

Reverse cultural shock

--a new awareness

How does an ex-Peace Corps volunteer see America?

Lynn Beck, a senior in agriculture, gives his views. He spent two years in El Salvador and plans to return to Central America after graduation.

by LYNN BECK

Considerable time is spent orientating the Peace Corps trainee on culture shock, or the rapid adjustment to sharply different customs and surroundings. Much of the roughness is filed from the edges of culture shock by the time the volunteer is in his new country. However, it is often forgotten that in two or three years the volunteer becomes so well adjusted to the unusual that the usual fades deep into the past.

Often, little time is consumed by terminating volunteers to reorientate themselves to the old world. This is fertile soil for another kind of culture shock—reverse culture shock.

REVERSE CULTURE shock is often the more serious. One is returning to his "old stomping grounds" where one would expect to be able to relate to one's people and customs. But in spite of sharing a common language and culture, one has not shared with these people the radically different experiences for the last two or three years.

But how does one relate this reverse culture shock, or a new awareness, to other people? It is caused by having feelings deeply ingrained in oneself, feelings based on two years experience of intensive living. Is it possible to feel without first experiencing?

Reverse culture shock is not limited only to return Peace Corps Volunteers. Soldiers and other people who live overseas for extended periods also live it, but my comments will be

pero... and stop. Then, "Con permiso" as I glided between people. This lasted for some time. Even weeks later when I was enrolled at the University, a friend would meet me on the sidewalk and greet me. "Hi." My mouth would open with the intent of answering him, but all that would come was either, "Adios" or "Que te vaya bien".

Upon leaving the airport many things astonished me. I was appalled by the abundance of public services available. There were several drive-ins on each block, laundromats, dry cleaners, huge supermarkets, shopping centers, and more American than Japanese vehicles. This brought my attention to the wide streets with luxurious American cars parked on each side. Ample sidewalks were attractively covered by well-dressed people walking the streets. Even women wearing slacks and shorts were numerous. It looked like the city was populated exclusively by affluent tourists.

The suburbs were inundated in elaborate houses. At the time, it seemed that the owners must all have large farms worked by exploited peasants. How could any spectrum of people be so wide, and yet so narrow, so colorful and yet so distasteful? How unnecessary it is to waste so much badly needed capital only to luxuriously shelter your body.

AND THE LAWN! Only the exceedingly rich could be so wasteful. Many lawns were larger than some of my

production, and drink Scotch while grilling thick steaks on it—while others struggle for simple survival.

When I returned to my family and friends, I found a communications gap. What could I talk about? I thought that after not seeing each other for so long that I would not quit talking for days, but I was wrong. I began to resent them. They were fully clothed and came in a car with air conditioning to meet me at the airport. Should people have air conditioning and huge lawns

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How can I explain the dirt floors and shoeless feet, landless and hungry people, to someone with carpets, clothes, and land? How can I relate seeing a bomber flying over, then a fighter darting after it, followed by smoke and flames on the horizon where the bomb

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while others simply cannot feed themselves? I began to feel the Civil War being fought inside of me; half supporting the North and half the South.

I see no wrong in having money, but I do in misusing it. People do not get assassinated for just having money, but they have for using it unwisely. Might this also apply to countries?

ARRIVING at our house, I found it redecorated. After living in one small room with dirt peeling constantly from the mud walls and flies buzzing and burying themselves deep inside, a whole house seemed like a palace. I was used to dirt floors with entire families living in one or two small rooms separated by a hanging blanket.

How were those people different from my family? They both worked hard. They both were rural people. Why did one merit a huge house with carpeting, refrigerator, stereo, piano, television, running hot and cold water, and the other a simple dirt floor covered by an insect-infested grass roof, and little more between them?

In the United States, we have passed the day where we struggled to put "a chicken in every pot". We now even have

their delicate, and superficial beauty from being marred by the everyday living in the world of reality. They seem to be deeply submerged in their simple and glamorous game of life.

On a recent field trip, our class was to take a University bus. As we filed towards the bus, it drew various comments from the students, such as, "Now I can see why we had to pay fifteen cents insurance?" And when the students had to dismount and push in order to start it, that brought even more derogatory remarks, although perhaps jokingly. And I thought of all the county extension agents in Latin America who have applied weeks in advance for such a bus in order to make a field trip, and were usually disappointed when their request was denied for lack of such a bus. Or the facial expression of my office's agronomist and home economist when, after six years, they finally received transportation, a 1953 GMC panel truck. To us it was a limousine.

RETURNING to the University was a continuation of my frustrations. I lived in a dormitory. To me it was a mansion compared with the small rooms lit by a single bulb with only a cot for a bed and a very small closet with no doors on it; stains on the ceiling marked where rain dripped to the floors. The food here was excellent, but I heard people seriously complaining that they had fed their dogs better food than that. I would try not to hear, but I did. And another would complain that he had blown his car's engine the night before and his "old man" had better put a bigger one in it the next time, or else.

And coeds, heavy in make-up, a wig, or tinted hair, and with a different dress every morning and afternoon amble

about as if their investments improved their personalities or minds. To me, they appeared to be glass China dolls. Something to look at and admire from a distance, and then to place on a high shelf in a corner. This would prevent

to an equal portion of the world's natural resources? Why should a hard working American college student be able to drive a sports car when another hard working college student elsewhere cannot even ride a bicycle?

How much longer can this fish bowl survive in the world ocean with the fish beginning to stare in from the outside, wondering why they are on the outside?

I grew rapidly tired of textbook problems giving rise to textbook questions, and being solved by textbook answers, all accomplished neatly and quickly without leaving the classroom. And then being measured by some irrelevant dipstick called an exam. What does it mean to get an A, B or C? Does it mean that I will make 90 per cent, 80 per cent, or 70 per cent as much money as another. Or that I will know 90 per cent as much as I should to be a success, or happy? Or that I will help 80 per cent as many people to produce enough food to eat as I should?

Somehow this seemed so remote, so isolated from the real situation. In some cases, it appeared to be a totally irrelevant, intellectual game.

THE PROBLEMS associated with reverse culture shock are difficulties from not being able to adjust one's values within each culture as rapidly as one can travel from one culture to another. What follows is a double standard of values. The new awareness that living a double standard excites in one is never lost.

To one, poverty may be not having a car, to others it is not having enough food to meet the body's basic demands. To transfer a person from one culture to another different culture would excite culture shock, and after a period of time to return him to his original culture would bring about reverse culture shock.

Where will this awareness lead? More irrelevant textbooks? Questions and conflicts? Answers and peace? Or just tomorrow... unchanged?



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limited to personal experiences.

I BEGAN to feel insecure upon entering the Houston airport—my first time on United States soil in over two years. I was overwhelmed by hearing everyone speak English. Only Spanish phrases were in my mind, making conversation difficult. When I approached someone to speak, I would start to say, "Pardon,

peasants' farms (of those who had farms), and they had large families to support. Green and weedless lawns, possible only by huge applications of fertilizers and herbicides, used with little understanding of how much corn, or beans, or bananas one could produce with that same fertilizer and herbicides. What extravagance! They take land and fertilizer, both badly needed for food

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Dear Editor... Dear Editor... Dear Editor...
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Questions Buckley

Dear editor,

Mr. Buckley's opinions expressed in "The New China" in the *The Daily Nebraskan* of April 28 are a bunch of B.S. What does he know? After all, aren't Americans famous for their naivety and ignorance?

By
 Know-more-than-you-do

Calls poster sexism

Dear Editor,
 The sponsors of the Up and Atom Peace Festival obviously attempted to create a poster that would attract attention to sell tickets to make money. The poster's obvious attraction: a bare-breasted

young woman. The appeal, of course, being to males. And the promise of "good times" to be had at the UP Festival defined in exclusively male terms. How do you know it's going to be "good times?" Because of that semi-nude good vibes "chi" on the poster? The media is the message. Hip sexism is still sexism.

Kathy Berkheim
 Joe L. Olson

Congratulates J.J.

Dear Editor,
 The fieldhouse has won. At the same time, congratulations to Gov. Exon. Why? He isn't, at least, "a pawning, sneaking, and flattering hypocrite, that will do, or be, anything for his own advantage."

Sudhir Bijanki