

The Canon

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From PSU to PCV: Teaching and Learning in the Peace Corps

By Andre Beriau ('09)

The dusty scent of sun-bleached carpets lining the walls of Rounds 203 filled the classroom. It was early morning on a late-February day. Joseph Monninger sat on his desk at the front of the classroom, his right leg splayed to the side. The course was Wilderness Literature. We were several weeks past the introduction of the curriculum. He presented the class with the proposition of what to do following undergraduate studies. Peace Corps, he explained, is a government-funded volunteer program he served in from 1975 to 1977. It was not the

first time I'd heard Monninger speak of the Peace Corps, though it was the first time I had considered it as an option.

With graduation ahead of me in the spring of 2009, I began researching the Peace Corps and its personal and professional benefits. Discovering that volunteers received a readjustment allowance, potential graduate school assistance, and the opportunity to travel, my choice was made. June the following year saw me arrive in Sierra Leone, West Africa, as a Peace Corps volunteer for three months of

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PSU English Professor Joseph Monninger Invited to Peace Corps 50th Anniversary Writers Event

By Bruce Lyndes

Plymouth State University English Professor Joseph Monninger has been invited to a prestigious event in Washington, D.C., celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Peace Corps. Monninger, a former Peace Corps volunteer, will attend the Peace Corps Writers Luncheon Thursday, September 22, at the Library of Congress to celebrate the establishment of the Peace Corps Collection at the Library.

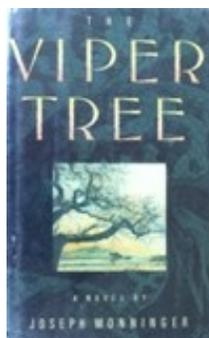
Monninger served in the Peace Corps in Burkina-Faso, West Africa as a well-digger from 1975-77, and began writing letters and short stories about his experiences with the local villag-

ers and his encounters with African magic and superstition.

Monninger later incorporated his knowledge of Africa in his 1991 novel, *The Viper Tree*, which will be featured in a special Peace Corps Writers collection displayed at the Library of Congress.

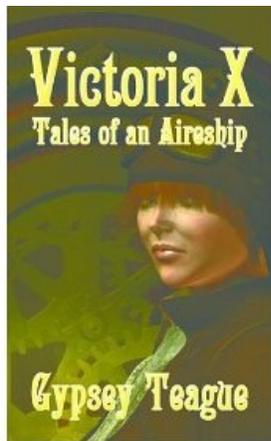
"My experience in the Peace Corps changed the direction of my life," Monninger said. "It's an honor to have my book represent many of the fine volunteers who served in Burkina Faso, and to record a tiny portion of life among the wonderful people of West Africa."

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Alumni Updates

Gypsey Teague's ('74) latest novel, **Victoria X: Tales of an Airoship**, was published in April 2011. According to the author, it is "an alternative history story in the Steampunk tradition of Victorian England." The book is available via Amazon and for Kindle.



Chris Kilmer ('99) and his wife, Anna Mattson Kilmer, welcomed their first child, a son, on January 4, 2011. Eli Joseph entered the world at 7 lbs, 11 oz, and has many ties to Plymouth State. In addition to his father, Eli's aunt, Tracy Kilmer O'Connor (2002), and uncle, Joseph Mattson (2005), are both proud graduates of Plymouth State.

Cassie (Stone) Viau ('08) was promoted to senior manager of client services at Effective Student Marketing. She helps colleges with all their marketing efforts, including writing e-news articles and press releases, managing social media accounts, and creating online marketing strategies. In her new position, she oversees all the account managers, working closely with them to make sure clients are happy and the company is running smoothly. Cassie also writes a weekly column about social media, "Connecting with Cassie," for

www.londonderrynh.net, the Londonderry Hometown Online News. She is also the publicity chairperson for the Relay for Life of Salem, NH. Cassie writes, "The work I'm doing is not something people think of right away as an option, but my English degree is definitely helping me a lot!"

Captain Brian S. Smith ('97) was assigned to the senior health care executive team while stationed with the Connecticut Air National Guard, 103rd Medical Group, located in East Granby, CT. While on assignment from 2008 to 2010, Capt. Smith significantly contributed to the single highest accreditation score in history of any Connecticut Air or Army National Guard Medical unit. This work garnered him the Air Force Commendation Medal awarded in 2011. In 2008, Capt. Smith received the Outstanding Junior Medical Officer of the Year award within the Connecticut Air National Guard. He currently resides in St. Petersburg, Florida, and has transferred to the Air Force Reserve, 927th ASTS, located at MacDill Air Force Base, Tampa, FL. Brian is still an avid Panthers football enthusiast.

Susan L. Goraczkowski ('97) celebrated her 10-year anniversary as publications assistant in the Communications Office at Phillips Exeter Academy in May. She proofs for the PEA alumni/ae magazine, The Exeter Bulletin, as well as Lion's Eye and press releases. She also writes articles, mostly Spotlights, for the PEACS Newsletter. Photos she's taken for the office have appeared in the Bulletin as well. She was awarded The Class of 1964 Award at a PEA staff/retiree picnic in June, and is VERY excited about celebrating her nephew Bray-

lon's first birthday on August 2.

Carin J. Plante ('99) will be teaching English at the Academy for Science and Design public charter school in Merrimack, NH starting this fall. She continues to serve on the NH state advisory board for Poetry Out Loud. She will graduate with an MA in English from Bread Loaf School of English at Middlebury College this coming August. She was also married on May 7 of this year.

Alyssa Ludemann ('04) writes, "I miss all the faces of my English professors!" She is happy to share that she is getting married in September to Jacob Vanderhoff. She recently started a new job as admissions director at Empire Beauty School in Somersworth, New Hampshire.

Crystal Lavoie ('04), an English teacher at Sanborn Regional High School, traveled this summer to the University of Colorado in Boulder to attend a one-week competitive application seminar entitled "The Great Plains: America's Crossroads." The seminar focused on the nineteenth century in the nation's heartland, where cultures have mingled and clashed for thousands of years. In the seminar, educators worked with primary source documents provided by the professors and the Gilder Lehrman Collection.

**Alumni and Majors:
Check out the English
department Facebook
group, PSU English
Majors.**

PSU Students Run Youth Writing Group by Nathan Verry ('11)

During the spring 2011 semester, MESA (Mentoring Enhances Student Achievement), an organization run by English majors, teamed up with Campton Elementary School's A-Plus Club to host a writing group on Tuesday evenings at the Campton Public Library.

The club, titled "Write Me Up," was hosted by a handful of PSU English majors who are interested in getting children enthusiastic about writing. MESA's two faculty advisors, English department faculty members Joe Mealey and Paul Rogalus, also attended all the workshops, even though they were run primarily by the students.

The college students initiated the kids' creative process by delivering them various writing prompts. Melissa Davidson, a junior English student at PSU, attended all of the writing groups and typically delivered the writing prompts. "We like to give them options. We've used really out-there ones like, 'You wake up in the middle of a forest. How did you get there and what do you do next?'" says Davidson. "Occasionally, we will give them a more serious and personal one that helps to vent their teenage angst, like 'Write a letter to someone telling them how you really feel.'"

The writing group gained popularity over the semester. What started out as a group of three eager students evolved into an ambitious group of more than twenty. Davidson says, "The kids have been telling their friends about the group, and I think that's why we have so many now."

Mikala Ash, a 6th grade student in Campton, attended Write Me Up every Tuesday since it began. "I have always loved to write," Mikala says, "and the college kids make it fun." Mikala hopes to attend college and become a teacher in the future, but that is a few years down the road.

Mikala's good friend Meghan Jerome, who also has ambitions of teaching, has been an active

member of the writing group since its beginning. She is drawn to writing without the guidelines imposed by the public school curriculum. "I like to write about funny, random stuff," Meghan says, "and I've also learned that writing can be interesting."

The writing group consists of students from 4th all the way up to 8th grade. The blend of ages creates a diverse atmosphere of writing level, creativity, and unique style. But it is all in fun. Sixth-grade student Barbara "Babs" McKenzie, enjoys the company of the older kids. Babs says, "I love the silliness of the 8th graders. I've learned that Justin Bieber is very hated." All the kids seemed to learn from and appreciate each other's written material.

Campton Library director, Tara McKenzie, says that the kids were really excited about how fun the group was. McKenzie says, "I think the students feel more comfortable with the college students because they are closer to their own age."

Of course, when a bunch of young boys and girls get together after school with their friends and are fed free pizza and soda, there are going to be some distractions. "Getting them to focus on the writing can sometimes be a challenge," says Davidson. "We have tried splitting them up into smaller groups and that seems to help."

Every week MESA collected samples of all the students' work. At their final meeting, MESA presented the kids with a magazine that features all their writing

"Write Me Up" was such a success that MESA and the A-Plus Club in Campton have already expressed ambitions to expand the program and return in the future. "I think this program has some great potential and I look forward to working with the Campton Public Library next semester," says Davidson. "Hopefully we can make it a longer program and do some really fun activities with the kids."

This article originally appeared in *The Clock*.



First Hinman Award for Literary Studies Awarded to Jini Rae Sparkman

The first annual Hinman Award for Literary Studies was awarded this spring to Jini Rae Sparkman ('11) for her essay, "Engaging the Body: The Reclamation of the Individual Through Inclusion of the Physical in Post-Colonial Literature."

Sparkman says that "to be the inaugural winner of the Hinman award was an honor, and it was a reflection of the incredible support and guidance that I received as an undergraduate. Salman Rushdie states: 'Literature is

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training in the education sector as a secondary education English teacher.

Dust stirs in the air now between the sun-filled walls of my classrooms. Four years of college has transitioned into four months as an educator. Each morning I meander through the alleys of Mapaki, a small village of about 1,000 in the Bombali district of the North. The walk to school is a mere 500 yards, though the formalities of greeting in Themne — an indigenous language I attempt to wrap my tongue around each morning — turns ten minutes into twenty. The principal of the Paki-Masabong Junior Secondary School, Mr. Daniel Fullah, speaks to the students at the morning assembly, a variety show of sorts. For twenty minutes the students sing praise songs followed by the Lord's Prayer and any announcements pertinent to the day or week. We separate, moving to our respective classrooms.

At the front of my own class of 120 J1 students — 7th grade — I begin the lesson. Grammar. Possessive nouns. *Boring*. A subject hard taught and harder learned. Poring over my grammar books the evening before, I strove to simplify the lesson to its lowest common denominator. Plymouth jogged through my memory. *You wrote a 15-page paper on the disparity of African-American vernacular between the suburbs and the city. You can simplify possessive nouns.* At the board I chalk up the lesson. It reads: "Usage: To show that one thing belongs to another." A simple concept. In theory.

We work our way through the lesson. It's a slow process, but students appear to grasp the concept, until I reach the plural possessive. Students begin fanning themselves. One or two sleep in the back. I'm losing them. Forty minutes is not sufficient time to teach a lesson. To regain the hold of the classroom, I switch my plan. Improvising is a key ingredient in attention holding. It's a skill I acquired through countless PowerPoint presentations in the classrooms of Hyde.

Less than ten minutes remain in the class. I need to have them understand at least half the lesson before the day is out. I ask a boy seated in the second

row of four, three seats to the back, to join me at the board. He steps reluctantly out from his desk. I ask him to write the possessive form of a singular noun not ending in "S." A blank stare. I provide an example. He follows suit. The result isn't correct. I offer him another chance. He tries again. Success. I congratulate him on his success and ask the remaining students to clap for him. As soon as he sits, the hand-rung copper bell sounds from the J3 classroom. My time is over for the day.

I return to the teachers' lounge, a baffle hut constructed of sticks and covered with palm fronds. Removing an orange from my black messenger bag, I pull the Swiss Army knife from my khakis and begin whittling off the skin. An unorthodox method for eating an orange, I know. I cut off the top inch and begin suckling, pushing the sour juice up from the bottom. I contemplate my previous class. *Where did they start to go blank? How can I present it in a better light? I can't have my lessons end this way each day.* With these questions in mind, I resort to the skills provided me at PSU.



It is easy to scrap a lesson and begin from the start. Yet easy is not adequate. Applying the critical thinking skills from classrooms of the past, I continue the assessment of my lesson, reviewing what works and what just isn't getting through. Learning to think critically as well as realistically are techniques I may have learned on my own, though I feel they were sharpened at PSU.

By using the skill set brought forth while studying in the PSU English Department — and in classes outside my concentration — I learned early that there is more to education than regurgitation. Yes, it can be difficult and yes, it can be exhausting. But it is the late-night library sessions, or the pre-dawn study sprints, seemingly needless at the time, which result in the skills needed to get through a day at the office or in the bush. It's a workbench full of techniques that allow me to step back, rethink my plans, and build upon them.

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From PSU to PCV

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The orange has been sucked dry. Opening the lesson on possessive nouns, I review the examples I provided before. Easy for some, sure, but not for second language learners. Tearing the page out, I copy the lesson over to where students began to fall asleep. I shift my position on the crude bench. Monninger's voice plays through with a possessive case example he'd made of "it's," "its'," or "its." I add a page from his notes to mine and continue.



This spring, several English Department alumni attended and participated in the Alumni Slam Event, sponsored by Poets & Writers. Among those attending were Robby Binette ('05), Cara Losier ('05), and Dan Singer ('03), pictured above with Professor Paul Rogalus.

Monninger Invited to Peace Corps Event

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California Congressman John Garamendi and his wife, Patti Garamendi (Ethiopia 1966-68) will host the luncheon, which is limited to Peace Corps writers whose books are listed in the Bibliography of the Peace Corps Experience.

Monninger, a Warren, N.H., resident, has taught at Plymouth State since 1990; he has published 13 novels and three nonfiction books; his young adult novel, *Hippie Chick*, was a Bulletin Blue Ribbon Book, and *Baby*, an ALA-Yalsa Top Ten Best Book for Young Adults. Monninger's awards include a New Hampshire State Council on the Arts Fellowship in 2007, a nomination for a Booksense Award, two National Endowment for the Arts fellowships and he was selected as an alternate for a Fulbright scholarship to West Africa.



Sparkman receives HALS

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where I go to explore the highest and lowest places in human society and in the human spirit, where I hope to find not absolute truth but the truth of the tale, of the imagination and of the heart.' It was with this in mind that I approached the subject of the inclusion of graphic violence (often sexual) in Post-Colonial literature and the discourse resulting from it."

This new prize, nicknamed the HALS, will be awarded each spring to the best undergraduate essay focusing on literary analysis, film studies, and/or cultural criticism. The author of the winning essay receives a \$100 prize, as well as publication on the English department website. Honorable Mentions may also be awarded at the discretion of the selection committee. The selection committee for the HALS includes literature and film faculty from the English department. Submissions (read blind) are welcome from all full-time PSU undergraduate students with a declared major or minor in English. The prize is named after Mary-Lou Hinman, a former professor of English at Plymouth State. Dr. Hinman taught for sixteen years at the college, chaired the English department, and won the 1995 Distinguished Teaching Award.