

G25: FIVE FOR FIGHTING

By Jessica Geraci

Stop. Do not jump ship. Do not pass go. Do not collect 200 dollars.

Seriously, stay where you are. If you're thinking about leaving, don't. If you know someone who's thinking about leaving, tell everyone so we can call-bomb them. And if you've experienced the G24 parade of clever clichés such as “you guys are dropping like flies,” and their constant bragging about their almost perfect attendance rate, ignore it.

Despite the fact that some people in our group consider this whole thing to be something like a vacation, this experience was hard for me from day one. No electricity, no running water, no friends, no family, teach-

much he loved us and got himself kicked out. It was a blow. Zach was our class clown. We needed him to raise morale, to lighten the mood, to dispel any brooding seriousness that captured us on our weakest days. He was the guy you wanted to punch and laugh at simultaneously. G24 has Calvin for that, we had Zach.

Eating Habits

Only a few weeks in, and the count fell to 27. This time we lost Kat. She was my neighbor in Tanoliu. Our families would tell us constant news flashes about each others whereabouts and eating habits like the worst kind of Facebook status updates. She was always good for a heart-to-heart.

they were. When Ambassador North came in to town for a visit, Santo Volunteers endured four days of random outbursts like: “Ambassador North, is your name North because you come from the North?” Which is only funny in Daryl's voice.

Okay. That was it right? We couldn't possibly lose anyone else. Four is more than enough. But then suddenly Abby was on a flight home. And our group lost its volume. Once during a training week in Vila, I was eating lunch with a bunch of G25ers and Abby asked me, loudly, across the table, in front of everyone, if I was still a virgin. That's Abby: honest, open, and funny as hell. My polar opposite in many ways, but my good friend.

30 MINUS 5 = 25

ing, integrating, and learning a new language. For me, this was and is something of a war. And my fellow Volunteers are my fellow soldiers.

Though I was too shy to make friends with everyone at first, I did learn to trust G25 as a solid group of really good people. In the first week they put together that ridiculous bonfire thing where we all had to talk about our feelings and stuff (I didn't participate in the feeling sharing part but still). And the English and IT Volunteers fought to get together with our Malafou Health friends even when it wasn't scheduled. We spent those first two months together building a support network. I left for Santo with four Volunteers, but I felt like I had 29 behind me.

Well, 28. Only I didn't know it at the time. We were about to lose Zach. He sang some song about how

Some of us discussed our fear of a possible domino effect. Someone had decided to go home, what if that lifted pressure and allowed others to do the same? But none of us actually did anything about it. You realized that leaving was going to happen and you tried to brace yourself against that blow; the sting you felt when each person announced their departure.

And then one day friends number 26 and 25 were gone. No warnings, no advanced notice. I had spent hours with Noni at nakamals drinking a Johnny Arrow and talking about how disgusting kava is while the boys downed shells of it. She always had something clever and funny to say, and something equally as sweet and kind if you needed a word of support. Daryl on the other hand, was loud with his advice and ninety percent of his jokes were only funny because of how ridiculous

Big Hearts

Everyone in G25 is worth knowing, everyone brought their own flavor to the group. Despite our differences, we were all there for each other from the very beginning. But as we've slowly started to lose more and more people, I've begun to feel like we're slipping further and further into this mode of independence. This mode of being in it alone and every man for himself. But this is war, guys. And I would pull any one of you out of the line of fire, any day of the week. You showed me that first week that we were here that you were all capable of caring quite a lot, that you all had big hearts. And you proved that again and again in those first two months that I came to know all of you, even when it didn't seem like I was paying attention.

I don't know all the reasons the people that went home decided to

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go home, but I do know that no one here wanted that. That we all miss Zach's inappropriate sense of humor, Kat's heart-to-hearts, Noni's sweet smiles, Daryl's ridiculous jokes, and Abby's unfaltering honesty. If we could reverse this, if we could have pulled them out of the line of fire, would we have? Of course. In this war, in my version of this war at least, I need every one of you, even if I'm not always calling you, even if we're not always talking, I've strung you guys to me, like lifelines. And every time one of them breaks, I lose just a little bit more of my willpower, of my fight. So don't leave. We're in this together, we always have been. Since the day you guys forced me to sit through those ridiculous bonfires. Since the day we stepped onto that plane together.

So soldiers, gather that courage.
Reach out when you need it. Roll
your eyes when G24 rolls out some
overused cliché. And stay right
where you are. Don't even think
about passing go. Because really,
that 200 dollars isn't even worth it.

G25's Jessica Geraci is an English literacy Volunteer at Narango School, Santo. She has no intention of leaving.