

# Running a Roadblock by Catherine Skapura

**I'm Catherine Liddell Skapura. I was in Group 15, working in Ogwashi-Uku at St. Rose's College. There were only two forms when I arrived. No water or electricity. The Principal was Kay O'Callahan, an old Irish Catholic woman. After I'd been there less than a year, she went back to Ireland during a break. She was never heard from again.**

When the new term started, the girls began arriving. I went to Benin to see the Catholic Bishop there. He was even older than the principal. I told him the principal had disappeared and school was starting. He said, "I think there's a Peace Corps girl there. I said, "I'm the Peace Corps girl." "What should I do about the students arriving at the school?" He gave me a basketfull of money and told me to go run the school. Which I did until the Biafran War.

I inherited the principal's VW, bought supplies, hired seamstresses and cooks, hired two extra teachers because now we had 3 forms.

On one trip back from Onitsha with school supplies, the federal soldiers had put up a road-block on the main road between Asaba and Ogwashi. Cars and trucks were backed up about a quarter of a mile. Nothing was moving. People were out of their cars standing around talking. Sweltering heat. I'd been shopping half the day in Onitsha and was covered in sweat and dust. The soldiers were just standing around.

So I pulled out of line and drove straight through, making the soldiers jump out of the way. I had driven several miles when two Nigerian men waved, asking for a ride. I picked them up and we were driving along chatting, when all of a sudden from the back seat, wild excitement and jabbering. They pounded on the back of my seat, saying, "Stop! Stop!" I looked in my rear-view mirror, and saw the soldiers in a car with guns out the window aiming for us.

I pulled over and stopped. The soldiers caught up with us, got out and came to my car. The Nigerians piled out of the car on their knees on the ground in front of the soldiers, explaining that I had come to help their country. And please don't shoot us.

The soldiers told the two men to take off. They told me to turn around and drive back to the road block, which I did.

Back at the road block, everyone had gathered 'round to see what the excitement was. I got out of my car. The soldiers were trying to figure out what to do. Suddenly I just burst out crying. This was the funniest thing the Nigerians had ever seen in their lives. Gales of laughter. Some people were actually on the ground holding their stomachs they were laughing so hard. I stopped crying; the Nigerians stopped laughing.

There was a community of Germans in Asaba building a textile mill. The Germans were no-nonsense people. They did not have the Peace Corps attitude. The soldiers couldn't tell the difference between Americans and Germans. So one of them said to me, "Now don't go tell your Mann and cause a lot of trouble. Just write down why you ran the road-block and then it'll be okay." So I wrote down that I

just got too hot and it affected my thinking. Then I drove on to Asaba where Bob was, stopped for a shower and comfort, then drove back to Ogwashi.