

Book Review

Not Exactly Retired: A Life-Changing Journey on the Road and in the Peace Corps

BY DAVID JARMUL N/72

(Editor's Note: David Jarmul's book has just been released. In it, he chronicles the adventures he and his wife, Champa, have been pursuing since mid-2015, when he stepped down as the head of news and communications for Duke University. He and Champa met when he served in N/72 as a Nepal PCV in Ilam, in the same school where Champa was teaching. Married in 1979, they lived for many years in Maryland and then moved to Durham, N.C. They have two sons and daughters-in-law and seven grandchildren. In June 2016, they began serving as Volunteers with the Peace Corps in Moldova, in eastern Europe. They completed their service there in July 2018 and returned to their home in Durham. Most of the book takes place in Nepal and Moldova.)

FoN: David, what inspired you to write this book?

DJ: I blogged actively during our adventure and had readers in more than a hundred countries. They were interested not only in Nepal and Moldova, and about serving in the Peace Corps, but also in how Champa and I were trying to redefine ourselves after we left the conventional workplace. When we returned home from Moldova, I thought a book would enable me to share all of this with a wider audience.

FoN: Who is the book intended for, and what do you hope your audience will gain from reading it?

DJ: An obvious audience is the Peace Corps community and people interested in Nepal or Moldova, as well as readers who enjoy travel stories. Then there are the millions of Americans who are rethinking what it means to be retired and looking to make the most of what could be several decades of active life.

There are a lot of "how to" books available to help older readers deal with finances, health care and other practical questions, but



David in Ilam classroom as PCV in 1978.

sometimes people respond best to personal stories. I hope ours will inspire them to be decisive about their own lives, regardless of whether they pursue the Peace Corps or something else.

FoN: Many authors say the process of writing includes personal learning and important realizations. Did you experience any of this?

DJ: Like so many people who have served in in the Peace Corps, Champa and I came home from Moldova with new appreciation for our lives as Americans. We knew we'd received more than we gave.

We also strengthened our ties to the Peace Corps, which were already substantial. After all, Champa was taught by several PCVs when she was growing up in Ilam. The two of us met while I was a Volunteer there. Now we had this unforgettable opportunity to serve together in Moldova. Without the vision of President Kennedy, none of this would have happened. Our children and grandchildren would't exist.

FoN: I'm sure there were challenges too!

DJ: I wrote more than two hundred posts for my blog, which served as my starting point for the book. Simultaneously, I knew a book wouldn't be compelling if it was just a mashup of dispatches. It needed to have its own narrative arc as a story. I wanted readers to keep turning the pages to see what happens next. With this in mind, I wrote

EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK

PP 208-210:

"The most common question my American friends asked me after I moved to Moldova was whether I found being a Peace Corps Volunteer different from when I served in Nepal four decades earlier.

My short answer was "yes, of course," but the experience still felt familiar. As before, I'd left my family and country to serve people in another country, learning their language and sharing their daily lives. After I'd been in Moldova for a while, though, several differences did stand out to me.

For starters, I was much more connected to the outside world than I was the first time. I had a smartphone, a laptop, and a Kindle, all linked to Wi-Fi. I regularly talked to my family. I could follow the U.S. election campaign and other news. I interacted online with my Moldovan partners and Peace Corps colleagues. In contrast, when I served in Nepal, I was cut off:

....

"I was also serving in a different country this second time around. Moldova is in Eastern Europe, with an agricultural economy best known for its wine. Its population is almost entirely white and Orthodox Christian. Nepal is in the Himalayas and mainly Hindu, but mixed with Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims. Both countries have delicious food and fascinating customs, but they are as different as can be, except for both being landlocked." ...

"Most importantly, I had changed, too. When I joined the Peace Corps in Nepal, I was two years out of college, single, and eager to see the world. Now I was a father and grandfather and serving with my wife, whom I met in Nepal. I was much older and hopefully a bit wiser. In any case, I was in a different place in my life and not just geographically."

several drafts, which I shared with writer friends who gave me feedback.

Once I finally completed the manuscript, I thought the hard part was behind

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ic. Well, that was wrong. As we recently approached the publication date, the coronavirus started spreading, which ruled out a launch party and bookstore readings. Fortunately, there as still been a lot of interest from reporters, podcasters and others.

FoN: And now, a very important question. How can someone get a copy of *Not Exactly Retired*?

DJ: The book is available as both a paperback and electronically. You can buy it on Amazon, through indie bookstores and elsewhere. There are ordering details and other information on the book website, notexactlyretiredbook.com.

FoN: You must have more adventures in your future! Are you planning to write more?

DJ: Champa and I have enjoyed spending time with our family and friends since we retired from Moldova, but we're not ready to settle down. We hope to travel a lot more and I look forward to writing on my blog and elsewhere. I've also gotten very involved with several



Champa teaching students in Moldova in 2018. (Photo by David Jarmul)

volunteer projects, including one that works with Moldova. As always, the two of us remain closely connected to Nepal through our family there. We love Moldova, too, but Nepal is deep in our hearts.

(Editor's Note: You can read and subscribe to David Jarmul's blog by going to its home page, www.notexactlyretired.com subscribe! And you can listen to a podcast with him on [Second Act Stories](http://SecondActStories.com).)