

Interview with Nehama Rogozen – Fall 2011



What has your path been since you left Schechter, i.e. school/education, personal, communal?

After graduating from Schechter, I attended Hathaway Brown School and Akiva High School. Before college, I spent a gap year on the Nativ College Leadership Program in Israel, where I studied at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and volunteered on a kibbutz.

I attended the University of Maryland for college, where I majored in Government & Politics, and double minored in Leadership Studies and Philosophy. During my time at UMD, I became very active in political and social justice issues. I spent a summer in India with American Jewish World Service, and found my passion for international development, which has led me to my current position as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Philippines.

What are you doing in your position in the Philippines and why did you choose to take this unique path?

I am serving as a Youth Development Facilitator in the Children, Youth, and Families program of Peace Corps Philippines. I am working in Ormoc City, Leyte, with a local beneficiary of World Vision, an international development NGO. I completed my 11-week training in mid-September, and have just started my position in Ormoc. I am still settling in, so I do not know what my exact projects will be, but they will be focused on improving life skills in youth, developing my organization's capacity, and working with the community to improve their quality of life.

How did Schechter inspire your sense of personal and communal responsibility?

Tikkun Olam was an important value I learned at Schechter, and has been inspiring my social justice work ever since our 5th grade class volunteered at Menorah Park. The idea that each of us has the power to change the world for the better is a vital one. I also gained a sense of equality at Schechter--originally in relation to egalitarianism, but then in regards to all of humanity. When I see all of the injustices in the world, I feel compelled to help in whatever way I can.

On a lighter note, my experiences growing up in the tight-knit Jewish community at Schechter have prepared me for the deeply familial society of the Philippines. Here, people always want to know everything about you, invite you over, and play some Filipino geography--just like at home (but with Jewish geography)!

What are you doing to celebrate the High Holidays? How are you deepening your connections with Judaism while far from your family?

Peace Corps has a policy that volunteers may not travel during weekdays during their first three months at site. Unfortunately, that means I cannot travel to the Jewish community in Manila for Rosh Hashana or Sukkot, but since Yom Kippur is on a weekend, I will be able to join them for that. (Probably a good thing I can't go for all three--I'm a 2.5 hour bus ride and then a 1-hour plane ride away from Manila!) There is a Chabad and a Sefardi shul in Manila and I am looking forward to getting to know the community there during Yom Kippur. I also plan on introducing the *chagim* to my host family here. I bought coconut honey from an organic farm I visited, and apples are available. I will also have my choice in picking a new fruit to eat, such as sugar apples, durian, or mangosteen!

Do you have a blog on which people could follow you and learn more about your experiences?

I send out an update email once a month--if you would like to be on it, just email me at nehama.rogozen@gmail.com.