



**National  
Peace Corps  
Association**

**2017 Peace Corps Connect  
Denver, CO - Aug 5, 2017**

**Harris Wofford Global Citizen Award  
Siotame Drew Havea's Acceptance Remarks**

*"Fakatapu ki he 'Otua Mafimafi, Tapu kia Hou'eiki, Tapu ki he 'Amipasitua Tonga ki 'Amelika mo kimoutolu kotoa pe 'oku mou me'a mai ketau kau fakataha he katonganga he 'ahoni.*

To all Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, Distinguished Guests, Former Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen, friends and families -- it is great to be with all of you today. This award has given me the opportunity to reflect on how the 20 plus years of my association with Peace Corps in Tonga. This has shaped and inspired my personal and professional journey in life, which has and hopefully still does inspire others. I am extremely honored and excited to be with all of you today, to share my story with a group of individuals that cares and took the initiative to leave your homes and live and work in our countries – you are living proof that people matter.

The concept and spirit of volunteerism is a way of life in Tonga. Tonga is an island nation in the South Pacific with 177 islands of which 36 Islands are inhabited with a population of about 110,000. Our smallness and remoteness from the rest of the world is an ongoing challenge on the development agenda; needless to say, we are often left out, as the criteria for selection is cost over benefits, so remote locations with small populations are not a high priority. Because of this, volunteering is our community response to development. And Peace Corps starts from a foundation of people respecting our differences, diversity and cultural uniqueness to work together for the common good for all. We have engaged the people to focus on human development, building capacity, empowering communities and developing mutual understanding.

When I started with Peace Corps, I pondered a long time about what drives Peace Corps Volunteers to accept the countries they were assigned to by the Placement Office. Being an island nation adds another degree of difficulty at the country level as we placed Peace Corps Volunteers on very remote islands where you must ride the boat for days, or rural villages where there is no transportation to the urban center. That desire to volunteer made me think of my Grandfather and his reason to volunteering for the Church in the early 1900's. My grandparents served the people of the Solomon Islands for 40 years.

Unlike my Grandfather, perhaps more so with my Grandmother, Peace Corps Volunteers didn't have a choice of what country they would serve when they signed up for Peace Corps service. (Although I hear that has changed now!) The majority of you signed up to serve and it didn't matter where you would end up. Although you may have had some preferences, you agreed to go to where you would be assigned – either to the rural communities in Africa, to the mountainous regions of Latin America, the developing areas of Central America or to the urban areas of Asia or the low atolls of the Pacific Islands. What I came to learn about the purpose of Peace Corps and the purpose of being a Peace Corps Volunteer is clear – Sharing your skills with others in the communities so that they, in turn, find sustainable solutions to bring about the change in their own community. Learning their languages, the way they live, sharing food and stories brings out a relationship built on understanding one another and on trust – that creates the world we need. “This is making a difference.” Peace Corps Volunteers do make a difference, they bring with them enthusiasm, a great can-do attitude and willingness to live at the level of the people they work with. After my years with Peace Corps, I appreciate and understand my Grandfather's decision to go to the Solomon's so much more.

The most interesting, inspiring, and the challenging part of my work with Peace Corps was managing and preparing the Volunteers to embrace their new environment and culture. I thought I was ready because I had experienced a similar kind of cultural shock when I was in the States for College 43 years ago. I was expected to familiarize myself with the new Country, new environment as I moved directly to Oregon to be my home for the next four years. At orientation, a couple of students walked over and

introduced themselves and then asked me where I am from? I said Tonga and they said, yes we know where that is, it is in West Africa. I smiled and thought to myself how on earth don't they know that Tonga is in the Pacific but again I thought, I may have pronounced it Togo so now I need to work on my pronunciation. Returning back to Tonga after College I often found my mail going to Togo first then to Tonga so I guess my pronunciation was ok.

Upon returning from school in the U.S. and moving back with my family, our “new neighbor” happened to be the Deputy Director of the Peace Corps – who would think that one’s neighbor could so greatly impact one’s career?! The Deputy Director approached me to see if I would be interested to work with Peace Corps. That was the beginning (Thank you Maureen Delaney – she is here with us from Washington D.C.) and from there I started my employment providing training for one year under the guidance of Mr. Van Nelson (Thank you Van). The support from Peace Corps Washington - Jody Olsen, Marianne Munitillo, Lee Lacy and (OTAPS) Randy Adams was exceptional providing those of us in the field with a Development Paradigm and tools that were 10 years ahead of other Development Partners. I quickly learned that working with Peace Corps, with its mission and goals, was going to be a life-changing experience. To impact the lives of the poorest of the poor is – to quote an ad – ‘the toughest job you will ever love.’ Serving the neediest of the needy means hardship, persevering, and love of service, for the betterment of everyone, regardless of the physical difficulty and mental challenges.

It was necessary to translate “Peace Corps” into a Tongan name to demonstrate that both cultures are valued equally – and as many of you know, there is often not a direct way to directly translate words so you are forced to develop a phrase that will resonate in the host culture. The Tongan name given was “Ngaue ‘Ofa” that literally means “Workers of Love” – for Tongans, the only thing that can drive someone like a Peace Corps Volunteer to leave America and come to work in a foreign country is their love for the people of the country.

After a few years with Peace Corps, we moved into Community and Youth development, as the majority of the volunteers had been engaged in Education and

Health. This move was very interesting because many outlying communities were not prepared to engage with the Volunteers – but one thing they were sure about was that there would be some changes in how they do things with a Peace Corps Volunteer in their community. This was intensified when the first group of community and youth volunteers arrived with 9 females and 2 males. This was completely unexpected in Tonga’s male-dominated society. What was incredible was that the 9 women completed their service and communities start requesting female Peace Corps volunteers. Clearly their sense of idealism was so high that it deflected the status quo and cultural biases. Equality to these young women was a way of life and gender equality is the engine that will drive the community to realize its full potential. These communities were empowered, girls and young women came out of the house, some played sports, some decide to return to school, some started income-generating activities, some were doing home gardening and others were doing activity that previously only men had done in the community. When you work with the Worker’s of Love, you put your mind, body, spirit and love towards the people you served sharing skills, knowledge culture and time. What volunteers learned, and what I also came to learn while working with volunteers, is that we learn a lot more from the people we come to help than what they learn from us. This is life changing.

Working with Peace Corps, I learned about the communities’ dynamics, their aspirations and challenges, their limitations and opportunities. Being with people is what makes all our experience meaningful. Working with Volunteers reminded me of a couple of learning experiences from my college days – coming from a small house where doors are always open, it took me a couple of months to understand that you need to knock on doors even if they are open before you go into a room. Secondly, I came from a culture where all material things are shared. A fellow who lived across the hall from me in the dorm had become a good friend. Every time I walked into his room he would be having a beer; without saying a word, I instinctively helped myself to a beer. He stared at me and said sarcastically, “Why don’t you have another one?” I smiled at him, took another one and said, “Thank you”. Three months later I realized that my friend was saying ‘ask before you take the beer’. The good things about Peace Corps that volunteers

get very good language and cross cultural training before they are posted to their work site unlike this Tongan student who had to learn the hard way.

Time has taught me that when you see a good idea, take it and apply it in your world. So after a number of years with Peace Corps, it dawned on me that perhaps we could do a modified form of Peace Corps for Tonga. With the support of the US Peace Corps, we started the Tonga National Volunteer Service, placing volunteers in projects that were often on different islands or villages from their home. That program was so successful that every Tongan that served in it ended up being employed when they completed their service.

After leaving Peace Corps, I have continued my volunteer work, dedicating my time to serve on Civil Society, Communities and on National Committees in Tonga. For the past 10 years I took the leadership of Civil Society in the Pacific Regions. And currently, sitting on Board of Governors on Civil society work for the Commonwealth Foundation. Although I have toyed with assuming a role in Government, I believe that I have had more opportunity to make a difference by my work in civil society. It's fulfilling to know that my efforts provide opportunities for people to improve their lives and make a difference in their communities. Work has been focused on issues relating to eradicating poverty – my goal is to change one life at a time. I advocate for a “community-first” approach to be a part of the planning and development thinking of our leaders. I have tried to influence and create space for young people, women and people with disability, individuals to express their views and influence policies that affect the work they do that directly impact their lives and livelihood, while contributing to their own society.

Valuing service for others, accompanying them at their own pace, speaking their language, sharing your time with them, respecting them, and sharing your skills are values and ideals that I have learned from Peace Corps and its volunteers.

Clearly, my outlook and my involvement have been directly impacted my continuing service in Tonga and in the Pacific where I work to make a difference in the lives of the people that I come into contact with. Thank you Peace Corps, for the opportunity you gave that young man years ago. Thank you to the Country Directors,

American staff and the many Peace Corps volunteers that I have worked with in Tonga; and thank you to all the staff in Washington and the IAP Region, for you have all helped me to be who I am. Thank you to my family, including those who are here with me today. Most importantly thank you to the National Peace Corps Association for your continued commitment to the vision, mission and ideals of Peace Corps and your passion to make the world we live in a better one. My few days in Washington with your Office and here in Denver have been an incredible experience. Thank you to all of you for making a difference in the World we live.

*Malo 'Aupito"*