My first and last (at least for a while) 24 Hours in the Old Pueblo events both began on Valentine’s Day. It’s a really romantic sentiment...if you’re into dirt and port-o-potties, but otherwise I’d chalk it up to coincidence.

The first time I went to this event in February 2009 I “raced” as a high school junior. I’d only actually ridden a mountain bike approximately three (3) times prior to that. And this February 2015, as a recent college grad, I had a large hand in organizing El Grupo’s camp since the team was split into two events that same weekend. And, after all, I had helped out at three other years’ events.

I’d say I was rather under prepared both of those times! And yet, they both have made me who I am and helped me get to where I am going – which is off to Indonesia for the Peace Corps in only a few days!

Even though I’d been a rider on El Grupo only a year and a half before I graduated high school and went on to the UofA, I found that I wanted to stay involved. I hadn’t been really drawn into any of the sports I’d done before El Grupo, and once I’d found that easy connection with the team and the joy in just riding around, I wanted to keep it.

Throughout college, with a few breaks here and there to actually study and get a degree, I found opportunities to volunteer and keep in touch with El Grupo. Being part of the crew at “the 24” became one of my favorite ways to do so. It’s an exciting, hectic and rowdy event that tests patience and sanity, but I love it. I loved learning how to help with the relay teams at camp and the experience I’ve gained there is really going to come in handy.

I’m leaving to Indonesia on March 16, 2015 for 27 months of Peace Corps service as an English teacher. The take away from up there is that the first and last times I’ve been at the 24HOP I’ve done things I didn’t know much about and didn’t have a lot of experience in, but I still made it out okay and had a lot of fun.

This whole Peace Corps experience is probably going to be extremely similar; a lot of bumbling around trying to figure out what I’m supposed to be doing but ultimately I’ll have a great time and a lot more know-how at the end (maybe I’ll even help people!). It was stressful and intimidating to try and learn how to ride a mountain bike on the fly and to coordinate a lot of the 24HOP camp details, but in the process of doing those things I learned a tremendous amount. I also learned just how much help there is if you only think to ask or look for it.
Keeping those lessons in mind, I feel better about life in a foreign country knowing that I've challenged myself to operate outside my comfort zone. I can also be confident in my ability to take in new information and incorporate it quickly into what I'm already doing, since winging it at camp has made me pretty good at that.

One other pertinent detail of my experiences with the 24HOP is that in the 6 years between the first one and the last one, I went from being a rider to managing riders. The difference in perspective is pretty analogous to having been a student for many years then becoming a teacher in Indonesia. Having been on one end of a relationship will, I hope, help me do well at being on the other. I realized that this year I made a lot of decisions that affected the riders – much like the way they would have affected me 6 years ago. Knowing that I successfully made that step once gives me some confidence in thinking I can do it again. Thanks, El Grupo!

Finally, at the very least, participating in the 24HOP with El Grupo makes you pretty good at running on not much sleep or with many resources, so I can say I've got practice at that. Tally ho! I'll see y'all in 2017!