

What was your undergraduate alma mater? Program-of-study?

I graduated from the University of Michigan in 2015 with a Bachelor of Science in Anthropology and a minor in Ecology.

Where did you serve? When?

I served in Matru Jong, Sierra Leone from July 2017 to September 2018.



What was your primary job? Did you have any secondary projects? How did you go about starting those?

I served as a biology and chemistry teacher to 9th and 10th grade students at a Christian secondary school named Centennial Secondary School. My secondary project was a female student soccer league in my community. I noticed that the boys had school and league teams in a few sports, but the girls did not have any teams to join. I initially started a soccer team at my school, inviting the girls at the middle school and high school to join. My goals for this after-school program were to empower the girls, encourage health and wellness, and promote gender equality in the community. After a semester of developing, coaching, and piloting this program at my own school, I invited three other schools in the community to do the same at their schools. Our biggest event was in the middle of the second

semester when schools were invited for a soccer match. The entire town became involved. Stakeholders, sellers, and town people came to watch these girls play. I would be remiss if I did not mention the push-back that I received from my school administrators, stakeholders, and some male community members. My best friend, Olmeh, who spoke the local tribal language, co-coached with me and after hours of convincing I was able to get my school principal, vice principal, and sports committee to support the program. Fortunately, I was able to coordinate with a group of American doctors that were coming to my town for a project and they donated jerseys, soccer balls, cones, and other practice equipment for the team.

With so many other volunteering programs, why were you specifically interested in the Peace Corps?

I was initially introduced to the Peace Corps at the University of Michigan at new-student orientation as an undergraduate. My orientation leader said, "On the steps of the Michigan Union, John F. Kennedy made a speech to 10,000 students at the University of Michigan at 2 am on October 14, 1960. He challenged these students to serve the United States and to the cause of peace by living and working in the developing world through an international volunteer organization called the Peace Corps." As an eager freshman with a passion to serve others, drive to work internationally, and a hunger for world peace, the Peace Corps was the next step for me.

Was your program-of-graduate-study choice influenced by your Peace Corps experience? What led you to choose the University of Arizona?

Yes. Prior to serving in the Peace Corps I thought of public health as a future career, but at the time I was more involved with parasitology and ecology. I was passionate about the ecology of infectious disease. Although when I applied to the Peace Corps I had hoped I would be a health volunteer, I learned that as a science teacher I was able to teach life skills such as sexual health and hygiene, as a part of the curriculum for my students. Peace Corps shifted my views and I knew that without a doubt that I wanted to pursue a Master of Public Health in Global Health. Ultimately, I chose the University of Arizona for its competitive Coverdell Fellowship, location in the Southwest (I am interested in border health), and the overwhelming network of RPCVs in Tucson. Of course, the U of A comes with all of the bells and whistles in terms of MPH program, faculty, and research. Choosing the University of Arizona was the best decision for me and I feel like I belong here.



What was the food like where you served? If you had a dietary restriction, was that difficult? And how did you manage?

At first it was challenging to adjust to the food because I was tired, homesick, and struggled to communicate in my host country's language. When I arrived to Sierra Leone I was a vegetarian, but this is not an idea that is well-known to the people of Sierra Leone. My host family was confused with me requesting that there is no meat or fish or beef in the food that they cooked for me. After I began to learn the language and was more equipped to communicate my needs and culture, they adapted to my dietary requests. At the same time, I adapted to their culture. I learned that eating meat in Sierra Leone is a privilege and necessary to feel well-nourished. We typically ate beaten vegetables like cassava leaf, onion, and hot peppers that is then cooked with dried fish, oil, and a bouillon cube. This "soup" is placed on top of rice. The Sierra Leone people say that you have not eaten throughout the day unless you've eaten rice. There are a handful of variations of "soup" with different vegetables, but my favorite is peanut soup with chicken. Actually, I still make peanut soup at least once per week here in the United States. It's spicy, savory, and reminds me of my incredible experience in the Peace Corps.