

Jane Troxell, Peace Corps Volunteer, Paraguay (1999–2001)

Biography

My name is Jane Troxell, and I have an identical twin sister named Jean. We were born three minutes apart in Cumberland, MD - a stone's throw away from West Virginia, across the Potomac River (if you have a strong arm). After



Jane Troxell (left) and her neighbor, Marlene

giving birth to the two of us on the same day as President John F. Kennedy's funeral, Mom declared that twins were more than enough to handle, so

it's just us. Jean and I both attended the University of Maryland, where I managed the women's sports teams in order to pay tuition. In 1986, I took a degree in Political Science. (Jean later graduated from the University of Las Vegas, Nevada, and even met Frank Sinatra Jr. at her part-time job.)

Two years ago, when we were 34, Jean had her first baby and I decided to join the Peace Corps. Today, we are two twins living worlds apart. She lives on the Chesapeake Bay with my nephew and brother-in-law, and here I am in Paraguay, South America, bathing in a bucket. I miss Jean and my family (and hot showers), but know that they will be there when I get back. In the meantime, I am speaking two new languages, helping out people who appreciate me, and making great friendships with the funniest people you could ever meet. Peace Corps life is sometimes hard here, but it sure is enjoyable.

As a Small Business Development Volunteer, my main goal here is to help a group of farm women make as much

money as they can from their only source of income—the weekly market or *feria*. The women cultivate vegetables, fruit, and herbs, raise pigs and chickens for meat and eggs, and make homemade cheese and empanadas (meat pies) to sell in town. The average weekly profit for each woman is the equivalent of about \$9. Thirty-six dollars a month does not seem like much—and it isn't. But it allows the women to buy flour, cooking oil, soap, basic toiletries, bread, sugar, yerba (herb) tea, and a few cookies for the children. Their husbands are poor farmers too, so every little bit helps.

For many years, I owned a bookstore in Washington, DC, so this Peace Corps form of "retail" is right up my alley. At the *feria*, I help these beginning businesswomen to set up and break down, improve presentation of goods, encourage good selling techniques, work on better client services, teach basic budgeting and accounting, and think up new products to sell. Peanut butter cookies were my latest "great idea," but so far the Paraguayans in my town haven't developed a taste for them yet! I realized that many of the women grow peanuts on their farms, so I am teaching how to make, sell, and eat peanut butter. At least I have tasty assignment!