This is a factual account of the circumstances pertaining to Peace Corps trainee Erica Williams' summary dismissal from the PC/Cameroon program in November '07 and the events which followed after her arrival in the States. The central issue here is the unethical methods employed by Peace Corps administration in Washington D.C. to cover-up the grievous errors of a Country Director. Erica's father, David Williams, is the original author. Only minor edits have been made; namely, replacement of the term "Country Manager" with "Country Director" and some typo corrections from the original email text. Aside from this, no substantive content has been changed.

.....

The following was written and emailed to family and friends on November 27, 2007.

From: Dave Williams < jdwilliams 74@centurytel.net>

Date: Tues, November 27, 2007 Mailed-by centurytel.net

Erica is home from Cameroon and will be reassigned to another country. She lived through two weeks of a hellish nightmare, something no one should have had to endure, all at the direction of the Peace Corps. We are still working to fully understand what took place and to determine who within the Peace Corps organization was responsible for putting Erica through this ordeal. Quite possibly, those responsible were not only the isolated, in country, Cameroon Peace Corps representatives but also people working for the Peace Corps in Washington. Erica has a meeting scheduled for December 18 with the Director of the Peace Corps to try to get answers, answers that will help her decide if she will continue her plan to serve in the Peace Corps.

Here are the high points of the ordeal. It is an interwoven story of two alleged 'away from post' violations and a robbery. I'll do my best to make it as clear as possible, but as you will see it is rather complex. The net of it is that the Peace Corps trumped up some false charges against Erica to protect a Cameroonian family's reputation. They forced her to resign and then within ten minutes of her resignation, they acknowledged that they made a terrible mistake. The resignation letter was torn up and she was placed on an 'interrupted service' status which is used when a Peace Corps volunteer needs to leave their country of service due to circumstances beyond their control.

On two occasions the Peace Corps says Erica was not at post, she was not where she was supposed to be. On the first occasion, they are correct, although the circumstances surrounding the away are fully understandable; in fact she probably took the correct action. The second occasion was at worst a combination of misunderstanding and miscommunication but quite possibly a setup to lay the foundation for Erica's removal from Cameroon.

During this period of incidents, Erica's iPod and money were stolen from her locked room at her homestay family's house. The Peace Corps representative said not to involve the police and that he would try to work things out. A bad situation turns worse. The

family is now tarnished forever as an American was robbed in their home. They take the position that the family is the victim, not Erica. They no longer allow the Peace Corps homestay coordinator to visit their house. Erica is left to defend for herself. It turns out that the host mother was the thief.

Erica receives a written reprimand for being away from post. All of the other Peace Corps trainees (38) sign a letter to the Peace Corps declaring their support for Erica and that all involved know it to be a result of miscommunication and confusion surrounding the Peace Corps homestay policy. The other Peace Corps volunteers are told that when they signed up for the Peace Corps that they also signed up to support the organization and the letter/petition does not support their obligation to support the Peace Corps. Nonetheless, all seems to be ok, sort of. Except that one day later, Erica's homestay father delivers a letter to the Peace Corps.

Two days later Erica is summoned to appear before the Peace Corps Cameroon Country Director, James Ham, four hours away. She meets with him the following morning, does an hour presentation on what happened with the away from posts, the robbery, the homestay family problems, her motivations, desire to serve, everything that she could possibly think of to say.

With no discussion, the Country Director tells her she can either resign or be kicked out of the Peace Corps. No reason is given for the termination. No indication of what happened or why was provided. Additionally, the contents of the letter from the homestay father were not revealed. And to top things off, she needed to decide within one hour if she would resign or be kicked out. Normally, a volunteer is given 24 hours to decide, but since the next day is Thanksgiving, she needed to be on a plane that day.

Through the efforts of our good friends, John and Maureen King, I was able to speak with the Director of the Peace Corps as he was passing through an airport on his way to South Dakota and a Thanksgiving holiday. (Thank goodness for Blackberries.) This conversation led to a postponing of the decision until Friday and also that Erica should be informed of the reasons for the separation.

After 40-50 emails and many, many phone calls all looking for support or to get people to understand the rest of the story, we finally get to Friday afternoon when Erica again meets with the Country Director. He informs her that because she was away from post on two occasions, she must resign or be kicked out. She resigns and with it her life long dream to serve in the Peace Corps is over.

While Erica is getting the news in Cameroon, the Peace Corps Chief of Staff calls me to give me the news. I press a bit to find out what actually happened and why. I asked what role the robbery and the family had in her termination. His response was that Erica had read the Peace Corps rules and signed a statement indicating so. One of the rules was that iPods needed to be locked up in their footlockers and Erica's iPod was not locked up. I laughed out loud, a belly laugh. I apologized for the outburst and knew it was over.

But, it gets better. Ten minutes after Erica is forced to resign, the Country Director calls her back into is office. He was crying and apologized to her for their terrible mistake, that they did not support her during her dealings with the robbery and the host family. He tore up her resignation letter and said she would be placed on interrupted service status, would return to the U.S. and would be reassigned.

All sounds good, but.....the Country Director says that Erica could stay in Cameroon and continue to serve there. She says that she would be interested in understanding how that would work; would she be safe?; would the host family come after her to protect their reputation?; how would the Country Director support her differently in the future as he had obviously failed her with this incident?

So the Country Director's response is that she has five minutes to decide if she is going to stay in Cameroon or return to the U.S. And, if she stays, but later determines that she would not be safe or would not get the necessary support from the Peace Corps that then she would be back to the original deal: resign or be kicked out. Part of the pressure to decide quickly was that they had already purchased a non-refundable ticket for her and couldn't afford another ticket on another day. Or did they want to do anything and everything possible to get her out of the country? Why?

Erica left Friday night and arrived Saturday night in Los Gatos. She enjoyed leftovers from Thanksgiving!

Obviously, there are many, many questions to be asked and answered. This is much more than some one handling a situation poorly. After the robbery, everything changed and it was clear that the Peace Corps wanted Erica out of Cameroon. Why?

Hopefully she will have a good meeting later this month with the Director of the Peace Corps. If not, you may be reading a more detailed description of what happened in another medium. Besides the obvious story of an attempted wrongful termination there could be an interesting story about how the United States operates in countries rampant with corruption and does the United States have to lower its values of honesty and integrity to achieve their goals in those countries.

As I said earlier, this is a complex series of events interwoven with the hopes and aspirations of a young woman wanting to help those less fortunate and a large bureaucracy made up of individuals in positions of power with motivations not necessarily aligned with those who they are charged to keep safe in difficult situations, thousands of miles from home.

1)	a	17	6
	•	4	v	$\overline{}$

Ps – Erica's blog is	http://ericawilliamscameroon.blogspot.com/	The last entry is prior to
these two weeks of	hell.	• •

The story got weirder and weirder and unfortunately the nightmare continued for some time.

When Erica called me to say that the Country Director tore up her resignation letter, I placed a call to the Deputy Director of the Peace Corps. I had been in regular contact with him from Wednesday morning on. He had heard nothing about the terrible mistake made by the Country Director and that Erica could stay and continue to serve in Cameroon. His recommendation was that Erica should come home under the "interrupted service" status, spend the holidays with the family and then in January, look at where she would be reassigned. I pointed out to him that the Peace Corps had royally screwed over Erica and that the Peace Corps owed her and that she should be offered any assignment in any country where the Peace Corps operated. He agreed.

On Monday, after Thanksgiving, Erica scheduled a meeting with Ron Tschetter to be held in Washington, D.C. on December 18. She also had a conversation with the Africa Regional Manager who was supportive of her returning to Africa and points out that more options would be available to her if she was interested in serving in more than French language only countries. He commits to provide her a list of countries and the departure dates for each so that Erica can make the decision as to where she would like to serve.

During the beginning of December, Erica receives an email from the Peace Corps with attachments that must be filled out and returned to the Peace Corps so that she can reapply to the Peace Corps. This is exactly contrary to her status and it turns out some of her concerns when she was leaving Cameroon were valid. Erica emailed Ron Tschetter asking about the re-application and received a response from the Deputy Director reassuring her that she need not reapply.

Also during this time, Erica receives several phone calls from the health department at the Peace Corps telling her that she needs to go through physical exams, blood work, etc. if she is going to serve in the Peace Corps. Erica finally gets through to them, that she is not applying to the Peace Corps, that she is in an 'interrupted service' status, has never left the Peace Corps and that if they have more questions to speak with Ron Tschetter, as she has his assurance that she is in the Peace Corps.

And this might be the best. Erica receives and email from the Boston area college recruiter for the Peace Corps, the woman that Erica initially met to start the application process. This woman says that she is sorry that Erica had to leave Cameroon, that she understands it was for medical reasons, and that if Erica did not want to talk about it, that would be okay. Erica contacts the woman and finds out that the Peace Corps' reason for Erica leaving Cameroon was because Erica had a broken leg!

A week prior to Erica's meeting with Ron Tschetter, she is called by someone at the African Desk and is told that she has three country options: Mali, Senegal and Mauritania. Erica speaks with the Deputy Director and asks about the commitment to

offer her any country in Africa and is told that these are three good countries and that she should pick one. This is not quite the response one would expect after having the number two person in the organization acknowledge that they screwed over a volunteer and then that they would offer her any country in Africa.

On December 18, Erica arrives at Peace Corps Headquarters for her meeting with Ron Tschetter. To her surprise, in the room are Ron Tschetter, Director of the Peace Corps, David Leiner, Deputy Director of the Peace Corps, a representative from Peace Corps Africa and a representative from the college recruiting group. One can imagine that this might have been a very intimidating gathering for a twenty-two year old. She began her one hour presentation on her ordeal and her quest to find what happened and why it happened, and to do everything she could to make sure that another PCV would *never* have to go through the same thing. One of her strongest motives to set up the meeting was to see how her story could help Peace Corps become a better organization.

After her presentation, Tschetter asks the group if there are any questions. There being no questions, Tschetter tells Erica that both the Peace Corps and Erica made mistakes and the best thing to do is to move forward. He says that they have offered three good choices and she should pick one. She described to me that at this point she knew she was in the middle of a bureaucratic cover-up that was being orchestrated by pros. Nonetheless, she continued to press on.

She pointed out that the supposed reasons for terminating her and the reasons for tearing up her resignation letter were not related. She asked what happened to her and why. The response was they could go back over everything and nothing would change and there were just too many volunteers, too many languages to go back. She was told just to pick one of the country options that PC had so "graciously" offered.

She asked what was in the letter written by the host father. They would not tell her, but did tell her to pick one of the three country options offered.

She stated that she felt the Peace Corps was not truthful to her and that people in that room were not being truthful to her. That got a rise from Tschetter but again the response was they could go back over everything and nothing would change and to pick one of the country options.

In exasperation, she said she was just trying to figure out why she was there in Washington, D.C. and not back in Cameroon, serving in her village, serving the hundreds of people she had met on her site visit and who were waiting for her, expecting her to fulfill her promise of a two-year service. Tschetter's response was that "You called the meeting."

I met Erica immediately after she left the meeting and the Peace Corps Headquarters. A father should never have to see his daughter in such distress, pain, misery and anguish as she realizes that her lifelong dream to serve in the Peace Corps and help others in need is

over and all of this the result of bureaucrats who are more interested in their careers than in providing the necessary support to those in their charge.

In March, with her future still unsure, Erica calls the Peace Corps to keep her options open and tells them that she will accept the post in Senegal. Their response is that she can not accept the post because there has been no offer of a post in Senegal. Another call to the Deputy Director clears up this latest confusion. This last "confusion" pushed Erica enough over the edge to really say goodbye to her Peace Corps dreams.

•••••

Attachment:

Interrupted Service PCT, James T. Ham/Director, PC/Cameroon

11/26/2007 TO: IFO/V INFO: CDU

FROM: JAMES T. HAM/DIRECTOR, PC/CAMEROON

SUBJECT: INTERRUPTED SERVICE PCT

A. NAME ERICA LYNN WILLIAMS

B. SSN --- - 5399

C. STATUS PCV

D. COUNTRY CODE, FISCAL YEAR

AND QUARTER V/T ENTERED DUTY 694-HE-07-02

E. TRAVEL DESIGNATION PORT OF ENTRY TERMINATION DATE NOVEMBER 23, 2007

F. U.S. ADDRESS 713 DEL REY ROAD

WHITEFISH, MT 59937

G. READJUSTMENT ALLOWANCE OVERPAYMENTS OR ADVANCES:

1. LIVING ALLOWANCE NONE

2. LEAVE ALLOWANCE NONE

3. OTHER INDEBTDNESS NONE

4. SIGNED PC 477 ON FILE YES

5. ADVANCE AGAINST

READJUSTMENT ALLOWANCE NONE

H. AUTHORIZED TRAVEL ADVANCES PAID

1. DAILY AND TRAVEL ALLOWANCES: \$16.00

2. TRANSPORTATION FROM POST TO HOME OF RECORD:\$6,010.29

3. OTHER PAYMENTS: \$22.37 (AIRPORT TAX)

4. CORPS CARE TO BE DEDUCTED FROM RA? N/A

THANKS.