

Why I Give

“Millennial” generation RPCV
Kristina Owens

by Natalie Hall

As part of our on-going series of interviews with National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) supporters, special projects volunteer Natalie Hall (Thailand 1967-69) reached out to NPCA Board and Director’s Circle member Kristina Owens (Bolivia 2000-02) to find out why this member of the “Gen X”/“Millennial” age cohort supports the NPCA.

Natalie: Kristina, you were just elected to the NPCA Board in 2012. Why did you decide to increase your time and financial commitment to NPCA?

Kristina: It just seemed the logical thing to do. I became a NPCA member within six months of completing my Peace Corps Service in Bolivia. When I moved to Washington, DC, I became active in the RPCVs of Washington, D.C. member group. Chairing the Peace Corps 50th Anniversary committee for RPCV/W put me in close contact with NPCA.

NPCA: That was a huge undertaking. How did you organize it?

Kristina: We had five committees to handle the Arlington Cemetery program, the walk of flags, development, communication, and year-long events honoring the 13 original Peace Corps countries. We worked closely with NPCA during those two years.

NPCA: How did working with NPCA change your perspective?

Kristina: I could really see the value of having RPCVs represented on the national level by NPCA. Local and Country of Service groups can accomplish a lot, but together we can do so much more! NPCA is that go-to organization



Kristina Owens (left) enjoys the harbor cruise with fellow RPCVs at Peace Corps Connect – Boston.

for the whole Peace Corps community. I felt it was very important that I contribute my time and financial support and bring the local perspective to NPCA and vice versa. I love the work I do.

NPCA: The 50th Anniversary in 2011 was such a highlight for many of us. How did you feel at the end?

Kristina: I loved doing it. It is definitely my kind of thing to work with others to be successful. I learned to really listen to everyone and then make decisions. It wasn’t always easy, especially fundraising, but we were very proud of our part in the 50th.

NPCA: Did you continue with the RPCV/W Board after the 50th?

Kristina: Yes, I stayed on to wrap up after the 50th and share what we had learned. It then seemed logical to move on to the NPCA Board. The Mid-Atlantic/Nationwide position was open and I was elected in 2012. So I represent the groups and many members in the Mid-Atlantic area as well as national groups, such as the LGBT group, which are not Country of Service groups.

Natalie: You have a very interesting family story of your connection with Peace Corps. Tell me about it.

Kristina: My father was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Peru. There he married

my mother and they moved back to the United States. Years later my twin sister, Wendy, and I both joined the Peace Corps.

NPCA: That’s quite unusual. Could you serve together?

Kristina: No, I served in Bolivia in 2000-2002 and she was in Paraguay. It was Peace Corps policy to separate siblings and that’s what we wanted too. I had graduated from State University of New York at Geneseo with a major in Spanish and minor in Chemistry. Then Wendy and I were accepted into the Loret Miller Ruppe Peace Corps Master’s International program in Forestry at Michigan Tech.

Natalie: What did you do in Bolivia?

Kristina: I taught environmental science and had a fruit tree project. The RPCVs of Wisconsin-Madison sponsored my community library project so I knew about the importance of the RPCV groups in supporting Volunteers in the field.

NPCA: What did you do when you came back from Bolivia?

Kristina: I finished my Master’s and started on my doctorate, but decided to find a job instead. I have been at the Department of Agriculture since 2004. I’m a biologist in the Animal, Plant, and Health Inspection Service located in the Washington, D.C. area.

NPCA: So what did you think you wanted to bring to the NPCA Board?

Kristina: I'm just at the end of Generation X and I identify with the Millennials who want to know "What's in it for me?" I believe I can help them see the bigger picture. For example, Peace Corps Connect-Boston really demonstrated what NPCA does and why it's important. There are things that local groups just can't do completely on their own, such as advocacy work. We need to have a national plan to be effective on the Hill and NPCA provides that plan. I can say that because I have seen things on a local level, and now on the national level too.

Natalie: Is advocacy a passion for you?

Kristina: Yes, I've been involved in advocacy since 2009 and am the new chair of the Advocacy Committee on the NPCA Board. One of our priorities is to get more state coordinators to connect RPCVs with their Representatives and Senators.

NPCA: Do Board members have to contribute a certain amount financially?

Kristina: Board members are encouraged to give on the Director's Level (\$1000 a year) financially and/or in-kind. At this point in my career I do a lot of the in-kind donations such as shared housing for Peace Corps Connect: Boston.

Natalie: You sound excited about your experiences with RPCV/W and now NPCA. Can you sum it up?

Kristina: Yes, as I said I love the work—to work across generations, listen to people and work together toward success. I have learned to be a leader and to move forward through my involvement with NPCA.

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Natalie Hall (Thailand 1967-69) is NPCA special projects volunteer.



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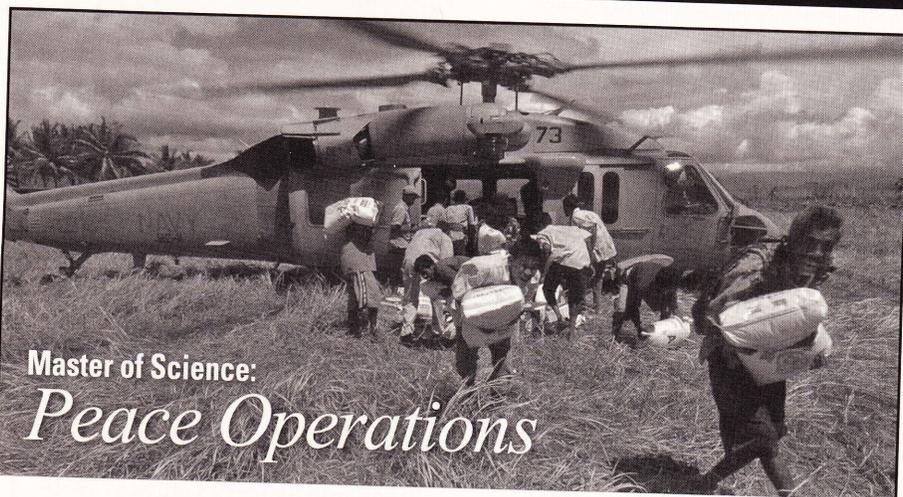
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