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# Amigos de Honduras

Vol. XXIII, No. 3

August 2016

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**SECRETARY/TREASURER'S REPORT** Joan M. Larimore (San Francisco del Valle, 1986-88)  
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Your Amigos bank account continues to hover around a healthy \$2000.00 and with your donations we should be able to afford a couple of grants. Please check your due date on your newsletter label or respond to Brant's email notification if you receive pdf newsletter. I am still trying to straighten our due dates for some of you. If you discover that your due date is incorrect, please let me know. Remember that basic membership for National Peace Corps Association is free but Amigos de Honduras annual dues are only \$15.

Do you realize that Amigos de Honduras is now 26 years old? And some of you have been with us from the beginning! There have been many changes in our country of service but Amigos de Honduras is a great example of "Good things continue."

## 2016 DONORS TO THE GRANT FUND

Steve Dylinski, Marie Beougher, Sigrid Brooks, Martha Goldstein, Frank Schwarz, Brenda Crumpacker, Ali Fujino, Maria Robinson,

Lisa Kisling Thompson, Nick Anderson, Jenifer McCurry, Rodia Flores-Joslyn, Edward Fischer, Dale Schmitz, Ali Fujino, Deborah Moskovitz, Tricia Hammes, Lou (Marie) Collard, Carol Spangler

Many thanks to those of you who have donated to the Amigos de Honduras Grant Fund. Your Grants Committee (Loren Hintz, Judith Whitney-Terry, Suzanne Mills and myself) are looking at two potential grants. Many thanks to Suzanne for stepping up to a request for an outline of how to present a grant to Amigos. She is doing this in both Spanish and English. This should make requesting Grant Funds easier for our Honduran amigos. This will be published once completed. For now continue to email your requests to Joan at [amigosdehondurasjml@gmail.com](mailto:amigosdehondurasjml@gmail.com)

## EDITOR'S CORNER

**Loren Hintz (Olanchito, 1980-82)**  
[ldhintz@bellsouth.net](mailto:ldhintz@bellsouth.net)

This issue contains more articles from folks who attended the Feb. 2016 reunion. There are several reports about projects that received Amigos de Honduras grants. **We need volunteers to manage our web presence on the NPCA site.** Please contact me if interested. Check out the NPCA website <http://www.peacecorpsconnect.org>

[/companies](#) and click on Amigos de Honduras. There are rumors of some PC Honduras events in Washington DC during the **Peace Corps Beyond Conference Sept. 22-25, 2016**. See the above website for details. Phyllis Shelton at [phyllisshelton@cs.com](mailto:phyllisshelton@cs.com) will be attending the DC conference and is also planning the next PC Honduras reunion in Portland, Oregon. Terri Salus at [terrisalus@gmail.com](mailto:terrisalus@gmail.com) may know of potential meeting places at DC restaurants. Quick's May article of the 1969 war generated a number of email memories of those times that will be shared in the November. Please keep sending articles to me. If it doesn't appear in the next newsletter I may have lost it in my 40,000 old emails. Please send it to me again!



## LA ORDEN DE SALVAVIDA

Since 2008 at PC Honduras reunions and NPCA events, Amigos de Honduras has honored RPCVs and friends with **La Orden de Salva Vida**. Recipients are recognized and honored for their particular accomplishments and service in

support of Peace Corps/Honduras, America-Honduran relations and Amigos de Honduras. On Feb. 14, 2016 in New Orleans, LA Ambassador. Frank Almaguer presented the following recipients with certificates and Mardi Gras beads with the Honduran colors and flags. Certificates were signed by Alan Waugh, Maggie McQuaid and Frank Almaguer.

#### Organizers of the New Orleans Reunion

**Desiree Loeb-Guth, Piero Caserta** In appreciation for exemplary creativity, masterful logistical arrangements, and amazing calmness while not spilling a single drop of cerveza in organizing and implementing the 2016 Reunion of Los Voluntarios del Cuerpo de Paz de Honduras

#### Honduras Mission to the US

**Roberto A. Martinez**, Consul of the Republic of Honduras to the United States of America In appreciation for his dedicated service to both the Republic of Honduras and the United States of America and his friendship towards the more than 5,750 Voluntarios de Cuerpo de Paz who served in Honduras between 1962 and 2012

#### National Peace Corps Association (NPCA)

**Glenn Blumhorst**, President, National Peace Corps Association In appreciation for his innovative and tireless work on behalf of all Peace Corps Volunteers, returned, present, and future.



#### Amigos de Honduras Editor

**Loren Hintz** In appreciation for his dedicated work as editor of *Amigos*, the Amigos de Honduras newsletter, and for keeping the Honduras RPCV community informed and connected

Group 1 (1962-1964)

**Brenda August, Evangeline H. Tierney, Kent Myrick** In appreciation for being the first, who led the way for more than 5,750 Voluntarios de Cuerpo de Paz.

Group 8 (1967-1969)

**Jack Riehl, Piero Caserta** In appreciation for being among the earliest, in whose footsteps followed several thousand Voluntarios de Cuerpo de Paz Honduras.

Also recognized were previous inductees in attendance: **Frank & Antoinette Almaguer, Jim Barborak Fred Corvi, Brant Miller, Maggie McQuaid, Terri Salus**. Not present, but contributed greatly to 2016: **Jon Lind, Leslie Hughes, Steve Phelan, Joan Larimore, and Alan Waugh**

### **CANDELARIA LIBRARY PROJECT (PART 2) Becky Williams (Sabanagrande, 2009-11)**

In February of 2009 I left for the Peace Corps to serve in the Water and Sanitation program in Honduras. As most Peace Corps volunteers, I share the story of quickly learning that I did not know very much about the world and that my desire to “make a difference” may have been a bit misguided. My experiences in Peace Corps, particularly as a woman in a very machisto country, changed my worldview and put me on the path to attending the University of Florida as an Interdisciplinary Ecology PhD student.

Interdisciplinary Ecology sounds rather academic but in reality, what I

study is gender and international development within the context of natural resources management. Peace Corps Honduras put me on a path that changed my life, and I was grateful for the wonderful (and difficult) experiences I had there. Leaving Honduras in 2011 was bittersweet, and I honestly was not sure when or if I would be able to return.

Imagine my surprise, a few years later, when my graduate advisor called me into her office with the news that she found me funding to research a development project in Honduras! So, in the summer of 2014 I boarded a plane and found myself back in my home away from home, now as a researcher. I spent the summer working in the aldeas around La Esperanza and came home flush with ideas for my dissertation. I returned in the summer of 2015 to finish my research in four communities near La Esperanza, one of which was Candelaria, Togopala. During my first couple of weeks researching in Candelaria I got to know the director of the school, Eva Vasquez, and many of the teachers while riding the bus with them every morning and afternoon. One day, “Profa Eva” asked if she could speak with me. She explained that the school was in dire need of a library. She shared that the school had no books other than the textbooks and the community is so poor that there are not even newspapers in the homes of the students. As a matter of fact, after visiting many homes I learned that most homes used previous year’s school notebooks for toilet paper because they could not afford anything else - not that I terribly minded using fractions for toilet paper.

Profra Eva asked if I knew of anybody who may be able to donate some books to the school. In the spirit of honesty, I will tell you that I hesitated. As an RPCV and development researcher, I have had countless people approach asking for aid and my abilities as a graduate student are somewhat limited – particularly financially. I told her that I would ask around for NGOs that may be able to help. That night, I tossed and turned and could not get a wink of sleep thinking about Candelaria. There I was, a graduate student who was researching (and in some communities living) in their homes in order to advance my own education and I was hesitant to help build a library! I decided that I had to do something, so I asked Profra Eva what her needs were. She spoke with her teachers (of which there were 11), made a list, and gave me a modest estimate of \$1,200 to meet their minimum needs. This seemed very reasonable to me, so I told her that I would try a GoFundMe fundraising website and see what I could do – but no promises. Especially since, I was only back in the country for a few months.

To raise the funds I asked the teachers for a few letters from students as to why the school needed a library. I received well over 100 letters from students. So, I read through all of them, chose the best, took photos of the students with their letters, and made a video with quotes from the letters and the photos. I also wrote up all of the interesting facts about the school. The school in Candelaria, named the Luis Bogran Center for Basic Education, is unique in that it boasts first through ninth grades. The secondary students come from six different communities and the students walk up to two hours to attend secondary school. There are over 300 students in the school and

unlike much of Honduras, there is a fairly even split of girls and boys. The classrooms are crowded with 40 or more students in each room, and true to Profra Eva's word, the school was desperate for learning materials. Excitingly, the parents of the school were very involved and the teachers really cared for their students. So, our video launched on GoFundMe, I emailed it to my social and university networks, I sent it out over Facebook, and I held my breath hoping I could at least bring them a few hundred dollars for some books.

Imagine my surprise and pleasure when I woke up the next day to a thousand dollars of donations. I was incredibly excited! Next time I looked, there was \$2000 – a staff member of GoFundMe donated from his personal money! Then my mother's church took up a donation and we were up to \$3,000. Small donations of \$5 came in and large donations of \$100 or more came in. Then I got a message from an RPCV who said, **"Hey, have you heard of Amigos de Honduras?"** She put me in touch and I wrote a proposal for a \$1,000 grant, which the board thankfully awarded us. Over the next few weeks, we would raise a total of over \$8,200. The teachers could not believe their eyes when I surprised them with the total amount, written large in RPCV style on a flipchart paper with markers. Not only could the school get their library, but also they could get everything they wanted on their wish list (which was closer to \$5000) and more!

When the teacher and I planned and made the agreement to work together, I did not anticipate I would see the finished library. The plan was that I would find funds and go with the teachers to San Pedro Sula or Tegucigalpa to

purchase the books (for transparency), help them get the books back to the school, and then I would be on my way. We went to both cities and purchased over 1,000 books of all kinds – dictionaries, thesauri, novels, books by Honduran and Latin American authors, map books, activity books, simple English books, music books, and others. We had enough funds to purchase materials to build a wall to separate the library from the classroom (Profra Eva graciously gave up her office space for the library). We bought paint, and had chairs and tables made by a carpenter in the community. We had large wood and glass cabinets made to protect the books. We bought globes, educational posters, and building blocks and puzzles for the small kids. We also bought speakers and a projector so the teachers could show movies and charge a few lempira to raise more money for the school. In two trips with a donated truck loaded to the gills, we hauled all of the materials to the school and watched the student's joy as they unloaded the trucks.

Seeing the happiness and excitement on their faces and on the teacher's faces was unbelievable. I felt that I had finally done something lasting for Honduras and could leave feeling as though I had given instead of just taking. As I said, I did not expect to see the finished library. I went one day to help with some painting for fun (and to get out of the field for a day) and they asked me to come back on Monday for a party to celebrate our success. I went to the school on Monday and had clearly misunderstood what they meant by party. They had put together a huge celebration with all 300 students and many of the parents, and had dancing, food, music, speeches, gifts, and a ribbon

cutting ceremony! The teachers, students, and parents had given up their weekend to finish the library so I could see it before I traveled back to the United States. What a joyous surprise. I was able to see the library with the students and parents who were also seeing it for the first time. The room filled with shocked and excited Lenca and the books went flying off the walls as they sat down and began to read.

I still keep in contact with the teachers and with Profa Eva. They send me occasional pictures of the kids in the library reading and working. The students get at least one hour of library time every week. They have access to the library before and after school. Now, I hear that the few students who study in La Esperanza come to the library to access the reference materials so they can do their work. The parents also use the library and read the books in literacy classes taught on Saturdays by the ninth grade students. The library, which they named the "Biblioteca Rebecca J. Williams," is a beautiful tribute to the partnership between RPCVs and their Honduran friends. It makes my heart shine to know that children are reading because of RPCVs and Amigos de Honduras.

The school still has many needs. Profa Eva has a vision of building four more classrooms so that the school can offer tenth through twelfth grades, allowing the students to get a high school technical diploma in agriculture or in health. Currently, there are 70 former and current students on a waiting list for this opportunity. So now, while finishing up my dissertation, I am thinking... how tough could it possibly be to raise money for four classrooms? And I try not to lose too much sleep while the ideas come rolling in.

## PALISAL UPDATE#2

Dale Schmitz (Yamaranguila 1967-68)

In 2014 Amigos de Honduras gave a \$1,000 donation to Tools for Opportunity that is an all-volunteer organization based in Des Moines, Iowa. We train carpenters in Honduras and El Salvador, provide them tools that they earn after one year of meeting some requirements. The donation was used to purchase tools for the carpenters, who work together in a workshop they built.

In 2015, we trained five carpenters at PALISAL Lumber Cooperative in Yamaranguila, Intibucá. We returned in March of 2016 to train another seven carpenters and donate additional tools. We interviewed the ones trained 2015 and all had completed the requirements: planted 5 trees, donated a carpentry project of 40 hours to their community, town, school, church, etc. and mentored another person in carpentry. The group had also built an addition to its workshop to accommodate more carpenters.



Next March 2017 we plan to provide them with a larger planer and additional tools; additional carpenters will also be trained. We are working with them to build a solar kiln with the assistance of the University of Forestry Sciences in Siguatepeque. Selling cured wood

will be more profitable for the cooperative, and also provide better wood for the carpenters to build even finer carpentry products.

Tools for Opportunity also provided training in March to 15 young carpenters at Colosuca in Gracias, Lempira. Next March we will begin using in-country co trainers and thereafter plan to utilize only in-country trainers. This year some local high school students translated for our carpenters from the U.S. who do not speak Spanish.

So you can see that the donation from Amigos de Honduras is providing solid careers for new carpenters and increasing their incomes resulting in better lives for their families. We always need and welcome contributions. See us at [www.toolsforopportunity.org](http://www.toolsforopportunity.org) or on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/toolsforopportunity](https://www.facebook.com/toolsforopportunity)

## HONDURAS IN THE TIME OF ZIKA Barbara E. Joe (La Esperanza, El Triunfo 2000-03)

At the end of February, I returned from my annual humanitarian and medical brigade volunteer visit to Honduras, the 12<sup>th</sup> since I left the Peace Corps there 12 years ago. Our International Health Services brigade ([ihsmn.org](http://ihsmn.org)) gave out medications, medical advice, and medical and dental treatment to hundreds of patients in villages near Yamaranguila and La Esperanza in Intibucá province. At Operation Smile in the San Felipe public hospital in Teguc, 136 lip/palate surgeries were performed during a

busy week, 2 surgeries at a time in each of 3 operating rooms.

Aware of the high murder and crime rate in Honduras, my children and friends have always expressed concern about my travels there. However, tiny mosquitoes are now proving to be the greatest risk. Since my previous visit in Feb. 2015, Hondurans have been introduced to chikingunya, yet another mosquito-borne illness to accompany malaria and dengue's 4 variations, with chikingunya sufferers reporting lingering joint aches after the acute illness has passed. However, chikingunya is not the last or least of new mosquito-borne scourges. The most feared now is Zika, first detected 6 months ago in Honduras, not long enough yet to know if unborn babies have been affected, but long enough to bring paralysis and even death from Guillian-Barre. In early February 2016, local papers reported there were more than 14,000 confirmed cases of Zika in Honduras and by month's end, the total was 27,000. Most transmission occurs via mosquitoes, though there have also been cases of sexual transmission.



Author with pals at International Health Service medical brigade, Semane, Honduras

In health centers and hospitals—and at medical brigades where I volunteer annually as an interpreter and helper—I met many anxious pregnant women. Most health centers lack ultrasound to determine how a fetus is developing.

Meanwhile, the government has undertaken a massive fumigation effort, while international agencies have been passing out bed nets and repellent. There is even talk of reviving the use of DDT. Mosquitoes do not live in high-altitude La Esperanza, one of the areas where I volunteer, but cases were arriving there from lower elevations. Although I wore long sleeves and slacks while traveling even in the scorching south and socks with my sandals, I did get a mosquito bite on one hand while in Tegucigalpa, but no illness followed.

Needless-to-say, with all its other problems, Honduras does not need Zika. Water pilas have a big potential for mosquito breeding and efforts are being made to make them less hospitable while maintaining the quality of water for daily use. **(Ed. Note: a July article in Science predicts current epidemic will last 18 more months.)** So now, in addition to gangs and crime, Zika is another risk in Honduras, meaning that the Peace Corps is not likely to return there any time soon. Neighboring El Salvador has now also suspended the Corps, a real loss in such needy countries. Hondurans ask me when Peace Corps will return there. I have to admit, not any time soon, but I do hope to live to see the day. **For more photos visit <http://honduraspeacecorps.blogspot.com>**  
**Ed Note: Barbara is also author of *Triumph & Hope: Golden Years with the Peace Corps in Honduras***



## RPCV DISCOVERED WORKING IN HONDURAS **Maria Robinson (Siguatepeque, 1963- 65.)**

Over the last year, working with a developing coffee co-op in La Union, Lempira, I had heard enthusiastic stories of “The gringa”, a former Peace corps Volunteer, who was traveling all through Copan and Lempira buying coffee—and, unlike the “coyotes” who came to town to buy in bulk, was paying fair prices. So it was with great pleasure that our Honduran rep Karen Spring and I were able to have a leisurely dinner in Santa Rosa de Copan with **Rebecca Stygar**, who represents San Francisco Bay Coffee Company in Honduras. She began working with coffee co-ops as a **PCV in Honduras in 2006**, and after a stint working with coffee co-ops in Rwanda she was recruited back to Honduras to source coffee for the Bay Area Company.

“Working with coffee farmers to improve the quality of their harvests and the sustainability of their farms is a blessing”, says Rebecca. “Since 2006, I have had the privilege to be part of the blossoming of the specialty coffee sector in Honduras. With each passing year more and more coffee farmers produce a quality cup, and receive higher pay for their efforts. Honduras in particular has shown itself to be a hugely important coffee origin, producing the most coffee in Central America and showcasing some of the very best micro lots in the world.” Watching “My co-op”

in La Union grow and prosper, I know first-hand the amazing impact Rebecca has had on Honduran coffee farmers. Last week, my contacts told me they had sold a container full of coffee- at a price just about double what they received from the “coyotes” last year. Now that’s real progress!

## REMEMBERING

### HONDURAS I (1962-64)

**Brenda August (San Pedro Sula) and Evangeline Harris Tierney (Tela)**

In order to understand what motivated most of us to join the Peace Corps in the early 60s, one must be aware of the climate of the country at that time. We had just elected a new president with a new message. John F. Kennedy was young (25 years younger than his predecessor), vibrant, and charismatic. There was something about him and his message of patriotism and service to others that promised change.

In his inaugural speech of January 20, 1961, two statements in particular ignited a spark in the minds and hearts of this country’s youth. He challenged us to “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country” and then he made a proclamation and commitment to the world that there would be a call to action led by a new group...“Let the word go forth from this day forward to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans”. It was a call to service...two months later the Peace Corps was established. He meant several things by those statements, but it caught the

ears of our youth and others. We were motivated, inspired, and filled with enthusiasm and idealism.

Evangeline and I, two African Americans, grew up in segregated New Orleans, Louisiana. At 21 years of age we began Peace Corps training, just 14 days after graduating from Xavier University of Louisiana. That year was especially turbulent, yet expectant for us. The country was in the middle of the most defining social movement in the 60s: the civil rights movement. Jim Crow was a familiar character in our lives. We lived the injustice, degradation, and humiliation of segregation and second class citizenship. Daily television brought images of the attacker dogs, water hoses, explosions of the protesters’ buses; and “sit-ins” at lunch counters and public establishments throughout the south (including New Orleans and Baton Rouge). Yet, for a variety of reasons, we chose to serve on foreign soil for people about whom we knew nothing, rather than at home for the rights of our very own families. This is a decision we have had to justify for our friends, family and colleagues many times since.

The Honduran population in 1962 was approximately 2.1 million. Honduras had the lowest literacy rate and the highest infant mortality rate in all of Latin America. Life expectancy at birth was 48 years. The social work profession and School of Social Work was just 4 years old when the Peace Corps arrived. Faced with tremendous social, health, economic, and educational challenges, the Honduran government requested Peace Corps public health nurses and social workers.

**Ranging in age from 21 to 65 years old, Honduras I was comprised of 26 volunteers, 23 were female and 3 male.** We served in a number of community development and health projects and worked for La Junta Nacional de Bienestar Social and Centros de Salud. I served as a social case worker in the San Pedro Sula Junta Nacional de Bienestar Social Office; taught classes at the Centro Penal; organized a community development project in Barrio La Navidad; and taught English to interns at the San Pedro Hospital. The Honduras I Director was Tom Walz who held a Masters in Social Work (minor in Public Health) degree from St. Louis University and was a PhD candidate in Social Work from the University of Minnesota. In addition to his daily administrative duties of Honduras I, Walz worked closely with the creator/director of the Honduras School of Social Work and assisted her to move the school from its infancy stage to the next level.

During the early Peace Corps years, universities were awarded contracts to train Peace Corps groups. Honduras I was trained at St. Louis University, a Catholic Jesuit run university with extensive experience and numerous missions in Latin America. We could not have asked for a more comprehensive and thorough training program. Even though 54 years have passed, I am still in awe of and am grateful for the level and quality of that experience. Given that this was the first Peace Corps group, it seems as though the training was designed to prepare us for almost any possible condition, situation, or challenge we might encounter abroad. Overall, training was comprised of three major

components: 3 months academic at the university; 1 month physical in Puerto Rico; and 2-3 weeks in Tegucigalpa.

Academic training was intense. Of course Spanish language training was high priority and folded into everything we did throughout the day. From the first day of training, regardless of minimal (or no) exposure to Spanish, we were expected to speak it. The first language laboratory class started early in the morning and ended with a Spanish language activity in the late evening. Throughout the day when other classes were not in session, even on field trips, we were accompanied by our Spanish instructors and expected to speak Spanish. University cafeteria workers were given the Spanish translation for the day's food menu items in advance. In order to eat, we had to request our food in language. I slept with cue cards in the bed and conjugated irregular verbs in my dreams. Every day was filled with classes in Honduran history/culture/customs; public health and social service issues/conditions; and tropical diseases. We even learned to deliver babies. Several Hondurans came to St. Louis to visit and talk with us about the country. Led by the Physical Trainer for the St. Louis Cardinals, physical education workouts were held every day to strengthen our bodies for the experience waiting ahead in Puerto Rico. We were trained to discuss/debate the issues of the times including the Bay of Pigs Invasion, Civil Rights Movement/Segregation, Cold War, Communism. "Meet the Press" was the premier TV program that

focused on the country's political issues. Their moderators came to our sessions and discussed current domestic and Latin American "hot topics". Administrators from universities and consultants from the Kennedy administration were also occasional visitors and advisors.

Overriding all of this academic training was the constant presence and oversight of psychologist, psychiatrist, and PC training staff. Several trainees were quietly "deselected" throughout the months. Then on to Puerto Rico.

**Evangeline** continues: We landed in beautiful San Juan, Puerto Rico and were immediately transported to a remote mountainous campsite, Camp Crozier, far removed from civilization except for the occasional "campesino" family. This rustic camp featured large military style tents, one for women and one for men. Each was furnished with rows of single beds which were personalized only by the addition of our own foot lockers. Another large tent served as the mess hall featuring metal divided plates and garbage cans for washing dishes and behind which was located the cold outdoor showers. The center of the camp was taken up by a large swimming pool and an enormous obstacle course.

**Camp Crozier** was the second phase of our preparation for Peace Corps; one month of intense physical training which was grounded in the Kennedy family's belief in and focus on physical fitness. It was based on the Outward Bound model which is designed to increase endurance and physical strength, build confidence in unusual situations as well as to push

trainees to personal psychological limits as part of the overall and ongoing evaluation process.

Immediately we began daily swimming survival training, running, hiking and obstacle courses. These soon progressed to "drown proofing" a timed underwater survival technique, ocean distance swimming, rock climbing and repelling, all day hikes followed by an overnight solo jungle stay and more. The challenges of each day increased and stress levels grew higher and higher as each individual faced personal limitations absent their usual and familiar supports.

This strenuous part of volunteer training was eliminated in later years but, let me say on a personal note, some of these experiences have had lifelong impact. Let me share a few stories. I was assigned as a social worker/community organizer in Tela/San Juan along with two other volunteers (Kent Myrick and Mary Lou Jackson). After the intense first month on the job we decided to give ourselves a day of fun at the beautiful San Juan Beach. While enjoying a wonderful extended swim I began to notice we were much further out from the beach than felt comfortable to me so I began to swim back in closer to shore. After several minutes it became clear that my efforts were not succeeding and that in fact I was moving further out to sea. I hadn't said anything to either Kent or Mary Lou as I thought I was the only one having trouble since I was the least strong swimmer of the three. In this moment, what had felt like a mild concern became a major issue when I looked into Kent's and Mary Lou's faces and saw real fear as it dawned on us that we were caught

in a rip tide and the undertow was pulling us further out despite our struggles. Panic was threatening to overtake us. In that instant, I remembered the “What to do if you are caught in a rip tide” lesson that was a small part of the water survival training. We stayed together and rather than struggle to swim toward the shore we began to swim sideways, stopping periodically to “drown proof”, allowing our bodies to rest and maintain an orientation to the shore. Eventually, we exited the pull of the undertow and were able to turn and swim back to the beach. The three people with wobbly legs who climbed onto the shore were exhausted and terrified, yet we felt strangely stronger as we climbed onto the beach. We were PCVs, we had survived and we truly felt prepared for anything that was to come.

Since the 60s’ were such a turbulent time regarding the fight for civil rights, Brenda and I are often asked how the issue of race impacted our time in Honduras. The average Honduran was only vaguely aware of the turbulence of the civil rights movement taking place in the States in the early 60s’. Our counter-parts and Indio client communities mostly greeted Brenda and I, the only African Americans in our group, with shy curiosity but were quickly welcoming and gracious after a few friendly initiatives from us. Sadly, we had most issues with other Americans and with upper class Hondurans who had either been educated in the United States or who based on their social status had been “trained” to be racist. The following are two very different examples of challenges I faced as a black volunteer.

Within the first month of our arrival in Tela, other Americans in town, all of whom lived across the bridge in New Tela, heard about our arrival and that one of the volunteers was black. Many of the people living there were employees of the United Fruit Co., one of the largest banana growers and exporters in Central America at that time. It was also true that many of those employees were from southern parts of the United States and unlike the average Honduran were very aware of the civil unrest and demand for change going on back home. The new volunteers were initially invited to a welcome lunch at the company country club but that invite was quickly rescinded after it was realized that I, a black person, would be coming. I was hurt and angry but my colleague Kent Myrick was outraged. He suggested we stage a kind of “sit in” as was taking place all over the southern US. Together we entered the country club and ate lunch as person after person gave us angry stares and side glances before walking out of the building.

A vastly different reaction to me as a black person came from some of the members of the Garifuna community with whom I was assigned to work. Since this is a community of black people, this assignment seemed a logical fit though many people in San Juan had never seen a black American before. I was to work in a community development role which basically meant there was no existing structure, project or formal organization into which I could enter, but rather my job was to find ways to enter the community with the goal of creating a structure/organization that could

begin to assess needs and develop goals for the community. After more than a month of daily drives into San Juan introducing myself, talking with people and beginning to learn who the natural leaders were, it became clear to me I was meeting some resistance to really being accepted into the community. It seemed the only thing I was able to do was organize games with the children, while the adults were pleasant but non-committal towards me. Finally one young woman told me the older women of the community, who turned out to be the informal community gate-keepers, were unsure about me. It became clear that while people were interested in what I talked about, no one would commit to anything until their approval was secured. I began to seek them out and learned they did not believe I was really American because the only Americans they had ever seen were blond and blue eyed. Additionally a rumor had spread that I might be a spy of some kind...a white person in black face who was there to find ways to take their land. My shock was palpable. I assured them I was in fact an American and that there were many others in America who looked like me. Finally one old lady took my hand, led me inside one of the small *manaca* roofed houses and began to signal me to remove my clothes. (For sure Peace Corp training had not prepared me for this). Only after I was naked and she was completely satisfied that I was black all over and in fact my body looked like theirs was the word passed around that I was acceptable. The gate was open!

In those early days, Peace Corps was a small agency of the Government. There were few layers of bureaucracy



between the **Director Sargent Shriver** and the volunteers in the field. Everyone was doing everything for the first time. Top leaders, in country as well as those in Washington, and volunteers could have direct communication. In the summer of 1963, Sargent Shriver visited Honduran volunteers and I learned my village, San Juan de Tela, would be among the stops he would make. This was a big deal for us the volunteers but also for our Honduran counterparts and the people of the Village. "El cuñado del Presidente Kennedy was coming to our village!" We prepared for days; I obsessed about how to keep sea food salad cold so he wouldn't get food poisoning, villagers planned a program with dancing and flowery speeches. We met Shriver after he landed on the field that served as the Tela airport. After warm greetings and much picture taking it was decided I would drive him out to my village.

Before his arrival we heard Shriver wanted to know what would make our work easier/better. I drove a little turquoise Peace Corps jeep from Tela to my village site each day. The motor was good but it had absolutely no suspension, hence was the most uncomfortable ride imaginable. (I ask that you remember I was barely 21 years old at the time.) I thought since experience was the best teacher I invited Shriver into the rear seat of the jeep and another member of his entourage into the passenger seat. We began the 6-7 kilometers drive with me admittedly driving too fast for the dirt and bumpy roads. He clearly was getting a taste of how bad it felt to ride in this uncomfortable jeep as he bumped around in the back seat. My

sense of satisfaction was abruptly interrupted by a cow suddenly crossing the road causing me to swerve the jeep into a ditch. Thankfully, we all exited the jeep with nobody bleeding or broken but all of us quite shaken. I of course was tremendously embarrassed. The men pushed as I backed the jeep on to the road and we continued, at much reduced speed, to our destination and on to a wonderful day of celebration where people of the village proudly displayed the community center building under construction as the result of our work together.

I'll never forget that day and I since learned the same was true for him. I had occasion to meet him again 4 or 5 years later at a RPCV event in Washington DC. As he was shaking hands with volunteers in a receiving line and I approached, we caught each other's eyes and he said excitedly "I know you, I know you", to which I said "We met in Honduras 1963; cow on the road". Much laughing and reminiscing ensued. I can testify to what a wonderful man Sargent Shriver was. Adventurous, engaging, curious, humble a wonderful and charismatic leader and thankfully a forgiving human being. People all over the world loved him.

Let me wrap up this piece by noting two extremely significant events that marked our time in Honduras. I think of both as sources of the deep bonding between Honduras I volunteers and the Honduran people.

**The first event was the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.** I'm sure everyone alive in

1963 remembers where they were and how they learned of the President's death. I was in Tela, preparing to return to work after the midday siesta. While it's true that most Americans could describe feelings of disbelief in addition to fear, sadness and anger on that day, those of us who were so far away from home, many of us for the first time, felt truly uprooted and disoriented about what was going on in our Country, in our home towns as well as unsure about what would happen to us, including the future of the Peace Corps. Within hours and for many days we volunteers were surrounded and supported by the Honduran people. They grieved with us, took care of us and let us know that this loss was also theirs.

The second event took place only 6 weeks later. The 1963 military coup toppled the government that brought us to Honduras. Chaos reigned in the community, local law and order was in the hands of the military, people we knew lost their lives in the mayhem, many people including volunteers all over the country witnessed tragedy and had traumatic experiences. Again the people came to our aid, insuring our safety, helping us to understand what was happening and communicating to the new leadership that Cuerpo de Paz was a valued part of their communities. There was talk at Peace Corps headquarters of withdrawing volunteers from the country due to political instability, but without exception volunteers wanted to continue. **We made it clear to hosts and local communities that we wanted to stay and stand/rebuild with them.**

These were both wrenching, traumatic and negative events. The reactions and response by volunteers and Hondurans together set the framework of mutuality into which all future Peace Corps Volunteers entered.

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Glen Blumhorst (President, NPCA) presented to Brenda and Evangeline the special PC pin standing for hope, peace and friendship.

## REMEMBERING

### THOM SAUNDERS Maggie McQuaid (Pespire, 76-78)

Thom Saunders died in his home town of Tupelo, Mississippi in April, 2016. I met him when we were both Volunteers in Choluteca province, back in 1977. Thom was a Little Rock Arkansas boy, with a disarmingly rich southern drawl. He was stationed in Choluteca city, and I was out in the campo. We'd meet for Sunday lunch at one of the hotel restaurants about once a month, take in a matinee at the air-conditioned theater downtown, and then have a beer before parting. He was a good friend to have. He was level and on the square, the best qualities in an

architect. When I was frantic or frustrated, his considered thinking and calm attitude helped me out. When I had a great idea, he helped me plan and consider ways to present it. With his dry humor and love of music, he was always good company. After we both completed our service, Thom came out to interview for a job in Phoenix at a community housing project in my neighborhood. We talked about what made for a livable neighborhood and a decent living situation. A good home was more than a well-built house or modern amenities. To Thom, it also meant a caring and friendly set of neighbors, walking access to stores and offices, and reliable, inexpensive transportation. A house isn't a home until there are people living inside. Thom never forgot the part about people. He didn't take the job in Phoenix, but instead went off to plan communities in Trinidad-Tobago. When he finally came back to the States, he settled in Tupelo and formed his own architect office with an old high school friend. He married, and stayed that way, and had two kids, now grownups. He was a decent, steady man, a good husband and father, and a reliable, hard-working peer. He mattered in my early life, and I celebrate his existence and mourn the fact he left too soon. The next beer's on me, Thom.

## HONDURAS IN THE NEWS

In May four men were arrested for the March 3 murder of indigenous rights activist and Goldman Environmental Prize winner, **Berta Cáceres**. She led a decade-long fight to block construction of the Agua

Zarca Dam along the Gualcarque River by DESA. One of the arrested is Sergio Rodríguez Orellana, manager for social and environmental issues for DESA. Another is Douglas Geovanny Bustillo a former employee of the security company employed by DESA. Also arrested were a Honduran army major and a retired army captain.

July of this year the Honduran Supreme Court under a request for Habeas Corpus ordered the release of 3 prisoners accused of the Nov. 2014 murder of Miss Honduras, Maria Avarado, and her sister Sofia Trinidad. The director of Radio Globo announced in May that many NGOs such as Di-Battista Foundation drained 12.5 to 16 billion Lempiras from the Honduran government to be diverted to the ruling Partido Nacional. In July 400 pastors were transported by Honduran Air Force helicopters and thousands of liters of olive oil were dropped from the air in order to bless the land of the Catrachos. The Mexican Ambassador visited Olanchito and was asked to help return the remains of **poet Jacobo V. Carcamo** to his birthplace of Arenal, Yoro.

The Democratic Party nominee for Vice-President is **Tim Kaine**. National media is noting his Honduras connection. Several folks have commented on the catracho accent of his Spanish. He volunteered at a Jesuit vocational school in El Progreso, Yoro for nine months 1980-81. While running a vocational center that taught carpentry and welding, he also helped increase the school's enrollment by recruiting local villagers. Last year he took a delegation of Senators to Honduras and had them visit El Progreso.

The Supreme Court upheld via a 4-4 decision a lower court decision to invalidate Obama's executive order to allow undocumented parents of children born in the US or having DACA status to remain and work in the US. His earlier executive order Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) stands. However, DACA students are ineligible for financial aid, grants or loans for college.

In Durham, NC (near me) **Wilden Acosta** was arrested in Jan. 2016 while going to Riverside High School. He fled Honduras due to gang violence in 2014 to reach his parents in NC and was stopped at the Texas border. He attending one court hearing but failed to attend a second in Texas. His classmates and teachers rallied support and were able to get Rep. Butterfield to prevent his immediate deportation. The most recent news is that he has been granted an asylum hearing which may result in Wilden returning to his high school to graduate.

6.1.16 the **Peace Corps** unveiled a refreshed brand platform that underscores the agency's commitment to engaging the next generation of Americans who want to make positive, lasting change in the world. The new look embraces a digitally focused communications approach and aims to make the Peace Corps more accessible to audiences through the platforms they already use. <https://www.peacecorps.gov/>

**Remember: September 15 is Central America's Independence Day! Tell us how holidays were celebrated at your site!**

## SPIRIT EXHIBITION

### Ron Anderson (1969-71, Tegucigalpa)

This summer the *70 South Gallery* in Morristown, NJ – in partnership with the National Peace Corps Association – will host their *Spirit. Exhibition* honoring the 55<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Peace Corps. The exhibition is open to the public from 7.16 through 9.2.16. **Images from Honduras** will be represented at the exhibition as I was honored to be selected as one of fifteen current or returned Peace Corps Volunteers whose photographic works will be on display. Current plans also call for a Peace Corps documentary film – *Don't Think / Some Days* that I produced in 1969 while a Volunteer based in Tegucigalpa – to be screened at the exhibit's public opening on July 16.

**Ron Anderson** attended the University of Denver from 1960 to 1968 where he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Mass Communications and pursued studies for a Master's Degree. From 1968 to 1971 he served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Republic of Honduras, Central America. As a member of the then emerging ranks of technical Volunteers in the Peace Corps, his activities often involved filmmaking and included production of some 100 television film shorts for Spanish language news programs illustrating the broad spectrum of development projects in Honduras, a half hour English training documentary for future Peace Corps Volunteers and a half hour Spanish documentary on the cooperative movement in Honduras.



PC Ag Coop Volunteer **Andy Cerio** gives a neighbor boy his monthly haircut outside the Coop's tienda in Ajuterique, Honduras. The Coop was featured in the PC USAID documentary film "Don Tomas". December, 1970. Foto R.A.

During his residency in Honduras, Ron Anderson also captured nearly 2,300 still photographs of the Honduran people and their country, from its cities and towns to its farms, mountains and forests. The subject matter of these photographs varied widely – portrait studies, landscapes, time exposures, still lifes, news releases, photo assignments. All were photographed in black & white because the only darkroom to which he had access lacked the capability for color imagery.



Keepers of the Flame Women with luminaria line the route of the faithful during a March 1969 Semana Santa procession in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. Foto R.A.

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Job \_\_\_\_\_

**Post-Peace Corps Experiences** (occupation, marriage, children, travels, interests) \_\_\_\_\_

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8-16

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