

PART II:

DEVELOPING GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

We got to the town where we would do our training for the next three months, and I wondered where all the houses were because all I could see were garages, or what I thought were garages. The houses were very different from what my concept of a house was. There were no yards on the outside like I had grown up with in Minnesota.

-Monica Fitzgerald²¹



People expected Americans to behave in a certain way. They expected all Americans to be blonde. They have a lot of U.S. movies and videos. . . people always expected Americans to be rich.

-Jean Deal²²

Although late 20th century advances in transportation and communications promise a smaller, more accessible world, we each perceive that world through the filters of our individual experiences and cultural development. Still, cross-cultural contact is a fact of our local, national, and global lives. It is more important than ever that each of us develop an inclusive global perspective that celebrates diversity and promotes tolerance.

The experiences of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers like Monica Fitzgerald and Jean Deal illustrate the dual mission of the Peace Corps: to teach and to learn. A Volunteer learns quickly that her view of the world will be challenged daily by the unfamiliar. By living and working alongside host country residents, Volunteers also have the opportunity to demonstrate the diversity of American culture. The stories of Returned Volunteers are stories of adaptation and acceptance, of how to be at home anywhere in the world (see “Sunday Morning Stares” on following page).

Global education experts Jan Drum, Steve Hughes, and George Otero have articulated the need to bring concepts such as diversity, adaptation, and acceptance to the attention of our students:

“Educated people today need to be aware that their view of the world is only one of many. . . . Teachers need to help young people become conscious of their own world views. Once students have clarified their beliefs, they can begin to imagine how others might see things differently; they can try to understand and empathize with people who see things from a different angle.”²³

The activities included in this section address these goals by helping students identify the factors that shape their individual views, promoting active appreciation for diversity in their classroom and world communities, and providing tools for analyzing information sources. Teachers are encouraged to review all the activities and to select or adapt the materials that are most appropriate for their students.



Sunday Morning Stares²⁴

The Sunday morning walk to St. Gregory the Great Catholic Church of Sogeri is two kilometers from my little red house on the Iarowari High School grounds. Today is Palm Sunday. I'm walking the Sogeri road. The weight of the sun is like an invisible heat blanket bleaching my hair, trying to set it ablaze.

Tall kunai grass towers on both sides. Wild bushes sprouting magnificent colored flowers climb the hills on the right side. Strange, crooked, randomly spiraling palm trees eerily look down on the tar like the background of a Salvador Dali painting. An unseen stream rolls over its rocky bed then reminds me of its presence down below the grassy hill on the left.



As I turn the corner coming up near the school rugby oval, I get a feeling. Unavoidable. It will stay with me until I'm back in my little red house. Some people are sitting on a fallen tree on the hill overlooking the rugby field and some more are walking my way. A woman and three children. I'm on stage. I'm a showpiece, a curiosity, a foreigner. Painfully aware, I'm a white man in Papua New Guinea. I don't mean to say that the Papua New Guineans never see whites. But one who lives amongst them? A man who walks the same road as they do, eats the same food, teaches their children? A white man who doesn't live in some expensive palace in Moresby going about his day beyond the barbed wire, acting as if he were back in his own country?

The stares come. They come from all directions. I pass the people on the fallen tree, but I still feel their looks on my back. The women and children pass me. A greeting of "*Moning nau*" is exchanged, but the children gawk. I give a smile and happily receive one back.

Where I came from (a small Midwestern town) did not prepare me to be at center stage, every moment of each day. I am the middle of nine children. At college I was a study in average. Comfortably packed in with the rest, a perfectly capable student, but one who never racked his brains with school. I sailed on the wave of the fat section of the bell curve. Last year, I remember thinking, "I don't want to get a job, in a few years a wife. I want to see the world! I want to be different!" Good Lord, I'm different now.

The stares keep coming, and for some unknown reason a lonely feeling creeps in. The "I wish I could talk to my family" feeling. The "far away in the middle of nowhere feeling." I fight it back down my throat. I want to sit. I want to close my eyes and imagine. Imagine that I can lose myself in a crowd, that I can look like everyone else. I want my hair to curl up into tight little dark balls and my skin to turn brown. I want to sit somewhere and have people walk by without staring, without even noticing. This spotlight is as bright and constant as the sun that has now reached every part of my body. Sweat drips down off my nose and makes a dark wet spot on my shirt.



I'm passing the community school now and two of my students have caught up with me. They give me a happy look and prepare to absorb some of the stares. Mostly they get stares of their own which say, "You two are with him, huh?" To which they smile and nod, "That's right, he's a *Taubada*, but he's OK, he's with us." I nod as if to affirm the silent conversation. I feel as accepted as I'll ever be. An appreciated stranger.

We pass an old man who has found a nice piece of shade. I recognize him. Local guy. A Papuan with a small belly and a baseball cap on. His hair has big Afro curls and his Melanesian eyes are spread apart. His teeth are stained a blackish red from a life's worth of betel nut chewing. Even though my Motu is limited to a few words, I mix some in with a Pidgin greeting, "*Ah Tura, namo. Yo Orait, eh? Gutpela, lukim.*"

My effort shows a lack of ignorance more than any great knowledge. He smiles and gives a quick wave of his hand. The lonely feeling makes a quick exit; I breathe in the beautiful morning and exotic surroundings. My students turn off to the Lutheran Church after the wooden bridge that looks as if it was built during World War II. The stares appear more like curious looks that make me smile as I walk on. I can see St. Gregory the Great Church. It is a little bigger than my father's garage back in Michigan, but today it has the feel of a cathedral. All kinds of palms decorate inside and out. The colorful flowers have made their way into the church. They cover the altar and crucifix. I'm early. I sit down

and place my elbows on my tanned knees to brace my head. More stares come my way, accompanied by the muffled giggles of some young girls in the back of the church. A thought enters my mind. All these stares, every look shot my way by the dark eyes of the PNG, they are 100 percent curiosity, zero percent animosity. They just want to know something about me. They want to feel my hair, pull my beard, touch my arm. They want to hear stories from the land of Rambo and Arnold Schwarzenegger. They want to see pictures of New York and find out if people actually kiss in public in my hometown. They want to hear about a football stadium filled with 100,000 screaming fans or ask how many times I've seen Mohammed Ali. Pure curiosity. Racial hatred hasn't come alive here yet. They just want to know something about me and my place.



Mass is starting and we all move outside to form a procession into the church, traditional Palm Sunday style. I've made a decision just now. Occasionally a loneliness that lessens over time and being on stage most of the day are small prices to pay for knowing this country and its people. I suddenly feel good about today, St. Gregory's Church, the Sogeri Plateau, Papua New Guinea, and, yes, even the look the man sitting beside me gives me right before he shakes my hand and says, "Peace be with you."

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