruiter, Michael Bradbury has been doing a good job and will be doing more classroom and community presentations in the next semester. If you would be able to help him you should let him know at <www.Peacecorps@umontana.edu> .

In addition to the MorepeaceCorps campaign that you can see more about inside I would like to call your attention to something we are considering. We have found a way to email the newsletter and put it on the website in a pdf format. I would like to know how many of you prefer to have the paper copy mailed to you and how many would rather just get it via email and the website. Thanks to all of you who have already responded to my email regarding this. Now I would like to hear from the rest of you. If you have access to email you can email me at <www.wmrpcv@yahoo.com> . If not you can call me at 549-1631 or write me at 1729 North Ave. West, Missoula, MT 59801. We may do the newsletter both ways, but only mail it to the people who request it, so I would like to hear from you one way or another.

IN THIS ISSUE

President's Message	P1
Donations	P2
Memories of Moritz	P3
Kava Ceremony	P5
NPCA President	P5

The WMRPCV Newsletter is published quarterly by and for the non-profit Western Montana Returned Peace Corps Volunteers.

All dues paying members receive a copy and are encouraged to participate in it's creation by sending comments, articles or other submissions to Dennis Bangs 1729 North Ave. West, Missoula, MT 59801, <wmrpcv@yahoo.com>

All newly returned volunteers will receive two free copies before they are requested to join.

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WMRPCV WELCOMES THE FOLLOWING NEW MEMBERS.
Kit Fischer from Missoula who was in Zambia

DONATIONS

The following is a thank you we received from Yvonne for a donation we made in her husband's memory.

From March 2008:

"Dear WMRPCVs and Mary Younger,

What a wonderful tribute to Jim through the donation to the Poverello Center in Missoula! Thank you all so much. Recently, hearing the Sierra Leone Refuge All Stars perform here in Bozeman and the viewing of the video with our friends, took me back to our life as PCVs in Freetown. Jim and I never lost our love for the people and culture of Sierra Leone, but we didn't have a chance to return to help as we had hoped. But the donation given in Jim's name helps where needed here in Montana. He would be so pleased. Thanks.
Yvonne Hauwiller "



Engineers Without Borders at the November Potluck!!!

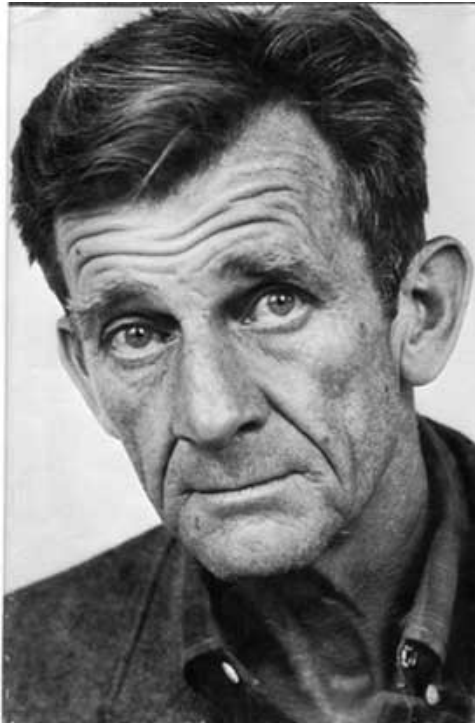
Reggie and Scott Spaulding (Fiji 93 – 96) asked a couple of people from the MSU chapter of Engineers Without Borders to give a presentation of their work. As a result of their presentation it was decided to give them a \$300 donation for their amazing work. Jordan McNaught was the student who did the presentation and if you want to see more about their work you can check out their website at <www.ewb-msu.org>. The following mission statement is taken from their website.

OUR MISSION: An impressive, but realistic vision...

We work in the spirit of grass-roots and community-specific projects. Our ambitious long-term goal is to provide the communities of Khwisero with potable water and improved sanitation. We will accomplish this by supplying reliable water sources to each of the 57 primary schools in the Khwisero Division.

Brick by brick, and school by school, we divide and share the work. We have installed one well and one composting latrine already in the Shirali school, as well as a second well at Munyanza. By the end of Summer 2008, three more wells and another latrine will bring the EWB at MSU total to five wells and two latrines.

EWB at MSU aims to provide sustainable solutions to each school's unique set of challenges. We make sure that the community is involved, so that upon completion, the project is owned, earned, and governed by the community



Moritz Thomsen in the 70s

A couple of months ago John Coyne who is the editor of the online magazine 'Peace Corps Writers' asked me to write something about my recollections of Moritz Thomsen. He said it would appear in an upcoming issue, but I decided to let you all see it first. Moritz wrote 4 books about Peace Corps, Ecuador, poverty and philosophy. He was living on his newly developed farm when I was a volunteer in Ecuador.

Memories of Moritz Thomsen.

By Dennis Bangs

President, Western Montana Returned Peace Corps Volunteers

At my training for Peace Corps Ecuador in Montana during the summer of 1970 I started hearing about Moritz. I can't remember for sure if I read the account of his Peace Corps experience, "Living Poor", that summer or just heard about it. I have since read it many times so my memory of the first time I read it is a little fuzzy after these 38 years. The book was first printed in 1969 and was required reading for a number of Peace Corps training programs so I may have read it that summer.

Whether or not I read the book then, I did meet people in training who knew Moritz and told stories about him. I was preparing to work at a cattle project near a town called Santa Domingo de Los Colorados which was close to where Moritz had bought a farm and settled down after his Peace Corps experience. Later on he recounts this experience in his second book, "The Farm on the River of the Emeralds".

On my arrival to the Santa Domingo area I had completely forgotten about Moritz because I was dealing with my own challenges of becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer and what that meant. At that time, the fall of 1970, Peace Corps had a big presence in Ecuador with many established and respected programs. I had the good fortune to work in a successful cattle program where we worked with local cattle producers. In the beginning it distributed purebred Brahma bulls into the local farmer's herds. We were commissioned to establish an education program for the prospective recipients of these bulls.

At the same time, another program just a few kilometers away on the same road had a similar program working with pigs. Because Moritz was a pig farmer in California and pigs were an integral part of almost any new farm in the jungle, he had a lot of pigs, and a lot of problems with his pigs. I didn't know him nearly as well as the volunteers who worked at the pig farm, but did I see him a few times. I also visited with these volunteers quite a bit about what Moritz was like and what he was up too.

As I remember it, no one was quite sure whether Moritz kept coming to the pig farm to get 'expert advice' on pig farming or he was just hungry for contact with fellow Peace Corps Volunteers and North Americans and a chance to speak English. Regardless of his motives he spent quite a bit of time with some of the volunteers in the pig program entertaining everyone with his intellect, sarcasm and cynicism. I don't remember a lot of details about those visits and conversations but I do remember Moritz as a fascinating character. He was trying to create a place for himself in the jungle in between Santa Domingo and Esmeraldas but was facing frustration at every step. In a way he seemed almost as much an Ecuadorian farmer as a North American writer. The frustrations that he faced with the farm seemed to roll off him like many of the farmers we worked with. If something didn't work and all of his pigs got sick he would shrug his shoulders and say something to the effect of 'asi asi'. A local expression meaning 'well that is just the way it is'. One of his other favorite expressions, if I remember right, was 'todo esta jodido' or 'everything is fucked'. In addition to the 'help' he was soliciting from the pig volunteers he enjoyed engaging in philosophical dialogues with them as well. Unfortunately I wasn't involved in many of those conversations. I just heard about them from the pig volunteers later.

I do remember one story more than the others. I think it showed up in his book "The Farm on the River of the Emeralds". He kind of liked to tell stories of his own failures. This one was about trying to find a good inexpensive source of protein for his pigs instead of buying expensive feed. He discovered that peanuts grew real well in the area of the farm, so he thought he had an answer. He would grow his own pig feed. The problem was that when he converted his pig's diet to an almost exclusive diet of peanuts many of them got sick and I think some of them even died. So then he ended up with a bunch of sick pigs and a mountain of peanuts that he didn't know what to do with. I do remember this was one of the problems he had for which he solicited help from the Peace Corps pig 'experts'. After he figured out how to nurse the pigs back to good health, he decided he could start a peanut butter business. Somehow he found a way to create a bunch of peanut butter from his piles of peanuts but then had a terrible time finding a buyer for it. I don't remember the details of the final outcome, but the story epitomizes his dramatic flair at failure. The odd thing though, was that he really didn't want to be a

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

farmer. He wanted to be a writer and he wanted to have Ramon and his family run the farm and he would have a comfortable place to hang out in the jungle and write and think to his heart's content. As his story in "The Farm on the River of the Emeralds" demonstrates, that didn't work out as planned.

At the time I met him, in 1970 and 71, I wasn't terribly impressed. Partly because I was young and cynical and wasn't easily impressed. Moritz appeared to me like one of the numerous crazy gringos living an unrealistic dream in the jungles of Ecuador and failing at it. But after I left the Peace Corps I started traveling more and reading more. I read or reread his first book "Living Poor" and sometime in the intervening 9 years read "The Farm on the River of Emeralds".

In 1980 and 81' I returned for a visit and to see how things had developed in our projects in the Santa Domingo area. After a month or so in Ecuador I traveled to Peru and Bolivia to see even more of South America. On my way back from Peru in the spring of '81 I had a chance encounter with Moritz on the plane back to Quito. I was waiting in the departure lounge and saw this white haired, tired looking gringo who appeared a little familiar but I didn't recognize him. When we got on the plane he and his traveling partner were seated right behind me. I realized who he was, introduced myself and we had an interesting conversation. I was keeping a journal at that time and the following is taken from my journal.

.....

From my travel journal Friday, May 6, 1981..."I met Moritz Thomsen the author of 'Living Poor'...seemed his old sarcastic self. He said he was in a bad way because he was trying to quit smoking... but I never saw him in a good mood about anything. We had a little conversation about him living in Brazil part time and the trouble he is having with his last book and the problems he was having trying to get his new book published. He actually looked pretty good for a harried ex-pig farmer, ex-Peace Corps Volunteer and ex-writer of about 70 years old. His hair was pretty white but his gaunt look was still that of a fighter. He was thin but looked strong and determined in a hopeless sort of way. He has the look of someone who knows that everything is all fucked up, but is going to hang in there anyway. One comment that he made really confirmed this. When asking me about trying to quit smoking I told him that my dad had quit after the doctor had told him to after his heart attack. Moritz said that wouldn't work for him because he would smoke just to prove the doctor wrong...."

The other thing I remember him saying, even though I didn't write about it my journal, was that he really was mad at his publishers because he had just written the best book of his life and they weren't smart enough to recognize what a brilliant piece of writing it was. The book was finally published under the title of "The Saddest Pleasure". I have read that book and have to agree with Moritz. I thought it was the best thing he had written. It is a fascinating travelogue recounting a trip up the coast of Brazil and part of the Amazon River, along with an intriguing introspective look at his life and philosophy.

I never saw Moritz again, but have heard more and more stories about him and read his other posthumously published book "My Two Wars". He was a truly interesting person and I am glad to have had to the opportunity to have known him.

Snail Mail or Email???

We would like to know how you would like to receive your newsletter. We can email it to you in a pdf format. We can and will put it on the website in the same format. Or we can send it via the postal service to your home. The reason we are asking this is that we can save time and money by doing it via the web. But we realize that some people still like to have the actual copy in their hands. So we are asking you to tell us what you want. Quite a few people have already responded to my email, but I would like to hear from all of you. We probably will continue doing it both ways, but if we only make a few paper copies and send them through the mail we will save some time and money.

Please let me know your preference. You can email me at <www.wmrpcv@yahoo.com> . You can write to me at WMRPCV, 1729 North Ave. West, Missoula, MT 59801. You can call me at 549-1631. Thanks.



Prior to the November Potluck, Reggie and Scott Spaulding hosted a Kava ceremony. It was well attended and Scott explained some of the details of the ceremony to those who attended. I thought it would be fun to share it with the rest of you. The picture and following description are taken from the website of a resort in Fiji named Matangi Island Resort.

Yaqona, kava drinking ceremonies

As a guest in Fiji, you will frequently be invited to participate in one of the most common ceremonial and social customs in our islands, the Kava Ceremony. The drinking of kava, or Yaqona, is quite common on social occasions. It is regarded in Fiji as "the National Drink". In the past, Yaqona was drunk only by chiefs.

Kava is made from the bare root of a pepper tree, pounded into a fine powder and then mixed with fresh water. Near Matangi Island, our family grows and exports kava root to the United States and Europe for use in homeopathic drugs and over-the-counter pills to aid in relaxation.

But in the Fiji Islands, the old customs still prevail. In fact, turning down an offer to drink a bowl of Yaqona is considered insulting in Fijian society. In traditional times, Yaqona was prepared by young village girls, who chewed the pieces of raw Yaqona into a soft pulp before adding water. Today, the chief or head of the ceremony mixes the powdered root with water in a large hardwood bowl, called a Tanoa, straining the root through a

cloth to keep out the grit. When it is ready, he claps with cupped hands to make a hollow "pop" sound. Sitting crossed legged on the floor, guests are arranged in a circle. Each guest in turn is offered a bilo, a small bowl made from half of a coconut, containing the liquid. He or she must clap before and after drinking. Honored guests are served first, then others according to their status in the group. The drink should not be sipped. It should be drunk in one continuous drink. The clapping of hands and the word "maca" signifies that you have properly emptied your bilo.

The following is from the other President. The President of the NPCA!

Dear Dennis,

Despite the many challenges at home and abroad, the Peace Corps community has a great deal to be grateful for:

- We have just come through a presidential campaign in which both candidates spoke of the importance of national service, explicitly recognizing the role of the Peace Corps.
- The President-elect pledged to [double the Peace Corps](#) and expand opportunities for Americans to serve in many different ways.
- The Peace Corps is close to a three-decade high with strong demand from countries that want programs and Americans — young and not so young - who want to serve.
- Plans are moving along for a global [50th Anniversary celebration](#) in 2011, culminating in a September 22-25, 2011 event on the National Mall.
- This January we will launch a [Peace Corps Social Networking website](#) that will be an unprecedented information resource **connecting, informing** and **engaging** our community.

To ensure that President-elect Obama acts on his pledge related to the Peace Corps, please sign our petition at www.petitiononline.com/morepc/petition.html.

To help generate the needed financial resources, please consider a donation to the National Peace Corps Association at www.peacecorpsconnect.org/pages/support.cfm.

Signing this petition and providing a donation would give us another reason to be grateful.

With very best wishes for a Happy Thanksgiving,

Kevin F. F. Quigley
President



Western Montana RPCV News

1729 North Avenue West
Missoula, MT 59801

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



**Don't forget
To check your
EXP date**



JOIN OR RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP IN WMRPCV OR NPCA

Name: _____
 Address: _____ City _____ Zip _____
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 Peace Corps country of service _____ Years _____
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MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL (CHECK YOUR LABEL!!!)

WMRPCV only, \$15.00 _____
 National Peace Corps Association, includes WMRPCV \$50.00 _____
 WMRPCV Student/Low Income \$7.50 _____

TOTAL ENCLOSED: _____

**MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO THE WESTERN MONTANA RPCVs and send to:
Mary Younger, 100 Erika Court, Missoula, MT 59803**