



## An Affiliate of the National Peace Corps Association

### Co-Leaders

Jennifer Monahan (Kenya '86-'89) [Jennifer.monahan@att.net](mailto:Jennifer.monahan@att.net)

Arthur Dobrin (Kenya '65-'67) [ArthurDobrin@gmail.com](mailto:ArthurDobrin@gmail.com)

### Treasurer

Kathy Williams-Ging (Peru '71-'73) [ktsging@optonline.net](mailto:ktsging@optonline.net)

### Newsletter Editors

Linda Restaino-Merola (Philippines '67-'69) [LRM1980@aol.com](mailto:LRM1980@aol.com)

Bette Williams Bass (Ethiopia '66-'69) [bettembass@yahoo.com](mailto:bettembass@yahoo.com)

### Membership

Brian Richardson (Korea '67-'70) [brichardson101@optonline.net](mailto:brichardson101@optonline.net)

### Media Coordinator

Lyn Dobrin (Kenya '65-'67) [lynbdobrin@gmail.com](mailto:lynbdobrin@gmail.com)

### Advocacy Coordinator

Bette Williams Bass (Ethiopia '66-'69) [bettembass@yahoo.com](mailto:bettembass@yahoo.com)

## March, 2020

This newsletter will obviously not follow our usual format of listing upcoming events etc. It will still include topics of interest to our group.

### PEACE CORPS/ RPCV NEWS

**Peace Corps announces suspension of Volunteer activities,  
evacuations due to COVID-19**

March 15, 2020

WASHINGTON – The following is an open letter to Peace Corps Volunteers from Director Jody Olsen.

"Dear Volunteers,

I know this is a very stressful time for you and your families, your host communities and the staff at your post.

As you know, we recently evacuated Volunteers from China and Mongolia due to the COVID-19 outbreak and related travel constraints and school closings. Further evacuations are now under way at several posts. Unfortunately, it has become clear in the last 48 hours that numerous posts must follow suit.

It is against this backdrop that I have made the difficult decision to temporarily suspend all Peace Corps operations globally and evacuate all of our Volunteers. As COVID-19 continues to spread and international travel becomes more and more challenging by the day, we are acting now to safeguard your well-being and prevent a situation where Volunteers are unable to leave their host countries..."

While our Long Island members, Bette Bass (Ethiopia -66-'69), and Kathy Williams-Ging (Peru '71-'73), were in Washington, D.C. for Advocacy Day of Action meetings they met 2 recently repatriated China PCVs. When RPCV Beth Whitehouse, who works for Newsday, asked if someone in our group knew of any PCVs who had been evacuated, Bette was able to give the names of these PCVs, Jessica Williams and Talisa Woodroffe. to the Newsday reporter, Olivia Winslow, who wrote the following story:

## **Long Islanders return home after Peace Corps suspends volunteer activities/**

### **Peace Corps volunteer recounts evacuation**

**Jessica Williams** of Port Jefferson Station was a Peace Corps volunteer in Chongqing, China, until the program evacuated all volunteers first to Thailand, and then back to the United States. Williams recounted her story.

**Jessica Williams** and **Talisa Woodroffe** of Hollis, Queens, both recent Peace Corps Volunteers, have been back home for several weeks, after their assignments in China were shut down months early as the coronavirus started to take its toll there.

**Josh Kotler** of Merrick said Monday by phone from Colombia, where he has been a Peace Corps volunteer, that he was waiting to be taken to the agency's headquarters in that South American country as the first stage of an evacuation process. Hours earlier, the Peace Corps had announced it was removing all of its volunteers from postings around the world because of the virus, also known as COVID-19.

In a statement posted to its website, the Peace Corps agency director, Jody K. Olsen, said in part: "As COVID-19 continues to spread and international travel becomes more

and more challenging by the day, we are acting now to safeguard your well-being and prevent a situation where Volunteers are unable to leave their host countries."

The announcement added that the evacuations represented a "temporary suspension" of volunteer activities.

As he waited for a ride in Columbia to Peace Corps headquarters, Kotler said: "I think it's good government is taking preemptive action to do what's in our best interest. But on the other hand, it's demoralizing because the community is who suffers. All my projects are now terminated that were in progress. I had a bunch of community groups, youth groups that now don't have a leader. A lot of projects I had been working on had finally become valuable to the community."

Kotler, 24, said he was involved in a community economic development program in a rural area about two hours south of Cartagena. "Where I am, the virus is not bad," he added. "I'm a lot safer here than the U.S." But since countries are closing their borders, he said it would be better if he were back in the United States. Kotler added he expects to be headed to New York Tuesday or Wednesday.

Kotler said he had been a volunteer in the country for 19 months. But the evacuation means, "This is termination of my service."

Williams said normally, a Peace Corps volunteer's assignment lasts 27 months. But her service which started in June 2018 in Chongqing, China, where she taught English, formally ended in early February. She said she and other volunteers in that area had been evacuated to Thailand at the end of January. Under normal circumstances, she said her service would have ended in July of this year.

Both Williams and Woodroffe said they feel fine and have not experienced any symptoms. Williams said she and others evacuated from China and were monitored by Peace Corps staff in Thailand. Neither woman was tested for the coronavirus, they said.

"There was a lot going on in January because we had gotten news the Peace Corps was ending its program in China completely," Williams, 25, said in a phone interview from Port Jefferson Station, where she lives with her parents and siblings. She said that decision was made before the coronavirus emergency, though she was unsure why. Williams praised the Peace Corps staff in China, who she said had been "keeping us updated very frequently," telling them to take precautions, such as wearing surgical masks and recommending against, then totally banning, any visits to Wuhan. She said she and other volunteers in the region "were not concerned about our health. We knew if something took a turn for the worse, they would evacuate us. And we were. We got evacuated to Thailand first, on Jan. 31. We were there for about seven to eight days. Our final close of service date was Feb. 6."

Woodroffe, 25, who had left China during a vacation that brought her back to New York earlier, on Jan. 18, said she didn't feel unsafe while in Chongqing. "No one was worried or super worried about it ... It's when I flew into the airport in New York — JFK — when I was going through immigration they had asked if I'd been to Wuhan. In that moment, it made me think this is a bigger deal than I thought."



By Olivia Winslow [olivia.winslow@newsday.com](mailto:olivia.winslow@newsday.com)

**"Well worth reading. There was a large contingent of recently returned China Volunteers at the NPCA Day of Action. Talisa and Jessica, were on our team, and spoke very movingly of their experiences. I hope that their advocacy will make a difference to our Congressional leaders. This is why Peace Corps needs to remain an independent agency." Bette Bass**



Catherine Anadu, Jessica Williams, the Honorable Tulsi Gabbard — in [Washington D.C.](#)



**Also, on our Facebook page we heard from Nikki LaRocca, a PCV in Madagascar who was in the process of being evacuated. Here is her post.**

**Posting on our FB page from Nikki LaRocca:**

**I'm a current ED PCV in Madagascar that is getting evacuated. The notice that we needed to evacuate came very quickly and unexpected for us in Mada considering our country was low risk and contained no documented cases of the virus. We were rushed out of our villages in about a day, forced to pack up everything we had and quickly say our goodbyes. It was incredibly heart wrenching, especially for my students. Leaving them teacher-less in the middle of the school year broke my heart as well as theirs; many tears were cried. Being rushed out so fast I was unable to say goodbye to many of my students and friends I had made along the way. My eyes**

well up just thinking about it as I sit in my hotel room waiting for my region to get called into the capital to COS. Due to the quick evacuation and flight options, I will also not be able to say goodbye or see my stage mates from different regions. This entire thing happened so fast and is affecting everyone deeply. My heart hangs heavy and I can only imagine the feelings and emotions i will experience once I actually land back in the US

## NPCA ADVOCACY

Bette Bass named Advocacy Coordinator for Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of LI  
Bette Bass is now the liaison between The National Peace Corps Association and Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of Long Island. Her role is to help carry out strategies to advance key public policy initiatives designed to recognize, honor and support the Peace Corps and its alumni. She is in regular contact with Jonathan Pearson, the NPCA Advocacy Director.



**A big thank you to all of you who have taken action in support of Peace Corps!**

Please see Bette's posts on how you can help NPCA and Peace Corps by going to our Facebook page

<https://facebook.com/LIRPCV>

There is some concern that the anti-PC Congressional members will use the evacuations of all Peace Corps Volunteers as an opportunity to defund the Peace Corps and not return any volunteers to the field. Please use this link to contact your representatives and ask them to continue to fund the important work of Peace Corps, as well as to support of evacuated PCVs.

If the link doesn't work, please go to our FB page to find the link that will connect you. (Try hitting Control key and click to open)

<https://advocacy.peacecorpsconnect.org/email-congress#/55>

**Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of Long Island and the National Peace Corps Association 2020 Day of Action**

(Before the coronavirus pandemic) Kathy Williams Ging and Bette Williams Bass were part of the record breaking 240 RPCVs participating in the 2020 National Peace Corps Association Day of Action on Capitol Hill. Both Kathy and Bette met with their Representatives, the Honorable Thomas R. Suozzi and the Honorable Peter T. King. In addition, there were meetings by Team New York with an upstate Representative and the foreign affairs aides of 2 additional Congressmen and legislative aides of both New York Senators.

Meetings stressed the importance of an increase in Peace Corps funding as well as passage of bills of importance to the Peace Corps, including H.R.3456, the Peace Corps Reauthorization Act of 2019. The Peace Corps was last reauthorized in 1999.



**OUR FACEBOOK PAGE and WEBSITE**

Have you been following our Facebook page where we are posting information about members of RPCVs of LI and other items we think are of interest to people who have served in the Peace Corps?

Check out the site <https://www.facebook.com/LIRPCV> (Hit Ctrl and click to

open) and read about recent LI-RPCV events, as well as items of interest to the Peace Corps community.

We hope that you will "like" the page and also send us news about what you've been up to.

Call or email Lyn Dobrin (Kenya '65-'67) if you have question or items of interest you would like her to post: 516-997-8545; [lyndobrin@gmail.com](mailto:lyndobrin@gmail.com)

Our group now has a website! It is on the NPCA Silkstart platform. Ella Dowell, the NPCA tech wizard, assisted Kathy Williams-Ging in launching the website in the Spring of 2019. We keep the website updated with news and upcoming events.

Check it out: <https://rpcvsoflongisland.peacecorpsconnect.org>

## ONCE AND FUTURE EVENTS

### **Pedals for Progress**

Thanks to Kathy Williams-Ging and Bette Williams Bass for again setting up a date for the collection of used bicycles and sewing machines which are sent to developing countries. This would have been our 18th year. We are obviously not doing the collection in May as planned.

Since beginning this collection, RPCVs of LI has collected over 1600 bicycles and over 200 sewing machines. Kathy and Bette are our coordinators and Lyn Dobrin (Kenya '65-'67) has been our outstanding publicist.

Thank you to Brian (Korea '67--70) and Gina Richardson for securing a collection site in Middle Island. We hope to reschedule at a later date.

### **Spring Dinner**

While we have had a spring dinner in May or June for several years, with the current pandemic, we will certainly hold off on scheduling with any restaurant until we can determine the feasibility and safety of meeting.

We had been thinking of an Afghani restaurant in Hicksville. Does anyone have any other suggestions for a future dinner? If so, contact Bette) at [bettembass@gmail.com](mailto:bettembass@gmail.com).

## RECENT EVENTS

Many thanks to Brian (Korea '67-70) and Gina Richardson for hosting a wonderful summer picnic last August at their home in Middle Island. What and enjoyable gathering with wonderful food and good conversations.

Also, thanks to Linda Restaino (Philippines '67-'69) and Lou Merola for again hosting our Fall Gathering in Eastport. As always, lots of food, good spirits, along with ideas for our group's future. We also welcomed Cristian Cedacero to our group. He served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Guatemala from 2013-2015.

## Cow Harbor Parade and Celebration—Northport

On Sunday, September 22, 2019, we marched behind our RPCV-LI banner and country flags in an old-fashioned Main Street parade in Northport, known as Cow Harbor for that weekend.

This year the parade's theme was "Northport Through the Decades." Each group was assigned a decade, and ours was the '60s, particularly appropriate to our establishment in 1961. What fun channeling our inner hippies! The weather was cooperative, with sunny skies and warm temperatures.

We had a good turnout, which included our youngest members, Mason and Dylan Gasiewski and young friends.

As we walked we received our usual warm welcome from the spectators and our fellow marchers.

### **IF NORTHPORT IS STILL ABLE TO SAFELY SPONSOR THE PARADE:**

Please consider marching with us this coming September. Marching behind our banner is a great way to help with Peace Corps' Third Goal (Bringing the World Back Home), as well as a fun way to spend an afternoon. After the parade there are harbor front activities, including rides and vendors.

As we walked we received our usual warm welcome from the spectators and our fellow marchers.





## **ANNUAL REQUEST FOR DUES**

There is no longer a yearly membership fees for NPCA (National Peace Corps Association). Any one can now join for free. However, NPCA does encourage contributions which will be used to fund projects. People who send donations to NPCA will be called "Project Partners."

All returned PC volunteers will automatically become members of NPCA. To continue receiving *Worldview* magazine, a person would have to be a Project Partner or have given another type of donation.

They will still process the \$15 membership fee to join the Long Island affiliate if you choose to send your dues through the national organization. Otherwise, you can (please) just send your \$15 check, made out to "RPCVs of Long Island," to Kathy Williams-Ging, 2 Prospect Drive South, Huntington Station, NY 11746

Our local dues are used to support projects that are most relevant to our members. Examples include helping to fund, libraries, school construction, and playgrounds where Long Island PCVs are currently serving.

Thank you!

## **PROJECT UPDATES**

### **Hope Children's Fund**

Larry Hohler, who is very supportive of our RPCV group, is a co-founder of the Hope Children's Fund. He and his wife Yvette have made several trips to Kenya to visit the Home. Some of us have sponsored children there. If you would like to help, please contact Larry at [hohlerj@aol.com](mailto:hohlerj@aol.com)

Incorporated in 2003, Hope Children's Fund is a New York State Licensed 501(C)3 that provides for the physical and emotional needs of some of the most vulnerable AIDS affected orphans who were living on the streets of Meru, Kenya. Its goal is to furnish the food, clothing, shelter and medical care that will enable these children to be enrolled in local schools. At the Jerusha Mwiraria Hope Children's Fund Home we expect to provide these children with the tools that will help them to become productive adults.

A success story and positive news:

"Doreen Gatwiri was 9 years old and suffering from malnutrition when she was taken into Hope Children's Home in 2005. She developed into an incredible young woman who just earned her MD and will soon be specializing in gynecology! We are understandingly impressed!"

## ABOUT US

Congratulations to Ellie Smith (Uruguay '69-'71 ) on the printing of her book, Return to Pastoreo.

" In the tumultuous times of the 1960s, while revolutions were gripping South America, this story tells a sprawling tale of love and loss. An idealistic Peace Corps volunteer finds herself enmeshed in a war she was never prepared for. Was she at risk of losing her life, of imprisonment, or a broken heart? Liz's son follows her trail to find the answers. "

For more information you can contact Ellie:  
esmith11@sjcny.edu)

A request to support the following project went out to our members about a month ago. Obviously, it will not proceed as scheduled but if you would like to contribute or find out more about the program and be informed when it does start you can contact Paul: paularf@optonline.net or 631-232-1262

Paul Arfin, one of our members wants to thank each of you who generously contributed towards the Pronto Tennis Program in the Brentwood School District. If other RPCVs want to do so, contributions are still needed and welcomed. Individual support augments a grant from the USTA to develop a program that is free and focused on children in low income families, grades K-6 who would benefit from learning tennis and its ability to build self-confidence and physical skills. Pronto also seeks community volunteers on Saturdays and during summertime (you don't need to play tennis to participate).

We certainly hope that we can eventually resume normal activities and meet.

In the interim-- be kind, be well and stay positive!

