

A moment i do not want to forget:

Walking to Justina's to buy bread on a beautiful "it's good to be alive" morning with clear blue skies, crisp fresh air and the sounds of morning chiming in from all around, I caught little Nyinha, the youngest of five - her hair a fluffy mess, smudges of dirt barely visible on her coffee colored skin and her dirty dress two sizes too big - in a shouting match with a kabrito half her size. They stood face-to-face, perched on their little legs - his furry and spindly and hers just shedding their baby fat- staring each other down. Her hands squared on her hips as she leaned her small, child's body into the face of the ferocious and garrulous goat.

In this position they engaged in a battle of force, wit and stamina. Who had more to say? That I could not tell you, but neither was to be outdone. Their shouts drowned the distant rooster cries, bounced off the broad face of mountain standing watch above and echoed down the nearby ravine. As they paused for a breath - their eyes frozen just inches apart - neither realized they were speaking a different language.

My Peace Corps experience taught me how to live slow and savor life – rolling its many flavors and textures over my tongue and enjoying it simply for what it is. On the volcanic island of Fogo in the Republic of Cape Verde, I had no choice but to slow down. Though I was teaching at least one hundred 11-15 year olds English every morning, the hot afternoon sun seemed to freeze time.

Each morning I set out on the 20 minute downhill walk to the school – initially rushing by my neighbors sitting on the wall waiting for a car to the city. I gave a bright morning wave and brief *bom dia!* and made my way along further down the hill to the public fountain where donkeys were lined up waiting to carry tire tubes filled with water to small cinderblock homes scattered along the mountainside. Vans filled with students and loud music pouring out would whiz by and deposit the uniformed children in cluster where they greeted me at the bottom of the hill outside the school.

In the beginning of my first year, the classes dragged as I struggled with Portuguese and my students struggled with English. At 1:00pm, with the sun near apex, the last bell would ring and I began the ascent. Though I tried, I never made it home nearly as quickly as I made it to school. The steep road was laborious in the hot sun and I couldn't help but feel a bit like Sisyphus as endless critique of the days lesson cycled through my head. My enthusiastic greetings of the morning turned to near mumbles as I trudged up the last section of hill to my house.

The cool cement floor was like heaven for my tired feet as I slipped my shoes off and changed out of my teaching clothes. I would prepare lunch knowing that my bed was there calling my name for a brief afternoon nap. Just as my eyes closed, I would hear the patter of small feet running up the steps – Nyinha and her siblings, later dubbed “the shadows.” As I lay in bed, I wanted to hide from their endless inquiries and desire to play. I wanted to prepare my lessons and study Portuguese, but I knew they had watched me walk home and there was no way of hiding. Reluctantly, I would open the door, but their innocent laughter and acceptance and gentle mockery of my own childish communication brought life and joy to a driven and motivated Volunteer.

Before I knew it, my communication improved and my confidence with teaching grew alongside it. As this happened, I began taking my time getting home at the end of the day. For the entire two years, it would always be hot when I walked home at 1:00pm and I was usually tired, but instead of rushing by, I stopped to shell beans with the shopkeepers wife who would tell me stories, help me with my Creole (I had given up on Portuguese since no one spoke it in my rural village) and sometimes feed me lunch. I would sit and share gossip with the young women waiting to fill their buckets at the public fountain and would sometimes stop in a neighbor's house for hours to just sit, chat and enjoy the company and sometimes I would just walk home as I prepared to head out for a soccer match later in the evening. The real difference is that I no longer felt like Sisyphus – I no longer rushed through the trip and no longer dreaded arriving home where – as always – the shadows would be waiting.