

## What I Learned as a Peace Corps Volunteer

After my time in university, I spent the following years traveling and volunteering abroad. Firstly, I volunteered on a **kibbutz in Israel**. During that same trip, I also lived with a Palestinian family in Jericho and volunteered at a hostel. These experiences inspired me and led me to join the **Peace Corps**.

### Adventure Is in My Blood

At my core, I am an explorer. There's something about the unknown that keeps me out there, walking and traveling through the world into unfamiliar places. The Peace Corps taught me to remain open to different cultures and to embrace new ways of life. I worked as a **rural aquaculture promotion specialist in Zambia, Africa**. For the first three months, I learned the local language, *Icibemba*. During this training, I learned how to wash clothes by hand, cook over a fire, live under a thatched roof, and engage with a host family.

The first day I arrived at my mud hut, I was greeted by a scorpion at my door. I quickly grabbed a rock nearby and smashed its head into the wall. At that moment, I knew I was up for the adventure of a lifetime.

### Be Adaptable

One of the things I learned during my time as a Peace Corps volunteer is to **be adaptable**. When you throw yourself into a new place or new experience, there's always a learning curve. I remember sitting on the front porch of Doris' home, learning how to slaughter and prepare a chicken for a meal—something completely unfamiliar to me, coming from an urban city like *Philadelphia*.

Every day, I would bike along dirt paths to and from the training center, learning to:

- Fix my tire if it went flat

- Carry goods in my saddlebags from the grocery store
- Speak the local language with the community around me

When you're thrown into a new environment, it's important to remain open and adapt. Simply learning the language is enough for you to be accepted with open arms into strangers' homes.

### **Human Thriving Is Possible**

When I was stationed in my village and introduced to my host family, I was greeted with a goat to slaughter and prepare with my host father. This was the ultimate greeting and **sign of respect** that I've ever encountered in my life. For the next few days, we feasted on the goat and got to know one another, sitting on the floor, eating with our hands, and listening to local Zambian music.

In the mornings, we cleared land around the fish ponds, while in the afternoons, his daughters would come home with bush fruit for us to eat. In the evenings, we prayed in the local church, and before sleep, we always shared a meal together. Every day, I saw the strength of their community:

- Mothers carrying sticks on their heads, with babies on their backs
- Fathers building churches and homes
- Sons making bricks for construction
- Daughters sweeping floors and preparing meals

**Human thriving is possible.** The families in Zambia showed me this truth.

### **You Don't Need Much to Be Happy**

Another key takeaway from my Peace Corps experience is that **you don't need much to be happy**. Having a community around you, family, a church, clean water from a borehole, fish from the lake, and good conversation is enough to feel a deep, blissful contentment. The days felt long and rich under the sun.

I spent many days walking barefoot, climbing trees, eating mangoes, and swimming in the local lake. It's the simple pleasures that bring true happiness—there's no material thing or consumerist item that can match this. Happiness derives from within.

### **Take the Road Less Traveled**

What amazed me about living in a Zambian village were the endless **unfamiliar paths and dirt roads** that led to new places. When I rode my bike, I often found myself lost. This feeling of being lost was unlike anything I'd felt traveling in America with Google Maps readily available. Instead, I would chat with locals, ask for directions, and maneuver through each day in new ways.

My village was positioned 14 hours away from Zambia's capital. If I wanted to experience urban life, I'd need to take multiple taxis and buses. Many times, taxis would break down, buses would halt, and there were even instances when I had to hitchhike on the back of a pickup truck. The village life provided everything I needed, teaching me that **immediate community and surroundings are what truly matter.**

### **Try New Things**

Lastly, I believe it's important to **try new things**. Whether it's food, experiences, or language, remaining open to newness has taught me endlessly. I'll never forget Doris bringing home a bucket of grasshoppers that she'd freshly picked from nearby fields. She simply dropped them in a boiling pot of water, added salt, and we sat on her front porch at night, eating grasshoppers and laughing. As an American, this was something completely new for me, but oddly, they didn't taste that bad.

The point is, you have to **make your own adventure**. These memories and experiences bring me joy to this day. I have no regrets, only gratitude for what I learned. Joining the Peace Corps was one of the greatest things I've done. It's something I'll never forget and will always reference. At the end of the day, perhaps humans are meant to explore, try new things, and learn through experience. The Peace Corps taught me exactly that.

