

SHARED VISIONS

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Volume Eleven, Number Four

— A publication to assist in the spiritual formation of lay volunteers — presented by the people who bring you *Connections* —

It's Not Easy Being "Green"

by Molly Brady
Quest

I have never been good at saying goodbye. After a year volunteering in rural Haiti, I agonized over my decision to stay another year or to leave Haiti. Part of me wanted to stay, to continue my activities, to assume responsibility for directing an ongoing public health project, and to form deeper friendships. Another part of me felt that it was time to move on, that I was getting burnt out, and that once back in the States I could do more good for the problems of Haiti. I knew that if new volunteers were coming in, they would be bringing new skills, talents and energy. I wouldn't be leaving the community in a bind. When we found out that two new volunteers were willing to come in August, I felt like that was a sign for me to leave.

As soon as I made the decision to leave, I could feel myself pulling back, not wanting to get more involved, pick up new projects, or get more attached to people there. It was more difficult since the rest of my community members were staying.

They were charging ahead full steam while I was busy trying to make sense of my feelings. There was guilt – for leaving, for leaving so many things unfinished, and for not truly being present. There was trepidation about what was awaiting me at home. One of the reasons that made coming to Haiti a fairly easy decision was that I left behind no major belongings, career path, or serious relationship. Now, realizing that I was returning home without a plan was scary. I was worried that once I left, I would be forgotten.

I knew that I had changed in Haiti. I had learned to be vulnerable, to trust in strangers, to be present to people, to turn to God for help, to make a fool of myself and enjoy it. But I wondered how many of these changes and these lessons I would have the strength and courage to carry back with me and make part of my American lifestyle. A friend of mine who volunteered

"I knew that I had changed in Haiti... But I wondered how many of these changes and lessons I would have the strength and courage to carry back with me..."

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Volunteers... you've been away from home for a long time. Now it's almost time for you to leave your communities and your service placements. We present this issue of *Shared Visions* with best wishes for a smooth transition as you say your goodbyes and figure out what's next.



- Former volunteers, Molly and John, share their stories, filled with personal challenges and hope, from when they finished up their terms of service pp. 1-3
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Opening One Door, Closing Another is Progress... But the Keys are Hard to Turn...

by John McLoughlin
Mercy Corps

John McLoughlin, a native of Ireland, volunteered with Mercy Corps in Baltimore, MD. After his term of service he has remained in the States and continues to open new doors.

Just when I thought I had dealt nicely with my past, the sharing of these insights brings me back a year or two ago. As I reflect back on my life as a Mercy Volunteer Corps member (1998-2000), I sometime wonder how did I turn those "keys" at all. My experiences as a volunteer led me through many journeys, with mixed emotions, thoughts and feelings. And yet despite all the positive and negative experiences during my two years of service, volunteering was all I had come to know and all I felt I was capable of being in life.

As my soul continued on its journey during my volunteer experience, I gradually surrendered my life in response to a personal call from my personal God. I began to see my last year as a volunteer through different eyes. Initial thoughts

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that my second year of service would finish my stay in America, were being slowly replaced with feelings that perhaps my next transition in life was to take place here as well. If I were to honestly respond to this inclination to stay in America, I also had to come to terms with the possibility that my life may not resume its original intended course with my family, friends and culture back home in Ireland.

Having completed my volunteer term of service and subsequently been offered a "paid" position at my placement site, I commenced on a life-changing experience: communications and a lack of satisfying interactions with the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service. Each of my responses to this "call" to pursue my life in America also seemed to bring greater experiences of frustration and despair. At times too, I lost awareness of who I was or who I could become in the days ahead.

While I waited months to receive clarification on my visa application status, my personal transition in many ways was stunted. At times I became extremely angry, not so much at the waiting but with the reality that total strangers could well decide my destiny, whether or not I could stay in the U.S.. In their eyes my application was "ME". Yet nobody saw my face, heard my voice or appreciated the uniqueness of me as a total individual. All I had done for the past two years and who I had become was in many ways irrelevant.

I began to feel a deep sense of depletion as my worth, integrity, faith and basic existence as an individual appeared unimportant. I followed the way of truth and yet was it going to be enough? Today I have secured a 3-year visa status and am now slowly transitioning to the "American way of life."

The end of my volunteer experience also saw the end of a somewhat structured community, which was characterized as spiritual and as a life of service. It saw the end of its structured supports and in some ways, an end of a certain identity. At my placement site I was the "Mercy Corps Volunteer." Subsequently, with the beginning of my new "employment," I felt like an individual living a new form of life. There were new supports and new belongings but yet I have also sensed an awareness of journeying alone. Today I belong to other communities and yet do not live in community. I belong to families of faith but yet I pray alone!

Each experience to date reminds me that all these diverse aspects of my life are an integral part of my own personal journey. Supports, regular paychecks and a government visa do not always gratify or affirm my life. Rather, validation of who I am and who I am becoming comes from within, not from the outside. It's how I respond to those externals that helps me to make them a part of who I am. I have accepted responsibility for playing the tunes and dancing the dance. It is me who chooses the doors and turns the keys. I have found that it is my true surrender to my soul's journey which totally validates all these aspects of my life, both for the past and for my future. This may seem simplistic or vague, but it is what I have learned in the process of my transition. By saying "YES" to all my experiences I am led into even greater experiences of transition. I have continued on my soul's journey even though the external changes sometimes have been obstacles in my path. Transition is life. It is living. It is change. It is fear and joy combined. It is growth. It is faith. It is daily experiences of my God in communion with others. Or, maybe what I am here calling transition is for me, in reality, good old fashioned "growing up." +

Create-a-Cookbook

Ever wonder how your housemate made that delicious homemade bread? Too embarrassed to ask your fellow volunteers for that pasta recipe again? Want to introduce your family and friends to a taste of a foreign country? Create a cookbook!

Gather your fellow community members around and distribute a number of index cards to each person. Have each person write down the recipe for his/her mouth-watering delightful specialty dishes. Be sure to include traditional cultural meals from the region where you are volunteering!

Collect the recipes and assemble in a cookbook format of your choice. Some possible cookbook formats include:

- **Individual pages:** each community member designs his/her own page with recipes, pictures, quotes, etc.
- **Category pages:** divide recipes into categories (main meals, appetizers, etc.) and assemble.
- **Photo pages:** community members take photos of each dish and write the recipes on the back of the photos.

This is a fun way to remember your volunteer experience, and once you return home you can make your favorite dishes for family and friends as they look at your pictures and albums. Or cook these delicious meals for yourself as comfort food to remember your experience!



Questions for John's article:

- John described his transition to post-volunteer life as a form of old-fashioned "growing up." What are some ways in which you see yourself as having grown up during your time of volunteer service?
- The end of John's volunteer experience also meant the end of a supportive community, a spiritual and service environment. What supports might you lose because your volunteer experience is ending? How can you compensate?
- For John, INS complications "stunted" his transition. Name any elements that you feel may be hindering your transition to post-service life. Any removable roadblocks?
- John learned that validation of his identity and affirmation of his personal values need to come primarily from within himself and that he should not depend entirely on others for this. How do you handle this need for validation? Do you look to yourself, others or a combination?
- Describe your track record in terms of how you respond mentally / emotionally to external changes which have occurred in your life. Do any lessons present themselves which could be helpful as you prepare for the big changes facing you now?

for a summer in the Dominican Republic put it like this: "When you were in the States, you were yellow. When you were overseas volunteering, you were blue. Now you return home green." What if nobody understood or accepted the new "green" me? What if I turned my back on all that I had learned in

"Daily prayer within my community had become so much a natural part of my routine that I didn't realize how much it had shaped my experience and how much I would miss it."

Haiti? And more pressing, what in the world was I going to do with myself when I returned home? In Haiti, each day held new opportunities, new challenges and new craziness. It was intoxicating to live with such change. Although I realized I was burnt out and needed some rest, I knew that for me it was so much easier to have these opportunities for growth pushed on me. In the States, I would have to look for such occasions and I would have to force myself to grow. Would I be up to the challenge?

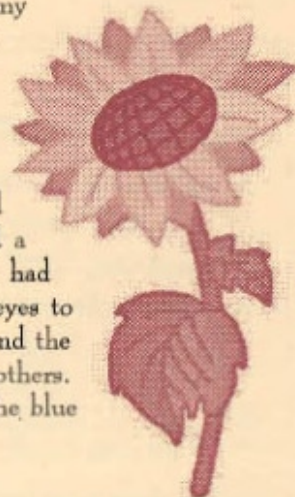
Once I returned to my parents' house in Indiana, I struggled to feel God's presence in my life. In Haiti, I had been continuously reminded of God's presence working in all situations, watching over us and guiding us. Each day, people would mention God, especially in their goodbyes - "See you tomorrow, God willing."

People weren't afraid to talk about God, to rely on God and to express their faith and love. At summer camp in Haiti, the highlight of each day was the songs of praise and glory in which the counselors led the kids. I had never experienced such obvious spiritual energy and joy. It was infectious and uplifting. Daily prayer within my community had become so much a natural part of my routine that I didn't realize how much it had shaped my experience and how much I would miss it. In the States, I felt isolated from a community and didn't feel comfortable expressing my faith and struggles with it. I couldn't find the joy in my relationship with God. I couldn't even concentrate on prayer and began to doubt that I ever had or would have a close relationship with God. I asked God to direct me as I tried to turn over to God my worries and insecurities about the future.

One of the most difficult things about leaving Haiti was the feeling that I had left so many things undone. One of the people I left behind was Jeff, a 9-year-old boy who needed heart surgery in the States. We had a tentative commitment from a U.S. hospital to take Jeff in October. I left Haiti promising he and his mother that I would meet them there and help translate. The initial hospital opportunity fell through for Jeff but we were able to schedule a consultation at a second hospital in my hometown, Indianapolis, in early January, as long as I agreed to translate. While I was grateful for this opportunity for Jeff, I felt torn. By then I was finally ready to move on and had planned to move to Atlanta, but now I was needed in Indianapolis. I couldn't say "no" to Jeff though and stayed with them in Indianapolis until late February, when he was fully recovered from surgery and ready to return to Haiti.

While the experience with Jeff and his mother was at times exhausting and frustrating, it was a time when I could truly sense God's presence in my life. He and his mother became a part of my family. Of course they were homesick for Haiti, amazed by the cold weather, and overwhelmed and scared about the surgery. Having Jeff in my home gave me the opportunity to return some of the hospitality that my neighbors in Haiti had shown me. Jeff's courage, good attitude, playfulness and curiosity brightened the spirits of everyone he met. Our neighbors, family, our church community, and the hospital staff were all touched by Jeff. His surgery meant the gift of a healthy life for him, but his presence also inspired those who met him.

It turned out that Jeff's visit was exactly what I needed to complete the first of many steps in my transition home. Gradually I am coming to terms with other loose ends from Haiti and found a measure of peace that my work in Haiti did make a difference. It reminded me once again how much I need to continue to develop my relationship with God and be patient with God's plans for my life. While my extended stay in Indianapolis certainly didn't fit in with my plans to continue with my new life in Atlanta, it became an opportunity to introduce part of my Haiti experience to my U.S. family and friends. It helped them understand a little more what my time in Haiti had meant to me. It also opened their eyes to the blessings we have in the States and the gifts we can receive from serving others. For a little while at least, it joined the blue and yellow me. +



Questions for Molly's article:

- Whether placed in the U.S. or overseas, many volunteers serve in a culture different from that of their family of origin. What were some of the more endearing or challenging qualities and values of the culture in which you served?
- When Molly initially thought about leaving Haiti, she had feelings of guilt stemming from unfinished jobs and unfulfilled relationships with the people. Where are you with regard to any feelings of guilt?
- Which aspect of your volunteer experience do you think you will miss the most when you return home (job, community, spirituality, etc.)? What are some supports you can build into your life to help bridge that gap?
- Molly had the healing experience of bringing a part of Haiti, in the person of little Jeff, back home with her to the States. When you complete your term of volunteer service, if you could bring any person back with you, who would it be and why?
- "That was a life-changing experience" is a common theme sounded by former volunteers and missionaries. What are some ways you've changed during your term of volunteer service?


The Doors to My Future



The experience of volunteering and of living in community introduces us to new values and expands our horizons. Portrayed below are several "doors to your future."


STEP 1: What opportunities lie ahead of you in each of these areas? What do you want to explore? List the possibilities next to "Ideas" on each door.

STEP 2: Now take it further and think of a concrete step that you'll need to take to move forward on each idea. Write down your first step next to "Action" on each door.

 Employment


Ideas: _____

Action: _____

 Education


Ideas: _____

Action: _____

 Social Justice
Issues

Ideas: _____

Action: _____

 Spirituality

Ideas: _____

Action: _____

 Church Ministry

Ideas: _____

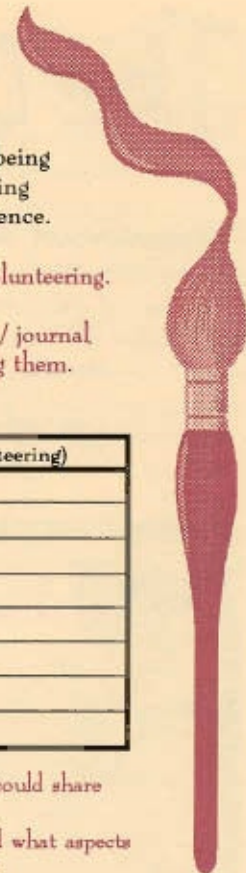
Action: _____

 Community Involvement

Ideas: _____

Action: _____

Yellow & Blue Make... Green!

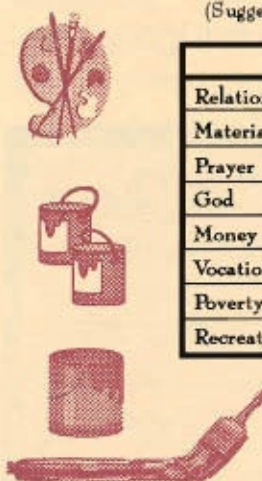


Molly wrote in her article about the difficulty of incorporating her volunteer experience into her post-volunteer life. She described herself as being "yellow" before volunteering, being "blue" while volunteering, then spoke about the challenges of integrating the two - becoming "green" - after finishing volunteering. Listed below are several areas, values and ideas that may have been affected by your volunteer experience.

1. In the "Yellow" column, describe or journal about what your thoughts, values and experiences were for each area before volunteering.
2. In the "Blue" column, describe / journal about new discoveries in each area from during your volunteer experience.
3. Looking forward, imagine how the yellow and blue will come together for each area. In the "Green" column, describe / journal about tensions you might face while incorporating your discoveries into your post-volunteer life, and ideas for resolving them.

(Suggestion: Reproduce the chart below on a larger sheet of paper or use your journal to write about your ideas.)

	Yellow (pre-volunteering)	Blue (while volunteering)	Green (post-volunteering)
Relationships			
Materialism			
Prayer			
God			
Money			
Vocation			
Poverty			
Recreation			



- > Brainstorm ways to introduce the new "green you" to family and friends. (For example, you could share stories and pictures by hosting a slide show and presentation about your experience.)
- > What aspects of the "green you" will involve internal changes (i.e. in values and attitudes) and what aspects will involve external changes (i.e. in career changes, involvement in community service, etc.)?

Are you finishing up your volunteer program?

Don't know where to START?

Ask your volunteer program for a copy of this year's "What's Next?" Notebook. This Notebook helps guide your transition after volunteer service, with suggestions for whichever next steps you may be taking! If your program doesn't have a copy, they can contact our office and we'll mail them one right away for duplicating and distributing!



Need a JOB?

Sign up to receive the Pallotti Center's free job listings from our Job Bank for former volunteers. Sign up on our website, or contact Christy Williamson at the phone number or email address below to receive our job postings via email.



Contact:

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<http://www.pallotticenter.org> pallotti@pallotticenter.org

(202) 529-3330 (In DC metro area) or (877) VOL-LINK (Toll free outside DC metro area)

Looking for SUPPORT when you move?

Join the **Network of Former Volunteers and Missioners!** Whether you are moving to a new area or going home, meet formers who live there and who are interested in helping people like yourself find employment or affordable areas to live, or getting together for social and spiritual activities! Ask your program for a sign-up form or you can fill out the on-line form on our website. Then, simply contact us and we'll send you the names of other former volunteers in the area you request!

Visit our on-line "Discussion Forum" for a great place to post your housing needs, and another great place to meet other former volunteers!

Want to STAY CONNECTED to this experience?

Staying Connected is our free publication specifically for "former" volunteers to stay in touch with the values and ideas encountered during volunteer service. You can sign up for the newsletter on our website and read all the past issues there too.

www.pallotticenter.org



Our website has a lot more resources to help support former volunteers. Find out about upcoming events and gatherings, check out the "Discussion Forum," and visit the "Resources in Your Area" feature to find help getting connected in your new area.

Saying "Goodbye" & Handling the Guilt... in the Spirit of the Gospel



One common challenge for departing volunteers and missionaries occurs when they are about to leave their program and still know there's so much more work to be done. Perhaps you can take heart from how Jesus handled it.

When Jesus spoke with the disciples at the Last Supper about his imminent departure, they were confused and troubled (John 14: 1 ff) not only then, but even seven weeks later while they met in the Upper Room in the early morning hours of Pentecost Sunday (Acts 1:12- 2:1).

Jesus' message to the disciples was that although he was departing, they should be confident the Spirit would be with them (John 16: 23-26):

I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.

If you believe that, after you leave, the Holy Spirit will continue to be with the people of your placement site, acting on their behalf, how would your feelings about leaving change?



Shared Visions

A publication to assist in the spiritual formation of lay volunteers presented by the Saint Vincent Pallotti Centers

©2001 The Saint Vincent Pallotti Center Volume 11, Number 4

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The mission of the Saint Vincent Pallotti Center:

To promote lay volunteer service that challenges laity, clergy, and religious to work together in the mission of the Church. Our goal is to support lay volunteers before, during and after their term of service. Regional Pallotti Centers are located in Boston; Paterson, NJ; St. Louis; and Sacramento. The National Office is in Washington, DC.

The Centers take their inspiration from Saint Vincent Pallotti (1795-1850) who believed passionately in the laity, in each person as being an image of God and as called to be missionary.

Shared Visions' goal is to explore five building blocks of spiritual development: Intellectual Growth, Emotional and Physical Health, Leadership and Prayer.



INSIDE: Stories and activities to nurture the personal, communal and spiritual development of lay volunteers and missionaries!

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