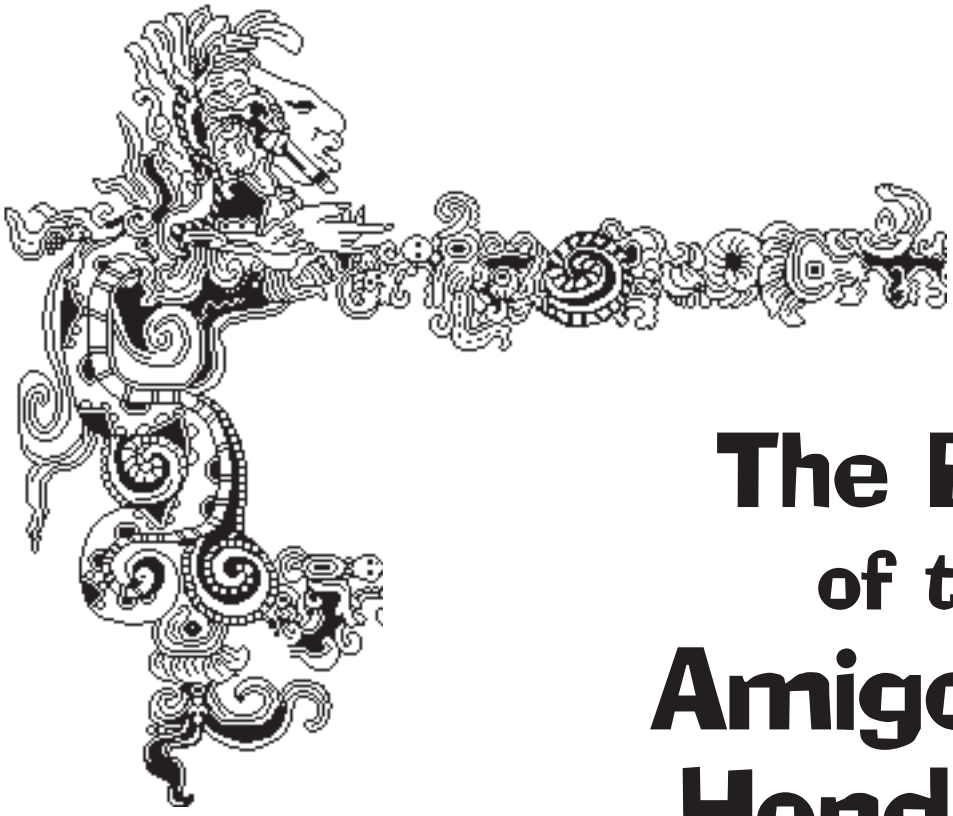


The Best of the Amigos de Honduras newsletter

1999-2013

Life & Times in Honduras Then & Now Stories, Personal Narratives & Travelogues

published October 2013

Amigos de Honduras

History

Amigos de Honduras began in 1990. **Joan Larimore**, San Francisco del Valle, Ocotepeque 1986-88 ~ Enumclaw, Washington; **Phyllis Bloch Shelton**, San Juan Puebla, Atlántida 1986-88 ~ Portland, Oregon; and **Marilyn Watts**, Yoro, Yoro 1985-87 ~ Ocean Park, Washington, who had known each other as PCVs in Honduras, realized at the 1990 National Peace Corps Association conference in Eugene, Oregon, that in a sea of tables with signs such as "Friends of India" and "Friends of Peru," there was no sign, no table for Honduras RPVCs. The three friends committed to organize an RPCV Friends of Honduras group. In 1995, with two of the group's leaders facing personal challenges, Amigos de Honduras fell dormant.

Hurricane Mitch trashed Honduras in the fall of 1998 prompting a number of Honduras RPCVs to e-mail, what can we do? **Joan Larimore** was catalyst once again, e-mailing a request for volunteers to revive Amigos. 135 RPCVs responded and several volunteered to take on specific tasks for the group. **Peter Cooey**, Orocuina, Choluteca 1966-68 ~ Sacramento, agreed to publish the newsletter, and **Alan Waugh**, San Pedro Sula, Cortés 1973-75 ~ Seattle, agreed to manage the database of Honduras RPCVs. Peter published a quick post-Mitch issue in December 1998 and then one more issue before being diagnosed with cancer. He died in 2003. Alan volunteered to take over editing & publishing the newsletter, and with the contributions of dozens of writers, sent issues to members' mailboxes for 12 years.

The objectives for Amigos de Honduras are. . .

- To keep in touch with each other as RPCVs, and others who have an interest in Honduras;
- To keep up to date on what is happening in Honduras and with the Peace Corps; and last but not least,
- To explore ways to support development efforts in Honduras.

In 1999, Amigos de Honduras incorporated as a non-profit corporation in Washington State. In 2001, Amigos' members voted to become an affiliate of the National Peace Corps Association. Today there are more than 220 dues-paying members of Amigos.

Joan Larimore has done yeoman's work over the years, as a founder of the organization, and ever since as master communicator with members; as treasurer: paying bills and accounting for our funds; and as printer: getting the newsletter reproduced and mailed.

Alan Waugh assumed many roles: chair, newsletter editor and publisher, communicator with the National Peace Corps Association, organizer of dinners, database manager, liaison with the Amigos Grants committee, writer of annual reports.

Newsletter

Beginning in 1990, Amigos de Honduras has published 60 editions of its newsletter. **Marilyn Watts**, Yoro, Yoro 1985-87 ~ Ocean Park, Washington, published the new organization's newsletter for five years from 1990 to 1995, publishing 18 issues. **Peter Cooey**, Orocuina, Choluteca 1966-68 ~ Sacramento, published two editions of the newsletter in 1998 and 1999. **Alan Waugh**, San Pedro Sula, Cortés 1973-75 ~ Seattle, published 37 issues over 12 years from 1999 to 2012. **Joan Larimore** published three editions in 2013. **Loren Hintz**, Olanchito, Yoro 1980-82 ~ Chapel Hill, North Carolina, will assume editorship in 2014.

We owe deep appreciation to all the Amigos' members who've written for the newsletter over the years – someday someone should compile all the first-person stories into a book, a pdf file or an e-book. We are particularly indebted to **Maggie McQuaid**, Pespire, Choluteca 1976-78 ~ Bisbee, Arizona, for all the articles she has written over the years: book reviews,

movie reviews, musical references, first-person stories. Thank you to the chair of Amigos' Grants Committee, **Roxanne duBois Cull**, San Pedro Sula, Cortés & Tela, Atlántida 1973-75 ~ University Place, Washington, for writing about the fun and rewarding parts of awarding grants to current Volunteers' projects, and for some of the travails. We are all indebted to the multiple contributions in recent years from **Mary Nowel Quijano**, Santa Rose de Copán, Copán, 1974-78 ~ San Antonio, Texas; **John Kotula**, Sonaguera, Colón 2005-07 ~ Peace Dale, Rhode Island; and **Barbara Kaare-Lopez**, Olanchito, Tocoa, & Trujillo 1978-80 ~ Denver – ¡muchas gracias a todos!

The National Peace Corps Association honored Amigos de Honduras with an award in 2002 for the content of its newsletter.

Directory

Amigos de Honduras published four hard copy, paper membership directories over the years: 1995 (?), 1999, 2001 and 2003.

The Master List

High kudos to **Fred Corvi**, Choluteca, Choluteca 1978-80 ~ San Jose, California for recognizing the importance of identifying all Honduras PCVs and staff over the last 50 years, and working during 2013 to find them and communicate with them in advance of the 2013 Colorado reunion.

Kudos also to the volunteers who searched for and communicated with 'missing' RPCVs in multiple ways:

Jim Couzzourt, Tegucigalpa 1965-67 ~ Canyon, Texas
Jean Tiffany Cox, Choluteca, Choluteca 1978-81 ~ Alburquerque, New Mexico
Mary Eastman Sanchez, Morazan, Yoro 1986-88 ~ Milford, New Hampshire
Rodia Flores Joslyn, Tegucigalpa ~ Austin, Texas
Dick Fuetz, Campamento, Olancho 1967-69 ~ Mt. Horeb, Wisconsin
Dean Geiss, San Jose De Colinas, Choluteca 1965-67 ~ Marietta, Georgia
Deborah Gish, Sabanagrande, FM 1976-78 ~ Panajachel, Sololá, Guatemala
Joan Larimore, San Francisco del Valle, Ocotepeque 1986-88
~ Enumclaw, Washington
Lesbia Matute Dodd, Tegucigalpa 1977-96 ~ Victorville California
Mark Reilly, Concepcion De Maria 1966-69 ~ Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic
Nancy Smith Tsurumaki, Choluteca & Tegucigalpa 1978-81 ~ Tokyo, Japan

Grants Committee

Thank you to the chair of Amigos' grants making committee, **Roxanne duBois Cull**, San Pedro Sula, Cortés & Tela, Atlántida 1973-75 ~ University Place, Washington, for shepherding the awarding of eight grants over the years to current PCVs' projects in Honduras plus four other small grants in support of development in Honduras between 2002 and 2013. She communicated with the recipient Volunteers, Peace Corps Partnership Program staff in Washington, D.C., Peace Corps staff in Tegucigalpa, and Grants Committee members, and wrote about all of it for the newsletter.

Amigos de Honduras members have made 311 donations from December 2001 thru October 2013 totaling $15,820.50.

The Amigos Grants Committee has awarded 12 grants, totaling $15,667.50 ($14,527.74 from donations, and $1,140.00 from excess dues).

Members of the Grants Committee have included . . .

Amey Adams, Maraita, El Paraíso 1985-88 ~ Germantown, Maryland
Brenda August, San Pedro Sula, Cortés 1962-64 ~ Bowie, Maryland
Jane Buckley, Tegucigalpa 1973-75 ~ Billerica, Massachusetts
Mary Cowdrey, Juticalpa, Olancho 1981-83 ~ Marshalltown, Iowa
Jim Criste, Tegucigalpa 1973-77 ~ Tegucigalpa
Susana Dinkins Limon, Balfate, Colón & Dulce Nombre de Culmí, Olancho 1988-90 ~ Hyattsville, Maryland
Steve Dylinski, Choluteca & Tegucigalpa 1971-73 ~ Furlong, Pennsylvania
Suzanne Eldred, Tegucigalpa 1978-80 ~ Alburquerque, New Mexico
Colleen Gross, San Luis, Santa Bárbara 2002-04 ~ Cambridge, Massachusetts
Patricia Hammes, San Pedro Sula, Cortés 1986-87 ~ New York, New York
Will King, Tegucigalpa 1979-81 ~ Gulfport, Florida
Ron Reafs, Tegucigalpa 1966-68 ~ Sacramento, California
Ben Unger, Choluteca, Choluteca 1996-98 ~ St. Louis, Missouri
Alan Waugh, San Pedro Sula, Cortés 1973-75 ~ Seattle, Washington
Judith Whitney-Terry, Choluteca & Tegucigalpa 1987-88 ~ Orleans, Massachusetts

Amigos de Honduras Grants Awarded

Fall 2002 - Ojojona, F.M. - public library - $1,400 ($800 from donors, $600 from dues) - **Chris Moore**, Edina, Minnesota
June 2004 - Jesus de Alto, Valle - potable water system - $2,000 ($1,460 from donors, $540 from dues) - **Chrissie Fowler**, Los Altos, California & **Tim Hopkins**, Ojai, California
Jan 2006 - Hoya Grande, El Paraíso - organic coffee coop water system - $2,500 - **Brian Camblin**, San Diego, California
Nov 2007 - pccatrachos.com website - $150 - **Kyle Rattray**, Sunnyside, Washington
Sept 2008 - East Bay Met School, Rhode Island - students of RPCV **John Kotula** travel to Honduras - $1,000
Jan 2009 - Camasca, Intibucá - school furniture - $2,214 - **Susan Lorbecki**, Kansas City, Missouri
Feb 2010 - Belen Gualcho, Ocotopeque - neighborhood pilas - $2,666.90 - **Casey Tyler**, Gloucester, Virginia
Feb 2010 - Aldea Catulaca, Gracias, Lempira - school environmental club - $10 - **Vanessa Porter**
Apr 2010 - shipping engineering tripods to PC/H - $773.38
Nov 2010 - Santa Rita de Oriente, Santa Bárbara - community latrines - $498.96 - **Alexandra Wilson**, Charlevoix, Michigan
Nov 2010 - small coffee farms - $1,954.50
May 2013 - in support of the new NPCA mentoring program - $500

Get-togethers

National Peace Corps Association Conference, Washington, D.C, June 2002

Honduras Organizing Committee:

Amey Adams, Maraita, Paraiso 1985-88 ~ Germantown, Maryland
Sarah Hall Goodwin, Tegucigalpa 1977-82 ~ Alexandria, Virginia
Craig Kullman, La Paz, La Paz 1999-2001 ~ Silver Spring, Maryland
Donnell Ocker, Tela, Atlántida 1993-95 ~ Austin, Texas
Terri Salus, Tegucigalpa 1978-80 ~ Chevy Chase, Maryland
Alan Waugh, San Pedro Sula, Cortes 1973-75 ~ Seattle

Peace Corps Honduras Reunion - Las Vegas 2002

organized by **Dave Lombardo**, La Union, Olancho, Tegucigalpa 1975-77 ~ Dubois, Pennsylvania

Peace Corps Honduras dinner, Phoenix, March 8, 2003

organized by **Alan Waugh**, San Pedro Sula, Cortes 1973-75 ~ Seattle

National Peace Corps Association Conference, Chicago 2004

Honduras Organizing Committee:

FranSchoenfeld Alcantara, Tegucigalpa 1973-75 ~ Riverside, Illinois
Alan Waugh, San Pedro Sula, Cortes 1973-75 ~ Seattle

Peace Corps Honduras dinner, Atlanta, March 18, 2006

organized by **Alan Waugh**, San Pedro Sula, Cortes 1973-75 ~ Seattle

Peace Corps Honduras Reunion - Nashville, May 26-29, 2006

organized by **Brant Miller**, Campamento & Jutiapa, Olancho 1975-77 ~ Antioch, Tennessee

Peace Corps Honduras dinner, Seattle, July 28, 2007

organized by **Alan Waugh**, San Pedro Sula, Cortes 1973-75 ~ Seattle

Peace Corps Honduras Reunion - Tucson, November 7-10, 2008

organized by **Maggie McQuaid**, Pespire, Choluteca 1976-78 ~ Bisbee, Arizona

Peace Corps 50th anniversary celebration, Washington, D.C. 2011

Honduras Organizing Committee:

Terri Salus, Tegucigalpa 1978-80 ~ Chevy Chase, Maryland, chief coordinator
Becky Boyd, Juticalpa, Olancho & Tegucigalpa 1979-81 ~ Sacramento
Maggie McQuaid, Pespire, Choluteca 1976-78 ~ Bisbee, Arizona
Brant Miller, Campamento & Jutiapa, Olancho 1975-77 ~ Antioch, Tennessee
George Moore, Tegucigalpa 1973-75 ~ Arlington, Virginia
Steve Phelan, Tegucigalpa 1973-74 ~ Holmes, New York
Madlyn Wohlman, Teupasenti, El Paraîso 1980-82 ~ Chevy Chase, Maryland

Peace Corps Honduras Reunion - Denver & Estes Park October 11-13, 2013

organized by

Jon Lind, Tegucigalpa 1980-82 ~ Louisville, Colorado:
Sue Spalding Golding, Puerto Cortes, Cortés & Nuevo Ocotepeque, Ocotepeque 1975-78 ~ Denver
Leslie Hughes-Lind, Marcala, Intibucá 1978-80 ~ Louisville, Colorado
Jim Barborak, Tegucigalpa 1977-79 ~ Fort Collins
Steve Phelan, Tegucigalpa, 1973-74 ~ Holmes, New York

Too Brief Observations on Honduras, 1999

Deborah (11-days-and-almost-the-whole-country-into-500-words-is-tough) Chandler, La Jigua, Copán 1989-90 ~ Loveland, Colorado

In January/February 1999, a friend and I spent 11 days in Honduras, running errands all over the country. We spent time in La Jigua, La Entrada, San Pedro Sula, Tegucigalpa, Santa Lucía, Valle de Angeles, Choluteca, Potrerillos (Cortés, the one just outside SPS), and Tela. And points between.

Of course we expected to see Mitch damage, and we did. At the same time, everywhere we went, business was booming! So my report is really mixed - if you want to make money, go down and start a 4WD dealership, any make vehicle you want; Toyota no longer owns the road, and everyone who makes Land Cruiser lookalikes is selling them there, like hotcakes!

The damage from Mitch seemed to be an all or nothing kind of deal: someone was either killed or wiped out, and that happened almost entirely within range of rivers, or they were hardly touched, and life is continuing on as usual. On the damage and devastation side, we mostly drove over riverbeds that are now very wide, and consist of a ribbon of water bordered by up to half a mile of sand and gravel, clean and waiting to be used in construction. In some cases, in addition to the sand and gravel there are huge boulders and gargantuan tree trunks, tossed into place by forces unimaginable, and clearly a long way from where they grew.

We heard two stories that pretty well cover the past and future. The riverbank we crossed driving into Choluteca is now wider than seems possible from that little stream, and the junk caught in the top of the bridge, maybe 40 feet up, seems equally impossible. But the view is mostly clean, a few twisted semi's, but otherwise garbage free. Later we learned that that area used to be an entire industrial park, and now the whole thing is gone. (So at least business was booming.) The other, probably even harder to deal with, came from a walk with a group of campesinos through their fields near Potrerillos. They had crops of corn and plátanos almost ready to harvest. The flooding wiped all that out, but far worse is that now the soil is contaminated, and they can't get anything to grow. They've tried at least four crops so far, and at best they get deformed plants that don't flower or produce. They are at a loss about what to do, besides keeping on trying other crops.

Maybe the biggest surprise came on both coasts, where damage was minimal compared to what we've all been led to believe. I stood on both Pacific and Atlantic beaches, and in both cases the buildings were damaged on their waterfronts, but that's all. They are salvageable, and most we saw are being rebuilt (or have been already).

One of our main missions was to go see the Central American Medical Outreach team, a diverse group of volunteers. CAMO is run by two Honduras RPCVs, Kathy Tschiegg and Rachel Ollar, and has been taking medical equipment and supplies and training to Honduras for six years or so. Kathy was down there when Mitch hit, so got a perfect look at what was needed. The team we went to see is there in a year-long program that will spend time in several areas, one at a time, with four semi's full of medical, and more importantly, mud moving equipment. It's a big enough deal to talk of at great length, but I'll just say that they are doing what they say they are, and if you feel like either sending money or going down to help for awhile, this is a great channel for either kind of aid.

On the up side, even the roads that are wrecked are better than they were ten years ago, and many have been fixed already. We saw and drove on roads that didn't exist before, including one to a new Mayan site, park, and museum, just south of La Entrada. Nice place. Santa Lucía and Valle de Angeles are clearly the weekend getaway destinations for Tegucigalpa, and as expected, with the departure of Peace Corps training, our cook, Argentina, is now running a great little restaurant. And aside from impressive road damage, Valle looks great. After we got to Guatemala, we heard terrible stories about how dangerous Tela is, and they surprised us because we had been astonished at how tranquillo and cheerful it was. We walked around after dark on a Friday, and the place was full of children playing, bicycles, almost no cars, a few adults... It was as close to Honduran Norman Rockwell as you could get.

Not everything has changed. I'd love to show you pictures, but unfortunately, our last day there, in SPS, all our stuff was stolen out of our truck. As we were walking the two blocks back to the truck from the police station, I saw two things that got my attention. First was an old woman and a little girl of maybe three, with a head of dry orange-blond hair, lying/sitting together on the sidewalk, a place they were clearly familiar with. And second, a girl of maybe 12 sitting on the sidewalk, her leg curled like a pretzel, never to be walked on. It was a good reminder that all I lost was some stuff – not much. We were there shortly after the rainy season, and the country is still magnificently beautiful. Lots of green down below, offset by blue skies and sunshine. Hot, even so early. Busy. A million opportunities, still. But it's come a long way, too. My aldea even has electricity now, and a phone!

December 1999

Mitch and the First Time Back

Alan Waugh, San Pedro Sula, Cortés 1973-75 ~ Seattle

The lottery ticket venders are still in the Parque Central near the *evangelistas*. Twenty-three years ago though, there were no people walking through with cell phones like today, and many fewer pickups and SUVs driving by. My first trip back to Honduras since finishing Peace Corps service in 1975 produced a flood of memories, head-shaking smiles at the changes, and comparisons between Hurricanes Fifí and Mitch.

Honduras in November 1998 after Mitch was really like the story of the blind men and the elephant: I can describe only what I observed, but not what I didn't see. The Rio Choluteca raged through Tegucigalpa, wreaking the type of havoc we saw on the nightly news in the states: stripping the guardrails off the bridges, and leaving trash caught on second story air conditioners. A hillside in Comayagüela slumped into the river, creating a lake, submerging the first floor of houses and shops. All the houses on the hillside were reduced to rubble. Adobe houses dissolved from standing in water too long, and tiendas filled with mud. Four weeks later I saw shops shoveled out and people painting, and saw shops that hadn't yet been dug out. And yet, in the Parque Central in several towns it was impossible to know a hurricane had hit the country: kids were flirting and t-shirt vendors were selling.

Every river or creek I saw had run amuck - 70% of the bridges I crossed were damaged, but unlike after Hurricane Fifi in 1974, almost all bridges had temporary fixes or detours already in place four weeks later. Many wouldn't meet USDOT standards, but they worked and traffic was rolling. In Teguc, much time and patience was required because taxis often had to go way roundabout because of the damage to the bridges to Comayagüela: sometimes the taxis could cross the damaged bridges, sometimes the *policía* said no. In Copán, people could walk across the half-gone bridge, cars and buses couldn't pass, and the city's water pipe was suspended from the bridge by bailing wire.

All the *mercados* I walked through had plenty of food. However, there were repeated stories that 70% of the fall's corn harvest was destroyed. Luis Bueso, the former Peace Corps doctor in San Pedro, told me the corn farmers in the west on the way to Copán didn't lose much corn, but that the corn farmers in Olancho suffered badly. A PCV who lives in Olancho told me the farmers around his village had already harvested, and only those with lousy storage facilities lost some corn to mildew. On the way to Copán I saw people drying both corn and coffee on *patios* and along the road. In January the UN FAO estimated a one-third loss in each of maize, plantains and beans. Who knows exactly?

I saw much less damage on North Coast this time than when Fifí hit in 1974. Four weeks later, lots of people were going to work in all the *maquiladoras* strung between San Pedro and Puerto Cortés. However, I did not get into the south, to Choluteca and Valle; many people said that is where the really extensive damage occurred. And now, the *sindicatos* are feeling strong-armed by Chiquita which wants concessions in the contracts because of the extensive damage to the banana plantations.

All PCVs and trainees were pulled out of Honduras after the storm. Two PC staff tried to describe to me the not-knowing where all the Volunteers were (several Volunteers lost everything they had), the lack of electricity and gasoline in Tegucigalpa, concern about lack of food, and the Honduran government's fear about looting which resulted in an immediate country-wide curfew. APCD Paul Teeple relayed the story that that first night in Panamá, when everyone was there, safe and gathered together, the Director, Arnoldo Resendez gave a speech in which he said, "tonight, for the first night in more than 35 years, there are no Peace Corps Volunteers in Honduras," and people cried.

I don't mean to minimize the effects of Mitch: people died, barrios were damaged, houses were destroyed, food was lost. Parts of the country were absolutely devastated, but Honduras was not destroyed: in many places people were shopping, selling, farming, busing as usual. The fears of disease were countered by immediate and effective action of international medical teams, and thousands of Hondurans were quickly put up in hundreds of emergency shelters. I spent a day with Mennonite volunteers in a shelter in SPS. I recommend RPCVs donate money and volunteer their time with organizations which already had an infrastructure in place in Honduras. There will be opportunities to join short-term U.S. work crews rebuilding housing. The needs in agriculture/food will be handled by staff and long-term volunteers of relief organizations, and bridge and water system repair will be handled by agencies such as AID and Crisis Corps.

I remember Honduras as being so beautiful, but it is more beautiful than I remembered: the blue, blue sky and the huge white billowy clouds. That hillside in Comayagüela? On my last day in Teguc, I noticed someone had already built a shack at the bottom of the landslide, right by the river, and clothes were hung out on the line to dry.

An RPCV-funded Peace Corps Partnership Project

Rebecca Luria, Texiguat, El Paraíso 1999-2001 ~ Arlington, Virginia

An RPCV-funded Peace Corps Partnership Project

In September 1999, the RPCVs of San Antonio contributed $1,000 through Peace Corps Partnership to a post-Mitch reconstruction project in Honduras. This first report was forwarded by Tom Hansis, Catacamas 1969-70, Tegucigalpa 1970-71.

Greetings from Texiguat! My name is Rebecca Luria and I am one of the PCVs assigned to the beautiful Texiguat valley. I am a Water/San Volunteer.

I am happy to report that the Peace Corps Partnership Program (PCPP) in La Colonia Nueva is moving forward and progress is being made. For those who may not have seen a copy of the most recent quarterly report from December, I will give you a brief background of the project I'm carrying out.

La Colonia Nueva is a housing project with the collaboration of Save the Children, World Vision, the municipality and Peace Corps. There are 41 houses; the majority of the occupants are *damnificados*, people whose homes were washed away after Mitch. The project was begun with the technical assistance of former PCV Kevin Coleman, who surveyed the land (with a professional surveyor from the States who donated his services for two months), drew the design of the housing lots and water system and began the construction of a 5,000 gallon water tank for their water system. Some of the PCPP funds paid for the skilled labor of the tank.

In August I came to Texiguat to fill the giant shoes left by Kevin. By December, inhabitants of La Colonia Nueva had running water. The tank was constructed, tubes were laid and valves put in all by the hands of the beneficiaries. Through constant interaction with the beneficiaries, I came to learn their backgrounds and economic situations, and from that was able to tailor a home improvement project to their needs.

A disappointing trend I see among development work is the handout. People have become very accustomed to receiving and not giving any sort of personal contribution, and I wanted to avoid this at all costs. I had hoped to realize a home improvement lending program with the PCPP money, in hopes that there would exist a pool of funds for future home or community improvement projects, but I didn't see the *patronato* (community governing board) as fit to manage such a fund. Instead I made the offer to the beneficiaries that if they arranged the transportation of the materials from Tegucigalpa to Texiguat, I would purchase the materials. The materials were to be handed in two stages. First stage was the latrines. Save the Children had earlier donated cement, rebar and corrugated metal for the structure of the latrines, but not the actual bowls. I complemented their donation with either a pour-flush toilet or a simple pit latrine (some lots are over semi impermeable rock and a pour flush latrine would fill up too quickly). The second stage is materials for home improvements such as cement to 'plaster' their adobe brick houses, corrugated metal to cover an additional room, or barbed wire to close in their lots. The agreement was that they had to have their latrines installed in order for them to receive the rest of the materials. To insure they didn't use the materials for other purposes (i.e., selling it) they had to have sand and gravel in their homes (for cement), additions completed (for cor
rugated metal) and wooden posts placed in their yard (for barbed wire).

The idea behind the project was to offer improvements that would make their homes sanitary and safe and to complement the efforts and donations of other institutions. La Colonia Nueva is on its way to being a model community! To date, I have given out about half of the materials. The latrines are up and running, people are completing additions to their homes with the running water and cement, and people are finally able to customize their house to their own personal preferences. I have been lucky to have had a lot of cooperation from the *patronato* on this project.

As far as expenditures go, I have spent approximately $2,500 - $3,000, although I do not have the exact figures in front of me at this moment. Look forward to more information, and hopefully pictures as well in the March quarterly report!

-Rebecca Luria

A Post-Mitch Carta from Orocuina

Steve Moulds, Ococuina, Choluteca 1964-66 ~ Yountville, Califrnia

Steve Moulds was one of the earliest Peace Corps Volunteers in Honduras. Over the years, his contacts with Honduras diminished. Immediately after Hurricane Mitch devastated Honduras in October 1999, Steve raised money, flew to Teguc, bought a truck, and headed for Orocuina.

Other than an extended stay in ('69 when several local friends nursed me back to health during a bout of hepatitis) and letter correspondence through '73, I had no contact. My desire to get back in touch was al ways there in the back of my mind, Mitch provided the catalyst. I was greatly motivated by a sense of appreciation and enormous gratitude for all these people gave me as a 19 year old kid. For two years I shared their friendship, warmth, and humor, as well as the many projects upon which we worked. This unqualified acceptance gave me a measure of self confidence that has impacted my entire life. Now was the time to give some of that back. Kind of hokey but every word is gospel. I expect this relationship to not only last for my life time, but my kid's as well. It's too precious not to pass on. Thanks for your interest.
Salud, Steve

This is a letter written to friends & donors after his latest trip to Honduras

July 25, 2000

Dear Friends:

With great appreciation and thanks from the village of Orocuina I write one last time. So much has been done that I want all of you who have been so kind to know just what it is that your generosity has accomplished. I have just completed my sixth trip to Honduras since the devastation of Hurricane Mitch. I am both pleased and proud of the im act we together have been able to make. The country as a whole has made great strides toward recovery. While many people still live in 'temporary' shelters, the nation has returned to the relative normalcy of eking out a living from an uncooperative environment. Aid has poured into the country from all over the world. The most effective of which has been managed outside normal bureaucratic governmental agencies. The good news is that the interest on much of Honduras' foreign debt has been suspended or waived. There is a good possibility that the debt itself will be forgiven in coming years. The challenge for a nation historically rife with corruption is to use this opportunity to rebuild its infrastructure with monies that otherwise would have left the country.

In Orocuina the placid day-to-day life has returned, marred only by two very deep scars. The first is firmly etched in the psyche of those who experienced the floods first hand. Many have told me they still sleep poorly for the week of terror they experienced, and not at all if it rains steadily. The second scar is that to the land. Riverbeds are a dry testament to the thousands of acres of topsoil that were carried into the Pacific. This has driven subsistence farmers, the *campesinos*, farther and farther inland. Small plots of corn and beans now appear on nearly vertical slopes in the mountains around Orocuina. They may last two or three seasons at best before mudslides wipe them out and force them to seek even more ecologically dangerous garden plots.

With that background, let me tell you what your generosity has helped accomplish. After the first phase of our relief campaign, the purchase of more than 14 tons of food, we began looking for ways to house those displaced by the flood waters. Ultimately we purchased five plots of land in four neighborhoods. We negotiated with the German Red Cross and Bolsa Samanitaria (Billy Graham's son is the founder of this relief organization) for the construction of 117 new cement block homes.

Upon completion, we deeded the land and the houses to the families that qualified. Having lived there, I imposed a deed restriction that requires title to vest where possible in the name of a married couple. Where this was not possible, title would vest with the parent responsible for the children. Sale of the property is forbidden for 15 years with right of inheritance going to the children. I don't mean to sound overly cynical, but my committee of advisors recommend ed this as a way of protecting the women and children from being evicted and the house sold for spending money.

In addition to our home building program, we embarked on a health related project last summer. Our son, Reed, volunteered for three months after his graduation from college. He oversaw the replacement of 240 homes that had thatch roofs with laminated zinc roofing throughout the mountainous area surrounding Orocuina. A dangerous little bug lives in the thatch, the *chinche pecudo*, which causes chagas disease. It's fatal five to ten years after the bite! We also taught people why this was necessary. The local Peace Corps Volunteer called this perhaps the single greatest health advance in the last two decades.

Other ancillary protects include school meals and supplies, small school renovation, AIDS training for school teachers, and the purchase of water rights for one of the *colonias*.

We are now entering the third and last phase of our post-hurricane relief program. The word relief implies

giving, and while the conditions have warranted it, giving runs the risk of creating dependency. My time in Orocuina originally was intended to create independence. For this reason we have sought out a program of sustainable economic development. After evaluating four -vital yet flawed concepts, we have focused on establishing a chicken co-operative. We have purchased the land and built a small ware house. A Spanish community development agency, *Ayuda en Acción*, has partnered with us to build the egg-laying barn. Northamericans for Orocuina will buy 1,000 hens, *Ayuda en Acción* will buy an other 500 and finance the villagers buying another 500. A market study has shown a vital need for fresh eggs in the south of Honduras. It is my belief that the 15 families involved in this endeavor will be a model development project in years to come. We hope to provide a positive alternative to subsistence agriculture as the only way to provide for one's family.

I apologize for the length of this message. I truly want each of you to know the immense value of your generosity. I made you a promise in December of 1998. We have collectively contributed nearly $100,000. I have given another $50,000 in donations and expenses. Every dollar you sent has gone to ward this worthwhile venture. If any funds re main after the chicken ranch is established, we will expand into fryers.

In closing, I want to express my profound and sincere gratitude for your assistance in rebuilding the town as well as the people of Orocuina. Without our effort nothing at all would have been done to help these wonderful and very humble people.

But words cannot truly express my appreciation for your confidence and your friendship.

I thank you.

August 2000

Goods and Services

Larissa Zoot, Alubarén 1993-95 ~ Baltimore

For a couple of weeks I was content to sit and wait patiently, watching the light bulb flicker on and off. At first it took ten minutes, then twenty, thirty, forty-five and finally it would be over an hour before the connection was made and the light stayed on in my room. When it reached one hour, I lost my patience and just didn't bother turning it on anymore.

I got by this way for several weeks, going to bed early or hanging out at the neighbors' instead of spending the evening in my unlighted house. Getting ready for bed only took a few minutes and it was easy to do by candle light. I had lived that way for six months before the electricity came, so there was no reason why I shouldn't have been able to keep living that way.

Then something strange and unexpected happened. I began having a lot of work to do, more work than I could finish before the sun went down in the afternoon.

> Electric light became a necessary resource so I had to track down an electrician.

The "electrician" turned out to be a young newlywed who lived just down the street. He showed up at my door late one afternoon with a screwdriver and a roll of electrical tape and started taking things apart. I'm sure he had no training or formal knowledge of electrical systems, so I held my breath, crossed my fingers, and tried to be of use, handing him parts when he needed them and otherwise staying out of his way.

That evening he could not find the flaw or fix it, but he came back early the next day. This time he took a few more things apart, found the problem, and fixed it. Once he had the light fixtures put back together and I had tested it several times to make sure it worked, I smiled contentedly, following him to the door, and asked the standard question: "How much do I owe you?"

The reply I received was also standard. "Nothing. Just your thanks." No money. No goods in trade. Not even a beer or a soda. Just thanks. So I offered him my most grateful, enthusiastic "Thank you!" and then watched him disappear down the street.

This is something I've experienced many times now in Alubarén, and it always leaves me stumped. Doesn't he realize that what he just did for me is considered work? Doesn't he know that his time and effort have value? Doesn't he need every penny he can get to provide for his new wife and baby?

Obviously he's not aware that back at home in the United States I would have paid through the nose for the services of an electrician or for any other work I needed to have done. Is it possible that he doesn't recognize that I'm one of the highest paid people in this town overshadowed by poverty, and I would gladly hand over whatever amount he chose to request? Or does he realize all of this and it's me who's missing the point?

I think over some of the other times when I've experienced this phenomenon...

the bus driver who hauled my new furniture over from the next village when the Volunteer there leftthe seamstress who took in the waists of my shorts when I lost too much weight and they were falling downthe carpenter who carried my new bookshelf down the mountainside on his backthe mayor's secretary, who typed up an official letter that I needed to send to the Ministry of Healththe teacher who took my packages to the post office on her weekend in the capitalthe neighbor who lets me cook on her stove any time I want to, but won't ever let me buy her any more firewood.

And there are more. What is it with all of these people who are so kind and do so much for me, but never accept any payment or ask for anything in return? Is it because I'm the gringa, an outsider, and they want to give a good impression of their people and their country? Do they intend to create that good impression by treating me extra special?

That's what I thought at first, but with time I realized that I'd been mistaken. It seems to have been another case of my seeing things through the filter of my North American values.

Now I've been in Alubaren long enough to gain a truer perspective on how things work here. The bus driver runs errands for people all the time and never charges a penny. A person who has coconuts or mangoes growing in her backyard will give them away to a neighbor who doesn't have them, but needs them for a recipe, and not even expect a sample of the finished product. A seamstress will stay up all night long making school uniforms for the children of another mother who doesn't have a sewing machine. Its just the way they are.

I hope that this generosity, this sense of community, is something I'll be able to take back with me. I hope I can remember it and practice it, at least to some extent. There's something very special about a place where the primary "value" placed on goods and services is the people's value for one another.

December 2000

Amigos, Niños Y Quince Años

Susan Potter)Donald, Jesus de Otoro, Intibucá, 1985-87

In September 1985, I touched down in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, in a plane full of Peace Corps Volunteers. Thus began a two-year adventure that has had a deep impact on my life. On May 7, 2000, I again touched down in Tegucigalpa, but this time with my husband of eleven years, and our two sons to start what I was sure was going to be quite a different kind of adventure.

The airport looked the same as I remembered it, small and crowded. The capital itself has had many changes. There are new colonias being built, including the one in which we now live. Colonia Hacienda is near the university and many new homes and car lots are currently under construction. Avenida Juan Pablo II, of which I have no recollection from before, is big, busy and full of fast food chain restaurants which were nowhere to be seen in Tegucigalpa in the 80's. Apparently with the floating of the exchange rate in the 90's, U.S. businesses saw Honduras as a viable market for fast food. They were right. MacDonald's, Burger King, and Pizza Hut, just to name a few, are doing well here. The prices are not such that the working class day laborers can afford. However there are many wealthy Honduran families, associated with banking and other businesses, who frequent the fast food chains and use them as a location for their children's birthday parties.

On my third day here, I took my sons, Lucas (age 4) and Adam (age 6) to Parque Central in hopes of finding familiar landmarks. The park and Cathedral were familiar as was the Dunkin' Donuts where we stopped for a snack. Adam said "Buenos días" to everyone we passed and Lucas imitated the traffic noises. I had lived close to Parque Central when I was in Peace Corps training at El Rincón so I spent a lot of time walking and sitting in the park by myself, striking up conversations with Hondurans in hopes of improving my very limited Spanish. I felt nostalgia and wonder to once again be walking in the park, this time with my two sons.

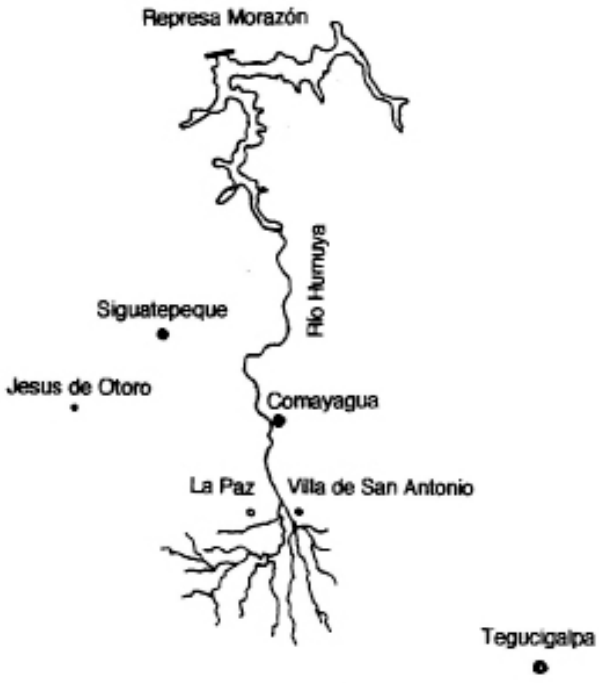
The next day, Adam came down with a case of chicken pox. As he felt better about a week later, Lucas became sick with chicken pox. So, the first few weeks of my big return to Honduras were spent taking care of the children in the quarantine of our home. The chicken pox was a going away present from the States.

From 1985 to 1987, I lived in Jesus de Otoro, Intibucá, teaching math to seventh and eighth graders in the colegio. Mike Donald, who is now my husband, came to Otoro as a fish volunteer in 1986 so Otoro will always be special to us as the place where we met. He and I along with the children have re-

turned to Otoro three times since moving here to Tegucigalpa. The town has grown and changed in many ways. There is now electricity, which means many homes now have television. There is also an ice cream parlor in town now run by old friends of ours, which we of course visit every time we are in town. The colegio has grown and now includes not only ciclo comun (grades 7, 8, and 9 which follow the primary school), but ciclo diversificado (trade school). The students can now remain in Otoro for that further schooling. A private bilingual school has also been established. With the paved highway, the ride to Otoro from the main highway is now 20 minutes instead of two hours. The teacher who participated in the teacher exchange program, for whom I was teaching at the colegio, is now mayor of the town.

One Friday afternoon in June, Michael, the boys, and I headed to Otoro. We spent Friday night there with our good friends, Don Adan and Doña Adelina. The next day, with our friends, we made the long journey to Omoa, Cortés, to visit with our friends' son, Pablo, who was also a good friend of mine from Peace Corps days. We surprised him with a visit and spent the rest of the weekend there with him, his wife and their two children. Pablo's son, Pablo César, is the same age as our son Adam. Even though they did not have a verbal language in common, they played happily together. Pablo and I watched them with the same thought. Who would have thought back in the 80's when we first began our friendship that one day our sons would be playing together on the sunny beaches of Puerto Cortés? What a wonderful feeling of coming full circle and what a joy to renew old friendships.

The end of October was the two-year anniversary of Hurricane Mitch. In our travels throughout the country, we have seen signs of his devastation. In the north, one can still see the pieces of the old bridges lying in the same places where Mitch had thrown them. In place of some of the broken bridges are temporary one-lane bridges, which will be used until new ones can be constructed. There are new bridges but more need to be built. All over the country are new housing developments of one or two room cement block homes being constructed for those who lost their homes. Various foreign governments and nongovernmental organizations sponsor these projects. Many people have had to be relocated. The reason for our return was for my husband to work on a 19-month U.S.D.A. project to help rehabilitate the upper watershed in the Humuya river basin in Comayagua, attempting the mitigate the damage from Mitch as well as other sources. Much is being done and much more is needed.



We have now been back in Honduras for six months. While I do not enjoy living in the city, I have grown accustomed to living behind a high wall and appreciate the protection of the security company who makes many rounds per day. Having children has certainly made me much more security conscious. Crime has also increased a great deal, as has the difference between the haves and the have-nots. I am not altogether comfortable with the higher lifestyle we have here in the city this time around versus the humble lifestyle in the campo as a Peace Corps Volunteer. However, I very much appreciate all that we are able to offer our children: safety, education, food and recreation. I grieve to see the street children shoeless and begging for money. As a parent, I now see how demoralizing it must be for people in poverty to not be able to provide for their children as they yearn to. As always I struggle with what my role should be in dealing with this complex issue of poverty.

Overall, I am glad to be back in Honduras, a country for which I will always have affection. The best part so far has been reuniting with old friends. The return has also stirred many good memories of the Peace Corps experience. Our home is open to any of you who would like to return to visit old friends and see for yourselves how things are going in nuestro querido Honduras.

Susan & Michael lived 9 years on the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State where their two boys were born. They lived in Libby, Montana, for 16 months before relocating to Tegucigalpa. Michael has worked for the U.S. Forest Service doing NEPA regulatory work on timber sales and other Forest Service projects.

Now and Some Time Ago

April 2001

Tom Camero, Peace Corps Rio Patuka; Tegucigalpa & San Marcos de Colón 1978-80; Crisis Corps 1999 ~ Hood River, Oregon

We were sent to the North Coast after Hurricane Greta in 1978. We had just finished training, when maybe 10 of us went to rebuild the small community of Barra Patuca on the Misquito Coast. Everything in the village had gotten blown away except the Catholic church and the school. But we were told you couldn't get there from anywhere, so we flew into Aguas on a loud Honduran Air Force DC-3 with lumber, tools (400 hammers, 400 machetes, files, nails, saws, you-name-it), and began constructing a barge of 55-gallon drums to deliver everything to BP. AID provided two large outboard motors for the raft and two drums of gas. Our crew dwindled to two as Mike Raponi and I spent the eight months in 10'x12' CARE wall tents.

So began my first assignment as a volunteer in the 'Skeet with some pretty incredible PCVs. I later returned to my host agency, JNBS, to build water systems in the South, and managed to be located in San Marcos de Colón and then Choluteca. I was later transferred to Tegus to work with AID and their Small Projects Fund to complete my PC service. My site changed a lot. Nevertheless, my stint as a PCV became one of the most impressive times of my life. I learned how to bathe with a cup of water, eat almost anything, sweat, and other survival skills that I know have forever provided the strength and insight that keeps me alive today. I COS'd believing I would be a PCV again.

After seeing the devastation that occurred when Hurricane Mitch hit the country in October 1998, I knew I wanted to do more than donate money. Peace Corps' Crisis Corps provided that opportunity. The application process was much different than I remember as a PCV in that my medical process was more involved, being older (and wiser?), and the security check was able to locate all my friends and enemies with little difficulty. Within a month all my clearances were obtained, and I was off to D.C. where I joined 23 others for the first Crisis Corps group to be sent overseas. We had for some group discussion on disaster relief, a meeting with Tipper Gore, and general foreign service cautionary discussions. After two days in Tegus, we were discharged to our sites. I knew I did not want to be assigned in the south, but when I opened my assignment envelope, Choluteca was to be my home again for 3 months. Puchica!!

Returning after more than twenty years to some of the very same places kept bewildering me. Parque Central is just the same. Shoe shiners on the same benches. Eating at Terraza Don Pepe's, and taking in the same smells never seems to change, but a few things did. There are more taxis, noise, and soccer mania than I remember as a Volunteer. Some beautiful new bank buildings, hotels, and churches have been built, as well as more concern for safety and gangs. What hasn't changed is the spirit of PVCs. I met a 2nd generation volunteer - her Mom had been a volunteer and now she was living in a small aldea building a new water system for her community. By the time I returned for the 3rd time in my life, her system was inaugurated just before she COS'd. PCVs in Honduras display the same idealism, hard work, good Spanish, and dedication that I remembered among my fellow PVCs more than 20 years prior.

Mitch hit the north coast with high winds damaging Guanaja, but as many know, the rains continued for almost a week devastating Tegus. Since the general drainage pattern has the southern half of the county flowing into the Choluteca River, the sections of town that had developed near the river were flooded. Choluteca was isolated for over a week. PCVs helped rescue people from trees with inner-tubes tied to a rope. Hundreds of homes were washed away, lots of people lost everything, and even today still shed a tear when asked about their experience during Mitch. They are grateful they survived with their family intact, and that so much help arrived from around the world. As a Crisis Corps Volunteer I worked with SANAA with French, Swiss, Spanish, and Canadian groups building homes, water systems, and drilling wells. I liked the international spirit of participating in such a grand reconstruction effort. But it was for only three months and voluntary. I still had car and credit card payments, a family, and other things to attend to back home in Oregon.

After returning to my little town of Hood River, it took me awhile to get back to accepting the changes and readjustment ... again. I remember leaving Tegus as a PCV, hitchhiking all the way to Idaho, and trying to adjust to stateside opulence. I think this time as a CCV it took longer. I began soliciting overseas organizations on the web, researching international positions and getting little response, because I wanted my family to share the experience. International Career Employment Weekly was a great tabloid that listed an incredible array of professional positions all over the world. I took advantage of their database and filed my resume with them. [http://www.internationaljobs.org/contents.html]

More than a year passed when I received a call at 6:30 a.m. one morning asking about my availability for a job in Honduras. They had seen my credentials on the ICW listing. I said, sure, I was available, where? A voluntary organization called

Planning Assistance in D.C. had received the contract for Mitch reconstruction that would provide potable water, sanitary sewer, and cobblestone streets in 3 colonias in and around Choluteca. "You mean, Choluteca?" I said. Yep, and you can take your wife and 10 year old son. My family discussed the merits of living in such a place, as I let them know the hardships of few paved streets, security, language difficulty, severe heat, and having to leave our kitty behind. We agreed as a family to accept the position, and I was off again to this little bit of paradise in Honduras.

Since serving as a PCV I had been a resident engineer building dirt airports in rural Alaska with a home in Fairbanks. For the last 10 years I operated a consulting civil engineering company in Hood River, Oregon, designing and constructing water, sewer, road and other municipal projects. I am now the Chief of Party for a $2.7 mil project that includes training in carpentry, plumbing, welding, and cobblestoning, and installing lots of pipe for water and sewer. I work alongside the Asociación San Jose Obrero and Padre Alejandro who has been here for 30 years creating an incredible organization and getting lots of jobs, houses, roads, education, and improved health to those in need. I like being here with my family, sharing the incredible daily vistas, smells, and inadequacies. They can now share my sentiments and appreciation of this land and people. My wife has joined a women's (girls', really) soccer team, and my son plays soccer everyday. He relishes his soccer indulgence.

On March 1st all PCVs in the country were invited to Ambassador Frank and Antoinette Almaguer's home for a celebration of the Peace Corps' 40th anniversary. There were 102 volunteers sharing their places, events, and stories as only PVCs can describe and appreciate. I was honored to have been included, and to know my family now can understand why I love being here doing this kind of work. My position requires lots of contact with USAID and other NGOs and knowing that many of those directing these humanitarian efforts have been PCVs. It is a fulfillment that stands among the most ambitious I have ever undertaken. Maybe I will be a PCV again someday.

August 2001

Guilt, Green Salads & Gringos Behaving Badly - My Week in Roatan

Maggie McQuaid, Pespire, Choluteca 1976-78 ~ Anchorage

I knew something was up when the waiter asked me if I wanted herb vinaigrette with my green salad. The fact that I ordered a green salad, and was eating it with impunity, should have tipped me off. Times had changed on the Bay Islands.

I was not a stranger to Roatan, though I had never made it out to the islands while I was a *voluntaria*. From Pespire, it was too expensive and complicated to journey north to the fabled charms of Utila or Roatan. I made my first trip in 1982, while visiting a friend working for Peace Corps/Guatemala. We flew to San Pedro, then got a small plane to Roatan. We found rooms in a boarding house in Coxen's Hole, and took *campo* buses around the island. It was quiet, funky, and a blessed relief from the terrors of Guatemala. There were a few well-heeled spooks doing their R & R at Anthony's Key Resort, but few other gringos.

I returned in the winter of 1996, and Roatan was already well-established on the hippie backpacker circuit. Flying down with a friend from Anchorage, Roatan gave us a well-deserved respite from the Alaskan winter. Comfortable and reasonably-priced hotels had sprung up in West End Town, along with a few small restaurants serving conch soup, pan de coco, and fabulous banana pancakes. The well-to-do were still funneled off to Anthony's Key, but otherwise, the tourists were young and adventurous, down for the great diving and a taste of quiet island life. Walking around the village in the evening, locals would pass with the murmured greeting of "good evenin" or "adios." It was charming, it was lyrical, and it was too good to last.

Five years later, again weary of the Alaskan snowscape, I made another trip in January 2001. There are now TACA flights out of Houston, direct to Roatan, sparing you the harrowing descent into Tegucigalpa and the blast-furnace heat of San Pedro Sula. The flight down was full, and most were celebrating their tropical holiday even before the plane left the ground. Loud, beery, gringo voices would prove a constant accompaniment for the next week.

Fortunately most of them seemed booked at Anthony's Key or other big resorts, or else for boat-based diving excursions. I

emerged solo from the Roatan airport, and was pounced upon by a horde of taxi drivers. My first lesson: there is no longer any bargaining with the *taxicistas*. Ten dollars to West End Town was the fixed rate, and no arguments. My driver began trying to work his wiles in English: "Are you married? How old are you?" Some things never change for *gringas* traveling alone, no matter how old and cranky we get. I insisted on speaking Spanish to him, and soon learned about his home (Olanchito, Yoro), his politics (Christian Democrat), and his favorite *fútbol* team (Manchester United). So far, so good, I thought: I can still speak Spanish, and I take no crap from would-be lotharios half my age.

It was to be one of my last opportunities to speak Spanish. Although English has traditionally been the prevalent language, the tourism boom has brought in thousands of Latinos from the mainland. But because of the boom, English is even more widespread. Spanish-speaking gringas were anomalies. I was pale-skinned and red-haired, ergo I spoke English or German or Italian. My automatic lapses into Spanish seemed to confound people rather than inspire solidarity or bargaining power.

My first dinner out brought even more consternation. The funky restaurants I remembered had vanished. I found myself a bistro where the menu was printed in English and Italian and the prices given in dollars. Lots of dollars. It was all English-speakers that night, and I felt embarrassed immediately. There were hordes of drunken young people, loud and barely dressed, and flocks of old farts, equally loud and only marginally more dressed. I remembered the admonitions of Cookie at the Training Center, and of Frank Almaguer, our Director. You are guests of this country, you're here only because the Honduran government has invited you, and you will act accordingly. Yes, we got drunk, and we occasionally got obnoxious, but we all basically knew how to dress modestly, keep our voices down . . . we knew how to behave.

The loud voices and bare skin were distressing. Even worse was the pervasive feeling that we tourists were there to be catered to. "Para serverle" seemed to be standard operating procedure and not just a courteous phrase. The rich gringos ordered, and the locals obeyed. It was not pretty.

I met many gringos who had come to live on the island, some working as dive instructors or bartenders, others to build big, foolish houses above the once pristine beaches of West Bay. Of the folks I talked with, very few had ever been "over to the mainland," or knew anything about local culture or politics. Fewer spoke Spanish. The woman who managed my hotel was from Colorado, and had lived on the island for ten years, but her instructions to the Spanish-speaking staff were invariably of the "mop-o el floor-o" variety. It was hard not to cringe.

Despite this, I had a few fine moments. The reefs have suffered, but there still is marvelous diving and snorkeling to be found. The half-day "dolphin encounter" at Anthony's Key was pricey, but one of the most life-enhancing experiences I've had. I rediscovered Rudy, a true Island gentleman who has been making sublime banana pancakes and fruit smoothies in his beachfront restaurant for years. I had a wonderful chat about the old days with Jimmy Miller, whose father I had met back in 1982. I breakfasted with an RPCV from Santa Rosa de Aguan who had weathered Hurricane Mitch there. His love for his friends in Santa Rosa and his continuing dedication to the community were inspiring. Maybe we have done some good here, I thought to myself. Some of us anyway. He asked if I had ever been back to my site, and I had to say no. I'm not sure they'd welcome me back in Pespire, much less remember me. The sense of not having made a difference, of not having done enough, was inescapable.

I spent my time alternating between embarrassment, guilt and nostalgia for a long-lost time. I found it difficult to just relax and enjoy myself - the contrast between the new, tourist-centered economy and my memories of more quiet times on the island were just too jarring. I couldn't fault the locals for wanting to take advantage of the booming gringo trade, but I longed for the days when I was regarded as a source of curiosity and ridicule, not as a source of dollars.

Roatan is still there, the palm trees, white sands and limpid turquoise waters remain. But I'm not sure that we grizzled Volunteers can easily go back. We may find we're packing a load of guilt and remembrance, along with our bathing suits and snorkel gear. A lot has changed, and the change may not do us good.

Amigos, Árboles Y un Aldea Solar

August 2001

Steve Lenzo, Agua Caliente de Linaca, Choluteca, 1985-87 ~ Chadron, Nebraska

Thirteen years after leaving Honduras, I returned on February 13, 2001, for a 10 day vacation of visiting friends with whom I had kept in touch. Actually, I "kind of, sort of" kept in touch since the village where I lived, Agua Caliente de Linaca in Choluteca does not have mail service. Writing to this village entails sending a letter in care of the nearest radio station, Radio Valle, in Choluteca. The arrival of the letter is announced during a morning program and the intended recipient must then make the journey to town to pick up the letter. Unfortunately, the last three letters I sent, never arrived, and so my friends in Agua Caliente were quite surprised when I drove up in my rented truck on February 15th.

The emotions I felt arriving in Tegucigalpa, driving through the country side to Choluteca, and being among friends in Agua Caliente were overwhelming. This was the country and culture and people where I learned to speak and think and breathe Spanish. I felt loved, accepted, surrounded by warmth and generosity, safe and protected. Hard to believe that one would feel that way in the capital, which now has more crime like any big city, but there is a feeling I get there that tells me I am safe, that people will greet you on the street, exchange smiles, looks, compliments, good wishes. The feeling is wrapped up in the sounds, sights, smells, tastes and feel of the Honduras. Walking the streets of Tegucigalpa, one experiences the mixture of tropical flower blossoms, grilled meat, fried platanos and raw sewage intermingled in the same breath. Mix that with the bright colors and movements of crowds of people, the noisy traffic and it all adds up to this feeling that everything is right, the feeling you get when you can really relax and feel like you've come home.

Many friends in Agua Caliente had decided that I had forgotten them, that I would never return, and after catching up on each others lives and children they would pause and say, "Usted volvio," you returned, as if they did not quite believe it. I told them that getting married, having three children, moving around the country, pursuing my career had all consumed much time and energy, but that I had finally decided to make a visit a priority (or it would never happen) and I was going to visit, now. I also told them I would not wait 13 years again for my next visit.

Another magical aspect of this return to Honduras was the way in which the Spanish language came back to me after all these years. Since completing Peace Corps service in 1985, I have traveled and worked in Spain, Mexico, Puerto Rico and the South Bronx. In each situation, my ability to converse in Spanish slowly returned and improved as the days and weeks went by. This time was different. Although I was only in Honduras for 10 days, my ability to communicate in Spanish was accelerated beyond belief. I would start sentences and hear myself finishing them with words and expressions I had not spoken, nor thought of, in 13 years. This was the country where I had learned to think and dream in Spanish. Being surrounded by Honduras and Honduran friends, the language seemed to be absorbed into my body along with the heat.

International/Intercultural Elementary School Exchange

As a volunteer assigned to CARE I had helped establish a small tree seedling nursery which we used to reforest the watershed surrounding the springs that supplied the drinking water for the village. One evening we walked to the watershed and it was satisfying to see the trees we had planted were now 50 feet tall. Where there once had been only grass and shrubs, there was now a closed canopy of forest trees. I had also been very active teaching in the grade school and helping to reforest the school site as well. On this trip I brought a book from my son's fourth grade class titled Our Favorite Places in Nebraska and South Dakota. This was a book written and drawn by the students, describing in English and Spanish, just what each of these places where. Some examples were the video arcade (hard to describe to students who just recently have experienced electricity), a water slide park (scary photos!), Wal-Mart, the Mall, Mount Rushmore. In return, the students from Agua Caliente also wrote a book of their favorite places. As you might imagine, they chose places more closely connected to the natural world such as: The milpa (corn field), The wildlife, The river, The ocean, The forest, The trees. Many of their drawings also included messages to save the trees, don't destroy wildlife, trees are the source of life, protect the water. The book, along with photos from my trip, will be presented to my son's fourth grade class in Chadron, Nebraska, as soon as the translation is finished. My hope is that the schools will begin a correspondence and exchange of information about their lives in two very different parts of the world.

San Ramon: The First Solar Village in Latin America (with free, satellite-based, high-speed, internet access!)

While visiting Agua Caliente I inquired about a village I had read about in the U.S., San Ramon, the first solar village (aldea solar) in all of Latin America.. My friends reminded me that I had visited San Ramon as a volunteer, walking the 15 KM while carrying a wooden saint on our shoulders to pay homage to their yearly festival. They also had

heard of the solar power project which was funded by the UN after Hurricane Mitch caused landslides that buried parts of the town. No one, however, had been there to see the project and I had little trouble finding a few friends who wanted to accompany me there to see the project first hand.

I did not remember the road being quite so steep, rocky and in some places very loose. It turned out we should have had 4-wheel drive and after a short harrowing descent, we decided to leave the vehicle and continue on foot.

After a 40 minute walk we arrived in San Ramon to the sight of solar powered street lights, each light outfitted with its own solar panel and battery perched high atop a pole. The school, the church and a few houses also had their own solar panels, batteries, and lights/electricity. When we arrived at the school we were shown the computer room with twelve brand new HP computers, printers, and even a satellite dish providing connection to the internet! The thirty students present were all huddled around one computer watching Disney's Jungle Book in Spanish, on DVD. We spoke with the person in charge and asked if we could use the internet and were told to make ourselves at home. After checking my e-mail (what a strange phenomena to have this sort of access to the world, from such a remote village) I asked my friends (who had never seen the internet or a computer) what pictures of the world they would like to see. They chose New York City and we surfed the sights, Empire State Building, Statue of Liberty, the sky line with all the big buildings, etc.

As we were getting ready to leave, Chepe asked me about making long distance phone calls. I had told him that in Tegucigalpa I had visited an internet café and sat next to a gentleman who was talking and singing to his girlfriend, using the computer to make the call. The owner later told me that it was a service provided by Yahoo and other companies for free!. I had told Chepe maybe we could do this in San Ramon . He was skeptical, well, so was I. So I asked one of the teachers who was in the room if we could do this thing and he said he had never heard of such a thing and probably not, but go ahead if you think you can. I downloaded the instant messenger program from Yahoo in about 1 minute, performed the simple test of the microphone/speaker system and then marked the numbers of my parents' phone in Detroit. After hearing a ring, mydad answered the phone and we spoke for 5-10 minutes. We were all quite amazed and then made several more calls to various friends and relatives in the US. Yahoo currently does not allow international calls so they must be placed from Yahoo to a phone number in the US. Since one can access yahoo.com (a US company) from anywhere on the planet, you can call from anywhere TO the US and it is technically not an international call. One of the folks in charge kept asking me if I was sure he would not be charged somehow for all these long distance calls, and several of the teachers had me show them how to make these free long distance calls from their profiles. I was only too happy to do so and pointed out that I myself had only learned the previous week from a Honduran in Tegucigalpa. After talking to several students and teachers, we walked back the truck and successfully ascended the switch backs returning to Agua Caliente just in time for the daily partido de futbol.

Another noteworthy change is that while I was a volunteer in '85 most of the young men would gather every evening at 5 p.m. to play futbol (soccer). There were two teams and we would play until it was so dark, the ball was barely visible. On this trip, I was encouraged to see that there is now an equipo femenino (female team). The team practices daily, has entered and won tournaments, and enjoys the support and cheers of the entire village.

El Trapiche de San Marcos de Colon and the Free Market

While serving as a volunteer in 85-87 I was assigned to CARE, given a motorcycle, and asked to work with some 25 communities in Choluteca. Although I lived in Agua Caliente and worked reforesting the watershed there, I also traveled and worked in the surrounding villages. One village I always loved to visit was El Trapiche de San Marcos de Colón. This village is close to the Nicaraguan border, at a higher elevation with a pleasant climate similar to Tegucigalpa, with pine trees in the mountains.

The president of the patronato, Antenor Guillen, is a wonderful human being who has worked tirelessly for the good of his community. He has been instrumental in bringing in first the potable water project, building a centro de salud, creating an egg business that employed a sizable portion of the village, and most recently, building a basic grains and foods cooperative to help farmers lower their costs of doing business. Unfortunately, Antenor and his business

got caught in the changing political winds when Honduras devalued its currency and moved towards a free market economy. With the importation of cheap eggs from Guatemala and El Salvador, he lost just about everything over the course of two years. He did manage to sell out with enough capital to buy a little land and 10 cows and he now makes his living milking cows twice a day and making cheese to sell locally. He also grows organic coffee for export and has an incredible jardin with grafted fruit trees of all varieties. I spent the night with Antenor, Consuelo and the two children who still live at home and in the morning, went up the mountain to milk the cows before sunrise. After several days of 100+ degree temperatures in Agua Caliente, it was a pleasure to warm myself by the fire in his estufa while we drank café con leche (café from his trees and leche direct from the cow). He told me of all his grown children who were now teachers, engineers, social workers, cooperative movement leaders, and of one daughter, Olga, who won a six year, fully paid scholarship to study medicine in Cuba.

After Hurricane Mitch, Cuba sent teams of doctors to Honduras to help out. When I was a volunteer, Cubans, Sandinistas, and Communists were all criticized by the government of Honduras and many people were a little concerned by the prospect of war between the Contras/US and the Sandinistas with potential Honduran casualties. After the medical brigades from Cuba visited, the opportunities for Hondurans to win scholarships in Cuba were publicized and today over 400 Hondurans are studying medicine in Cuba. Applicants must pass an exam and come from a poor family. The only requirement is that each recipient must agree to complete two years of social service in their own country providing medical service to the poor in a rural area. I had the opportunity to see pictures of Olga and her friends in Havana and read her letters home and was impressed with her dedication along with the generosity of the Cuban people and government. The medical school in Havana has over 4000 students from throughout Latin America, and provides a much appreciated service that does not receive much publicity in our country.

Changing Political Winds

As I was driving back to Tegucigalpa on the day before I was to leave, I stopped to pick up five teachers who were hitchhiking from their school in Pespire to their homes in Tegucigalpa. We spoke of the changes that had occurred over the past 15 years and said that I noticed a change in the attitude of the police. That when I was a Volunteer, the FUSEP (Fuerzas de Seguridad Publica) were a branch of the military assigned to police work. They carried M-16s and treated everyone they encountered as an enemy of the country. They were known for being rude and disrespectful and detaining people (and worse) for no reason. On this trip I noticed the police now are called the Policia Nacional, wear a more civilian looking blue uniform, carry pistols and seemed much more polite and professional. The teachers all agreed that this was indeed a very positive change for their country. The police are now part of the Justice Ministry instead of the military and part of their training includes human rights. The teachers also talked about how the electoral system has changed, how you can vote for candidates at the national, departmental and local levels of government (instead of only voting for President as in '85), and even split your ticket among the various parties. One of the teachers had been detained and beaten in the 1980's for possessing literature that was offensive to the police official who discovered it. He said that the political climate has radically changed and did not believe that sort of thing would happen today. As I dropped the teachers off in Barrio Guanacaste I felt overjoyed to have made their acquaintance, to have lived in Honduras and to have returned and witnessed many positive changes in the country.

August 2001

Ya Just Gotta Go Back!

Kathi Hutson, Texíguat, El Paraíso 1985-87

When approached by a Nurse Practitioner friend, Pam, in early December about joining their medical office staff on a mission to Honduras in March, I thought for about 2.3 seconds and replied, "Of course!! I'd love to go!" That started the ball rolling for my return to my "home away from home." In addition to the medical mission week, Pam and I planned an additional whirlwind week of visiting "family" and friends from my past. Since Pam stated she'd like to "experience" the country, I had a plan: What better place to take her than my old home of Texíguat, El Paraíso, for an overnighter. Thanks to the ever-growing Peace Corps grapevine, I was able to make contacts with former and current Volunteers to make all the needed connections for a fulfilling visit.

Not having been in Honduras since my return to Indiana in 1987, I was curious about the changes, especially since Hurricane Mitch so devastated the country. Our first stop in-country was to Las Ruínas de Copán via rental car from San Pedro Sula. The memories

washed through me as I passed towns whose names I recognized: Florída, San Jerónimo (where volunteer Julie lived), Naranjito (where volunteer Kathy, [la loca] lived), La Entrada, and on past dusk until we finally reached Las Ruínas.

Tourism in Honduras is thriving! The ruins are absolutely magnificent!! For Pam's sake, we hired an English-speaking guide for our several-hour tour — much different from the '80's when the tour was on your own. Archeological digs are currently underway: new statues and new finds being dug up every day - including the discovery of civilizations built over past civilizations - all open for public view. The ruins and museum are a must-see for all who return to Honduras.

During the week of the medical mission, we worked out of a small clinic near a hospital under construction in the town of Balfate along the north coast between La Ceiba and Trujillo. In addition to regular clinic hours, we made home visits to the surrounding aldeas. Pam and I (now an Emergency Room nurse) teamed up together. Although we had local bilingual high-school students as interpreters, I was able to fend mostly for myself due to daily interpreting in my current job in a large hospital Emergency Room. I just cannot fully describe my feelings when I first entered Río Esteban, our assigned aldea and approached the first house except to say that I felt like I was home again. The smoke-filled air from the cooking fires, the animals running wild, the children in their school uniforms, the tile-roofed adobe houses, dirt floors, patate mats on bedtops strung with rope, plastic bags hanging from rafters holding the entire family's belongings. Makeshift chairs. Plastic curtains sectioning off the bedroom area. No electricity, few latrines. I noted readily available water - a good sign. And the people: friendly, welcoming, curious, gracious and thankful for our help. It was good to be back.

At the end of the week, we were off to Tegucigalpa by plane. At the airport, we met up with a current volunteer, Mark, to deliver a microscope, books and school supplies sent by his mother. Mark agreed (thankfully!) to accompany us to Santa Lucía where I lived for three months during in-country training. Although Sta. Lucía has grown tremendously, it was not difficult to find my "family" as I lived on the far edge of the soccer field. Being Saturday, there was, of course, a game going on. We found Doña Estela's house and were greeted with a big hug. She is now divorced, her three sons grown with families of their own, all living in the enlarged house where I had become part of the family.

The next morning we were off to Texíguat. South out of Tegucigalpa, turn left in Sabanagrande, and keep going until the road ends. Memories flood back of the 60 km, 8-hour bus ride shared with 3-4 people per seat, animals and bags of corn and rice stacked up in the aisles, chickens with their feet tied together under the seats, mothers breast-feeding, kids staring at me, the "river water" smell of the people and their clothes, and the never-ending dust from the hot, dingy road. Being in an air-conditioned rented vehicle, this time the trip was cushy. I knew the terrain like the back of my hand - even after all these years. We stopped many times for photo-ops: the majesty of the mountains, the changing terrain, the "typical" scenes of women hauling water or supplies on their heads, the men herding cattle, the kids playing or walking to school. When we drove through the conifer-lined portion of the trip, the windows came down, air conditioner off, my nose out the window: the fragrant pine scent was heaven.

Approaching each mountain summit, I rounded the curve in anticipation of the view below: my Texíguat, sitting in the valley along the winding Choluteca River. It finally happened. There it was, as beautiful as ever, just as I remembered. Click: another photo before continuing on. Texíguat has changed and improved tremendously - for the better. There is now electricity all the time (and not just occasionally from a generator!), almost every house has either a pour-flush toilet or a latrine, the school is divided into more than just two classrooms, each class having its own teacher, and the health center where I worked as a Rural Health Educator is now staffed with full-time nurses and a full-time doctor! Mitch destroyed the bridge which is in the process of being replaced - the big machinery seeming out of place here, in the middle of nowhere.

One of the current volunteers, Rebecca, was my contact in Texíguat. She is not in the health field (I noted that the health of the community is being cared for) as I was, but rather is in a forestry or natural resources, working alongside community folks to improve their environment. The best part of the visit to Texíguat was seeing Rina - she was the little girl (9 years old when I left in '87) who hung out with me, was my little buddy. She is now in her 20's, still shy, still sweet. And Arturo, the teacher, my "profe" still correcting my Spanish during my return visit! The centuries-old church has been totally cleaned to show off its rock walls and enduring engravings.

After spending the night (with a fan on!!), we hugged and said our farewells and returned to Tegucigalpa for our last night in-country. My final visit was to the Peace Corps office and a talk with Jutta, the nurse. What an icon! And a phone call to Doña Cookie, one of the Peace Corps trainers and an icon in her own right.

My general impression of Honduras after all these years is positive. Overall, I observed improvements in sanitation, in health and hygiene, in living conditions, in transportation and in the government's desire to continue improving. My thought is that, as sad as it may be to think of all the lives lost to Hurricane Mitch, much good has come from it. Countries from around the world are pitching in with time, talent and money to help rebuild the country and are producing jobs for

Hondurans which, in turn, provides housing and food for their families. Where we boiled our water before drinking or cooking, bleach is now used - an easily affordable means of improving health at the root of a major problem. Water sources are more prevalent and accessible to smaller communities. Latrines were every where, it seemed, in comparison to the 80's. And the children in the schools were learning about health and hygiene through a variety of means other than rote memorization and chanting of lessons.

There is still a long way to go, but it was acutely obvious that many changes and improvements have taken place. I am confident it is in part due to the continuing presence of the Peace Corps and its volunteers like you and me.

April 2002

A Beatle Remembered

Alan Waugh, San Pedro Sula, Cortés 1973-75 ~ Seattle

The death of George Harrison this winter reminded me of the time in San Pedro Sula when our used French-made refrigerator ran out of freon. Someone suggested a repairman on the other side of the tracks. Back behind a dusty house, in an incredibly cluttered garage/workshop, I found the guy. When he realized I was an American, we began to talk about Nueva York and music: he attended Harrison's Concert for Bangladesh in Madison Square Garden in 1971. It is indeed a small world, and we are all connected.

July 2004

Two Tramps in Tropical Time

Maggie McQuaid, Pespire, Choluteca 1976-78 ~ Anchorage

I can remember one hurricane season
Walking the beaches at Tela with you.
Finding the present sufficiently pleasing,
The pull of the past already fading from view.

Eating fish chowder and coconut bread,
A little Flor de Cana with lime,
Never a thought as to what lay ahead,
Just two tramps in tropical time.

Knowing by heart all the best local bars,
Telling the tourists terrible lies.
Sitting up late over beer and cigars,
Waking up early with the sun in our eyes.

Dancing all night to those great reggae songs,
Making each memory rhyme.
Hoping the right time would never turn wrong,
Just two tramps in tropical time.

You can't live forever on beans and tortillas,
You can't live your life on a mile and a dime,
And when it's all over, I always will see us
As two tramps in tropical time.
(We're just two tramps in tropical time.)

I wrote this in Pespire in 1978, under the equal influences of Jimmy Buffett and Salva Vida. I never set it to music, but if anyone wants to, feel free. We can make a demo tape, sell it in Nashville, and retire rich to the North Coast.

From Teguc to Guate City

April 2002

Susan Potter Donald worked in secondary education in Jesus de Otoro, Intibucá, 1985-87, where she met Mike Donald, who worked there in fisheries biology, 1986-88. After working for the U.S. Forest Service in Washington State and Montana, they moved to Tegucigalpa two years ago where he worked for the U.S.D.A. post-Mitch on a Rio Humuya watershed rehabilitation project in Comayagua. In the December 2000 Amigos newsletter, Susan wrote about their return to Honduras.

On November 27, 2001, we packed up the car with the kids, the black lab, a few personal items and drove away from Tegucigalpa heading toward the Guatemalan border. We were all two years older, more proficient in Spanish and a little bit tired of packing and moving. Even our car showed signs of wear and tear, especially the cracked front windshield. This was compliments of a young boy on the north coast who, probably more by luck than aim, hit our front windshield dead on with a rock. Better the front windshield than through the open side window where my son was sleeping. The previous Monday, Sr. Maduro had won the presidential election. His platform was to vanquish crime in Honduras.

Is crime more of a problem now in Honduras than it was in the 80's? I would say yes, absolutely. When I lived in Honduras during the Peace Corps years (1985-1987), we hitchhiked everywhere, mainly because bus routes did not exist in some areas. Hitchhiking is no longer allowed for Peace Corps Volunteers and I rarely saw Hondurans hitchhiking in these last two years. Also, no Peace Corps Volunteers are assigned to the north coast as that is now a high crime area. The recently elected president based his campaign on fighting crime. His campaign song stated "venceremos la delinquencia" (we will vanquish crime). President Maduro has been personally impacted by crime; his son was murdered by kidnappers.

Election day found us vacationing in Utila. There was, of course, a big build-up to the election with a lot of campaigning, posters, radio commercials ,etc. I asked all of my Honduran friends who they thought would win. Several from the Liberal Party were crossing over to vote for Maduro, a Nationalist, but there didn't seem to be any crossover in the other direction. I found the election exciting. I also found myself remembering watching the second elected president, Jose Azcona, swear in as president when I was a Peace Corps volunteer. His swearing in represented the first transition of one elected president to another in the country of Honduras.

Tegucigalpa continues building more restaurants and more new, large houses. In the time I was living there, Ruby Tuesdays, Papa John's and Tony Roma's were built not too far from my house. Last Spring Break we visited Pico Bonito, a national park and Cuero y Salado, a wildlife refuge on the north coast. Neither were designated areas when I lived there in the 80's plus there are other national parks. I have noticed advancements in the environmental education campaign, but there is still a long way to go. My eight year old would become very frustrated as we watched the trash build up on the empty lots in our neighborhood and along the roads. "Do they think the world is their garbage?" he would demand.

Both my sons were in Honduras for a school year and a half. Both went to bilingual schools and progressed quickly in their Spanish. Adam is now 8 and in 2nd grade. Luke is 5 and in pre-kinder. Now, in Guatemala, they are both again in bilingual schools and continue to entertain us with children's songs in Spanish. The latest is "Caminando horas para arriba, caminando horas para abajo, todos los gorilas uh, uh, uh." They enjoyed living in Tegucigalpa and so far, seem content here. We moved in the middle of the school year, but they seemed to adapt well. A few days ago, I asked Adam how he liked living in a foreign country. He said it was fine. So, I guess it is fine. My son isn't one to elaborate unless he is telling a story or talking about Pokemon.

We officially moved to Guatemala City on December 31, 2001. After spending one week in a hotel, we moved into our house. Within a month, our personal items and furniture all found us so now we are settled in our new home. The children began school on January 7th and I continue to keep busy keeping their uniforms clean, making sure they wear the correct ones on the right days and that they have their lunches on days they don't buy them in the cafeteria. This past Saturday we attended their school for a Peace Festival. For the last couple months, the children have been learning all about Nobel Peace prize winners in their Social Studies class. Several organizations that work for peace sent representatives to the school - United Nations, Doctors Without Borders, Red Cross, etc. A Human Rights Organization that works here in Guatemala brought a copy of the 1997 Peace Accord between the Guatemalan Military and the Rebel Organization to put in the school library. The event was inspiring. I'm happy to hear my 8 year old talking about Rigoberta Menchu, Martin Luther King, Lech Walensa and all the other Nobel prize winners.

My husband Michael is currently working for AID-Guatemala, on loan from USDA. He has a great job, I think. He will be traveling around Central America checking on USAID projects to insure that they are following the US environ-

mental codes. The traveling part sounds great to me. This week he is in Antigua for a conference.

We have been doing some exploring of Guatemala on weekends. Last month we went to Lake Atitlan. I was there in the 80's, but the place is larger with more markets and hotels than I remember from before. I am looking forward to revisiting and visiting for the first time the sights of Guatemala. When I traveled here before, the cheap hotels (i.e., the ones Peace Corps Volunteers stayed in) were in Zone 1. Now, for safety reasons, volunteers are not allowed to stay in Zone 1, and since they cannot really afford the other hotels, AID and Embassy families host them. We are hoping to host Volunteers on a regular basis.

Here we are on another adventure. This time, we plan to be here 3 to 5 years. I am happy to feel settled again and know that we are going to be here longer than just another short stay.

April 2002

Only in the Peace Corps

Mark Brazaitis, Guatemala 1990-93 ~ copied from a recent Peace Corps recruiting publication

There you are in the middle of a cornfield in a Mayan Indian village, spinning and twirling with three Guatemalan farmers, demonstrating a solar eclipse.

We were standing in a cornfield, three farmers and I, when Alfonso, the farmer with the largest straw hat, asked me what I was going to do when the eclipse came the next afternoon.

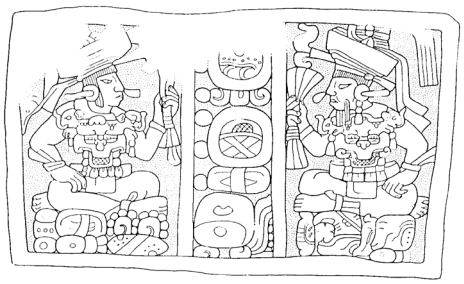
"Not look at it," I said.

"Right," he said, "you'll go blind if you do."

The two other farmers nodded.

We were having trouble. The birds were eating the corn. As a Peace Corps Volunteer working in this Mayan Indian village in the north of Guatemala, I knew it was my job to ensure that the corn grew without problem. The previous week my counterpart, an agronomist from Santa Cruz Verapaz, the town where I lived, had strung tape from an old Peter Frampton cassette from trees on either side of the cornfield, but the cassette tape was not doing what the agronomist hoped it would do. The birds weren't afraid of the tape's glossy shine.

The agronomist wasn't with us this week. A good thing. He'd taken a peculiar joy in stringing Peter Frampton from tree limb to tree limb. He never said where he got the cassette – perhaps it was a worn gift from another gringo – but as he destroyed it in the name of a better harvest, he cackled, his white teeth brilliant beneath his black beard.



The farmers, though, weren't as worried about their corn as they were about the eclipse. They'd already told their children they were forbidden to leave the house the next day. Their wives, too. They themselves planned to spend all day in bed.

I, however, was concerned about the corn. I hadn't done my job, and I couldn't think what to do. The corn was too tall for a scarecrow to be effective. Netting was too expensive. Now, two weeks before harvest, the birds had already eaten a fourth of the crop, and all we could do was watch.

"I'm sorry about the corn," I said. "It doesn't look like the cassette tape is working."

Alfonso glanced at me, but it seemed he hadn't heard. His mouth was working, chewing imaginary gum, and his bright brown eyes were focused on the sky. After a while, he turned to me.

"How does it happen?" he asked.

"How does what happen?"

"The eclipse."

The question seemed to interest the other two farmers, because they leaned closer, their straw hats poking my shoulders.

"Well," I said, "the moon moves in front of the sun."

The two farmers nodded.

"And then it's night," Alfonso said.

"Well, no, it gets dark for a minute," I said. "And then it gets light again after the moon crosses in front

of the sun."

The two farmers nodded again, but Alfonso seemed unsatisfied.

"This isn't night?" Alfonso asked.

"Not exactly," I replied.

"Then how do we have night?"

"The Earth turns away from the sun."

"*Mentiroso*," Alfonso said.

"No, it's true," I said. "You don't know?"

I looked at Alfonso, who shook his head, and I looked at the two other farmers, who did likewise.

I'd learned a lot from these men – how to dig deep, *acequias* to stop erosion on hills, how to use a machete, how to say "hello," "Goodbye," and "I love you" in Pokomchi. Now I was in a position to teach them something. Something wonderful.

"Here's how it works," I said. I assigned Alfonso to be the earth and another farmer the moon and the third the sun, and I maneuvered them around each other in the, cornfield, twirling them, teaching them about why we have days and nights, why we have full moons and half moons, and why we have eclipses. With each of my revelations, the three men grinned, as if I were opening doors to rooms full of gold.

I felt like Copernicus, not just reciting facts long known but discovering them, pulling from my mind the fresh observations of genius.

As we walked out of the field, the farmers were muttering their wonder, and I was floating, as if part of the astronomical configuration: the sun, the moon, the earth, and Mark.

Before Alfonso turned down the path to his house, he said, "Maybe the eclipse will do it."

"Do what?" I asked.

"Scare away the birds."

Mark Brazaitis is the author of The River of Lost Voices: Stories from Guatemala (1998), a wonderful book of short stories about the Guatemalans he came to know; The Other Language (2009), a book of poems about Guatemala; plus a novel and two other collections of short stories. He is a professor of English and the director of the Creative Writing Program at West Virginia University.

April 2002

My View from the Stands

USA vs. Honduras - A Soccer Game - Seattle - March 2, 2002

Roxanne du Bois Cull, San Pedro Sula, Cortés & Tela, Atlántida 1973-75 ~ University Place, Washington

The first time I ever saw soccer being played was during my first month in Honduras. It was a skirmish between a bunch of neighbor kids in Tegucigalpa. Many years and four soccer kids later I have finally come to understand the game, wondering now only if "Team Mom-15 years" might add anything to my resumé. It was my youngest, Ian, now a goalie on his high school team, who first heard about the upcoming exhibition game between the United States and Honduran National Teams at the Seattle Mariners' new Safeco Field. (We are talking seriously fancy stadium here). Ian loves soccer, and knew my normally thrifty self would part with my VISA card for the required nine seconds to purchase tickets to anything having to do with Honduras. Besides, his godfather, who had been in the Peace Corps with me, would be visiting that week and therefore coming to the game with us. This would be special. On the day the tickets were to go on sale at 10 am sharp, Ian had to be in school. He asked me to promise to get to Ticketmaster early, so the game would not be sold out (this would not be unusual for us). I promised.

Not far from my home is an unassuming drug store that houses one of Tacoma's best kept secrets: a Ticketmaster counter. When I wanted James Taylor concert tickets, I only had to wait an hour and a half to get decent seats and only two hours for Bette Midler (I own good binoculars). How bad could this be? I was running later than planned and at 9:20, mug of coffee in hand, I rushed into the drugstore to establish my place in line.

There was no line. There was a tall man wandering near the Ticketmaster counter, which also serves as the cigarette, alarm clock, video and camera department. I began to wonder if I had come on the wrong day. Twenty minutes later, we were still the only ones there. Having finished reading the *National Enquirer* that was lying on the counter (did you know Lady Di was really an alien?), I figured I had nothing to lose by approach-

ing the stranger who stood near me. I asked if he was waiting for soccer tickets. He was, and we were both relieved to be correct about the date. He was a soccer coach and dad who was rewarding his daughter with tickets for making it onto one of our area's premier teams. I did not know him, but we seemed to have a lot of friends in common - all soccer folks, of course. He was very pleasant. It was nice to have someone to talk to. And wait with. He picked up a small atlas. He asked me if I had ever heard of Honduras, and if I had a clue where it was - I didn't like him anymore.

At ten o'clock, the counter lady appeared. I handed her my credit card and told her I wanted to purchase the 4 best available seats. How much could they be? My first car did not cost $250 (but then *it* did not have 4 seats in it.) My son was thrilled. He said he knew I would get good seats because the team playing was Honduras. My kids know I have this really soft spot for anything that has to do with Honduras!

Today was the big game. Ian's godfather, Jim Criste, did not make it. He was called to DC to be offered the position of Country Director of Peace Corps/ Costa Rica. Some excuse! (I intend to publish in this nesletter the address of his house with the guestrooms as soon as he gets settled in that beautiful country!) Accompanied by my husband and older son, we four headed for Seattle early at Ian's insistence to see the players warm up.

The weather was cool, sunny and glorious. Our seats were great. The fans were excited. My husband brought us all beer and soda. Thirty thousand voices suddenly silenced and we collectively turned and faced the warmth of the sun as the two national anthems were played. Then the crowd roared with excitement. The referee blew the whistle and the game began.

I picked up my roster and looked over the names on the USA side: Williams, Cunningham, Howard, Keller, and my kid's favorite, Jones. My kids named their dog after Cobie Jones. As my eyes moved to the right side of the roster, and down, the field in front of me began to dissolve into a foggy sea of memories: Rosales, Pineda, Alverez, Perez, and Canales. It then floated to a small wooden chest in my room - where I treasure my most precious worldly possessions. In it is a soccer jersey - with a tear in the right sleeve. It was given to me when I was in the Peace Corps.

I had been working briefly in a small village outside of Tela. There wasn't a regular road back then, and I traveled there by horse or on my motorcycle. The young but obvious leader of the village was wearing the soccer jersey the first time I visited, and every time afterward.

It was a Guatemalan Soccer Jersey with a large Quetzal on the front of it. There was a tear in the right sleeve. I asked him about his shirt, so different from the attire of the rest of the men in the village. Juan had been a star player on the Honduran National team, and after playing Guatemala, one of the opposition players gave him his jersey as a sign of camaraderie and friendship. But Juan's soccer career ended abruptly when his father was killed in an accident on the United Fruit Company's banana plantation and Juan, the eldest son, came home to harvest bananas and support and help raise his many younger siblings. His beautiful young wife told me his jersey was his most prized possession.

In 1974, Hurricane Fifi did her best to level much of the North Coast of Honduras (another story). Approximately twenty thousand people were killed. I was transferred from my school in San Pedro Sula to direct a program for CARE in the Tela area. Although I have neither before nor since worked so hard in my life, I was given the often joyful task of administering a million dollars worth of aid in the form of housing materials, agricultural supplies (including hundreds of new machetes!) seeds, etc. CARE, along with other organizations, did a lot to keep thousands alive and fed after the devastating hurricane that ended or changed forever the lives of thousands - including my own. Juan's little village, one of the hundred or so in the CARE/ Tela program, rebuilt their houses and planted crops. Months later, as the harvest began, my work there was done.

The day I left my site in Tela, I stopped by my office to give (or

rather collect) a few last hugs to my country counterparts. On top of my now empty desk, was Juan's clean and folded soccer jersey. I was told that he was waiting at the door when it was unlocked at 6 o'clock that morning. Juan had explained that since he was on foot, he had to leave immediately to make the 10-mile walk back to his village to start work that day. The jersey, he had insisted, was to be delivered to only me as a symbol of gratitude and affection from his village. I boarded a flight the next morning for my return home to the USA.

I was still in my seat on the airplane, tears stinging my eyes, clutching my jersey and listening to the roar of the Pan Am jet engines when my son tapped me on the arm, "Mom, you are such a space case! You are not even paying attention to the game!" It was almost over now. The score was 4-0. Cobie Jones had not played. I guess second string was enough to beat the Honduras Team. This time anyway.

The game ended. The fans jumped to their feet in applause. As is tradition, the players re-entered the field to greet each other. Then one of the US players took off his jersey, and handed it to his Honduran opponent!

August 2002

You Can Go Back . . . and People Do Remember: of guns, conejos & garrapatas

Jeff Duke, Victoria, Yoro 1966-69 ~ San Leandro, California

I guess you can go back, even 32 years later. Since I left Victoria, Yoro, in 1969 I had been thinking and talking about going back. Somehow it never happened and I was about to turn 56. It was now or never.

I had spent three years there beginning in 1966 as a community development worker. I remember Joe Grimsby, I guess he was middle management, asking me whether I minded being in an isolated location. I was only 20 then and I probably would have said yes to anything.

Victoria when I first arrived was a town of about 1,000 people accessible only by SAHSA DC-3 onto a dirt airstrip or a four-hour walk or mule ride to the nearest road. Its only nod to modernity was running water and I often thought that aside from my short wave radio, I could be living in the nineteenth century.

After a week of culture shock in the prone position, I did manage a few successes and impressive failures. These included the construction of a water project with technical help from Jerry Brownfield, and the construction of several CARE-related schools in the outlying aldeas. And the operation for a year of a grain-buying cooperative in town. This came to a quiet end when the lack of truck access got us no farther than break-even on profits and the ability to just pay back the loan.

Then there was the rabbit-raising project with teenage boys. The rabbits lasted about one week.

With no contact with anyone since that time, I contacted Art Williams, my immediate predecessor in the site, to get some idea of what to expect. Art, and his wife Georgina, originally of La Lima, were very helpful and their recent videos of Victoria clued me into to Carmen Murillo, then the 20 something school teacher I took my meals with - and now the director of the school.

Still trying to make connections I wrote offering books for her school library, and Carmen became my lifeline back.

I went at the end of August 2001, spending about a four days with Carmen in Tegucigalpa seeing people and buying things for Carmen's school and four days in Victoria. It was a workout, but everything I had hoped for.

Tegucigalpa has grown enormously, with perhaps five or six times the population of the late sixties. It was not the quaint, slow-paced colonial town I remembered. The old downtown looked shabbier, with the streets full of people most of the time. Doña Olympia's pension, where I used to stay in Tegus, was shuttered, sad-looking and for sale. The Teatro Clamer, where I can remember

seeing more than one 007 flick, was also closed and in disrepair. But out in the new colonias there were stores and streets that could have been stateside, even warehouse shopping.

And I did notice the guns. Guys with shotguns in front of Banco Atlántida. Guys with machine guns in front of DIUNSA, the fancy department store. And old friends and new acquaintances with assorted pistols in their pockets.

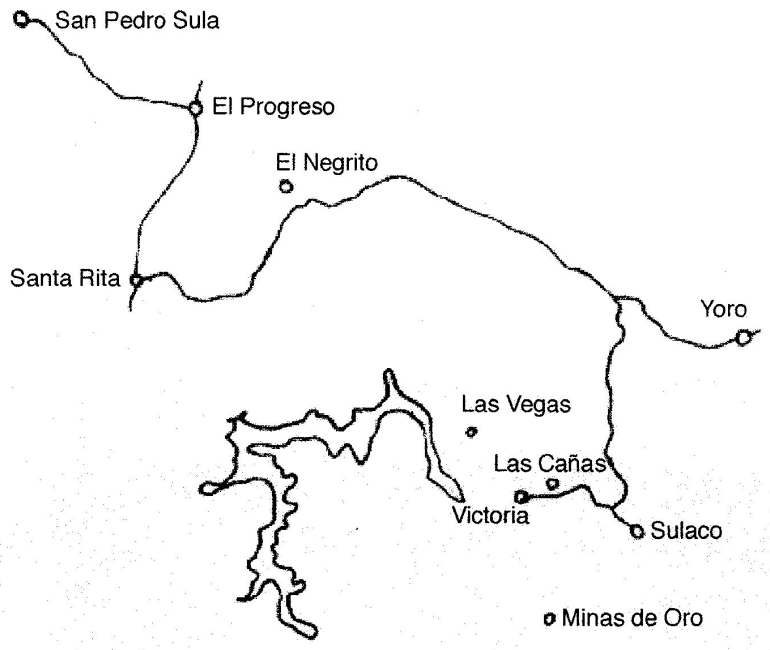
But as Carmen directed me from one part of the city to another, meeting old friends, I quickly felt very comfortable and very connected. Victoria had been a very closed community, where everyone knew each other, for better or worse. Now much of Victoria was in Tegucigalpa and in fact much of Victoria was in the United States.

The state of insecurity in Tegucigalpa was, like other Latin American cities, the result of its lure to the rural poor and resulting breakdown of the civic norms of small towns, where everyone knows your mother. Yet the connections of small towns still exist in Tegus, and it was really nice running into people I used to know, especially accidentally on the street.

The trip to Victoria, in a rented Toyota 4x4, was about four hours long over mostly dirt roads. The bridge over the Sulaco River to Minas de Oro was still under re-construction after being swept away by Hurricane Mitch. So we took the long way. In this time of drought, the countryside looked surprisingly green, but the soil was very dry.

When we got to Victoria, Carmen insisted that I stay with her rather than in the local hotel. My instincts resisted, since Carmen lived alone and I remembered the old village taboos. But we were both in our mid fifties and she had seven sons, so I decided we were beyond that. It turned out very well, because Carmen continued to keep me connected to everyone and everything going on in town.

With some trepidation, I launched myself down the main street. The town had grown by fifty to one hundred percent since my time, but the streets were still unpaved. I was told that much of the growth came with the road and the opportunity to get agricultural products out of the valley. A lot of the houses that were just mud and stick before were now completely plastered and painted. People said the dollars coming from sons and daughters in the U.S. were another reason the town looked better.



Victoria now also had electricity, telephones, television and even a sewer system for flush toilets. Instead of the one primary school, there were now two primary schools, and a high school.

I was pretty turned around those first few minutes, but began to get my bearings and started to call on people I knew. Andres Cubas at his pulperia, Ulyses Castro at his new house. Marco Antonio Funes for lunch. And so on.

I got a few odd looks, but most of the people who I remembered, remembered me even better. And there were quite a few people who came up to me in the street and recounted things I had completely forgotten: the mother of one of the rabbit project boys; a man (then boy) I used to pay to take my mule to pasture after trips to the aldeas; the little boy (now man) who used to live next door.

Carmen and her fellow school teachers were very nice to give a dinner in my honor. She was going to put on an *Acto Civico* at the school for my contribution to the library, but there was a nationwide teachers strike at the time.

It was great having the four wheel drive truck even though it was expensive. I took a trip one day to my water project site, Las Cañas. I got a warm welcome. This little aldea, too, seemed somewhat prosperous - perhaps because of its access to bottom land - with a new school and health center. These people seemed relatively contented but their life and outlook was definitely less sophisticated than even Victoria. I took along a Polaroid camera to leave pictures of myself together with some old friends and it made a big hit both with the kids and the adults.

I learned that they were now finishing their third water project - mine had lasted ten years. It was a

much more modern project, with a completely enclosed source from farther up the mountain. The project was being run by Medicos Sin Fronteras, the group that was also responsible for a new water project in Victoria and house spraying for Chagas disease in the area.

Antonio Marquez invited me to his house to try some tamal de elote with mantequilla (fresh corn tamal with cream). It was so fresh, the taste exploded in my mouth.

Back on the road, I used the truck one day to see the new water project for Victoria with Ulyses Castro. On another day I drove to the other end of the valley to the aldea of Las Vegas. I really enjoyed having this truck, because I still remember the last time I was to Las Vegas on mule back and my backside felt it for days.

Las Vegas had been one of the most prosperous places around in my day because of its coffee fincas in the nearby mountains. The coffee market has been crushed for the last few years, and the town showed it.

Before I left the states, I had been reading *La Prensa* on the internet (a great way to bone up on your Spanish) and heard about substantial famine caused by the drought last year. The effects of the drought were felt throughout Central America and especially in southern Honduras.

In Victoria, the drought meant only several hours of water each day and taking baths with a plastic bucket out of the cistern some days. But I had also seen articles about children going to school hungry in the outlying aldeas of Victoria and Sulaco and this was confirmed by Carmen. I ended up making a small contribution for a daily rice and bean merienda at Carmen's school, which hopefully had some momentary impact. I think the effects of last year's drought are still being felt.

Back in Tegucigalpa my last night, I got to see Magaly Funes and her sister, Marlyn. These were 8 and 14 year olds in my time. I took my meals at their parent's house and they used to pick garrapatas off me for ten cents each. Magaly has since gone on to become a Diputada in the National Congress and lived abroad for many years in the foreign service.

Given enough time, some things do change.

A Song for Olancho

Brant Miller, Campamento and Jutiapa, Olancho, 1975-1977 ~ Antioch, Tennessee

I wrote the following song lyrics shortly after they paved the first section of the Olancho Highway between Tegucigalpa and Telanga, the road I traveled via the El Rey bus whenever meetings or recreation took me from my work site of Campamento, and later Jutiapa, Olancho. I remember singing the song for some PC friends during a get-together in Catacamas, this particular house being one of the few places I could get a hot shower after riding that dusty old road! Before Honduras, I had never experienced anything like catching a bus at 3:00am and riding for hours on winding mountain roads, packed in tight with campesinos and their chickens. I wonder if they ever finished paving that highway; I guess I'll just have to go back and find out. So, now, please climb on board, take your seats, hold on to your chickens, and enjoy this little journey back in time with an idealistic twenty-three-year-old, who grew to love that wild little country with all its bumpy roads. To set the record straight regarding verse 3, as a forester I have always believed that the chainsaw is a needed tool for good forest management. In that verse, I was referring to over-exploitation of the resource. Lastly, if anyone would like to know how the melody goes, feel free to look me up in the Amigos directory, give me a call, and I'll sing it over the phone!

Today They Opened The Road That Goes Olancho Way

Today they opened the road that goes Olancho way
It's a big flat stretch of pavement that shortens the ride, they say
It goes from Tegucigalpa to Telanga, Morazán
It'll be in Juticalpa before a burro can yawn

The first time I traveled the old road was on an early mornin' bus
The trip it was so bumpy and we were all full of dust
But the curves no longer matter, and the holes are laid to rest
And everybody's happy, I hope it's for the best

I can see the diesels comin', breakin' the speed of sound
Bringin' all sorts of progress to the small Olancho towns
And the forests all are managed by the buzzin' chain saw minds
As the last of the palomas go soarin' through the pines

It's many a road I've traveled that's kept me from my sleep
And the loss of one small highway should hardly make me weep
But I see the future comin' as I see the world is round
That fate is sealed and packaged before they break the ground

I've seen it in my hometown, I've seen it on the moon
If fuel was not so costly they'd also pave it soon
And they'd build an infrastructure between the planets one to nine
But I prefer star gazin', I think it's mighty fine

But today they opened the road that goes Olancho way
It's a big flat stretch of pavement that shortens the ride they say
Instead of gettin' all dusty, instead of gettin' sore
You can go in two short hours where once you went in four
And the curves no longer matter, the holes are laid to rest
And everybody's happy, I hope it's for the best

From the great Atlantic Ocean to Catacamas and Culmí
They're buildin' all kinds of highways as far as the eye can see
Well, there's just one kind of highway that we just can't seem to build
The kind that makes us happy and doesn't ruin our world

Queen for a Day (Almost)

April 2003

Barbara Kaare-Lopez, Olanchito, Tocoa & Trujillo 1978-80 ~ Denver

"Why would you want try do something stupid like join the Peace Corps? Those people hate us!"

- relative of Author

"Vos no sos gringa, vos sos Catracha."

The "feria" (fair) of Santa Barbara was approaching rapidly. Spirits were soaring in Trujillo, the magically beautiful town on the Caribbean where Peace Corps Volunteer Barbara, now known as Barbarita (and sometimes as Barbarazo), resided. It was incredulous that she, a nurse from Motown Detroit, was living in a town whose patron saint also bore her name. What could this mean? Did fate place her in this location? Lord knows she had paid her dues in Honduras before arriving to live and work in Trujillo.

First she had lived in Olanchito, a rural but bustling town, where she never was accepted by that pendejo of a nurse, her Honduran counterpart, Mirna. Ten months were seemingly wasted as she tried to learn and do her job, without ever really being a true member of the staff. Her Spanish was so poor she couldn't understand the patients and they couldn't understand her.

Then she transferred to Tocoa, another rural town with no potable water or electricity except for one small section where she had the good fortune to live. The plumbing had been laid there years ago by Standard Fruit Company. Bought from the local discotheque, electricity was provided three hours a night.

The town had since raised money to get plumbing laid, but every new mayor had stolen the money from the "Plumbing for Tocoa" fund. Barbarita was incredulous that the townspeople hadn't mutinied. With total innocence and belief in the democratic process, she would ask the Hondurans, "you mean that pendejo of a mayor steals the money and you folks do nothing? Why not?"

The people in town would respond, also in total innocence, "si Dios quiere" (if God wills it), "then something can be done." Otherwise, zero, zip, nadita. Ay, que pendejos! (pendejo was becoming her favorite word, learned from the list of "Dirty Words to Defend Yourself" that she had first obtained while in Peace Corps training. In Honduras, it is a strong word for fool - an insult - but also correctly used means pubic hair. Now explain that connection).

Barbarita often felt flabbergasted. At other times she felt like a volcano ready to erupt. How can people be so passive? Why, in the U.S.A., that could never happen in 1979. Maybe in the past, but not now. Or could it?

Peace Corps Volunteers are supposed to be apolitical, but neutrality didn't come easily. Barbarita was ready to lead a revolution, but that was taking a stand. Better calm down, "tranquilite, Barbarita," she would tell herself. No wonder Tocoa was called by some, "el culo del mundo."

Later, when she way: transferred to Trujillo, she felt a peculiar stirring in her soul, a transcendental type of feeling that she would do something special here, in this magical city, whose patron saint ironically bore her name. But what would that great something be?

Trujillo had its own great history. In 1525 Columbus landed there on his fourth and last voyage to the new world. Part of the old fort and cannons still stand on a hill overlooking the Caribbean. "What a wonderful town to 1ive in," she thought.

A few months passed by and Barbarita toiled diligently as all Peace Corps nurses did who worked for the Honduran Ministry of Health. Would she modernize the health system? Would she help eradicate malaria? Or would she influence Honduran women to breastfeed their babies and stop them from inadvertently killing them, which they did when they made their baby's formula with dirty, unboiled water. Diarrhea and dehydration were killers.

Her fate was revealed one day while she was sitting in her office toiling over the nurses' schedule. Dr. Mario Ponce, the five foot tall director of the hospital came by, jubilant with the announcement. "We need you to run for Queen of the feria," he proudly exclaimed. "You will be the hospital candidate."

Flabbergasted once again, Barbarita's jaw dropped. "Queen of the feria?" she repeated, but in an inquiring fashion. To herself she bemoaned Dr. Ponce's proud declaration. "What a dumb thing to do . . . a beauty contest". she thought. When the saliva stopped drooling out of her gaping mouth, she recovered enough to explain why she, a Peace Corps Volunteer, a representative of the U.S. government, could not be a queen candidate. "We have to be apolitical, Doctor. I'm sorry I can't do this."

Now it was Dr. Ponce's turn to be incredulous. "You have to do it. You, Mercedes, and Francisca are the only single women in the hospital. Everyone else is married, so they can't run for Miss Trujillo."

"So nominate Mercedes or Francisca. I

told you, I'm a gringa. We have to be apolitical. I can't be in a beauty pageant."

Dr. Ponce's face was as red as a ripe tomato. He shouted, "Mercedes weighs 300 pounds and has a mustache. Francisca is only 4'9" tall; the crowd would never see her on the stage. You have to be the hospital candidate."

On that enraged note, Dr. Pence left in a huff, slamming the door behind him. "Puchica, what am I going to do," thought Barbarita. Then she began to be a little indignant. "So that's why I get nominated, because I don't have a mustache, or weigh 300 pounds, and I'm taller than 4'9."" Was this the something special Barbarita would do as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Honduras . . . be a contestant in a beauty contest?

Life surely has its surprises. When Doña Alma, the Honduran lady with whom Barbarita lived, found out about the nomination and Barbarita's apathetic response towards it, she was mortified. "Gringo de mierda," she yelled. "You should be honored to be nominated. Any girl in Trujillo would be. Who do you think you are? You and those damned Yankee politics of yours. Accept the nomination."

Doña Alma's outrage jolted Barbarita. Supposedly Doña Alma liked her very much despite the fact she was a gringa ("north American female"). After conversing with some of her gringo and Catracho (Honduran) friends, she decided to accept the nomination. The hospital staff was delighted.

The hard, chilling facts of reality were to follow. The nominee needed an escort, a dress, and a pair of decent shoes. When Peace Corps sent its list "Suggested Items to Bring To Your Country of Service," it didn't include an evening gown. Happily, the dress was easily obtained from an American in town, Kim, which carne as a great surprise and relief. It was Kim's old prom dress, and why she, a non-Peace Corps Volunteer, brought it to Honduras, Barbarita didn't know or care. One obstacle was out of the way.

High heels are extraordinarily important to most Latino women. If it wasn't for the fact that Barbarita was a nurse, and required to wear flat, white orthopedic-style shoes, she guessed she never would have been accepted by the Latin culture. Barbarita once climbed a mountain outside of Tegucigalpa with a Honduran woman who wore high heels for hiking. To Barbarita's chagrin the Honduran woman made it up and over the mountains and wasn't even limping afterwards. Barbarita meanwhile, having climbed in her sturdy hiking boots, limped for three days afterwards. With the feria imminent, a trip to Tegucigalpa produced a pair of high heels for the gringa.

At the preliminary dance that was held for the townspeople of Trujillo to view the candidates for queen and to vote for their choice, Barbarita wore her rubber flip-flop sandals, with a sacklike muumuu dress. Her hair was straight and wet as she had just returned from a vaccination campaign along the coast, traveling in an open boat through the rough ocean waters.

When the eight candidates for Miss Trujillo lined up for the townspeople to view them, even Barbarita had to concede how hippie-like she looked amongst the decked-out ladies of Trujillo's social scene. Doña Alma shouted, "gringa de mierda. You'll never win looking like that!"

Eight Americans lived in Trujillo, and that's exactly how many votes she got. She came in second to last. "I wonder why I didn't come in last," she thought. At least the loyal gringos had turned out to vote for her. Self doubt of her own beauty engulfed her. "I am a 'gringa de mierda.' Whatever happened to that saying, 'when in Rome, do as the Romans do.' I better start dressing with style," she told herself. "Get some class, girl."

The last and most difficult part of this beauty contest ordeal was finding an escort. All the single doctors she asked to escort her were already taken by the Honduran candidates. None of her other gringo friends wanted to be an escort. "That's for Hondurans, not us," they complained. Finally she asked Lorenzo, her ex-Honduran boyfriend whom she swore she would never date again. Lorenzo had drunk himself into a stupor with Flor de Caña, Honduras' rot-gut rum, on their last date, which was to a picnic. Before the stupor set in, he had lunged at her with glassy eyes, yelling, "Barbarita, te quiero, te adoro" (I love you, I adore you), then tripped on a log and did a face plant in the sand. There he lay for hours, flies buzzing around him, no bodily movement except his breathing. He resembled a beached whale, but was just a tad smaller.

So much for the vow, "I'd never date him again." Lorenzo was beaming like a lighthouse when Barbarita asked him to be her escort. "Barbarita," he exclaimed, "thank you for giving me another chance. I'll never disappoint you again."

The day of the feria arrived and Barbarita was actually excited to be wearing her evening gown and Honduran-bought high heels. "Caramba, que mujer!" (Wow, what a woman), exclaimed Doña Alma. "If you had dressed like that the night of the voting, you might have won." Incredulous, Barbarita thanked her. This was the first time Doña Alma hadn't called her "gringa de mierda" (shitty gringa). It felt good.

As she was primping and imagining herself as a Honduran beauty queen, Lorenzo stopped by early to make an announcement. "Something has come up," he stammered. "Two of my ex-classmates from San Pedro Sula are in town for the feria and they need an escort to the dance afterwards.

After I escort you to the coronation, you can join your friends and I'll escort them to the dance."

Despite a little nervous twitch in his lower lip, he seemed to be surprisingly sincere about his announcement. After all the work I've gone through to find an escort for this silly queen contest, I swallow my pride and ask this once stuporous beached whale to be my escort. If only I had a harpoon, I'd spear him, she thought.

What she said was, "ok."

Somewhat sheepishly, not whale-like, Lorenzo departed with the words, "I'll see you in two hours."

Tears swelled in Barbarita's eyes. "Why did those Hondurans have to nominate me to be their candidate? It has been so much work, and I came in second to last. If this is supposed to be an honor, I'd rather do without it." Besides, her Honduran friends at the hospital were upset with her when she socialized with other Americans in town. "Your Spanish is getting bad. You sound like a gringo when you talk."

"I am a gringo. Of course I sound like one," she responded.

"Pues, you spoke Spanish better when you first came to Trujillo from Tocoa. You shouldn't hang around with those gringos." Could they be jealous? No, impossible. But were they?

"I can't win for losing," Barbarita thought. "I don't really fit in with the gringos in town, and I'll never be or talk 1ike the Hondurans." Once again she whined to herself, "if this is an honor to be nominated, I wish it had never happened."

Barbarita made it through the coronation ceremony. The hospital staff complimented her on how nice she looked in high heels and a sexy dress. "You don't look like a Peace Corps Volunteer or gringa anymore," they said. "I guess that's a compliment," she thought. Even the ex-beached whale, Lorenzo, gave her a compliment.

Last year's queen, now starting to show the early stages of her pregnancy and still a señorita (unmarried female), crowned the new queen. The crowd yelled with excitement, "Que viva la Reina!" Long live the Queen! Photographs were taken, the crowd was cheering, fireworks went off in the sky, and people were dancing. It was a great Saint's Day.

The procession began to the dance and Lorenzo dutifully danced his two dances with Barbarita, posed for pictures, and then announced his duty to escort the two exclassmates. He left her standing alone. "Catracho do mierda," she silently called him. "What I'd give to have a harpoon now." With embarrassment she asked her hospital friends if she could sit with them and their escorts as Lorenzo had to "do his duty."

The hospital staff could care less that their candidate had just been abandoned. Dancing resumed, but with a note of sadness on her part. "What a night for a queen candidate," she thought, perhaps now taking it too seriously. What was the something special she would do that she had fantasized about when first arriving in Trujillo? Apparently nothing.

A few weeks later, the elusive chance to be as Honduran beauty queen was a dim memory, along with Lorenzo, although he was still seen around town. Barbarita still imagined him walking down the street with a harpoon sticking out of his back. Perhaps this was a mirage brought on by the hot Honduran sun. Perhaps not.

While at a picnic one day with the Honduran hospital staff, they once again began their teasing. "Your Spanish is getting bad again, Barbarita. You are hanging out with the gringos too much." Why did they say this? Not until she moved to Trujillo were there even any gringos to hang out with, and she did try not to hang out with them too much. No longer able to contain herself any longer, Barbarita shouted defiantly, "what do you care if I hang out with gringos sometimes? They are my people. I am after all a gringa."

Two of Barbarita's best Honduran doctor friends responded, "vos no sos gringa; vos sos Catracha."

Could this be the something special Barbarita was to do in Honduras? They had told her, using slang "you", used only with one's real buddies and/or intimates: "You are not an American; you are a Honduran."

In other words, "you are one of us."

Is this why she was nominated to be a Honduran beauty queen? The nomination meant much more than a chance to be Queen.

"Why would you want to do something stupid like join the Peace Corps? Those people hate us!"

- relative of Author

Do they?

Catacamas Market

April 2003

Rebecca Easton, Iban, Gracias a Dios 1987-89 ~ Gaborone, Botswana

The market keeps transforming itself one minute to the next
as I gaze about.
First, a dirty noisy, smelly place,
everyone in rags and poor, flies everywhere
mothers scolding their screaming children,
and me guarding my pack like a hawk against thieves;
people selling worthless junk imported from
the States, and the poor wasting their last centavos to buy it;
And the busses squashed full with sweaty bodies
pushing and yelling and the whole scene is
Very dreary and trodden looking.

Then, it becomes a social place, people buying and selling, and kids playing with the dogs,
sharing their ice cream, and bananas piled high, five centavos a piece (a bargain) and it's active here,
but relaxed; people watching buses, talking about
their neighbor's jealous husband;
And it's a colorful place, oranges hanging in bags
trinkets of all kinds glimmering for the children's eyes,
and people going places, their bags packed,
and others waiting, watching each other and
watching the afternoon going by at the market and
just being themselves.

copied from the World Wise School section of the Peace Corps website
http://www.peacecorps.gov/wws/guides/honduras/honon.html

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December 2003

The Night Before Christmas, or, Saint Nick Visits Pespire

Maggie McQuaid, Pespire, Choluteca 1876-78 ~ Anchorage

'Twas the Night before Christmas, and all through Pespire,
It was one big *fiesta*, with everyone cheery.
And I in my hammock, in a *cervesa* haze,
was dreaming about my more northerly days,
When a knock in the door ruined my small *siesta*
And I sprang to my feet, murmuring, *"¿Quien es esta?"*
It was a stranger! I drew back in fear,
'Til a voice said, in English, "Does the *gringa* live here?
His red coat was filthy, he looked tired and sick,
But I knew in a moment it must be Saint Nick!
"Santa!" I cried, "What are you doing here?
Where's your miniature sleigh and eight tiny reindeer?"
"Its a long story," he said, full of gloom.
"And I'll tell you as soon as I use your bathroom.
I was stopped at the border, they acted plumb *loco*,
'Cause I had no visa, *ni* passport *tampoco*.
But then what was worse was those border-guard boys.
They took my sleigh and my sack full of toys.
"But how did you get here?" I asked, with a shiver.
"Like everyone else does. I swam the river."
To his lips came a sigh as I got him a beer.
"This is awful," he cried, "Get me out of here!
Send me back north, to Fairbanks or Nome,
but I hate the tropics, I want to go home."
"Now Santa," I said, "I'm in the Peace Corps,
And you know I've heard that old story before.
And I'll tell you the truth, Nick, although you may rue it,
But down here, when there's work to do, well, you do it.
The job may be tough, the environment sleazy,
but nobody said it was gonna be easy.
Now Central America may make you ill,
But this is one place that needs peace and good will.
Folks from Guatemala way down to the Isthmus
Are all waiting for you, because we need Christmas!"
"Maggie," he said, "You have got me inspired.
I was wrong to give up, I guess I was just tired.
But now you have given me strength to pull through."
"Ah, hell Nick," I told him, "I've been through it too."
So we finished our beers, and then with no more fuss,
We went out and flagged down the Teguce-bound bus.
And I heard him exclaim, as they roared out of sight.
"Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night."

I wrote this in December1977. I was halfway through my term of service, and it was my second Christmas in country. I guess my advice to Nick was really my advice to myself.

Todd Fields (1961-2003)

August 2003

Dan Stanton, Cabañas, Copán 1986-88 ~ Tempe, Arizona

It is with great sadness that I report to the Peace Corps/Honduras community the tragic death of one of our own, Todd Fields of Peña Blanca, Cortes, Honduras. Todd died on Friday, March 28, 2003, near Lake Atitlan, Guatemala, where he had been leading a retreat for missionary children preparing to return to life in the United States. Todd was driving a van containing two other adults and six teens, when three armed men in a pick-up truck attempted to run the van off the road. While trying to protect his passengers and drive away, Todd was shot three times. The remaining passengers were taken to a secluded area and robbed, but otherwise uninjured. Todd was buried on Saturday, April 5, in Mt. Vernon, KY, with about 700 people in attendance.

Todd and his wife, Lynnell, were Volunteers in Honduras from 1986 to 1988, he in fisheries, and she in community health/nursing. They spent the last 13 years doing missionary work and raising their two daughters, Savannah and Sophia, in their community of Peña Blanca, Cortes, where they had been Volunteers. Todd was no stranger to missionary work, having grownup himself in a missionary family. The latest information I have is that Lynnell and the girls are planning to stay in Honduras for the time being.

For those of you who didn't know Todd, he was the quintessential "Gentle Giant" - well over six feet tall, and pushing 300 pounds. In receiving this sad news, many of us from Todd's training group have had a chance to reconnect and share Todd's memory.

Mike Donald, who first passed the news on, is currently living in Guatemala with his wife, Susan Potter, and their two sons; Mike works with AID. Of Todd, he writes:

As far as memories . . . there are so many. I recall the crazy fish culture training in Oklahoma and the fun times in training in Santa Lucia; all the fishing trips at Lago de Yajoa being a welcome weekend get away; the "giant bear of a man." When I considered returning to Honduras in 2000 he gave me advice on raising a family in Honduras and once again offered a weekend refuge for me and my family. I am very grateful that his kids and mine have spent several years growing up together with frequent visits.

He has been a great influence in his community in Honduras and that was evident in the memorial service in El Bigope, near Peña Blanca).

Brian Smith, who shared the Peña Blanca environs as his site remembers:

Todd and I embraced a kindred spirit of fishing. We'd spent hours sharing stories of past fishing adventures. From the start, I wanted to fish with Todd. Well, as it worked out, Todd and Lynnell were stationed in a village near Lago de Yojoa and within a year I was placed in a nearby village (walking distance). For me, it was great! Electricity, a toilet, a place to fish and a buddy to go with. Todd, during the year prior to my arrival, scoped out the fishing. Big largemouth bass were in good population in the lake. Todd had made connections in the States to be sent Care packages of plastic worms. He also found locals who rented their row boats to fish in. Oh, my, he and I slipped out as often as we could. Mostly in the evenings. The fishing was great. Folks would wait ashore to see what we caught. Most fish were given away. Then one day, one ordinary day, schedules allowed Lynnell, Todd and I to venture to the lake together. That day made a memory for me . . .

The weather was beautiful. We fished and picnicked out on the lake. The day went by quickly. In no time, it seemed, Todd was rowing the boat back up the canal to return it. As was customary, whoever wasn't on the oars, the other would drag a plastic worm behind the boat. Third world trolling. Bang! A huge bass inhaled my worm. The rod bent double. Time was standing still. The longer the fight, the more I thought I'd lose the fish. Slowly the fish came to the boat. In the clear water I saw a huge bass attached to my line. I was pumped. The biggest bass of my life. Twice it came to the boat and ran off. I thought, if we only had a net. A net was luxury we didn't have. Everyone was excited. I was so focused. When the fish finally seemed played out, it slid to the boat. I reached to lip my prize. In a last gasp, it shook its head. The hook simply fell out of its mouth. The fish and I were stunned. The fish was stationary at the surface. In the blink of an eye, I dove from the boat, grabbed the fish with two hands, kicked to the surface and pitched the fish in the boat. Todd and Lynnell had shocked looks. I was surprised myself. I never thought of diving from the boat; it just happened. We picked up my cowboy hat from the water. I flopped back in the boat. We talked about the whole thing for the rest of the evening. A favorite memory of mine.

I have a few snapshot memories of Todd:

- playing hacky-sack during breaks at the training center
- watching this giant of a man get pale, sweaty, and wobbly-legged when it was time to get our quarterly gamma globulin shots, especially if Rita [Spike] was the Nurse!

- assisting Todd with his one vice - chewing tobacco; Todd used to buy those nasty local hand-rolled cigars (*puros*?) and chop them up, and those of us with other vices would supply him with a bit of Flora de Caña rum to moisten it up and kill the bugs. Voila - *Campo Copenhagen*!

My thoughts go out to Lynnell and the girls, and to Todd's family. You have lost a loving husband, father, son, and brother. The rest of us have lost a gentle man and friend.

Que le vaya bien, Todd.

December 2003

Cartas from Ojojona

In the fall of 2002, the *Amigos de Honduras* Grants-making Committee contributed $1,400 through the Peace Corps Partnership Program to a library project in Ojojona, Francisco Morazán.

The Instituto de San Juan Polavilente provides education for 7th to 9th grade students, and the plan was to include 11th grade in 2003. To accommodate the new grade plus a hoped for 12th grade, the Ministry of Education is providing funding to build four additional classrooms. The school did not have a library; the school administration and the Parent's Association converted one of the classrooms into a library. The students studying carpentry and welding provided manual labor to equip the new buildings with doors, windows, chairs, and tables. A request for funds to PCPP was initiated by PCV Kristine Smith, and completed by PCV Chris Moore from Edina, Minnesota, who was starting his second year of service. The $2,880 request to PCPP was to purchase a computer, a printer, books, and other informational materials for the library. *Amigos'* funds were combined with funds from other donors to equal $2,880. The citizens of Ojojona contributed $11,040.

From Chris' Final Report . . .

We left off from quarterly report #1 as we were waiting for the bookcases to be completed. They since have been finished and we just bought the last of the books. the library looks great and is now open to the students ands the teachers. The whole school is very excited and we are going to have an opening ceremony next week.

The students were able to make a metal barrier that divided the books and computer from the working area. This was made from the extra material that was not used to make the bookcases. This barrier will really helping keeping the books and computer safe and where they are supposed to be.

To measure the success of the project it is necessary to visit the colegio. The "library" they had before was an overcramped little room with no lighting and nowhere to sit and study. the students now have a place where they can study and look up material they need for projects. To make sure the students know how to use the library and its resources, we have set up different projects will all of the classes. Everyone in the school will have to go to into the library and look up certain information and then report on it.

I feel the community has participated more than I expected they would. The colegio staff and students have been great throughout the whole process. The students and staff have a sense of ownership. The construction of the building with funds from the school as well as the making of the bookcases and room divider by the students also contributed.

The project will have a lasting positive influence on the school. The donors for the project who made this all possible should know their generous donations were put to good use and they will make a difference in the studies of countless students in the years to come.

An E-mail from Chris . . .

I am glad that you guys finally received the summary report for the library project. Thank you all again for the support that was provided by "Amigos de Honduras".

The colegio has grades 7-11. After that they can go to one of the higher grade high schools in Tegucigalpa or the business school in nearby Santa Ana. The students take a wide variety of classes, using their years there to decide what they are interested in studying after they graduate. Courses range from history to metal working. Basically like any high school here in the United States.

The books we bought with your help covered just about every one of the courses offered at the colegio. What we found that was especially needed at the colegio were Central American History, Geography, Psychology, and Honduran History. The books in these areas were either non-existent or extremely outdated and beat up. So these areas and others were able to get really well done books that will help the students and the teachers a lot.

The whole volunteer experience

was incredible for me. Most of my work dealt with small businesses in my town. We were able to start up five new businesses ranging from a clothes shop to a bakery/pizza shop(which makes incredible pizza, if you are ever in the area). I also worked a lot with existing businesses, trying to improve their practices. My world view was really changed by this opportunity. Being home now, I am able to look at things in a different way, probably more accurately and aware. I am now working at a transitional housing shelter. I am starting and running programs, mainly for youth. I love the job so far and I am really happy that the job came up for me.

So, thanks again to "Amigos de Honduras." The town is greatly appreciative for the help that you all provided.

Sincerely,
Chris Moore
Ojojona 2001-2003

March 2004

Doña Clarita

Joan Herberger, Corquin, Copán 2002-04 ~ Greer, South Carolina

My friend Tonga and I have just found Doña Clarita after climbing through three barbed wire fences and wandering through a mess of brambles and brush on her property, following the advice of some neighbors and the sounds of someone working the earth with a machete. She was feeding her three cows high on a hill above her house.

Emerging from tall weeds, I catch my first glimpse of tiny Clarita, 80-years-old, waiting for us patiently, with a big smile, a sack of cow feed, and her machete. In a rosy pink dress, she looks delicate, except for her feet and hands. Doña Clarita's feet are short and broad, strong, with short toes. The toes are spread apart from years of walking without shoes. Her hands are also strong and broad, tanned, with earth under the fingernails. She is a woman who spends more time working outside than washing clothes.

Clarita lives alone in an adobe house, in the aldea of Los Mangos, outside the pueblo of Corquin, Copán, in western Honduras. We have come to visit Doña Clarita because Tonga has been talking with her about her work making pottery. Clarita is one of three or four old ladies that still practice what used to be a popular handicraft in the Corquin area, and Tonga has asked Clarita's help in teaching younger women the art.

With Clarita, we head back to the dusty dirty road and down the hill towards Clarita's house. It is mid-day, the sun is hot, and Tonga and I try to squeeze under the shade of my small umbrella. I am fascinated by her feet, and cannot stop staring at them as she walks. I imagine what it would be like to see and touch the soles of her feet. Would they feel scratchy like a cat's paw, or smooth like old leather? I wonder if the body produces more oil to moisturize the skin when it is asked to withstand Clarita's daily life, walking around on the hot dirt and rocks and rough, dry grasses. She has bright eyes and says *verdad* after every sentence, as do many rural people in this area. Her long white hair is pulled back with bobby pins, and her skin looks cool and clean, even though mine feels dirty and sweaty.

Clarita has never married and has no children, although today she is accompanied by her grandnephew, a shy boy of three or four years old. Up until a few months ago, she lived in this house with her sister, also unmarried. Her family wants her to move to the *pueblo*, but Clarita insists she is happy right where she is.

I understand why. It's a nice place. In her yard a gigantic tree, grows almost sideways, roots visible above the scorched ground. I want to climb up into what looks like a perfect nook for sitting or lying down, but we are ushered into the cool shady corridor alongside the house.

Also in the yard are three giant clay pots, broken at the tops. In one of them is clay and water. In 10 or 12 other clay pots are cactus, flowers, basil, herbs for stomachaches and achy bones. Clara tells us that hardly anyone uses them anymore, that she had to look hard to find them, that every once in a while someone comes to look for her, asking for some *monte*. In the yard there is also a fat mama pig and nine baby piglets. The mama pig is covered in dirt, and it is hard to tell what color she is. The baby pigs are white, black, and pink, polka-dotted. I want to look at them up close but realize the mother is struggling to stand up, suckling piggies and all, to take a defensive stance. She's big and looks upset, so I back away. I want to take pictures of all of this, of beautiful Clarita, of the tree I want to be my house, but do not want to make her feel uncomfortable or shy, so I leave my camera in my bag.

The house is two rooms, the kitchen and her bedroom, both opening onto the corridor. In the corridor, there is a small

table with one chair, a broom made from a long stick with dried plants tied to the end, and a small bench, on which Clarita invites us to sit. It feels good to lean against the cool adobe wall. We can hear the stream that runs near the house, further down the hill

Clara does not talk much. And the whole time we are there, she does not sit down. I never get a chance to peek at the soles of her feet so am left wondering what they look like. She goes in the kitchen and returns with a pan of oranges and bananas, a knife, and washes the oranges with a cloth and water. I am amazed at how easily she squeezes the juice from the orange halves with her strong hands.

The juice tastes better than anything I can remember. She goes into her bedroom. Seeing a key in her hand to open the padlocked door surprises me, since the kitchen door had been wide open when we arrived. She comes out with two tiny *jarritas*, water pitchers, each no bigger than the palm of her hand. These are miniature versions of the giant ones in the yard. "This is my little work," she says. "They are not done yet, they have not been fired." Her broad pointer finger slides around and inside the lip of the tiny pitchers, unconsciously. She goes back into the bedroom another time, and emerges with two slightly larger pitchers. I ask to hold one. It is damp and cold. The clay is still fresh. I've seen little figurines like this for sale in Corquin, and I wonder if they are hers.

Sitting on the bench, I look at my own feet, encased to the ankles in sturdy waterproof hiking boots. My feet are hot, and a blister is forming on my right pinky toe. I want to take my shoes off. I think that our skin is supposed to be tougher than it is, that we are supposed to spend more time outside. I wonder if there is a pair of shoes in her room, but I doubt it.

After drinking the juice, I get up to admire a succulent plant. She goes behind the house and returns with a tiny version planted in a recycled juice can. I admire it some more, as the slow pace of the visit invites this kind of thing, and she waves us around back to see the others. Behind the house, she has nailed narrow boards into the sides of the adobe walls to form ledges, and there are at least 100 tiny cans like the one she has given me, each one holding a mini-cactus or flower. She wants to give me another one, but I tell her I have too many oranges and bananas to carry back to town, and that I would love to visit her again, when she can give me another plant. She laughs and smiles and says, "I might be dead by the time you come back!" She looks so healthy! But I know she is smarter and wiser than me, and that all kinds of things can happen to keep me from coming back, so we take the plants and wave good-bye and leave Doña Clarita to her afternoon chores.

March 2004

Las Caras Multiples de Honduras

Steve Moulds, Orocuina, Choluteca 1964-66 ~ Napa, California

Alan, always great to hear from you. It's been a couple of years, so I thought I would share some of my more recent experiences. Working backward, I just fulfilled a 40 year dream of visiting the Moskitia. My wife Betsy, our daughter, two friends and I just returned from 24 days traveling throughout Honduras. We felt like we had four vacations in one. The truth that we all have known, yet may easily forget, is that our adopted country has many faces.

I had not visited the Bay Islands since 1965. While they had obviously changed dramatically, they had not changed quite as much as I had feared from all the *bulla* one gets over the years. I must confess that I recognized absolutely nothing. It was friendly and comfortable, even for non-scuba types like me. There is a lot of development, but it is sporadic. Enough poverty remains to remind you that this is not an adjunct of Costa Rica, let alone Miami. We spent five days in French Harbor, mostly because that's where I thought I stayed before, and it was central enough that we could explore either end of the island without too much difficulty. The 747-capable airport was the first inkling that things were to be a bit different. In 1965, when four of us took vacation over *Semana Santa*, we left La Ceiba in what was called a "push-pull." It was a four-seater, including pilot, with a prop forward and aft. We flipped a coin for who got the right seat. Delighted when I won, we boarded with a pilot who embodied nonchalance. He had a large cup of coffee in hand, and one could sense he knew where his priorities lay. As we passed over the cemetery at the end of the runway and began to level off, he said, "You take it." I'll never forget strangling the wheel for my 20 minutes of fame until he said, "I'll land it now." My other most dramatic memory is that of hanging my hammock between two palms beside the sand runway for one night. Even though it was still 'dos por uno,' a hundred bucks a month still didn't go that far. Roatan, for me, is today a great adventure tourism locale. There are high end dive

spots and cruise ships on a regular basis, but there remain quiet spots, reasonably priced, where one can still "get away."

On the higher end of the spectrum, I was amazed to discover The Lodge at Pico Bonito. On the outskirts of La Ceiba, this hotel prides itself on its "rustic elegance." The jungle/rainforest location is beautiful. There are many hikes and other activities off campus. At what arguably could be considered the highest room price in the country, it will be interesting to see if they can pull it off, even with their absolute commitment to service. [http://www.picobonito.com]

Returning to my earlier mentioned dream, we were able to arrange a guide to take us up the Rio Platano into the World Heritage Biosphere. This area is so remote that the Peace Corps no longer sends volunteers out here. I was taken by the challenges that the Moskito Indians, as well as the Peche and Tarakawa, face. They are trying to convert from subsistence ag to modest tourism consistent with preserving the Biosphere from further degradation. The lumber poachers are still encroaching from the upriver areas of Olancho. Honduras is in jeopardy of losing its World Heritage designation for its inability to intervene effectively in this rampant deforestation. We stayed in the home of a wonderful Moskito couple who were tickled to have us. The charge for a clean room with mosquito netting, and 3 meals a day, was L100, or about six bucks a day per person! The Peche in Las Marias are developing a modest handicrafts business. It seems perfectly teed up for an economic development volunteer. They weave delightfully rustic, yet functional water bottle carriers out of natural fiber for about $3. Guess what? They fit a wine bottle perfectly. I could almost re-up.

The original reason for going back was actually to return to Orocuina, my home for two years. As you may remember, I hadn't been back since 1969 until Mitch changed the landscape for all of us. Since 1998, I'm proud to have re-established many of my old relationships and introduced my family to a town that played such an important part in my development. My first trip after the hurricane was committed to providing food to those who had lost everything along the banks of the Rio Grande de Choluteca. Returning to the U.S., we started raising money for housing. Working in support of the *alcalde*, many teachers, and old contacts, we were able to buy five parcels of land over that first year. Owning the land outright allowed the German Red Cross to commit the funds to build the needed housing. Over 15 months we were privileged to build 117 homes and turn over the *dominio util*, or deed, to many desperate and deserving people. Working with many of the teachers I had known 40 years ago ensured the proper eligibility of those receiving help.

When our son graduated from college in 1999, he volunteered to continue work on the projects underway. As it turned out, the *alcalde* was growing increasingly concerned about chagas disease, which had been growing in the mountainous areas surrounding Orocuina. We put together a team which evaluated, cajoled, and convinced families living in the *aldeas* of the need to replace the straw roofs that were home to the *chinche pecuda* beetle which literally threatens lives. We bought the materials and the families performed the work, replacing the roofing structure with *lamina de zinc* for 240 homes.

In 2000, we began looking for projects which would impact the economic future of the area, rather than continue to put band-aids on never-ending requests for assistance. We evaluated at least 6 different models, most of which had some fatal flaw. The proposed bakery needed *lena* to fire the ovens. Sugar cane wouldn't work for some reason I've long forgotten. Raising a goat herd presented both ecological and community relations concerns. We finally settled on a *Granja Avicula*, or chicken egg-laying development. We partnered with *Ayuda en Accion*, a Spanish community development organization with a philosophy similar to the Peace Corps. We built a large coop, a feed barn, and purchased 2,000 layers in El Salvador. Training was held for the 15 families that committed to the co-op that was formed. They have learned how to feed, care for, package, and most importantly, sell their product. Every day is still a struggle, but every day they grow more confident that they can, in fact, change their lives.

This particular trip was to join our daughter, who has now been living with friends in Orocuina for four months.

She has been working on community development projects initiated by several schools, as well as health and sanitation projects. Six projects have been completed over the last four months and six more are being initiated this month. Transitioning schools into the computer age is a thrill. A school that I helped build with 'school to school' funds in 1965 has just been converted into a library/computer room for what is now a complex of five school buildings. Still no electricity - solar power!

Perhaps I still don't completely grasp what happened in the closing days of 1998. What I do know is that I have been given an opportunity to say thank-you to a people and a town that embraced me, nourished my soul, and gave me life-long spirit. I have just returned from my tenth trip back to Orocuina in five years. It's slowing down a bit. Others are stepping in. I am overwhelmed by our collective good fortune. To have had the opportunity to really know another people - another land - has made all the difference. I went to Honduras a bright eyed young idealist of 19. I was going to change the world! I return now thankful in many ways that we did not have the full effect we then desired. I do know that I am humbled by all that I feel I have been given by a small village in a small country.

March 2004

The Worm

Kelly Biedenweg, San Julian, El Paraíso & Tegucigalpa 1998-01 ~ Keene, New Hampshire

Tegucigalpa, Honduras
April 23, 2001

It had been two months since the bump on my leg began to continually spew puss and occasionally purge small black dots. I decided it was time to see the Honduran (let me see your breasts under black light) dermatologist. I explained to him how I originally thought it was a staph infection, and then an ingrown hair, and recently eggs - how it hasn't grown much and when I press it together mostly blood and puss come out.

"Uh, huh," he says as he wordlessly and almost unconsciously walks over to his drawer, grabs a huge tube of KY jelly and squirts it on the bump. As he sits down with a 6 inch diameter magnifying lens and a flashlight I continue to tell him that it doesn't hurt, but does itch sometimes and about once a day it pulsates, which quickly goes away when I push out the backed-up puss. "Uh, huh," he says again, completely engrossed in my jelly covered bump. "*Alli esta!*" he suddenly screams. "See it? There's the head!" The head? I question. "Yes! It's a worm! But two months? This will be very difficult." At one point I felt dizzy - right about the time he jabbed open the hole, "creating a larger escape route for the little *picaro*. He is so big, his *cueva* has taken up about 1/2 of your front leg and is filled with air," he says. Luckily, Hondurans are prone to exaggerating even more than I - I think he meant to say 1/4 of my leg.

After an hour of squeezing the bump together and applying more jelly to his constant. "*No quiere salir. Es muy grande*," he finally sends me to his waiting room to see if another hour of suffocation will pull it out, or if I'll have to go to the emergency room. So I sat on his couch, watching my jelly filled leg with slightly gaping opening to see when the worm would next poke his head out. The upper class Honduran woman across from me watched with a look of disgust that I'm used to getting when I have disappointed the American reputation. Eventually, I got bored and started reading William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, beginning to accept my emergency room destiny.

After two more patients, the doctor calls me back, both of us gloomy about our impending lost battle. We sit down to look at it one more time. No worm head. He squeezed the lump. HALELUYA! He runs over to get his tweezers, in a jig-like fashion, shouting, "*Triunfo! Triunfo*! We did it!" As I held the magnifier light for him he squeezed the bump, grabbed the white gunk he saw and pulled, and pulled. I was a bit worried he'd break the head off and this long, leg-length worm would fester inside me, but I realized it wasn't quite what I'd imagined. He ran to the bathroom to take off his gloves screaming, "We won!" and I looked down on the gauze to see a fat, ½ inch by ½ inch worm laying motionless. "That's an animal," he points out after returning from washing his hands. Really, I thought as I imagined endless hours of invertebrate zoology under the microscope. He folds the gauze and hands it to me and says, "Here, take it." "Take it?" I ask. "For what?" "I dunno. Maybe the PC nurses want to see it." "O.K.," I say, a bit skeptical. He seemed so fulfilled at having accomplished this feat that I couldn't deny him the proof of victory.

Remembrances

March 2004

Before the Fall edition of the *Allí No Más* went to press, the members of the soon-to-depart training group South-East 6 were surveyed about their experiences of the past two years; the responses were published in the Volunteer newsletter. This is a sampling of the responses - excluding responses incomprehensible to someone who served 30 years ago and those involving Honduran idioms unrememberable (¡thank you to Jeff Cohen, current Peace Corps/Honduras Program & Training Officer for translating some palabras!). I thought many of the items in this selection of remembrances would ring true with Amigos' readers and might, just might, stir up some remembrances of your own. - Editor

Favorite Food:

carne asada, plátano frito, nacatamales, yuca frita con chismol
plato típico, ¡por supuesto!
sopa de caracol in Tela
tortillas hot off the *comal* with *frijoles* and *cuajada*

Worst Thing I Ate:

patas de pollo
hummmm...it would have to be the chicken soup we made wherein not basil was added, but basil-covered beetles from an unbeknownst compromised jar infested on the shelf
refried bean banana split: fried *platano* topped with refried beans and *mantequilla*
Cold *mondongo*

Worst Thing I Ever Smelled:

the smell of fermenting mangos in the streets
blood and guts from the pigs my Honduran uncle slaughtered at 5 a.m. outside my window
a tossup between *Tropical Banano* and the disinfectant used on Hedman Alas buses

Biggest Freakout:

hiking up the mountain of *Ojo de Agua* to a *caserio* one morning to find our *partera* intently listening to Radio America. She waves us into her yard and tells us to listen 'cause a "plane crashed in Canada." We sat down and listened play by play in Spanish as the seond plane crashed into the WTC, September 11th, 2001. We sat there for over an hour listening to the live coverage of the attacks, in a *caserio* of ten houses with no electricity or water, looking out over the green mountains of El Paraíso. Very surreal.
when I woke up during the night and thought someone was breaking into my house. I spent the rest of the night crouched in a corner of my room. Come to find out it was a donkey eating the plant outside my bedroom window.
a 12-day GPS study that produced no altitudes when I downloaded 1,470 data points

Favorite Hondurenismo:

Hay más tiempo que vida
ahora which describes a timeframe between 2 hours and never
¡Que mierda esta haciendo este maje pendejo, hijo de la gran mil puta!
¡Mire!
Vaya pues

Favorite Piropo Received:

*Allí va la Reina de los Estado*s from an 8-year old boy
We were headed down soth in a beautiful afternoon *jalón*, dirty truck driver character moved in behind us. Mouth wide open, staring and oozing with diesel perversity, I no longer can withstand the excited man. I bring on a fake barfing spell with the hopes of driving *aquel jodido* away. He did indeed pass . . . while shouting, "I still love you baby even though you're sick," IN PERFECT ENGLISH! Damn, you gotta give him props for that.
Que curvas y yo sin frenos
¡Que lindo! (something tells me high school girls in the States won't be shouting this to me)

I Could Never Figure Out:

why things are hung so high up on the wall
white paint/cal on the trees

Stupidest Thing I Did in the Past Two Years:

believed the guys at COHDEFOR when they said a meeting would start within two hours of its scheduled time
getting the mayor's truck stuck in a *quebrada*

Greatest Lie Told at My Site:

Que rica la comida. No más, gracias. Estoy muy lleno.
Peace Corps doesn't allow us to adopt
Ya me acustumbre a la calor

You Know You've Been in Honduras Too Long When . . .

you start flirting with the bus *ayudante*
I only think in metric
you ask your 4-year-old friend how he takes his coffee
I walk by a group of *trabajadores* unloading bricks by tossing them from truck to rooftop and am totally transfixed by the sheer athleticism of it, and then blush and demurely

bat my eyelashes like a good *colegio* girl as they throw their best *piropos*

after eating for a while you realize with a laugh there are dead ants in your soup and you calmly pick them out while muttering how "*hormigas molestan mucho*"

Biggest Accomplishment:

acquiring such a proficient level of Spanish that people now stop listening to me instead of trying to make me say something

developing a wildlife database for the protected areas of a small nation

training the cooperative employees in Concepción how to successfully use a computerized system for sales and inventory in the coop's general store

getting mad in Spanish

Defining Peace Corps Moment:

when my host grandfather died and I found my place inside the emotional 200+ crowd gathered inside my house - realizing the significant connection I had to my community while in the *velorio* and funeral.

when my friends and counterparts would call me a *latina* and a Honduran by heart

the last of many late-night work sessions with our counterpart and two colleagues and friends. We were teaching them how to use the new database we'd created, and the evening was as full of deadline haste and humorous breaks as any late night I've had at work before. I realized for the first time that I felt perfectly at home and capable of continuing to work with these people in Gualaco indefinitely.

getting off the bus after being in the States for a while and being so glad to be home

walking in my town, everyone I pass is a friend and we stop to talk, *cipotes* shouting my name from all directions

What I Am Going to Miss the Least:

hora hondureña

taxista road rules; *cohetes* at Christmas; acronyms for everything; *zancudos* with ninja-like dexterity

the evangelical band across the street from my house

What I Am Going to Miss the Most:

all the little kids who I chat and play with

simple unrushed mornings, moments of contentedness when time stops and I find myself HERE and think about what that means

the hospitality of the people, my Honduran family and friends

1 *lemp churros*

the rainy season, living in such a beautiful place, the independence of planning your work

the view of the mountains from my door

July 2004

Answering My Way to an Article

Marlene Martin, La Ceiba, Atlántida 1967-68 ~ Carmel, California

All PCVs have stories to tell. Some tell them so well they wind up in *World-View* or even in *New Yorker* with book contracts and semi-fame. In my youth, I wanted desperately to be a writer, so when I became a PCV, I hoped the Peace Corps would provide writing fodder. But I was so puzzled about what to write that there I sat, thirty-five years later, still having written nothing about the Peace Corps. Meanwhile, I published dozens of newspaper and magazine articles and three books - all without mention of my Peace Corps experience.

Then suddenly, a muse struck. This muse's name is Alan Waugh. There he was on my e-mail, writing with perhaps a hint of desperation in his role as Amigos de Honduras editor. He asked some key questions thus getting my creative ball rolling, questions other PCVs may find helpful in capturing their experiences in writing:

What was PC training like for you and your training group mates?
Were you in Puerto Rico?
Were you young?
What did you expect?
What was it like for you to land in Honduras?
And what happened afterwards?

My Peace Corps story begins on October 14, 1960, in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Was I young? I was seventeen and a freshman at the University of Michigan. There I stood, discretely across the street from the Student Union with my date Dave, president of the Young Republicans. He was indiscreetly waving a sign: "Young Republicans for Richard Nixon." The crowd grew. Finally, six hours after Dave and I arrived, the parade joined us. The discreet apolitical seventeen-year-old was shoved into the convertible carrying Michigan's umpteen-term governor G. Mennen Williams and the Senator from Massachusetts who was running for President.

The crowd squashed me against the car. My nose was shoved into the Senator's knee. Without apparent ill effects, the Senator moved up the steps of the Union, held up his hand to quiet the noisy, young, tired, irreverent crowd. He was, he assured us, "delighted to be in the Harvard of the West." Next day, the *Michigan Daily*, with editor Tom Hayden, waxed enthusiastic about the candidate "from the Michigan of the East." That night on the Union steps, John F. Kennedy talked for the first time publicly about his dream for a Peace Corps.

Three years flashed by. It was December 1963 and far from the happy crowd in front of the Union. The stage at Hill Auditorium in Ann Arbor was shrouded in black as I received my Bachelor's degree: the man who had inspired a nation had been murdered three weeks earlier.

Then it was 1967. I had completed an M.A. in English at Michigan while teaching high school, and I was married to a fisheries biologist. We had just landed in San Juan and were heading to Hotel Normandy for the first week of Peace Corps training. Dawn was breaking. The sky was gray. The royal palms lining the highway were tall and elegant and very foreign to a young woman from a tiny farming community in Michigan.

In San Juan our group of fifty had our teeth drilled, and we were poked, propped, injected, and oriented. On our own we explored and found more contrasting worlds. We took a ferry, a taste-and-tour of the Bacardi factory with its lush rolling lawns and groomed tropical landscape. Newby we walked through La Perla, a barrio with open sewers and clean-swept, neat casitas, and a dying puppy in the arms of a very sad man. We were learning about another world - a world far from home, a universe away from that Ann Arbor October evening when I first heard about the Peace Corps.

Our world was a troubled one. An unpopular war raged in Viet Nam. A presidential election campaign raged back home. Anxious for knowledge of stateside activities, we congregated in front of a McDonald's and struggled to hear the news in staticy English on an old portable radio. The 1968 Republican convention was in full swing. Richard Nixon chose Spiro Agnew as his running-mate. So who was Spiro Agnew? Nobody knew. Later that month, now isolated on a rainforest hilltop in the middle of Puerto Rico, our anxiety was even greater as we struggled to figure out what was happening at the Democratic convention in Chicago. The police were beating people, and Tom Hayden was jailed with the Chicago Five.

After our orientation week in San Juan, we were bussed to the middle of the island to the upper of two camps named after original Peace Corps volunteers who died in a plane crash. Larry Radley, I learned only recently from the NPCA Newsletter, was there in the crowd at the Michigan Union in 1960. Now our group, Central America Fish I, would train in a camp bearing Radley's name. We were an experimental program in which the Peace Corps and the United Nations worked together to increase the amount of fish-based protein available in Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica,

> How many of you who are going to be doctors are willing to spend your days in Ghana? Technicians or engineers, how many of you are willing to work in the Foreign Service and spend your lives traveling around the world? On your willness to do that, not merely to serve one year or two years in the service, but on your willingness to contribute part of your life to this country, I think will depend the answer whether a free society can compete. I think it can! And I think Americans are willing to contribute. But the effort must be far greater than we have ever made in the past.
>
> - Presidential candidate John F. Kennedy's impromptu 2:00a.m. speech to a crowd of more than 10,000 people at the University of Michigan, October 14, 1960

Guatemala, El Salvador, and Panama. Congress had given special approval to extend our training time. The Peace Corps wanted volunteers with graduate work in fisheries biology and economics or experience in commercial fishermen. One of our group had been a commercial fisherman; the rest were fresh out of college. The Peace Corps wanted unmarried people, but they wound up with a half dozen married couples among the biologists and economists and no real plan for the wives.

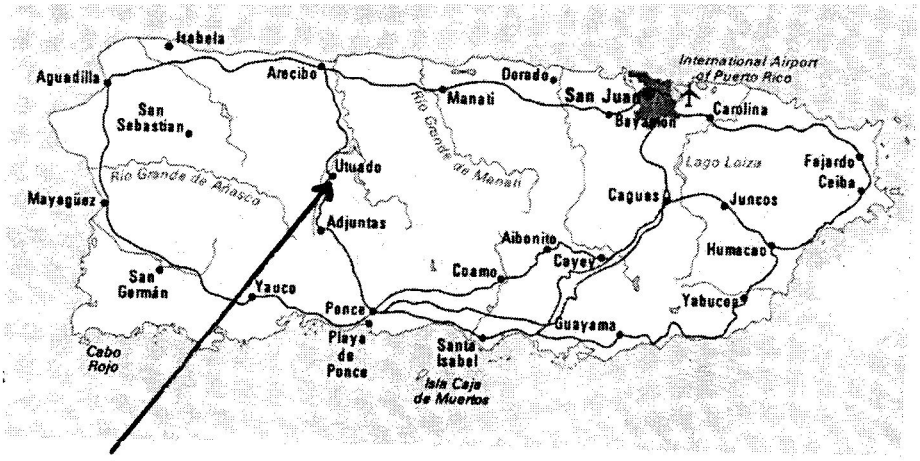
The camps were rustic. We jumped off the bus at Camp Radley and made up the black-mold covered cots in our new homes. News spread quickly in camp: Peggy Brown found a scorpion under her mattress. Four couples lived in each leaky shack with partially divided rooms, each lighted by a single bare bulb. We teamed up to solve problems. For example, under the leadership of Joanne and Dave Wytock, using peanut butter and poison, we eliminated our rats-in-the-rafters problem and slept more securely.

The lady's room - a latrine with a shower mostly open to the rainforest - was far away down a steep clay embankment that became steeper and extremely slippery when it rained. Once it poured for a solid week. Everything was wet. Getting down the embankment clutching at tree trunks to slow our skid was a feat impressive beyond anything conceived by Outward Bound.

As soon as we arrived at Radley, we were divided into work teams: during our three months of training, we changed jobs each week. I pulled latrine cleaning duty the first week. Our team of three latrine cleaners went to the supply room and a teammate who previously studied Spanish asked for "jamon." We were directed to el comador. Eventually, we figured out jabon, and were off to battle the insects (former movie stars in films like *The Flying Cockroach That Ate New York City*).

Camp service personnel spoke only Spanish. Language immersion was an immersion indeed. Before classes even began our Spanish-speaking colleagues were tutoring us: "¿Hay mas comida?" I repeated over and over, quickly learning to target specific foods like carne and pan. Very quickly, I distinguished between jamon and jabon.

Five and a half days a week we met in groups of two or three on open-air platforms to learn Spanish while lagartijas distracted us with little lizard antics. During breaks, we amused each other with lagartija imitations; there was not a lot of outside entertainment. Each week we changed instructors so we wouldn't develop a country accent. In the classes of the former Cuban ambassador and his wife Señor and Señora Cortina, the best student (not always easy in a class of two) was rewarded with a hot shower in their trailer. An indoor shower with privacy and hot water and without large, flying insects was beyond delight.



Camps Radley & Crozier

Because our program would be coastal, we "drown-proofed," first in the pool at Crozier and later in the ocean. Dumped into water over our heads while we wore jeans, tee shirts and tennis shoes, we learned to disrobe, tie the shoes over our necks, make an inner tube of the jeans, and do a travel stroke. If our plane ditched in water or our boat sank, we would need the clothing should we make it to shore without being eaten by a shark. A man-eating shark jawbone was passed around so we would know what to expect from those rows of teeth. Once we preformed in a relaxed fashion and could stay in the pool for an hour, we were off to pass our final test: an hour in the ocean.

In addition we trained for cultural and interpersonal sensitivity. The Peace Corps divided us into groups of five who met to discuss each other's behavior. Were we cheerful and energetic team members in jobs such as cleaning the latrine? People not deemed appropriate were deselected. We wrote feedback to each other; a copy of each letter was read by the two psychologists assigned to our camp to help with the deselection process. The psychologists' job was selection, not counseling.

El Comador was somewhat nicer shack than our home shacks. It had picnic tables and lots of food purchased from the Navy and then treated to a good deal of cooking - often in oil. We lined up for meals that were put on our large, stainless steel trays which we later washed in big barrels outside the dining room. On weekends, we took a two-hour ride down the mountain past Arecibo to Caracoles, a nearby beautiful beach, for an afternoon of hanging out and snorkeling.

Half-way through our training, I was assigned to La Ceiba, Honduras along with the LeFavers. John was an economist. Since Carol Le Faver and I had teaching experience and Honduras had many education volunteers, we were told to create our own education orientation, a plan reinforced when Don Clark, Peace Corps education director in Honduras, told us to visit schools in Puerto Rico and work very hard on our Spanish. Carol, with education and experience in elementary education, was better prepared than I with my two degrees in literature and four years of high school teaching. The rest of the wives worked on community development skills. Because our program was unique, Peace Corps Director Jack Vaughn visited us in camp as did the Director for Central America, Gary Williams.

After two months, we were sent out on the island to find poor families who would let us live with them - once for a long weekend to practice and then for a week as a test of our Spanish, resourcefulness, and intercultural skills. Groups before ours had repelled down Dos Bocas Dam and battled nature in Outward Bound programs. By our era, the Peace Corps believed that finding and living harmoniously with a poor family was more relevant to our Peace Corps career. During our week experience, Peace Corps staff visited to see if our interaction was appropriate and if our family was poor. My ex-husband and I lived with Doña Louisa, a widow, and her son Luis over a little bodega. Warm and motherly, she insisted on giving us her bedroom. When I came home one day, I knew my Spanish was inadequate because it sounded like Doña Louisa was saying that the Señora Kennedy had married Aristotle Onasis. She was sobbing. It turned out that my Spanish was right on. In addition to getting to know our families, we were assigned group projects. My group in Mayaguez had to learn why the fishermen were so poor and what private and public services were available to them. Bob Ting, the University of Puerto Rico Mayaguez scientist I interviewed is still a friend.

At the end of training, there was a final deselection process based on the observations of the Peace Corps staff, the written comments from the volunteers, and the FBI background investigation. We lost several colleagues - one very mature and capable fisheries biologist because he admitted to an FBI claim that he had smoked a joint at a party. The Peace Corps staff and all the volunteers rallied behind him. We were told that even Jack Vaughn tried to intercede on his behalf, but he was not allowed to go to his assignment in what we all knew was a big loss to the program. Because volunteers could not return to the states in the few days of leave before we went to our country sites, several of us went to St. Thomas and stayed in a hotel with flush toilets and hot water.

With the help of a few questions from Alan Waugh, I have learned that I do indeed have a lot to say about my life all those years ago - and a lot to say in future articles. Alan's question list ends with "What happened then?" After training, I went to Honduras, where I taught in a teacher-training program. I left Honduras to get divorced. A year later, I married oceanographer John Martin, whom I had met in Puerto Rico. We were married for twenty-four years and have two sons. He died of cancer in 1993. I have taught English at Monterey Peninsula College for the past thirty-one years. My interest in other countries has remained strong: In the past decade, I have had two Fulbrights - one in Poland and Hungary and one in Peru and Ecuador. I gained a huge amount from this volunteer experience in the Peace Corps.

In the big, complex puzzle that is life, I am left with questions about those with whom I lived so closely during these few months of training. What happened to the other Honduras volunteers: Carol and Chris Elsassser and John and Carol LaFaver, for example? What happened to all of those people who worked together so effectively battling insects, cleaning latrines, learning Spanish, and living with poor families in Puerto Rico? Were their lives richer because of this experience? I'll bet the answer is a resounding "yes."

Through all of my life, the self-confidence and sense of priorities I gained in the Peace Corps has been sustaining. In our troubled world, John Kennedy's vision of a Peace Corps is even more relevant than it was on that autumn evening in Ann Arbor in 1960.

A Return to Tela

July 2004

Jenny Collingwood Chavez, Lancetilla, Atlántida 1994-96 ~Paonia, Colorado

Six Years. Six years had passed since I left Honduras at the end of my stint as a PCV. I decided to go back just for fun. It was a gift to myself for finally getting my teaching license.

I lived with the Castellanos family throughout my 2 years in Lancetilla Botanical Gardens, Atlántida, and I knew they had moved to Barrio El Retiro in Tela, but I didn't know exactly where. I thought - I'll just take a bus to Tela and ask around. On the flight from Houston to San Pedro Sula, I talked with the man sitting next to me. He coincidentally was from Tela and in fact his sister lived in Barrio El Retiro. At the airport, the sister knew the Castellanos and yes, they'll just drop me off at their doorstep. *Excelente*. What a great start!

Before arriving to Tela, we stopped at a Texaco station to grab a *refresco*. I remembered being at this Texaco opening party years ago; we had danced on the cement next to the gas pumps. Now it had a full air-conditioned restaurant selling all brands of chocolate that I would have died for 6 years ago: Crispy M&M's, Hershey's, and malted chocolate balls.

My heart started beating rapidly as we approached the Castellanos house. I saw Don Jorge sitting on the porch with his salt and pepper hair. I jumped out of the truck and walked down to their cement block house with an iron gate. They had no idea I was coming. I hear Don Jorge exclaim "*Jennie! Llega Jennie!*" Doña Thelma came around from the back with a wide grin. She looked older of course, but I was a little surprised as to how much she had aged. Then a succession of kids came out of the house. Six years ago, they were kids, now they were young adults. I couldn't imagine Carlos except being 4 years old, running around barefoot with only a pair of shorts, and now he was dressed in a uniform with shoes for school.

We visited about everything and everyone. What's happened. A son crossed *mojado* and is now in Boston working construction. Don Jorge unable to get a job because he suspects he's too old. Their only daughter studying to be a teacher. Doña Thelma doing some seamstress work. Who's working at Lancetilla Botanical Gardens and who's not. Living in town is not so bad, but they miss the simple and quiet nights in the garden listening to howler monkeys. They asked me to stay with them, but I knew they'd give me their best bed resulting in the kids sleeping on the floor, so I declined using the excuse that my husband already made a reservation for me at the Telamar.

The Telemar: the premiere resort in Tela. These days I could actually afford it. We used to sneak in as PCVs and swim in the pool. They have the best beach front and at $43/night - I was in heaven. There I had my independence even though I spent every evening with the Castellanos making pizza, *baleadas*, and rice crispy treats, re-experiencing our cooking adventures when I lived with them.

During the day I walked around Tela visiting old haunts, restaurants, and shops. I had a nostalgic feeling - this is where I spent 2 years out of my life, but not I'm not a part of it anymore. It was a bittersweet feeling and I felt more emotional than usual.

One locale was on my list to definitely visit. It used to be my little escape: Casa Azul restaurant owned by Francine and Claude, French-Canadians. They ran this Italian restaurant and I was glad to see they were still there. I had heard horror stories through the grapevine that crime in Tela was out of control and Francine had to rent another guard. Travelers were coming into her restaurant in droves crying over robberies, stolen passports, and bad experiences. They were going to pack up and leave. But, surprisingly, Francine informed me that the new Honduran president declared a war on crime and instituted a tourist police, upped the police in general, and actually came to Tela to meet with business owners. Tela is mellow now and they might stay. Good, I thought, because her restaurant was a refuge where you could get excellent pasta, a cold beer and people spoke French, Italian, Spanish and English.

The next day came the trip to my old site: Lancetilla Botanical Gardens. I caught a ride with a taxi and ran into my old boss, the director as he was driving out. He was very surprised to see me. He had to go into town, but he'd catch up with me later. I went into the garden and went to look for my apartment, but it was gone. It had been torn down to put in another administration building. Then I went to where the Environmental Education Center was. This was our greatest achievement while in the PC. This was now being used for storage. Hmmm. A little disappointing. There were new rooms, new *domitorios*, new technicians, new offices with air-conditioning. New computers in the office, new guides, new this, new that. Of course I knew it wouldn't be the same, but it looked like a whole different garden. I hooked up with the director and he filled me in on the changes. Seeing a familiar face there was a good feeling. Why was I so naive that I thought I'd see the exact same faces and people and buildings?

After 6 days in the area, it was time to return home. I'm glad

I went, but my memories were so vivid about my experience 6 years ago, that I wasn't quite ready for all the changes. I still had my head in the mode of Carlos being 4 years old, the same technicians working in the garden, Doña Thelma without gray hair, and knowing no one personally who went *mojado* to the U.S. It was a reminder that life goes on.

Jennie (Collingwood) Chavez was a PCV in Lancetilla Botanical Garden from 1994-96 and closed out the site. She now teaches Spanish in rural Colorado. stevejenchavez@yahoo.com

Lancetilla was originally a plantation research station of United Fruit Company which eventually turned into (I think but I'm not sure) Dole. It was taken over by ESNACIFOR which is the College of Forestry in Honduras. They administrate it. ESNACIFOR is located in Siguatepeque.

There are 3 parts of the Botanical Garden: 1 is experimental plantations, 2 is the Protected Area (a biological reserve outside of the garden) and the 3rd is the Botanical Garden which is open to tourism and the public.

It's mission is mostly investigation. There are numerous exotic and endemic species there. Some were lost in the Hurricane Mitch, but things are coming back.

July 2004

A Town Called Liberty

Kala Strauss, La Libertad, Comayagua 2003-05 ~ Chicago

Hi, My name is Kala. I am a Hondo1-muni-d-PCMI volunteer, and just in case you don't speak Peace Corps anymore: Hondo1 is my training group - the first to be divided by project rather than region, "muni d" is what we call municipal development volunteers, and the PCMI part is what I've been asked to describe.

Established in 1987, the Masters International degree is now offered at over 40 academic institutions in a variety of fields. I went to the University of Washington Evans School of Public Affairs and specialized in Nonprofit Management. Each school has its own requirements but they all award some academic credit for Peace Corps service which usually happens after 12-15 months of class work and is usually followed by an extra quarter/semester upon return. The idea is to give masters candidates the opportunity to apply theory to development practice while living overseas. PCMI students apply to Peace Corps, struggle with medical clearance, wait for an invitation, and accept the country they are offered just as any other Peace Corps volunteer.

My program at the Evans School emphasized broad-based public policy analysis and management knowledge, and offered the opportunity to focus on (a) a more specific policy area (i.e., health, education, urban planning, etc), (b) international development, or (c) nonprofit management. Core requirements focus on the basic analytic and quantitative skills needed by policy analysts and public managers. I took classes in general public management (budgeting, leadership, resource management, etc), policy analysis (statistics, cost benefit analysis, planning, and communications, etc), and specific nonprofit management classes (grant writing, board work, public-private partnerships, etc). As part of a cohort of PCMI students all preparing for Peace Corps service together, I also participated in a 1-credit seminar facilitated by an RPCV designed to get us thinking about how to incorporate and apply our book learning to field-based practice once in site.

My last quarter at school I connected with some professors, pulled together a graduate review committee and laid the groundwork for my proposed masters project - a participatory community needs assessment. I took out every book I could find from the library and scanned them all to CDs to bring to Honduras with me, and clarified communication expectations with the members of my review team.

Here in Honduras, I am working with a small community in a coffee-producing region of Comayagua that was severely affected by Hurricane Mitch. I am working with a local coffee producer to better market his coffee in the States, and set up a fund to which he will contribute 2$ per pound of coffee sold to provide scholarships to colegio kids. I have a youth group and work a lot with local teachers. In addition to the million other side projects that I'm sure you all remember, I work with the municipality to improve public service delivery and encourage better community participation.

Now that I have been in country a year, and have read all those books I scanned, I am gearing up to start the needs assessment process in the community where I work. By collectively analyzing community strengths and weaknesses and producing a final, formal, written plan, the community will (a) be better able to address some of their problems without outside help, (b) be better able to ask for and specify the kind of help needed, and

(c) gain experience with collective planning processes. By better defining their needs and thinking about what goods and services can be provided locally, I hope the community will be empowered to, and have the capacity to, more clearly voice their needs to the municipal authorities. I will use my relationship with the mayor and other key community stakeholders to bring them into the process in the plan development stages in an attempt to ensure a positive outcome and prove that grassroots community development really can be a catalyst for municipal development in the long-run.

I had planned on finishing my project by February and return to Seattle to finish by May 2005, but am currently considering a 3rd year extension (remember that part, too?). I really love it here!

November 2004

The Diabolical Architect of Curaren

Maggie McQuaid, Pespire, Choluteca 1976-78 ~ Anchorage

My volunteer work sometimes brought me to the little village of Reitoca, way out in the despoblado of southwestern Honduras. The church in the village was neglected and somewhat oppressive, rumored to be haunted by the ghost of a priest who had been stuck by lightning many years ago. But the people in the village told me "If you want to see a really haunted church, you should go up the valley to Curaren. The Devil built that church." This is the story they told me. Over time, I have added a bit to it, and I've been telling this at storytelling events for years.

A long time ago, none of the villages in the despoblado had churches. Amazing to say, people got along fine without priests or bishops. But one day, word came to the village of Curaren that change was on the way. The Viceroy of New Spain had directed that all villages in Honduras pay the municipal tax. And that tax could only be collected from real villages, with churches. So the Archbishop of Comayagua announced that, as of a certain date, all villages in his realm would build churches and have them ready for priests and the Mass. When the villagers got this news, they just laughed. "The Pope and the King are very far away, they're not going to mess with a little mud hole like ours."

Time passed and the village men talked a little about getting a church built. But between the burning of the fields, the planting and the harvest, the horse races and card games, there never seemed to be any time. No one really cared. "The Archbishop will never come all the way out here," they said to one another.

Only one person in town seemed to be worried. That was Doña Felipa, who lived in a little house facing the plaza. She lived all alone, with only her rooster, Paco, for company. Doña Felipa was not shy about speaking her mind.

"You lazy pendejos better get your butts off the ground and do something," she warned the men. "Rome and Mexico City may be far away, but the Pope and the Viceroy have long arms. Someday those arms are gonna reach in and knock your pinche heads off."

But the menfolk just laughed and rolled their eyes. Doña Felipa didn't even have children or a man of her own. What did she know? "Oh, Doña Pipa," they'd say to her, "just go back home to your rooster and let us worry about things."

But one day, a runner came up from the village of Reitoca, a day's walk away. "The federales are in Reitoca, looking at our church. They're coming here tomorrow and you better be ready. The word is, if they find no church, they'll burn the village down and ship all the gente up to the silver mines at Rosario." The men all met in the plaza. What could they do? The officials would be there in the morning and there was no church to show them! What could they do? They were all screwed now. The men's talk began to get more desperate. No one wanted their families shipped out to work in the silver mines. They'd all been so happy there in their little lives in the despoblado, but that was all over now. Resigned to their bitter and unfair fate, the men started to disperse for their homes and their last night with their families. But then, they noticed a stranger in their midst. This was strange, because no one had noticed his approach, but there he was, mounted on a fine black horse, real as anything.

"Buenos tardes, companeros," he said with great suavity. He was dressed head to foot in black, from his fine boots to his leather gloves. He wore a wide black hat, and a black veil covered his face. The village men had rarely seen a stranger and never one as strange as this. But he spoke with a fine Castilian accent, so he must be important, right?

"I understand," said the stranger, "you need to have a church built in the most expeditious manner, claro?" The men all nodded. The stranger continued, "this may seem impossible, yes? But not to me. I can have a fine church built for you overnight, with two bell towers if you like. Are you in-

terested?"

Just then, a shriek came from the house of Doña Felipa, where she had been listening at the window. "Don't listen to that man! He's evil! He'll screw us in a minute if we let him!"

"¡SILENCIO!" snapped the man in black, and a small spark flew from his finger. Then, regaining control, he turned back to the men. "I see you gentlemen are plagued by women here. With whom should I negotiate, the ladies, or yourselves?" All the men puffed out their chests. They wouldn't let a crazy old spinster screw up their last chance, no sir. "Ignore her, she's loca," they told the stranger. "Let's continue the negotiations, esteemed sir."

"Pues," said the stranger. "I can start work on your beautiful new church immediately. And I guarantee I will have it finished by tomorrow morning." And just then came a sweet, timorous voice, from somewhere: "by cockscrow tomorrow?" it asked. (The voice may have come from Doña Felipa's house, but no one was paying attention.) "Cheque" said the stranger, "by cockscrow tomorrow."

The menfolk began to feel a great deal better about their immediate prospects. ¡Que suerte! And to think that soon they would have a fine church with not one but two bell towers! That was two more than any church they knew of. Why, soon their church would be bigger and more imposing than even the Cathedral in Comayagua.

But the smooth, suave voice cut into their rosy thoughts. "There remains one small matter to settle. The cost." "But we are all poor men," they cried, "we couldn't pay you much."

"No importa," smiled the stranger. "I have no interest in money. All I ask that you give me in return are the souls of every unbaptised baby born in this valley." Now at this, the men should have realized who they were dealing with, and they should have cast him out immediately. But what could they do? The authorities would be there tomorrow, and would destroy the village if they found no church. Wasn't it better to save the living, and worry about the unborn later? And besides, if there was a church, there would be a priest, and they could just make sure that he was there to baptize all the newly born children right away. After talking among themselves, the men all turned to the stranger. "We accept," they told him.

"Bueno," purred the stranger. "Now if you gentlemen will return to your houses and not look out your windows, I will commence the work." The men ran to their homes and locked themselves inside. When their spouses demanded the details of the bargain with the stranger, you could hear their outraged cries from one end of the valley to the other. But this noise was nothing compared to what was happening in the plaza.

Still mounted on his horse, the stranger clapped his hands. Hordes of demons, carrying whips and chains appeared. Cracks opened in the earth and out swarmed the souls of the damned; all condemned to slave away for eternity. The work commenced. Through their bolted windows, the terrified villagers could hear the crack of whips, the rumble of infernal machines, and the cries and howls of the damned. The work commenced, and a stone foundation was laid, then blocks of stone rose. Slowly, the shape of a large church began to appear. The doomed souls labored and shrieked, the demons swung their whips, and lighting flickered in the skies above the village.

It was the most evil night anyone could have imagined. The townspeople took shelter under their beds or on the floors of their homes. Their cries and moans began to match those of the poor damned souls laboring outside. In all of Curaren, only one person maintained her sanity.

Inside her little house, Doña Felipa took her rooster into her arms and sadly stroked his feathers. "Paco, you see what a bunch of chingados I have to put up with. They're not worth it, viejo, but somebody has to save their sorry asses. I guess it's up to us now." And saying this, Doa Felipa slipped a cloth hood over the rooster,'s head and closed him away in a box. Placing an unlit candle before her on the table, she sat down in the darkness to wait.

Outside, the work was continuing at a blinding rate. The walls rose, high as a man, then higher. The middle of the night passed. The walls were now high as three men, and the roof beams were being laid. The red tiles were put across the roof, and now the whitewash on the walls. The darkest part of the night passed. One bell tower was raised and finished, and the second was started. In the east, the black night began to pale. It would soon be dawn, but puchica! The second tower was almost done. The church was almost completed and dawn was still an hour away.

Inside her house, Doña Felipa knew it was time to act. She opened the box at her feet, drew out her rooster, and stood him on the table. With a flint and iron, she struck a spark and ignited her candle. Then, she drew the hood off her sleeping rooster. Paco opened his eyes, saw the light, threw back his head and crowed, "Qui-qirri-qui! Christo he subido!" Outside, the work halted. The second bell tower was not completed! The Devil had been foiled! He snapped his fingers, and all his minions vanished into the earth. He drew his cloak over his shoulders, put spurs to his horse, and vanished. Some say he went on to Guatemala, others to Nicaragua. No importa, at least he never came back to Curaren.

Later that day, the authorities rode up to

the head of the valley. Down below, they could see Curaren's fine new church. Strangely enough, one of the bell towers was incomplete. Who would start such a fine church and not finish it? "Oh, those lazy campesinos," they said to each other, rolling their eyes. "But they have a church, so add them to the tax roles." And so it was done. The Curarenses had their church, they didn't have to go off and work in the silver mines, and they didn't have to worry about the souls of their new babies. But they still had to pay taxes. Pues, asi es la vida.

I never made it to Curaren, so I never got to see whether or not the church was as described in the story. Have any of the Amigos readers ever been there? Has anyone else heard this story, or were the people in Reitoca just having fun with me?

November 2004

Update From Your Amigos de Honduras Grant Committee

Roxanne duBois Cull, San Pedro Sula, Cortés & Tela, Atlántida 1973-75 ~ University Place, Washington ~ Committee Chair

I just love happy endings...

In the July Newsletter, we reported that the Amigos Grant Committee had voted to "empty the coffers" and make a $2,000 donation to an important Peace Corps Water System Project in Honduras. Even after our donation, there was still $7,500 needed to complete it. While the PCVs in Honduras solicited additional funds from other sources, we offered you instructions for donating on line to this project either through Amigos or through the Peace Corps Partnership Program in Washington, D.C. Time was of the essence....

On September 29th, some happy volunteers, a joyous village, and our proud U.S. Ambassador to Honduras, Larry Palmer, celebrated a dream come true...for a little town called Alto de Jesus.

Alto de Jesus is a small, rural community in Southern Honduras, located in the municipality of Alianza and the Department of Valle. A few months ago, this village still had no running water. Indeed their only source of drinking water had to be brought in on a weekly basis. Two Peace Corps Volunteers changed all that.

Chrissie Fowler and Tim Hopkins met while they were students at the University of California at Davis. They are both originally from California, Chrissie from Los Altos, and Tim from Ojai. Engineering degrees in hand, they married and worked in the Bay Area of California for a few years and then decided to join the Peace Corps, 'While our lives were still flexible." They were sent to work in Nacaome, Honduras, and (I know this will be a surprise to you all) word spread that the Gringo PCV Engineers were living in a nearby village.

In March, 2003, a member of the community of Alto de Jesus arrived at the door of Chrissie (now called "Ruth" in her village) and Tim (Now "Timoteo" of course!). The visitor asked the young couple if they would help design a water system for his community. Ruth and Timoteo agreed to visit and view the situation. What the Volunteers encountered was a very frustrated community. Not only had Alto de Jesus, on their own budget, perforated three wells in the center of town only to find hot, unusable water, but they had also experienced over ten years worth of empty promises from varying agencies. The Volunteers agreed to complete the survey and design, and prepare a solicitation to be handed out to various Honduras NGOs. Unfortunately, because Alto de Jesus did not have a usable well, nor a tank already in existence, no agencies seemed to be interested in getting involved at the time. So together, Alto de Jesus, Chrissie and Tim forged the road toward finding financing.

This ambitious project started out with a price tag of $36,000. Ambitious indeed! Enough was raised through donations, fund-raisers put on by their families in the States, and PC Partnership to start Phase One. Ground breaking for the water tank began on April 22nd, 2004, as fundraising efforts continued. Amigos entered the picture as well. Two well perforations, a 10,000 gallon elevated tank, water tests, pump, tube and distribution line installations, training on plumbing and educational train-

ing on health, numerous latrines, pilas, showers, and washboards later, Alto de Jesus celebrated the realization of their long-lived dream of having potable water in their homes.

And Chrissie (Ruth) and Tim Hopkins completed their assignment and just left Honduras on October 18th....for some well deserved rest and exploration in Central America before heading for home in the US... and their next adventure. Congratulations Tim and Chrissie. We were

La gente de Los Altos de Jesus, Tim, Crissie and U.S. Ambassador Larry Palmer

November 2004

The Expatriots' Song

Maggie McQuaid,, Pespire, Choluteca 1976-78 ~ Anchorage

"I've got it made," he said when he met me,
At a bar on the beach at Trujillo that day.
"There's nothing around here that tends to upset me,
It's a good place to just let the time slip away."

You've got no past, so you don't have to worry.
What lies in the future is so far away.
Whatever it is that's making you hurry,
You best let it rest until some other day.

"It's not the crime in the streets that'll fret you,
It's not the poverty wears your mind thin.
It's the beer and the bars that finally will get you,
And life in a hammock can do a man in."

You've got no past, so you don't have to worry.
What lies in the future is so far away.
Whatever it is that's making you hurry,
You best let it rest until some other day.

When we finished our beers, the night breezes were blowing,
The waves on the beach were dissolving in foam.
"I don't know," he told me. "Which way my life's going.
And all that I know is I'll never go home."

You've got no past so you don't have to worry,
What lies in the future is so far away.
What ever it is that puts you in a hurry,
You best let it rest until some other day.

This is another song Salva Vida-inspired song from 1978. I wrote this right after meeting a charming old Brit out in Trujillo in 1978. I caught him as he was falling off a barstool. He had lovely manners and a posh accent, but it was obvious he was on the fast track of the road to ruin. Whoever he was, and wherever he ended up, I thank him for inspiring a great song!

Ode to Roger Cooper

Chris Garrison, Puerto Lempira, Gracias a Dios 1977-79 ~ Goldsboro, North Carolina

Roger Cooper died in a rockslide in late June while climbing Mt. Katahdin with two friends. He was a man about town in Puerto Lempira, a stargazer, a nude wrestler, and a good friend. I was so glad to see him in Las Vegas, but he'll always be 26 or so, hiking down to the *desembocadura* for a talk and a swim.

Paul Dulin, Tegucigalpa & Rio Lindo, Cortés 1977-79 ~ Hatch, New Mexico

Everybody who knew Roger probably has a "Roger story." So I thought I would share mine.

I was fresh out of Peace Corps training and had been assigned to carry out a new watershed management program around Lago de Yojoa. The FAO Hurricane Fifi Relief Project was in full swing in the Sierra de Omoa, attempting to repair the watersheds surrounding San Pedro Sula and Choloma where so many people had been swept away by flood waters. Henry Tschinkel was the Project Director and several PCVs were assigned to the Project, including Bob Bach, Mark Meissner and Rodger Cooper.

So I was sent up to the Sierra de Omoa to get a feeling for what "watershed management" was really like. Henry told me that another volunteer (Roger) was going to take me to several of the project sites so I could see what was being done and would need to be carried out in the Yojoa watershed. Roger came to my pension and we hopped a bus to the edge of San Pedro, where we got out. Here I thought we would wait for a project car or at least another bus for the rise to the sites. Roger said, "let's go," to which I replied, "where?" He then said with that pearly while smile of his, "up there!" pointing up somewhere on the horizon toward the top of the mountain. And he started off on a dirt road. I followed.

We slogged up (and I do mean up) this road for maybe an hour, when we came to few houses clustered together and there was a little nursery and a series of terraces. We looked around, all the while Roger with his running commentary. I don't think I ever stopped my heavy breathing from the hike up that mountain. Then Roger said, "let's go see the next one!" I must admit, I thought that this was the one and only stop (maybe I was hoping this anyway).

Back on the steep winding road that narrowed to a trail that had been washed out pretty good by the Hurricane some two-and-a-half years before (lots of *carcavas* to scale). Another half-hour we hiked, ever-upwards. By then it was about 10:30 in the morning and the sun was on us all day long. I was sweating like a peccary. Another stop and we saw another few terraces, a tree plantation here and there, and a greeting to the participating farmer. Then another slog up yet another hill, then another and finally another. We could look back over the entire Sula Valley and the bananas plantations, and a view of the Caribbean. We were up there! Now I was sweating with my pores as big as *"daimes" and* we had no water. I was not told to bring water, so I didn't. This would be one of the most important lessons that I learned while I was in Peace Corps . . . always bring water.

Finally Roger said, "OK, let's go down!" So I figured we would retrace our steps and follow the trails and roads. We did this for about the first half-hour. Then Roger cut off the trail and headed straight down through the bush. I guess Roger had a better and more "efficient" way to get down. We went through maize and bean fields, brush, giant grasses, thorns, whatever, until we finally came to a huddle of houses, some of them of the replacement kind that always follow a disaster like Fifi (four walls of cement with a zinc roof, a door and two wooden windows). But there in the middle of them was a sight so welcome . . . a *pulpería*! We asked what they had to drink: "*Solo hay Peksi bien helada*." Ah, *Peksi*! *Deme una, no dos, no . . . tres*! I drank 5 *Peksi bien helada*, one after the other. I have never to this day put so much sugar liquid in my system. But I didn't feel that bad, because Roger drank 5 *Peksi bien helada* right along with me. He smiled and said, "We're almost there," and we headed back on a straight-down tangent until we reached the highway. Roger said, "Now that wasn't so bad, was it?" I guess it wasn't. We survived. I didn't even go into insulin shock after the overdose of *Peksi*. I thanked Roger for the orientation and went on to do our thing in the Yojoa watershed.

I guess Roger never lost that spirit for climbing mountains. His accident is tragic. I too am glad we were able to see each other at the Reunion in Las Vegas, and especially the trip to Red Rocks State Park.

Roger, you are a man of spirit and optimism. I will never forget your pearly whites and tonight I toast you with a *Peksi bien helada*!

Here Be Dragons . . .

March 2005

There are several dozen Honduras RPCVs living in places other than the U.S. I've often wondered about the stories behind the addresses, the conscious decisions and happenstances of life that led people from pueblos in Honduras to some of the far corners of the world. This issue of the newsletter is about traveling, the itch to see places other than home, the desire to work with people of other countries . . . and leads off with the stories of two people for whom place names on a map and cultures of other people are siren calls.

- Alan Waugh, editor

San Pedro Sula to Kwajalein

Debbie Goodwin, San Pedro Sula, Cortés 1981-83 ~ Kwajalein

You asked, what draws someone from San Pedro Sula to Kwajalein Atoll? Well, the answer is below. I know you wanted 100 to 300 words. But when I sat down to write this, it all just kept streaming out. There just is not a short, easy answer to how I got from San Pedro Sula to Kwajalein. There is not even a short answer of how I even got to San Pedro Sula in the first place. It took two years from the time I submitted my application until I arrived in Honduras. The story below will tell you why. It all worked out in the end. I cannot imagine life without the Honduran, Paraguayan, and American friends and experiences I had while in Peace Corps.

Here is my story.

My journey to being a Peace Corps Volunteer and now a teacher in the Marshall Islands began with two trips. The first was to Mexico while I was in high school. I went with a group of 20 girls to the World Girl Scout Center in Cuernavaca. We climbed pyramids, shopped in outdoor markets, visited colonial churches, explored the silver town of Taxco, and participated in lots of other fun activities with Scouts from around the world. We also shared our own culture with a slide show of southern Illinois, a square dance and music. We participated in a community project with a local womens group. Sounds a little like Peace Corps, doesn't it?

The second trip was a summer spent traveling in Europe while I was in college. Those two trips, while stunning, made me want more. I didn't want to just travel and see a little here and there. I wanted to live somewhere else in the world. I wanted to experience living in another culture.

Peace Corps seemed like a perfect way to do that. After reading about the Peace Corps, talking with many returned Peace Corps Volunteers and much reflection I decided I wanted to be a PCV more than anything else in the world.

I spent weeks preparing my application. I sent if off with great hopes in August of 1981. Two weeks later I fell down a hill. It was not an impressive hill, but nonetheless I completely fractured two bones in my leg. I spent eight days in the hospital, had surgery, and spent months on crutches followed by months of physical therapy. I had to put my application on hold.

In January of 1982 things were looking up. I was ready to reactivate my application. Then I had a check-up with my eye doctor. I found out I needed to have a corneal transplant in one of my eyes due to a problem with that cornea. I was put on a donor list for a cornea.

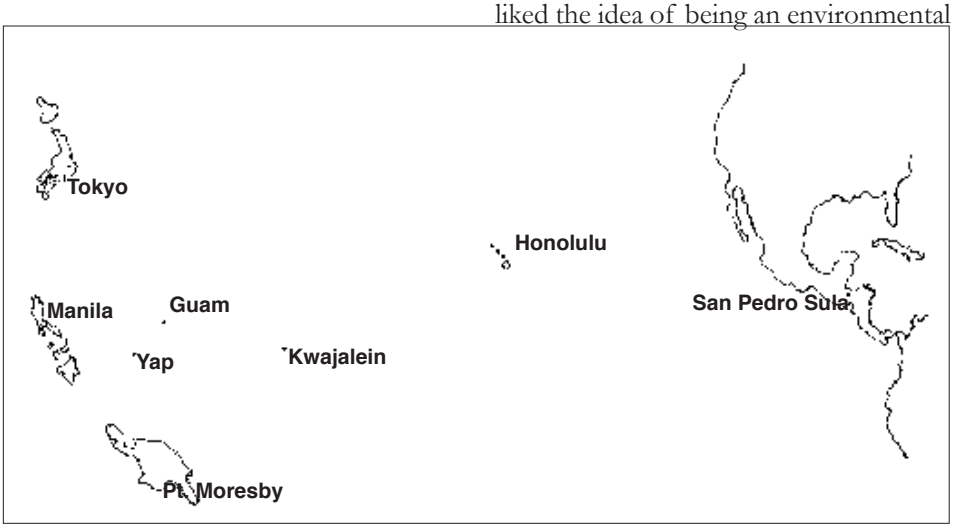
The day after Memorial Day weekend 1982 my doctor called. A teenage boy had drowned on Memorial Day and his family was willing to donate his cornea. The next morning I had the surgery. Thanks to that anonymous donor and his family, and with time, my eye healed.

Even though my leg and eye had healed I still had to have a yearly check-up for my eyes. I knew Peace Corps Medical might be reluctant to accept me because of that.

I had listed Latin America as my first preference and with that in mind I came up with a plan. I decided to find ophthalmologists in every Latin American country where Peace Corps was located at that time. I wrote to the embassy of each of those countries in Washington, D.C. I wrote to the U.S. Embassy in the capital city of each of those countries. I wrote to the U.S. Academy of Ophthalmology and to the Pan-American Association of Ophthalmology. I asked for a list of names and addresses for ophthalmologists they could recommend.

I cross-checked all the lists I received. I chose ophthalmologists who appeared on more than one list. I ended up with one or two or three for each Latin American country. I then composed a letter that described my eye problem, surgery and the good results. In my letter I asked, if I come to your country, would you take me as a patient and do my yearly eye exams?

(I even wrote that letter in Spanish, using the best Spanish that I could muster from my university studies. Luckily I was friends with a couple from Venezuela. Fernando and Virginia proof-read that letter and made corrections.)



It was now January 1983. I had a letter from my U.S. ophthalmologist. I had a letter from my orthopedic surgeon. I had ALL those letters from ophthalmol ogists in the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Paraguay. I had my own cover letter. I sent it all off to Peace Corps headquarters and held my breath.

In March of 1983 I heard the decision. I was accepted. As I am writing this I am starting to cry. The memories of that long wait, my leg, my eye, and just how happy I was when I was accepted by the Peace Corps, all those memories have welled up now.

I found out later while talking with a Peace Corps official that the medical review board was rather amazed at all the work I had done with locating ophthalmologists in Peace Corps countries. They said, if she wants to be a Peace Corps Volunteer that bad, let her go. They had only one condition. I had to go to a country that was listed as better medical conditions. Fortunately all the Latin American countries met that category.

In May 1983 a Peace Corps desk officer contacted me about three possible positions. One was in the Dominican Republic, one was in Ecuador and one in Honduras. The jobs were all different. After thinking about it and knowing that my degree was in biology I decided I liked the idea of being an environmental

took her six weeks on a tramp steamer to reach Lamotrek. She described how she and the 200 villagers lashed themselves to trees in the center of the island to avoid being swept away by the winds and storm surge of a super typhoon. She talked about a culture where there is a sacred men's house where women are not allowed except when a villager is dying. Then all the people of the island gather in the sacred house to care for the villager until that person dies or recovers. The RPCV, her name was Catherine I believe, fell ill with a fever about a year after her arrival and was unconscious for three days. When she awoke she was in the men's house surrounded by all the villagers. She knew two things. She had almost died and she had been fully accepted by the village. In thanks she followed all of their customs her second year, including always keeping her head lower than a man's head as she passed by. I was awed by her stories. I already knew I was going to Honduras and I was very glad to be going there. I also knew Micronesia seemed to be such an exotic and remote place.

Finally, in August of 1983 I arrived in Tegucigalpa. Two years had passed since I had submitted my application.

Every day during training I took a bus from my Honduran family's house to the training center. I had to change buses downtown at the main plaza where there was a beautiful cathedral. On my way home in the evenings I sometimes would go in and sit down for a while. I would pray and thank God for being able to be in Honduras.

My two years working in environmental education with a high school and elementary schools in San Pedro Sula passed. They were wonderful years. Then my Peace Corps program director, Jorge Betancourt, talked to me about staying for a third year but at a different site. I was interested in doing that. Then he called me with a possibility I had never even considered. He had received a cable about a position as an environmental educator at a teacher training institute in Paraguay. Peace Corps was having trouble filling that position since they wanted someone already fluent in Spanish. So a notice was sent out to see if any COSing volunteers would be interested. Jorge said it would be for another two years of service. He asked me think about it for a week and let him know.

I did think about it. Ultimately I knew that I would always regret it if I did not go. I accepted.

I left Honduras in November of 1985 and went home to the U.S. for the holidays. In January of 1986 I arrived in Paraguay and spent another two wonderful years in the town of San Juan Bautista de las Misiones.

In February of 1988, somewhat reluctantly, I returned to live in the U.S. I went back to college to get my Illinois teaching certificate. I taught first year Spanish at my university as a teaching assistant so that I would have free tuition and a stipend. In the end I was certified to teach biology and Spanish. That began a period of years of teaching science and biology in high

schools in Illinois.

At heart, though, I suppose I am an expat. There is just too much of the world to see and to experience. So I decided to look at the overseas American and international schools. I went to an international education recruiting fair in Iowa. I ended up getting three offers. One was in Colombia, one in Turkey and one on Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands in Micronesia.

I loved my years in Latin America, but I wanted to try another part of the world. So it came down to Turkey or Kwajalein at the time. Kwajalein was simply the better offer by far. So that is how I came to Kwajalein in 1997 to teach at a high school for American and Marshallese children at a U.S. Army base here.

I often think about the RPCV from Lamotrek I met over 20 years ago. At that time I never dreamed that I would live in Micronesia myself one day. And yet, somehow, life led me here, too. We are remote. We are isolated. We are a tiny island, too. Not quite three miles long and a half mile wide. We do not match the isolation of that Lamotrek RPCV, though. It only takes a six and a half hour flight from Honolulu to reach

March 2005

Guarita to Bratislava

Nick Remple, Guarita, Lempira 1973-75 ~ Tarrytown, New York

I worked in Honduras from 1973-75. My work with the Junta Nacional de Bienestar Social was to promote home, school and community gardens in the area extending from Guarita, Lempira, through Tambla, Tomala and Valladolid to La Virtud on the border with El Salvador. It was a rough area, fairly isolated at the end of the road from Santa Rosa and San Marcos. I used my own resources to establish a number of gardens with Caritas-promoted Clubes de Amas de Casa and local schools. I then worked in El Progreso, Yoro, with CARE and Caritas. I'm not sure what Peace Corps saw in me, frankly, but I'm certainly glad they decided to take me. In my interview, I told them about my father's annual rite of spring, his kitchen garden, and my sharing that with him. Maybe it was the enthusiasm and nostalgia in my voice, maybe they needed to fill a quota of some kind. It's no exaggeration to say this experience changed my life, was absolutely formative in shaping my career, my tastes and interests, even my family. I was 21 when I left Honduras.

When I left Honduras in 1975, I was convinced that I wanted to continue to work with campesinos in Latin America, but I didn't have a clear idea of what I should do next. As luck would have it, my cousin was working with a small NGO in the highlands of Chiapas, Mexico, helping small Mayan communities build potable water systems. I'd seen San Cristobal de Las Casas on the way back to Honduras from home in '74 and liked what I'd seen - a sleepy town with amazing light that filled with hundreds of Indians from nearby communities during the day. I was romantic enough at the time to possibly see myself living the rest of my life in such a beautiful and interesting place.

I stayed in Chiapas for only a year (until August '76), but managed to see a good bit of the backwoods. The communities we worked with were deliberately selected for their isolation and we often walked hours with our tools on our backs, slept on dirt floors or on a table or two in the school, ate with local families. Though physically arduous, the experience of living so close to the heart of these communities was unforgettable. Of course, a job installing potable water systems had its own risks - while building it, we drank the water the local people drank. During a bout with hepatitis, my father very subtly sent me a couple of college catalogues, and I decided to apply to Colorado State. People may not remember, but I think I was the only one in the training group who didn't have a degree of some kind - I was 19 when I entered the Peace Corps in 1973.

Back in the States I went after an agronomy degree with the sole aim of using it to make myself employable in the Latin American campo. Two years at CSU gave way to two more at Cornell as I absorbed more and more about soils, crops, and tropical agriculture. I became more and more interested in (obsessed with?) Latin America: I read dozens of novels, books of poetry, history, watched every film I could find, bought music, attended every cultural affair I could find, got involved in an advocacy group.

Graduating from Cornell in 1981, I found my way back to Chiapas and into a job with the state government as the agronomist responsible for a special horticulture extension project in a nearby village. This devolved into demonstration projects, growing my own potatoes, and setting up a practical farm school for local campesinos. As we all know, work and social life are very intertwined in Latin America, and I spent many a day at village fairs or just chewing the fat with local farmers. As fairly remote as this part of Mexico was, I don't recall ever being

bored - there was always something or someone of interest: anthropologists, rural development experts, agroecologists, weavers, political activists, refugee workers, archaeologists, artists, etc., etc. Again, I found myself contemplating the possibility of staying there forever, but after six years, I felt I had to move on, do something new.

So, I moved to Patzcuaro, Michoacan, where I spent a relatively uneventful year working at a Latin American center for adult education. I say "relatively," since while the work was straightforward and fairly unexciting, I did meet Vianney, my future wife. We married in Mexico in early 1988 and our first child, Nicole, was born in Mexico City.

Nothing like new parental responsibilities to make you take a sober look at your life - I decided in '89 that there wasn't much of a future for a gringo agronomo in Mexico's depressed economy, so I headed back to Colorado and applied to grad school. Two years at the Yale School of Forestry put me together with a fascinating assortment of people from around the world, including a Colombian who headed up the Natural Resources Management Group at the United Nations Development Program, based in New York. He was kind enough to circulate my CV to the Latin America Bureau and I was hired to coordinate proposal development to the Global Environment Facility (GEF). This involved working with countries to identify projects in biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation, and amelioration of pollution in international waters. This was tremendously exciting, since I was able to use my knowledge from the field as a sort of "ground truthing" for proposals - when I left the LAC regional coordination in 2001 we had mobilized more than US$ 300 million in funding from the GEF for more than a hundred projects. One of the best things about this job was the ability to travel to places I'd only read about - Rio, Buenos Aires, the Chaco, not to mention our project sites, which, given the nature of the work, were often remote, beautiful places.

But after ten years of one of the best jobs I could ever hope to have, I felt the itch to move on. For the first time in my life, I thought of going beyond the boundaries of Latin America, and so I accepted an offer to take on the regional GEF coordination for UNDP in Europe and the CIS. I was based in Bratislava, Slovakia, for three and a half years where I helped develop and fund a variety of projects: wetlands conservation in the Baltics, establishment of a regional park system in Kamchatka, creation of a biosphere reserve in Uzbekistan, mountain conservation in Bulgaria . . .

Last month I came back to New York, again leaving a wonderful job to take on something new - deputy manager of the GEF Small Grants Program (SGP). This year the SGP will provide US$ 45 M to hundreds of small NGOs in 73 countries around the world for projects to protect habitats, manage water sustainably, work to eliminate use of banned pesticides, and many other activities. As deputy manager, my responsibilities cover countries on continents I never dreamed of visiting in 1973.

My daughter is now 16 and in high school, my son - born during the first period in New York - is 12. We plan on staying in New York for at least 3 years and then we'll see.

March 2005

Digging for and with Mayans

Alan Waugh, San Pedro Sula 1973-75 ~ Seattle

The first busito out of town taking people to work in cities on the coastal plain drove 15 feet from my bed every morning about 3:30am. Then the big bus, the one with the dual chrome horns, in use, drove by about 5:30. We got up to the smell of a hundred wood fires in the village and stepped outside to see pairs of Mayan girls walking to the grinder where the corn soaked overnight in lime was made into masa for the morning's tortillas. There were dogs running around, and little boys playing soccer in the streets, vacant lots and the plaza of the little turquoise Catholic church. The dank, organic smells of the mercado raised memories, and who knew what some of those vegetables were? A number of evenings, a marimba band practiced in someone's white-washed candlelit house. It was wonderful to be back in Central America this summer, to be in a place both strange and oh, so familiar.

The archeology dig was in a little coffee-growing pueblo, Chocolá (not on most maps) in the Departmento of Suchitepequez, southwest of Guatemala City. This was an early, Pre-Classic, Mayan city (maybe 1,000 BC to 250 AD), essentially not worked on because of an alledged bias toward working on the more glamorous Classic sites (Pre-Classic Mayans hadn't figured out yet how to construct stone buildings) and because the coffee co-op apparently didn't allow anyone to dig until last year. In two summers the Guatemalan and American archeologists have decided the city site is about 5 by 2.5 kilometers, with perhaps 100 mounds identified. We were digging in coffee plantations - the proj-

ect had to pay $5 for every bush we cut down to dig the pits. This is where the coastal plain begins to rise up to the volcanos, and where the afternoon clouds coming in off the Pacific dump fifteen feet of rainfall annually on the village. There was rain, thunder and lightening almost every afternoon right on schedule about 3:00 - we worked from 7:00 to 3:00 in part because the Quiche Mayan project workers clearly wanted to get the hell out of the woods as soon as the thunder began. We found ceramic shards in almost every bucket of dirt we sifted - the final report said the 6 teams of Earthwatch volunteers this season dug up 35,000 pieces of ceramics and 5,000 shards of obsidian knives, scrapers, etc. I found an almost complete obsidian arrowhead. The archeologists were particularly interested in a system of storm sewers to carry rainwater away from structures - and they were pretty amazing. Several ceramic figurines were uncovered, including one without a head (ritually beheaded? or simply an accidently broken figurine?) located outside the Y where two storm sewers joined (significant location? or simply happenstance?).

Lunch was at 3, then showers, naps and time for a beer at Don Carlos' bar/post office/discoteque. The debate several evenings was about whether the first Americans crossed from Siberia, or whether they could have island hopped across the south Pacific, or sailed from Africa to Brazil. In Guatemala City, the Popul Vuh museum displayed an anthropomorphic ceramic figurine labeled an alligator - it was holding its jaws with decidedly human hands with fingers - but there were no teeth evident and it looked to me just like Northwest Coast Indian sculptures of thunderbirds. The Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología displayed 3-footed, straight-sided jars with semi-flat lids with handles - just like Chinese tea storage jars. And what really grabbed me at the Popul Vuh were a pair of 5" tall ceramic whistles, each with a face on top - labeled monkeys. Those whistle faces looked exactly like puffy-cheeked Benin sculpture of human heads prior to the arrival of Europeans in Africa. Where did these people come from?

On the summer solstice, several of us climbed the tallest mound (60', on the edge of the village) to watch the sunrise. No shamans appeared, nothing magical . . . unless you count the volcano which erupted behind us just after the sun rose.

Every villager (and I mean every one) said 'buenos dias' in passing on the streets. They used hand motions I didn't know the meaning of, and executed them so fast that I couldn't reproduce them. Two weeks was not nearly enough time. And on the drive back to Guatemala City, another volcano erupted.

March 2005

Meanwhile, Back in the Jungle

Maggie McQuaid, Pespire, Choluteca 1976-78 ~ Anchorage

Shortly after I first arrived in country in 1976 and started looking at maps, I wanted to visit La Mosquitia. It may have been a love for back-of-beyond places and blank spaces on the charts, or it may have been pure contrariness that made me want to go there. But it was a difficult undertaking back then. Travel was restricted to those who had business out there, and I was frequently told that I had no business going. Once in 1978, I nearly talked my way onto a flight to Brus Laguna on the Alas de Socorro plane, but when the pilot learned I was traveling alone, he refused to take me. "No way I'm leavin' a white woman out there by herself," he said.

Over the years, I dreamed up several scenarios which would take me to La Mosquitia: running guns into the jungle or going as part of a medical team after a hurricane. There was one long-running fantasy in which I went out to investigate the mysterious disappearance of some old Peace Corps friend. But my wildest fantasies were no match for the reality of my ultimate means of travel, as part of a Birding group.

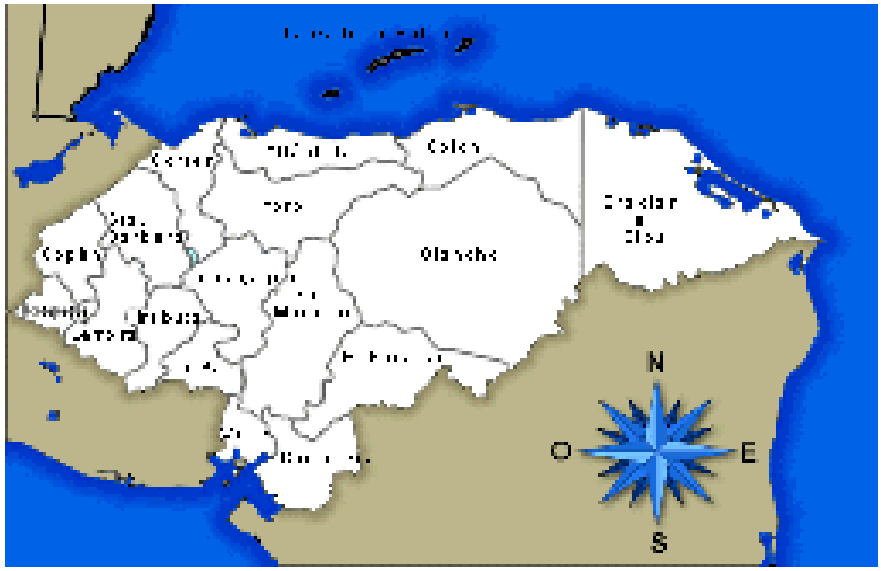
Last summer, reading my Nature Conservancy magazine, I noticed their announcement for a 10-day trip to the north coast of Honduras. It was their mention of four days and nights on the Mosquito Coast that got me. Checking out the tour company, I learned that the tour leader and naturalist were both former Peace Corps Volunteers, and the guide for the Mosquitia section was my old friend, Jim Barborak's counterpart, Jorge Salaverri. It was reasonably priced, it would get me out of Alaska in January, and it was run by people with whom I was certain to have plenty in common. So what could go wrong?

It was a group tour, for starters. I have

been making fun of tour groups for as long as I can remember. I've long had grave reservations about the morality of large groups of rich white people traipsing around Third World countries for fun. But it would get me out to La Mosquitia, so I signed up.

After traveling solo for a week, I met up with the group in Copán Ruínas. The town has gotten so tarted up that it just doesn't resemble anything in the rest of the country. Hearing others in the group exclaim over the color and charm and quaintness, I could only think of one word: Disneyland.

We moved from far western Honduras across country, spending a night in the glamorous Lodge at Pico Bonito, outside La Ceiba. It prides itself as being included in the registry of the "Finest Small Hotels of the World." I thought it was yet another place that bore no resemblance to the rest of Honduras. It wasn't the place I would have chosen from whence to begin our trip to the Mosquitia, but the group liked it.



In the pre-dawn darkness the next day, we drove to the La Ceiba airstrip and embarked to Brus Laguna. At last I'd be seeing the notorious place that had been so rudely denied to me all those years ago. First impressions were disappointing. We landed on a dirt road in the pine savanna outside town and took a little schoolbus in. It looked like a fairly prosperous little place, actually, with neat little houses up on stilts, and lots of flowers. There were no street brawls, no sleazy bars, nothing that would seemingly endanger a white woman traveling alone. But before I could do any lengthy investigation, we were loaded into boats and soon were off across the broad expanse of Brus Lagoon.

A trip down a natural canal brought us to the mouth of the Rio Plátano, then west on another canal and out into Ibans Laguna, putting into the small village of Raista for the night. Raista is a beautiful, tidy little village of thatched-roof houses perched between Ibans Lagoon and the Caribbean. It is the headquarters of an NGO called MOPAWI, the Honduran partner with The Nature Conservancy.

MOPAWI has been established to administer the Rio Plátano Biosphere Reserve and other protected land in La Mosquitia. Besides protecting the lands in the Rio Plátano watershed, they operate a sea turtle restoration project and are charged with creating and fostering sustainable development projects in the area. It was an NGO set up with the assistance of the Peace Corps, and is a remarkable success despite overwhelming odds. We spent the evening with the executive director, Osvaldo Munguia. Being with him both inspired and saddened me. He has achieved a series of small successes despite death threats, not-so-benevolent neglect from the government, and the constant whittling away of land at the boundaries of the Reserve. Osvaldo is a slight, stooped, modest man who casts a giant shadow. He could be a saint, and we all know what can happen to saints in this world. He invited me to come back any April to help out in the turtle release programs.

The next day we began the one-day trip upriver to the village of Las Marias. The river and surrounding forest have a stately beauty. Herons and egrets flapped up the riverbanks all day. The group worked on their life lists. I sat back and thought about life lessons. At lunch we pulled into a gravel bar in midriver. It was covered with potsherds. I uncovered a piece of a large pot with the handle still attached. The figure on the handle, much eroded, was a stylized bird, definitely Pre-Contact. It made me think of the legendary Ciudad Blanco, rumored to still be standing somewhere in La Mosquitia. Even if the early people didn't build white cities, they made beautiful pots.

Evening brought us to the Moskito-Pech village of Las Marias, a long strand of huts running along the water. Parrots and toucans fluttered through the treetops as sunset painted the face of the river. Nights in Las Marias are lit only by candlelight, and by the light of the moon and stars crowding the sky. This was could have been the quietest place we would ever experience, but silence had no chance against the group. I had no idea eighteen white people could make that much noise.

Las Marias is one of MOPAWI's sustainable development successes. Tourism into the Reserve is strictly regulated. Most visitors pass through Las Marias, and the villagers have made sure they benefit from the trade. A Peace Corps Volunteer named Erik Neilsen organized the villagers into a guiding service. Villagers wanting to

make money from guiding or operating boats take turns on a revolving basis so they all have a chance to share in the benefits.

We stayed in the hospedaje of Doña Rutilia: four thatch-roofed cabins, equipped with wooden bunks and mosquito nets. The big front porches were wonderful places for watching the moonlight on the river and for fleeing my cohorts. With her income from the hospedaje, Rutilia has been able to open a food store and to send her children to high school in Brus Laguna.

The next day the rest of the group continued upriver for an additional day of birding. I stayed behind, and hired a guide to show me the village. Tourism has allowed the villagers to build and staff a health clinic, to improve their elementary school, and to even build a "kinder" so the little kids would have their own place to start school. My guide had recently cut his leg with a machete, and his wound was neatly stitched and bandaged by the resident nurse. He told me his wife was at a class learning how to protect the family against malaria. These were all such small steps at change, so small as to probably be invisible to anyone visiting. But I could see them for what they were: giant steps to a better life.

We traveled back downriver to Brus Laguna the next day, and put up that night in the best hotel in town. I may have been the only person to notice the used condoms and condom wrappers in the courtyard. At least someone's paying attention to the "SIDA o Vida" posters, I told myself. The electricity went out at nine, but by flashlight beam, we could watch bullfrogs squeezing under the hotel room doors and tree frogs emerging from bathroom drains. Two dogs fought in the courtyard all night, and the roosters started crowing at 2:30am and did not stop. This was the real Mosquito Coast, I realized. People were no threat; it was insects, amphibians, and domestic fowl that would drive you nuts.

We were glad to journey out to the end of the dirt road the next morning to wait for the plane. It was to be a long wait, as the pilot coming from Puerto Lempira forgot we were there, and had to be turned back when he got to La Ceiba. In the intervening hours, we sat underneath the pine trees and fended off the insects. My view of the group began to change. They may have been rich, loud, white people, but they took the delay and the bugs like real troupers. We played a series of alphabet games, where we had to take turns naming things in a certain category in alphabetical order. This was a well-educated bunch of folks who came up with some impressive categories. We did tropical diseases, crayon colors, authors and painters, and marine life. I will never underestimate the ability of educated people to amuse themselves.

The plane finally took us back to The Lodge at Pico Bonito. The next day, a tour of Cuero y Salado National Park was scheduled. I ducked out by claiming a mysterious tropical illness. What I really wanted to do was get a ride into town, and visit La Ceiba. This proved impossible. "We really don't encourage our guests to leave the Lodge," sniffed the manager. "We offer all-inclusive services here, so guests really don't need to go elsewhere." "But I'm sick," I said, madly trying to keep up the facade, "I need to find a pharmacy." "I'm sure we have what you need right here," he told me. What I need, you insufferable snob, is to get out of here and get back to the real world. "What's wrong?" I asked him. "Are you afraid I'll see a poor person?"

But I figured that as long as I was a prisoner, I should embrace my fate. I hiked the groomed trails, went for a swim, and then ordered lunch. I had just finished and was chatting with the waiter, when I was interrupted by a raspy voice asking "Maggie, is that you?" I turned to see the unmistakable Siamese cat grin of Cookie Rocklin de Izaguirre, who trained me in 1976 and went on to run the Peace Corps Training Center for the next 25 years. An afternoon with Cookie helped me curb my anti-social tendencies. Talking with her about our lives as Volunteers and in the years since, about our memories of Honduras and of the modern realities, of what we had accomplished and of what still remains to be done was comforting and reaffirming. By the time the group returned that evening, I was ready to join them.

Traveling with a tour group, even with a group sponsored by The Nature Conservancy, had its challenges. They were Birders, and now they had "done" Honduras, they could check it off on their life list. I suspected that their view of the world rarely extended below the treetops. Maybe seeing life at ground level is a burden we ex-Volunteers carry. But it's a vantage I'm stuck with, and really wouldn't trade.

La Mosquitia was worth waiting for. I won't be running guns or looking for vanished companions anytime soon, but my work there is not done. At this point in my life, helping release baby leatherback turtles sounds like my kind of fun.

A Guancascos in Gracias

Maggie McQuaid, Pespire, Choluteca, 1976-78 ~ Anchorage

The clouds that perpetually wreathe the forests of Celaque have moved down the slopes and hang low over the streets of Gracias. It's damp and chilly here in the highlands; young people mill about the plaza wearing leather or pile jackets, their elders wrapped in blankets or even bath towels. One old gentleman wears a striped wool poncho, the first I've ever seen in Honduras. He looks like he could have stepped off the pampas of Argentina. The mist hangs closer, and the cobblestone streets of Gracias shine like silver. The chill and the fading light cannot dampen the excitement of the Guancascos, soon to begin.

We are gathered in the plaza of the Church of San Sebastian, said to be the oldest and one of the finest colonial churches in Honduras. It would be hard to judge, though, seeing as how the church has been demolished by workmen sent by the King of Spain to restore the town's fabled colonial architecture. Judging from the looks of the buildings still standing, the Sebastian church must have been so decrepit that it had to be destroyed before it could be rebuilt. But the two old bronze bells from the towers have been saved, and for this occasion, have been set up on low scaffolding at a corner of the park. Two teenage boys with crowbars strike each in turn, and the bawling and clanging can be heard all over town.

The noise is overlaid with the constant chatter and pop of firecrackers, and the less frequent whoosh and crump of fireworks overhead. The cofradia of San Sebastian has saved all year for these pyrotechnics, and it's clear the parishioners have not neglected the firework fund.

The plaza is full of color and movement. But on the street fronting the church is a quiet island, full of purpose and anticipation. The street is blocked with a massive wooden trestle table, which looks as though it could have been part of the original church's furnishings. It is probably the altar table, and looks big enough and old enough to have seated guests at the Last Supper. On the table are two massive silver candleholders; their thick tallow candles waver and sputter but miraculously stay lit in the windy drizzle coming down from the mountains.

A few yards behind the table, facing into the street ahead, are representatives from the Sebastiano cofradia: two old men carrying tall staffs topped by silver crosses, and an old woman bearing a bunch of flowers. They look humble and steadfast, as though they could stand there, against all foes, forever. They are Lenca Indians and they have been standing against all foes in these mountains since the Maya came down from the north. On a flower and ribbon decked litter behind the three elders is the life size statue of their patron saint.

The plaster San Sebastian droops languidly, his swooning eyes upturned to heaven and his pale flesh pierced by arrows. In all his gothic distress, the saint is creepily erotic. It's easy to understand why Oscar Wilde chose St. Sebastian as his patron saint, and why the saint is a popular icon amongst certain homosexual groups. But fortunately, the onlookers are unaware of all this. They flock to caress the statue's face, to tuck lempiras into the foliage, and to have their pictures taken next to the litter.

Now an increasing murmur of excitement ripples through the crowd. Around the corner at the far end of the street, another group approaches. They carry candles and a litter containing another saint, and behind them come dancers in a swirl of movement. This is the cofradia of the Church of Santa Lucia, an aldea just three kilometers away. For centuries, they have shared this yearly ritual visit with the Sebastianos. The Guancascos has a thin, ritual veneer of Catholicism, but is probably much older, a ceremony pledging mutual aid and cooperation, perhaps, or a promise of non-aggression for another year. All that is known is that this is very old, so old that even the earliest Spanish explorers wrote about it in their letters home to Spain.

Although the Lucianos have lived next door for centuries, they are a different Indian group, distinct in their customs. They are the descendants of a tribe brought down from the north by the Spaniards, to work as slaves in the gold mines. Their name underlies their origins: they are los Mixtec, the people from Mexico.

Three people head their procession: two tall old men and a little girl. The men wear white tunics with red sashes and carry staves topped with crosses. They wear on their heads tall, conical caps covered with mirrors and glass beads, capped with hibiscus flowers, and garlanded with long, streaming ribbons. The little girl between them is dark, solemn and fierce-looking, dressed totally in white with a crown of pearls in her hair. She is a living representation of the statue of Santa Lucia, borne behind on a litter wreathed in white flowers. Behind the tall men and little girl and the saint's litter dance nine men and boys, wearing gaily striped shirts and the same ribboned conical hats. And flanking them come six dark men. They wear black shirts and trousers and black slouch hats. Each wears a yellow blossom in his hatband. The men wear animal skins over their shoulders and are wreathed in green foliage. And each of the dark men wears a wooden

mask, crudely carved into the visage of a human face. They carry heavy wooden staves, which they rhythmically pound on the cobblestones. In contrast to the whirling ribbon men, they are slow and ponderous, the very representation of the deep, dark spirits of the mountains and forests.

The Lucianos progress down the street, then pause and kneel a few yards short of the barrier. The Sebastianos, who have stood silent and impassive all this time, progress. They take a few steps forward and pause to kneel on the pavement, lowering their crosses to the ground. They do this four times, then stop at the altar table itself. The men bearing the crosses thump them down resoundingly on the wooden table. Then the Lucianos rise, take a few dancing steps forward, then whirl and retreat. They advance and retreat, their ribbons swirling, four times and end kneeling at the barrier. One of the headmen from the Sebastianos cries out in a great voice, "Who are you and what do you wish with the people of San Sebastian?" One of the tall Lucianos answers in a plaintive, wavering cry, "We are the people of Santa Lucia, and we have brought our saint to visit your church." Then the Sebastianos walk around the barrier. They embrace their counterparts from Santa Lucia. The litter bearing San Sebastian is jostled around the barrier to the Luciano side, and that of Santa Lucia comes across to the Sebastianos. Then both litters are raised and borne into the plaza. In other days, they would be taken immediately into the church, but tonight, alas, there is no church. Instead, they are placed on a raised platform at which a Mass will be held later in the evening.

The Lucianos assemble in front of the two statutes. A young man plays soft chords on a guitar, and the masked and ribboned dancers twirl and dip. The tall headmen and the fierce little girl dance among them. The headmen and the girl come face to face with each of the dancers; they dance forward and back, then join raised right hands and dance around each other. It is a stately, quaint movement, like an old quadrille step, undoubtedly something added by the Spaniards. After the headmen or the little Lucia has whirled around each ribboned or masked dancer, all the dancers kneel facing the saints.

A crowd forms as the Lucianos and the Sebastianos press together. Two old men from each group approach each other. The are the Mayors, the newly elected heads of their cofradias, and the Mayordomos, the outgoing leaders. The Mayors each carry staffs of woven straw and cornhusk, brooms, really, wreathed in flowers. The Mayordomos carry tall wooden canes, topped with silver handles. They each make a speech of welcome and friendship, and the Sebastiano Mayordomo announces the schedule for the events to follow: a Mass, a dance, and hot coffee and hot chocolate for everyone.

I can hear their words, for I am pressed in at the very front of the crowd. At the end of his announcement, the Mayordomo of San Sebastian turns to me and beams. He is a beautiful old man, with silver hair and classic Mayan features. The top of his head barely reaches the level of my chin. He takes my hand, and welcomes me to the Guancascos, telling me I have been their guest at something very old, very sacred. He invites me to Mass and to drink some chocolate. My eyes fill up, and suddenly I have no words, either in English or Spanish. Finally, the best I can do is put my spare hand over my heart and say, "Es un honor tremenda para estar aqui con ustedes."

November 2005

New Memories Replacing Old

Marion Wilson ~ Florida, Copán 1985-87 ~ Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

It is now a year since I returned to Honduras, having COS'd 17 years before. This time I went on a mission trip to a Christian camp near Piñalejo, Sta. Bárbara. We performed physical work at the camp for 5 days, repairing, planting, painting, etc.

Our group flew into SPS where I was able to see some old friends before leaving for camp the next day. I had traveled that same road west to my site so that I was curious to see the changes. The shacks by the side of the road were still there, along with the garbage. Toward SPS however, there were more warehouses, factories and companies. What really surprised me along the highway were the green directional signs such as we have on interstates to point you in the right direction.

I took a day off from my work camp to visit my old site, Florida, Copan. A friend came to pick me up in his brother's frozen poultry truck. He told me several years ago the government pushed education about deforestation. In his opinion there is less burning of the mountains now. We also saw a Hedman-Alas bus headed toward the west. It was an air conditioned coach like a Greyhound. I remember school buses.

La Entrada, which is on the way, has a traffic light at the desvio for Santa Rosa

and Copán Ruínas. I barely recognized the town where I used to go to market every Friday. The commercial establishments have exploded, obscuring the market. A new type of taxi imported from India was zipping about: the mini-moto. What a great mode of transportation! They are at Copán Ruínas too. On the outskirts of La Entrada there is a very nice Texaco. It is just like a large minimart here except for the micro-business set up outside the bathrooms: a woman would sell you a few squares of toilet paper.

We arrived in Florida, which hadn't changed much in appearance. Several streets had been rather badly paved with cobblestone. I met up with my Supervisora who took me to see the escuela primaria where I had worked as a teacher trainer. A basketball court now filled the center, surrounded by little gardens in front of each classroom. A new computer room with freshly delivered computers and wired for the Internet was to be put into use for the upcoming school year (which started last February). There was a full time orthodontist in one office. I visited each aula where the students stood upon my entrance and greeted me in unison. That was one small show of respect I'd forgotten. The principal was proud of the American teaching methodologies they were using - something the elementary education Volunteers in my day had tried to introduce. A second primary school had been built in town because of the population growth. The one downside was that there was no longer a library because the books were not returned or cared for.

Old friends and teachers held a luncheon for me in town. It was quite touching. One day wasn't enough to see everyone. Some general observations about my town: They no longer have water 24 hours a day. I guess they lost that luxury a long time ago because they didn't seem to remember that we had it in my day. There is electricity all day, though. There is home telephone service although the equipment given to the town was "old" so that the service is unreliable. There are 3 internet cafes. I saw an ambulance sitting in the parque central. Many Hondurans have cell phones.

The day of being isolated in your site may be over! I used to have to travel 1½ hours to Santa Rosa to place a phone call. PCVs can now communicate with family, friends, and the PC office so much easier. No more wondering if your telegram was received, no 20-day wait for a reply to a letter to the States. I think a little of the PC experience is lost by being able to communicate so easily. I must admit that it would have been nice to talk to friends in the States via email. Something to do on those boring Sunday afternoons.

Our group visited Copán Ruínas for a short trip. We didn't have time to visit the new museum, but I'm told it is pretty impressive. I did go to a bird sancutary which had just opened, being relocated from Roatan. Very nice! I hope is does well. (My group enjoyed this town despite the rather harsh comments of another writer.)

I really enjoyed reconnecting with the culture and my friends. I have kept in touch with some since then. I'd like to go back again to spend more time in my site.

November 2005

The Invisible Hunters – a Miskito Legend

Late one Saturday afternoon, three brothers left the village of Ulwas on the Coco River. They were going to hunt wari, the wild pig which is so delicious to eat. After walking an hour through the bush, they heard a voice. "Dar. Dar. Dar," said the voice. The brothers stopped. They looked around, but there was nobody there. Then they heard the voice again. "Dar. Dar. Dar." The voice came from a vine that was swinging from a tree in front of them.

The first brother grabbed the vine. Instantly, he disappeared. Then the second brother grabbed the vine and he disappeared. The third brother cried out in fear, "What have you done with my brothers?" "I have not harmed your brothers," answered the voice. "When they let go of me, you will see them." The first two brothers let go of the vine. Instantly they became visible again. "Who are you?" demanded the brothers in amazement. "I am the Dar," said the voice. "When you hold me, neither human nor animal can see you."

The brothers quickly understood how the Dar could help them. "We could sneak up on the wari and they wouldn't see us. Then we could kill them easily with our sticks." Each of the brothers wanted a piece of the Dar. They grabbed for it, but the vine swung away from them and disappeared. "Before you take my power, you must promise to use it well," said the Dar. "We will promise anything," said the brothers. "First, you must promise never to sell the wari meat. You must give it away. Then, you must promise never to hunt with guns. You must hunt only with sticks."

The brothers had never sold wari meat. They had always given it to the people. They had never hunted with guns. They had always hunted

with sticks. They knew no other way. "We promise," they said. So the Dar allowed each one of them to take away a small piece of the magic vine. That day, the brothers had great success in the hunt. After killing many wari, they hung their pieces of the Dar on the tree and started for home.

The people of Ulwas welcomed the brothers with much rejoicing. They cleaned the animals and hung them above the fire. Soon, the delicious smell of smoking meat reached every house in the village. When the meat was ready, the brothers cut it in pieces and shared it with everyone. Never had the people of Ulwas eaten so well. Later that night, the elders of the village asked the brothers how they had killed so many wari. The brothers told them about their promises to the Dar. "This is truly good fortune," said the elders. "We have heard of this vine. It is very old and powerful. As long as you keep your promises, our village will prosper and our people will honor you."

With the help of the Dar, the brothers became famous hunters. Stories about them spread to all the villages along the Coco River and even beyond. One day, a boat carrying two strangers arrived at Ulwas. The strangers greeted the brothers and gave them presents, bright colored cloth and barrels of wine. "We have traveled many days to meet such great hunters," they said. The brothers invited the men to eat with them. After they had eaten, the strangers told the brothers that they were traders. They had come to buy wari meat. "We cannot sell the wari," said the brothers, remembering their promise to the Dar. "That is what our people eat."

The traders laughed. "We never expected that such great hunters would be so foolish. Of course your people have to eat. We only want to buy what they don't eat." The brothers were tempted. "Maybe we could sell just a little meat," said the first brother. "But the Dar will know," said the second brother. The brothers looked at each other nervously. Then the third brother said, "We have seen that the traders are clever men. Their power must be greater than the power of the Dar." The brothers nodded. It would not be wise to displease the traders. So the brothers began to sell the wari. The traders returned many times to the village of Ulwas. Each time they brought more money for the hunters. Each time they took away more wari. Soon the brothers were worried that there was not enough wari for the people.

The traders laughed at their worries. "It is your own fault for hunting with sticks," they said. "But we have always hunted with sticks." "That is why you cannot feed your people. You need to kill the wari faster. You need guns." The brothers talked things over. "If we bought guns, we could kill more wari," said the first brother. "We could sell to the traders and feed the people too." "But what will happen to us?" asked the second brother. The third brother laughed before he answered. "We will become clever men like the traders." So the brothers began to hunt with guns. They had completely forgotten their promise to the Dar.

Little by little their hearts turned away from the people. The more meat they brought home, the more they sold to the traders. They were becoming accustomed to the things that money could buy. The elders of the village spoke sternly to the brothers. "You must feed the people. They are hungry." The brothers answered angrily, "If they want meat, they can pay us for it like the traders do!"

But the people had no money. They began to wait for the hunters outside the village. When the hunters returned loaded down with wari, the people demanded meat. "Clever men do not give away what they can sell," said the hunters to each other so they gave the people spoiled meat, which they could not sell. The people were angry. "Are you no longer our brothers?" they shouted. The hunters laughed and went on their way. They even pushed aside the elders who tried to reason with them.

Many months passed. One day when the brothers returned to the village, the people did not crowd around them as usual. Instead, they backed away. Some covered their eyes and screamed. Others stared in disbelief at the strange procession of dead wari moving slowly through the air. Only the elders understood what had happened. "The Dar has made the hunters invisible," they said. It was true. The brothers were invisible. They had left their pieces of Dar at the tree as they always did, but they were still invisible. Something had gone wrong. They dropped the animals they were carrying and raced through the bush to the tree.

"What have you done?" they asked the Dar in terror. But the Dar did not answer them. The brothers fell to their knees and begged for help. But the Dar only repeated its name over and over "Dar. Dar. Dar." Then the brothers realized what terrible things they had done, and they were ashamed. Tearfully, they made

their way home.

Outside the village the elders were waiting. The brothers pleaded for forgiveness, but the elders did not forgive them. "From this moment on, you are banished from Ulwas," they said. "Never again will you live with us." The brothers begged the elders for one more chance. "How can we live away from our people?" they cried. But the elders turned their backs on them and walked away. So the invisible hunters left their village forever. They wandered up the Coco River as far as the falls at Carizal. As they wandered, they called out to the Dar, begging to become visible again.

Some of the Miskito people from the Coco River say that the hunters are still wandering after all these years. A few even say that the invisible hunters have passed them in the bush. They know it is true, they say, because they have heard voices calling, "Dar. Dar. Dar."

March 2006

Solar Ovens in Honduras

Vicki Parsons, Talanga & Tegucigalpa 1986-89 ~ Tegucigalpa

I am now truly a returned Peace Corps Volunteer. Not only did I return to the U.S. after my Peace Corps service 1986-1989 as a Rural Health Educator - mainly in Talanga, F.M., then a year in Tegucigalpa to aid my "counterpart organization" (PLAN en Honduras) develop its Child Survival Program for 5-10 years, but then I returned to Honduras in 2000 with my husband and two small children (now there are three … no more!).

My husband is Canadian, and how we met is another story, but it was before the Peace Corps, and we were married two months after my return to North America, in July 1989. We lived for two years in Canada, and then until September 2000 in California.

For four years prior to moving to Honduras, we worked (voluntarily, raising our own support) with Youth With A Mission in Chico, California, and the leadership there sent us to Honduras with their blessing. YWAM, in a nutshell, is a loose conglomeration of independent "bases" (of operation) who seek to "Know God and Make Him Known" through evangelism, discipleship, and "mercy ministries."

In July 1999, my husband Lorne had gone to build houses for a month in Monjaras in southern Honduras with a group of teenagers under YWAM and felt called here. We headed to Honduras to administer a housing project after Hurricane Mitch that "fell through" as we were packing, and we came anyway. We landed in Tegucigalpa and moved to Santa Lucia, F.M. in September 2000.

So, what happened when we got here? My husband had connected with a man in Illinois before the 1999 trip to Honduras who made industrial-sized solar ovens. Once we moved to Honduras, the William Temple Solar Project (William Temple is the man who designed the ovens – nothing religious!) contacted us and asked if we would check on the 22 ovens they had sent down here between 1998-1999.

Around the same time, we were introduced to the Director of Manos Extendidas, and our sense of life calling, personal styles of working, and desire to serve the needy "clicked", and we became connected with Manos Extendidas. ME focuses on Honduran children by supporting short-term mission groups from the States – the volunteers work in street ministry, a trade school program, and post-Mitch housing construction. YWAM Chico still handles donations for us to this day.

As Lorne began literally hunting down these ovens from the information given him, he found one after another in need of repairs, and most of them sitting in someone's yard unused. He picked up a couple of them and started investigating the problems. The designers changed their design after Lorne diagnosed the problems.

What to do with these ovens? The repairs aren't cheap, and we wanted to see them placed in needy areas. The TSP people (Rotary Club) had already spent $275,000 to purchase these ovens and have them shipped to Honduras.

In 2004 with a lot of help, we received funding from the Canadian government and the TSP to repair 7

ovens, create a training manual, do training workshops for 7 different groups in southern Honduras, install the ovens (mounted to cement bases), buy basic equipment, etc. Most groups didn't want bread pans, but flat baking sheets for making rosquillas and the like, which sell a lot more easily. Anything you can bake in a normal oven, you can bake in this, plus things like corn-on-the-cob, tortillas, beans, rice. We partnered with two Honduran organizations, ASOMUDE (Asociacion Grupo Productivo Hondureño Mujeres en Desarrollo) in Choluteca and CODDEFFAGOLF. It was truly a joy to see five of the groups, mostly women from the "boonies" where 'ner a PCV has been, get trained and then receive a solar oven! Each group had to come up with a nominal application fee.

Most groups were women's co-ops with small bakeries that used large amounts of firewood cut from forests already severely depleted. These ovens saves time, money spent on firewood, reduces health problems related to smoke inhalation and helps the women advance their businesses. This project ended February 28, 2006.

Living here as a civilian has certainly been different, especially with children! We have the same things to take care of as in the U.S., like education, shopping, etc., and yet the same cross-cultural issues as were common when in the Peace Corps, plus we are complete volunteers here – no "allowance"! I now drive around instead of taking busses, which I hear are now too dangerous for PCV's too, at least in the big cities. When I first landed here, everything looked much the same, but Blvd. Morazan was unrecognizable, and whole new areas of Tegus had been built up beyond my wildest imaginations.

We have begun the process with MIRA (Manejo Integral de Retencion de Aguas), an organization who has received most of USAID's money for 2005-2009, of writing a new grant proposal to rehabilitate more ovens, do the training, provide the cookware, etc., for more women's groups. Our focus will still be Southern Honduras, in areas MIRA has designated as "high priority" to try to slow down deforestation, still with ASOMUDE in Choluteca. The groups will, by definition, be located in the mountainous regions down south.

Assuming we get the funding (we have received verbal encouragement and enthusiasm from the MIRA workers), we will continue in Honduras for at least another 2-3 years. From there, God knows!

Rotary International solar oven project:
http://www.rotarysolarovens.org/

Mano Extendidas:
http://www.mehonduras.org/

March 2006

Amigos Makes Another Development Grant

In January, Amigos de Honduras made a $2,500 contribution to a current PCV's development project through the Peace Corps Partnership Program, our third grant in the last three and one-half years. The two previous grants were made with a combination of dues monies and members' donations. Due to the wonderfully gracious giving of members during the holidays, this contribution was made entirely of donated funds. The article on this page combines the description of the project posted on the PCPP website to which the Grants-making Committee responded and an e-mail interview between the Volunteer and Roxanne duBois Cull, the Chair of Amigos' Grants-making Committee. The article on page 6 was an e-mail reply from the PCV in response to questions about some of the technical aspects of this water for coffee project.

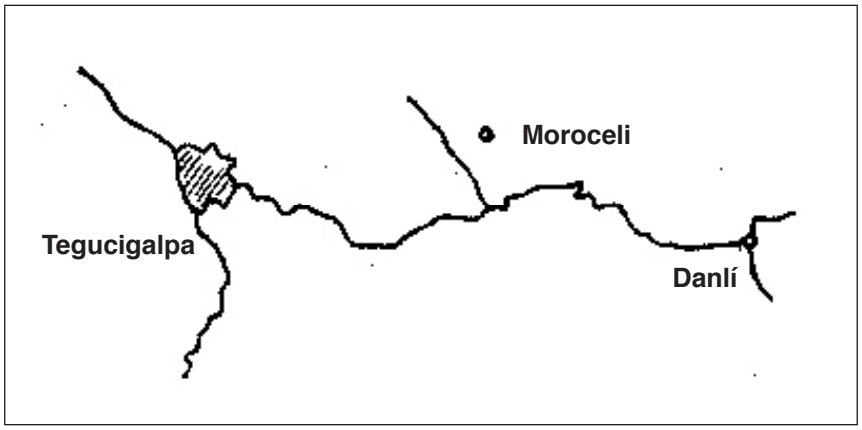
Roxanne duBois Cull, San Pedro Sula & Tela 1973-75 ~ University Place, Washington

Amigos de Honduras—YOU did it again!

Many of you have contributed toward our Amigos Peace Corps Honduras Grant Program, and those donations added up to fully fund a grant in January. Seriously cool.

To recap—The "Amigos de Honduras Grants-making Committee" keeps in touch with our treasurer, Joan Larimore, as well as the Peace Corps Partnership Program in Washington, D.C. When you Amigos renew your subscriptions, you

often send in a small (and sometimes not so small) donation along with your $15 annual membership dues. This vicing ecological wet-milling machines hampered the efforts in the community of Hoya Grande to provide environmentally sustainable alternatives to the traditional wet processing of coffee. Perforations in the existing system have lead to intermittent closures causing producers in the region to revert to traditional milling methods. Unfortunately these traditional milling methods can increase water consumption to toxic levels of residential run-off draining into the micro watershed.



The community was ready and anxious to provide the labor to build the water system, but they needed about $2,500 for piping and other materials needed to the project and (b) that every dollar is accounted for.

Through the magic of new technology (we old timers were lucky to be able to phone home every 3 months . . .) most new volunteers have access to e-mail. I was able to contact the Volunteer directly about the project (he may even have photos to us by the next edition of the newsletter!).

I emailed the Volunteer and asked him to tell us a bit about himself and his Volunteer life.

Brian Camblin was born and raised in San Diego. He has been in Hoya Grande manual labor is a refreshing change from the monotonous mental grind I left at home. I am the only volunteer in Hoya Grande. My nearest neighbors are about a forty-five minute car ride, two hours on horseback. My Honduran estate is rather humble . . . I share an adobe, cement spackled clay-tile roofed two bedroom house with my good Honduras friend. I eat with my neighbors, an amazing family that has taken me in as another part of it. I keep my horse in their corral. I eat my beans, eggs and tortillas from their kitchen, and fearlessly drink from their faucet. Please express our appreciation to all those who donated. This project is a big stride for the coffee group and for this town."

If you have any questions about the funds or the projects - or you would like to be part of the Amigos Grant Committee, please contact me by email. We still have some money in the treasury and I am hoping it will grow. I am told that there are some new project proposals now. One is from a Volunteer in Boqueron who is helping women starting a poultry-raising project to provide more protein for their kids . . .

Peace,
Roxanne duBois Cull, Chair,
Amigos Grants-making Committee
rcull@nwrain.com

More Perhaps Than You Ever Wanted to Know About Coffee Processing

Brian Camblin, Hoya Grande, El Paraíso 2004 -

First and foremost, thanks to Amigos de Honduras for the expressed interest in supporting the Organic Coffee Farmers and Environmentalists of Hoya Grande. Hoya Grande is an aldea of Moroceli, El Paraíso, approximately 64 kilometers from Tegucigalpa on the highway towards Danlí.

In 2001, CORAH (the organic coffee group), with assistance from outside institutions including Peace Corps, purchased two compact ecological wet-milling machines. Unfortunately, at the time of the installation, the group was unable to afford the construction of appropriate water systems to service these machines, water being a necessary component for their operation. The once provisional measures have now proven inadequate, with constant disruptions or disconnections in the existing plastic tubing. As a result, the group has been plagued by sporadic water shortages during years past, ultimately leading to temporary closures of these machines. These shortages are preventable with a reliable PVC system from the nearest water source to each of these machines.

In addition, the project aims to resolve the same water inconsistency with the group's classification canal. The classification canal is just as vital to the quality of the group's coffee as the ecological milling machines. Again, plagued by constant disconnections as a result of the poor quality of the plastic tubing, the classification process was by-passed on several occasions the harvest past. As a result, unripe or dry cherries were mixed with the premium coffee beans, ultimately diminishing the quality of the group's coffee. Considering CORAH's interest in specialty markets, the quality of the group's coffee is essential to finding a permanent buyer. Thus re-constructing the water system with PVC tubing servicing the canal is an invaluable step in securing the quality of the group's coffee, and therefore their financial future.

Is this a new type of wet-milling?

The compact-ecological milling machines are not so new to the coffee industry, they are however, relatively new to the community of Hoya Grande (5 years now). To be quite honest, I'm not sure how long they've been in Honduras. The group owns and operates the machines, performing maintenance duties when necessary.

How is the proposed system more ecological?

The compact ecological milling machines operate on just 10% the amount of water required with traditional milling. Most of the water consumption during the milling process is due in part to the sugary mucilage left on the coffee bean after removing the protective outer cherry husk. This sugary mucilage is what ferments giving added flavor and overall quality to the coffee bean. However, after a twelve hour period, if not removed, this sugary mucilage begins to over-ferment resulting in diminished quality of the bean. With traditional milling, water is used to remove the mucilage, creating a potent residual run-off which often contaminates near-by rivers and streams.

In comparison, with these compact ecological milling machines, the coffee beans are de-pulped then passed through a vibrating cylinder which shakes the mucilage from the bean rather than using water. The result is less water usage during the de-pulping process, in addition to lesser amounts of contaminating residual run-off. To allow the coffee to ferment, optimizing it's quality, the cylinder can be removed and run apart from the ecological milling machine (something CORAH is still working on).

Another advantage of the ecological milling machines is that they serve to centralize the wet-milling process within the region. Prior to their use, each individual farmer would transport the day's harvest to their personal mill, de-pulp, and then wash the coffee. In addition to the higher amounts of water consumption and toxic residual run-off, the left-over coffee pulp was often discarded carelessly becoming another potent source of contamination to near-by rivers and streams. With a centralized mill, CORAH has been able to capture this residual run-off in oxidation ponds, eliminating the potential contaminating affects to local water sources. Under proper management, they have also been able to utilize the leftover coffee pulp, an otherwise pollutant, as an organic fertilizer for their farms.

Does it prevent the milled cherries from rotting in the river?

As mentioned above, with a centralized wet-mill, CORAH has been able to utilize the leftover coffee cherries as an organic fertilizer on their farms. The cherries are left to decompose near the machines, away from any water sources, then either applied directly to the farms or mixed with a number of other organic components prior to application. Currently about 60% of coffee farmers in the region are taking advantage of the services these machines have to offer. CORAH is currently in an on-going campaign to encourage more farmers to utilize these machines, and therefore diminish the harmful environmental affects associated with traditional wet-milling.

I hope I've better explained the process and the importance of these water systems. Without them, the community of Hoya Grande could not rely on the ecological benefits provided by these compact ecological milling machines. If you have any further questions . . . please don't hesitate to ask. Again the group and I appreciate any support you might have to offer. Thanks again.

Homeward Bound, But Where?

Megan Horst, Monte de la Virgen, Las Flores, Lempira 2003-05 ~ Shorewood, Wisconsin

This article was written near the end of Megan's service and published in the Fall 2005 edition of *Allí No Más*.

"You can't go home again"
– Thomas Wolfe

"It is suicide to be abroad. But what is it to be at home? What is it to be at home?"
– Samuel Beckett

"And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time"
– Yi Fu Tuan

Well, sometimes the time crawled by and sometimes it flew, and now we H2ers find ourselves quickly approaching our final days in Honduras. We are all headed off in different directions, with different hopes, dreams and plans for the future. I imagine I am not the only one who is just a bit nervous about leaving my life as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Central America behind. In the past two years my site has become my home, my *catracho* neighbors and Peace Corps friends my family, and Honduras my second country (it was Honduras I rooted for in the *fútbol* game on July 21st, not the USA). And while I like to let my friends and family back in the U.S. think I am really sacrificing here, the truth is that these last two years have been an incredible opportunity to develop new skills, experience a new culture and way of life, broaden my understanding, question my beliefs and values, establish long-lasting friendships, and maybe, just maybe, even make a tiny difference in some people's lives and in their community.

And now, we all face the prospect of, after *quizás* some traveling and what not, going *allá, o sea*, returning to our home of record. And it's scary. We've had some nice comforts the past two years, the comfort of having a support network (consisting of basically all *gringos* in Honduras) who kind of all get what we are experiencing, of having a job where we decide the priorities, and, of course, an established end point to the commitment. We now say *adios* to these comforts and head to the unknown, full of questions and uncertainties.

After spending two years in communities where everybody knows everybody, will our old home towns (or in the case of most Americans, home cities or suburbs) and home country feel like home? Will we be able to connect with our family, friends and new acquaintances, make connections with the people there? After spending two years with other reasonably world-wise, open-minded, and creative PCVs, what will we have to say to those Americans who make our country famous for not being able to find places like Honduras on a map? Spending two years outside the US has undoubtedly made all of us more appreciative of the positive aspects, as well as more critical of the not so positive aspects of our birth country. Will we be able to live happily in the USA? What about the urge to roam, explore and travel that no doubt lies inside all of us? Will we have the itching desire to explore other lands, and if so, how do we explain that to family who wants us to stay home for a change? And what kind of work will we look for? Where will we find work that offers as much opportunity for personal challenges, personal freedom, deep relationships, and ultimately honest goals as in the Peace Corps?

All these questions loom on the horizon, so while we all probably are a little eager to finish our service, I admit that I am not entirely sure that life is really going to be better or easier in the USA. No doubt it will be full of more luxuries and modern conveniences, but I am sure we all agree that those really aren't the things that make for a better home or better life. I, for one, am going to leave Honduras not really certain where home truly is.

La Union, Olancho, March 1980, returning to La Ceiba on a Honduran military DC-3 after translating for a team of medical doctors. The woman with the bended knee is Barbara Kaare-Lopez (Trujillo 78-80) and the women on the right with the backpack is Nancy Talbot (La Ceiba). Does anyone know who the man or the other woman are?

Biking Home

3,118 miles (5,018 km) over 78 days from September 24, 2005 to December 10, 2005

July 2006

Getting to Honduras was a quick two- or three-hour plane flight. For Emily Metzloff, getting back took two and a half months. It's just not as fast on a bike.

Metzloff was in Honduras with the Peace Corps, teaching kids about life skills, health and computers. While she was there, she biked everywhere and realized she liked it. "I had a really good friend who also liked to bike ride, so one day I said, 'Hey, we should ride home,'" she said. "So we did."

That ride was a 3,100-mile trip from Honduras to the U.S. - biking to Guatemala, taking a ferry to Belize, and then biking again when they crossed the border into Mexico. When she told her parents of her plans, they weren't quite so enthusiastic. Her father, Tom - a law professor at Duke - was especially worried. He'd never been to Mexico, and could think of a million reasons why two women biking through it alone might not be a good idea. "I guess there's a part of me that kind of hoped it would pass with time, like some ideas people have," he said. He offered to send Metzloff and her friend backpacking in Europe instead, which he thought might be safer.

"Tom did a number of things to try to encourage them to do something different," said Metzloff's mother, Nancy, who also works for Duke as the executive assistant for the University's executive vice president. "And I just thought, boy, if that's what they wanted to do and if they felt capable of doing it, they ought to do it."

And they did, planning a route that ended in San Diego. Metzloff and her friend, Sarah Monger, biked about 50 miles a day, working their way up North America toward their destination, with the bulk of the trip in Mexico. "We went from the littlest, tiniest places that weren't even on the map to huge, huge cities," she said. They stopped in hotels as they came to cities and towns; where there were none, they camped. Once, when they couldn't find a campsite, they slept in an office at the local police station.

Behind their bikes, they pulled 50-pound trailers, which held tents, sleeping bags, clothes, kitchen supplies, bike tools and food. That made biking hard. "There were some days when we finished just absolutely exhausted," Metzloff said. "Where we were ready to stop, but we had a good 20 miles before we would get to a town, so we had no choice but to keep going."

Metzloff and Monger biked passed Mayan ruins and beach towns, rode along cliffs overlooking the ocean and passed through small Mexican villages - stopping points on their journey, "typical Mexico you probably wouldn't necessarily see in the guide book," Metzloff said. Most of the people the women met along the way were amazed by their trip, Metzloff said. "They thought it was really neat," she said. "Many people we talked to said that, you know, it was dangerous and couldn't really understand why, but they also had a lot of admiration for what we were doing, too." People helped them along the way, and they only felt unsafe once or twice, Metzloff said.

At home, Metzloff's parents kept in touch electronically. She could normally get to an Internet café every few days to write e-mails and post to a Web journal where she was writing about her travels. (To see the journal, go to www.crazyguyonabike.com and search for Metzloff.) Once, they were even able to visit her, spending four days on a beach with Metzloff and Monger as they rested.

"There were times when we were nervous if we hadn't heard from them in a while, but I always felt that they had the wherewithal and the resourcefulness and confidence to negotiate whatever they ran into," Nancy Metzloff said.

The most serious trouble they had was in Baja California, a Mexican state bordering the U.S., Metzloff said. To get there, they had to take a plane over the Gulf of California. They just missed the boat, and another wouldn't be leaving for days. Once they arrived, their luck didn't improve. They were met with constant headwinds that stifled their progress; they could barely move. The riders were tempted to quit, Metzloff said. "We had just realized how easy it was to just fly home and how all we had to do was get on a plane or a bus to get on with the trip, so it was really miserable riding," she said. "A lot of times, we were just wrestling [with] whether it was still worth it; whether or not we were still having fun and whether or not it was worth it to achieve our goal."

In the end, they decided it was, although at one point they chose to hitchhike about 120 miles to the nearest city. The next day, they were back on their bikes. "I guess that's the thing I'm most proud of," she said. "That's when we most wanted to go home, when it was going to be so easy to get on a plane." They made it to San Diego.

Now, back in Durham, Metzloff is biking three or four times a week and looking for a job, perhaps as a teacher - something where she can impact people. "Eventually, I'd like to have more adventures like that and go do more bike trips, but I'm also excited to be around here, living in one place and having more of an opportunity to be involved," she said.

Amigos de Honduras

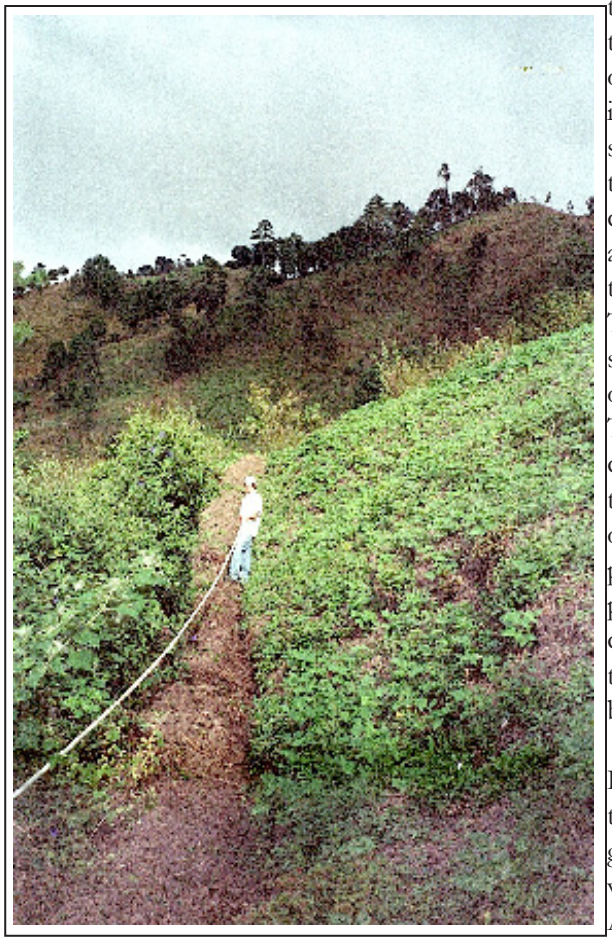
In January, Amigos de Honduras made a $2,500 contribution to a current PCV's development project through the Peace Corps Partnership Program, our third grant in the last three and one-half years. The two previous grants were made with a combination of dues monies and members' donations. Due to the wonderfully gracious giving of members during the holidays, this contribution was made entirely of donated funds. The project funds will purchase materials for 're-plumbing' a ecological coffee mill for a cooperative or organic coffee farmers in Hoya Grande, outside Moroceli, El Paraíso. This is an update by the Volunteer.

Brian Camblin, Hoya Grande, El Paraíso 2004 -

Un cariñoso saludo a todos los Amigos de Honduras.

Well here we are four months after receiving your generous support, the majority of the project complete, and water flowing a plenty. Side by side, the Organic Coffee Producers and Environmentalists of Hoya Grande and I dug over three kilometers of ditches, connected and buried just as much PVC tubing, and constructed one small retention damn. We've currently to finish the construction of another retention damn, though the provisional measures we took to increase water flow from that particular source continue to function. Though the project arrived just after the close of last year's harvest, water is currently filling the holding tanks situated above all three compact ecological milling machines. Abundant water is also arriving to the group's classification canal, located on their dry milling terrain.

The project's implementation thus far has not been without obstacles. The work involved required a significant amount of sacrifice by group members, a sacrifice not all members have been willing to confront. For personal reasons, some members of the group have been less than forthcoming in their willingness to work or alternatively, send paid workers during those days designated for project implementation. In order to dispense the costs associated with labor (personal or paid) evenly between group members we initiated a work log. By noting the days worked or paid, and by whom, the group has been better able to monitor the debt of those members less active in the project's realization. We have also experienced some difficulties regarding other community members disrupting the flow of water through the system to serve their own needs at home or on the farm. In order to address this interference, group members were forced to reinforce the susceptible parts of the system with a lock and chain in one instance, and a provisional fence in another.



Brian Camblin pulling pipe

Apart from these minor obstacles, the project thus far has been very successful considering water is flowing to all three designated locations. In regards to the group's dry milling terrain, the water has been absolutely invaluable as the group is currently in the midst of another project amplifying and improving their dry milling infrastructure. This project consists of the construction of a 25 x 30 meter cement patio, a 10 x 15 meter storage shed, and improved fermentation tanks and classification canal. This construction would not be possible were it not for the steady supply of water currently flowing on sight. The group plans to complete the construction of the remaining retention dam in July, as they are currently occupied with the abovementioned project and the year's first planting period. Our goal is to have all the current construction complete in time for this year's harvest, which begins in November.

Despite the construction status, thanks to Amigos collaboration, the group will most certainly enjoy a water-filled and worry-free harvest. Again, on behalf of CORAH and myself, your support is very much appreciated. Mil gracias…

- Brian

Honduras Now and Then

July 2006

Dale L. Schmitz, Yamaranguila, Intibucá, 1967-69 ~ Clive, Iowa

In June 1967 after three months of training at Camp Crozier in Puerto Rico, the "selected" sixty-eight of us in Honduras VIII boarded a Pan American flight to El Salvador where we transferred to SAHSA ("Stay at Home Stay Alive"), since Pan Am did not allow its planes to use the short runway at Toncontin. It is still no longer but the new entry part of the terminal opened this year, along with the arrival of jet ways and computers to handle immigration.

My assignment was rural community development in and around Yamaranguila, Intibucá, which is situated at 6,000 feet in the pine-covered mountains of west-central Honduras. I spent two wonderful but labor-intensive years there, organizing *patronatos* and with them building 5 rural schools, a potable water system, 2 suspension foot bridges, started a 4-S club with a Honduran Ag agent, and a few other projects like feeding sites for pre-schoolers. No one in Yamaranguila spoke English and the closest gringos were PCV's in La Esperanza; so my new Honduran friends helped me master Spanish. The PC book locker, Coleman lantern and short wave radio were great at night. A faithful dog and two trusty, horseshoed mules, one of which was attacked by a lion or jaguar one night at the edge of town, were faithful companions. Telegraph was our means of communication.

At the very end of my PC service, I married Francisca Aguilar Monzon, a Honduran, and we returned to the U.S. where we raised four children. I spent most of my working life as a Field Manager with the Iowa Department of Human Services, most recently in Des Moines. Earlier in my career I also worked with OEO-CAP supervising VISTA volunteers, and worked for John Deere.

Frances and I have made twenty trips back to Honduras over the forty years, and we have been spending a month there these recent years, usually in March each year. Hopefully that time will increase now that I have retired. Some of it is vacationing and visiting family and friends, but there are always work weeks too, such as helping families in Yamaranguila with electrical installation when electricity arrived in 1989, plumbing work after an expansion of the water system and when sewer service was installed in 1996. Telephone service just came last fall, and now there is even Internet service.

Honduras' population has more than doubled since the 1960's. Traffic in Tegus is even more congested, perhaps more so in the *colonias* than downtown. More malls are being built in the major cities. Yet one occasionally still sees a horse or burro with a pack on some streets toward on the edges of Tegus. Long gone are the VW *busitos* for 10 cents and the "Treintero" taxis. The exchange rate for Lempiras is no longer 1 for 2 but 1 to 19; banks now offer accounts in dollars. There are many strikes and demonstrations these years by groups such as teachers, nurses, unions and *compesinos*. These often shut down major highways and streets.

Crime is very widespread and one always needs to keep security in mind. It is a frequent concern and topic of conversation among most Hondurans. An example is the many cell phone robberies with some people even killed for them. The killing of children and youth by gangs, police or "professionals" hired by businessmen happens too often. Unsolved are the murders of about 50 U.S. citizens murdered over the last ten years. We no longer ride the buses in Tegus because of the gangs and their sometimes "war tax" on drivers and riders. Nor do we freely wander around Tegus and Comayagüela or San Pedro Sula much after sunset, and we visit the San Isidro Market with care. We have only had a couple brushes with crime, such as a couple years ago in Comayagüela in mid morning when we were saved by the sudden appearance of police as an irrational taxi-driver held a pistol to a family member's head. This April on the night before we left Honduras a female Peace Corps Volunteer was robbed of money and papers as she left the Peace Corps Office about 8 in the evening; fortunately she was not harmed.

The gap between rich and poor seems to be widening. Unemployment is very high. Health care seems better now. Regular gas is nearly $4.00 a gallon. Important exports now are melons and shrimp along with coffee and bananas. The number of *maquilas* and employees seem to fluctuate. The effects of CAFTA are yet unknown, but my farmer friends are very concerned it will hurt them and their way of making a living. An increasingly large number of Hondurans set out each day on a most difficult and dangerous journey to reach to U.S., among whom have been some of Frances' nieces and nephews. A coyote's fee is now between five and six thousand dollars. The *remesas* Hondurans in the U.S. send home each year now rank 3rd on the list of the income sources for the country.

Corruption among officials at all levels of government is unfortunately still extensive, and Honduras remains high on the list of the most corrupt countries in the world. There are the local politicians who enter office poor but leave richer, often having "acquired" public lands or skimmed funds. The same corruption occurs at the national level. Eastern

Honduras is an especially good stopover for drug runners from South America, whose money adds to the corruption in Honduras. A few recently rich *compesinos* got that way from raising marijuana. While a few of our family members and friends are fervent about their political parties, most of them feel it makes little difference whether the Nationalists or Liberals are in control: nothing will change for the better. They distrust most politicians who seem to need them only at election times. Political patronage continues strong.

Brigades of people on medical, religious and humanitarian missions are many these years. Tourism is becoming an increasingly important source of income for Honduras. There are still beautiful natural areas, such as La Tigra, Celaque, Pico Pijol and Pico Bonito. Copan Ruins has a good Mayan museum. Cruise ships now stop at Puerto Cortés and Roatan, where more upscale resorts are being built, and to where there is now direct air service from the U.S. The coral reefs are in some danger. While Lake Yojoa is still scenic, it is slowly dying. It is sad to see the tremendous deforestation that continues in Hondurans, contributing to the increasingly scarce water resources. Unless illegal logging is halted soon Honduras's environment will become like Haiti's.

In the 1980's the country was swarming with Honduran and U.S. military because of the Contras; activity was especially high along the border with Nicaragua and around the Cano Soto (Palmerola) Air Base near Comayagua. On trips we were often stopped and ordered off intercity buses to be searched. There is a civilian police force now in place of the military.

Some of the Lenca Indian population in Intibucá still wear bright and colorful clothes especially on market days, and they are better organized now to obtain their due including land rights. Some still hold some of their traditional Indian religious ceremonies, and the clergy do not seem so determined now to eradicate these customs. There were only two jeeps in Yamaranguila when I was a PCV, whereas now many pickups and other vehicles travel roads, poorly maintained to be sure, where once only horses and mules trod over trails. In my day traders brought goods on mule trains up from El Salvador. In 1967 not

even the highway between Tegus and San Pedro Sula was paved, whereas now there are many hard-surfaced roads. The trip into Tegus years ago took a long 12 hours over terrible roads in old wooden, "chicken" buses, where machetes were machetes were checked at the front of the bus, but not the chickens and small pigs. Now the trip takes about 3½ hours on a modern bus, usually still with loud music. Even today one can still see the effects of Hurricane Mitch in 1998 on roads, bridges and other structures.

Most Honduran people are still the same kind-hearted, hard-working people they have always been. They continue to strive for a better future for their children. Family gatherings are the same wherever they occur in the world. We have the same great times there as here when sitting around with family and friends, especially at times like *Navidad* or *Semana Santa*, remembering old times and discussing current events. Hondurans still love their fútbol. Most still strive to build or have their own homes, even though sources of on-going income are uncertain.

Besides the old friends we see and visit, I am still surprised by people who remember me; but until we talk awhile, I sometimes do not recall their names. An old friend who was mayor has just turned 90, but the Departmental Governor who was most supportive of my Peace Corps projects has died. Just this March when we were out walking in Yamaranguila a man come up to us and said to my wife: "Say, I know this fellow. I was in sixth grade and joined the new 4-S club he and the Ag agent started; he sent me to an agricultural course in Marcala." Particularly satisfying to me has been to watch some of the communities and people I worked with on projects years ago who have continued to resolve other problems with new projects and solutions.

The few Peace Corps Volunteers I meet from the large contingent in Honduras still seem to have the energy and drive and commitment to work with Hondurans to improve their futures. Hopefully our future times in Honduras will both allow us to explore new parts in Honduras and meet new friends as well as allow us to continue contributing with *Catrachos* for a better future.

Que viva Honduras!!

A PCV and a Coffee Co-op

November 2006

In January 2006, Amigos de Honduras made a $2,500 contribution to a current PCV's development project through the Peace Corps Partnership Program, our third grant in the last four years. The two previous grants were made with a combination of dues monies and members' donations. Due to the wonderfully gracious giving of members during the last holiday season, this contribution was made entirely of donated funds. The project funds purchased materials for 're-plumbing' a ecological coffee mill for a cooperative of organic coffee farmers in Hoya Grande, outside Moroceli, El Paraíso. The Volunteer, Brian Camblin, contributed articles to both the March '06 and July '06 newsletters. He agreed to be e-mail interviewed during October.

1. Give us an update on the work done since June with the new piping, etc. What is a "classification canal" that you were working on? and are the 2 (or is it 3 ?) mills ready to go for this harvest season?

Well. it's been a busy couple months since June. The water system was an essential part of a much larger project funded by PROACTA (an affiliate of the European Union) and Zamorano (Pan-American School of Agriculture). These two institutions contributed a substantial sum to the Cafetaleros Organicos y Ambientalistas de Hoya Grande (CORAH), allowing them to construct a wet/dry processing mill. Not to be confused with the wet milling structures located in the upper part of the sub-watershed, this wet/dry mill involves processes more directly related to the commercialization of the group's coffee.

In May of this year, after several months of repeated attempts and failures, we were finally able to locate a tractor and willing owner to level the construction sight. Once leveled to a workable grade, the group and I set out to construct a 25x30 meter cement pátio that will serve as the foundation for the solar drying structures. We are also just days away from completing a 10x15 meter storage shed that will provide the necessary space and conditions for the group to store their coffee through the harvest. To compliment the installed water system, the group constructed a 3x2.5 meter holding tank. We also built a caption tank at the bottom of the classification canal to allow the group to recycle the large amounts of water

required for classification. The canal itself begins at the foot of two large fermentation tanks and stretches nearly 30 meters in length. The idea is that after fermenting over night, which adds flavor and density to the coffee bean, the coffee is then emptied into the canal and the classification begins. A steady flow of water from the upper portion of the canal slowly moves the coffee the length of the canal. Meanwhile, the canal operator pushes the coffee in the opposite direction with a large paddle. The concept is rather simple, any damaged or unripe beans have a lower density and therefore float. The better quality beans have a higher density and tend to sink to the bottom of the canal. Essentially what you have at the end of the process is a quality spectrum. The coffee in the upper portion of the canal is withdrawn and dried in the solar dryers then stored for export, while the beans that have drifted to the lower portion are generally dried separately and sold locally.

We are still putting the finishing touches on the canal, fermentation tanks, and the solar dryers. The water project is now complete, rather than building a completely new retention wall the group spent the designated money on fortifying an existing dam. Were it not for the water system, none of the current construction would have been possible. So, again, a big thanks to Amigos de Honduras.

2. What does this year's harvest look like for the cooperativa? the appearance of the cherries forming on the bushes? the weather? the number of farmers participating in the coop work to get ready for harvest and processing?

As we race to complete construction before this year's harvest there are a few things about which the group is not particularly concerned. The three wet milling machines are ready to go, with the exception of a few pre-harvest preparations and maintenance checks. This year the group is expecting a larger harvest as last year's yields were relatively low. There seem to be no concerns with regards to filling a container for export, a feat requiring at least 35,000 pounds of dried green coffee. Coffee beans have started their formation process, as tree branches are now starting to droop beneath the weight of the bright green cherries. This year's rainy season has been a relatively dry one here in south central Honduras. There were some initial concerns that farmers would only be able to plant one harvest of corn and beans, though more rain is forecast in the coming weeks. The lack of water also tends to delay the coffee harvest, with lower humidity levels on coffee farms generally slowing the maturation process of the coffee beans.

CORAH's membership is at an all time low of eleven families. From their conception in the year 2000, it was a group of twenty-three families. However, as is similar to the life cycle of many groups here in Honduras, they've successively lost members on the fringe who perhaps were expecting a more immediate return on their investment. I've personally seen three members retire during my two years here in town. The producers who've endured are those most dedicated to the protection of the sub-watershed and the embetterment of their personal socio-economic situations. It has been an all together pleasurable, often times frustrating, yet always inspiring learning experience working side-by-side with them.

3. Tell us about a typical cooperativa member. How many acres of coffee bushes does an average member farm? How many pounds of dried, processed coffee beans does an acre produce?

The average coop member dedicates approximately five acres of his or her terrain to coffee cultivation. The standard measure of land here is the "manzana," which measures approximately 7,000 meters square (one manzana is approximately 1.7 acres). The standard amount of coffee trees in one manzana is 3,000, not including shade and fruit trees. Currently the group averages 1,500 pounds of dried green coffee per manzana. Numbers have been known to reach as high as 5,000 pounds of dried green coffee per manzana in some parts of Honduras. The production numbers depend on a wide variety of factors ranging from micro-climactic conditions, to shade regulation and pest management. Increasing production per manzana has been a group focal point, however, the process is a slow one requiring constant monitoring.

4. Do the typical coop members also have other income? crops? animals?

The majority of coop members also dedicate themselves to the production of corn and beans, which comprise a better portion of their daily diets and provide a supplemental income to coffee. Some members also manage small animals such as pigs and chickens around the house, fewer still own livestock. Aside from crops and animal husbandry, some coop members also do contract construction work in town. However, by and large, the greatest part of their annual income

comes from coffee.

5. Under what names is your coffee sold? to whom? and is it arabica or robusta?

CORAH has tried hard to ensure that their coffee retains it's identity when exported. Often times exporters will buy coffee from local producers and commercialize it as their own. To date, CORAH has yet to establish a contract with any interested buyers. Thus each year, the process of selling their coffee begins anew. This year however, they have taken part in a few regional initiatives designed to help coops commercialize their coffee. The group cultivates a number of varieties of arabica, including: typica, paca, catuai, and lempira. Variety selection depends largely on cup characteristics and natural resistance to local diseases and illnesses.

6. In looking back, what do you anticipate will be the result of your two years of work in Hoya Grande?

It's hard to say what the fruits of our labor will be. During my two years with CORAH we've focused primarily on increasing their capacity to process coffee. By solidifying their production systems (i.e., installing the water system and the humid/dry mill) we hope to expedite the group's pre-harvest preparation and alleviate costly maintenance concerns. For the group to produce the consistently high quality coffee buyers are looking for, it's necessary that they have a reliable infrastructure to work with. In my honest opinion, any results of our work, be they good or bad, will depend entirely on the eleven individuals of CORAH. I've been present for many a petty arguments that have taken some members to the edge of withdrawing. I've also walked away with the tired contentment of a full day's work next to all eleven. I've seen the group live up to it's potential just as many times as I've seen them fall short. In that sense, I presume that any results of the work we've done over the last two years will correlate with the group's ability to continue working together.

7. What are your personal plans when your service ends in December?

My personal plans are to continue taking advantage of the relatively commitment-free days of my youth and travel through South America. Colombia, Brazil, and Argentina amongst others are on the itinerary. As far as career moves . . . not just yet.

March 2007

Discovering an Entrance through Panqueques y Barriletes

Terry Fieldhouse, Queruco, Lempira 1989-91 ~ Nevada City, California

ser-en-dip-i-ty: a desirable discovery or outcome arising totally by chance.

I suspect that my becoming an accepted part of village life in Queruco, Lempira, was not remarkably unlike that experienced by the other volunteers following training and moving to our respective sites in late summer of 1989. However, for me, it seemed to be taking an inordinate amount of time and energy. The coffee harvest had ended and the *coyotes'* pickups, loaded with bags of the dried berries, could already be seen heading out of San Rafael bound for Santa Bárbara and San Pedro Sula.

I had developed a degree of patience, though, telling myself, "Well, it's only natural. You're a gringo, over 60 years old, bald and bearded whereas Eddie [the previous volunteer] was in his early 20s, spoke the language fluently and was very personable and outgoing." Eddie had very graciously made great effort to "break trail" for me during my first site visit. I was introduced to the numerous on-going forestry and other conservation projects as well as to the many *campesinos* with whom he'd been working and with whom he had also clearly developed close relationships.

I'd been encouraged to find a place to live in Queruco. That village, located about a mile from San Rafael on the road to Gracias, reflected somewhat less material well-being than did San Rafael. By late November I'd managed to find a leaky roofed casita where I could set up housekeeping. It had a small room at the rear in which I could prepare meals on my kerosene stove. Little did I know that it would be activities occurring in this room each morning that would initiate serendipity's first strike.

Continuing a lifetime practice of having oatmeal for breakfast almost every day, it was comforting to find that *avena* was stocked at the nearby *pulperia*. As rains began to diminish in January, the window was swung open during the preparation of morning's meal. Soon, outside the windowsill, little curious and wide-eyed faces began making a regular morning appearance. This, at least, presented the wonderful opportunity for me to better get to know the closest neighbor kids.

One morning, I made pancakes rather than the usual oatmeal. The kids instantly sensed, or smelled, that I'd changed the usual breakfast routine and a lengthy discussion took place between us about what was going on. I'd bought a jar of strawberry preserves before leaving Tegucigalpa so I did up a few of the pan-

cakes and handed them out to the kids.

It's reasonable to assume that curiosity was not limited to the children; certainly there was a collection of mamas who pumped their kids for information and spread the word about what that old gringo did in his kitchen in the morning. But the surprise came a week or so later when I went to the *pulperia* to buy flour and was greeted more warmly than usual by the owner, "Ay, Don Terry, vamos hacer panqueques, eh?"

The second serendipity occurrence was probably somehow triggered by the first: "If that gringo can make *panqueques*, maybe he can fix *barriletes*."

It was fairly common to see San Rafael kids flying commercially made decorated kites during the late winter and early spring months, far less so in Queruco. One day a Queruco boy appeared at the door with a badly tattered kite that he'd evidently salvaged from a treetop in San Rafael. He asked if I could fix it.

The struts were in many pieces so I told him the kite was irreparable. However, I added that when I was his age, my father taught me how to make kites and if the boy could bring a short section of bamboo from which to make struts, I had the newspaper for covering as well as a ball of string and we could make a kite together. I also made it clear that this finished kite would be mine and that he would have to make his own afterwards if he wanted one.

A couple of days later, a warm wind blew upslope from the river below. The finished "test" kite lifted gently from the boy's hands and hovered over the village for all to see. Soon, a number of residents were out in the street exclaiming their enthusiastic support.

Once again, I was faced daily with a group of young ones – this time prospective kite makers.

By now it's probably clear how this "chapter" ends: the array of young faces slowly augmented each day by an increasing number of shyer and older visitors requesting tree seed for their *vivero forestal*, vegetable seed for the *hortaliza*, or just to spend a while chatting.

Just for fun though, a quick fast forward from that "chapter's" ending and we catch the merest glimpse of the week-long, mixed gender field trip taken with "my" *campesinos* and *campesinas* which so surprised everyone, but perhaps most of all, the only practicing organic farmer then in Honduras. That, of course, is another story.

March 2007

Doña Bárbara

From Doña Bárbara or Gringa de Mierda to Doña Bárbara

Barbara Kaare-Lopez, Olanchito, Tocoa & Trujillo 1978-80 ~ Denver

"Don't forget to bring your cotton underwear!" Cheri reminded me. Since I normally wear this type of apparel, it was nothing I had to remember. "Why are you going to Honduras in the summer, it's so hot and humid?" Sue, my "Ex- Peace Corps Volunteer from Honduras friend in Denver" questioned me.

Being a School Nurse Practitioner with Denver Public Schools, I had no choice but to travel in the summer as this is when we have our summer vacation. But perhaps the better question was why I felt the urge to return to Honduras after 25 years since leaving in 1980.

The summer of 2004, this inexplicable urge first grabbed me; it wasn't *La Venganza de Lempira*. This urge was to return to Honduras and do some volunteer work, either as a nurse and/or as a clown. I am now a nurse clown: Nurse Patch - it is my clown name. I had traveled to many countries since returning to the U.S., but never had returned to Honduras. I searched the internet and came up with an organization called Helping Honduras Kids (HHK) which was affiliated with an SOS orphanage on the North Coast where I had lived (or south of the Coast) as a Peace Corps Volunteer, 1978 to 1980. This HHK requested at least two months of service; now that I am married to Big Bernie (who still is not keen on overseas travel), I decided I could not go. "I probably should not leave him for 2 months," I told myself. But knowing how much he becomes hypnotized by the Boob Tube, he might not have even noticed that I was gone! Other medical missions I researched were already full and/or it was too late to try to travel with them. And I did not want to return to Honduras simply to be a tourist; I wanted to do something, to somehow help.

The summer of 2005 did not work out either to travel. Helping Honduras Kids founder, David Ashby,

still wanted two months of service which I could not promise. But the summer of 2006, after a few emails back and forth, David emailed me that "2 to 3 weeks of volunteer time at the orphanage could be mutually beneficial."

Upon receiving that email, the wheels were set in motion. I obtained a plane ticket on Continental and TACA, and arrived in La Ceiba mid-July; it was actually 25 years, 7 months, and 3 days since I left Honduras after my Peace Corps service ended December 14, 1980. I found a hotel in La Ceiba, and traveled daily, from Monday to Friday, to the SOS orphanage 17 kilometers from La Ceiba on the road to Tela.

Volunteering At SOS Orphanage

The SOS orphanages were founded in 1949 by an Austrian after World War II. It is an international orphanage system and has seven or eight orphanages in Honduras. Aldeas SOS outside of La Ceiba has 134 children, who live in homes similar to a ranch style house with their Tia as they call her; she is not their biological *tia*. There are 15 houses at the Aldeas SOS, with one house of teenage boys living in La Ceiba. About 7 to 10 children live in each house, sharing chores, cooking, taking care of the younger children, going to school in the mornings, and hopefully bonding with the Tia. Most of the children are orphans, but some have been removed from their homes for neglect, abuse, and/or abandonment.

I met with Olman, the Director of the SOS, who had suggestions for me to help at the Aldeas. Thanks to the help of two young Swedish volunteers, Nora and Karen, who were political science students in Sweden, and who had volunteered for five weeks at the Aldeas before I arrived, I was actually able to accomplish a few projects. I helped the Honduran nurse, Claudia, and did heights and weights on all the children. Oh, so many of the children looked so short and "not their age." We gave a talk on nutrition to all 14 of the Tias. When Claudia was in La Ceiba, I helped with injuries at the Aldeas. Nora invited me to attend her art classes where I gave *charlas* on nutrition and dental care. Afterwards the children would draw pictures of the food pyramid and then of teeth, toothbrushes and toothpaste. We performed a great experiment of putting a human tooth into a small container full of full strength coca-cola; hours later the tooth would be discolored brown and softer. If the children stayed for the entire art class, they were rewarded with a toothbrush and toothpaste which I had brought to Honduras, contributions of Denver Public Schools' nurses program where I work. My last day at the Aldeas, Nora, Karen and I led a talk with 13 teenage girls on questions we had as, "why are the boys playing soccer in the afternoon, but NO girls are?" "Why do more boys attend the arts and computer class compared to girls?" "Are the girls allowed to participate?"

One day for the Friday Treat, Nora and I face-painted the children using special face paints I had brought from the U. S. To our surprise, most of the paintings we had applied to the faces were soon washed off or sweated off in the hot Honduran sun. Needing to paint with my left leg stretched out so the kids would not be on top of me was also a shock. Being a *zurda*, I needed space to paint with my left hand; in a matter of a minute, they were practically on top of me despite my pleas in Spanish to move back. Shocked that most of the face paints were washed off, I told my story to an ex-Pastor at the Gran Hotel Ceiba where I was staying. He had been raised in Honduras during the 1950's and 1960's. "That's easy; it's because of Spirits that they washed off the paints!" I never thought of that. The next week we painted mainly on the kids' arms; the paintings stayed.

I had requested to visit the Francisco Morazon school where the elementary age students attended in the morning. I was never able to as the teachers were on strike two out of the three weeks that I was in Honduras! Ivan, the Honduran teacher who tutored in the afternoon at the Aldeas, told me that he earns 32 lempiras an hour as an elementary school teacher in the morning. Remember when 1 dollar equaled 2 lempiras? Now the lempira is 18 to 1 dollar!

Some of the kids' attitudes shocked me. While I was giving my health *charla*, suddenly a boy might begin to scream! Others might just get up and walk out; most would stay. Some would woefully tell us, "*no puedo*," when asked to do their project. Some would stand outside of the class and bang and kick the classroom door, demanding to be let in. Nora and Karen had a theory that it is because we are *gringas* and/or women that the kids would not respect us. Danilo, the Assistant Director, shed light on this my last day. "*Gringos* come and go; many come for 1 day to play with the kids and give them toys. The Honduran teachers and others who work at the Aldeas are there to stay. Yes, they also get tested by the kids; eventually those who stay win. Yes, we *gringos* also have our Spanish accents. And regarding our classes, we had demands on the kids behavior; some of them did not like that." Some kids are new to the Aldea and test everyone.

Many kids touched my heart. I told Bernie that I had an 11 yr. old boyfriend, Sergio. I earned his respect by arm wrestling with him on the school bus and winning. Playing soccer outside of the nurse's clinic one day, he yelled at me to watch him, "I'm the goalie. Now move your chair over here so you can watch me!" he ordered. Later when talking to the nurse Claudia inside the clinic, he came limping inside, complaining of an ankle injury which I assessed and iced. Eleven year old Evelyn looked like she was 7 years old; her deep dimples and crooked smile captured my heart. And little 4 year old Angie wore thick glasses

but still couldn't see; she had 4 different conditions affecting her eyesight.

One day I was invited to the small clinic in El Pital, up the road following el Rio Cangejal, a gorgeous drive. The HHK dentist, Doctora Blanca Murillo, impressed me by working in such a small space, having to get out the mop and mop up water spilling onto the floor, having the electricity go out after her first patient was treated, and later reappearing. She sent her first patient to the *pulperia* to buy *agua purificado* as the water from the faucet came out brown. One 20 yr. old woman did not known her birthday. And instead of just pulling teeth, she actually put in fillings, gave antibiotics for infections, and even stitched gums after extracting wisdom teeth. I remembered my dentist in Olanchito who ONLY would pull out teeth; patients did not receive fillings. Blanca also gave me two extracted teeth for my coca-cola dental experiment at the Aldeas. Blanca only charged her first patient 10 lempiras for putting in a filling (about 50 cents).

El Nuevo, El Bueno, El Viejo y El Malo

So what is new in Honduras since I left? Drinking safe water from the bottles of *agua purificado* was great. Although I still got *La Venganza de Lempira* for a couple days, it probably was the food. Using my U.S. debit card and getting money in Lempiras out of an ATM machine was so easy! There is a free, bilingual book for tourists, titled *Honduran Tips*, which was very helpful. La Ceiba even had a tourist shop for good travel information there. My hotel actually had recycling. Cell phones were in common usage. I never did prepare and either convert "something" on my U. S. cell phone OR get a new number for Honduran usage, but it was possible. Various internet cafes existed in La Ceiba; I could actually call Big Bernie in Denver for one lempira per minute from them. I also watched TV at night with good TV reception. Plenty of CNN was viewed as I was there during the Israeli-Lebanese short but deadly war. Outside of La Ceiba there was a beautiful ecotourist travel lodge, Pico Bonito Lodge. One day I took the bus there, walked to the Lodge, had a short guided trip on the Lodge's paths, and ate a rico seafood meal. Other tourist companies had sprouted in La Ceiba, but sadly the city beaches were still dirty, reportedly dangerous, and no one was enjoying the Caribbean from them.

The worst event that has plagued the North Coast and other parts of Honduras is the proliferation of gangs such as Marra Salvatrucha and Marra 18. Hearing stories of tourists being robbed in open daylight, mainly around San Pedro Sula, I usually stayed in at night unless I took a taxi home. Traveling *solita* as a woman, I decided to be safe. This of course got somewhat boring. Since the gangs arrived in the 1980's, Honduras recently has "cleaned them up;" details how this was done is unknown to me. Were suspects just sent to prison as one Honduran told me? Luckily I was safe during my 2006 Return To Honduras.

For those readers who are interested in children's issues, I learned that four organizations exist in and around La Ceiba to help orphaned, ne glected, abused, and abandoned children. As previously outlined, there is the SOS orphanage; INFA; Casa del Ninos, which was founded in 1996 by Feed The Children, and works only with boys at this time; and Casa Hogar Feliz. Sadly the SOS orphanage, as of fall, 2006, no longer welcomes outside help! This is due to a change in policy from the main office in Tegucigalpa.

Queen For a Day

"I remember you; you were in the Miss Trujillo beauty contest!" This was the comment that greeted me 25 years later when I took the Pullman Bus to my last and favorite site, Trujillo, on the North Coast one weekend this summer. I entered a pharmacy looking for the daughter of the Honduran woman I had lived with in Trujillo, Doña Alma. The daughter, Almita, is now a pharmacist and has her own pharmacy, Farmacia Almim. Don't laugh readers. If any of you had read my previously published story in the April, 2003 issue of Amigos de Honduras, you know what I am leading up to. Entitled "Queen For A Day," by process of elimination I was the Hospital Queen Candidate for the Miss Trujillo beauty contest in 1980. The other two single women were discarded as applicants. One measured about 4 foot 9 inches tall, and would not be seen on stage. The other weighed about 300# and had a mustache. I came in second to last in the contest, which I did NOT shed tears over. I was shocked and flattered that my Honduran counterparts nominated me to be their representative at this huge event in Trujillo.

The bus ride to Trujillo was a 2 1/2 hour ride on PAVED roads; before, one could only fly in from La Ceiba, or take a dirt road in from Tocoa, my second Peace Corps site. Some of El Bueno y La Bella de Trujillo that I encoutered in Trujillo was the *bella mar* and still clean beaches in town. Many champas or thatch roofed restautant/cantinas have sprouted up along the beach. The Santa Barbara fort overlooking the Carribean had been modernized to become a fort/museum. Miss Peggy, a transplanted retired *gringa* I met in 1980 did in fact build her Villas Brinkley, which had only concrete blocks up on a hill when I lived there. Miss Peggy's health is now failing; she is 80 yrs. old and back in the U.S., and her Villas are now in decline.

With the help of a writer/poet, Nelson, who published *Desde Finlandia Para Trujillo*, and whom I met in the fort, I toured the Hospital Salvador Paredes where I used to work as a Peace Corps nurse. I also located both the Honduran nurse, Aura Ninfa and her once skinny husband, Ramon, and Almita, the previously mentioned daughter of Dona Alma, only with his help.

"*Gringa de Mierda!*" Dona Alma, would shout at me at times. She would get exasperated with me and my gringo Spanish, and the fact that I did NOT want to be in the Beauty Contest initially, but she reportedly liked me. Nelson helped me find my old house which Almita had moved her family into and remodeled beautifully. That Sunday I spent with my old Amigos de Trujillo. In a small group I understood almost everything that was said, and Aura Ninfa and her husband seemed especially happy to see me again. Almita updated me on her family, children, and the two former Honduran *novios* I had when I lived with her mom. But in a group of Hondurans talking fast and using the Honduran slang, much of which I have forgotten, I was lost often in the conversation. A *Catracho* explained to me that they will substitute J for S when talking fast. Did I know that when I lived in Honduras? I did remember the usage of Vos, but I forgot how fast some of the Catrachos speak, and the poor enunciation. Thank God my friends had their teeth still; otherwise I would have really been lost.

El Malo de Trujillo is that for some, it is still somewhat isolated. The movie theatre is no longer operating. It was there that I could go alone or with friends and encounter my *gringo* and *catracho* friends. Hotel Central and other buildings in the center of town have burned down. The *ajene* (sandfly) problem still exists on the beach outside of town. Depending on your viewpoint, the new hotels that have sprung up could make it more commercial. But I found it to be still charming and it is where I was told by my Honduran friends one day at the beach, *"Vos no sos gringa; vos sos Catracha!"* You are not a gringa; you are a Honduran. In other words, you are one of us.

Helping Honduras Kids

In the Fall of 2006, the Director of SOS Orphanages in Tegucigalpa, decided that she no longer wanted outside help nor contacts from the agencies that had been involved with them. David Ashby, who founded Helping Honduras Kids, has since emailed us on the email list about this disappointing news. It is a mystery why this has transpired. Could it be that she wants the kids in SOS to be integrated more into the community and not live separately as they do outside of La Ceiba? Does she want them to be treated as other kids are and not have special resources, as a nurse in their Aldea? David has shifted his resources to other orphans and/or children being raised by their aged grandmothers on the North Coast. If you would like more information on his organization, and/or how to contribute to them, email him at: www.helpinghonduraskids.org.

You can send money to Helping Honduras Kids at: 305 Vineyard Town Center, #253, Morgan Hill, California 95037, U.S.A. From the U. S. call: (714) 277-3601 (note this California # will ring in Honduras). Honduras: 011 (504) 443-1209.

July 2007

Honduras Community Support Corporation

compiled by Alan Waugh from pieces written by Nola White and T. Orin Lee

Honduras Community Support Corporation (HCSC) is a small, all-volunteer nonprofit organization that mobilizes funds and materials to support community efforts in the Omoa region on the North Coast. Its history stems from 1990s when Nola White worked as a Peace Corps Volunteer to help mountain communities in that region build gravity feed water systems and pour-flush toilets. In the years that followed, Nola revisited these communities from time to time – as RPCVs who have been lucky enough to return to their sites know, once you are part of a place in Honduras, you remain part of life there.

The project began with the simple idea of doing something to provide such housing. With financial support from one of the participating friends, the plan was to help the community of Las Flores de Omoa acquire a piece of land next to the school, and then help them build a house on it for two teachers. But one thing led to another.

To hold legal title to the land, the community would need to be incorporated. In fact it became clear the community did not have legal title to the land under its school, or the land under a community storehouse/meeting place, or the land in the center of the village that served as soccer field, playground, park, and all-purpose gathering place. Through local Honduran friends, Nola found a sympathetic attorney who agreed to do the necessary work to give the community legal control over these parcels as well as the land for the teachers' house. Honduran law allows *campesinos* to gain recorded title to land they have been occupying and using if they can afford – as of course they usually cannot – the necessary filing fees and the services of an attorney.

Before this project was completed, Nola began receiving requests from other communities in the region that needed

to acquire and/or secure legal control over particular pieces of land to protect critical community interests. One of these requests came from the communities of Camino Nuevo and San Miguelito, whose shared water system was threatened by the fact that the owner of the land above the water source had put the land on the market and was allowing trees to be cut. Deforestation would cause the impoundment serving the system to be silted-in and ruined. Sale of the land might also mean a new owner would insist on removal of the dam and waterline from his land. Having identified a possible source of funding to cover the cost of this land, Nola and friends incorporated HCSC to receive a grant for this and other related purposes.

The process of seeking help is fairly simple: the community makes a request which must be supported by the whole community and benefit the community. Nola visits to meet with the community and assess the project. Then they discuss next steps - what the community will contribute, where else we might look for help and what they need to request from HCSC. A formal letter is drafted by them including the number who will benefit, the costs of the project, etc. The Board prioritizes projects, and decides what HCSC can finance.

To date, we have provided funds to build teachers' houses in remote villages and teachers' bonuses, which have stabilized education. Repair for schools, and school supplies are regularly needed. Getting materials to the village, or the nearest road head, is a big help and our trusty ancient 4X4 continues to do so. Materials (and, occasionally, some outside expertise) are provided to build or improve water systems), usually working in conjunction with government or other groups. Roads and bridges have been improved, mostly for animal and people use, but some for vehicles. And land has been purchased, fenced and reforested.

One project has continued to lead to another. Four parcels of land have been acquired for purposes of watershed protection, and more are anticipated. A second community has built a teachers' house with help from HCSC. Another community received HCSC funding for interim support of a teacher and for school improvements. Two communities have received help in building or repairing access roads, and another group of communities was helped to build a suspension bridge over Rio de Omoa. Two communities have received help in completing water systems, and another was helped to plan the expansion and upgrading of its system when HCSC brought RPCV water systems engineer Peter Haase from California to inspect the existing system and make recommendations. Currently HCSC is working with three communities to provide materials for construction of pilas in homes that do not yet have them.

Rural people in Honduras are closely dependent on the land and on their land-based communities. But these communities (like the individuals within them) generally have no legally recorded right to the land they use – for water systems, schools, roads, trails and gathering places, among other uses. They can lose control of the land to anyone who has the necessary money or influence to record title. HCSC helps these communities gain title to certain lands as a way to strengthen their ability to provide for themselves and as a way to anchor the members of the community against wholesale displacement.

Though HCSC's intention is to continue to focus on the communities of the Omoa region, one project has entailed a loan to a sustainable forestry co-op in the remote Sico Valley two days travel to the east of Omoa. The co-op needed to pay for the professional plan required for government approval of a sustainable harvest of mahogany and other tropical hardwoods. With approval in hand, they are now proceeding with the work and are repaying the loan at the rate of 1 lempira for each board foot sold.

Several years ago, Nola and her husband, Kirby, built a house on the coast near Omoa, which allows Nola to spend four or five months a year in the region organizing and overseeing projects. The house has also made it possible to provide housing for interns and other volunteers. We have had several wonderful volunteers – some bringing their own project expertise in solar cookers and composting toilets, but mostly bringing abilities to support projects already in progress. The thing

they have all brought was interest, energy, great ideas, and an ever increasing respect for the people they worked with. The Hondurans have appreciated the interest and energy, and greatly enjoyed the relationships created.

We fund incorporation to the villages we work in, and if land is involved, we work to provide legal title to it and to any other land held in common by the village. Our interest in stabilizing the villages this way led quite naturally to concern with the watersheds. To protect the water, the land must be secured and protected and this has become a major focus in the last couple of years. We're particularly excited because a Honduran non-profit has grown out of our concern, which is so strongly shared with the *campesinos* we serve.

Fundacion Eco Verde Sostenible (FECOVESO) was incorporated under Honduran law in 2005 "to support community efforts to protect the environment of Northwest Honduras and promote the health, education and well-being of the people." Each village affected by purchase of a watershed agrees to provide daily protection to it, and to elect a member to the Board of Directors of FECOVESO. FECOVESO holds legal title to these micro *cuencas* and the Board makes the rules of use. Fencing and reforestation is ongoing as we add new pieces as money allows. Working with this Board is one of my most exciting ventures in Honduras! The enthusiasm, the energy to undertake the responsibilities and the sense of satisfaction I see in these wonderful people is awesome. So far, HCSC has been the sole support of FECOVESO, but they are moving towards fundraising – quite a step for campesinos!

HCSC's initial projects were launched with a grant from Equity Trust, Inc. Since then, financial support has come from a small but growing group of individual donors who have donated approximately $75,000 over the past 3 years. We are seeking $30,000 in grant support for a Watershed Acquisition Fund that will allow HCSC and FECOVESO to seize acquisition opportunities in the Omoa region as they arise and thereby expand FECOVESO's land holdings and influence within the region.

In addition, as we go back and forth, we transport donated clothes, books, musical instruments, eyeglasses, over-the-counter medications and dental supplies, etc. In November each year we distribute a newsletter reporting on the year's activities. Visit our website to learn more information about our many projects, and to see photos of the work and the Hondurans who benefit: www.hcsc-honduras.org. To subscribe or for more information, contact us at HCSC, 137 Shepard Avenue, Saranac Lake, New York 12983, 518-891-0417, HonSCS@Yahoo.com. _

July 2007

El Amor de Honduras

Jackie D'Amico Good, Siguatepeque, Comayagua 1988-1991 ~ Corrales, New Mexico

I fell in love. Not with anyone in particular, but with a country and a people as a whole, Honduras. Even though I left in 1991, I carry with me to this day a warm and happy memory of a very special time in my life. I have tried to relay this emotion and experience to my husband over the years and where he could see the joy in my eyes when I spoke of my time in Honduras, he could never quite get it.

We had discussed volunteering with a medical brigade for many years (he is a dentist and I am a nurse). Last year, we got serious and started researching and investigating different organizations. After much web searching, we located a group with a mission statement that matched our beliefs: MEDICO - Medical Eye Dental International Care Organization, Inc. It is a non-profit, non-governmental and non-religious organization based out of Texas. They work mainly in Honduras and a bit in El Salvador and Nicaragua. E-mail questions and telephone calls to and from veteran volunteers were exchanged and of course the paperwork was completed and we were set to go.

MEDICO volunteers serve for one week in a host agency sponsored location. Costs are paid by the volunteers and include everything from meals and lodging to airport taxes. I think the two most impressive items I gleaned from their information before heading out was that 61% of the MEDICO volunteers were returning MEDICO volunteers (or veterans to this organization) and that 96% of each dollar received is applied directly to program services. For more information, go to www.medico.org.

As an aside, I lived in Siguatepeque and worked in the neighboring *aldeas*, nearly 16 years ago. I was in the health sector under what was referred to then as the Child Survival programs. I trained community health workers, traditional birth attendants, and anyone else interested in learning skills ranging from first aid to nutrition and growth monitoring. So the

prospect of returning and again working in health care greatly interested me.

As excited as I was to land in San Pedro Sula, I was apprehensive to alter a near perfect memory of a special time and place in my life. San Pedro Sula airport is no longer the cinder block one room shack it used to be, though the trip through *inmigracion* and *aduana* hadn't changed. One is immediately hit with what I shall politely call "progress" as you exit the airport. The smell of Wendy's assaults your nose. I had been longing for a full array of other cherished smells, fresh cooked tortillas, black beans, the smell of the street as it is heated by the day … all of these things, but not fast food from the States.

My husband and I arrived a day after the rest of our group due to a passport issue in Houston, so we were kindly met at the airport and transported to our worksite by Fausto. Fausto is a Honduran national working with CARITAS in the area of Naranjito, in the Department of Cortés and he was just what I needed to dilute the "progress" and transport me back to my beautiful memories of Honduran hospitality. We talked non-stop on the 2.5 hour ride up the mountain into the Menedon region outside of San Pedro Sula. Politics, economy, culture, family, agriculture, nothing was left out, except my husband who did not understand any of it.

Once in Naranjito Banaderos, a small *aldea* in the mountains, we set up the medical, dental and eye clinics. Our group consisted of doctors, physician assistants, nurses, pharmacist, dentists, optometrists, translators and program staff. MEDICO has made over 100 medical trips to Honduras since its founding in 1990. They are very well organized and supplied. A local doctor, Salvador Paredes, joined our team for the first day and it was a treat to work with him and see his dedication to his people. During our 4 days on the mountain we served close to 1,800 people - it left me happy and exhausted each day. As a nurse and translator, I was more mobile than most staff members. I had the opportunity to play with the children, chat with the mothers and laugh with the teenagers, whereas my husband spent all his time bent over patients and pulling teeth.

After inventorying, packing supplies and cleaning up, we headed back down the mountain into San Pedro Sula where we were deposited into the Hilton Princess Hotel which was as far from Las Brisas (a classic PCV location a few blocks down from the Plaza for 7 lempiras a night) as one could go. Outside the hotel was more "progress," chain restaurants from the States, Red Robin, McDonald's, BK, Wendy's, Applebees, then there was the MALL . . . just down the street. It was "anytown USA" right in downtown SPS! All this "progress" was a bit too much for me to bear. I needed perspective. I needed to see something familiar so that I could ground my experience. I needed to go to Siguat and see how my town had progressed.

MEDICO always allows for one free day for the volunteers to explore the country, so we decided to rent a car and head south. The drive out of SPS was amazing. A four lane highway with smooth roads! It did make me smile to see the vendors still on the side of the road peddling everything from *miel* to *rosquillas*.

If I thought "progress" hit SPS, I was not prepared for its assault on Siguat. Gone is the serene quiet *buena clima* town that stole my heart so many years ago. There was a population explosion! There are now 3 main roads leading in,

buildings and homes from the main *caratera* to the center of town and congestion filling the streets. The *aldeas* I worked in now have daily buses transporting people to and fro. The end of the road that was used to dry coffee and beans is jam packed with cars and *bodegas*. I had difficulty locating my old neighborhood. Billardes Pimpelon, the landmark by which I gave directions had closed years ago. My old home was gone, replaced by a 3 story cinder block apartment building that was still under construction. Some things were still there, the Mercado, the Italian pizza place - Pizzeria Vienza, the Texaco gas station, the plaza which now has a fish pond and golden arches, and the Hondutel office.

The cost of progress is high. Speaking with people about the economy, inflation and the cost of living was depressing. They are growing and producing less beans and corn. The cost of 3 tortillas used to be 25 centavos, it is now 2-3 Lempiras. The exchange rate is at $1 to 19 Lempiras. Crime and gang violence is up. 60% of the Honduran health care is provided by outside sources and not by the Honduran Health Ministry. The good news is that the infant mortality rate has decreased from 63/1000 in 1992 to 30/1000 in 2006. Honduran friends said that if they did not have children in the states (illegally) sending them money, they would not be able to make ends meet. I did not expect Honduras to be the same place it was and I am not sure that it is fair of me to question their "progress," but I am also not sure if this progress did not just exchange one set of problems for another.

The joy of my trip was when I found my old friend, Anita, still in her home with her children all grown and her grandchildren all around. I had been afraid she wouldn't recognize me or worse yet, remember me. We had lost touch after so many years. But as we embraced and cried and laughed, I think my husband finally understood my love for Honduras.

July 2007

Working in Honduras Again with International Health Service of Minnesota

Steve Rice, Brus Laguna, Gracias a Díos & Pespíre, Choluteca 1973-76 ~ St. Paul, Minnesóta

This past February, I returned once again to Honduras where I had done my Peace Corps service in 1973-1976. It turns out there is a local organization here in Minnesota, called International Health Service which organizes medical mission trips down to Honduras a couple of times a year.

International Health Service of Minnesota is a 100 % volunteer group of people who offer medical and dental services to the general *campesino* population across the northern section of the country, from Santa Bárbara to La Mosquitia. I don't especially enjoy pure tourism. I would rather see things while I am doing something. IHS is not associated with any religion, so there is no offer of services in exchange for signing some denominational roster. It sounded like the kind of organization that could get me to Honduras while being part of a constructive effort. I signed up as a translator for the first time in 2001 and have repeated the trip yearly.

I admit that February and Minnesota winter plays a role in my altruism, but IHS has timed its mission well. This group has been working year round for the last 25 years to send down annual brigades of people to deliver medical services in the least serviced part of the Honduras. The Honduran health department tells them where the need is and that is where we set up.

IHS has no paid staff, but you would never know it from the level of organization that they have achieved. They have their act together! People are now volunteering from all over the U.S., Great Britain, Spain, and Portugal - the 2007 contingent numbered just over 100. IHS runs as many as ten teams in ten different locations simultaneously. On the Honduran side they have a permanent operating committee based in La Ceiba that has links to the Cruz Roja. The local committee adds Honduran volunteers to each of the various site teams. All combined we numbered just over 100 volunteers.

The group is mostly self-funded. There is some fund raising, and a ton of solicitation for medical supplies and other donations. They use the in-kind support of Standard Fruit to ship as much as two semi trailers of material down in advance of the February mission. Each volunteer pays an agency fee of approximately $500. The fee which covers 2 weeks of food (read: lots of beans and rice), lodging, which amounts to a dry place to pitch your tent, and email communications back home, which happens by short wave radio and the internet. The rest of the cost is your round trip air fare, spending money, and cost of an additional vacation if you choose to make a trip to Roatán or Copán, or track down your friends of bygone years. I spent about $1,500 over 17 days for everything including the agency fee.

Who goes on these medical brigades? In general it is people with the time to spend two weeks away from their normal endeavors. College kids, to retired people, and every age in between make up the teams. Sometimes there are parent child combinations, friends, single individuals, and married couples. Backgrounds include, secretaries, computer types, ham radio operators, teachers, social workers, company CEO's doctors, nurses, dentists, dental assistants, general helpers, handymen, pharmacists, a host of others, and most importantly translators!

My adventures have included tracking down lost luggage, handling the verbal exchange between doctor and patients, fitting reading glasses, holding the flash light for the doctors as they assisted a first-time mom give birth in the middle of the night in a jungle hut, ordering dinners for my teammates in a restaurant, assisting with crowd control as waiting patients get frustrated with the wait, explaining the right way and the wrong way to take certain medicines, making speeches on behalf of community leaders to our site team and returning the favor on behalf our team leader to the local officials, and finally translating jokes both ways between Honduran and American comedians. Truthfully, a lot of punch lines do not translate.

One of the real adventures was working with the Cuban doctors who dot the rural areas. They often come in from their remote sites to work along side the U.S. doctors. Wow, do they talk fast! Their accents really stretched my ear! They seem to love compare notes with our docs. That was a real challenge to translate medical talk back and forth between them. There is a sub agenda besides wanting to share camaraderie, and that is to score left over medical supplies. It is a definite good move on their part, since most are located in the boondocks without much by way of supplies. Of course, the Cuban doc pitched the request to me, and I passed it on to the team leader.

As I think back on my trips, one of the steady highlights is watching the doctors, nurses and dentists work their crafts.

Watching teeth restorations seems like a little miracle every time a happy patient gets out of the chair. Another treasure comes from the interaction with people who are unpretentious and humble. That alone makes the whole trip worthwhile. I return home with a sense of being grounded in reality once again. I count the cost as a well placed investment in myself.

IHS needs translators every year (as well as every other skill). The site teams work a lot better with a minimum of two on a team. Returned Peace Corps Volunteers are naturals for the job. Most of us can speak Spanish, without the need for a dictionary in one hand. One caution though, it is not a vacation in the standard sense. Honduras, while changing and developing, is still a third world country. You need to have good health. The work days are long and constant. You will be tuckered out every day and at the end of the two weeks. On the plus side is the fact that you can now sit down with a cold beverage at the end of the day - just about anywhere. It didn't used to be that way in Brus Laguna, Gracias A Díos.

For me, the IHS experience feels like a way to give back to the universe. You get to see the country again, visit with old friends, make new ones, and do something worthwhile.

If you are interested, check out the IHS Web site at www.IHSofMN.org. If you want to donate, it will tell you how and where. Look at the pictures from the various sites, imagine yourself in Honduras, download the application. Send in your application this summer because team assignments are made in September and open spots may be gone. Join us in February 2008. For more information, get in touch with Recruitment Director, John Kirckhof at JmKek@yahoo.com.

July 2007

The Dogs of Tegucigalpa

Connie Cookson, Marcala 1976-78 ~ San Diego

I was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Honduras as a *nutritionista* in Marcala. What I am about to tell happened in Tegucigalpa when I was in training in the spring of 1976.

I went to an international party on a Friday or Saturday night with a friend. I was ready to go home and go to bed before my friend was. I told her to stay at the party and I would walk to the street below and get a cab. When I was in my twenties as a Volunteer, I still did dumb things such as walking alone by myself in the dark.

I soon heard packs of stray dogs approaching me from both behind and in front of me. To at least get something between me and the dogs, I quickly climbed a black iron fence surrounding a house.

Even though it was late, I rang the doorbell of the house to try to get some help and explain what I was doing in their yard. Nobody answered the door. I didn't know if nobody was home or if people didn't answer the door when strange people rang their doorbell late at night.

I ended up staying in the yard for the rest of the night. I was cold and damp from the dew. I listened to the packs of dogs howling. I tried to sleep, but I couldn't. About sunrise, the howling of the dogs stopped.

I gingerly climbed the fence. I walked down to the main road below and caught a cab back to where I lived with my host family. I returned around 6:00am.

The irony in this story is that a few days earlier Peace Corps told us our behavior in Honduras should be beyond reproach. At the time I didn't have a problem with that proclamation. Coming in at six after being out all night didn't qualify as acting with the utmost propriety.

I found out later my host family heard me come in. Fortunately, I spoke fluent Spanish and I explained to my host family what had happened. I also told them about the admonition from the Peace Corps a few days earlier. The darker side of this story is that I may have narrowly missed bring attacked by packs of stray dogs and a series of very painful rabies shots.

Reflections About Change

Susan Potter Donald, Jesus de Otoro, Intíucá 1985-87 ~ Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Last summer my family and I ventured back to Honduras for two reasons: to visit old friends and attend a family reunion of my husband's siblings and their children. Michael's brother, Jack Donald, is a Jesuit priest who lives and works in Bonito Oriental, between Tocoa and Trujillo, near the coast. Jack has lived in Honduras for about 30 years now. His parish was inaugurating a chapel, a cemetery and a retreat center. A huge celebration was planned and the chapel was going to be inaugurated in the name of another brother, Bob Donald. Bob had visited Jack many times throughout Jack's work there and had always supported, financially and in person, his brother's work with the poor. Bob passed away from cancer October 2004. Celebrating the inauguration of a chapel in Bob's name seemed a fitting way to honor him. I know I speak for all of my in-laws when I say that Bob's death left a big hole in our lives.

On Monday, June 19, we flew from home (Santo Domingo) to San Pedro Sula. I realized that we had been living in humid Santo Domingo for a long time because normally I find the heat of San Pedro Sula oppressive. This time, I felt right at home and comfortable. My twelve-year-old Adam even commented on how nice the weather felt. He also said that we were back in the place of clearly spoken Spanish. I thought the same.

Our first stop was Lago Yajoa to visit Lynnell Fields and her daughters. Lynnell and her husband, Todd, were in the same Peace Corps training group with my husband. Sadly, Todd was murdered in Guatemala in March 2003. Our last trip to see Lynnell was Christmas of 2003, the first one without Todd. Her daughters, Savannah and Sofia, were very welcoming as always. When my family was living in Tegucigalpa (May 2000 to November 2001) we spent many weekends at their home outside of Peña Blanca. We were returning to familiar territory full of good memories, but the place also holds the sadness and loss of Todd.

The next day, Michael and I, along with our reluctant nine-year-old, Lucas, headed to Jesus de Otoro, the site where Michael and I met and each spent two years. Michael worked in Fish Culture and I spent two years at the colegio in Secondary Education. We stopped in at Adelina Sorto's house. The Sorto family were and still are good friends of ours. Their youngest, Roberto, was in kinder when we first met him. When we dropped in for a visit this time, we were told that Roberto had graduated from the university with a degree in engineering. All the kids had gone on to college and most were working. All but two are married with their own children. Adán Sorto, the father, was the only one home but we were able to catch up on all the news and relive old memories.

Next we knocked at the door where I used to live. Reina Palacios, my former landlady and neighbor, opened the door to us and recognized us immediately. We enjoyed sitting in her living room and catching up on all the news. We laughed again over stories of me living in that house, especially about the uninvited guests that dropped into the bathroom, specifically the toilet bowl. The first was a snake that splashed down moments before I was about to seat myself. The second one appeared during a spaghetti dinner I was having for some friends. I heard splashing coming from my empty bathroom and went in to investigate. By candlelight, I could see a huge rat swimming in my toilet bowl. Those stories are funny now, but at the time, laughter was not the sound emanating from my mouth.

We drove around town, trying to identify old landmarks. There were many changes. The school had been enlarged, new stores had appeared and all the trees were taller. We bored our son with all our recollections and stories, but we had a great time. Visiting with old friends and catching up on their children's lives, I made two observations. One is that most of the people we knew as children went on to complete more education than their parents had, some even earning college degrees. Secondly, most had grown up, married but chosen to have fewer children. On average, most of our friends' children have two children of their own and stopped there. I know that the friends we made do not represent the whole population of Honduras, but I do believe that more people are able to go further in their education and those that do, choose to have fewer children. The problem of unemployment continues though, regardless of increased education.

On Friday, we left our friends at the lake, drove to La Ceiba to return our rental car and hopped a bus to Bonito Oriental in the Department of Progresso. The 4:00 pm bus showed up right at 5:00 pm. The bus ride was pleasant and comfortable, surprisingly. The bus was actually meant for long bus travel; it was not a school bus nor a van without shocks. The Mirna bus line is still in operation and doing well.

We arrived at Jack's place ahead of the rest of the families. We have been visiting Jack in his current parish since 2000. When we lived in Tegucigalpa, we visited frequently. After we'd moved to Guatemala, we tried to visit at least once per year. We have many friends there from our frequent visits and I always feel so

welcome each time we return.

The next few days were a blur of church activities and hanging out with Michael's two brothers, their families, Bob's widow and three of their children. On Sunday was mass at the retreat center that had recently been completed and the blessing of the nearby chapel by the Bishop in Bob's name. Then we all walked from there, the huge group of us, to the blessing of the new cemetery, playground and then on to another community that had just completed building their church. I enjoyed the day, the company of old and new friends, family and the long walk. Although I miss Bob, my brother-in-law, very much, I couldn't help but smile and reflect on how much he would have enjoyed the fun and chaos of the day, Honduran style.

The next morning, we all left Bonito Oriental, most by bus, others by rental cars. Those on the bus headed to the ferry in La Ceiba and boated out to Roatán. The others flew to Roatán. We all spent several days enjoying the beach. My family and I returned home, via San Pedro Sula, sunburned and mosquito bitten. For me, the 10-day journey back to Honduras was a kaleidoscope of memories and emotions. There have been many changes in the lives of people there and in our lives, some hopeful, some sad. Once again, I am reminded of how important Honduras and its people are in my life.

November 2007

Honduras: Now and Then

Carolina Cardona, RPCV Río Lindo, Cortés 1985-87 & Program and Training Officer, Peace Corps Honduras 2005-07

It feels like déjà vu. I end my tour as Programming and Training Officer (PTO) for Peace Corps/Honduras in December, 20 years to the date after I finished my service as a Peace Corps Volunteer. Prior to my departure, I thought it would be appropriate to review some of the changes at PCH during the last two decades - obviously, there are still lots of acronyms!

Immigration

I can remember only one young guy from my town who went north. Now everyone has a family member in the U.S. or Canada or has tried to make the trek themselves. Today, some PCVs describe their sites as ghost towns composed of only seniors, women, and kids. All of the working age men are in El Norte. Money flows back to Honduras, which provides a safety valve. But it is also a cause of apathy. Why should I work to make change when I have *pisto* waiting for me every month at Western Union? Having fathers, mothers who work outside means kids are left to grow up with grandparents and does nothing to strengthen the family unit. Unfortunately, not everyone learns good habits in the land of plenty. One priest remarked, "Gang members get their doctorates in delinquency and are shipped back to Honduras, ready to work the streets as professional criminals." This brings me to my next point…

Crime

As a PCV I always carried my money in my shoes for fear of being pick pocketed, but I never was a victim of crime. I do recall a couple of PCVs being held up in Belize. But they were the exception. Today, it is the norm in Honduras. PCH averages slightly more than one security incident per week; they run the gamut from thefts and burglaries to physical assault and armed robbery. A fifteen year old with nothing to lose and a gun in his hand is a dangerous character. Last year during a period of eight days six staff members (including yours truly) were held up at gunpoint at six different locations in Tegucigalpa. All of our PCVs will agree that our post, under the guidance of Safety and Security Coordinator (SSC) Juan Carlos Romero Lopez, does well in terms of preparing PCVs to prevent crime and instructing them on what to do if they become victims.

The SSC position, although very warranted, is not unique to Honduras. As a result of the bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, the disappearance of a PCV in Bolivia in 2001, and 9/11, all PC posts have SSCs. We have an emergency action plan and test it periodically to ensure that we can locate PCVs within approximately 24 hours. We have PCVs who are Emergency Zone Coordinators (E-Zone) who have cell phones and have been trained to contact other PCVs in their region in case of emergency. In the heyday of the Contra War, I remember getting a security telegram two weeks after the fact, so our communication system has improved a lot.

More Structured

Maybe it is my current position (creator and enforcer of policies), but it certainly seems that PC has a lot more rules. The days of "we'll see you at the end of two years, have a nice service," are over. For example, does anyone remember keeping track of vacation days? I certainly recall taking an occasional trip, but I did not report my whereabouts to my APCD each time I left site for more than 48 hours. Furthermore, I did not count the number of vacation days that I had left each year. Vacation

aside, PCH has a lot more structure, and by in large, it is for the better.

We have a site development and a site visit protocol, for instance. (I recall my APCD stopping by once to drop off materials and say a quick hello.) Each of the six projects has a project plan, and PCVs biannually report their activities and how they have achieved the project's goals and objectives. In addition to the guidelines that PCVs receive from HQ, at PCH have a 60+ page policy handbook. Yes, el Cuerpo de Paseo still exists, but overall our operations are less loosy goosy, and there is a lot more communication between PCVs and staff.

Technology

All of our lives have changed as a result of technology. The PCV experience is no different. Our volunteers have cell phones, and those PCVs who live in the mountains are given special antennas to enhance their reception. While not all PCVs have Internet or electricity in their sites, all of them do have email addresses and check them every one to two weeks. To expedite communication we send text messages to their cell phones, updating them on security issues such as transportation strikes. PCVs text or phone staff members for project materials or to ask questions. We have a staff member who carries the duty officer phone 24/7. Some people say that cell phones and email taint the PC experience because some PCVs never cut the umbilical cord. But I would disagree. It certainly changes the experience, but I think the faster more connected communication has a lot of benefits. I can think of at least two instances, for example, in which I was grateful to be able to pick up my cell and call a PCV who had a family emergency.

Those *Amigos stateside* who like to be connected to the *Amigos in the field* should check out a new website: www.pccatrachos.com. A currently serving PCV started this unofficial site. Other sites such as http://pcukraine.org/have been up and running for several years. I have called Alan Waugh a couple of times (on my Vonage line from Teguc) in order to garner support for the website. The agency has been piloting three official sites in the region, and I believe the "if you cannot beat them, join them" mentality will prevail. (Preventing hacking and safeguarding information are concerns.) An electronic newsletter saves paper, postage, and time. We could still charge a yearly fee and protect part of the site for currently paid members. As I head to another continent, I will definitely be logging on.

I have enjoyed my life in Honduras. As both a PC staff member and a PCV, I have learned a tremendous amount. My favorite part of the job has been seeing PCVs integrate into their communities and build relationships with Hondurans. Despite the differences, what has remained the same has been the spirit to serve, the willingness to learn another language and become completely immersed in a new culture. Volunteers are a great group of Americans, of which I am happy to be member.

Carolina was a rural development PCV from 1985-87 in Rio Lindo, Cortés. She married her husband, Chilo, at the end of her service, and they lived, studied, and worked in North Carolina for ten years. She managed a reproductive health project for the International Rescue Committee in Azerbaijan, which led to Uzbekistan where she worked as the Peace Corps Health APCD from 1998-2001. They moved to El Salvador after the 2001 earthquake when Chilo was contracted to manage a reconstruction project for the Salvation Army - Carolina taught 5th grade at a bilingual school. She began as Peace Corps PTO (Programming & Training Officer) in Tegucigalpa in March 2005. In January 2008, she will become the Peace Corps SRPTC (Sub-regional Programming and Training Coordinator) for a handful of country programs in West Africa - she will be based in Benin. Carolina and Chilo have one son, whom she expects to graduate from high school in Africa.

November 2007

Women Can Learn Things, Too

Amber B. Davis-Collins, San Pedro de Tutule, La, Paz 2002-2004 ~ Smyrna, Georgia

Cerro Grande was a two-hour walk up the mountain from my town of San Pedro de Tutule. The dirt road ended abruptly about a mile before arrival - a government project gone awry. Instead, patrons of this little community at the top of the mountain (population 110) had two choices - a steep, slick trail that took about 20 minutes from the dirt road, or a more gentle approach that took twice as long. I always chose the latter, which ended near Don José and Doña Maria's house.

I originally met Don José at a baby weighing in Granadillo. This is a community event where mothers bring their children to be weighed so that adequate nutrition and healthy development can be tracked. I was about three-fourths of the way through my Peace Corps service at the time. He had heard that the *gringa* in Tutule had vegetable seeds and wanted some for his family. He was the only

man in attendance at the baby weighing that day. In fact, Don José was the only man that I ever saw at a baby weighing during my two years in Honduras. He didn't speak until every child had been weighed and most of the women had taken their children and returned home.

"They tell me that you have seeds," he said, not looking at my face.

"Yes," I answered. "But today I have only carrots." I handed him a packet.

"Do you want me to come to your house and help when you plant?" I asked, hoping that I hadn't offended him.

"Yes, please," he whispered. "I live in Cerro Grande," he said, pointing to the top of the mountain. And so our friendship began.

On my first visit two days later, none of his six children spoke to me. Five of them stood behind their mother, Doña Maria, while Don José made introductions. The other, still too young to walk, stayed in Doña Maria's arms and wailed. Doña Maria appeared sullen and withdrawn. The two-room house was made of rocks, sticks, and mud. A ragged dog tended to its scraggly pup next to the earthen stove.

The kids giggled and ducked their faces when I directed my small talk toward them, but none mustered up the courage to reply. "They have never seen a white person before," said Doña Maria flatly, as if this explained everything. And I guess it did. In an area of the world that still didn't have electricity, much less radios or televisions, my blond hair, blue eyes, and pale skin must have been quite a spectacle.

All the children except the youngest came out to watch Don José and me plant the garden that afternoon. A few of the neighbors came, too. We were obviously the biggest entertainment venue in town that day. As we worked, I asked about the school that I had passed on my way up the mountain. "The teacher almost never comes," Don José explained. "It's been too rainy and the walk is just too long."

"That's terrible!" I exclaimed.

Don José shrugged his shoulders. "The boys aren't old enough for school yet."

I looked over at the two oldest children, both girls, standing shyly at the edge of the garden. "What about the girls?" I asked.

Don José laughed. "They have work to do."

As I pressed on, Don José revealed that his wife had never gone to school and that he himself had only gone for two years. That's all that he was going to require of his sons, too, provided that the school ever got a regular teacher. "But there's no one in Cerro Grande that can teach," he added softly.

Over the next few months, I trekked up the mountain every week or so to check on the garden, as well as to visit Don José and his family. More often than not, Don José was away, and I would end up passing the time with Doña Maria and the children instead. I brought more seeds - onions, sweet peppers, and radishes. We talked a lot about gardening - the importance of thinning and weeding, how often to water, and how a diversified diet would make her family healthier - their nutritional regime at the time consisted of corn, beans, and an occasional bit of rice. She and the children worked in the garden with me when I visited, but most of the work was done when I wasn't around. It wasn't long before shoots started springing up.

As time went by, this woman that I had once dreaded visiting because she seemed so bitter, began to open up. We talked about her family and her life before she married José. Doña Maria's past had not been rich with opportunity. Although she never said it, and probably didn't even realize it, I could tell that a difficult life had left her emotionally numb. But things were changing - she began to smile and talk excitedly each time I arrived at the house. She greeted me with an ear of corn and laughed when I played with the kids. There was a definite transformation in the house of Don José and Doña Maria.

On one of my last trips up the mountain before I completed my service, Don José was home. I began my visit with the obligatory soccer match with the children - the ball was an ancient wadded-up plastic bag tied into a ball shape with a piece of string. Afterwards, the entire family moved out to the garden to admire the work that everyone had done over the last few months.

Standing in the garden, Don José pulled a mature carrot out of the ground. "You know," he said thoughtfully, "I'm really glad that you have been helping Maria. Because of you, I have realized that women can learn things, too."

My first reaction as an educated woman was to laugh because I was sure that he was joking. But when I looked at his face, I saw that he was serious. And the stark realization for me was that this was a totally new insight for Don José. After I was able to close my gaping jaw, I met his smile with one of my own. In the background I could hear Doña Maria laughing.

originally published in *A Life Inspired: Tales of Peace Corps Service*, Washington, DC: Peace Corps/USGPO, 2006. Amber B. Davis-Collins served as a crop extensionist Volunteer in Honduras from 2002–2004. She was awarded a bronze medal by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and a national environmental justice award for her work with Latino farm worker issues.

Peace Corps Work Today

Today's PCVs write biannual reports to their APCD – as part of the country staff's annual report to D.C. each APCD generally asks a few Volunteers to write vignettes – here are several from the most recent PC/Honduras report.

Business PCV Jonathan

I arrived at the municipality on a lazy Monday morning. It had been one of those weekends where you miss home a little bit more than usual and wonder about whether or not you are really accomplishing anything. As I began to get my things set up for the day, the lady I am training brought a report to me. As I flipped through it, I asked who made it. To my pleasant surprise, she said she did on the previous Friday afternoon. It included information on the city's taxpayers such as who was late, how much they owed, and where they were located. Knowing that without my work the process for pulling this report would have taken months, I saw how my presence had helped them save time gathering this information, and this allowed them more time to recover payments from late tax-payers. This isn't the groundbreaking achievement I envisioned the day I joined the Peace Corps, but it nonetheless made for a much happier Monday.

Health PCV Meghan

The nurse and counselor, Catalina, at the nearby STI and HIV clinic has been my lifeline here, taking me on home visits with her and allowing me to spend hours with her in the clinic, getting to know the numerous people that cross her path everyday. She's the one who introduced me to Ana. Catalina and I made the 20-minute walk to Ana's house, through the mud and past the chickens, dogs and children that run through the dirt streets of my town. We finally reached our destination, a home that was made of nothing more than some wood slates, a tarp and some rope. Catalina went in first, and I followed. When I saw Ana, a young, pregnant, HIV+ mother of two, lying on the bed too weak to move, I became overwhelmed with emotion and concern for this family's future. I remember thinking, what could I possibly do to help. So far, I only had a vision of a support group in my town.

After a long discussion of necessary precautions for Ana's pregnancy, Catalina and I left to go back to the clinic to meet with more patients. Every week after that initial meeting, I would go and talk to Ana. I realized that while the tasks she needed to do to protect the health of her baby seemed daunting, if we went through them step by step, they were rather simple. Finally, Ana had a perfect baby girl through the help of a C-section. Ana took ARVs through the last 6 months of the pregnancy, her baby was immediately put on them, and Ana was enrolled in a formula program. Several months have passed, and the baby's HIV test is negative. Ana said to me, "This is God's miracle," and I said to her, "but you made it happen."

Carlos, Ana's partner and also HIV positive, was usually working in San Pedro Sula during my visits, but one day he was in town and we also got to talk. I told him how important and beneficial it would be for him and Ana to get to know other people in situations similar to theirs. At first, Carlos was very apprehensive. He did not think there were people who would understand and that it would only make his life harder. After numerous discussions over various months with both him and Ana about confidentiality, the various benefits to talking to other HIV+ individuals, as well as simply a social outlet, Carlos and Ana decided that they would form the first HIV+ support group in town.

After almost a year trying to form a support group I realized that I had been going about the formation the wrong way. I had been looking to bring people into my group that would meet in a place that I selected and then planned on getting to know them and making friends in the process. Instead, I needed to do what I had done with Ana and Carlos. I had first made friends with them in their own environment and slowly gained their trust and then, through my encouragement, they decided that they would form a support group for people like them. I was just invited along for the ride.

Digging in Deep:
Improving Basic Sanitation
Protected Areas Management PCV Annie

"Tap, tap, tap. . . ¿Ani?" (pronounced A-knee) comes a meek little voice from the corner of my window. I roll over and look at the clock (sigh). Who else could possibly be knocking at my door at 5:30 a.m. but my favorite counterpart, Mario Sanchez? "¿Si?," I grumble in reply. "Fijase que . . ." he begins as my mind immediately goes to autopilot.

When I first arrived in Honduras, Peace Corps emphasized the laid-back, "siesta" culture of what would be the next two years of my life. Obviously, Peace Corps had not met Mario and his community in El Caracol. The level of commitment and motivation of the community board members and the rest of their families is, simply stated, outstanding. These individuals recognize the value of determination and hard work.

Their latrine project initiated from a "charla" I gave at the local grade school on health and hygiene. Previously in the

community, three latrines existed for over 170 people. As one of my students said, "You don't have to be a mathematician to realize that those numbers just don't add up." What's worse is that the demographics of the region are such that a river (Rio Caracol) flows through the town's center before providing the water supply to the nearly 30,000 inhabitants of San Marcos de Colón. Moreover, El Caracol lies within the buffer zone of a newly declared protected area of Honduras ("La Botija"). Therefore, the members of the community became conscious of the contamination of their water supply and the surrounding municipality.

In general, El Caracol is often overlooked for government based aid due to political infrastructure. Thus, the community board thought best to seek assistance for a latrine project through a Peace Corps SAG-USDA grant. With Mario in charge, the community board members went to work, elaborating an extensive grant that included GPS points of every latrine in relation to the river. During this time, community members received training on sustainable latrine usage for pour-flush toilets, basic health and hygiene courses, as well as instructions regarding the construction of the latrines themselves.

When the community received funding, they immediately went to work. At 6:00 a.m. on a Saturday, I received a frantic phone call from Mario saying that the prices of PVC tubing and cement blocks were going through the roof and we needed to get to the hardware store ("¡Pronto!") . . . Thus began the latrine project in El Caracol. The words "digging," "holes," and "blisters" were the topic of conversation for weeks. Mario and the community decided to contract the mason work out through three local masons and within another two weeks, all of the holes were completely lined.

The community is currently waiting for the torrential downpour of the rainy season to subside to finish construction. Community members will continue to attend workshops on the sustainability of the project and future maintenance of their pour-flush latrines. But more than just the "basics," they will receive the necessary skills to write grants and seek funding sources for future projects as well as the confidence and pride, knowing that they have completed a project initiated from within the community itself.

Mario still grins a mischievous little smile when I kindly remind him that most Americans appreciate their sleep. But, what can you do when you work for a community that matches your determination and hard work by 150%?

November 2007

A Blog From Beginning to End

Joe Bergstrom, Cruz Alta, Lempira, 2005-07 ~ Pullman, Washington

Man, There's a Special Feeling

August 4, 2005

Man, there's a special feeling that hits you when you're driving down a windy, mountain, pothole filled, dirt road of Honduras, sitting in a Toyota held together with duct tape and a radiator that is constantly filled with the same coke bottle for drinking which happens to be next to the coke bottle for gasoline (also behind the seat), next to two people you don't know who are speaking a form of Spanish you've never laid ears on, one of whom has a large revolver crammed down the front of his pants and you can't tell him that he really isn't demonstrating the proper way to carry a firearm because you only know half of the words to that sentence, but it doesn't really matter because you're all eating off of a pineapple the size of a two-year old and you realize that you aren't scared and this all seems strangely normal and it all makes sense. Well, that pretty much sums up today. I'm in route to Cruz Alta, a tiny (700 people) *aldea* about two hours (only 17 kilometers) south of Gracias Lempira. I'll have much more to say on Monday or so when I get back from this site visit and have seen the place I'll be for the better part of two years. It all seems really big and really small at the same time. It is a little hard to describe what I'm feeling right now, all in good time I guess. I've met the person that serves as my introduction and guide to the community. Her name is Profesora Maria Santos Perez and she was the lady sitting next to me in the car and her husband was the dude with the gun. Both are extremely nice people. A lot of people down here have guns actually, kind of like the old west and it really makes me miss mine. Also I've had some complaints from back home about my skeleton-like figure seen in the pics, not much I can do about it now, I've lost about 25 pounds but plan on gaining them back as soon as I can. I also had a bout with a bacterial infection this week that pushed me over another hole in the belt. It is the wet season down here and it really brings out the bugs (of all shapes, sizes and severities). Two more people from our group look like they might have Dengue, the problem is that you can't test for it until the 5th day you've had it, don't ask why. As for me I remain in good health

95 percent of the time and attached to the can the other five. Aside from my pants always falling down I actually feel really good. I'm going to eat two jars of peanut butter and have a good cry the first night I'm actually stationed in my site. Alright, alright, time to get some *plato tipico* (beans, tortillas and fried bananas).

Ciao, Joe

A Little Rantin' I Guess

May 4, 2007

Good morning everyone, I pretty much start every blog with, it has been awhile, I'm sorry for the delay and I promise to do better next time so I'll skip it for now. Things have been good in site. I've been teaching grades seven through nine English and ninth grade everything else. I'm working on a fish pond project. I've headed out to my friend Don Pedro Rivera's coffee *finca* a few times now scouting a location and we started excavation for his pond last week. It is a bit of a hike to get out to his place, actually more than a bit. It takes me an hour and some change to get to the top of his coffee farm, where we are digging his pond. Tilapia ponds are a good way to supplement the diet's protein intake. Tilapia require little input and initial investment and are easy to maintain. They grow quickly and can be harvested after six months. They are basically vegetarian and live off the algae that grow in non-moving water. Once you have the pond excavated you need to fertilize the water with compost, animal manure, commercial fish feed, or almost anything organic. Once the water is properly fertilized you shouldn't be able to see your hand if you stick your arm in the water up to your elbow, they like it filthy. It sounds pretty gross, but fried tilapia are really, really good, especially with fried plantains.

The work is pretty tough. After the hike Don Pedro and I get to work in a muddy, filthy pit filled with huge limestone boulders. We use a pick-axe (*piocha*) to loosen the rocks and then carry them over to our earthen dam. We use shovels and hoes (*palas y asadones*) to remove the muck and fling it on the dam. Right now our pond is more or less 4 meters squared and 60 centimeters deep. We are shooting for a depth of a meter, if you go much deeper than that at this altitude the water cools and the tilapia don't grow. Working with Don Pedro in his *finca* is always a treat. It is extremely well managed, he has fruit trees, hardwoods, and enormous pines. His *finca* is full of all kinds of wildlife and beautiful tropical birds and he is eager to point it all out. After working we always head back to his house, covered in muck and completely worn out for a snack or some coffee. Last week his wife gave me a local drink called *chilate*. It is a hot beverage made from boiled white corn. *Chilate* is typically drunk with a heaping portion of *dulce*, unrefined sugar from sugar cane. I really like *chilate*, it is a little bitter, while everything else here has tons of sugar. The *dulce* was a little rough; it was like eating an entire bowl of brown sugar. When in Rome I guess.

Yesterday I spent the day out at Elias' working on his new house. I spent the day hauling buckets of mud and then using it to set huge adobe bricks. The bricks were heavier than I thought they'd be and by the end of the day I needed some serious hammock time, but didn't get any since I had to head to class. It is pretty neat building an entire house out of the earth. Even the roof tiles will be from fired clay from the area. The only wood we'll need will be for the eaves, window shutters, and doors. Elias has started talking about wanting to go to the States again. My most memorable moment in service has been the conversation I had with Elias several months back. He constantly was asking me about the US and I would respond that yes, the US was fine, but living with your family is more important. After months of discussion he finally told me that his family was more important than money and he really does like his life here. Who wouldn't? He is living a dream here, not just the American dream but the dream of nearly everyone. He has his health and his family, his own house, and land to plant and crops to reap. He has a coffee farm, grows beans and maize, and has fruits and vegetables in abundance year round. He is his own boss. When he's tired he stops, when he is rested he works. And the greatest of his possessions is the peace that he lives with. People should envy this peace and the time he spends with his family. But he yearns for more. He wants to pay a *coyote* five thousand dollars to get across Guatemala and Mexico. He's ready to embark on a long, difficult, and very dangerous journey by train, car and foot. He is willing to be a slave to a fifty or sixty hour work week at minimum wage and to be a nobody. In Cruz Alta he's already a prominent member of the community, he's a member of several committees and cooperatives and his opinion is already respected, even though he's only 26. He wants a television and a car. He wants to pinch pennies and lose at least thirty percent of them to check cashing business and Western Union.

I guess I'm upset. I am most upset at the fact that he's leaving two great sons and a fantastic wife to make it on their own. Far too often (and not just here) we are a generation raised without fathers. In the book *Fight Club* (it is hard for most people to get past the movie, the chiseled abs of Brad Pitt . . . but it is an excellent book) Chuck Palahniuk talks about how our fathers are our models for god. What does that say about god when our fathers abandon us? Honduras is full of sons raised by their mothers and the little money their fathers send down. They seek validation from women, thinking that status can be gained by sleeping with many, especially outside of marriage. A man who's faithful to his wife is not a man; he needs a few *viejas* on the side. Birth control is not often used and the women are frequently not empowered or educated enough to ask the men to use it. And the cycle continues - more fatherless children. The

men in Cruz Alta laugh when I tell them I don't want a girlfiend here. When I tell them I have a fiancé in the states they tell me "but she's in the states, you don't have a girlfriend here." I am truly blessed to have been raised by fantastic parents. I grew up in a complete household. I can't thank god or my parents enough. I have an ideal role model in my father who works hard and seeks time for family, life, and improvement. I have a mother that has always been there for me no matter how great or small the need and is a model for love and understanding. I am blessed.

In three weeks I'll complete two years living in Honduras and every day I still ask myself why am I here. I'm starting to see that the people in Cruz Alta are better off than most people in the states. They have food on their plates and shelter over their heads. They have more time than most for family and recreation. They may not have cars or designer jeans but if television and NGOs weren't here to tell them that they're poor they wouldn't know it. People like Elias are seeking a standard, a standard that we've provided. Electricity came to La Campa (my nearest town) 4 years ago and with it came cable television. Before you got power in your house you had to sign a cable contract. And now I'm starting to see how horrible that really was. The consumer's dream is everywhere; it is filthy and spreads like disease.

I think I'm slowly figuring out why I'm here. I'm not here for development other than for my own. I'm here to find simplicity, and gratefulness for the things I have. I can teach and I can dig fish ponds until my hands bleed and I can't stand up, and tomorrow I will go. And in a year or so I may or may not be remembered. For the last two years I've lived without electricity in a little cement house, I ate simple foods, and people shared with me what they had. I love my family, my soon to be wife, and my friends. They love me in return no matter how far away I am. I love god and nature, to which I belong. I've never had to go without. And for all this I am truly thankful, and this is why I'm here.

I think I've had too much coffee and too much sun. I'm all smiles down here. And no matter how hard my parents may have tried not to they raised a bit of a closet socialist. Eduardo Galeano, a Uruguayan journalist, wrote a book right before the millennium called *Upside Down*. He talked about not being able to guess what's coming, but at least we have the right to imagine the future we want.

Oh man, sorry this got so long, am starting to fade so I'm off to eat some *comida tipica*. God bless, and I'll see everyone soon

—Joe

retrieved 11-12-07 from http://pam-honduras.blogspot.com

Joe is a graduate student in environmental anthropology and Peace Corps rep at Washington State University.

March 2008

Saying Goodbye to Enoc

John Kotula, Sonaguera, Colón 2005-07 ~ Peace Dale, Rhode Island

In the spring of 2007, my wife Deb and I were winding up our two years as health volunteers in Sonaguera, Colón. Getting ready to leave was emotionally hard for me. Much of my sadness was focused on Enoc Mejia Lopes, a twelve-year-old neighbor, who had been my sidekick for about a year. I saw Enoc, a.k.a. Bimbo, almost everyday. Here are some stories about him and about saying good-bye.

During my service, I wrote a Partnership Grant to paint a mural at the Centro de Salud. This led to also painting at a bar owned by the husband of one of the nurses. Enoc and other youngsters from the neighborhood worked with me on this and the bar owner gave us cokes and occasionally chicken soup for our efforts. One wall had a picture of *folklorica* dancers. There was too much open space in the composition and I planned to put a dog in one corner and a pot of flowers in the other. Enoc copied my drawing of a dog scratching its ear. With some slight adjustment, his drawing was better than mine. I told him to paint it brown. He said, no, white with black spots. He was right. It came out great, maybe the best artwork I've seen him do yet. I showed him how to shade it with a little gray. I asked him if he was proud of it. He said, "yes." I said, "You should be." He asked, "Can we paint a boy with his arm around the dog?" I said, "No, but you can draw that on paper if you want to." He did a couple of quick sketches, but wasn't happy with them and tossed them out.

A half hour or so passed and he said, "When you go back to the States, you're going to sell your bike, right?"

I said, "I've been thinking about giving it to you."

He didn't say anything and I realized I couldn't leave it at that. "Yeah," I said. "I'm going to give it to

you."

He didn't say anything.

"Do you want it?" I asked.

He said, "If you want to give it to me."

Hooked and reeled in by a master. Later he came by the house to give me a drawing he had made of a boy hugging a white dog with black spots.

Enoc turned twelve on December 16. For his birthday, I took him and a bunch of his neighborhood buddies to the circus. Besides the clowns, who specialized in lewd transvestite humor, there were two notable acts.

La Anaconda was a 15 foot long boa constrictor. It was carried in draped over the shoulders of The Strong Man. The snake hung down on either side of The Strong Man and he held the tail aloft in one hand and the head in another, forming a huge, slithery "W." They paraded around the ring for a while. What must that thing have weighed? 200? 250? The Strong Man unlooped the snake and stretched it out on the ground. I had sprung for the expensive seats ($1.50) so we were sitting in plastic chairs right at ringside. The snake's head was no more than four or five feet from our toes. They turned off the lights. It was pitch black in the tent. There was much screaming and shuffling of feet. Despite myself, I had to fight the urge to pull my legs up into my chair. When the lights came back on, the snake was once again draped over The Strong Man's shoulders. They took a bow and exited to much applause. My group of boys, with Enoc's voice raising above the rest, broke into a raucous exchange of accusations and denials about who had been the most afraid.

La Flexible was a big, curvaceous woman in a thong, halter top and fishnet body stocking. Despite the abundant roundness of her bosom, belly and bottom, she could bend over backwards and wink at you between her own knees. She could also balance on her elbows and pat the top of her head with the soles of her feet. In full split position, she could bring her back leg up over her shoulder and suck her own toes. She didn't actually suck her own toes, but the possibility clearly existed along with others too numerous to mention. I was thinking, this is the way every twelve-year-old boy to should spend his birthday. I was also thinking, no circus in The States would hire La Flexible unless she lost forty pounds. Viva Honduras!

Enoc's five-year-old brother, Roger, can't walk. He has a clubbed foot. Lots of kids here get around fine walking with their ankles turned under. It is not clear why Roger has never walked. His legs are very underdeveloped, like little sticks. What came first, lack of muscle development or inability to walk? Which caused which? He gets around on his knees, which are knobby with calluses.

Roger was one of four kids that Deb took to Tegucigalpa to a brigade of pediatric orthopedic surgeons who come to Honduras once a year to do club foot operations. The kids' mothers went too, including Marta, Roger and Enoc's mother. They were gone eleven days.

Just before going to Tegucigalpa with Deb, Marta had moved her family from one two-room house to another three blocks away. She told us this move was the result of breaking up with the father of nine of her eleven kids. She also mentioned that he had another family a few blocks away. This was common knowledge in the neighborhood, but she hadn't spoken of it to us previously.

It is a very unusual circumstance for the mother to be away from the house. Enoc was left at home with four older siblings and a younger sister. Two older brothers live in the neighborhood with their families. There are a couple of aunts and uncles scattered around Sonaguera.

He started spending even more time at our house. I fed him at least one meal a day while his mother was away. He asked if he could sleep over and I said no. He told me he was afraid in the new house and that his brothers were bothering him. I asked in what way they were bothering him. I pictured Joel (18) and Melvin (19), neither of whom seemed to be playing with a full deck, taking turns abusing him. He said they turned off the lights and acted like vampires. I knew Enoc well enough to know he'd be right in the middle of a good game of vampires in the dark, even if he did scare himself shitless. I stuck to my guns about him going home to sleep.

I stopped by the house a couple of times to see how things were going. Enoc's sixteen-year-old sister seemed to be in charge. She said there was no money for food, because their father hadn't given them any. I gave them 300 lempira ($15.) This was probably overly generous, but there were six people to be fed for an undetermined length of time. I used my cell phone to call Deb so Marta and Roger could talk to their family.

While they were in Tegucigalpa, Marta told Deb that if it weren't for Roger, she would go to The States to make money for her family. She would like to "regalar" him, give him to someone else to raise, but he is too much work and no one would take him.

Marta and Roger came home a few days later. Roger wasn't a good candidate for surgery because he was extremely anemic. He came home with iron drops, vitamins, leg braces and recommendations for exercises. He also seemed to have developed an interest in walking, an image of himself as a potential walker.

The recommendations were that he sit in a small chair so that his feet could be

flat on the floor and not dangle down. We bought him a child-sized plastic chair and talked about him being King Roger and the chair being his thrown. I held out my hand for him to kick and, much to his delight, cried out in mock pain when he managed to raise his foot and touch it. I told him another good exercise was to kick his brother's butt. I got Enoc to bend over and react dramatically when Roger kicked his backside. I bought a ball and talked to Enoc about letting Roger sit in his little chair and kick it to him.

Whenever we stopped by, the family seemed quite interested in the things we did with Roger, but I didn't think they were buying into doing a regular routine of exercises. Maybe it didn't make sense to them. Maybe my trying to make everything "fun" wasn't setting the right tone. Maybe the process of strengthening his legs was too distant from actually walking. Maybe it was too systematic in a life that just proceeds from day to day. Maybe it meant taking too much initiative in things that are, after all, in God's hands.

A week or so later, I walked over to Marta's house to check in on how Roger was doing with his exercises. Enoc had built parallel bars for his little brother. He had constructed a walkway about six feet long out of tree branches. There were four uprights pounded and wedged into the ground and railings lashed to the uprights for him to hold on to while he was walking. I asked Enoc where he had gotten the idea for this and he shrugged his shoulders. Roger demonstrated it for me. He took three or four steps in one direction, turned and walked back again, completely unaided. He did three laps and then asked for his chair to sit down. Enoc got the little plastic chair for him. Roger sat smiling proudly at me with his feet planted firmly on the ground.

Deb and I left Honduras in the middle of April. Since then Roger has had his surgery and walks and runs everywhere. He is going to be starting school this year.

Enoc text messages me, "Soy Enoc. Llameme." We talk on the phone for a few minutes about once a month. It is unusual if a day goes without me thinking about him.

November 2007

Whom do You Trust?

Dale L. Schmitz, Yamaranguila, Intíbuca 1967-69 ~ Clive, Iowa

I wrote this story at my son's request back in probably the mid-1980s, when he was a middle school/junior high student.

It was a gray, cool day in late November 1967. While it was only about 4:00 in the afternoon, the heavy clouds and fog made it seem much later. I was returning on my mule, Pava, from a four-day trip into the mountains above Yamaranguila, Intíbuca, in western Honduras. I was a Peace Corps Volunteer working to organize rural communities to build schools, bridges, water systems and try new agricultural crops. Both my mule and I were anxious to get back home, but we still had at least three hours to go. Mules always seemed to step more sprightly and have more energy on the way back home. This was a big brown mule I had bought from a trader who came through with goods on a mule train from El Salvador. Mules were more sure-footed than horses on the trails, which were often steep and sometimes rocky or muddy.

It was misting as we worked our way along a barbed-wire fence around Azagualpa, a large and public plain where over a hundred cattle and some horses were grazing. We were above 6,000 feet altitude. I decided to attempt what I thought would be a shortcut. We came upon an area with taller, unfamiliar-looking grass; the ground was wet. The mule stopped, looked down, and sniffed a bit. I urged her on, first with the reins and a command. She would not budge. So I used the spurs, but to no avail. Finally after more of the spurs and strong commands, she proceeded.

And down we went! The mule sank up to her belly and I was still on. She could not move ahead or get out. Fearing some sort of quicksand that would pull us both down, I quickly grabbed a coiled rope I kept attached to the saddle, and I jumped off. With considerable difficulty, I slowly made my way in the nearly waist-deep, spongy mud hole to the fence and gradually got ahead about 20 feet to solid footing.

Meanwhile, my poor mule was thrashing and attempting to free herself. Between her own efforts and my pulling and coaxing, she finally struggled out of the mud hole. We both looked a mess, covered with slimy mud. My saddlebags and bedroll were wet and dirty. We were both frightened and shaking a bit, but ever so glad to have escaped and not sunk so deep we could never have gotten out.

It was dark and a little later when we got home that night, but thankful we made it. I learned to trust that mule a lot more as we continued our trips around the remote, mountainous areas I worked and enjoyed so much.

I Am Rich

July 2008

(essay modified from a letter home written while a PCV)

Amber Davis Collins, San Pedro de Tutule, La Paz 2002-04 ~Atlanta

I am rich. Magda told me so. Even though my house is made out of adobe, my living room floods every time it rains, and I don't have indoor plumbing, I am rich. I laughed when Magda told me this. It was almost like an accusation. I had just hiked up the mountain from Tutule to Granadillo huffing and puffing all the way.

"If only I had a motorcycle," I thought as I trekked up the trail. But no, that wouldn't work. Besides being against Peace Corps policy, nobody in any of the *aldeas* had a *moto*, so I didn't either. I thought that people respected me for this. And I guess they did - to an extent. But that didn't stop Magda from singling me out. We were sitting on a log outside her two-room house made of mud and sticks she shared with eight other people (her mother, sister-in-law, and six kids under the age of five).

"You are rich," she said.

I laughed. "What are you talking about?" I asked her.

"You have beautiful shoes," Magda stated matter-of-factly.

I looked down at my bright red Nike sneakers. I had gotten them off the clearance rack at an outlet store back in Georgia. My mother had called them gaudy. A fellow Volunteer laughed every time she saw them - my "flashy shoes" as she referred to them. Magda, who owned only *chancletas* - and not very good ones at that - called them beautiful. I looked at her feet. Magda and I were roughly the same age - mid twenties. But her feet were - well, different from mine. She had probably never worn a pair of closed-toed shoes in her entire life.

Her feet, like those of most of the *Catrachos* that I worked with, looked, um . . . "rugged" might be a good word. I knew for a fact that Magda's family didn't own a pair of nail clippers because Sarah Ruth, my former site-mate, used to take nail clippers with her every time that we visited. She would just "go to town," as my mamaw would say - all the kids lined up and nails flying everywhere. But Sarah Ruth was gone, and it was just me, and I was under fire.

"You wear glasses for the sun," Magda continued.

Again, I was guilty as charged. "I have sensitive eyes . . . " I started to explain, but Magda just looked at me, almost daring me to say that her eyes weren't sensitive too. So I mumbled something about blue eyes being weaker than brown ones, although I had no I idea if it was true or not. Probably not. And at that moment, I realized that Magda was right - that I was, or rather, I AM, rich.

I am rich because I grew-up with a myriad of opportunities that Magda could never imagine - a good public school education, two employed parents, hospitals, libraries - and those are just the basics. I was raised to think for myself, to believe that I have the ability to create my own destiny, and in an environment conducive to helping me reach my potential. When I take into account two-thirds of the world, I am rich with my tennis shoes and sunglasses. And when I take into account the other third, I am rich because I have been given the opportunity to realize my wealth. Thank you for pointing this out to me, Magda.

July 2008

Honduran Miracle

John Kotula, Sonaguera, Colón 2005-07 ~ Peace Dale, Rhode Island

Titi was my neighbor in Sonaguera. His appearance was a bit strange. His head was slightly asymmetrical. One day while we were walking to Drive Inn Las Champitas, I asked him, "When you were younger did you have health problems?" He replied, "*Si, hombre*," with an emphasis that means, yeah, without a doubt. He proceeded to tell me the following story.

When he was nine he fell out of a mango tree and suffered a serious blow to his left eye socket. He pointed out a good-sized scar running through his left eyebrow. Several years later, when he was 15, without warning, he began hemorrhaging from his nose and the left side of his face began to swell up. He was taken to the hospital in La Ceiba. They couldn't diagnose him, so they sent him on to San Pedro Sula. There, they said he had a tumor and attempted surgery. However, in the middle of the operation they decided they couldn't proceed and stitched him up. He has a scar about six inches long on his throat below his left

jaw. He had been in the hospital in San Pedro Sula for six months when he was transferred to Hospital Escuela, the big teaching hospital in Tegucigalpa. Two surgeons from the United States were coming to examine him and another boy whom the Hondurans considered untreatable. The North American doctors said that surgery might be possible in the U.S., maybe in Panama or Costa Rica, maybe even in Cuba, but not in Honduras. They said he had two or three months to live.

It is not clear to me how or why, but another doctor gave a second opinion. She had studied natural medicine in Japan. She said he should drink a tea brewed from the rinds of pineapple, ground *pimienta gorda* (allspice), and honey. She prescribed drinking it several times a day for six months. The pineapple rinds were for cleansing, the *pimienta gorda* to stop the bleeding, and the honey would act as an anti-inflammatory. Four months later, not only was Titi still alive, but the swelling was mostly gone and he had stopped hemorrhaging from his nose. The natural medicine doctor said he could stop drinking the tea. The other doctors said he didn't need an operation. He is twenty-seven now.

Later, I went back to his house because he wanted to show me a photograph of himself when he was in the hospital. In the picture the left side of his head, from eyebrow to chin, is at least twice as large as the right. Titi's parents, Don Rodolfo and Doña Lola, join us to look at the picture. They retell the story. Don Rodolfo said he knew the president of Honduras at the time. The president was working on getting a visa and money for Titi to go to the U.S. for the operation. During this waiting period he started drinking the tea and got better.

I asked if they thought it was the tea or a miracle. Doña Lola said, "Clearly it was a miracle. I prayed every day." Don Rodolfo said that when the doctors predicted that Titi had two months to live he told them, "But you're not God, and God will decide how long my son lives." Then Don Rodolfo turned to Titi and said, "Did you tell him about when you got your dick stuck in your zipper. Now, that was really serious."

July 2008

Provide a Fiesta: the 4th of July 1975

Mary Nowell Quijano, Santa Rosa de Copán and Tegucigalpa 1974-78 ~ San Antonio, Texas

Provide a fiesta, and they will come.

A Peace Corps Volunteer's job is written between the lines.

Those are 2 important lessons I learned as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Honduras.

We worked hard and played hard as volunteers. An unwritten job description was that of being prepared for any opportunity to celebrate and share our culture with those around us. Furthermore, these opportunities to celebrate what we take for granted would become those memories we'd relish later in life. One such party unfolded and took place my first July in Honduras in 1975. The 4th of July would never be quite the same for me again.

I worked in Santa Rosa de Copán at the Escuela Experimental, a local elementary school. My counterpart was Profesor Bracamonte, the director of this school. He was a delightful person and very dedicated educator. We became friends immediately. On paper my responsibility in this cobblestone town set in the mountains was to train elementary school teachers in "modern" teaching techniques. When I read between the lines, I learned that wasn't my primary job.

I began my Peace Corps job as a 2nd grade teacher while the regular teacher was out sick until "mañana" arrived. On Saturdays I directed the kids' basketball team, and in the evenings I taught English to students in Bracamonte's high school. My class was comprised of some 90 teenagers and young adults. I remember before I convinced the director to cut the group in half, I stood on the teacher's desk so that I could project my voice to the students in the back of that long narrow classroom. In my spare time, I taught myself how to play the wooden recorder and began a 5th grade band, teaching the students the basics of music while I directed a small school band!

There was another job description lurking between the lines that designated me as the person in charge of arranging and presenting interesting assemblies for the school children. The 4th of July was a perfect opportunity to have some fun with a topic I knew quite a bit about. Lucky for me my friend Barbara, a PCV who worked in a nearby town, was in town for a month-long workshop. She welcomed the idea of helping me prepare a skit to share some basic ideas about the U.S. and its independence. Together we presented an entertaining and educational program to the students, and thanks to Barb's talent on the guitar, it was complete with music!

Our skit was a smash hit, and the students loved the music. Our closing song, "You're a Grand Old Flag" was received with such enthusiasm that we had to come up with more songs to satisfy our young screaming fans!

We did what any good PCV of the 70's would do. We strummed out popular folk tunes and in true volunteer style, just sang our hearts out. We gave Tom Hanks and the cast of *Volunteers* some real competition that day.

Curious reporters from the local radio station were there to see the program. They asked us for an interview afterwards that I thought went smoothly. I was curious to hear how my growing Spanish would sound on the radio.

The following day, the 4th of July, the interview aired and I heard myself inviting the city to join us for the celebration. "Come join the party at our house. We'll be singing and dancing in the streets and we'll top it off with fireworks!" We found out later that night that at least 100 townspeople understood my Spanish and accepted the invitation. Of course, everyone in town knew where the Gringos lived!

At that time in Honduras' history, there was strife between Honduras and the U.S. because of the exploitation of the Honduran land by the fruit companies. Relations were often strained between the Americans and Hondurans and we sometimes walked a fine line as Gringos in Honduras. But that 4th of July, with a cautious confidence I found myself expressing my pride as an American and extending an invitation to my Honduran neighbors and townspeople to celebrate with me.

The mayor, who had married a woman from Texas, was flying the American flag outside his house that day. We felt that gave us license to do the same, plus we added the Honduran flag, a Scottish flag for Krysia, a Scottish volunteer who lived in our house, and a Polish flag that Krysia, Barb and I put up to celebrate our Polish backgrounds.

After putting out the four flags that we had made we proceeded to sing the American, Honduran, Scottish, and Polish anthems. The neighbor kids solemnly joined in as we sang the Honduran anthem and they respectfully listened as we sang the other anthems, and then for good measure we sang a rousing "You're a Grand Old Flag" as they cheered and clapped in rhythm. Before we cut a huge flag cake we had baked, we all sang "Happy Birthday," one song we could all sing in Spanish and English!

It was one of those moments of unexpected depth and meaning. We were showing concern and respect for each other regardless of our origins or heritage. More importantly to us at the time, we were having a whole lot of fun! Later a neighbor who watched from a distance told me she cried as she saw the sense of unity and caring that emanated from our little flag ceremony.

People came from all over the city! As I wrote in a letter home, "at least 100 people (no kidding) had shown up. They were in the patio, kitchen, dining room, living room, and in the street and everyone was happily celebrating each other's culture that day!" There was even musical entertainment provided by the neighbor kids playing a little marimba we had set up outside our house. We danced, sang and enjoyed the fiesta into the night! Everyone cheered as the assorted bottle rockets and other fireworks lit up the sky. It seems everyone danced more heartily when occasional misguided fireworks made their flight in a more horizontal pattern.

As we ended the celebration, we saluted our flags once more, Hondurans, Americans, standing together as one saluting each other's flags. Final fireworks, songs and goodwill ended the evening with smiles all around.

As we cleaned up, Krysia summed it up perfectly. "If all people could live like this, caring for one another, doing good things for one another and celebrating with one another like this, the world would have peace."

We hadn't planned a big party like this. It just happened as so many things did during my days as a PCV. It left me with a feeling of fulfillment, contentment, and I must say a bit of patriotism.

It surely was a 4th of July to remember. A celebration to treasure for the rest of my life. Yes, we provided a celebration, and they came to share in the fun. I didn't have to read between the lines to see I had made a connection with my Honduran friends and we all reaped the rewards of genuine respect and concern while we had a whole lot of fun.

¡Viva la independencia!

Mary is thinking of writing a book of Honduras experiences, and requests this story not be reproduced without permission.

Los Monos de Barrio Abajo

John Kotula, Sonaguera, Colón 2005-07 ~ Peace Dale, Rhode Island

October 16, 2006

Just down the street from our apartment, is a large house with a big front porch set back from the street. It is the house of Don Rodolfo and Doña Lola. The front yard is mainly dirt, home to chickens, turkeys and pigs. It is also a hangout for many of the teenage boy and young men in the neighborhood. From afternoon into the evening they gather there, fixing their bikes, kicking a soccer ball around, admiring somebody's new motorcycle, roughhousing, laughing, practicing break dance moves, and flirting with the girls who walk by, basically doing what guys do on corners all over the world. Doña Lola feeds many of these boys. Whoever is around at lunch, or dinner time, including me, gets a plate of food set in front of them. One of the boys told me, "We all have two homes: our houses with our families and here."

This house has become the center for the project *Los Monos de Barrio Abajo*. It consists of making 20 monkey masks and having a monkey parade for Halloween. During the parade *Los Monos* are going to solicit donations for the benefit of the health center. Whatever we collect will be turned over at the end of the parade and I hope the masks will go on display at the clinic as part of my mural project.

The task of making 20 monkey masks by October 31st seemed daunting to me until I got Don Rodolfo and Doña Lola's family involved. As near as I can pin it down, there are eight kids living in the house, both children and grandchildren. They range in age from 8 to 26. Additionally, there are all those adolescent boys to whom this is a second home. What a source of labor!

A key player has been Roberto, aka Tiki, the 26 year old son. He likes to do handicrafts and has previously given Deb and me a pencil holder that looks like a tree trunk and a cardboard picture frame covered in sea shells and spray painted gold.

My original design for the mask has mutated due to exposure to so much adolescent, male energy. The catalyst for this evolution was Alan. He is one of Don Rodolfo and Doña Lola's 18 year old twin sons. During the week the twins live in La Ceiba where they study engineering, but they come home every weekend. Alan decided to make a gorilla mask. He constructed a wire armature that you could drive a car over. Then he fashioned large, flaring papier-mâché nostrils and huge, fang-like papier-mâché teeth. The younger boys loved it. Soon everyone's mask was sprouting fangs and looking more like gorilla-vampires and less like monkeys.

Don Rodolfo and Doña Lola have a total of 14 children. Six of their children, along with two grandchildren they have raised from birth, are still living at home. A married daughter lives next door. Seven more are in The States. Money from The States keeps the family prosperous. Every year, they have a piñata for the neighbors to celebrate the Day of the Child. This year they hosted a mass for the Virgin de Los Remedios during holy week. Doña Lola cooked two hundred tamales to feed those attending the mass.

Don Rodolfo is a civic-minded man who has been discouraged by corruption. He told me he worked hard on the town's water system. An NGO had supplied a design and funding to construct a system with two large holding tanks. However, when it was completed the system only had one small tank and a lot of the money was unaccounted for. Not long after, the former mayor opened a Pepsi distributorship. Don Rodolfo has a lot of enthusiasm for *Los Monos de Barrio Abajo*. Despite his disappointments, he thinks young people should learn to help their communities. He says he'll ride along with the parade and play music from speakers mounted on the back of his pickup truck.

October 29, 2006

Yesterday, I did my HIV/AIDS *charla* for the young guys in the neighborhood. Don Rodolfo set it up and we met on the family's front porch. There were fifteen participants ranging in age from 11 to 26. They all know me from around the neighborhood and from working on the monkey masks. Some of the younger boys wandered in and out. Don Rodolfo was there in the beginning. Doña Lola sat in for the last part. Two teenage daughters were also there on and off. It felt just right: talking to boys and young men I greet everyday, in a place they hang out, in front of their parents. The scale and the intimacy of it matched the content better than standing in front of a group of forty in a classroom. As usual, it was a lot of fun. We laughed, acted goofy and made bad jokes. It felt focused and woven into their lives in a way that left me hopeful about having some impact.

November 1, 2006

The Halloween Monkey Parade was one of the highlights of my Peace Corps experience!

I used money from my Partnership Grant to have fifty T-shirts printed with the *Monos de Barrio Abajo* logo. I ordered five size 8, five size 10, five size 12, 15 smalls, ten mediums, five larges and five X-larges. Of course

this distribution was all wrong, because Hondurans wear everything skin tight. The only person who wanted a large was Doña Lola, who at 5'4" probably weighs 200 lbs. Her plump teenage daughters grabbed the size 12s. Even the most pumped of the teenage boys wanted smalls. Nonetheless, by the start of the parade 40 t-shirts had been given out. Those who had an inch to spare were knotted at the waist to tighten them up. I held back some of the big ones to give to other Peace Corps Volunteers.

The parade pulled out of the yard at 5:30pm following Don Rodolfo's battered pickup, which was blasting *reggaton* through two loud speakers. He could also speak into a microphone and play a loud siren noise. He continually broadcast that the parade was celebrating Halloween, was for the benefit of the Health Center, and that any donation, no matter how small, would be accepted.

The kids, at least thirty of them, ranging in ages from 7 to 26, swarmed all over the street, hopping along and screeching like monkeys, rough housing, and jumping in and out of the moving pickup. They carried two five-gallon plastic water jugs to collect the donations. They invaded stores, bars, and pool halls en masse, dancing, jumping around and shoving the collection jars in people's faces. It was too scary for some of the little kids along the route. They cried and ran back into their yards. Dogs barked and snapped in total confusion. People gathered on their doorsteps a block in advance of the procession to see what was happening. It felt intense to me, maybe a little invasive, but the parade was universally greeted with delight and generosity.

At first I was a bit on edge, because by U.S. standards for a youth event it was chaotic and the supervision was negligent. Nobody was keeping count. Groups of kids would run down a side street and catch up with the main parade two blocks later. It was dark. They were wearing masks that limited their vision. After awhile it dawned on me that I was the only one worrying. Everyone else was thoroughly enjoying the high jinks.

Two women from the neighborhood had come along, Profa Leti and Profa Lucy. They are both teachers and mothers respectively of Angelina and Estefani, two of the few girls who were participating. In addition to keeping an eye on their daughters, they took charge of the soliciting. They directed the bottle carriers to people with bills in their fists, but they also stopped people in the street, looked them in the eye, called them by name and pretty much told them to get their *lempiras* out.

Over two and a half hours, I went from being a little nervous, to elated, to exhausted. Don Rodolfo kept thinking of new places we should go. We probably covered five miles, crisscrossing our way through town. Enoc, among others, was barefoot the whole way, running full speed over the rocky roads. By the end, I was feeling every stone through the soles of my hiking boots. Enoc's brother, Darwin, was walking in reconstructed flip flops with plastic clothesline between his toes. Finally, when I realized there were more kids crammed into the back of the pickup than walking beside it, I said to Don Rodolfo, "Let's go home." He said, "Yeah, yeah. We'll just turn this corner up here and go straight to the house."

Back on the porch, Profa Leti was put in charge of counting the money. After a few minutes of trying to shake the bills out the narrow mouths of the jugs, someone found a machete and hacked them open. We had collected 1,897 *lempiras*, almost exactly $100. Keeping in mind that many Hondurans live on less than $400 a year, this is a lot of money.

Don Rodolfo called for attention on the porch. All the kids respectfully calmed down and the speeches started. Between Don Rodolfo, Profa Leti and me, we told the kids they were the future of their country and that they had shown that with creativity they could improve their community. Even Fabricio, the seven year old, could be of service. Deb and I were thanked for being in Sonaguera and for sharing a part of our culture. Doña Lola said, "Nobody from here ever saw this before." Profa Leti asked the kids to speak. Titi said it was a lot of fun. He liked it. He was glad we did it. Enoc said we could do it again for Christmas.

I finished up the night with a ghost story, "Where is My Golden Arm?" The story ends with a shout. It gave everyone a good scare. Of course, they all proclaimed loudly that they had not personally been afraid, but it sure was funny the way Fabricio, Donald and Chino had jumped.

Deb and I went for beers and *tajadas* at Golosinos Kevin, accompanied by some of the kids moaning in quavery voices, *"¿Donde esta mi brazo de oro?"* Later with my head on my pillow, I felt how deeply contented I am to be doing this work, living this life, and how hard it is going to be to leave it.

Christmas in July 1975

Mary Nowel Quijano, San Antonio, Texas ~ Santa Rosa de Copán and Tegucigalpa 1974-78

"You'll come back with more than your luggage."

That's a catchy phrase on a poster that hangs on my wall now. While in Peace Corps, I thought it was a directive.

Sometimes I almost felt like I wasn't doing enough for my host country nationals because it seems I was reaping much more benefits from my time and effort as a Peace Corps volunteer than my Honduran counterparts. Peace Corps always offered me opportunities to grow through unique situations and events that just seemed to unfold as if they were destined to be keepsakes that I'd be including in my luggage back home someday. One such experience was Christmas in July.

A month after I arrived in Honduras, I was faced with my first Christmas away from home as a wide-eyed Peace Corps trainee. December 1974 was the date. I can still remember how empty and alone I felt, despite the tremendous partying and celebrations going on around me. I remember how Mark, a fellow trainee, and I questioned our decision to leave home as we witnessed the strange behavior of our host country families that Christmas Eve night.

It was truly an unusual ritual. Something out of a Dr. Seuss book, but staged in a language we didn't quite understand. Our Honduran families danced around a piece of silver tree branch, flung firecrackers at each other while their feet never stopped moving to loud beating music, fueled themselves with a firewater called "guaro," and stopped to eat some food wrapped in a banana leaf. Christmas day, they all slept it off, and never stepped outside to avoid the noxious smell of sulfur heavy in the air from all the fireworks the night before. Oh, where was my white Christmas, and peaceful dinner of turkey and dressing with pumpkin pie and whipped cream?

I survived, like we all did that Christmas, and felt I had never had a true Christmas. Until July 2nd a half year later.

Once I became a volunteer, I settled into a house in Santa Rosa de Copan with Burt, another volunteer from my group, and Krysia, a volunteer from Scotland. Barbara, another PCV who worked in a nearby town, was in town for a month-long workshop. As is typical in most Peace Corps houses, there was always an assortment of visitors and travelers residing and sleeping on the couches or on the floors for a day or a month.

We had some volunteers from the Amigos of the Americas group visiting and staying for a short while. That summer we had all begun to bond, volunteers, Amigos, and our Honduran friends and neighbors. At the beginning of July a feeling of unity had begun to grow within the house and we all enjoyed sharing our typical tasks in a home where all foods were prepared from scratch and our laundry was beaten clean on the scrub board at the outside "pila." Dinnertime usually found us sitting together talking with each other, as there was no TV, no phone, no e-mail. I dare say we had begun to feel like a family and it was great fun to sit around at dinner and share our stories.

It all began on July 1st when one of the Amigos of the Americas started humming a Christmas song as he was helping me bake some cookies for that night's dessert. There was a feeling of Christmas that this Amigo had brought out with his subconscious humming which prompted us to decide to celebrate Christmas.

Preparations were spontaneous and exciting. Some of our Honduran friends visited us that evening and picked up the spirit. One found a pine tree for the star we had made, while another drew a huge picture of Santa Claus for the neighbor kids who frequented our house. I pulled out my cards from last December to decorate the house, Barb practiced her Christmas songs on the guitar, we wrapped goodies for Santa to deliver to the children in the evening, and then we scurried away to the market to fetch the plumpest chicken we could find, feet and all, and we prepared the house for a Christmas celebration that would continue to ring years afterwards!

As I wrote in a letter home, "Everyone who stepped in the house felt the Christmas spirit. It was complete – cards, mistletoe, Christmas flowers, candles, a pine tree with a star on top, roast (almost turkey) chicken, holiday cookies, muffins, presents, caroling, a feast." A silence came over the room as we read the Christmas Story in three languages before we ate, each person reading a line or two in their own language. The dinner was complete when Burt dressed as Santa came down the stairs yelling "Ho. Ho. Ho…!" with a sack of gifts for the niños as they squealed with delight.

At dinner that evening all of us, PCVs, Amigos, and Honduran friends and neighbors made an agreement. We promised to remember the group of 20 or so people, regardless of their reasons for being here, regardless of their country of origin, and say a little prayer for each one, wherever they might be every year in July.

Later, in the "after Christmas

hush" that evening, I had a chance to reflect on what had transpired that day. I had found a community, a family, a group of people, from three different countries, all with different reasons for being there, and we had spent a day together as one united group filled with unique individuals all celebrating an event that transcended its traditional counterpart reserved for December. It fortified me, it filled the void I had felt seven months prior. We made history. Why, even the stores hadn't thought of Christmas in July yet! It was one of those defining moments when I knew that this experience was one that would continue to shape and define my future life, one that I would continue to reap the rewards from far into the future.

Yes, we did affect the lives of many host country nationals, but some of the true gems were those moments that were defined by how our lives had been affected. I still carry that day with me. If someone had told me that Krysia, Barb and I would be e-mailing each other more than 30 years later on July 2nd to wish each other a Merry Christmas, I would have said, "What's email?" But you know, that's what we do. And we still remember the group with a smile and a little prayer of thanks for all the gifts that we received as we filled our bags that we'd carry back to our futures. More than our luggage? That was an understatement.

In closing, I'd like to wish my friends of long ago a merry Christmas this July 2nd. More than 30 years later, I still treasure the magic of that time and remember those who shared with us and made that event just one of the many things I brought back with my luggage.

Merry Christmas. Feliz Navidad. I remember.

Mary is thinking of writing a book of Honduras experiences and requests this story not be reproduced without permission.

November 2008

Birds, Parks, Books and a Visit

Loren Hintz, Olanchito, Yoro 1980-1982 ~ Chapel Hill, North Carolina

My wife, son and I returned to Honduras in 2006. We landed in Tegucigalpa and of course clapped after a safe landing near the end of the runway. Now after the most recent TACA crash I hear the international airport is being moved. We took a taxi to the Peace Corps office on Avenida de Chile and after showing our passports, met our friend, Caroline Cardona. She is Peace Corps staff, then Honduras, now Benin. Caroline was a great hostess and reminded us of the security precautions PCVs and staff have to take. While in Teguc I visited Pilar Thorn (RPCV) who still teaches biology at UNAH. I visited the small natural history museum where Saul Flores and Gustavo Cruz still work and admired the Honduran Emerald mural, more about that later.

Next stop was the Honduran Tourism Institute. Erasmo Sosa is no longer working there. No other tourists were visiting the office. Folks were nice, but did not have a lot of information. However, one employee gave me a copy of *Birding Honduras: A Checklist and Guide 2003* by Mark Bonta and David L. Anderson (RPCVs). Try www.birdinghonduras.com for info. From there I walked past the U.S. embassy, the vacant movie theaters, Mas Por Menos, Hotel Granada and to Libreria Guaymuras next to the old Cine down from the Peace Corps office. This libreria is still one of the few places you can buy books in Spanish about Honduras. This trip we didn't make it to Picacho and its small zoo, but we did see the art museum. There was a special exhibit of all the Honduras stamps ever produced including one of Hillary Clinton after Hurricane Mitch.

I'd like to make a plug for museums. Honduran museums and zoos (except for Copán) have a tiny budget and entrance fees are minimal. They are an easy way to learn about Honduras. If RPCVs would take a couple hours to visit them, take their friends there, and talk them up, it would help. I take the time after my trips to Honduras to write *Honduras This Week* and the tourist books an update of visiting hours and locations of museums.

Margaret, Carl and I splurged and took a Hedman-Alas bus from Teguc to Copán Ruinas. The three wheeled minitaxis were great for getting around. We saw Parque de Aves, Hacienda San Lucas (RPCV was a manager), Copán Museum, the ruins, and visited RPCV Robert Gallardo (www.birdsofhonduras.com). We had a great time seeing his butterfly garden and getting up early for birding. We had distant views of the King Vulture which I previously had only seen in the Teguc Picacho Zoo.

Again on Hedman-Alas we headed to La Ceiba. For a change all roads and bridges were in good shape. We visited the butterfly museum in El Sauce and braved all the warnings of ladrones and went to the abandoned banana dock to

see the sea. We hooked up with Chilo to see his cattle ranch. He bought some of the land from one of the many failed coops. We hiked up a mountain stream, saw a Green Kingfisher, swam in rocky pool and heard stories of the changes. His take on many of new stores along the north coast highways was interesting. They don't seem to make much business but their real function is to launder money.

The same situation with the increased cost of land in more isolated valleys. Folks are using the cattle business to *lavar dinero* from the drug trade. A different friend confirmed the story that two foreign tourists going to Pico Bonito were dropped off at the wrong place by a taxi driver. They hiked into a illegal drug dealer area. Both were shot, dumped elsewhere ... one survived and one died. Yes, you need to follow those safety precautions in Honduras!

Finally a local bus to my old site. We stayed at Hotel Olanchito and visited friends. As usual the Mejia high school was closed. This time the campus was occupied by the custodial staff in protest of salaries and benefits. Candida, who earned extra money by washing my clothes, was at the gate and as a special favor let us in. Every few years the students raise money and add a few classrooms. I remember when I first worked there we all went on strike so the government would make it tuition free. John Geiger, Jon Lind, Bill Metzger and I gave environmental workshops to science teachers around the country then.

A former student runs Libreria Ramon Amaya Amador. He sells school science texts that I noticed incorporated some of the ideas from our old workshops. Of course, Olanchito is the home to the Ramon Amador museum. He was considered a subversive by some before he died in exile in Czechoslovakia. His ashes were returned to Olanchito. If you didn't read his book, *Prision Verde,* about the banana companies, go to a university library in the states and check it out. Bill was going to translate it into English, but told me he couldn't get the copyright permission.

A book in your university science library is *Seven Names for the Bell Bird* by Mark Bonta (2003). Mark describes the conservation issues of Olancho and the attitude of peasants towards the environment. He shows how rural agricultural landscape is also important bird habitat. He points out the value of local names for wildlife. Too often environmental education and natural history writings use only the English name or a foreign standardized Spanish name that no one locally understands. Groups like www.sustainableharvest.org apply this knowledge in Honduras.

As a PCV I was too busy or ignorant to rediscover the Honduran Emerald, but the only Honduran endemic bird species is found near Olanchito in the Upper Aguan valley. Crazy birders from all over the world want to see it. Its habitat of tropical scrub forest is endangered and the World Bank required Honduras to protect some of the hummingbird's habitat before a road project could be built. An old air force practice bombing field has been converted into a wildlife preserve. This is being managed by the Pico Bonito Park Foundation (www.bosquemuysecotropical.org) with help from the American Bird Conservancy. Fito Steiner took us to the visitor center that was being built and that is now complete. We enjoyed hiking the trails seeing unique arid plants and animals and after a number of false alarms finally saw the Honduran Emerald Hummingbird.

Since COSing in 1982 I've returned to Honduras every few years. Many people still seem to be recovering from the effects of the neighboring wars and from Hurricane Mitch. Most of my coworkers and friends have retired. A few have died from smoking or banana pesticide diseases, murders and accidents. In Olanchito many talk positively about protecting the environment, but few know anything the national parks and reserves. Most parks depend on local NGOs and they are working to different degrees. Perhaps Amigos de Honduras could compile a list of RPCVs who worked in parks, sustainable agriculture and environmental education and also provide a list of RPCVs currently involved in Honduran projects. I'd be interested in helping.

Hondureñismos

Ahora – the dictionary definition is now; the common usage is today, this morning / afternoon / evening

Ahorita - within 15 minutes or an hour (common usage); it refers to the past or the future, in response to "When did it happen?" or "When will it happen?"

Ya - already; now; finally; soon, presently; in time. Note that the same word is used for "now," "soon" and "in time." The next time you hear "*Ya va a salir el bus,*" remember it can mean "The bus is leaving now," "The bus is leaving soon" or "The bus will leave in time." In other words, the bus will leave sometime in the future.

- from *Hondureñismos, o sea, Everything You Couldn't Find in Your Spanish Dictionary and Were Afraid to Ask* by Sonia Kranwinkel, Chalmeca, Copán 1989-92 ~ Solana Beach, California, published in 1992

The Patuca River Then and Now

March 2009

Jerry Touval, Tegucigalpa 1977-79~ Great Church, Virginia & Jeff Opperman

Jerry, reflecting on the Patuca "then"

Transformative experience. Its one of the things that Peace Corps is about. For many of us, we arrived in Honduras as one person and left 2 or however many years later, forever changed in some way. Hopefully for the better……

Even within that 2-year window of transformational change as a Peace Corps Volunteer, I would guess that for each of us, there are some moments that stand out as particularly significant and transformative. For me, it was a 3-week trip down the Rio Patuca into the depths of the Mosquitia wilderness during January and February 1979.

The Patuca River rises in the mountains of central Honduras and flows approximately 500 kilometers toward the east and into the Atlantic Ocean near the Nicaraguan border in the region known as the Mosquitia. The Mosquitia is part of the largest uninterrupted rainforest north of the Amazon and it functions as a biological corridor for Central America's wildlife. It is one of the remotest areas of Honduras and, as such, is one of the least disturbed and most intact areas ecologically.

Seven of us set out on the Patuca adventure. Most of us were working in the natural resources sector. We had with us a set of topographic maps (which didn't cover the entire stretch of river we would be navigating, but such was life in the 70's), food supplies for 3 weeks, and a pistol in case we came across some game.

We had 4 inflatable rafts that we had acquired during visits back to the U.S. I was in charge of getting our paddles made at a local carpentry shop in Tegucigalpa. Although I had provided very specific measurements for the paddles, when I finally went to pick them up they looked like those big wooden spatulas used for putting pizzas in pizza ovens. If you've ever seen the movie "Spinal Tap" where the tiny Stonehenge model descends on the concert stage, well this was the exact opposite – paddles so big we couldn't get our hands around them. A couple days of intensive sanding by me and my compatriots got the paddles down to usable size.

Tom Green and Jerry Touval on the Rio Patuca

In late January 1979 we put in just outside of Catacamas on the Rio Guayape and then floated a couple days downriver to where it meets the Guayambre and forms the Patuca. From there it was several weeks of pure adventure, shooting through rapids (one appropriately named Portal del Infierno, which it was), spending several days being lost despite having the topo maps, and venturing into indigenous villages to trade salt for fruit. We ended up in the little town of Ahuas, deep in the Mosquitia. Since there was only one flight a week into and out of Ahuas, we spent several days there feasting on delicious flour tortillas and trying to blend in with the locals. We were less than successful at the latter, of course.

Along the way, what we saw was pristine nature at its finest. In 1979, if memory serves me well, the first national park was just about to be declared in Honduras - Parque Nacional La Tigra outside of Tegus. There were no protected areas extant in the country at that time. We were less than 10 years past the original Earth Day, and conservation consciousness was just beginning to take hold in Central America. Nevertheless, aside from a very few gold mining barges that we saw in the lowlands towards the end of the trip, we were treated to harpy eagles, anhingas, macaws, howler monkeys, and one of our group was even lucky enough to spot a jaguar (I have a photo of the footprint as proof). The Patuca was a free-flowing undammed and magnificent river.

Fast forward to the present. Writing this article thirty years to the day after the Patuca trip, I'm still working in natural resources, now for The Nature Conservancy as Science Director for South America. Talk about transformative - before arriving in Tegus that fateful day in August 1977, I didn't know where Latin America began and ended; didn't know a word of Spanish.

Jeff, bringing us into the Patuca's present:

The Patuca River is at a crossroads to-

day. Although deforestation and land tenure have changed the river's upper reaches, its middle and lower sections remain largely intact as the river flows past three large protected areas (the Rio Platano Biosphere Reserve, the Tawahka Asangni Biosphere Reserve and the Rio Patuca National Park) before fanning out across a broad and expansive floodplain. The region's indigenous populations are culturally and economically tied to the river – the river provides fish that people eat, a transportation corridor to connect communities together, and irrigates crops when higher flows reach out beyond the river channel.

The Patuca is now being called upon to provide energy for Honduras. A 104 megawatt hydropower dam called Patuca 3 is under construction just a few miles below the confluence of the Guayape and Guayambre rivers. Honduras is desperate for energy to electrify rural areas and power factories and industry. Flowing water is one of its few indigenous energy sources. The challenge for the Patuca is whether it will provide an example for the international community to follow regarding ecologically smart dam development or whether it will follow the historic trend toward dams that transform the nature of a river.

Although Patuca 3 will not directly inundate the indigenous communities, that doesn't mean that the dam won't impact those communities, or the river's ecosystems. Dams can have dramatic effects on downstream rivers, both by blocking the movement of fish and other aquatic species and by altering the river's flow regime. The flow regime - the seasonal rise and fall of water - orchestrates nearly all aspects of river ecosystems. For example, high flows deposit silt on floodplains and the small floods that mark the changes from the dry season to the wet season provide a cue for fish to begin spawning migrations.

Due to a growing awareness of the importance of the flow regime, the Honduran government asked The Nature Conservancy for technical assistance on developing recommendations for environmental flows below the dam. Environmental flows include a set of flow levels and events (such as floods) that can maintain a river ecosystem.

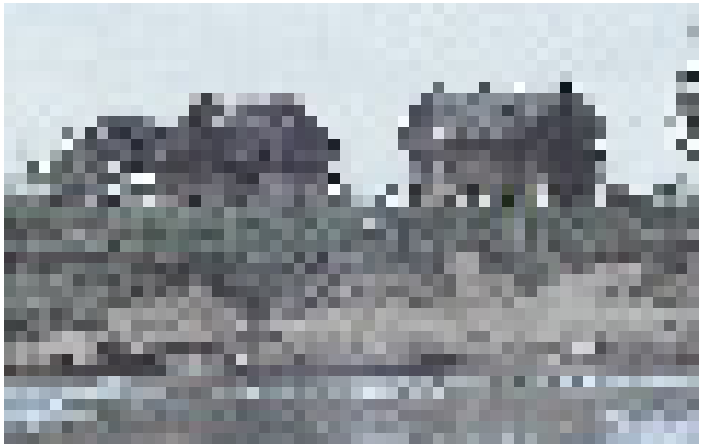
When TNC began the process to develop environmental flow recommendations, they quickly learned that almost no scientific information existed on the Patuca River and there were few or no scientists who were familiar with it. Because of this lack of knowledge, TNC decided to collect Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) from the indigenous communities along the river. Not only did these communities have the most direct information about how the river worked, they also had the most at stake with any changes to the river as they used the river for transportation, food (abundant fish and other aquatic species) and periodic deposition of silt maintained the fertility of their floodplain farm fields.

Thus, involving the communities directly in the flow recommendation process also gave them a chance to voice their concerns and articulate their priorities. And so 27 years after Jerry floated the Patuca with Peace Corps colleagues, another group set out down the Patuca River. This group travelled in *pipantes*, long dugout canoes with outboard motors, and consisted of Honduran scientists, engineers, and Pete Esselman, a PhD candidate in Ecology at the University of Michigan hired by TNC to conduct fish surveys and collect TEK. At each stop, Pete and the Honduran scientists interviewed fishermen and other community members about the river – its seasonal flows, how high it got when it flooded, what fish they caught and where and when they caught them, and many other questions about how they interacted with the river.

The Nature Conservancy
Protecting nature. Preserving life.™

Later, two workshops were held in Tegus, including one with 12 representatives of the Tawaka and Miskito communities. Through these workshops and the TEK collected on the field trips, The Nature Conservancy developed environmental flow recommendations for the Patuca below the future dam and is now working to get these recommendations incorporated into the dam's operational plan.

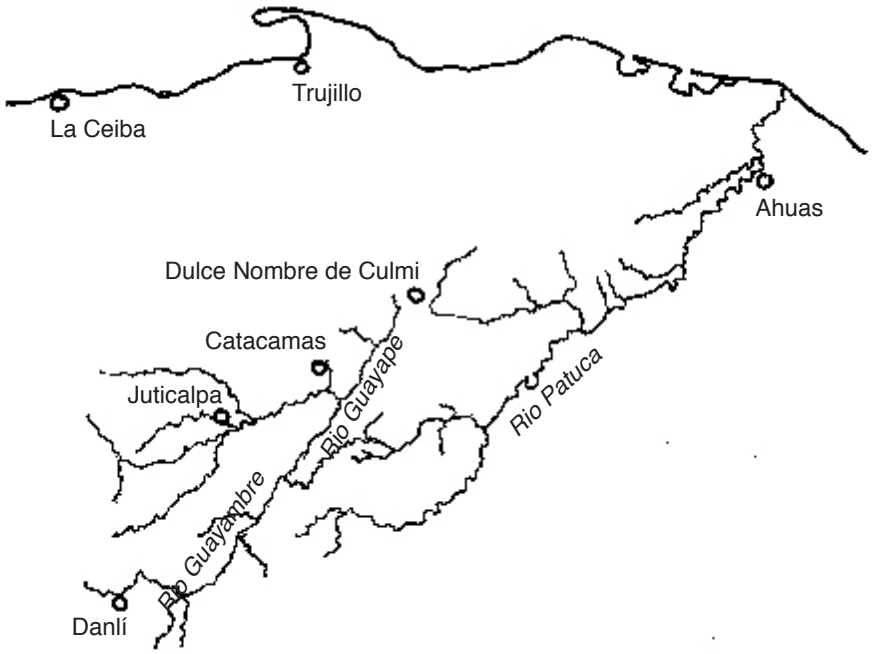
While all of this represents great advances in formulating a compatible approach to hydropower development and river conservation, as with everything else in life the reality is complicated. We still are not assured that the recommendations we helped develop will be utilized in the dam design and operation. It is still difficult to figure out the best means for getting accommodations for the environment embedded into development projects. There are challenges in determining the right pathways of exerting influence and making the best decisions about which



agencies we should focus our efforts on. In other words, much still remains to be done to ensure the conservation of the Patuca River.

Jerry and Jeff, reflecting on the connection between the Patuca then and now:

The Patuca is just one example of the thousands of dams that are being proposed and built throughout Latin America, and indeed nearly everywhere in the world, to harness river energy for hydropower. While hydropower has its role in providing electricity, we can't help but think about the incredible beauty and value of the untamed and near-pristine river Jerry floated in 1979. This vision motivates us in our work to help push this hydropower development toward true environmental and social sustainability. That will mean working to improve the environmental flow releases from hydropower dams, but also ensuring that there will always be enough wild and free rivers in the world to transfix and transform future generations.



For information on how you can support The Nature Conservancy's conservation efforts on the Patuca River and elsewhere in Honduras, please contact Julio Cárcamo, Honduras Program Director at jcarcamo@tnc.org

The Nature Conservancy works on similar hydropower/conservation projects in Zambia, China, Colombia, Panama, and the United States. For more information on any of these projects. Please contact Jeff Opperman at jopperman@tnc.org

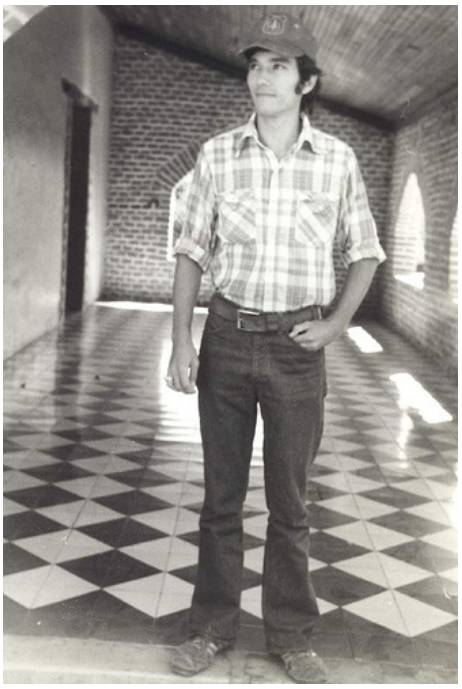
Jerry Touval is currently South America Science Director for The Nature Conservancy. As a PCV in Honduras he worked as part of a national watershed inventory team for Programa Catastro Nacional. In two years he worked on inventories of ten major watersheds around Honduras. He traveled around most of the country in that job, then went back to Tegus to write up the trip reports before heading out to the field once again.

Jeff Opperman is Senior Advisor for Sustainable Hydropower, Global Freshwater Team of The Nature Conservancy.

Contributing to the article were Nicole Silk (nsilk@tnc.org) and Julio Cárcamo (jcarcamo@tnc.org).

Participants in the Great Patuca Raft Trip of 1979 were Tom Green, Brackney, Pennsylvania; Don Riggle, Dexter, Missouri; Mark Sensibaugh, Flagstaff, Arizona – public services staff officer, Coconino National Forest; Kevin Slagle, Mt. Hood-Parkdale, Oregon - Recreation, Wilderness, Special Uses, Facilities; Hood River Ranger District, Mt. Hood National Forest; Steve Synar, Coyle, Oklahoma and Jerry Touval. The 7th was a paramedic Volunteer living in Yoro whose name was Jim but whose last name escapes the author at the moment.

Photos illustrating the article were borrowed from a collection 67 photos posted by Steve Synar on Flickr: http://www.flickr.com/photos/19sfs51/sets/72157603026569051/



Steve Synar circa 1978 from the Flickr collection cited above

Back to Sonaguera

John Kotula, Sonaguera, Colón 2005-07 ~ Peace Dale, Rhode Island

Last November, my wife, Debby Drew, and I returned to Honduras for the first time since our service there from 2005-2007. We went back accompanied by a group of five high school students - Mike, Christian, Sarya, Chyanne, and Natalie - and their teacher, Mary Vieira. This group was from The East Bay Met School, an alternative high school in Newport, Rhode Island. I had been working part time at The Met as the school's arts coordinator. Mary and I worked together to organize and fund this trip. It became a possibility when the Newport Housing Authority gave us a generous grant that paid the expenses of any student living in public housing. With the cost of the trip covered, I began soliciting donation that we could give to groups in Honduras who would be helping us with the trip. I raised $2,100. The largest donation - $1,000 – came from Amigos de Honduras. We gave money to Arte Accion in Copán Ruinas, Cruz Roja de Sonaguera, and Instituto Genises. Instituto Genises is the high school in Sonaguera that hosted and housed us. Some of the funds were also used to pay the expenses of a couple of Hondurans who traveled with us.

Here are some snapshots of the trip:

I went to Honduras a week early to double check on our reservations and contacts. I learned the roads were out between Tegucigalpa and the North Coast. People said the flooding was some of the worst since Mitch. Not for the last time, people asked me why I had planned a trip during the rainy season. It looked like I might be stuck for a while at the Guadalupe II. I even had the thought we might have to cancel the trip. I felt myself slipping back into my Honduran mindset of whatever happens, happens. I realized how much of that peaceful acceptance had slipped away in the year and a half I'd been back in the States.

Two days later, the buses were running, although it continued to rain. I went to La Ceiba and on to Sonaguera. In Sonaguera, the Red Cross had started a new, well-funded HIV/AIDS prevention program. Of the four staff people in this program, Deb and I had trained three of them. It made me think about how hard it is to judge the impact of our Peace Corps service while we are doing it. Everyone in town was glad to see me. At the same time their lives had gone on. I'm a minor character in an ongoing story.

I invited a couple of young men from Sonaguera, Melvin and Hector, to join the group and travel with us. Later, everyone agreed that having the Hondurans with us was one of the best parts of the experience.

Melvin, Hector and I met the group in San Pedro Sula. During a six-hour layover in Miami they had eaten lunch at a restaurant on South Beach that featured an erotic salsa show. The kids were convinced they should have stayed in Florida for the whole two weeks.

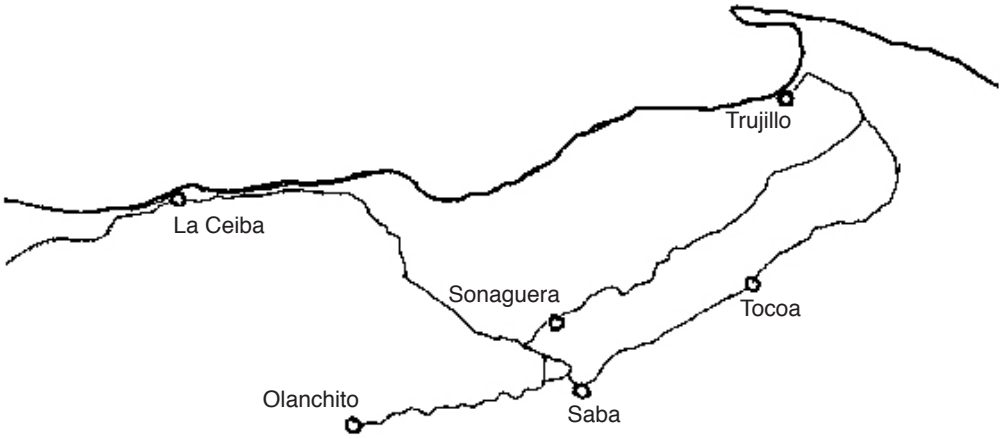
The next day we arrived in Copán Ruinas. We split up among three moto-taxis for a ten-minute ride to The Blue Iguana hostel. It was quite chaotic, but fun, too. Many of the streets are ankle deep in mud. The drivers had to gun their motors to get up the hills, slipping and sliding all the way. It was only later that we discovered that in the excitement, Mary's wallet had disappeared. We lost the school credit card, which was going to fund the trip. However, more significantly, we lost Christian's green card. He is a citizen of Ecuador and was traveling on his Ecuadorian passport and his proof of U.S. residency. This led to daily e-mails and phone calls to the U.S. embassy, two trips to Tegucigalpa, and a trip by his mother to the Honduran consulate in New York City to get travel documents for him to leave Honduras and reenter the States.

In Copán we worked with Arte Accion (http:/www.arteaccionhonduras.org) to level a playground in front of the rural school so it could be used for soccer and basketball. We also soaked in the hot springs, toured the ruins, and ate *pupusas*. By the end of three days, the kids were convinced we should have stayed in Copán for the whole two weeks.

The Met School puts a lot of emphasis on tailoring learning to individual interests and real world experiences. Each of the students had an area they are suppose to focus on during the trip. Christian's stateside internship is in a restaurant. In Sonaguera, he worked with Orbi who runs Golosina Kevin to prepare and serve a lunch of *sopa de gallina* for the group. He also made donuts with one of our host mothers as an election night treat. Chyanne is an excellent mechanic and fell in love with *moto-taxis*. After much networking, we found someone, who knew someone, who had a brother who let him drive one. He also visited a couple of Honduran garages. Sarya is interested in dance. She got *baille folklorica* lessons, saw a *punta* demonstration and got to party at a Honduran disco. Natalie spent a day at the health center and also went to an *aldea* to weigh babies with Debby. Mike can spend hours searching on line for bargains on hot brands. He loved bragging that

his Coach passport holder cost $100. He spent a day in a store whose owner regularly goes to Los Angeles to stock-up.

The kids all got along great with each other. Unlike at school, there were no interpersonal conflicts. Even their banter and teasing was gentler and kinder than what is typical. They were essentially very well behaved, sticking to the contract they had signed. For at least three out of the five, two weeks without getting high was unheard of. However, they wore me out. They would eventually do what was asked of them, but there was a lot of resistance and complaining. One of my most unpopular decisions was that if we were riding in pickup trucks they had to sit down. This was viewed as stupid and arbitrary. Christian got so mad he glared at me for an hour. He got over it. Another time that my stupidity really got out of hand was when I made them leave the disco at 11:00pm on Halloween night. The les



son to be learned, I think, is that there is a reason why 60 year olds don't usually chaperone teenagers. One night in bed, I said to Debby, "If I ever talk about doing this again, shoot me." Lately, I've been thinking about doing it again.

We watched the election returns in Spanish on CNN. We had a pure sugar and carbohydrate dinner: donuts and *pastel de piña* that the kids had made washed down with Coke. Zoila, one of our host mothers said, "They are always going to remember where they were when they found out Obama was president." The interest in the election in Honduras was very high. Everyone seemed in favor of Obama. There was a strong belief that he would change things for the better. When the election was called Sarya said, "Oh, my God. We got a Black president. Oh, my God."

We were in Sonaguera for six days. When we left the kids were convinced that we should have skipped the other places on our itinerary and spent the whole time there.

The last three days of the trip were spent in Tela. We booked Garifuna Tours trips to Punta Sal and to go kayaking. Melvin, one of the Hondurans who were traveling with us, was unusually quiet. I asked him what was up and he said he couldn't swim and was afraid of going in boats and being on the water. This surprised me because I view him as such a confident and competent young man. We agreed to stay close to each other on these outings. That seemed to be all the reassurance he needed. After paddling through the mangrove swamp for a couple of hours, he was at the head of the pack racing back to the dock.

Sarya and Christian developed a thing for each other. They had upped the ante on their cuddling and physical affection. Mary and I pulled them aside on a couple of occasions to talk to them about being too sexual in public and remind them that part of their contract was an agreement not to have sex on the trip. They protested that they weren't doing anything. I said to Christian, "Look, if it gives you a woody, it is inappropriate." Sarya said, "No, no. That ain't gonna work. Everything gives him a woody."

At our good-bye dinner on the last night, Melvin and Hector gave eloquent Honduran style speeches thanking us for including them. Our kids were less articulate, but just as clear that one of the most important parts of the trip had been getting to know these young men. They are all still in touch by e-mail. The students from The Met School want to sponsor them to come and visit. I encourage them to try it, but also warn that it is almost impossible for young, poor Honduran men to get visas.

Debby flew out of San Pedro Sula on schedule with four of the kids. In the airport, Sarya said, "I don't know why I'm going back. I don't have nothin' to go back for." Then she brightened. "Oh, yes, I do! I got my president." Mary, Christian and I spent three more days in Tegucigalpa before the Embassy finally issued him his permission to travel.

I see the kids from the Honduran trip every week. Typically, before they say hello, they ask, "When are we going back?"

A Day at School: Appreciating the Little Things

March 2009

Theresa Leidtke, Moroceli, El Paraíso

from Allí No Más, Winter 2006

Some of my friends and family e-mail me and ask me what I am doing in Peace Corps in Honduras. I don't really know how to answer that question. I have my minimal tasks that I do in a day and if I write them on paper as a list they look small and shallow as compared to my list of events back home in the states.
For example yesterday:

- Woke up at six-thirty
- Went to visit the school in Moroceli.
- Went to visit a neighbor
- Went home for lunch
- Went to the computer center to check e-mail
- Went home for dinner and to clean house
- Read a book for half hour and went to bed at ten thirty.

(Doesn't really seem that thrilling to write home about)

And then I make a list for today:

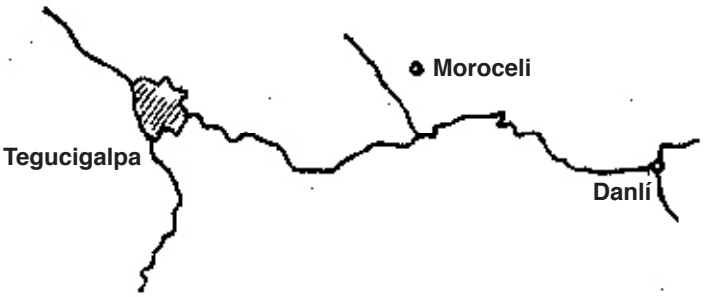
- Woke up at six-thirty
- Rode bikes to the school in the nearby town of Suyate
- Taught one English class and one reading class
- Rode home to have lunch
- Went to the computer center to check e-mail

I am still here, but I imagine that I will go home for dinner soon, then read my book, maybe take a cold bucket shower, and then go to bed around ten-thirty or so...

Now let me lay out the events of a typical day in the United States before I came here.

- Wake up at seven-thirty
- Go to substitute teach at local school
- Walk to the supermarket for lunch
- Return to teach until four in the afternoon
- Walk home to change clothes and get apron
- Walk to local restaurant to waitress
- Get out of waitress work around ten
- Go out to the bar or local coffee shop with friends
- Come home around eleven or twelve for bed.

So if I share what I do in terms of events in comparison to the lengthy busy schedules in the United States, one might be inclined to call me lazy. Now, rather than a list of events let me share the details because it's the details that are really the important part rather than the events themselves.



I woke up snuggled with my husband this morning at six-thirty. It's so wonderful to wake up close to another human, another soul that knows me inside and out, to be accepted for my strengths and my weaknesses. So I wake up each morning with the comfort of having my best friend by my side and that in itself makes my world beautiful. We crawl out of bed and the sun is already beating on us. That is another detail—the sun and its amazing power that is stronger than in our home in the North. It's the detail of adventure that reminds me that I am growing to know the workings of another culture.

For breakfast we have organically grown coffee, the coffee is produced by our friends who hand pick the coffee in the mountain. We devour its freshness with bread and honey, in an old glass ketchup bottle from the lady who lives in the next village. Another detail is connections and close relations with neighbors. I walk out the back door in my long t-shirt and underwear and my neighbor greets me with "*Buenos Dias*." She holds something behind her back with a larger grin than the usual morning, and then presents me with my pants that I gave her to cut and turn into capris because it's just too hot for me here to wear pants. I try them on and thank her for her wonderful hemming job. She beams at the ability to please the only female foreigner in town.

At eight-thirty we head out the door and roll down the gentle road across the valley about forty-five minutes until we reach the small cluster of houses and a school known as Suyate. Here we stop and all the kids yell "GOOD MORNING." They are proud to test the few English words that they can remember from my lessons. I pat some on the head, kiss others on the cheek, and hug the taller ones who can reach my shoulders. Others I call my love, and I pinch cheeks too. To my surprise, a crowd of about twenty kids are headed out the school door. I pinch a few more cheeks, shake some hands, and then ask boldly, "Where are you all going?" They reply that their teacher did not

classmates.

The *directora* of the school knocks softly on the wooden door and thanks me for coming. She brings me a banana shake as her sign of thanks. I hug her and we linger outside the classroom for a good ten minutes sharing stories about our weekend, and how her daughter is finally recovering from the flu, and how she is recycling old ketchup bottles to make flower vases. I say I would love to see them and in less than five minutes two of her students stand wide eyed at the door with two of the recycled vases.

When the mothers of the community come with a pot of fresh cooked beans and corn tortillas, I dismiss the class with a high five for each student as they pass out the door. I wander in and out of the other classrooms during the snack, more hand shaking, head patting. I read a few of my home-made books in Spanish to them as they eat and then hand them out for them to read amongst themselves. I tell the teachers to send me the kids who cannot read to one of the empty classrooms. From each grade, first through sixth, the teachers send two children. Some have no shoes or socks; others are like crazy monkeys, running in all directions. Without enough chairs, my job is that much more difficult. My classroom is a dusty enclosure of twenty screaming, running monkeys. It takes me a good five to ten minutes to get them to sit on spots I draw in the dust on the floor. Somebody hits so and so and they begin to run and shout all over again and my drawn lines are stepped on and erased. Teaching is not that easy, you see. It takes patience and guts to be in there with all these monkeys. Sometimes it still takes me a moment to move beyond my being overwhelmed and my frustration to pick out the words in Spanish to discipline them. I count in English, I clap my hands, and I pat the good children on the head who are following directions.

Finally, just for a moment they are sitting and looking at me. I take advantage of the nearly quiet moment and begin reading a story in Spanish to them. I tell them that a story has different parts and somehow without the chairs, without the shoes, without markers, or paper for everyone, we form a story together and we say it together over and over again. We talk about what characters are and setting and a problem and a solution. I don't know exactly how it all happened, but I shook all their hands and dismissed them one by one. I still don't know all their names, so I just call them my love.

I am so relieved to escape the rushing Spanish and running wild children when we finally ride our bikes back to Moroceli. It begins to rain mid-trip and we have to stop at someone's shack house for shelter. I walk in the front room and six sets of curious eyes stare back at me. I ask if they are sisters and brothers and the answer is yes. Some are dressed and some are not. An old wrinkled man extends hands as a sign of welcome. I can't help but notice the lack of teeth that makes his language hard to understand. The rain shower leaves as fast as it came. We thank the family kindly, kiss them all on the cheek for letting us take shelter and we head home after saying *buenas tardes* to everyone we pass.

When we arrive home we have to boil water from the water basin to cook veggies. The three year old neighbor boy enters the door way and just stares at us. Just stands there staring, staring, and staring some more at the strange white people. I invite him in to touch my pet bunny and tell him to fill up a bowl to give the rabbit water. He does as he is told and then I hand him a book (Dr. Seuss that I found in the Peace Corps office in English). He can't read anyway, but I figure just maybe the colorful pictures will encourage him to enjoy reading. Just maybe it will make a difference.

After lunch, I decide that I miss the comfort of close friends and the close long hugs of my own mother and father. So we walk to the computer center to check email. It takes us awhile to reach the center, not because the walk is terribly far, but because everyone knows us and we take the time to shake hands, and kiss cheeks. I admit that I feel guilty at times because I just can't remember all the names. Even the town drunk stops us to shake our hands. He asks Steve where his other women are and Steve replies that one wife is plenty. We chuckle and keep walking.

So with all these details written and recorded, what is it that I do? I walk around all day and shake hands, give hugs, hand kids random books. I try to make a difference. In conclusion, I am doing the same thing that each and every one of you is doing. I am trying to make a difference. When I think of what it is that people have done to influence my life. It is just caring and loving me. Often times I sit here in my quiet, quaint little house and I ponder what is it in life that I am supposed to do. What really matters? It is not my body, how thin I am, how much make-up I wear, how many hours I work—not at all. It is love and really caring for others.

Gladys Gives Birth: November 6, 2006

Debby Drew, Sonaguera, Colón 2005-07 ~ Peace Dale, Rhode Island

Halloween night after the monkey parade as we were sitting on Don Rodolfo and Doña Lola's porch counting money and listening to speeches, I found myself sitting next to a pregnant woman named Gladys. Turns out she is Rodolfo and Lola's oldest daughter and is due with her third baby any day. The other two were born at home, but she has decided to have this one at the maternity clinic because her midwife, Doña Maura, can't see anymore. I give her my phone number and tell her I will be glad to come for support if she would like.

This morning my alarm goes off at 5:52, and I instinctively turn it off. John asks what was that and I tell him it was the alarm. "No, it wasn't, that was your phone ringing." Because I use my cell phone for my alarm, in my sleepy stupor, I had disconnected a phone call. I hadn't even set my alarm. I thought it might be Gladys calling, but had no way to call her back so I just waited. A few minutes later the phone rings again and this time I answer it to hear Lola say they are ready and going to the maternity clinic. I say I need to get dressed and will meet them there.

Within five minutes I am out the door, teeth brushed, hair brushed, dressed, water and knitting in my daypack. I should have known better. "Ready" is a very relative word in Honduras. I wait for an hour at the maternity center, chatting with the nurse, knitting, eating some *baleadas* for breakfast and drinking a couple of cups of coffee. Gladys and Lola arrive at 7 and Gladys is clearly uncomfortable. Juana the nurse takes her into the delivery room to evaluate her. She listens to the fetal heart and does an internal exam (using aqua sonic gel for a lubricant). Gladys' cervix is 5 cm dilated so she is instructed to go to the labor room and walk around for a while.

Lola, Gladys and I hang out in the labor room for about an hour. We get into a rhythm of rubbing Gladys' lower back and shoulders during contractions. Gladys needs to go to the bathroom, but the door is locked. I ask the nurses and they tell me that toilet is broken and she needs to use the other one which means walking across the large waiting room in her johnnie which does not cover her butt. With a towel wrapped around her bottom half, she makes the journey, while a throng of pregnant women waiting for their appointments watch her in wonder. There is no toilet paper so Lola sends her son-in-law off to buy some. I hadn't realized that he had been sitting in the waiting room since they arrived.

Back in the labor room, Lola touts the value of *esencia de coronada* in labor. She says a little of that mixed with warm water will calm the nerves and speed up the labor. She had given Gladys some this morning. Lola has given birth to 16 children (14 living) including a set of twins and delivered them all at home with a midwife. She also says a glass of beer will help and sends her son-in-law off again who returns rapidly with a glass of beer. I wonder where he bought that at 7:45 in the morning. Gladys sips on it and Lola is pleased.

Lola and I chatter as Gladys works. Lola keeps saying there should be a chamber pot in the room so women can pee without having to walk across the waiting room. I almost feel like she wants me go find one, but I am at a loss. She also tells me that the reason women have so much pain in labor is because Eve ate that apple. I respond, "If you believe that." She is adamant affirming with, "Of course, it's in the Bible." And so ends that discussion.

By 8 o'clock they want to go back to the delivery room because Gladys is having strong urges to push. Juana checks her again and asks me to listen to the fetal heart. Her cervix is 7 cm dilated and the head is down a bit more. The decision is made to stay in the delivery room and walk around with the air conditioning on. Juana leaves us.

With the next contraction Gladys squats over the metal bucket lined with a plastic bag at the foot of the delivery table (alas the chamber pot). Lola and I support her whiles she moves her bowels, too embarrassed to take the walk across the waiting room at this point. We clean her up as best we can and Lola gets two more rolls of toilet paper from her son-in-law. Gladys wants to get back on the delivery table. She feels like she can push better there. She is pushing hard and moving her bowels. We are doing our best to keep her clean with wads of toilet paper and no gloves. The water breaks and clear fluid falls onto the heavy brown paper that covers the delivery table. Lola knows the baby will come soon. I go to tell the nurse and the doctor that she is pushing and that the water has broken. They come quickly.

The doctor is Mario. He is in his final year of medical school doing his required year of social service before he can graduate, sort of like an internship, but with very little supervision. He is young, smart, likeable, flirtatious and a little arrogant. He asks Gladys her name, but does not tell her his. He tells her how to push and she delivers the head with the next contraction, never needing a bit of instruction. Mario grabs the head and pulls the rest of the baby out, not waiting for restitution or internal

rotation. He is wearing gloves, but no gown so he has to hold the slippery baby away form his body so as not to soil his own clothes. Juana clamps the cord in 2 places and hands Mario the scissors. He cuts the cord and transfers the baby to the warmer. Blood is squirting everywhere (including on Mario's shirt) and I see that he didn't cut the cord between the two clamps but outside the clamp closest to the baby. He quickly realizes his error and gets a clamp on the cord while Juana calmly cleans the baby. It is 8:25.

The baby is crying lustily and weighs in at 8 lbs. The placenta delivers without incident and Mario wants to give Gladys a shot of pitocin because she has some persistent bleeding. There is a delay because he can't find the syringes where Juana told him they were so Juana has to leave to find them.

Lola fusses over her new grandson: "washing" him with baby oil and powdering his genitals before putting on a diaper. He is all dressed in red. Gladys brought adult pampers with herself to wear after the birth (smart woman!) and we get her into the pamper and the wheelchair to transfer to the postpartum room where she will rest, eat, socialize with her family and nurse the baby. Her husband joins her there to meet his son.

My reactions:
In light of the fact that Honduras has a strategy to reduce maternal deaths by institutionalizing births, I do not see any evidence that this birth was a safer experience for Gladys than a homebirth with a midwife would have been. In fact, I think she would have avoided two uncomfortable vaginal exams from the nurse and the condescending instruction on how to push from the doctor. The baby would have fared better without early cord clamping and without the blood loss that followed the error in cutting the cord. Midwives here do not tie off or cut the cord until after the placenta has been delivered. Unfortunately Gladys is right about Doña Maura. She is too old and visually impaired to take this on any more and there is no other midwife in the neighborhood. I tell Lola she should think about being a midwife, but she declines the offer. I feel a little saddened, but happy for this new life who will benefit from the advantages of a large and loving family. He could not have been born into a more secure environment.

July 2009

New Beginnings

Mary Nowel Quijano, Santa Rosa de Copán, Copán 1974-78 ~ San Antonio, Texas

It seems as though our unique experiences as Volunteers continue to color the fabric of our lives throughout the years. These points of renewal are opportunities to reflect on the joys and the challenges we encounter at each stage of our lives. Getting together with Peace Corps family from decades ago at the reunion last November in Tucson was another such renewal. I like to think of these events as new beginnings.

Many of my new beginnings can be traced back to the time I began my assignment in Santa Rosa de Copán. All the parties of trainee days had come to an end; no more could I use the excuse that the *guaro* I imbibed at El Bar Presidente was ingested to aid in my Spanish acquisition. *Al fin*, it was time to begin the job I had come here to do. I had already pre-defined my job and my living situation at my site, just as my gringo upbringing had trained me to do. Plan in advance, set goals, visualize, and be prepared!

The early morning bus whisked me away from my Honduran family in Tegucigalpa and delivered me to the cobblestone streets of Sta. Rosa de Copán. I was ready to begin my life as the new *gringita* in town. My new friend and counterpart, *el Profesór* Bracamonte, director of two of the schools in town, helped me get settled in my new *pueblo* in the mountains. I'd be involved in teacher training at the elementary school and would be teaching English in the evenings at the high school. All very exciting! I was ready to hit the ground running. Train those teachers, teach those young adults English, and take on the Honduran culture.

As I soon learned in Honduras, the job description is usually a work in progress, and I needed to be open to new challenges and adventures with my new job, "the toughest one I'd ever love."

My first assignment as teacher trainer had to be put on hold because the *Profesór* didn't have enough teachers to begin the school year. I was asked to teach 2nd grade until a Honduran teacher arrived.

School was a challenge. Few students had any books. A few came to school with a pencil and some paper. Most of the material had to be written on the chalkboard. Students sat two at a desk. Dealing with 40 students, none with any books or any real school supplies was a job for a seasoned teacher who was comfortable with the language. The confusion, chaos and noise that those 7-year olds created was beyond anything I had ever been trained to deal with in my edu-

cation courses at college. The fact that I was still a novice in the language didn't help and I often went home at the end of the school day drained of all energy.

Rather than give up, I took on the challenge, tried to keep my sanity, and as many resourceful Volunteers do, I fortified myself in the evenings with some liquid Spanish reinforcements. After a couple of months I gladly handed the class over to a Honduran teacher who became my best friend in town.

Before moving to Sta. Rosa, my dream was to be an independent *gringa*, apart from the influence of any other English speakers. I was going to live on my own, be a refuge for Hondurans who might want to mingle with an entity from another world who was taking on the life of a native. Such a glorious picture I had of my life as a Peace Corps Volunteer, the *gringa* turned *catracha* hauling water from the river, beating her clothes clean in the nearby river, reading and writing by candle light after a day of tending to the veggie garden and the chickens. What high expectations I had of my Peace Corps experience.

Of course, just as my job description had been significantly altered, so had my living arrangements. There was a house that would soon be available for me to inhabit where I could take on that noble role, but for now, I had no choice but to move into a house that was already inhabited by a British volunteer named Krysia. We were joined by Burt from my training group. Three of us together. It would do, I thought, for a while at least.

No need to run to the river with my laundry, as I could beat my clothes clean on the scrub board in the patio. Our running water flowed thanks to the gravity that pulled the water from the *pila* on the roof. We bought our chickens at the *supermercado* with head and feet sometimes included. No extra charge! I'd triumphantly walk home from the market with my bag full of vegetables after utilizing my Spanish skills to bargain for the best price. Those practice sessions at the Bar Presidente were reaping some mighty rewards! And at night, there was no need for candlelight because we were settled in a modern city of some 5,000 people complete with electricity.

It took very little time for me to see that this house was indeed a godsend. It soon became our home. We became house-mates in no time at all, trying out our culinary talents on each other, partying, singing together, and sharing tales of our daily events, in short, becoming a family of support for each other. There was plenty of room to house others who happened to be traveling through or working nearby. Never a dull moment. There was constant interaction between Volunteers and assorted people traveling through town. Our home became a marvelous and diverse exchange of friendships.

So it was at the reunion last November of some 100 people who continue to share the vision, the dream, the laughter, the songs and the stories that remain constant through the decades. In Tucson, we renewed our friendships, laughed, sang, shared pictures and memories, told of our current adventures, made new bonds and then traveled back to our homes with renewed beginnings. What a network of friends my time in Honduras has afforded me. What a treat to visit and share our stories again, some we can share with our kids, and some we choose to keep within our group!

The day after returning from our weekend in Tucson, my husband, Jose, and I were talking about the magic of being together again. We were so thankful to be part of such a dedicated, fun-loving group of people some 30 years ago, and so glad we're still a part of this diverse group of people we call our Peace Corps family.

Our own family is a result of my Peace Corps experience. Years ago Jose and I met and married in Sta. Rosa when I was a PCV. We celebrated our wedding with the volunteers in town. And now that we had just returned from a celebration with some of the same people in Tucson, another circle had been completed. We were enjoying a new beginning as we returned, feeling the warm glow of friendship we had rekindled that past weekend.

Quite distractedly, we reminisced while we did some grocery shopping. We were busy chatting about it when Jose asked me where a certain item was and I pointed to its place on the shelf behind him. We both laughed when I realized that my hands were still on the shopping cart and I had pointed with my mouth, *estilo Hondureño*. New beginnings propel our lives forward, but an old habit is proof of where we've been!

Hondureñismos

Amor de lejos es para pendejos – only idiots have long distance relationships

Como pollo comprado – how you feel when you're in a group where you don't know anyone

De todas maneras – oh, well; anyway (as in "We're going to be late anyway, we might as well stop for a Coke")

Eso es harina de otro costal – that's something else entirely

- from *Hondureñismos, o sea, Everything You Couldn't Find in Your Spanish Dictionary and Were Afraid to Ask* by Sonia Kranwinkel, Chalmeca, Copán 1989-92 ~ Solana Beach, California, published in 1992

Back Road Stories : Yoro to La Ceiba circa 1975

July 2009

Rob Thurston, APCD 1973-76 ~ Corvallis, Oregon

Okay, so maybe it was a bit hair-brained for PCV Eddy Perez and me to drive off along the dotted track shown on our map. It was clearly the most direct way from Yoro to the Aguan Valley and on to La Ceiba. Besides, Eddy was great company and an engineer, I rationalized. The option was to backtrack to El Progreso and then go around through Tela - a boring six-hour drive.

Bear in mind that, in the mid-seventies, driving in and out of Yoro was not fun (I'm obliged - and happy - to say that visiting the brave and isolated Peace Corps souls there made it worth while!). Leaving pavement at El Progreso, the narrow road was a potholed bed of choking dust - at least two hours of breathing through a bandana while overtaking and blindly passing dust-plumed vehicles. The thought of driving back around that way didn't appeal to either of us. On the other hand, those dots followed a cool, forested ridge-line leading to the upper Aguan.

"Si senor, siga no mas," we were repeatedly told by those walking along the track, when we sought directions and reassurance. We'd been in Honduras long enough to remain skeptical, but, to our great relief (and after a little rock removal and shovel work) we were elated to glimpse the extensive valley unfolding in our view. The worst was over, we had survived, and visions of cold beers in La Ceiba floated into our heads.

But not so fast! Afternoon storm clouds quickly darkened the sky, as rain dumped on the coast range we had yet to traverse. But surely, we agreed, the more-traveled gravel road from Olanchito to La Ceiba would be fine. Even though it was getting dark, the rain was letting up, and the road, while slippery, was passable and absolutely free of traffic. We'll be in La Ceiba in no time! Such were our thoughts as we came skidding to a halt just short of where the roadway abruptly disappeared into a swollen stream. But wait, in our headlights we could see the roadbed re-emerging on the other bank. Yes, this must surely be the regular fording spot, and it can't be that deep here.

We inched the Jeep Cherokee's nose into the dark water, where it rapidly rose over the tires, then front bumper and then submerged our headlights. Then the engine stalled. Stop! This isn't going to work. While the front end was underwater, the back tires were still on the bank. By throwing the car into reverse and engaging the starter motor we jerkily extricated ourselves. While drying out the distributor we wondered what to do. The car would run, but we didn't want to go back.

As if on cue, a horseman emerged from the dark. He chuckled and helpfully said that this was not the right place to ford the river. "Follow me and I'll show you a better spot," which we did, driving through the weeds and over no discernible track. *"Aqui es"*, he said. In the beam of our car lights, we watched as he rode his horse easily across the shallows. We then followed without a hitch. "*Mil gracias, señor*," we said as he rode on into the night, chuckling still, "*gringos locos*." Okay, what a story we now had to tell over those beers in La Ceiba.

At first I thought it was an earthquake. But no, what is that jangling noise and why are those old leaning and slanted telephone poles along the road in front of us becoming erect? That's right, as we approached each pole, it would straighten up, ghost-like, in our headlights. "What the hell is going on Eddy," I shouted. We stopped and the poles, too, stopped up-righting themselves. Somehow, we'd caught the end of the old telephone line in the undercarriage of the car and our forward motion pulled the sagging wire taut through the leaning poles, standing them up as we approached. We got untangled, drove uneventfully on to La Ceiba and directly to the first bar for a *roncito* . . . forget the beers!

Rob Thurston was an agrarian reform PCV in Venezuela 1968-70, APCD for PC Belize 1972-74 and ag/natural resources APCD for PC Honduras 1974-77.

He worked for USAID from 1977-94 in Honduras, Bolivia, India, Nepal, Indonesia, and Washington, D.C.

As an independent short-term consultant he worked for AID in Central America, Bolivia, Caribbean and Africa from 1994-99.

From 1999-2006 he worked with the Oregon University System to grow and manage an international internship program sending students from all seven state colleges & universities to do individualized professional internships in most parts of the world. He retired in 2006 and resides in Corvallis.

Padre Tito

Joe (Jose) Zingsheim, Taulabé, Comayagua 1965-67 ~ Port Washington, Wisconsin

I grew up in Grafton, Wisconsin, and had 16 years of Catholic education. I was not a rabid Catholic but being a PCV in a "catholic" country like Honduras was a bit of a shock. It started my slide to my current state of religious neutrality. Taulabé did not have a resident priest in 1965 and I was not impressed with the Honduran priest that came on occasion from Siguatepeque. It seemed like he was one of those status quo guys. I kept in contact with Taulabé but lapsed in the mid '90s. Then in February 2006 I did a Google on Taulabé and was amazed at the number of hits. One was about the Catholic Church in Taulabé, San Gaspar, twinning with St. Mary's of West Bend, which is about 20 miles from my home in Port Washington. I associated with their group and they told me about the Honduran priest, Padre Tito (real name Eduardo Mendes). Of course I was skeptical about him. I met him when he came to West Bend in June 2007. He is of the liberation theology school. In February 2008 I went to Taulabé for 3 weeks. I had not been there since 1976. I found out that Padre Tito is the priest mentioned in the book, *Don't Be Afraid, Gringo*. The Honduran army swept into Taulabé in 1982-83 (?) and arrested him. The charge was something like subversive preaching. The townspeople came to his rescue and although he was in custody for a time they forced his release.

During my visit in 2008 I was able to go with him on visits to rural *aldeas*. His parish consists of about 44,000 (yes, thousands) people. He organizes local groups to keep the faith alive between his visits. He also has them work on community projects such as health, schools, water, latrines, nutrition, electrification, etc. One of his organizers, a woman from the *aldea* of Cerro Azul, near Lake Yojoa, received a grant from Catholics in Spain to attend a women's religious conference in Barcelona. At the meeting the participants said what their experience was. Almost all were college grads, many with PhDs. When it came her turn she replied that she was a poor *campesina*, raising a family in rural Honduras, and implementing the social teachings of Jesus.

When the church in West Bend twinned with Taulabé, Padre Tito told them that he did not want them to come to Honduras with handouts. It took three to four years before they decided that they would raise money in West Bend to support scholarships for youth in the Taulabé area to attend high school. This year we had 48 students in school. Padre Tito meets with them once a month and reviews grades, etc. Then they receive their monthly stipend. It varies for each student's needs: room/board, transportation, uniforms, books, etc. He involves them in community programs. He also tells them that they have an obligation to return after graduation and help new students.

It really has impressed me as being a real person to person foreign aid program. Every year some of the group from West Bend travels to Taulabé, usually in late February and they get to meet the students. When I came back on September 17th I brought letters from the students. I translated most of them and it is very emotional. This weekend we start our fund drive for scholarships for the next school year.

Thanks for your time. I hope that more local groups can get involved in grass roots projects such as this one.

Anytime you are near Port Washington-Milwaukee you are most welcome, Peace Corps style! (Milwaukee has a don't-miss-it, Calatrava-designed art center).

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November 2009

ECO Café - Excepcional Café Orgánico

an interview with Eric Harrison, Marcala, La Paz 2006-08 ~ Bremerton, Washington

From the Eco Café website . . . Founder of Eco Café and returned Peace Corps Volunteer, Eric Harrison, set out to develop a new type of coffee company that would turn the coffee industry upside down. Eco Café transfers the knowledge and equipment of roasting and bagging coffee to the local farmers, creating higher end jobs and lasting changes to the local communities. Instead of processing, roasting, bagging and distributing coffee in the United States, Eco Café is creating a sustainable economy for local coffee growers by having these activities done in their communities. Eco Café is fostering a sustainable community where local children are beginning to be more motivated to study in school as the jobs available to them are becoming more inspiring than simply picking coffee.

But, Eco Café's founder didn't stop there. He has decided to work for free so he could donate 100% profits back to coffee communities to build infrastructure projects such as water systems, schools, and health centers. Did we say 100%? Yep 100% of Eco Café's profits are donated back in order to improve living conditions in developing countries.

When and where did you serve as a PCV, and what work did you do then?

I was a water and sanitation engineer in Marcala, La Paz, from 2006 though 2008. I designed gravity-fed community drinking water systems. I managed the projects all the way through construction. I also got involved in HIV/AIDS training and mid-wife training. I worked with various international groups such as Rotary International, Engineers Without Borders and International Rural Water to help find funding for the water projects.

What was the beginning of the idea for Eco Café?

Seeing past community water projects that had failed. If an outside agency is donating all the money for the project there can be no ownership on the part of the locals. True sustainability comes not from outside organizations but from a grass roots effort from the local people. Coffee is the major economic activity in Marcala, however there is still a huge amount of poverty. Current coffee practice in the United States and Europe is to import raw or green beans from places like Marcala. The local people do not get much money for the coffee because they do not put much "value added" in the product, i.e., roasting the bean, bagging the bean, marketing material of the final product, etc. All this work takes place in the United States. Therefore the idea of Eco Café was to allow local coffee farmers more money for their product by having them process the bean, roast the bean, bag the beans, and ship a completed product. Through Eco Café they now get twice as much per pound for coffee as they did before. By basically doubling their annual salary, they can now better support their own community projects such as water systems, school supplies, health centers, etc.

Tell us about the role you play in Eco Café. How do you enlist coffee farmers to sell their product through Eco Café? Where is the coffee roasted? How do you maintain consistency of product quality? How much time do you spend in Honduras each year?

I manage the operations of the business. This includes handling sales and marketing material in the United States for Eco Café. I make agreements with grocery stores to sell Eco Café and I manage the website where we sell to individual consumers. I have an agreement with a cooperative in Marcala to process, roast, and bag the coffee. They have placed a quality control manager in charge to maintain consistency in Eco Café's product quality. Honduras has been undergoing a change in culture in regards to product quality and understands the importance in business relationships to maintain consistent product.

It varies how much time I spend in Honduras. This year I am only spending one week in Honduras.

What has been the most difficult challenge for you in bringing Eco Café to the business entity it is today?

The most difficult part is trying to get started in a market that is already well established and is some respects already saturated. It's nearly impossible to get

grocery stores to sell a new product. Also entering last year during one of the worst economic recessions wasn't easy either.

What role does the web play in your marketing and how much of your sales is attributable to the web? Would Eco Café have been possible twenty years ago without the web?

The web has been helpful but the sales through the web are not that substantial. Less than 10% of sales is done through our website. It is easier to build business relations in person, talking with someone face to face, than to try to build real connections of the internet. Also, the internet has lots of people all doing similar things. It's difficult to convey our message of how different our operation really is.

You can support Eco Café by purchasing their coffee online for $8.99 to $9.99 per 12 oz. bag of whole roasted beans.

www.ecocafeonline.com

Eco Café donates its profits to a non-profit organization called Water and Sanitation Health. W.A.S.H. is dedicated to improving living conditions in developing countries.

www.waterandsanitationhealth.com

Eric Harrison, 206-388-8092
ecocafeonline@gmail.com

November 2009

Pavo Real

Mary Nowel Quijano, Santa Rosa de Copán, Copán 1974-78 ~ San Antonio, Texas

Pavo real: Dumb Gringo translation … Real turkey. Intelligent Gringo translation … Peacock

Memories of holiday turkeys bring me back to the campo in San Juan de Opoa, half way between Santa Rosa and Gracias. Our holiday turkey came from a friend's patio. It had been filled with *guaro* before it met its end. After it was defeathered it was injected with extra shots of the fiery liquid and then handed over to a seasoned baker, Doña Chepa, who baked that bird in record time in her outside clay oven. What a delightful, tender, tasty bird that was!

That turkey, baked by Doña Chepa in her *horno de barro*, may have been tasty, but some Thanksgiving turkeys have evolved into real turkey stories to relish throughout the years. *Pavo real.* They may not be peacocks, but they're real turkeys and memorable tales.

Real Backpack Turkey via Toncontin:

The year my parents decided to spend Thanksgiving with me, I advised them to fill their pockets with dollar bills and chocolates to expedite their journey through the searching hands of the *aduana* officers. Good ol' Dad also stuffed a frozen turkey in his backpack and packed one more in his luggage! When the customs officer asked my non-Spanish speaking dad what was in the backpack, he started doing the turkey version of the chicken dance while gobbling loudly. I'm not sure if it was the offerings from his pockets or his antics that afforded him a quick trip thru the otherwise arduous and time consuming process of going thru customs and luggage check. Once the customs officials matched the frozen turkey in the backpack to the strange dance and noises coming from this crazy ol' Gringo, the officials happily exchanged smiles for the handfuls of goodies my dad took out of his pockets and whisked those two travelers through. I was amazed at the speed at which they were released. *Pavo real?* You bet, and a tasty dinner with loved ones it was, too! Thanks, Dad.

Real Commissary Turkey and Unique Dessert:

One Thanksgiving we hosted a dinner for a group of Volunteers and other folks who had connections to the Embassy. That year we had a real commissary turkey to roast. I gleefully roasted the turkey and everyone else brought a side dish. As we watched the Dallas Cowboys play football it was easy to pretend we had traveled to the U.S. for that Thanksgiving. Until we got to dessert.

"Sweet potato" pie, made with *ayote* in place of sweet potatoes, was brought in. We quickly learned that *ayote* should NEVER be substituted for sweet potatoes. We tried to imagine we were eating sweet potato pie. Unfortunately, it was coarse, stringy and green and lacked the sweet taste of *camote* that makes sweet potato pie a delightful ending to Thanksgiving dinner. The texture and color resembled the types of pies our agricultural volunteers avoid stepping in! What a treat, though, to sit with a bunch of compatriots sharing a traditional Thanksgiving dinner, watching what was then "America's team" play football! An enjoyable time despite the cow pies. *Pavo real?* Definitely, but hold the dessert, please. Thanks, dinner friends of long ago, especially Patti, for the memorable pie.

Real Turkey in the Sink:

Since I decided that my couple of years as a volunteer wouldn't suffice, I stayed on for a while longer with my little family and worked at the American School. For a while we lived in Colonia 21 and shared a house with our buddy, Jaime Buston, who was also extending his stay in Honduras while he worked with USAID. We each had our own separate part of the house while we shared a patio.

A few days before Thanksgiving we heard a common friend enter the other side of the house while Jim was out. As he left he informed us that he was leaving a Thanksgiving turkey in the sink. Oh boy, I thought, another commissary turkey that will thaw out just in time to be baked up for Thanksgiving. I'll offer to bake it and then we can all share a Thanksgiving dinner with REAL sweet potato pie!

A while later, we started hearing some muffled sounds from the other side of the wall. Strange because Jim didn't have a pet. Maybe the cockroaches were taking over.

It wasn't long before we had a hunch the turkey in the sink wasn't thawing out. It was begging for mercy! We couldn't wait to hear Jim walk in to greet his Thanksgiving dinner and have it return the greeting! His arrival confirmed what we had suspected. There was a live turkey tied up in the sink, complete with freshly laid egg. Thanksgiving breakfast tacos, perhaps?

Never fear, Jose, el Tigre, was there to save the feast! He helped the turkey meet her maker, *estilo Hondureño*. After sharing sufficient *guaro* with our prospective dinner, we let it run around the patio for a while before dealing the final blow. Then it ran around like a turkey with its head cut off! That turkey dinner rivaled that of Doña Chepa's from years ago. Must have been the *guaro*. *Pavo real? Absolutamente*, with all the trimmings plus breakfast tacos. Thank you, Jaime!

Pavo Real in the Casa Presidencial:

This Thanksgiving it seems a *pavo* has taken over the Casa Presidencial in a manner reminiscent of the days when *golpes* replaced the rulers. Could that be a *pavo real* or a masked *pavo golpista*? Too bad the problem can't be resolved by some dancing, dessert and *guaro*. The argument has caused some discord among our ranks, and it definitely has our Honduran friends and relatives divided. *Pavo real?* Don't think so. It's caused too much damage and suffering to our friends and relatives in Honduras.

Yet, no matter which side of the turkey fence each of us is on, we all carry memories that are real *pavo*. That's what binds us together to this day. Regardless of your manner of celebrating the holidays, be it with turkey-dancing loved ones from far away, or accompanied by unusual desserts, or one that's different from what you were expecting, if you include memories of those who shared with you through the years, it's bound to be a *pavo real*.

Happy Thanksgiving to all. May we all do a turkey dance in thanks for the many memories we continue to share. And if we're lucky enough to have some, let's share a round of *guaro*, for the good ol' days. *Salud*!

March 2010

The Pila Project: Clean Water at Home

Maggie McQuaid, Pespire, Choluteca 1976-78 ~ Bisbee, Arizona

Amigos de Honduras contributed $2,666.90 to complete funding of this $3,361.90 project. La gente del pueblo contributed an additional $1,260.95. The description in the original proposal said:

"This community-initiated project will construct *pilas*, which are large cement 75 gallon wash basins. *Pilas* are a basic necessity in Honduras, and in most parts of Central America. They allow families to wash and bathe regularly since it is a luxury to have a sink inside a home. *Pilas* also allow access to running water every day. The main objective of this project is to provide the beneficiaries direct access to a cleaner and more convenient water source. With contributions 36 impoverished families will no longer have to go to the river or use buckets as their primary water source, granting a cleaner, healthier lifestyle. Other objectives of this project are to teach the beneficiaries about logistics in planning projects, writing budgets, proposals and strategic planning. This community-initiated project will be providing gravel, rock, and labor for the project which equals about 27% of the total costs of the project."

The volunteer responsible for this project is Casey Tyler, and we chatted about the project through an extended series of e-mails. Here are some excerpts of our interviews:

Maggie M: Casey, where is your hometown? Where did you graduate from college? What drew you towards the Peace Corps?

Casey T: I am from Gloucester Virginia. I went to college at a small college in Central Virginia called Lynchburg College. What really drew me to Peace Corps was the first time I went abroad to Costa Rica I knew right then that I wanted to work in international development and then a few weeks later stumbled upon the Peace Corps website and it just seemed to fit what I wanted to do.

Maggie M: Tell me about your site in Honduras: What town and department? How long have you been there? Are you the only Volunteer in town?

Casey T: I live in Belen Gualcho, Ocotepeque. It is absolutely one of the most beautiful places in Honduras, it is tucked into the mountains right on the edges of Celaque National Park. It is very tiny so I am the only volunteer here. I have been here for close to a year and a half and some days I cannot believe it has been that long and I only have seven months left to complete everything I am doing.

Maggie M: Tell me a little about your project. Why *pilas*? How many have you already installed, and how many more are planned?

Casey T: The reason I decided on this project is because almost exactly a year ago, when I had absolutely nothing happening and doubted anything would ever happen, a woman named Laura Vasquez came to my house said she worked with the Peace Corps as a Volunteer five years ago and wanted to work with me. Laura is the president of *caja rural* called *Luz y Esfuerza*, I met the group and asked how I could help, and they told me they wanted help doing a *"Mejoramiento de Viviendas"* project that would focus on *pilas*, floors, and latrines. At first I was not real keen on the idea because I am a municipal development volunteer and know little to nothing about building *pilas*, floors, and latrines. I also didn't really see it as a very sustainable project. However, after a few weeks of talking to them I decided to take it on as long as they agreed to participate in all the training I did with them about writing budgets and looking for funding. We have broken the project down into three phases, *pilas* being the first stage, partly because they were the cheapest and easiest to construct, also because they were really imperative to daily life. When I first moved into the house I live in I went five days without a *pila* and it was very difficult not having any place to wash dishes, clothes, or get water from when there was no running water.

Up until a few weeks ago we were waiting on funding and the proposal to go through the different offices of Peace Corp. However we are scheduled to start the construction of 36 *pilas* in approximately three weeks, probably the beginning of April.

Maggie M: What exactly is a *"caja rural"*?

Casey T: A *caja rural* is like a micro lending agency; however, these groups also participate in a variety of other projects within their communities, and the *pila* project is an example of one of them. However, I believe there are really strict restriction on whom and what they can lend to; it has to be an income generating project.

Maggie M: Will this project serve people specifically in Belen Gualcho, or in surrounding *aldeas* as well?

Casey T: The project is actually in the *aldeas* of Belen Gualcho, the majority of people in the *casco urbano* already have *pilas*. It will be done in five *aldeas/casa rios.*

Maggie M: What other kinds of infrastructure in your village? Electricity? Running water? Plumbing/sewage?

Casey T: We have electricity in the *casco urbano*; however I can't tell you the exact statistic but probably about 1/3 of the *aldeas* have electricity. The majority of the houses I'm working on do have electricity, I think there are about eight or nine that do not have electricity. As far as I know the majority of *aldeas* have running water, there have been development organizations working here for quite a while to ensure that. There is sewage (of sorts) in the *casco urbano*. However, almost all *aldeas* rely on latrines, or rivers. The roads up here are all dirt and a large majority of the *aldeas* you cannot get to by car, the ones I'm working in we can get to by car, however, there are three houses we will have to go on horse back.

Maggie M: Thanks, Casey. Anything else you'd like to add?

Casey T: Thank you all again for your generous contribution! My group is so very grateful, and we are very excited to get started. If you would like I can send you pictures as soon as we start making progress. Let me know if you need anything else!

(End of interview)

As a writer, this was quite an interesting article to research and put together. I am incredibly impressed at the kinds of projects young Volunteers like Casey are involved with. Meeting her was a privilege, and I wish her the best in her life after the Peace Corps. As part of Amigos de Honduras, I am very proud of the projects we support. Although our Peace Corps days may be long gone, through our memberships in Amigos, we are able to keep the spirit alive. My sincere thanks to Casey, to all the people in the Belen Gualcho area who are helping with this project and to Amigos members everywhere.

March 2010

Peace Corps Honduras, 1969 - the film!

Maggie McQuaid, Pespire, Choluteca 1976-78 ~ Bisbee, Arizona

For the past year, I've gotten interesting e-mails from the mysteriously-named *La Baguette*. "La Baguette" is really just the name of a bakery in Santo Domingo owned and operated by an old Honduran hand named Mark Reilly who was in Group 6 in Concepcion de Maria, Choluteca, from 1966 thru 1969. But I like calling him "Baguette": it sounds like a wonderful old *nom de guerre* from the French Resistance.

Mark wrote:

"I was just notified that Ron Anderson, one of our co-Honduran PCVs who did film work for USIA, has posted what became a Honduran PC training film on line. It's very good, and among people who contributed were Howie Knox, Norman Powell, the Misiorowskis, Ken Brooks, Phil Giesen, and others. Here is the link - enjoy!" **www.ronanderson-services.com/pc_film.htm**

I followed the link and discovered an incredible piece of film history. After watching it a few times, I was finally able to track down Mr. Ron Anderson himself, and we had the following e-mail exchange:

From: Maggie McQuaid
March 12, 2010
To: randerson@ronandersonservices.com
Subject: Ron's old Peace Corps training film

Dear Ron,

My name is Maggie McQuaid. I was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Honduras (Pespire, Choluteca) in the mid-70's and am assistant editor of "Amigos de Honduras," the newsletter of the Honduras Returned Peace Corps Volunteers Association. Recently, one of our members (Mark Reilly, Group 6, 1966 - 1969) e-mailed me a copy of the training film you made for the Peace Corps in 1969. I would like to write up a small article about the film and include the viewing link so that others can watch it.

Would you mind answering a few questions? How did you come to make the film? Did you do it as a part of your Peace Corps assignment? Who sponsored it? What have you been doing since that time?

I thought it was a very good piece, by the way. The first segment, with the young man working for a cooperative, was filmed in my old site of Pespire, which I enjoyed immensely. I was struck by how the situations you filmed then are still pertinent and relevant today. Also, I thought the very opening segment had sort of a zen-like feel to it, which was cool then and still is now.

Thanks for making the film. Even though it was done seven years before I got there, it still triggered a lot of memories.

Saludos,
Maggie McQuaid, Bisbee, Arizona

Hi Maggie

I'm happy that you enjoyed my *Don't Think / Some Days* film and that it provided you the opportunity to relive some memories from Pespire.

RPCVs from all over the country seem to be discovering the film's website since I put it up live on March 2nd. On March 4th, Brad Dessery (I believe he was in the same group as Mark Reilly) was the first former Honduras Volunteer to email me that he had visited the website after having received its link from some of my family friends. Brad passed the link around to several other RPCVs and predicted that at least one of them would probably cause the site to go viral. Viral? Well, maybe, in a closeknit Peace Corps family sort of way.

I do hope, however, that somehow each Volunteer whose name appears in the closing credits has an opportunity to visit the website and see the film. So far, I've only managed to track down Stu and Nancy Siefer and Bob and Elise Misiorowski (all four of whom either live or spend much of their time in your state of Arizona, by the way). Oh yes, and Drew Days at Yale Law School - his name doesn't appear in the credits per se but it was his guitar - which he sold me shortly before his Peace Corps tour in Honduras ended - on which I played the solo music bed used on the film's opening and closing titles.

Peace Corps Washington has also visited the website, I should mention, and likes it very much. A video file copy of the film is on its way to Washington as I write this with the intent that it will also be posted on the Peace Corps YouTube Channel (http://www.youtube.com/peacecorps). There are also plans for me to deliver a 16mm motion picture release print I've had in my possession for

some 40-years to Peace Corps who will have a film preservationist restore the print and turn it into a digital video copy compatible with other high definition content that will be used during the 50th Anniversary of Peace Corps in 2011.

All very exciting developments for a website and film that I created as a labor of love. But, then, isn't that what lies at the heart of Peace Corps in the first place?

On to some answers for your questions...

I assume you have read through the "Titles, Credits and Trivia" page on the website. That page and the expanded *Show/Hide detail* in each paragraph gives quite a bit of background on the making of the film but doesn't really answer the questions you asked, so here goes . . .

How did you come to make the film?

Shortly after I arrived in Honduras as a Volunteer in Group 11, Peace Corps Country Director Jon Gant asked if I might be able to create a documentary film that could be used with Volunteers in training at Camp Crozier near Rio Abajo, Puerto Rico, and at the in-country La Colmena training facility in Choluteca, Honduras. The intent of the documentary was to provide trainees with content that would stimulate thought and discussions on the cross-cultural life experiences that awaited future Volunteers to Honduras. I decided to build the film's content on two foundations. First, Volunteer sentiments expressed as highly reflective observations to questions I asked during recorded audio interviews (in the film you can occasionally hear my voice in the background making rhetorical remarks such as "It doesn't tie up in a very neat ribbon..." during Howie Knox's comments in the opening scenes of a campesino sitting in the light from a nearby doorway). The second foundation is obviously the visual content that illustrated, reinforced or was suggested by each Volunteer's recorded sentiments. I recorded far more audio with each Volunteer than was ultimately edited for used in the film (a recording session with a single Volunteer typically lasted between a half-hour and an hour). And I recorded interviews with more than just the five Volunteers who are heard in the film (names of the Volunteers whose interviews did not make the final film are included in the closing credits). The film's visual technique using long, unhurried scenes are as much a product of reflective cinematography and editing technique as they are a result of a severely limited film rawstock budget - thus forcing me to squeeze the maximum amount of running time from every scene I shot.

Did you do it as a part of your Peace Corps assignment?

"Don't Think / Some Days" was produced as part of my Peace Corps assignment. I was placed in Honduras for the specific purpose of helping to foster in-country development projects through mass media (radio, television, film). My placement was an experimental one that Peace Corps had never previously attempted to implement in Latin America. I was extended an invitation from the Peace Corps largely on the basis of my professional experience in broadcast television and documentary filmmaking. There was an established - though narrow - precedent for Volunteers with such media backgrounds as mine in one other Peace Corps region in the 1960's - American Samoa had volunteers helping staff a local television station. I had applied for the American Samoa project but it had no openings at the time. Peace Corps Washington asked around their other regions to see if anyone might have need of a Volunteer who was a documentary filmmaker and television director. To everyone's surprise, Peace Corps Honduras responded with a request that I be sent their way. I served three years as a Volunteer in Honduras. I extended my two year tour by an additional year in order to finish a half-hour Spanish language documentary film titled "Don Tomas" that portrayed the effects of the Honduran Agricultural Cooperative movement on the life of a single campesino. During the three years I spent as a Volunteer, I shot hundreds of short film clips for television illustrating one aspect or another of Honduran development efforts. Most of these efforts profiled the cooperative movement and rural community development projects. In between these news clip film assignments, I took on larger productions, the first of which was "Don't Think / Some Days."

Who sponsored it?

As the last title in the closing credits states, the film was produced by Peace Corps Honduras. The United States Information Service office in Tegucigalpa provided the production and post-production equipment with which the film was made. My office and editing facility for the three years I was a Volunteer was, in fact, located in the USIS building on Calle Real in Comayaguela. As a Volunteer whose daily life spanned both the Peace Corps and USIS (which, by implication, included the U.S. Embassy), I was always keenly aware of the delicate nature of my placement and obliged to conduct myself in such a way as not to arouse even the appearance of impropriety. Apparently I was successful in balancing allegiances as Peace Corps and USIS were seeking a Volunteer to replace me as I prepared to return to the U.S. I never learned whether or not they found such a replacement, however.

What have you been doing since that time?

Upon my return to the U.S. following the Peace Corps, I resumed my career in media, serving, among other things as a television director, vice president of production for a film company, broadcast producer for an advertising agency and a broadcast and cable television operations manager. I also spent 3-years in Saudi Arabia as au-

diovisual director for an international sports program charged with training Saudi Arabian national teams in track and field, basketball and swimming and diving. The Saudi Arabian project also took me to Montreal for the 1976 Summer Olympics. Today I offer consulting services to both traditional and new media ventures. I'm also a software developer and dabble in standards-compliant website design.

So, there you have it, Maggie.

Now, it's my turn to ask a question or two.

Tell me some more about "Amigos de Honduras." Is it an online, email or hardcopy newsletter? If online, how do I find it (for the search string *amigos de honduras*, Google returns some missionary sites, some broken links to "amigos de honduras" at peacecorpswiki.org and a November 10, 2009 Facebook post from Alan Waugh that mentions the newsletter but no link). If the newsletter is emailed or hardcopy, how do I get on the mailing list? Please let me know.

Should you have any further questions or comments, feel free to contact me.

Thanks for the opportunity to contribute to the Amigos de Honduras newsletter.

Saludos...

Ron
Ron Anderson
Peace Corps/Honduras 1968-1971
4445 Sentinel Rock Terrace
Larkspur, CO 80118-8909
303 681-2454 (Home)
303 947-8856 (Cell)
http://www.ronandersonservices.com

P.S. Looking back over my answers to your questions, I see that they don't particularly lend themselves to a "*small* article about the film," so my apologies, in advance, for any laborious editing I've forced upon you.

I've found Ron's entire response so interesting that I decided not to edit it at all. As a follow-up, Ron did eventually find a link to Amigos, and has since become a member. Welcome aboard, Ron!

This is really an amazing film, and I urge all Amigos readers to click on the link. It brought back some very poignant memories of my site in Pespire, and I found the segment about the teacher and the cows both moving and funny. For readers who served in the years since this was made, I hope you enjoy the footage of "old" Tegucigalpa, and that you don't laugh much at the dress and haircuts of we ancient Volunteers

Additional Info

The film begins with a series of phrases by late '60's Volunteers . . .

Don't think too hard about what
you're going to find here.
Because you'll find it.
Nobody can tell you how to feel
about it.
About dirt floors.
Spanish language.
Campesinos.
Few roads.
A day's twenty-four hours.
Some days you count every one.

Production on the film was halted in July 1969 as a shooting war over immigration issues broke out between Honduras and El Salvador on July 14, 1969.
The last scenes shot for the film prior to

the commencement of hostilities were in a rural classroom near the town of Pespire halfway between Tegucigalpa and the Golfo de Fonseca. A blackboard in the campo school bears the date *Sábado 12 de Julio 1969*. A cease fire took effect on July 20th and, subsequent to that date, the filmmaker was temporarily reassigned to the Organization of American States to shoot documentary footage of troop withdrawals for the film *OEA: Gestión de Paz* which was later distributed throughout Latin America. Upon conclusion of the OAS assignment, production resumed on *Don't Think / Some Days* in August, 1969.

Names from the past . . .

Volunteers appearing or assisting in this film:
Ken Brooks / Los Angeles, California
Chago Freeman / Canoga Park, California (now of Woodland Hills, California)
Bob Knower / Albany, New York (now Venice, Florida)
Howie Knox / Stonington, Connecticut
Mike McKinney / Como, Texas (now possibly Louisville, Kentucky)
Bob and Elise Misiorowski /Berwyn, Illinois & New Canaan, Connecticut
Norman Powell / Rahway, New Jersey (now possibly Ft. Lauderdale)
Priscilla Schouten / Santa Barbara, California (now Firebaugh, California)
Stu and Nancy Siefer / Detroit, Michigan (now Tempe, Arizona)
Russ Wallis / Madison, Wisconsin

PC/H staff supporting the project . . .
Jon Gant / Director
Chuck Traver, Phil Giesen & Mark Levine / Assoc. Reps.

Memories of Events Around the July 1969 Soccer War between Honduras and El Salvador

March 2010

Otto M. Hausch, Tegucigalpa 1966-69 ~ Keokuk, Iowa
Honduras Group 6 - proofread & added details about Choluteca & types of planes by Mark Reilly

On June 8, 1969, my Honduran girl friend, Rosa Godoy, and I attended a Sunday afternoon soccer game between the two subject countries in the Honduran National Stadium in Tegucigalpa. Honduras won that game 1 to 0, the lone score occurring late in a hard played game. There was a best of three games scheduled to determine which country would advance into the regional playoffs for a chance to go to the 1970 World Cup. After the game, we went to a Chinese Restaurant, Pagoda de Oro, located near the National Post Office in the center of Tegus. There were Salvadorians dining at this restaurant, and all things seemed normal and hospitable.

The return match was one week later in San Salvador, which El Salvador won. Along with the entire nation, I listened to the game on the radio, and remember vividly the radio announcer, both before and during the game, describing violence occurring in El Savador to cars and buses that were decorated to show support for the Honduran team. The Honduran announcer was pleading, nearly in tears, over the radio for fans from Honduras to turn around and go back to Honduras so their vehicles and/or persons would not be attacked by violent mobs.

Fellow PCV, Pat Hare, went to the game on a bus with a group of friends from Barrio Chile, in Tegucigalpa, where he lived. He commented to me later that week he had not seen much in the way of violent activity, other than the fans who took down a Honduran flag and burned it. In the place of the burned flag, during the playing of the Honduras national anthem, the Salvadorans ran a dirty rag up the flag pole. Also, he mentioned there was a home-made sign in the stadium of a Salvadoran rabbit having its way with a Honduran rabbit. Let me explain, the best Honduran player's nickname was "Conejo," rabbit in Spanish. He played soccer in Spain and had returned home to play for la Seleccion de Honduras.

In retribution for the treatment their team had received in Tegucigalpa, Salvadoran crowds besieged the hotel where the Honduran team was lodged, breaking all the windows, throwing eggs and garbage, and making it impossible to sleep. The Honduran team had to have a heavily armed military escort to and from the game. Returning home, the Honduran coach commented that is was just as well they hadn't won as they might not have made it out alive.

After the game, I believe, in great part because of the announcer's commentary on the violence toward Hondurans visiting El Salvador for the game, people in Honduras began to attack stores that they associated with El Salvador. Adoc (Salvadoran) was a brand name shoe store. Most Adoc stores had their windows broken and people looted those stores of shoes. I was very surprised when a lady in the office where I worked commented she ended up with a pair or more of shoes.

The Honduran government and police decided it was time to step up an already on-going investigation of some 300,000 Salvadorans living in Honduras to determine if they had entered the country with the proper papers. The jails filled quickly, and officials decided to detain the increasing numbers in the national stadium. Deportations began. El Salvador complained to the Organization of American States, which was to investigate. This move against Salvadoran nationals was very serious for El Salvador as underpopulated Honduras had long served as an escape valve for densely populated El Salvador.

On July 14, 1969, a Monday, Salvadorian army troops invaded Honduras. Tanks and artillery at El Amatillo, on the Pan American highway, and infantry in the more remote, largely roadless areas along the border north of El Amatillo, crossed the border into Honduras. Most Honduran soldiers killed in the fight were in the El Amatillo area of the border. The PCV living in Langue, near the border, was forced to flee cross country to Tegucigalpa. At the same time as the ground invasion began, the Salvadoran Air Force attacked Choluteca and other targets with their vintage P-51 Mustangs. Toncontin was attacked by a DC-3, dropping bombs out the door that missed the airport totally.

The Honduran Air Force, consisting of WWII U.S. Navy Corsairs, bombed the international airport near San Salvador and hit fuel tanks at an oil refinery near La Union, a port city on the Gulf of Fonseca. There were even dog fights!! Most indications were that the Honduran Air Force was kicking butt while the Army was having a tough time of it. The reason the Honduran AF kicked butt was the relative experience of the pilots. The Hondurans were all SAHSA pilots who flew every day, while the El Sal pilots didn't have a puddle-jump airline to train on.

Curfew and blackouts were imposed in Tegucigalpa on Tuesday night. Where I worked, at the Oficina de Construcciones Escolares, workers sent by the owner of the rented building came to open a brick wall from which they removed rifles and ammunition. Rumors were rampant . . . that the Honduran Army was running low on ammunition, that the 'Guanaco' army was moving freely up the Western Highway, that ammo would be supplied by Somoza in Nicaragua. The Salvadoran propaganda machine boasted of great and glorious victories, that Choluteca had fallen, and on and on. Finally, a cease fire was reached after four days of fighting. The park in Comayagüela near the army's cuartel has a placard dedicated to 206 Honduran soldiers who died in the war.

When the war broke out, Peace Corps informed all volunteers to not travel. Volunteers in the border areas were telegraphed to come to either of the PC offices (San Pedro Sula or Tegus). Some were retrieved by PC staff.

Some time during the following month of August, I went to a comedor near the National Theater for an evening meal. At the table was a recent university graduate who had been to the soccer game in San Salvador. He told me that during the game, he stood-up and yelled "Viva Honduras" and was shot in the neck with a .25 calibre pistol. He showed me the scar and the recovered bullet that had been removed from his vertebra. He also told me of mud and rocks being thrown at cars and buses from Honduras before and after the game.

In early September, the Oficina de Construcciones Escolares y Reparaciones, where I worked, sent me to the Western border regions of Honduras to inspect schools which had been used as barracks by the invading troops of El Salvador. My job was to identify needed repairs due to damages possibly caused by the invading troops. I was selected because half of the area was in the Department of Lempira, near where I had worked before, Candeleria and Gualcince. Walking and mule travel would be required. I bused from Tegus to Nueva Ocotepeque with my backpack. I found a hotel for the night and inspected the school the next morning. Damage was minimal at most of the schools. It amounted to forcing open the locks on the classroom doors in almost all cases. However, a detailed list was required so the needed tools and repair parts could be sent with repair personnel. From there I bused to San Marcos.

In San Marcos, I met an American priest who told me of his war experiences, which included being a prisoner of war. The Salvadoran army, after taking Nueva Ocotepeque, put soldiers into several school buses and proceeded north on the main highway toward Santa Rosa de Copán. However, the Honduran army had prepared an ambush midway up the mountain road several kilometers outside of Nueva Ocotepeque. The buses never got past the ambush location. However, other invading troops had crossed into Honduras outside of the city and had proceeded to San Marcos by trails. In San Marcos they ransacked the church and sacristy. The American priest found a note written in the back of a bible asking for forgiveness and that he had been ordered to destroy things in the sacristy. Two nuns who lived and were working in Nueva Ocotepeque had left and gone to San Marcos. The nuns and priest were taken prisoner and sent under armed guard back to Nueva Ocotepeque. A Salvadoran officer, who spoke English, told the priest privately that he could not guarantee their safety. Once they reached Nuevo Ocotepeque and were within sight of the nuns' home, they asked if they could retrieve some clean clothes and food from their house. All three were allowed to go and once they were out of sight of the soldiers, they just kept walking and went the 12 kilometers to Guatemala on foot. The priest had to re-consecrate the church in San Marcos, because of the atrocities that were committed inside the church. The school there was not damaged.

I caught the afternoon bus from San Marcos to Guarita/San Juan Guarita, found a hotel on the town plaza and inspected the school. About 6 or 7 o'clock, that evening a UN peace keeping observer, I believe a Canadian Army officer, returned to Guarita and went directly to the telegraph office. He had been near the border, but inside Honduras, when his mule was shot out from under him by a Salvadoran sniper. He was furious, as there supposedly was a ceasefire in place, and was sending a telegraph message to his superiors. Townspeople found someone who was walking to Valladolid the next day, who could be my guide in the morning. Valladolid is about 12 kilometers (no road) from Guarita, going down the mountain, fording a stream and back up a mountain. I lucked out and found a horse I could rent a short distance after crossing the stream. The guide told me about houses being mortared in Valladolid. As we entered the small village, I saw three to five houses of just adobe walls and burnt collapsed roof beams. I heard more of the story from a village official in the home where I ate supper. Before the war started, a couple of armed Salvadoran soldiers crossed into Honduras and stole livestock from nearby farmers. Honduran officials sent an army patrol to the area. They ambushed two Salvadoran soldiers on the trail just prior to the start of the war. The next morning I rode by their bodies in army fatigues, two months after they were killed, on my way to La Virtud. The mortaring of the houses was said to be retaliation for the killing of the two soldiers.

In La Virtud, which is just 2 kilometers from the border, I stayed with the people who were distributing relief supplies. The supplies, clothes and food were being flown to La Virtud by helicopter

by US forces of Panama from the airport in Erandique. The organizers of the relief distribution were explicit about me being ready to run with them, immediately and taking nothing with me, should an alert come warning of a Salvadoran attack! I only had one more school in Mapulaca to visit and three more days of travel by mule, horse &/or foot to reach Erandique. I had a ticket to fly back to Tegus from there. I asked if anyone was being flown in or out on the US Army helicopters. I was told to go to the landing spot and ask. The next morning I heard the helicopter arriving and hurried to meet it. The pilots believed my story and 20 minutes later, I was on the ground at the Erandique airport.

I used my last week of vacation in mid-September to visit Guatemala. Upon my return, I proposed to Rosa. We married October 25th and honeymooned in Mexico City on the way to Iowa.

July 2010

A Cast of Thousands ... Comedy of Errors ... It Takes a Village ... Whatever!

News from the Amigos Grant Committee:

Roxanne duBois Cull, San Pedro Sula & Tela 1973-75 ~ University Place, Washington

Once upon a time, there was a nice American man named Dan who occasionally traveled to Honduras to help with amazing medical missions, sponsored by a hospital in Virginia. Over the years, he had crossed paths with Peace Corps Volunteers and had come to respect their dedication and efforts. Eventually he even came to know Trudy the country director herself who lamented that the engineering volunteers often lacked basic equipment.

Imagine the Peace Corps director's delight when Dan contacted her to say that an engineering firm he was familiar with in Virginia offered to donate ten fantastic engineering tripods (and some theodolites—but I won't write about those until I can pronounce it). We have all seen civil engineers using these things. Even we non-engineers know what these big tripods are. In the U.S. the engineer sets up the tripod, hopes he will not be run over by crazy drivers, looks through the gismo thingy to "survey" and then produces amazing reports and incredible blue prints for new roads and things. I don't understand any of it, but as Martha would say, "This is a good thing."

This is especially good for Honduras where they are also used for building community centers, water systems, and well, you get the idea. So, Dan kindly went to the engineering firm, picked up the ten tripods and hauled them home to store in his garage for a few days until the Peace Corps could "come get them." Only the Peace Corps does not "go get" stuff like that.

After some head scratching, Peace Corps Honduras contacted the office of "Special Projects" of the Peace Corps Partnership Program. They did not know how to help either, but they remembered that Amigos de Honduras had helped out with other Peace Corps projects in the past. John Hrivnak sent an email to Amigos asking if we would consider paying for the shipping. His email was dated January 11, 2010. "How much?" was my first (and I felt very logical) question. They had no idea what that would cost. No one did. We all love the Peace Corps and Honduras but not even Amigos sends out blank checks.

I called the U.S. Postal Service. Nice folks, no help. Funny that they don't handle any large packages to Honduras now … something about "No vale la pena" or something like that. Meanwhile, Dan was sending cheerful emails just reminding me that these not so small tripods, ten to be exact, are still in his garage… So I contacted an old friend, Terry Grassman Martin (RPCV San Pedro Sula 1973-75) who lives near D.C. and she zealously offered to help … until she was literally snowed in by the crazy winter storms and at first thaw had to leave for a long planned trip to Africa. But her cheery self and encouragement was a bonus in this saga.

Over the phone I introduced myself and our dilemma to Roul, at a Federal Express store near D.C. that handles international packages (thank you God or Al Gore or whoever personally gave me access to the Internet!). Roul, in a thick Indian accent, patiently explained that he could not give me a quote for the shipping since he could not weigh something that he could not see, that was indeed miles away in someone's garage. Oh, that. The owner of the garage was now out of town, but that was ok, I needed a few days break on the emails and phone calls anyway.

An engineering firm here in my own stomping ground near Seattle (did I mention that I live about 3000 miles from Virginia, the tripod state?) enlightened me a bit on size and weights of these tripods and eventually I was able to get a general shipping quote. After more emails contacting the Amigos Grant Committee members, we were able to vote and approve the $600 shipping quote. But who would pack the tripods and get them to the shipping folks? More emails, more contacts. Shrink-wrapping is something I hate dealing with, but evidently that is the only way to send tripods to other countries these days. One never knows when you might be glad to have this kind of information.

For a bit extra, Roul offered to shrink-wrap our tripods. Worked for me. When that was resolved, a few other people got involved to help organize getting these shipped through the Embassy to Honduras.

Only the Embassy does not take big packages anymore. Not even very carefully shrink-wrapped ones.

So they gave us an address. St. Dan (as I now refer to him) hauled the tripods himself to be shrink-wrapped and shipped to an address that was given to Peace Corps Honduras for shipping. Whew, job done.

However, "The tripods arrived" thank you note never came from Honduras. That was because the tripods did not end up in Honduras; the shipping address was incorrect. Eventually, they were tracked down in storage somewhere on the East Coast, were retrieved, and for another couple of hundred dollars (sorry folks I made that unilateral decision, so fire me), were shipped to a correct address in Honduras.

Eight hundred dollars, about 100 emails across many international borders, several phone calls, Roul, and more than four months later, Amigos received the following email from the director of Peace Corps Honduras:

"We received the tripods! Thank you for all your help in getting them to us. The Volunteers will put them to good use. Gracias, Trudy Jaycox"

No problem. No problem at all. We are, after all, Amigos. I just wonder though if they are still wading through all through that shrink-wrap.

Peace,
Roxanne Cull
Chair, Amigos Grant Committee
rcull@nwrain.com

A Little PCV History

"Banana Blossom" was the generic name for the Peace Corps Folk Festival Maggie McQuaid organized in 1977 and 1978. Paul Dulin kept the tradition going, and they ran for about 5 years into the 80's. Held in the back yard of the PC office in Tegucigalpa, it was predominantly folk music. A couple of older PCVs would invariably get up and recite poetry. Paul Dulin, doing his Juanie Dinero schtick, emcee'd two Banana Blossoms, and PC Director Frank Almaguer emcee'd another, doing jokes written by his wife, Antoinette. Ambassador Mari Luci Jaramillo and her husband Heriberto were invited to BB#3 - she laughed all the way through, and he was pulled up and made to be the straight man in an act with four *voluntarias* who tap-danced.

Hurricane Fifi, September 1974

In September 1974, a strong tropical wave developed off the west coast of Africa, moved across the Atlantic and into the Caribbean as a tropical depression. Near Jamaica it intensified into a tropical storm, and they called it Fifi, the sixth named storm of that hurricane season. It was not a particularly fast-moving storm as it moved west, generating circular windspeed until it became a hurricane. As it approached Central America, it rather crawled along the Honduran coast from east to west without the eye of the storm ever leaving the ocean and coming in over the mainland. It was not a particularly windy hurricane, a Category 2 storm on a scale of 5, with winds estimated to max out at 110 miles an hour. But what Fifi lacked in speed or windiness, it made up for in size, at 300 miles in diameter a larger than average hurricane, pushing a huge amount of rain-filled clouds ahead of it. As the slowly moving storm drenched Honduras, the steep hills and mountains, ravaged by slash and burn *campesinos*, could only soak up so many inches of rainwater. After that, every drop ran off the saturated surface down into the valleys below. 24 inches of rain in 24 hours at one measuring station. Twenty years later, U.S. AID estimated 12,500 Hondurans died in Fifi's floodwaters, ranking it in some accounts the fourth deadliest Atlantic hurricane on record. Almost every bridge on the north coast was destroyed. The name, Fifi, was permanently retired from the list of names of hurricanes, never to be used again

Most Peace Corps Volunteers in the north half of the country went to work in relief efforts: almost everyone wanted to help, and for many, their regular Peace Corps assignments no longer existed as their host country agencies shut down, schools closed for many months, and normal life ceased for a while. PCVs from neighboring countries were offered the opportunity to go to Honduras to help with short-term relief work.

PCVs from that era were asked . . .

> Where were you living and what work were you doing before the hurricane? what was the day or two of the storm like for you and your neighbors? what did you do in the days immediately following the storm? what did you do in the next one to six months? what were the impacts of the storm on the people and infrastructure of the community in which you lived and worked?

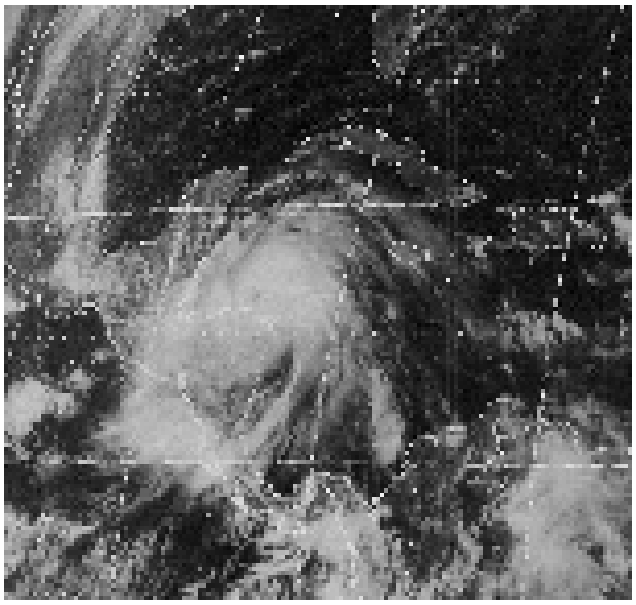
This issue of the Amigos newsletter features the stories of nine Volunteers. Their memories begin on page 7.

November 2010

Hurricane Fifi in Tela

Elise Barrett, Tela, Atlántida; Goascorán, Valle; Pespire, Choluteca; Tegucigalpa 1974-79 ~ Tucson, Arizona

Hurricane Fifi, what an absolutely silly name, I thought when I first heard it. I grew up in Minnesota and knew nothing about hurricanes and the weather they bring. Co-workers, neighbors and other PCVs in the area were talking about the coming hurricane. We listened to Radio Belize for reports. The weather had been overcast and rainy for several days, for me a relief from the hot, humidity of August when I first arrived as a new volunteer in Tela. There were several volunteers in the Tela area, including my engineer roommate, Bob Rivard from Connecticut. Two other volunteers assigned to a small village, Triúnfo de la Cruz, just seven kilometers from Tela. And weekend visitors almost every week. The Sunday before it hit some visitors and I met some British officers who had just docked at the Tela wharf in a small merchant ship from England. What fun it was to meet two young officers, to hear their story and share our Peace Corps experiences. We made plans to meet with them later in the week, but even that Sunday night visit was cut short, as they were called back to the ship. We didn't find out until much later that they had to leave the wharf and weather the hurricane out to sea. Simon Baker, the first mate, wrote me a letter several months later.



The day before the evening the hurricane hit the north coast the hardest, a roaming, *parlante*-truck was urging citizens to go to higher ground at the only three-story building in downtown Tela. Dances were held on the third floor. It was one large, football-sized ballroom with a wood floor and rickety outside stairs. I had been there for dances and it didn't seem like a safe place to me. My PCV roommate didn't know what we should do either. The volunteers Bob and Casey from Triúnfo said they would stay in their Peace Corps built house in that Garifuno village. A neighbor, Julio Flores, social promoter with the Junta Nacional de Biénestar Social, the agency Bob Rivard and I worked for, was staying in his two-story home. He only lived a block away from us. Doña Olga, our laundress, lived across the street on the second floor of a two-story building. We all lived within two-blocks of the nice part of Tela beach, between the beach bars and the two-story pension on the east side of town. Finally, it was Doña Olga's wisdom that had us stay put in our two-bedroom apartment. She told us first, that everything was God's will and that if we needed to we could cross the street to her second-story house and stay with her.

So, we stayed up most of the night listening to Radio Belize as much as we could, looking out our doors and windows front and back. We couldn't really see much in the back except the dark night that faced the beach and from the front only the pouring rain, slanted with strong winds in the corner street light. I fell asleep about two or three in the morning not knowing what might happen. I felt secure in the apartment. We made it though the night. In the morning the tide was higher than usual and the ocean and sky were one blue-gray color. I went to the Junta office and heard the news of the floods and devastation caused both north and south of Tela where rivers had overflowed their banks, and torn away the bridges north and south of town. Fresh *leche Sula* was sorely missed as we were landlocked in Tela for six months.

Probably about 24 hours later a marine or army helicopter came to check on the Volunteers in the area. My mother received a phone call I was okay. I went to the Junta office everyday but couldn't do much until the clothing bundles came. Then I helped sort clothes we received in the huge bundles from world relief agencies. I remember thinking how inappropriate the clothing sizes and choices were for this tropical climate. We didn't know what to do with men's extra large wool suit coats and pants.

Eventually, programs started up again and I was assigned to a new area west of town.

Fifi on Roatan

Joe & Cristina Kessler, Roatan, Islas Bahia 1973-75 ~ St. Johns, Virgin Islands

September 17, 1974, was definitely a case of "ignorance is bliss." We were sitting in our little wooden house on stilts, 50 feet from the sea in Punta Gorda, Roatan, listening to Radio Belize say, "Watch out, Bay Islands, you are about to be hit by Hurricane Fifi, the worst in 100 years. Close all windows on the side the wind is coming from, and open one on the opposite side. When it gets calm, don't go outside because that is the eye, and the winds will start again from the opposite direction. Close that window and open one on the other side. Get your drinking water and food organized."

And so we spent the day preparing with the villagers, pulling dories far up on the beach, tying down loose objects like all the lumber and roofing sheets under our house for the school we were building. When the storm came it was unbelievable. For the first few hours we played Crazy Eights by hurricane lanterns. Soon though, the raging chaos of wind and waves and snapping trees was too much to ignore and we huddled in our bedroom. The screech of nails being ripped from the wood on the roof of the little shop next door was one of the eeriest sounds we have ever heard.

Fourteen hours later morning light revealed a village with downed trees, several around our house but none on it. Most of the mud kitchens had taken a hard hit, and the shop next door was roofless. Wooden canoes were tossed around like toys, but given the intensity and longevity of the storm the village looked pretty good. A boy was born, who must still be embarrassed because they named him "Fifi."

The village immediately got to work, helping one another clean up and resume life. Within days the village was back to normal and, other than the piles of debris here and there, it looked as it had before.

Two days after the storm we walked a few miles to Oakridge, the nearest town with a telegraph office, to send a message to PC/Tegucigalpa, but the telegraph office had been blown into the sea. So we shrugged and went back to Punta Gorda. Oblivious to the devastation on the mainland, we decided to get back to work.

It wasn't long before we were back to building the school. About two weeks after the storm some kids came running to the school site shouting, "They come for you. They come for you!" We went out to the beach where a British Army helicopter had landed. They verified we were Joe and Cristina, PCVs, then handed us our hurricane relief supplies - $50 and a bottle of whiskey.

Little did we know that we were the last two Volunteers to be accounted for. Our parents had been in distress and anxiously awaiting news of our survival. On the 10th day our names were released to ABC, NBC and CBS, including the *NY Times*, as the only two Volunteers still missing in action - ratcheting up our parents' anxiety to even higher levels. On the 11th day they were notified that we were both safe and sound in Punta Gorda.

Shortly afterward Cristina received a telegram, delivered by Ponta, the one-armed postman on horseback. He had received it from a truck from Coxen Hole, about 20 miles away. The telegram told her to report to the PC office in Tegucigalpa as soon as possible. So she dutifully packed her bag and headed off to the capital. When she arrived there Ana Rosa de Ortiz asked her, "Where is Joe? Didn't he get his telegram too?" (I still wonder to this day why they didn't send one telegram to both of us …)

We were being called in for shots, and after Cristina got hers she headed out with a volunteer leader, Sue Overland to check on Volunteers along the coast. The devastation was over-whelming, a by-product of flooding and landslides from the torrential rains. It was a sobering trip that involved rock slides, river crossings and a UFO - but that's a whole different story.

November 2010

Fifi on the North Coast

Steve Weber, San Pedro Sula, Cortés 1973-75 ~ Santa Barbara, California

I vaguely remember you asking for some comments about Hurricane Fifi. So under the disclaimer of having had impaired faculties due to heavy consumption of *Salva Vida*, and not being willing to swear as to the indisputable accuracy of my memories, I think I recall the following:

Hurricane Fifi was the biggest event to come along during the two years I spent in Honduras. The fact that a poor country, already well behind the "eight ball" in just about any category you would care to choose, had a killer storm show up and destroy most of the North Coast, was impossible to comprehend. The part I remember was the rain - the first time I understood the meaning of the word "monsoon." It rained and rained. Hard. When it was done raining, and the rivers had flowed all over the place, and the mudslides and the wind had finished up, the place - from Puerto Cortés, to SPS, to El Progreso, to Tela, to La Ceiba, etc., was trashed.

The real impact was apparent when I started to help with CARE and we'd drive from SPS towards Cortés or El Progreso. Roads, bridges, homes, and agricultural lands were all reshaped or bent out of shape permanently.

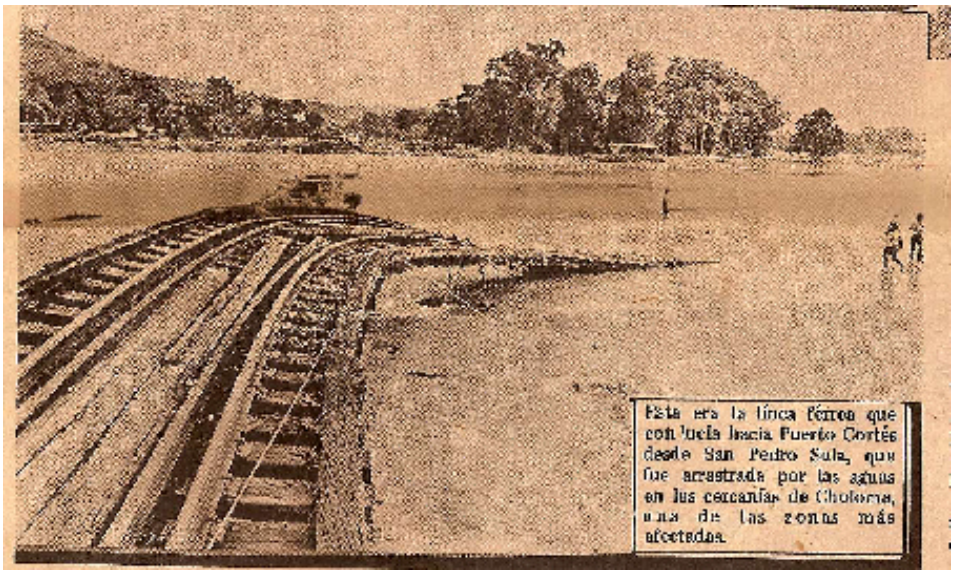
The simple explanation and/or plea for some sort of relief from any victim was: Fifi. For months to come, that word "Fifi" summed it all up - a big mess and loss to lots of people in one way or another.

I remember going out to an *aldea* near the Cortés River and seeing what I thought was perhaps some new *lamina* laid out on the soil in a checkerboard type pattern. Someone then told me that those were the rooftops of the places that had been buried by the mud from the river during the hurricane and that we were probably walking in a cemetery.

And then there was the Tocoa story, part of the relief effort, and here's what happened.

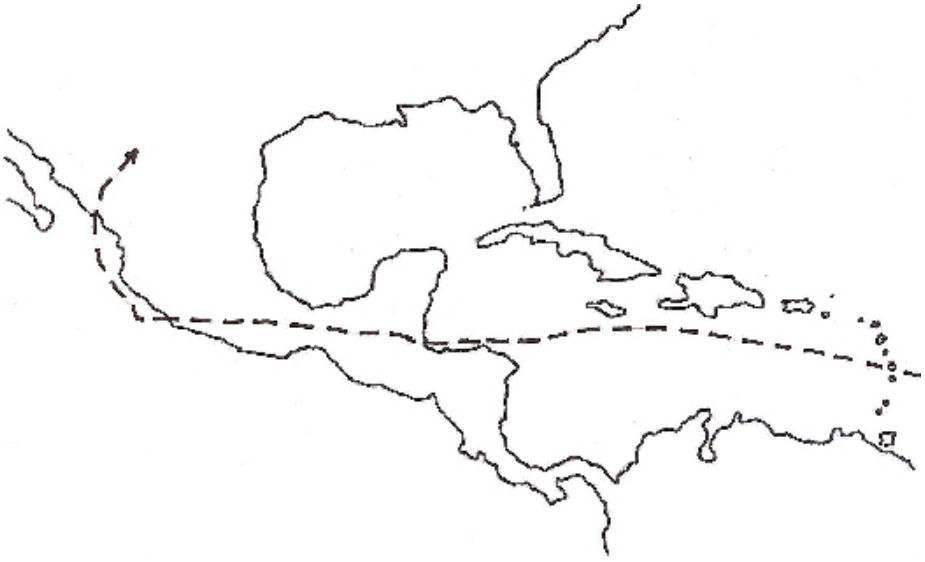
When I was helping out with CARE, they asked for someone to deliver a brand new GMC pick-up truck from La Ceiba to Tocoa. Smelling an easy job, I quickly volunteered. An added bonus was that I got a free ride in a private jet from San Pedro to La Ceiba (I was only included because the pilots wanted to hit on Donna Driscoll and impress her). They took us on a fly around the North Coast to show us all the carnage from the hurricane, from the air it was amazing to see how much had been wiped out. Disaster movie scenes everywhere.

In La Ceiba I went to the CARE office about 10:00 am and got the new 4-wheel drive truck. It was a beauty and still had that new car smell. I was told to deliver it that afternoon, a 4-6 hour drive, and what route to take. Everything was right with the world and off I went, until . . . until I pulled up to the bridge crossing at the Río Aguan - the bridge that was no longer there. Instead there was a line-up of vehicles waiting to be loaded, one at a time, on a small wooden ferry/raft set up, pulled by ropes from each side, that looked like something out of Huck Finn. The river was still flowing at a good clip and the whole process was extremely slow and precarious.



In line in front of me were about four Honduran Army trucks escorting a donated truck from *Alemania* called a "Uni-Mog." To this day, I have no idea what purpose in life it has, but it's big, looks like a cross between a garbage truck and a fire truck, and can perform all sorts of neat tricks, kind of like a kid's transformer toy. It too, was brand new and shiny and was next up to be loaded on Mark Twain's raft. Bad idea. It drove out on the raft, seemed level and ready to go, but as they started to pull the ropes from the other side it immediately listed to one side and was headed for a rollover into the river. The army lieutenant in charge, *"El teniente,"* flew into an

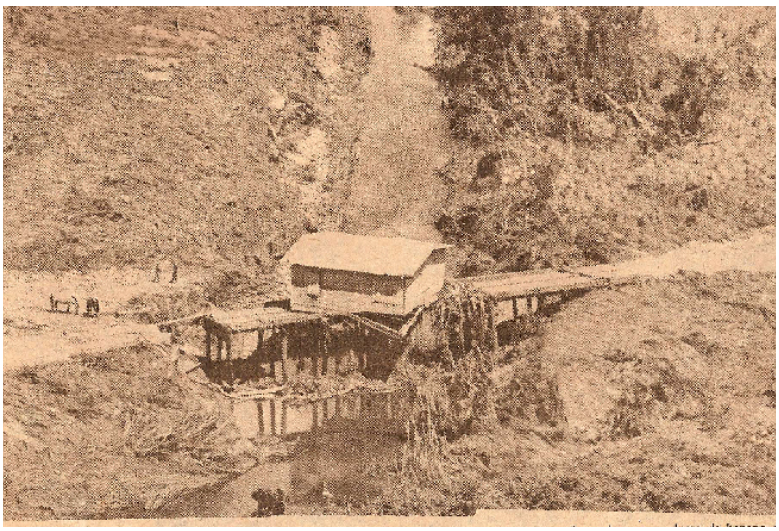
September 13 - 24, 1974



There was another unique oddity about Fifi. After passing by Honduras and going ashore in southern Belize, the winds decreased in intensity as it crossed southern Mexico. But the tropical storm kept going, crossed into the Pacific Ocean, where, refueled by the warm waters, it regained hurricane strength, was re-named Hurricane Orlene, and it curved northward to strike Mazatlan and dissipate in the Sierra Madre.

incredible frenzy on the river bank that is hard to describe. He was yelling and screaming at all of the "*campesino/damnificado* bystanders" to get ropes or whatever and save the f...ing Uni-Mog, or else. No doubt his next assignment on the Salvadoran border was flashing before his eyes. The driver in the Uni-Mog was scared shitless and frozen. Luckily the Mog had a rear steel winch cable that they were able to get to, tie around a tree, and use to pull it up the bank and save the $100,000 Mog. *Muchos abrazos* all around. The raft destroyed, some of it already floating away downriver.

The now "heroic *teniente*" approached me and asked me what I was doing there. I think he was worried I was someone important who was going to rat him out to his superiors. I told him I was a harmless PCV and he invited me to join him in a convoy to the next bridge crossing about 15-20 miles downriver. This was to take about 3-4 hours following the cart path along the river that the *campesinos* used. Alas 3-4 hours turned into 4-5 days of Jungle Hell. The path soon disappeared and with the Uni-Mog leading the way and commandeered *campesinos* with machetes, we hacked, slogged, and winched our way to that elusive next bridge. A couple of days we only made about a mile. Pure suffering - rain, mud, mosquitoes, snakes, Honduras at its best. Sleep deprived, and with the new truck trashed and dented from being winched around for four days, we finally made it to Tocoa. The CARE rep was astounded to see the "brand new GMC truck" he had been promised. It was new no more and neither was the Uni-Mog for that matter. The truck didn't smell so nice anymore either.



I don't know how the Army Lieutenant fared, but when I returned to La Ceiba, I was told it was thought I had stolen the truck or been the victim of some accident and they were on the verge of ordering an aerial search and checking the borders to see if I was on my way home in The Truck. Hmmn - shoulda, woulda, coulda. My days with CARE were numbered after that. Anyway, *"Que Dios le bendiga El Uni-Mog y El teniente."*

The positive thing about Fifi was the international relief aid that showed up at the San Pedro Sula airport. It took awhile, but it was an impressive sight to see and I think most of it was distributed as best as possible, and not just swallowed up by the government. I also recall lots of heroic efforts by PCVs and others for an extended period of time following the disaster and that's been a good lasting memory of my PC days.

¡Viva Honduras!

More North Coast Stories

Erik Johansen, La Ceiba, Atlántida 1973-75 ~ Camarillo, California

Fifi was scheduled to pass over La Ceiba at about 6:00am that morning. So, Scott Richards and I, being from Southern California and not having a clue what that might mean, had an early breakfast (the last meal we had that day as I recall), and walked down to the end of the Standard Fruit Co. wharf to meet Fifi head on. The waves (wait…there aren't any waves in the Caribbean, are there? At least not in La Ceiba) were breaking just under the bottom of the pier and rocking the pilings. No wind, yet, but Scott and I decided that it would be prudent to get the fuck out of there. So we did. Good thing the forecast update had Fifi arriving later that night, around midnight.

We reported in at the *Centro Comunal* where we were working. I remember attending a meeting of some of the community leaders, and they developed a plan to help evacuate those folks living on the beach and on the banks of the Cangrejal River to the east of town. We spent the rest of the day doing that - trying to convince people that this was serious weather coming. Problem was that a few years prior to this, there had been a threat of another hurricane, and nothing really happened. Most thought it was another false alarm. I remember talking to one man who had a plot of land on the edge of the river. It was fenced in with a cow and a horse. The house was in the middle of the property about 100 yards from the river - a wife and several children as well. I talked with the guy, trying to warn him of the pending danger to him and his family. We had an evacuation center set up at a local school and that he should go there with his family. He told me that there was no way they were leaving, actually accusing me of trying to get him out of there so I could steal his livestock. Bad move. A day or two later I went by to check up on him. His livestock was gone, his house was gone… the entire property had been washed away. There was never again any sign of him or any of his family.

We went down to the mouth of the river where a group of fishermen had set up a small community across the river from town. A few over 50 families lived there. They had begun crossing folks across the river by *kayuco* earlier in the day. They were fishermen and knew something really bad was coming. They got out all but a handful of fishermen. They had just built a cement block schoolhouse, and those left behind spent the night floating in their *kayucos* in the rafters inside the building. They survived. The entire community survived. The only building left standing was the schoolhouse. The rest was empty beach the next morning.

Stuff like that was going on all over town. Scott and I were pretty beat, so we decided to get a *Salva Vida* and head back to our house. The *Chafas* chased us out of the only bar left open at about 10:00pm, so we went back home. The wind had really picked up by then and it was raining hard, but nothing compared to what was coming.

At about midnight, all hell broke loose, and many of our neighbors started knocking on our door for refuge. Our house was built on posts, about eight feet above ground. Those around us were not as fortunate, and their houses were beginning to fill with water. We all huddled around our front room wondering if this was it. The house was swaying as the winds pummeled us first from the east, then an amazingly peaceful calm, then again from the west. The eye had passed right over the top of us.

Things gradually started to calm down, and by dawn, it was, essentially, over. I went outside to take inventory. Our house was at least 1 ½ miles from the river, yet there had been at least three feet of water under the house the night before. Most of the flooding had subsided by morning. Trees had been sheared off at the trunk, and I'm talking big trees. The electric post just outside our front door was also sheared off at the base and was dangling by the few wires still there.

Things were pretty gruesome in town. Sink holes in a few neighborhoods that took up an entire intersection. The highway out of La Ceiba was completely destroyed. Huge concrete sections of the two main bridges leading towards Tela were washed hundreds of yards down river, one propped up against a felled tree. Amazing forces at work.

The school where we had helped send people had filled with water, and many there had drowned. That was hard to take.

I spent the next several days working with both the *Centro Comunal* people and the people from CARITAS, a Catholic organization, as well as with the *Cruz Roja*. I was able to find a ham radio operator with a portable generator who contacted someone in Texas with my parent's phone number, and he passed along the message I was OK. It had been four days and our families had no idea if we had survived or not. My Dad took the call, thanked the gentleman, hung up the phone and started crying in front of Mom and my sister. They immediately called Scott's family to let them know he was OK. Four days later they got a call from the Peace Corps in

Remembering Fifi

Cookie Rocklin Izaguirre, La Esperanza, Intibucá 1973-75 - Tegucigalpa

When Fifi hit Honduras, I was a PCV in the Health Sector, 1973-75, assigned to La Esperanza, Intibucá. I am currently an expatriate, still in Honduras. My two year assignment has stretched to nearly 40! My work with the Junta Nacional de Bienestar Social centered around working with community groups, mainly *Clubes de Amas de Casa* and *Patronatos*. Back then, grassroots development involved working in the aldeas and organizing the first community groups. We worked with a consultant from the UN and learned from him, then duplicated the work in the *aldeas*. Many members of those first groups and their offspring now own their own land, grow potatoes and organic coffee and send their kids to school, colegio and even the University. Yes, development works, although it isn't fast or easy; those seeds you plant do bear fruit. You may plant an apple seed, and it may grow into an avocado tree, but it bears fruit!

La Esperanza was not directly hit by Fifi. However it rained, and rained and rained. The image that has stayed with me is huddling in the park with the rest of the normal people, and watching a wedding party of the rich and famous (a Lopez Arellano bride) as it left the church after the wedding. I got such a kick from those beautiful women leaving the church with their minks and gowns trailing through the mud!

Well, no emergency plan for PC/H in those days. But at some point, I was assigned to El Progreso to work in a Primary School that had been converted into a shelter. Work of course, was mainly in organizing the women to prepare food for the families there. We had lots of those odd flours that USAID and the UN loved to distribute, cooking oil, and treats like American Cheese and all kinds of canned foods donated by people from all over the world. And, of course, what people wanted to eat was tortillas, Honduran red beans, rice and eggs!

After the storm and for many, many years, people asking for handouts used the phrase, "Dame Fifi, regálame Fifi!" Unfortunately, as Honduras advanced through the decades, the environment and poorly constructed infrastructure weakened the country's the ability to withstand natural disasters: Mitch really slammed us, and the capacity to respond was not at all up to the task. However, in the intervening years, from Mitch to the present, and also, I believe, as a result of the early grassroots work, and input from so many of you RPCVs, in recent years, Honduras is now very well organized, with proactive plans and groups at all levels who know what to do before, during and after disaster strikes.

Washington. Typical.

One cool thing did happen. I was out at the airport, helping organize the amazing amount of relief goods coming in from communities all over the U.S. (we were the first, of course, to respond with relief) and trying to keep the Honduran Army from ripping off anything they could get their hands on. A U.S. Army helicopter was being loaded up with boxes of food and clothing on one side of the runway. The pilot came to me and asked if I was familiar with the coastal area. Scott and I had done all our work in the area and knew it well, so I was loaded up as a guide to point out and name the small villages (mostly Moreno towns like Sambo Creek) between La Ceiba and Trujillo. They were trying to get their bearings before starting to deliver relief to those outlying areas. It was the coolest flight I have ever been on, until one of the side doors blew off and my feet were getting sucked out the door while I'm hanging on to the bulkhead for dear life. They decided to put down in Rio Esteban, a town where Scott and I had spent a lot of time working with a group of fishermen there. They asked if I thought the people there could use the supplies they were carrying on board. Of course! We circled the town twice, then landed in the soccer field. I walked out of the chopper (the locals referred to it as the *zancudo grande*). I am sure it was the first time they had ever seen a helicopter. I was a hero from that day forward. There had been some damage to some of the buildings, the old schoolhouse in particular, but no loss of life. The town worked out a plan to distribute the goods, and the Army returned later to pick me up. Not a bad day, considering all the bad ones that had preceded that.

Scott and I, as well as Jim Lengerich and Scott's girlfriend, Donna Driscoll, as well as several other Volunteers from other parts of Honduras and Guatemala began relief work through USAID funds and CARE. We helped distribute tools, building materials, seeds, etc., to help folks get back to living a normal life. Scott spent some time in Trujillo and in Santa Rosa on the edge of the Moskitia coast doing some cool work through CARE. Jan Johnson and I got a boat building project going in La Ceiba to help the local fishermen get back to fishing, and it was a pretty successful project. We were able to help several groups beyond the Ceiba group. One downside. The first boat we made sunk when we launched it. Actually, Jan and I knew it would fill with water because the planks it was made from needed to swell from the water first. It was funny to see the guys frantically bailing (they were in about 2 feet of water). Everyone got a good laugh out of it once we explained what had happened. Funny, though. After that, no one seemed too excited about taking that particular skiff out to fish.

Atlantic Ocean, September 1974

Terry Grassman Martin, Capules, Cortés 1973-75 ~ Chevy Chase, Maryland

Before Thursday, September 19, 1974, I was living with friends in a cinderblock house in Colonia Ideal, a suburb of San Pedro Sula, working as a Peace Corps Teacher Trainer in Capules. After Hurricane Fifi struck along the north coast of Honduras wrecking havoc from Trujillo to Cuyamel I got involved in the relief effort.

In San Pedro Sula it rained and it rained and it rained, not just on the 18th and 19th, but for many weeks after Fifi exited Honduras intent on causing damage further north in Belize and Mexico. We got the rains, the mountains got the mud slides with flash floods down old dry riverbeds and the valleys got the flooding. Nothing was dry and the loss of life was catastrophic. It was planting season and the crops couldn't go in.

In Fifi's wake there was death and destruction with an estimated 8 to 10 thousand fatalities. Chaos was in charge in the first days after the hurricane struck. It was hard to know where to start with a relief effort as the damage was so extensive. It also was impossible to know who was in charge. By Saturday the U.S. sent in helicopters, personnel and supplies from Panama and the British did the same from Belize. They jerry rigged a communications center and I finally got a call home on Tuesday, the 24th. The Peace Corps had phoned my home and all other Volunteers' homes to let our parents know we were safe, but there is no substitute for hearing your child's voice.

I stumbled around trying to find a useful spot for myself and ended up with Caritas in Choloma, spending my first two days on collecting data before any food was given to the people. I think I was a little annoyed by the slowness of getting food into the hands of the hungry. I, with my elementary education degree, flew in a helicopter with a medical friend over flattened banana plantations and flooded plains to assist in the delivery of a baby in El Progreso. The poor woman had been in labor for more than five days. That the mother and baby, who when she finally came, came with a whoosh, both survived was a miracle.

A funny story shared with me by a helicopter crew came out of this period. The flooding made it hard for the helicopters to land in many of the areas, so often in the first weeks the crew would drop relief supplies in areas where they could see stranded people. Later when it dried enough that the helicopters could land some of the *campesinos* complained to the crew about the quality of the tobacco and cigarette paper they'd received. It was in the areas where the British had been dropping tea and toilet paper along with the corn and rice and beans.

Within weeks I found myself working for Caritas on a Food for Work Program in Omoa with fellow PCVs Victor Latham and Ray Baum. I don't really remember the progression of events that got us there, but I do remember it was an area that truly needed help. We lived in an old building that had at least 2 rooms upstairs for sleeping, one for women, one for men. There were few beds, with people sleeping 4 or more to a double bed, 2 or more to a single or on the floor. I think as a *gringa* I was usually afforded a single bed.

For awhile we took turns preparing the evening meal. We, along with everyone else, survived on donations from other Latin American countries and the U.S. I particularly remember wonderful boxes of frozen beef that would occasionally show up from Costa Rica. We would distribute it to the surrounding villages that we worked with, keeping one box for Omoa. We could have fresh meat the first night, but after that the meat was cut into thin strips and hung on clothes lines to dry to make jerky – otherwise it would spoil, as we had no electricity. I don't know if the flies were instrumental in making the jerky, but they sure did hang around the meat while it was in the drying process. Vic decided to become a vegetarian. I also remember preparing dinner one evening using boxed saffron rice which I thought would be a nice change from the usual white rice. Not! The Hondurans kept looking around and finally asked me where the rice was. I pointed to the yellow colored rice they were eating. Yes, but they needed rice with their meal. Rice has to be white as I learned that evening.

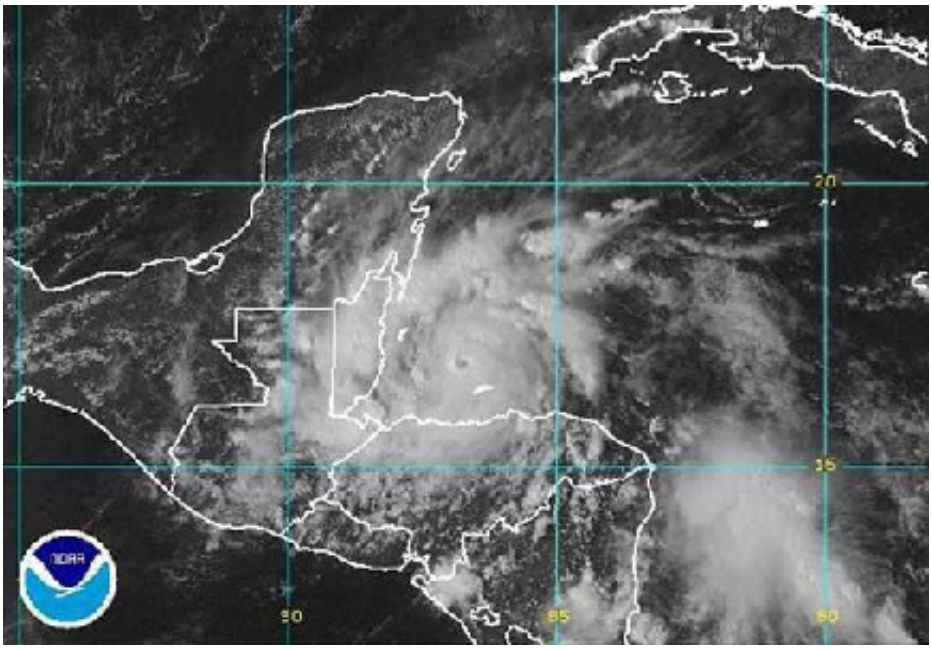
A huge room inside the Fortaleza was used to receive and sort clothing and then villagers were allowed in to pick from the offerings. Many of the clothes came from the U.S. It was sometime hilarious to see these little *campesinos* trying on large American men's pants. They would pull out from the waist to show that another one or two of them could fit in there with them. Walking down the road you would see one *campesino* reach over and pull out the tag on a friend's shirt, pretending to read it, then say "marka Fifi." Death, destruction and a little humor were all present.

Sometime after I arrived in Omoa I met a man who had been the communications specialist before the hurricane. The night of the hurricane he was at his home located on the Main Street of Omoa down near the Fort. Early eve-

ning he stepped outside and found some little water coming down the street. A couple hours later he stepped out again. Now water was rushing down the street and up to his knees. He went back in and told his wife they needed to leave. She gathered up some of her clothes and he packed up his telegraph machine and other items necessary to his work or special to him. He put these possessions into a bundle, grabbed a flashlight and stepped out the door with his wife. In less than half an hour the water had risen above his waist and continued to rise as he and his wife pushed their way towards higher ground at the top of the street. There were dead cows and dogs and other bodies coming towards them in this newly created raging river. With his wife in front of him and the bundle over his shoulder the telegraph man was making slow but steady progress towards higher ground. He was thankful he'd thought to bring the flashlight, at least until as a large tree was swiftly moving past them the light caught a snake scared and angry striking out in all directions. His wife screamed and went under the water. To save her he dropped the precious bundle and the flashlight. By the time the couple got to the higher end of Main Street they were exhausted and sure they where going to die with nowhere to go and water still rushing at them. On the corner there was a two story building with doors on the second floor which opened onto Main Street. There were people on that second floor who put down a rope and pulled the couple to safety.

By the end of November I had turned the Caritas Food for Work program over to Alma Rapalo and under the direction of Jim Nash I had taken on the responsibility of getting a CARE housing reconstruction and agricultural program started in the Omoa – Cuyamel corridor from the sea to the top of the mountains. CARE issued me a beautiful green and white Ford truck to drive. Boy did that make me happy!

To get to Omoa I had to cross a couple of rivers and the first one was particularly swollen and fast moving. My beautiful truck stopped right in the middle and wouldn't budge. Water started coming in around my feet. *Campesinos*, when they stopped laughing got the *bomberos* to drag my sorry wet truck out of the River. When Jim Nash heard about the incident he suggested I might like to switch places with the guy who was doing the same project in the Puerto Cortes area with no rivers to cross. We talked a little about male chauvinists and then there was no more mention of moving me from Omoa. Jim and I actually became very good friends.



The first thing I needed to do was find a building that would lock and was big enough to warehouse seeds, farming implements and tin *laminas* used for roofing the houses. I found a really nice building and then the offer was rescinded so I had to look again. Eventually I got what I needed. To get a handle on the number of villages and villagers who would benefit from the program I used information gathered while working for Caritas as well as information the Honduran Army had been collecting. Dealing with individuals would be a nightmare so I asked each village to name representatives so I could reconnoiter and distribute to one village at a time rather than one person at a time. Word of the CARE program was spread by the Army, other volunteer organizations working in the area, word of mouth, and through my contact with various priests in the area. Volunteers helped me in stocking of the warehouse and distribution of the materials. An annoying problem was the continual disappearance of the files used to sharpen machetes. They were small and they seemed to grow legs and crawl away on their own volition.

I suppose there were about 90 villages and hamlets which benefited from the CARE program in my area. One of my tasks was to include the construction of latrines along with the houses. If the family was willing to dig a latrine, I gave them an extra *lamina* for the roof. I remember talking to a couple of guys about the program. They were in from some tiny hamlet way up in the mountains having heard someone was giving something. I told them that I would need a list of all the families in their community and needed to know who had lost their homes. Every family could get the farming implements and those who had lost their houses could

get the roofing materials. I said that any family willing to dig a latrine could get an extra *lamina* to roof the latrine. They looked at each other and said, "*¿latrina*?". They had absolutely no idea what I was talking about. I did not give them the *latrina lamina*. Even so, I did get quite a few latrines built throughout the area. It was one of my little successes.

At some point around Christmas, some nurses from Save the Children moved to Omoa and began working on health issues in the area. I moved into a house with them. I mention this because part of my job was to verify the information that villages were bringing to me about the extent of the damages. One predawn morning I met representatives from an area high up in the mountains. They had a very trusty mule for me to accompany them back up a very muddy steep trail. We spent the day going from one little hut to another arriving back at my truck at dusk. My wonderful traveling companions handed me a chicken when I dismounted. I assured them that I did not want a chicken and they should take it back up the mountain. They insisted, so finally I politely thanked them and took the chicken home to my roommates who wanted to know what I intended to do with the poor thing which had hung upside down for who knows how many of the hours we traipsed around the mountains. The chicken was just starting to come around when I suggested we'd eat it for dinner the following evening. My roommates thought that an awful idea so I said if the chicken laid an egg we'd keep her and if not we'd eat her. I stuck her in a box in a closet and went to bed. Next morning when I opened the closet there was an egg in the box with the chicken. It was an ill formed egg with no shell, but it was an egg. We kept the chicken, named her Henrietta, and she went on to lay many fine eggs, some of which we ate, and we raised many little chicks. When I left Omoa I gave Henrietta and her chicks to a local family with the understanding that they couldn't eat her.

As if filling the warehouse, confirming the losses, distributing the materials and following up on any reports of misuse wasn't enough, I got involved in helping getting the reconstruction of the water system in Cuyamel approved and underway. On a very dark and moonless night I was headed home from a meeting in Cuyamel with a passenger, Oscar. Too late I realized I had not turned off the road down a bank into one of several

dry riverbeds which during the hurricane and after was a roaring raging river that in one case took out a whole hamlet of houses and people minus one old lady along with domestic and wild animals, trees, and anything else in it's path to the sea including the highway. I felt the front right tire drop where the road ended and only air existed. My first thought was that I was not going to die. I held onto the steering wheel and leaned in and down (remember this was before seatbelts and airbags). We hit on the corner of the passenger's side of the roof and then we rolled several times coming to rest on the wheels. I couldn't get my door open so crawled out the window. I don't know how long it took, but by the time I got around to Oscar and got him out there were *campesinos* offering help. I have no idea where they came from, but I was certainly thankful for their presence. Oscar had a gash in his leg and on his head, which was bleeding quite a bit. I asked for water and some clean cloth so we could see how serious the wounds were. I don't know how they did it, but within a very short while they had a whole washtub full of clean water along with clean rags. It was a miracle.

A second miracle followed in the form of a jeep heading to Puerto Cortés. The rancher who'd been up in the mountains hunting mountain lions (I don't think he got any) dropped Oscar at a hospital in Puerto Cortés and then drove me to Jim Nash's house in San Pedro Sula. Jim took me to a hospital in Sula to get my broken hand treated. The next day he went to see my poor, no longer lovely, green and white Ford and said that he didn't know how we had walked away from it alive. I love luck to this day. I continued to the end of the CARE project only I drove a 4 wheel automatic as I couldn't steer and shift with my broken hand. Oscar ended up with stitches and a story to share about the dangers of riding with a *gringa*. The program ended in May or June, 1975. At that point Peace Corps didn't want to find me a new job for the short time left for our group so I packed my bags, went to New York to interview with CARE and then home to Wisconsin. My next overseas chapter began with CARE/Nicaragua.

Memories of Pre- and Post-Fifi 1974

Vic Latham, Siguatepeque, Comayagua 1973-75 ~ Pensacola, Florida

I had been in country a little over a year with Group 26, but I'd never visited the ruins in Copán. It was near the time of Honduras' Independence Day when another Volunteer, Rudy Rodriguez, and I, decided to take a bus for a day or two. I rode the bus from Siguatepeque to San Pedro Sula and remember the morning we left on our trip reading in the local paper about a hurricane battering the North Coast. The name was Fifi. Rudy and I found the bus station and in a few hours we were in his site (if I remember correctly, it was Macuelizo) close to the ruins. The bus was packed with *campesinos*, animals and cargo heading home. We had to cross a body of water. Rudy mentioned that it was usually just a small stream, but when we reached it it was several feet deep. We made it across and were then stranded at his site for the next two days unable to cross back over the water.

Once we did get back to San Pedro Sula we began seeing signs of severe devastation. We walked over to the Peace Corps office. They were looking for Volunteers to help out in a site north of SPS called Choloma. What should have taken less than an hour to reach took us three times as long. All along the way there were hundreds of people streaming both north and south with whatever they could carry. Several bridges we would have crossed had been washed out. Once we arrived in Choloma we found that a wall of water had come down from the surrounding mountain and had washed a swath of devastation through the city. There was no food or water to buy. I remember a man walking down the street with the head of a cow. Most of the people had not eaten in days. I saw parts of bodies sticking out of the mud. It was very hot and humid. We were taken to a feeding center with hundreds of people waiting in line for whatever food they could get. Hours passed as we tried to document which families were getting what. There was no electricity in the town and as it grew dark we were told to begin loading the 50-pound sacks of food back onto the truck. Once the people saw what we were doing they began to press forward. Out of nowhere I was pulled into the truck as the mob completely pounced on the bags of food that were not already loaded into the vehicle. We made a hasty retreat back to SPS.

Days followed and much was the same in Choloma and surrounding areas such as La Lima where we were taken to help out. After a week or so I was asked to go out to the coast to a town that had been hit very hard. Omoa was directly on the coast. We commandeered a house as our *bodega* which was directly on what was once probably a beautiful beach. Now it was littered with decaying animals, rotting logs and numerous pieces of what had once been people's possessions. I was one of the people in charge of a "Food for Work" program through a Catholic relief agency, Caritas. People would come down from the surrounding villages high in the mountains each morning and request food. There was little to document other than their word that they were helping look for survivors, clean up, make roads passable, etc. There was no running water or electricity and often we ran low on food for ourselves. I remember that we received a delivery of shoes … thousands of them were mixed together. We were storing them on the 2nd floor, but they took up valuable space. So, one day we made an announcement in town that we'd be giving away shoes free. That's all it took. We soon had hundreds of people milling around. There was NO way we could match up the shoes so we decided to toss them over the balcony. It didn't take long before the people were searching for two shoes that were similar in appearance. After about an hour only a few odd shoes remained. On another occasion we received a shipment of frozen beef from Costa Rica. Well, when the truck first set out the meat was frozen. By the time it got up to us the ice had melted and most of the meet was unfit for human consumption. On another occasion the only stockpile of food that remained were black beans. Unbeknownst to us the Hondurans we encountered did NOT eat them. When we showed them around the *bodega* they left empty handed. Food deliveries were sporadic and at times all the volunteers had to eat were homemade *tortillas* and some plantains. I had lost a LOT of weight in country during the first year and continued losing weight during the two months I stayed there. About 20 volunteers from various countries lived at times in the house. It was stifling. We had to bathe in the sea. The health clinic that had once sheltered more than 50 people had been destroyed by the wall of water. Only two concrete steps and the foundation remained. Had it been me seeking shelter I would have gone to the Spanish fort which had been built some time in the 16th century. I spent my 23rd birthday there. Some time in November the facility closed its doors and I returned to my site in Siguatepeque.

Fifi Relief Efforts

November 2010

Susan Overland Strom, Santa Rosa de Copán 1972-74 ~ Eau Claire, Wisconsin

The day Hurricane Fifi ravaged the coast of Honduras, I was on vacation in Guatamala. We wondered why the weather was so horrible (rainy, windy, and cold), being unaware of the hurricane, which had hit the coast. When we returned to Santa Rosa de Copán, where I had lived for two years, we were told to report to the coast. I had recently moved to Tegucigalpa, and extended my two years to do in-country training for health volunteers. Driving into San Pedro Sula, the devastation was immediately visible and unbelievable. The huts, which hung above palatial homes were gone with the rain and mudslides. Streets were mud, and getting around was almost impossible.

For that reason, my first trip into the camps was in the back of a truck, and looking around, I couldn't believe this was the same place I had stopped for ice cream on our trips home. Of course, the closer to the coast you got, the worse the destruction. There were people wandering around, injured with dazed looks on their faces.

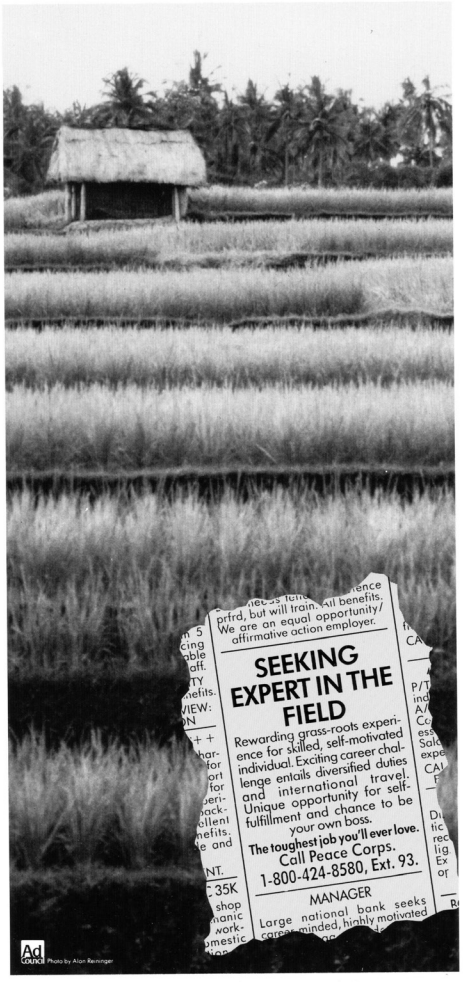
We were assigned tasks from command headquarters and went where needed. One day it was simply cleaning vast pots in which soup was prepared for those hundreds of Hondurans without shelter. I managed to cut my finger on that rusty old pot, and then had to find somewhere to get a tetanus shot. I was also stationed at least one day in a health facility distributing aspirin, assisting with immunizations, and listening to many who were stressed and displaced. Certainly without anything but the clothes on their backs, and numb from the shock of the storm.

We stayed at a fellow Peace Corps Volunteer's home in our sleeping bags on the floor. We were terrified when the rains started again and wondered if they would ever stop. Our days were long as we loaded up at 6:00 a.m. and returned late in the evening. I know we didn't eat much because during the ten days I spent on the north coast, I lost ten pounds.

One day I flew vaccines to Puerto Cortés. As I climbed into a U.S. Army helicopter sitting on top of the cooler centered between the open doors manned by soldiers with guns, I held on for dear life to the strap above my head. As we hovered over the water-covered banana fields and roads, the pilot remarked how similar the terrain was to Vietnam. We made a food stop at a village surrounded by water. There was fighting among the villagers for the sacks of beans and rice that were unloaded. It was very tense for a while, however we managed to make it out of there without shots being fired and to the coast with the vaccines. The mosquitoes on the coast were thick, and I hoped many would get these typhoid vaccines. Water sources were a hundred times more polluted than normally!

We were concerned about the Volunteers (Chris and Joe) on the islands, and I remember some of the time I was traveling to make sure Volunteers were safe. Chris and I almost were covered by a mudslide and got stuck in clay up to our ankles. I can't remember how we got out of there or what we were doing, but it was scary.

It wasn't until years later, when teaching disaster nursing, that I read the theory of how the horror and unreality of something as overwhelming as the aftermath of a hurricane could be. To say that the people of Honduras suffered is an oxymoron, their lives which held so



One of Those Significant Life Experiences

Alan Waugh, San Pedro Sula, Cortés 1973-75 ~ Seattle, Washington

It began to rain, it rained non-stop for 48 hours, torrential, tropical buckets. I remember being vaguely aware there was a hurricane out there somewhere in the Caribbean, I don't remember any warnings nor suggestions of how to prepare for it.

The morning after the night the eye of the storm passed by Puerto Cortés I walked to work in downtown San Pedro Sula. Boulevard Morazon, the main drag descending from the richer neighborhoods in the foothills straight down to the *parque central* was a small river, knee deep. I hopped on the back bumper of a pickup to get across.

My workplace, El Centro Cultural Sampedrano, was blacked out with no electricity. The night *watcheman* let me in, and when I asked if our boss, Señor Findley, was in, Juan said, yes, in the *auditorio*. Down in front I saw a flashlight beam. Jim Findley, an American Foreign Service officer, had stripped to his underwear, stark white in the darkness, and was on his hands and knees in a deep pool of water, trying to close the valve someone had left open in the floor drain and which had allowed who knows what kind of water to back up into our theatre. He was wet and pissed, not something to tease him about until the next day, when he could and did laugh about how he looked.

The next day a group of PCVs from San Pedro trucked out to Choloma, the town the most hard hit of all *lugares* on the north coast. Catholic Relief Services, Caritas, was the only organization with its act together: appropriate supplies in warehouses, trucks, and *gerentes* making appropriate decisions about what to do where. We spent the next couple of days serving food in a feeding station in what had been the *parque central* in Choloma, amidst the ten or twelve old buildings remaining standing on the main street because they had been built of concrete or concrete blocks.

In the old days the road from SPS to Puerto Cortés passed through downtown Choloma and crossed the river there. Progress however meant a new by-pass highway and a new bridge half a mile west of town. Further west and upstream, three small rivers dropped out of the Sierra de Omoa mountains and joined to become the Río Choloma. Over the years *barrios* of shacks had been built up on both banks of the river between downtown and the new bridge. The night Fifi passed by, the massive amount of debris which washed down the hills and rivers formed a logjam at the intersection of the three rivers or behind a bridge, depending on who is telling the story. At 2:00 in the morning, the logjam broke loose on the largely unsuspecting residents of Choloma. Between 2,500 and 5,000 Cholomeños drowned – no one really knows. Both riverbanks between the bridge and town were now beaches, sand dunes, not a shack left nor any evidence a thriving neighborhood had existed there twenty-four hours earlier.

The new highway bridge had been constructed of three sections of prestressed concrete beams resting on two pillars in the middle of the river. The north section remained in place sans guardrails. The center section remained attached to one of the pillers, but loosened from the other piller, had been turned ninety degrees downstream. And the south section? It had been lifted off its foundations by the rushing waters filled with trees, logs and other debris and carried undamaged 300 yards downstream where it lodged against the riverbank. It remains there today, left in place to become part of the new levy constructed to protect the outer neighborhoods of Choloma, not shacks as before, but concrete block *casas* with flowers and children's toys in the front yards. Wikipedia says Choloma is now the third largest city in Honduras, 225,000 people thanks to the *maquiladoras* between SPS and Puerto Cortés.

The second night after Fifi I walked down to the telephone company, the only way to call out of country, but the lines were too long and I left. Finally on the fourth night I waited long enough to get a line, in one of the phone booths which lined the lobby of Hondutel, and called my parents, who hadn't heard a thing, but, positive thinkers they were, assumed I was alive and working on reparation. Several years ago, Carolina Cardona, the PC/H Program & Training Officer at the time told me the story of allowing a PCV to hitch a ride in the back of Carolina's pickup from the site back to Teguc, and spending the entire trip talking on her cell with friends in the States.

A bit further away from Choloma was Aldea SOS, an orphanage run by Catholic nuns. Somehow, someone became aware of the logjam, alerted the sisters, who decided in the middle of the night to evacuate the children to a nearby hill, and all were saved. Looking at the green lawns of the orphanage, a handful of concrete block buildings constructed on the floodplain, one might not have guessed a river had just overrun the place. But each room in the dormitories was filled with three or four feet of wet muddy silt. A group of us spent the next several days shoveling out children's rooms.

Our days became rounds of getting up early, grabbing breakfast, trying to fill the *pila* while the water was still running, and going somewhere to work. We generally did not eat lunch, someone would be tasked with shopping for basic groceries, and, too tired to cook for a group, we often went out to dinner in SPS - Vicente's particularly was a favorite and seemed to be serving most of its menu items. The *mercados* were open, had food to sell, though not in the same quantities as before the storm. Peace Corps Volunteers from elsewhere in Honduras began showing up at the SPS houses of Steve Weber, Mike Lewis and Bill Waite, and Roxanne duBois and me. People I never really got to know crashed on our floors for several weeks. Two years ago Susan Overland Strom and I decided she might have been one of those crashees (see her piece on page 9). Peace Corps solicited Volunteers from neighboring countries to come work on reparation efforts, which is how we met the PCV serving as the coach of El Salvador's national diving team and Charlie Blood from Quetzaltenango, Guatemala. I remember a teacher from the International School in Teguc who was a chemical engineer explaining in Steve's apartment how to make soap.

Max Furst was the Honduran-born son of a German who settled in Honduras, married a Honduran woman, and started a shop which sold fabric, needles and thread. Max' parents sent him to Germany for college where he earned a degree in engineering. He then returned to San Pedro and took over the fabric shop. I got to know him because he loved classical music, and initiated a school to teach children how to play classical music. He convinced Peace Corps to provide his new school with a Volunteer, Thomas Facey, to teach music and conducting, and another Volunteer, Gianna Felix, to teach violin. Whenever El Centro Cultural Sampedrano needed a grand piano for a concert, Max would loan us his grand piano . . . supervising the trucking both way and insisting the piano be re-tuned by the blind piano tuner once we returned it to his house. He did not forget his engineering training. He was the one who figured out one of the wells at Aldea SOS was still functional, it hadn't filled with silt, and the electric water pump still worked. Somewhere, perhaps from the subsidiary of one of the banana companies which manufactured plastic piping, Max acquired a mile of blue flexible plastic tubing three or four inches in diameter. In the cloudless, blue Honduran day, a small group of us began to schlep the rolls of tubing from the well across a couple of pastures thick with tall grass. The temperature was more than 100°. As the afternoon wore on we would stumble our way through the grass carrying the awkward rolls which Max would connect one to another. It took us two days to create a water line from Aldea SOS to the Choloma *parque central*. Max was the one who figured it all out. When I returned to SPS in 1998, I found Max in the fabric shop, semi-retired. He did not remember me, but he did remember loaning his piano to El Centro Cultural and he remembered stringing the blue water pipe to Choloma.

Four or five days after the eye of the storm passed by, Caritas loaded what was allegedly the first truck through from San Pedro Sula to Tela. Every bridge between El Progreso and Tela had been wiped out. It took most of the day to get to Tela, the overloaded truck fording some streams, waiting in one place for a bulldozer to clear a path through the boulders in the riverbed so the truck could drive through. In one river we hit a rock and bent a steering rod. We were carrying food to a community center run by a nun . . . and my best Fifi memory is the wonderfully refreshing, oh, so cold, *horchata* waiting for us as we unloaded the truck.

The days blurred together back then and blur together today in my memory. Early on, for some long forgotten reason, I was out on the highway from SPS to La Lima, climbing into a 4-place Cessna, taking off down the highway because the San Pedro airport was an island in the middle of a sea of water with no road access. Looking down, the banana plantations were all flattened, nothing left standing, all the stalks laying in the direction the water swept through. Landing at the SPS airport, it was thrilling to see the world's response to Fifi: huge military cargo planes from many, many countries, Argentina, Canada, Cuba, Switzerland, the U.S., off-loading pallets while the north end of the airport's one runway was still under standing water.

Back in the day there was a small grocery store in the middle of a downtown San Pedro Sula block near the 6-story bank building where Jaime Beam, Cliff Davis and David Rosen lived on the top floor. A pretty barren gray apartment, but how many Peace Corps Volunteers lived in a "penthouse" on the top floor of a "skyscraper"? The grocery store was owned by a fat *norteamericano* married to a Hondureña. He was such an arrogant jerk we shopped there for only one reason: frozen catfish fillets. A pair of brothers from the Arkansas Ozarks had rented banana company land near El Progreso, dug fish ponds, and raised pan-sized catfish for export. The little grocery was the only place in Honduras to purchase the wonderful boneless fillets. Fifi rained, the Río Ulua overflowed its banks, washed the catfish into the Caribbean, filled the ponds with silt, and ended the catfish business.

In each of our lives there are significant events which remain with us for the rest of our lives: a girlfriend, a job we really wanted, grad school, hurricanes. Others do not always understand. For the people who shared a bit of their lives in this newsletter, Fifi clearly left indelible images, sounds, smells and narratives in their minds. 36 years later, few had any difficulty putting fingers to keyboard and recalling those memories for us. We do understand. ¡Mil gracias - viva Honduras!

letters to the editor re the Hurricane Fifi edition

I think this is the best issue of Amigos I have ever read. I came 2 years after Fifi, but up until now have had no idea how devastating the hurricane was. I am amazed and humbled at the courage, ingenuity, and will of all the Volunteers who helped rebuild the country. My hat is off to all of you.

In awe,
Maggie McQuaid, Pespire, Choluteca 1976-78

I just began reading the accounts of Volunteers pertaining to Fifi and the stories bring back many memories both good and otherwise. You did a fantastic job collating them all.

Thanks again for putting together a GREAT newsletter. I'm printing it out. Perhaps someday I will take the 200+ pages I typed years ago and publish a book of my account of the first 2 years.

Victor Latham, Siguatepeque, Comayagua 1973-75

Great work ... what a joy to read the accounts of my fellow/sister PCVs of the Fifi era, remember them, and chuckle we all looked back on what happened and who we were oh so long ago! And, of course, yours, Alan, and the rest of my buddies from Group 26! Saludos

Cookie Rocklin Izaguirre, La Esperanza, Intíbuca 1973-75

Been reading the issue of Amigos and have to concur with the opinion that it's one of your finest efforts, (not because I'm in it), but also because the others from our era really did a great job of presenting the disaster's human face. It did trigger my remembrances of people staying at our apartment and briefly meeting so many new people who were involved in the relief efforts. Harry Howell, Mike Nord, Porter Owen, George ?? who rebuilt some *aldea* out near Choloma just about single handedly and had it named after him (Colonia Jorge or something like that), and many others who stayed or passed though our town at that time.

So I suggest you do a round two - more stories from Fifi and get Roxanne, Jim Lengerich and others to write down their experiences. I'm pretty sure Jim Lengerich went to Tocoa after me and inherited the truck I beat up. Must be others too, who got something to say. Anyhow, very nice to read all those accounts and reflect on those days and the amazing effort of so many good-hearted people.

Thanks for the newsletter,
Steve Weber, San Pedro Sula 1973-75

Alan,
A massive job.
20 pages! wow!
Thx so much.

Ron Reafs, Tegucigalpa 1966-68

That is one magnificent newsletter! Thanks for all your time and hard work!

Mary Nowel Quijano, Santa Rosa de Copán & Tegucigalpa 1974-78

Thank you, Alan. Nice job. I learned more than I knew about Fifi's devastation.

Susan Overland Strom, Santa Rosa de Copán, Copán 1972-74

Thanks, Alan, great issue! I loved reading all the hurricane stories. I was living in Olanchito (leeward side of the mountains south of La Ceiba) in October-November 2005, when two major hurricanes struck the north coast within 3 weeks of each other. PCVs were having a Halloween party in a house outside La Ceiba on the Cangrejal River the night the first hurricane struck - we ended up evacuating out early the next morning, some of us leaving our stuff at the house because we didn't have enough room for it, trying to fit 30 people into two passenger cars and 2 pickups.

I can remember more stories from those 3 weeks, mostly about everything in site being wet and moldy and wet, and drinking rainwater after the water system was out for 6 days straight.

We all have our stories - thanks for sharing yours and motivating the others, too.

Suzanne Mills, Olanchito, Yoro 2005-07

November 2010

Honduras Revisited, July, 2010

Mary Nowel Quijano, Santa Rosa de Copán, Copán, 1974-78 ~ San Antonio, Texas

Coming ever closer to the coast of Honduras, above the blue-green hues of the coral reefs below, Jose and I wondered if our trip would be delayed by a hurricane, or a worker strike closing down the airport, or perhaps a coup, or a non-coup depending on your point of view. It had been five years since our last visit and we wondered what changes we'd find in this trip to visit family and friends. Honduras has seen such progress since we were married in our little town of Santa Rosa de Copán some 30 years ago. And in many ways it's just the same.

Arrival at the airport in San Pedro Sula was the same, customs declarations and sifting through a sea of humanity on the way to the parking lot. Once we arrived at our relatives' cars, it didn't take much time to see the valley of division that was caused by the events of last summer. As we were reacquainted with our favorite brand of *cerveza Hondureña*, the conversation turned to politics. *¡Golpe!* vs. *No fue golpe! "El presidente sacado en sus pijamas…"* vs. *"Solamente haciendo lo que la constitucion dice."*

As we drove to the home of Jose's nephew Milton, where we'd spend much of our time during our two-week vacation, we shared our views of the political situation in Honduras. We weren't surprised that in Jose's family, the division ran deep and sometimes surfaced with heated discussions. Because Milton and his wife have continued their studies and both are professionals with two jobs, his family has progressed from a cramped apartment in downtown San Pedro Sula to a comfortable gated community home. They can afford to educate their three children in bilingual schools.

San Pedro is definitely a busy city full of big city evils, gangs, robberies, shootings, kidnappings, and the police are making a presence. After the second time being stopped by machine gun-wielding police, watching Milton calmly answering to uniformed men sometimes looking no older than 20, I tried to convince myself that this was a necessary evil. The roads are routinely blocked off so police can search for people suspected of being involved in some type of illegal activity.

At his home, we watched a video taken by hidden cameras of the horrors the Honduran people suffered last summer.

Fear was evident on all fronts. Police were seen running through the streets with guns and clubs, pulling people out of stopped buses and beating them to the ground. People who were trying to get by the barricade were apprehended and punished for being in the streets. Others were dragged out of nearby *pulperias*. The video went on at a heartbreaking pace. Milton told us of those first months when fear and martial law dominated their lives. They barricaded themselves in their house and when they had to go out to buy food or supplies they all huddled together as they quickly got their needed supplies and then hurried back home. He said there were times he thought they were going to die.

When I asked them what the foreigners did at that time, I heard stories that made me cringe. I was told of different groups from various countries, some teachers visiting schools, some groups of doctors working in the field who were hidden and huddled together for fear of being accused of participating on one side or the other.

These raids through the streets have ceased, but the scars of divided families linger like the graffiti on the walls proclaiming the loss of their leader, "Mel." That three letter word fuels the division. One side talks about him as their hope and future who will liberate the poor people from their struggles. The other

side looks down on him as a criminal who will take away what little possessions they have. Fears the ousted president would have taken away that second piece of land someone owned, or fears that they would be forced into a communist state fuel those who proclaim the events of last summer to be their liberation. On the other hand, those struggling to somehow free themselves from their poverty see the hope of their future evading them with the absence of "Mel." It's such a personal thing for both sides it doesn't seem like the divisions will ever end.

The struggle is made very evident in the graffiti which was much more evident in San Pedro Sula than in the small towns we visited. The *Parque Central* is a stunning example we found on our first evening there. The cathedral, beautifully painted and illuminated, was regal against the dark skies. Turning our backs to the cathedral, we were faced with stark, bold graffiti covering the kiosk and other structures. *"Viva Mel", "Policias asesisinos"* and other expressions still shout strong discord. Cleaning the structures is as effective as cleaning a chalkboard. The messages appear again and again.

This poor country is still reeling from the events of last summer. So many hard working Hondurans are trying to get on their feet, working two jobs if they can because some, like the teachers receive a promise of "next month" in place of a pay check every month. That's the reality I found with many of our relatives. Some of them had been waiting six months or longer to receive a paycheck. They have running tabs, scratched in notebooks, at their nearby *pulperia* to buy necessities. The teachers take days off to demonstrate and strike this unfair treatment, and these days aren't made up at the end of the year, I was told.

Despite the internal struggles of the country and the personal struggles of the families we visited, in true Honduran style, these people I broke *tortillas* with and ate *tajadas de platano y frijoles con mantequilla* while I struggled with my waning Spanish, welcomed us with their huge hearts, and we smiled and laughed and enjoyed our visit more than I imagined I would. Despite the political division in Jose's family, everyone expressed their ideas and left it at that knowing the situation is beyond their control. They shared their hopes and dreams, their struggles and sorrows with open hearts, tears, smiles and hugs, knowing when we leave they will still be there struggling to keep their families going.

I am glad to say some things never change. I was occasionally forced to shower with a bucket from the *pila*, and I cheered when Milton drove on the sidewalk to expedite his approach to the next right turn. I held my breath every time we approached a bus passing cars on a two-lane winding mountain road on the way to Copán. It was a sheer delight to walk those cobblestone streets of my dear Santa Rosa de Copán again. We met a PCV in town working with the government who was quite frustrated in her work, but happy to be in a small town where life is safer and calmer. We even met up with a friend of Jose's who tried to sell us some real estate just outside of Santa Rosa! The present is very difficult right now, but the resilient Honduran spirit still reaches to the future.

We took a ferry from La Ceiba to Roatan and spent a weekend on the island. What an improvement that ferry is over the rickety plane that used to transport visitors from the mainland. Being totally pampered for a few days at a resort in Roatan, it was easy to forget the pain and struggles of the people on the mainland. I ate the food I love, while enjoying a cold *cerveza* or a delightful cup of real coffee, and I celebrated with family and friends who were genuinely glad we had come to visit. The hospitality, genuine concern and care we felt in all we did was a constant that no political divisions can take away or diminish.

As we were leaving I thanked the teenager in the family whose room we had occupied while he slept on the couch. After I thanked him for sharing his room with us, he laughed and informed me he didn't share it with us: we had taken it from him! Shared or taken over. *Golpe* or *no golpe*. The reality is the same. The struggles are still there, yet the hope and open heart of the average Honduran remains constant.

It's a beautiful country, this heart of Central America. Returning to visit relights that flame of excitement I felt the first time our training group landed in Tegucigalpa with Ana Rosa de Ortiz who had introduced us to the culture of the country on our flight over with a bottle of Timoshenko and *totopostes*.

Jose and I brought back a bottle of Timoshenko, just for old time's sake. We declined the *totopostes*. Some things never change.

Salud. Que viva Honduras.

Training Group H-17 Inauguration ~ September 10, 2010

November 2010

by Jessica Leonor Cañas, a PCV selected to give the "class speech" in Spanish - translation assistance by Mary Nowel Quijano & Jose Quijano

Ya ha llegado el día, el día de decir adiós, adiós a caras conocidas y voces amigables. Pero no nos vamos tristes sino ansiosos, ansioso de conocer más este país tan hermoso. Poco a poco Honduras y sus catrachos nos han enamorado con sus montañas majestuosas, baleadas deliciosas y "fíjese ques." Ahora nos toca a nosotros enamorar a Honduras; salir a sus campos, aldeas y municipios y conquistar el corazón de su gente. Pero el viaje no será fácil ni simple. Cuando los días en el trabajo se pongan difíciles y las noches un poco solitarias miren a la niña que corre por el campo con su pelo colocho, piel color caramelo y sonrisa de alegría y recuerden por qué estamos aquí, por qué hemos dejado nuestro país, nuestras familias y amigos. Recuerden que lo hemos hecho para que esa niña de pelo colocho y piel color caramelo pueda correr por ese campo sin miedo, sin hambre y con educación. Recuerden que somos soldados, soldados de un ejército de paz. Desde Atlántida a Choluteca y Ocotepeque a Olancho cosecharemos frutos buenos de educación, fraternidad y orgullo cultural. No tengan miedo. Verán que las puertas estarán abiertas y los corazones de la gente también. Solo tenemos que entrar y vivir en ellos sin dudas ni miedos. Si logramos hacer esto, recibiremos mucho más de lo que demos. Porque recuerden que no solo venimos a enseñar sino a aprender, no solo a mejorar sino a mejorarnos, no solo a sembrar sino a crecer, porque dando es como recibimos. Por esta razón, Honduras por siempre será parte de nuestras vidas; aunque nos encontremos lejos de sus campos y ciudades. Ahora, antes de comenzar esta nueva etapa de nuestra experiencia en Honduras me gustaría compartir un poema que escribí sobre Honduras. Ojalá capture un poco de sus propios sentimientos hacia este país.

Un día en Honduras es más que vivir,
Es sentir por cada poro del cuerpo el viento de afuera,
Es reír hasta llorar y llorar hasta sentirse llena.
¿Cómo puede ser que un pueblo tan lejano sin calle ni luz pueda encender este sentimiento?
Cada suspiro es algo nuevo,
Cada sonido es algo bello.
En la oscuridad de la noche me apodera tu tranquilidad del día.
Lejos de mi tierra y seres queridos
Me envuelves en tus vientos y sonidos.
Honduras, lentamente expiro,
No me dejes nunca, ni permitas que haga lo mismo.

The day has come, the day to say goodbye, goodbye to well-known faces and friendly voices. But we do not go away sad but anxious, anxious to know this beautiful country more. Little by little Honduras and its people have enamored us with their majestic mountains, delicious baleadas (flour tortillas topped with whole beans and other goodies), and "fíjese ques" (very popular slang expression meaning "imagine that"). Now we are called to love Honduras; to go to its fields, villages and municipalities and to conquer the heart of its people. But the trip will not be easy or simple. When the work days become difficult and the nights lonely, watch the curly haired girl with caramel colored skin and joyful smile running in the field, and remember why we are here, why we have left our country, our families and friends. Remember we have done it so that curly haired girl with caramel colored skin can run in that field without fear, without hunger and with an education. Remember we are soldiers, soldiers in an army of peace. From Atlántida to Choluteca and Ocotepeque to Olancho we will harvest good fruits of education, brotherhood and cultural pride. Don't be afraid. You will see that the doors will be open and the hearts of people also. We just have to enter and live with them without doubt or fear. If we manage to do this, we will receive much more than we give. Because remember that we not only came to teach but to learn, not only to improve but to improve ourselves, not only to plant but to grow, because in giving we receive. Because of that, Honduras always will be part of our lives; even when we find ourselves far from its fields and cities. Now, before beginning this new stage of our experience in Honduras, I would like to share a poem I wrote about Honduras. Hopefully it captures some of your own feelings towards this country.

A day in Honduras is more than just living,
It's feeling by each pore of the body the outside wind,
It's laughing until you cry and to crying until you feel full.
How can it be that a town so far away without streets or lights can ignite this feeling?
Each breath is something new,
Each sound is something beautiful.
In the darkness of night your daily calm empowers me.
Far from my land and loved friends
You surround me with your winds and sounds.
Honduras, slowly I expire,
Don't ever leave me, or ever allow me to do the same.

Honduras I : 1962

Time flies so quickly we often forget there was a beginning, a first person to do this or do that. Or, in this case, a first group of Peace Corps Volunteers to enter The Republic of Honduras. This is a remembrance of those years. And on page 8 are remembrances of three other members of that first training group.

Carol Gregg Welsh, San Pedro Sula 1962-64 ~ Palm Coast, Florida cwelsh@att.net

I was 22 when I joined the Peace Corps with my first husband, Hugh "Stew" Stewart Gregg. The government didn't have a background on how to train Peace Corps Volunteers. So for the first few years, it was trial and error until they found the best training was/is in-county training. Fortunately I received excellent pre-training through my college education and work experience.

Stew and I graduated from George Williams College with a BS in Group Work Education. During the four years I was a student at the college in Chicago, I also worked part time at the "Y" and at the Boys Club. I worked with children and developed programs. During the summers I was a camp counselor at residence or day camps.

From September 1961 to June 1962, I worked at a Jewish Community Center in Chicago. I was the only gentile on staff. I was in charge of the programs for 10-12 year old children, the Kosher cooking class and special activities. I loved learning about a different religion, ethnic culture, and the customs and ways of celebrating the various holidays. Most importantly, my supervisor taught me to be a risk-taker, to use my initiative. Every time I asked her thoughts about a particular activity I would like to try, her reply was always, "You won't know until you try it."

While in college, coincidently I wrote a paper about Senator Hubert Humphrey's support of a Youth Corps. The book, *The Ugly American* by William Burdick and Eugene Lederer created a stir because it illustrated how arrogant Americans often were in foreign countries, expecting everyone to speak English and to follow our customs. The Youth Corps' idea was to send young people trained in the native language and/or dialect and to work side-by-side with the people in the countries where *they were invited!* I was excited about the idea and was delighted when it evolved into the Peace Corps. Stew and I were walking down State Street the beginning of June 1962 when we saw a recruitment sign for the Peace Corps. We applied and ten days later we were accepted!

In 1962, the wife of Honduran President Ramón Villeda Morales, First Lady Doña Alejandrina, placed a request for Peace Corps Volunteers to help staff new health and community centers. With my education plus experience in developing programs for community centers, I was thrilled to have this opportunity. We had 10 weeks of training at St. Louis University. I thought I knew exhaustion in college but this went beyond that. We had 11 hours of class six days a week. Six hours was in language lab. Since I didn't know any Spanish, I was grateful for this. Sundays were for washing and ironing your clothing – no permanent press back then.

After St. Louis, we went to the Peace Corps training site up in the mountains of Puerto Rico for three weeks of Outward Bound training. There was a ropes course, rock climbing, staying overnight in the woods alone and a 3-day, 2-night trek through the tropical woods with a group. The ability to meet my fears and conquer them head-on was invaluable experience for me. Again, I was being trained to be a risk-taker, but not foolish. Safety was always important.

We arrived in Honduras in October 1962. There were about 30 of us. I was assigned to a community center in San Pedro Sula. It was a new building with few programs. I was looking forward to starting an activity club for boys, ages 6-10, a similar girls club and a women's club.

We were in Honduras for only three weeks and at our assignments for two weeks when the Cuban Missile Crisis occurred. My husband and I were renting rooms from a widow, Dulce Maria, and her three children. She was crying and screaming because Cuba is close to Honduras and she was extremely fright ened that there was going to be a nuclear war. Fortunately, that crisis passed.

A missionary who had lived in the rural mountainous area of Honduras for 22 years almost begged me to start a cottage industry that would take advantage of the abundance of oranges. I talked to the Women's Club members about making marmalade. Except for a recipe, I really had no idea how to get the marmalade to where it could be marketed. But, I remembered my JCC supervisor's words, "You won't know until you try it." Well, cooking up big pots of marmalade was hot and hard work. After a month, one of the women who represented the others confessed that they really didn't want to do this. I felt like a failure for only an instant. Because, after taking a deep breath, smiling, and agreeing with them, I felt their acceptance of me, even though my Spanish wasn't fluent yet. It took about three months

before I finally was thinking in Spanish rather than translating. Dulce Maria teased that she thought I was *muy reservada* when we first arrived. That was because by the time I translated in my mind what to say, it often was too late to say it so I appeared reserved and quiet. When I was thinking in Spanish, she indicated with her hands that I was nonstop talking!

A year later, there was another crisis – a military coup. President Morales focused on helping "the poorer elements of society, introducing welfare benefits and enacting a new labor code that favored the country's large working class population. While these steps were popular with the masses, they enraged the traditional sources of power in Honduras: the military and the upper classes. When it seemed likely that he would win the 1963 election with an even stronger mandate to enact his social reforms, the military responded with a coup, just ten days before the election was scheduled to take place." (quoted from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramon_Villeda_Morales)

Because of the coup, funds for the Health and Community centers were cut off (these were government-run programs) along with salaries for the staffs. I talked to my Honduran supervisor, Blanca Estela, about having a fundraising carnival for the Centro Comunal. She enthusiastically supported the idea. We visited businesses in San Pedro Sula and each generously provided samples of their products to be used as prizes. The carnival was scheduled for Saturday, November 23.

During lunch on November 22, the young girl, Theresa, who was Dulce Maria's servant, started screaming, "Presidente … asesinado!" It was not uncommon for a president of a Latin American country to be assassinated so I didn't fully comprehend initially. She became hysterical so her sobs were mixed with laughing. Suddenly, Dulce Maria slapped her soundly. She gasped as did I but it stopped her hysteria. That's when I realized she was talking about President Kennedy. No! No! No! This can't be true. This doesn't happen in the United States! I was too shocked to even cry. Numbly another Volunteer and I got drove back to the Centro. People poured out into the streets crying. They loved President and Mrs. Kennedy. We were grief-stricken and then my tears flowed with theirs.

The Centro's staff wanted to follow traditional customs for grieving out of respect for President Kennedy and for us. That meant the carnival would be cancelled! My heart sank. Our office space was filled with the prizes. The games were set up in the main area. We had been working on the preparations for a month! Shaking, I explained that the Peace Corps was President Kennedy's dream. In honor of his dream we should go ahead with the carnival. Fortunately, they agreed. 350 lempiras were raised from nickels and an additional 150 came from an auction for items too big to use as prizes such as a rollaway bed. 500 lempiras were equal to $250 in 1963. The 500 lempiras kept the Centro running for several months, including the first 8-week day camp I started, until the government funds for the Centro were restored. President Kennedy's dream lived on. This carnival would not have happened if it weren't for the knowledge I gained from running the Purim carnival at the Jewish Community Center.

Oswaldo López Arellano, who led the military coup, appeared to want to win over the favor of the Peace Corps Volunteers. Stew was working in a rural community of sugarcane workers. He won their friendship and trust and asked them how he could help them. They said they needed to build a bridge over the river so during the rainy season they could still get their sugarcane to the market. They held small fundraising activities and slowly bought lumber until they almost had enough to build a bridge. The military came in and said, "We will build the bridge for them!" Stew helped them understand that it was important for the villagers to build it themselves. I used to have slides that showed military men working side-by-side with the villagers. They also wanted a water spigot in the village so the women wouldn't have to haul water so far. Each month they saw the spigot get closer and closer and they added another length of pipe. Latrines weren't as important to them because they had been using the bushes for generations.

At the last meeting of my women's club, in June 1964, they asked me for two favors: could they touch my hair, and to please tell them how I kept from becoming pregnant.

I have baby-fine hair and back then my ash blonde hair was further lightened from the sun. At one of our club meetings I had the women come with washed hair. I brushed out their long black hair and showed each how to wrap her hair up into a French twist. With the intense heat, I couldn't comprehend how they could stand having their long heavy hair covering their backs. They loved having me work with their hair, but none continued to wear their hair in a French twist. The custom of having their hair hang down their backs stuck. At that time, it never occurred to me to have them play with my hair. So at that last meeting, they exclaimed over the silkiness and how fine it was. I still get choked up over that gentle experience.

The birth control pill could be bought without a prescription. It was very cheap compared to the pill in the U.S. but the women explained with excitement that it was much cheaper than having another baby. Some of them had to charge for sex to feed the children they already had. We were warned in training not to talk about contraception because it was a Catholic country. But I was leaving in two days, so I felt it was safe to tell them. They hung on every word as

I gave them careful instructions on how to use the pill. They looked at each other in amazement that a little pill could keep them from having babies. Most of them had lost a child or children to malnutrition. Perhaps they wouldn't have to suffer that pain again.

My Peace Corps experience was the most profound and rewarding experience of my life. I never felt so loved as I did when I was at the Community Center. I can still hear the children calling out to me: Carolina … Carolina Maria! When the women left after our club meeting, we walked down the road hand in hand, until there was just me. Then I would catch the bus home. Living in a city instead of a small village meant our living accommodations were nicer. We had a cold-water shower and flush toilet except for the dry season. Then we washed our hair and bathed with one bucket of water, which in turn was used to flush the toilet.

In September 2009, the Honduras I group had a reunion in Iowa City, Iowa, where our Peace Corps Country Director, Tom Walz, lives. Many continued their work as nurses or in social services and took advantage of being bilingual. Peace Corps instilled in me a "can-do" attitude. I graduated at age 50 with my Master's degree in Adult Education, and have written two books since. I talked about ways to get published at the 40th Peace Corps reunion in D.C. where I saw Sargent Shriver again after 38 years. It touched me deeply even though it was clear he was failing. He still cracked some jokes!

I went to a 50th Peace Corps Celebration in Jacksonville, Florida March 5th this year. It's always fun to talk to RPCVs from "way back when." We talked about life without the Internet and cell phones and how snail mail seemed to take a trip around the world first. We marvel at what the volunteers can accomplish now through their e-mail and Facebook contacts and sometimes partnering with another NGO to reach a particular goal. But, there have been only 200,000 of us in 50 years! It was a privilege to serve. ¡Viva Honduras!

April 2011

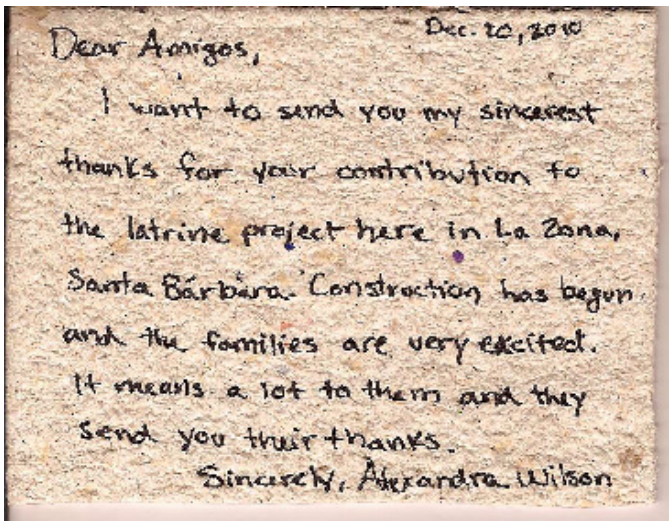
Interview with New Amigos Grantee

Alexandra Wilson, Santa Rita de Oriente ~ Charlevoix, Michigan

What is the name of this aldea or pueblo you live and work in, and where in Honduras is it? Tell us a little about the place and people and the economy.

The name of my aldea is Santa Rita de Oriente and within that I live in a barrio called La Zona. It is located in central western Honduras, at the foot of Santa Barbara mountain (the second tallest in Honduras). The mountain suffers a lot of deforestation for a variety of reasons. This region is home to a lot of coffee production, which is one of the causes of the deforestation.

In my town, La Zona, where we did the latrine project, there are about 500-600 residents. Unlike most other places in Honduras that suffer water shortages, we are a water-rich community, with two rivers in short walking distance and several other creeks that run into them. As we are located only a twenty-minute drive from the department capital city, Santa Barbara, many of the residents are able to find work there in construction, retail, and food sales. Others do agricultural work, largely for subsistence (beans and corn) but some are fortunate to have coffee farms high up in the mountain. On a first tour through the community, one would think that it is not so very poor - several houses with low-walled cement fences painted in pretty colors, stereo systems blaring. However, tucked away behind or between other houses you will find families who are extremely poor. One three-room adobe house has 10 habitants, for example, and their latrine recently caved in. Another family of five, which has never had a latrine (but will soon!), has very little and sporadic income - the mother hand-washes clothes and the father collects wild herbs, such as cilantro, to sell.


Dec. 10, 2010

Dear Amigos,

I want to send you my sincerest thanks for your contribution to the latrine project here in La Zona, Santa Barbara. Construction has begun and the families are very excited. It means a lot to them and they send you their thanks.

Sincerely, Alexandra Wilson

thank you note on hand-made paper

The main actor on the latrine committee is named Gustavo. Gustavo is a self-made carpenter and a successful one at that.

He has also started recently a small poultry raising operation. Gustavo has three children, the eldest a 19-year old girl who is in her first year at the University in Santa Barbara. He and his wife are highly participatory in the local Catholic church (capacity: 50). Gustavo has also been the president of the town council (*patronato*) and is also a member of a regional environmental group. Though he is an extremely busy man and has his own family´s needs well taken care of, Gustavo was happy, and even eager, to take on the latrine project. I write about Gustavo not only because without him, this project would not be happening (which is true), but also because he is, unfortunately, unique in his overwhelming willingness to help other people in his own community.

Tell us a little about you. Where is home? What college? What drew you towards the Peace Corps? Are you the only Volunteer in town? How long have you been there?

I grew up in a small town in Northern Michigan called Charlevoix. I went to the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor for my undergraduate degree in English and Global Change, and then I went back a year after graduation for a Master of Science at U of M´s School of Natural Resources and Environment. My degree is called Sustainable Systems and focuses on systemic analysis and solutions to natural resource management and behavior. I was drawn to the Peace Corps first in high school and thought about it throughout college. I was first interested in going to China, but when my senior year of college came I just felt too scared. It was the little things really, like what I´d have to eat. When I got to grad school and had focused in on my career interests a bit more, I met several RPCVs who told me all about their experiences. I decided to apply. The Peace Corps seemed to hold a lot of what I wanted at the time - to live abroad, to learn another language, to learn another culture, to help people and our environment, and the opportunity to put to practice all that grad school theory.

I am the only volunteer in my town, but since Honduras is a small country with about 200 volunteers, there are three volunteers within a 30 minute bus ride away. I have been here now for 17 months.

April 2011

Cruz Bermudez

John Kotula, Sonaguera, Colón 2005-07 ~ Peace Dale, Rhode Island johnkotulapchn@yahoo.com

Cruz Bermudez is a self-taught artist who lives and works in a small, wooden house just outside of downtown Tela, a beach town on the north coast of Honduras. He is proprietor of an art gallery called El Aura, which takes up the living room of his house. Cruz, his wife Maria Lopez, also an artist, and their two young children, live in a couple of small rooms behind the gallery. Paintings are hung and stacked all over the house. The yard functions as a studio and arts workshop where Cruz, Maria and a couple of brothers from each side of the family gather to paint.

Cruz' paintings are distinctive and easy to spot around Tela. Most of the hotels have a couple on display. Typically, he depicts life along the north coast of Honduras, especially the life of the Garífuna, an Afro-Caribbean community that has as much in common with the cultures of Haiti and Cuba as with Latino Honduras.

He paints men fishing from canoes and from the beach with nets, thatched huts,

roosters, musicians and dancers. He is particularly adept at painting night scenes; houses glowing against near black foliage, deep blue water reflecting moonlight, clouds back lit against nighttime skies.

This is Cruz' bread and butter work. There isn't much of a tourist industry in Honduras except for the island or Roatán, but those who do travel on the mainland often pass through Tela. Hondurans of means, from San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa, also come to the beach here, especially for *Semana Santa*, the week of celebration around Easter. Cruz supports himself as an artist. He is proud that his paintings have been taken home to the United States, Canada, Germany, France and Spain, rolled up in tubes, stuffed into suitcases or back packs.

Certainly these are commercial paint-

ings, created to sell, to remind people of their experiences in Honduras. However, within this context, Cruz is often

after something deeper.

For example, in a painting he recently completed it is nighttime. Off to one side a man paddles a small canoe out into the bay to fish. In contrast to his adult responsibilities, four boys are playing on a pier. The two oldest boys, probably teenagers, are in mid air, having jumped from the pylons. They seem to be at that exact moment of weightlessness before gravity overtakes the momentum of their leap. The next boy in line is a little younger. He is considering jumping. It seems likely that he will follow the older boys and take a swim in the perfect blue of the nighttime ocean. The fourth boy, younger still, hangs back. His posture indicates hesitancy. He is not ready. Maybe he is too young. Maybe he is timid by nature.

Here in the guise of a lush painting for tourists, is a perfect portrait of that moment when you realize that your life is waiting for you. It is yours for the taking. Will you dive in? Will you hesitate, play it safe?

This description is based in part on Cruz' explanation of the themes of the painting and in part on my extrapolation.

If this painting was hanging above your couch and you looked at it every day, I believe you would find yourself making braver choices. Even if you never thought of it metaphorically, you would develop a yearning to join those boys in mid air, in that moment where anything could happen and nothing is retractable.

Cruz has been an artist since he was seven years old. Throughout his boyhood he drew and sold a comic book featuring a character named Jeiko. Jeiko was a Honduran Tarzan. He was born in the mountains and could talk to the animals. His adventures included combat with giant snakes, plunges into jungle pools from the tops of waterfalls, and swims across crocodile infested rivers. He swung a mean *machete*.

Cruz sold photocopies of his comic to his schoolmates for one cent. He always had plenty of pocket money. His buddies pestered him, "When will the next one be ready?" There are no surviving issues of Jeiko.

Cruz has two children with Maria Lopez. They are eight and ten. He had them show me their drawings. Both the girl and the boy had drawn themselves trying on outfits from a closet full of colorful clothes. They draw very well.

Cruz has two older children from a previous relationship. I asked him if they were artists, too. He replied, "Yes they play guitar and sing. We are a family of artists. All of this - painting, sculpture, music - comes naturally to us."

Cruz, who is 55, has been with Maria for seventeen years. I'm guessing she is fifteen to twenty years younger than him. I asked if she was already an artist when they met. He said, "She liked to paint, but didn't think she could. Now she is better than me because women are more perfectionistic. I can do it if I want to, but it doesn't satisfy me. In fact Maria's paintings are meticulous and yet seem fresh and lively. She specializes in portraits of Honduran women often at work. These portraits have strong psychological and social resonance.

I told her that Cruz and I had been discussing why he paints and that I wanted to ask her the same question. She said, "At first, I painted because I liked it and to make money. Now I

paint because I want to show how things are at this time in this community."

After a couple of hours of talking, Cruz said, "I make paintings to sell, but I also make paintings for my private collection. These I make for myself and for my children after I am dead. I show this work to close friends."

Cruz had shown me some of his private work on previous visits. This time he went into a back room and brought out a half dozen canvases. One is a large painting of a boat with slack sails full of refugees, people with sad faces making a desperate journey. The boat is becalmed. It seems to be making little forward progress. Cruz said the name of this painting is *El Viaje de Esperanza*.

Cruz said that all over Latin America people are leaving one place and going to another in hopes of a better life. Hondurans leave for the United States or Spain. Haitians leave for the Dominican Republic. Nicaraguans leave for Costa Rica. Cubans leave for where ever they can land. Many die just because they want a better life.

"I painted this for my children because I hope they never have to make such a journey."

Maybe all the best paintings are prayers.

I asked Cruz about his plans for the future. He said that he would like to be an artist outside of Tela, outside of Honduras, outside of Central America. Visitors have said they will help him organize shows in Canada and Germany. He said that he would like to have an exhibition in the United States. I guess I've got my work cut out for me.

Here is a link to photos of more paintings by Cruz and Maria:

http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=251446&id=669761364&l=8a0dab474b

December 2011

Of Gringos and Guitarras

Brant Miller, Campamento & Jutiapa, Olancho 1975-77 ~ Antioch, Tennessee finalvinyl@comcast.net

I'm sure glad I brought my guitar and blues harps on that flight to our staging in Miami. As an incoming Peace Corps Volunteer, I had only a limited amount of belongings I could bring, and these musical instruments proved to be as vital to my survival in Honduras as my Swiss Army knife, leather boots and denim jacket. They also helped to forge friendships that I've maintained to this day.

After thirty-six years my memory's a little hazy, but Ed Fischer, Catacamas & Culmí, Olancho, 1975-77 ~ Custer, South Dakota, must have been the first fellow-musician Volunteer I met. Both foresters, we arrived in the same group in '75, and I imagine our guitar cases must have given each other away. It didn't take long for us to sit down and jam for an hour or three. I was really happy when, after our 10-week orientation in Teguc, "Eduardo" ended up just an Olancho stone's throw away from me, with Catacamas a mere 3 or 4 hour dusty bus ride from my COHDEFOR office in Campamento.

It could get lonely being the only gringo in Campamento, and I found every possible excuse to hop a bus to hang out with Ed and some other Volunteers, and jam 'till the *vacas* came home. Good thing that they found every possible excuse to throw a party! One of Ed's housemates, fisheries Volunteer Jack Turnock, Catacamas, Olancho 1976-79 ~ Seattle, also played guitar. Jack was (and is) a laid back guy of few words, but of many hot licks. With Jack's "axe," Ed's guitar and song catalogue (he seemed to know about every Lightfoot and Prine song there was, among many others), and my harps, we made some pretty decent music. Once in a while, our friend Maggie McQuaid would pull in all the way from Pespire, which was a special treat. The combination of guitars, harmonicas, sad ballads, bawdy blues, Salva Vida, Yuscaran, Flor de Caña, and a room full of Volunteers and Honduran *compañeros* was a recipe for *una gran fiesta….y un goma aun mas grande*!

Though I remember the parties, I also remember the many more nights spent alone in my spartan little room near Campamento's central square, after a hard day in the woods – or, more often it seemed, in the office waiting for the Land Cruiser to be fixed. They shut off the generator at nine, so while most of the village was sound asleep, I would often find myself strumming my old Yamaha acoustic by the light of a kerosene lantern, trying to shake off the cool night air and the loneliness with a song or two. The music was a fine way to leave behind a day of often frustrating attempts to communicate in halting Spanish. It was just me and Woody Guthrie, Bob Dylan, and Lightin' Hopkins playin' the blues – pretty good company. This was a language I was more at ease with, in this land so different from my hometown of Croton-on-Hudson, New York, or anything else I had known before.

I had dabbled in blues and folk music as a teenager and later in college, but it wasn't until the Peace Corps that I really started finding my own voice as both a musician and songwriter. Songs started spilling out, born of being a stranger in this strange but beautiful land.

I felt compelled to sing the praises of the trusty old bus that got me from town to town - *" I love to hear the El Rey go by, it sounds its horn most every night, it tells me in its voice so clear, any time I can get out of here . . . It's three o'clock in the morning and I'm ready to go, I've done this before, how many times I don't know . . . The motor's hummin' and the wheels are spinnin' round, we're all half asleep and we're all destiny bound."*

Or express mixed emotions about the paving of the dirt highway that ran from Teguc to Juticalpa and beyond - *"Today they opened the road that goes Olancho way, it's a big long stretch of pavement that shortens the ride they say, instead of getting dusty, instead of getting sore you can go in two short hours where once you went in four, the curves no longer matter, the holes are laid to rest, and everybody's happy, I hope it's for the best."*

Or put words and music to finding solace in a trip to the coast when Olancho cabin fever set in - *"Take me to the sands of Tela, Mr. Busdriver, where the sun shines bright and her rays keep me warm, bathing in the sea with the waves never ending, where mysteries are hidden and worry loses form."*

Or sing the blues about missing the folks back home - *"So please where are you, the ones who I love most, the night is getting later and I'm about to die for loneliness, what has brought it, who has given me its hand, the only one I'm holdin' tonight."*

Now, I don't want to give the impression that I was a hermit while living in Campamento, or later in the forestry camp adjoining the tiny *aldea* of Jutiapa where I transferred after about a year. I would often spend hours hanging out with my Honduran friends in the *comedor* where I dined, drinking an Imperial and trading stories of our native lands. After it was discovered I owned a *guitarra*, there would be gatherings at my room with sing-alongs of the popular Honduran songs of the day (invariably including *Cielito Lindo* and *El Rancho Grande*). The guitar would be passed around, since it seemed every Honduran I knew played at least a couple of chords. I would pull out my harps and try to mimic the accordions I heard blasting from radios all through town. We had some good times, for sure.

It's kind of magical how musicians always seem to find each other, and the Peace Corps Honduras was no exception. Magic, with a little "Arizona" Maggie McQuaid thrown in for good measure! Reminds me of the first time I met that gal, at a volunteer's party in Teguc, her smoking a cigar while we danced…. but I digress. Maggie, a talented singer and writer with a personality as colorful as her name, was able to round up just about every musically-inclined Volunteer for the 1st Annual Tegucigalpa Banana Blossom Festival early in our Peace Corps stint. Just how she was able to pull that off in a country of few phones and mail slower than snails, sure beats me.

Besides Ed, Jack, and me, she recruited the incomparable "Hombre en Negro" Juanny Dinero (a.k.a. Paul Dulin, Tegucigalpa & Rio Lindo, Cortés 1977-79 ~ Hatch, New Mexico), a large group of the notorious Volunteers known as "Los Terribles," featuring Kathryn Hunter, singing a rowdy version of her "Athol Idaho" (I live in Athol, Athol's my home . . . well, you had to be there), and the incredible Diane Kouba Palencia, Le Ceiba, Atlántida 1977-79 ~ Weatherford, Texas, singing "Don't Fence Me In." Chris Garrison, Puerto Lempira, Gracias a Dios 1977-79 ~ Goldsboro, North Carolina; Jerry Touval, Tegucigalpa 1977-79 ~ Great Falls, Virginia; Sono Hashisaki ~ Seattle; and many others were there making joyful noise, as well.

Brant Miller, Ed Fischer and Jack Turnock picking in Catacamas, Olancho 1977

* * * * *

In the years since, I have been blessed on repeated occasions to pick and sing with many of my old Peace Corps buddies, especially Ed and Maggie, both of whom moved to Southeast Alaska in the late '70's not long af-

ter I did. After that, it was quite a long spell before we were able to make music again. That changed starting with the first reunion of our 70's group in Vegas in 2002, followed four years later with our gathering in Nashville, then Tucson in 2008, and again this past September in D.C. At all of these glorious occasions, there were wonderful jams with many or all the great folks named above, some very informal, and others a little more organized that involved a stage and sound system (the last but not least of these being at the 2011 reunion's Friday night shindig, where Jerry, Chris, Maggie, Diane, and I were the "house" band for the night). Every reunion has been special in its own way, with music making it even more memorable for musicians and listeners alike. I am already looking forward to the next one.

That old Yamaha guitar remained behind with my Honduran *amigos* in Jutiapa when I left Olancho and Honduras in December of 1977 when my two years were up, and for all I know, it's still there playing backup to *Cielito Lindo* and *El Rancho Grande*. I hope that wasn't all I left behind in those *montañas de pino*.

And as I wrote and sang shortly before leaving, "*Tortillas and frijoles are not heaven, and Yuscaran's not Paradise they say, but just because you cannot take it with you, I may just have to come back here someday . . . "*

July 2011

We'll Always Be RPCVs

sung to the tune of "El Rey"

lyrics by Brant Miller, Campamento & Jutiapa, Olancho, Honduras 1975-1977
~ Antioch, Tennessee

Verse 1:
It's been muchos, muchos años
since we worked with those Catrachos
as new Peace Corps recruits
(new Peace Corps recruits,
new Peace Corps recruits)
We could barely speak the lingo
when they shipped out all us gringos
after just 10 weeks in Teguc

Chorus 1:
Con amoebas, sin amoebas
we worked hard through floods and fevers
to leave behind our legacy
And though we're now paunchy and grayin',
el mundo's still there for our savin'
'cause we'll always be RPCVs

Verse 2:
We washed our flagyl down with guaro,
partied like there was no tomorrow,
then we'd work our butts off
(work our butts off,
work our butts off)
We were young and green with no fear,
did we change the world in two years?
I'm not sure, but I know it changed us

Chorus 2:
Con amoebas, sin amoebas
we worked hard through floods and fevers
to leave behind our legacy
And though we're now paunchy and grayin',
el mundo's still there for our savin'
'cause we'll always be RPCVs

Verse 3:
We no longer take cold showers
or eat frijoles at all hours
but we still get it done
(we still get it done,
we still get it done)
'Cause the seed was planted in us
in those green hills of Honduras
not to stop 'till the good fight is won

Chorus 3:
Con amoebas, sin amoebas
we still work for those who need us
'cause a better world doesn't come free
And though we're now paunchy and grayin',
el mundo's still there for our savin',
we'll always be RPCVs
Yeah though we're now paunchy and grayin',
el mundo's still there for our savin'
and we'll always be RPCVs

My Early Days in Honduras

Kent D. Myrick, Honduras Group I : Tela & San Juan, Atlántida 1962-64 ~ Phoenix

I graduated from the University of Redlands on June 10th, 1962. I packed up four years' worth of stuff and took it home, where I unpacked it and repacked to fly to St. Louis University four days later to begin Peace Corps training. Our original group of 30 ultimately shrank to 24, mainly in the three months we were in St. Louis. We then went to Puerto Rico for the month of September 1962, and finally to Tegucigalpa around the first of October. We stayed in the capital for another month of training, and headed out to our respective placements around the first of November.

My name didn't easily translate to anything in Spanish, as did most of our group's names: Carolina, Ruby, Jaime, Marilú, Evangelina and so on. Even Estú was all right.

But Kent sounded too much like *quién*, and that sounded like a joke. And besides, no Spanish-speaker could manage the final "T." My nickname Rick easily became "Rico", but I really didn't want to be thought of as *rico*!

So people called me just Ken or Meester Ken, and that was just fine.

Mary Lou Jackson, Evangeline Harris and I were assigned to Tela. They found families to stay with right away. I stayed in the Hotel Baldarach in Parque Central for the month of November. The girls found us all places to live behind the Casa Blanca dry goods store. Our landlord, Luis Kawas, cleaned out two sections of what had been the home he grew up in. The girls had what had been two bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs, and I had the former kitchen and dining room downstairs, also with a bathroom. I moved in on the first of December. Van and Mary Lou had already moved in upstairs. We were all home!

Mary Lou was a nurse, assigned to the Centro de Salud in Tela Nuevo. Van and I were assigned as Trabajadores Sociales in the Oficina de la Junta Nacional de Bienestar Social, on the opposite side of the same block where we lived. No commute problems for us!

There was a ladies' auxiliary for our office: Servicio Auxiliar Voluntario, or SAV. One of the ladies of SAV, Doña Victoria de Gottardi, was destined to become a lifelong friend of mine. She told me her husband directed a band in New Tela, and said I should talk to him about joining it. I had my doubts, since I didn't play any instrument except the piano (badly). But since I had actually taken one semester of violin and one semester of horns at Redlands, I gave it a shot.

Don Jorge Gottardi was a tall man, extraordinary in many ways. Born in Italy, he had come to the States and played in the U.S. Navy Band during WWII. He learned to speak nearly faultless English. After the war, he was employed by United Fruit Company, and was sent to Tela, Honduras, where he became fluent in Spanish and married Doña Victoria, whom I believe he had met through the USO during the war.

Among his other talents, Don Jorge was an accomplished music teacher. There was no community music in Tela. Feeling the lack, he dreamed a dream, and made that dream a reality in 1963, by establishing the Banda Sinfónica Teleña.

It was a monumental task. Local schools had a few instruments he was able to borrow in the winter, when school was out. But then he would have to return them. He had written the U.S. Navy asking for help to establish the band. When I joined, he also wrote Sargent Shriver, asking him for assistance to get our own instruments, since he had a PCV in the band!

As he got people interested in the band, he had to teach each and every one, first to read music, then to play one of the instruments! On top of that for each musical piece Don Jorge had to write out by hand, the parts for each instrument. What an undertaking! And what energy and charisma the man had!

When the band was just getting started, Don Jorge was teaching groups of people to read music and play their instruments. He had a French horn not in use, so he asked if I'd like to play it. Of course I would! He loaned me the horn, wrote out the fingering for it, gave me a full set of music, and told me to come to practice from 5:30 to 7:00 on Monday! We worked till 5:00, so I barely had time to get over to New Tela, and no time to eat. No microwaves or fast food in those days!

But I was in a band for the first time in my life! At least I could already read music, and I had learned the rudiments of how to blow a horn at school, though I had never actually played one.

The only Americans in New Tela who didn't work for the Company were Father Smith and his wife and daughters Judy and Betty Sue, 14 and 10. They all played sax or clarinet in the band, on their own instruments. They could eat supper before practice, but often invited me over for dessert afterwards.

They ate American food from the Commissary, so my supper often consisted of a delicious piece of cake or pie! Just like home!

"Pajarito" (then-President Ramon Villeda Morales) and his wife Doña Alejandrina Bermudez de Villeda Morales came to Tela the end of February, and we played a concert for them in the gazebo in Parque Central. The mayor of Miami was with them, for some reason. Don Jorge went down to talk to them afterwards, then called me down to meet them all, in front of the whole town! Pajarito was very impressed with the band, and promised us a thousand Lempiras to buy instruments! And I found out that the Navy was going to help us too, so the band could go on!

Once I knew we could continue, I had Mom send me my cousin Eddie's trumpet, which he no longer played, and someone else took over the French horn. I had to learn a new set of fingering, but that was simple enough.

I was never particularly good at playing the trumpet, but that didn't matter, because no one else in the band was either! But what we lacked in musicality, we far more than made up for in enthusiasm. We had so much fun! We played for a wedding. We played in a funeral procession for one of our own members. The mayor of Miami had asked for my home address. When he got back to Miami he wrote my parents and told them about the band and said they should be very proud of me. He made it sound as if I had started the band!

During Semana Santa, Padre Rafael's Iglesia Católica made a parade through the streets of Tela Nuevo and Tela Viejo. Six men carried a bleeding ceramic Jesús in a glass casket. Behind them the Banda Sinfónica Teleña struggled valiantly to walk and play our instruments at the same time. That was a new challenge since we had to clip our music onto our instruments somehow, and it didn't stay very well. It was constantly slipping sideways, or falling off into the muddy street. We marched that way for two and a half hours, till it got dark, and we were exhausted!

But the wonderful thing about the Easter Parade was that Pajarito was there, and was one of the six casket bearers! We were playing for the President again!

The band met from 5:30 to 7:00 every evening in a large storage room above the Commissary in New Tela. When it rained, the roof leaked right over the trumpet section, so we all had to shift around. It was always very hot, but nobody cared, and there was never any attendance problem. We were all eager to show up and play. There was only a handful of Americans in the band. Besides me, Father Smith and his daughters, teenager Bob Duplantis played when he was home on vacation, but he was attending high school in New Orleans during the school year. The rest of our members were native Hondurans who worked with Don Jorge for the Company. Don Jorge's 9-year-old son Virgilio played trumpet beside me. He was in the 3rd grade at the American School in Tela.

In June 1963 the U.S. Navy ship Gainard came to Tela to deliver hundreds of CARE boxes of food, which our office was to help distribute. The band gathered on the pier at 7:30 a.m. to meet them. We played the national anthems of both Honduras and the U.S., as the men all stood on deck saluting. What a thrill!

Everybody knows of the 4th of July in Tela because of the fruit company, so people congratulated us all day long. In band that evening Don Jorge brought out copies of the Star Spangled Banner to play in honor of the Americans in the band; the Smiths, Bob Duplantis and me! He said we didn't have to play it if we just wanted to listen, but of course we all wanted to play it too.

A few other people had their own instruments, and we were able to keep some of the borrowed ones awhile longer, so the band continued even after school started again. A friend of mine at home got 8 used clarinets donated for the band, and my parents sent them down to us. Don Jorge was ecstatic! We only had about 20 instruments, and every one donated meant another band member! We had rummage sales and raffles in Tela to raise money. We got donations of money and instruments from several sources, and the ones we were purchasing from Italy were soon on the way.

They finally arrived one day on the ship Johann. I went with Don Jorge and several band members to get them and take them to his house. Don Jorge was like a little kid at Christmas! His hands were actually trembling as we unwrapped them. We now had 46 shiny new horns and reeds, and they were all ours! The Banda Sinfónia Teleña was official!

At one point I got Herman, our Carib friend, interested in the band. Don Jorge gave him a clarinet and the usual fingering instructions. Herman was very bright and took to it quickly, even though he had never had any musical instruction before. One day we were listening to the radio and heard a woman sing a very high note. Herman said "Do you know what that note is, Kent?" I told him I couldn't tell without getting out my trumpet and finding it that way. He said "I know what it is." He got his clarinet and played the same note, with no hesitation. Turned out he had perfect pitch!

Herman was also taking some classes at the Colegio Triunfo de la Cruz in New Tela. He lived in San Juan, and it was hard for him to walk all the way into town and back every day. So he stayed in a hammock in my back room some of the time. I hung it from the hinge on the door to a bar on my window. It was just the right distance. That was when he also joined the band, since he was in

town at night.

Sargent Shriver visited every Peace Corps household in every country while we were in Honduras. I don't know how many groups were in the field in 1962 but I do know there were just 4 groups who really began the Peace Corps in 1961. Hearing about them was got me interested in joining.

So Sargent Shriver came to visit us in Tela, with film crew in tow. Sarge asked me what I did for fun and I told him I played French horn in the Banda Sinfónica Teleña, the only known community band in all of Honduras. So nothing would do but that I play for him! So I sat in my rocking chair and played my French horn for Sargent Shriver! A few decades later, on a whim, I attended a Peace Corps recruiting meeting in Phoenix. They showed a film of early PCVs and there I was! My two minutes of fame! (except that no one in the auditorium knew it was me.)

Mary Lou was a nurse and worked in the Centro de Salud over in Tela Nuevo. Van Harris and I worked in the Oficina de la Junta Nacional de Bienestar Social, on the other side of the same block we lived in. Rafael Mejía was the jefe of the office. He took us out to the black Carib village of San Juan during our first week in Tela. Van's project was to assist them in the construction of a Centro Comunal. We didn't have our jeep yet, so we all walked to San Juan along the beach, a distance of a mile or so.

The entire village turned out to see us. The Caribs had seen Americans before, but they had never seen a black American – and a woman at that! Van was instantly "la reina de San Juan." For the moment, I was chopped liver. And I had never been a crowd in which I was the only white person. I never felt so pale in my entire life!

A young man named Herman sought us out. He was only a little younger than Van and me. He spoke excellent English, as well as Carib and Spanish, and he was destined to become our best friend. His family was prominent in San Juan. His *cuñado*, Bernardo Lino, was the head of the village. He and his wife Facha also became best friends of ours. Herman's other *cuñado*, Silvestre Pitillo ("Piti"), was another of my future best friends.

After we'd been in Tela a couple of months, our jeeps finally came. After that it was easy for Van to get to San Juan every day. I was working in the *presidio* just a couple of blocks from our office, so I only needed the jeep when I showed movies in the prison. There was no electricity, so I had to take our borrowed PC generator with me. And boy was it heavy! It frequently broke down, but there was usually someone around who could coax it to work again. Also the light bulbs blew out often. I could always get a new one from Padre Rafael, the Catholic priest in New Tela. It was his projector.

My efforts at the *presidio* were shot down one by one. The *alcaide* (Don Toño, the man in charge of the prison) didn't like me being there on his turf. He first asked me not to show the men any romantic movies, as it "gave them ideas." Then he shot down the very popular cowboy movies, as they "turned the men violent." I could borrow movies from an American agency in Tegucigalpa, but they had a limited supply; mostly romances, cowboy movies, and Pat Boone movies . . . not even the prisoners liked Pat Boone movies! So my Movie Night at the Presidio flopped.

The prison "yard" was little more than an 8-foot wide corridor with filthy open toilets and showers at one end. There was absolutely nothing to do. I had a Whiffle ball and bat, but there wasn't room to use it. I tried to start a library for the men, thinking it would help pass the time. I could get books from another American agency in Tegucigalpa, but they were all in English. But that didn't matter anyway, because I soon found out that practically none of the men could read.

Great! I got some *colegio* students to start a reading program in the prison. It was a great success! The men loved it, the students loved it, and every bigwig in town came to watch . . . the one and only class. Because the *alcaide* whispered to one of the students that a lot of the men had TB. They never came back!

So all of my great ideas for the prison flopped.

I could still show movies in other places at least, and they were always a big hit. I showed them in the barrios of Tela, and out in San Juan. There was always standing room only. Literally.

Van's Centro Comunal project was coming along well, and both she and Mary Lou had started various groups with children and young women in San Juan. Then one day one of my friends out there asked me if I could teach him English. What a great idea! I asked Herman, and he said all the young guys would attend. There was a good-sized *balneareo* on the beach near Herman's house that had a thatched roof and wooden floor. I borrowed a blackboard and some chalk from someone in the American School in Tela, and I was in business. There were no books, so I just made up lessons and wrote them on the board. The guys had to supply their own paper and pencils. They also scrounged a couple of small tables and some chairs. We had an English class – my first unsullied success! I don't know how much they learned, but we had a lot of fun, and I finally had a legitimate excuse for going out to San Juan with Van every day, since my work in the prison was so disappointing. I even had my own project in the next Carib village

of Tornabé. They wanted a community center out there too, and wanted me to teach English.

About that time the *golpe* happened, and funding at our social work office became non-existent, so there was nothing left for us to do in town anyway.

Ahhhh, the *golpe*! We had been in Tela exactly a year and 2 days when the government was overthrown by the Military. Pajarito was ousted from the country, and most everything came to a halt. We were awakened at 4 a.m. on the 3rd of October 1963 to what we thought were firecrackers. Then our friend Roberto came running down from the other upstairs apartment and told us not to go outside the wall. The soldiers might shoot us! We were terrified, and had no idea what to do! Rafael came over and told us about the revolution. He didn't know much more than we had already heard from Roberto, who was 10 years old (if you wanted to know anything in Tela, you just asked the children!). But Rafael told us it would mean our office had no more money. We were just about to move into our new office building! It was a combination office and centro comunal, with meeting rooms downstairs and our offices upstairs.

The Army had shot all the Guardia Civil, the President's guard. That was the shots we heard. We had known some of the local Guardia Civil guys.

Mary Lou was in Tegucigalpa for the week. But Herman was attending the Colegio in town, and was staying in a hammock in my back room. No one was allowed to drive, and we were afraid for Herman to walk out to San Juan. So there were three of us.

And we were cut off. The post office was closed. The telegraph office couldn't send out telegrams. We couldn't phone anyone outside of town. All roads were blocked, and all other public transportation (planes and trains) were also shut down. But oddly enough, we could receive broadcasts in English about our revolution from Belize and Miami! That was our only contact with the world outside our wall.

Eventually we could go out and walk around town, but there was a curfew from 6 to 6. That stopped my visits to Tornabé right off the bat because there wasn't time to get out there and back before 6 o'clock. There was no road, so I had to drive along the beach, then cross the *laguna* by canoe to get to the village. Everything just took too long and there was always a danger of the jeep getting stuck in the sand, where there were no trees to winch myself out.

The curfew also meant no movies, no band practice, and no other evening activities. We played cards a lot!

The afternoon of the second day Herman was helping us move stuff from our old office to the new one when a troop of soldiers marched by in the street. We were out on the porch watching them just as the last man turned and fired his rifle over our heads, yelling that someone had shot at him! We knew better, but they swarmed into the yard, cleared out the building and lined us all up against a wall. Van was scared because she was a woman; Herman was scared because he was a Carib and they might just shoot him for no other reason; and I was just plain scared because I had never had a gun pointed at me before! They searched us, but didn't bother us otherwise. They knew Van and I were Americans, and Herman was our friend, which may be all that saved him from being shot.

But they took Rafael off to jail on some trumped-up charge we didn't understand. I think it was mostly just because he was nasty to them. We wondered later if the whole charade wasn't designed to lock him up for whatever reason they could manufacture. They also locked up many other prominent men in town for obscure reasons.

After all the excitement died down, Van,

Herman and I went home and nervously tried to calm each other down, with little success. As 6 p.m. approached and we could see soldiers in the street downstairs, we suddenly got spooked and decided to flee to Father Smith's house in New Tela. It was only a few minutes to 6 when we bolted. Just as we got outside the gate Mr. Shannon, head of the United Fruit Company in New Tela, drove up. He offered us a company house over there, as they did not expect any trouble in New Tela. He gave us a key, and told us where the vacant house was. It was furnished and had electricity and water.

We thanked him profusely and followed him back. The house was sandwiched between Father Smith's house and the Catholic Church, but we didn't dare poke our heads out to go to either one, as there were soldiers patrolling over there too.

We had taken nothing at all with us. There was soap and towels, and coffee in the kitchen, besides two bedrooms with bedding. We had no food, no books to read, no radio, no change of clothes or anything else. Not even a toothbrush! But Herman had a deck of cards in his pocket that the soldiers had not taken, so we sat around from 6 p.m. on, playing every card game any of us could think of.

The next day all seemed to have returned to normal again, and we went back to resume packing and moving to our new office. It was a comedy of errors! The windows were just screens with bars. There was no way to close them, so rain blew right in and flooded the place. And the toilets were placed right in front of the windows!

Mary Lou came back in a day or two, so our household was back to the three of us plus Herman. Our entire group survived with no major mishaps. We didn't know how long the curfew would last. Our main fear then was the remote possibility that we might all have to go home. Honduran radio stations were still shut down, but we still got occasional local news on the Voice of America from Radio Belize and Radio Miami.

A few years after I returned home from Honduras, I was surprised to receive a letter from Doña Victoria. She and Don Jorge had 2 daughters who were in high school in New Orleans while I was in Honduras, so I never really knew them. Both stayed in Louisiana after graduating and by that time had their own families. Doña Victoria was living with one of them, helping her with the baby, and cooking for them. Don Jorge was still in Tela. They seemed to have a friendly relationship, visiting back and forth. They just weren't living together anymore! I never asked!

She and I wrote back and forth for years. I always cringed when her letters came because they were several pages long, and in cramped, nearly indecipherable handwriting. And of course in Spanish. I visited her twice over the years, in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana. We talked for hours each time. I had always spoken to her in Spanish in Honduras, though I knew she understood English. So the first time I visited, I spoke in English, and she spoke in Spanish! We both understood each other, but it was easier to speak our first languages. In 1993, the second time I visited, I spoke only Spanish too, just to be sure I still could. Don Jorge, who was then nearly 90, was also in Louisiana, living with their other daughter. So I went to see him too. It was a very emotional visit, which I wrote about in the Find A Grave Memorial I created for him with ome old pictures of Tela.

Lluvia de Peces

article noticed by Maggie McQuaid, Pespire, Choluteca 1976-78 ~ Bisbee, Arizona

Known as the *Lluvia de Peces* or "Rain of Fish," it is said to occur at least once and sometimes twice in a year in the small town of Yoro: during a massive rain storm, hundreds of small silver fish supposedly rain from the sky onto the streets of the small town.

Said to have been happening in the town since the 1800s in the months of May or June, each year a large storm rolls through the town with a very heavy rain, and once the storm has passed, the streets are found flapping and flopping, full of small, still-living fish.

In the 1970s, a *National Geographic* team actually witnessed the event, making it one of the few credible sightings of such a phenomenon, though proof that the fish were coming from the sky and not another source remained elusive. Known as "animal rain," this weather phenomenon has been reported around the world for centuries, though the scientific understanding of it still remains sketchy.

Maggie asked on the Facebook site, Honduras Peace Corps, "Any of you ever witness this?"
To which Gordon Comstock replied, "It MUST rain fish in Yoro! I've never actually seen it, the local newspaper has published pictures of the fish. So it must be true . . ."

July 2011

Rio Patuca Float Trip

Otto Mike Hausch, Tegucigalpa 1966-69 ~ Keokuk, Iowa

In February of 1969, I believe, Joe Miller, Group 8, got the idea of making a float trip down the Patuca River. One of the businesses in Teguc had imported one large and one small inflatable rafts. They were made in Italy. The business was not able to sell them, and had lowered the price to their cost, L400 or $200. Joe had made friends with John Hallam. He was born in Wales, but grew up in Africa. He was in Honduras as a grain expert with his wife and teenage daughter. Pat Hare, Group 6, found some history on the Patuca, about the Honduran army going up stream and making notes of the trip in 1944. I purchased drink mix, Tang, dried soups, instant oatmeal and a few canned meats. I then estimated the total costs and divided it by four. John had offered to purchase the two rafts for half price after the trip. That would save us three PCVs considerable Lempiras. We planned a 10-day trip. The following is the exact words from the article that I wrote and was published in *The Mayan*, the Peace Corps/Honduras newspaper. However, I believe the editor did embellish my words in a few spots.

Shooting the Rapids on the Patuca

by Mike Hausch

On Friday, March 27, PCV's Pat Hare, Mike Hausch and Joe Miller, along with British engineer John Hallam, pumped air into their rubber rafts on the banks of the Rio Guayape not far from Catacamas, Olancho. Thus beginning a trip by river that would take them through the jungle of the Mosquitia and the legendary "Portal del Infierno", the *sumamente peligroso* roaring rapids of the Patuca River.

We armed ourselves with machetes and a 16 gauge shotgun to fight off wild boar packs, crocodiles and dart throwing Indians.

Further equipped with zipper-closing pup tents, PC mosquito repellent and snake serum, we felt prepared. The shotgun and fishing pole would hopefully, provide plenty of fresh meat for the campsite feasts. Luckily, however, John insisted on carrying at least some food for every meal.

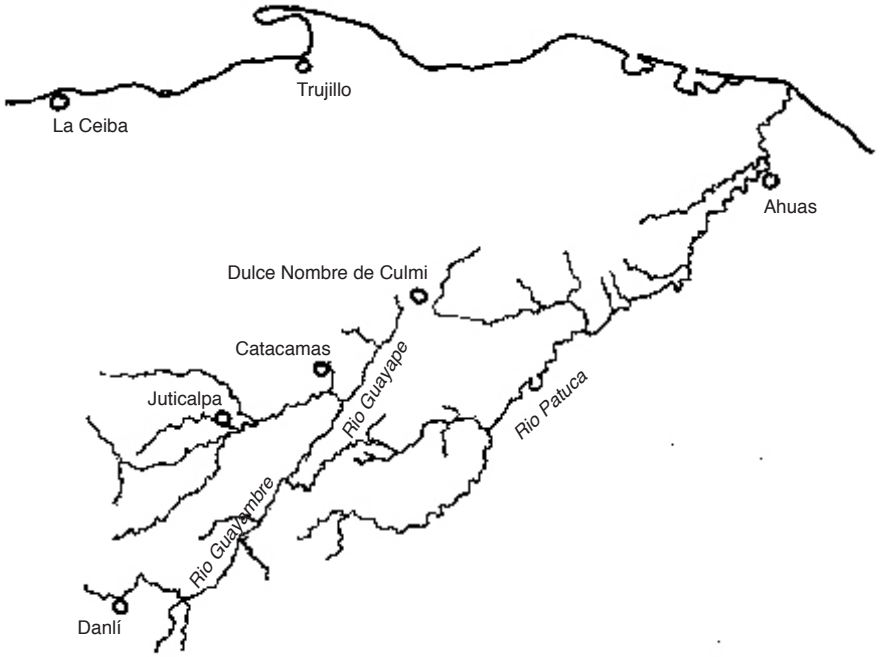
The first evening's campsite was well visited by *campesinos*, who among other things were curious about what would happen to the raft if a rock or a stick were to puncture it. We assured them that the rafts were made by an expert Italian firm with much experience in the business. Fortunately, none of them tried to test the expertise of the manufacturer for themselves.

At 5:10 the following morning while I was sawing wood for the breakfast fire and the others were breaking camp, Joe suddenly spotted a strange striped object under the small raft! Deciding it was one *!/? of a big snake, Joe and I prepared for the kill.

As we flipped the raft over with a fifteen foot stick, Pat's striped alforja appeared staring at us very ominously.

After a breakfast of oatmeal and Tang, we packed everything in plastic bags and loaded the four-man raft, which then would only allow three of us to squeeze in. The little raft held one pack and the winner of a coin toss. Minutes before 8 a.m. in foggy overcast, we pushed off and shortly came upon some *campesinos*, who were spear-fishing from horseback. They had poisoned the river with a special kind of tree branch that either stuns or kills the fish. The fishermen certainly were *aprovechando* (taking advantage of) their good fortune! We wondered what fishing would be like the next year.

Rowing, rowing, and more rowing eventually brought us to Los Encuentros



where the Guayape and the Guayambre Rivers meet to form the Patuca. Within a half-hour we arrived at the first series of large rapids and beached to give them a look over and to plan our strategy. The river dropped some ten feet for every fifty of distance, and it seemed as if there were rocks protruding everywhere between the white peaks of foam. After deciding on a course through the rocks, Joe volunteered to brave it in the little raft. When he was halfway through, he yelled over the noise of the rapids, "Come on in. It's fun!, and the big raft followed. We had walked the camera gear down the river on the shore . . . for safety's sake. Three exciting rapids later, we stopped to camp for the night in a canyon formed by the rivers' cutting through the mountains.

The next day, after running some more rapids and passing *campesino* homes shingled with mahogany, we set up camp on an island in the river.

On Tuesday, the first of April (incidentally April Fool's Day) and the fifth of our journey, we came upon a large stone with faces and figures carved on it in the middle of the river. We were about to enter the "Portal de Infierno." A while later, after having passed through a rock-walled canyon and over some small whirlpools, we realized we had just been through the Door to Hell. It definitely was not *sumamente peligroso*. But had it not been April Fool's Day, who knows what might have happened! The legend must have been created to keep someone away . . . perhaps the white man.

After Wednesday's breakfast of doughy pancakes, we passed the camp of the international Geography Survey mappers that had flown within ten feet over us a few days earlier. Later we came onto a camp of some Zambo Indians who were hunting *jaguars*. These were the last people we were to see for three and a half days!

Rain Thursday afternoon and evening made the outing a real camping treat. I managed to shoot two iguanas which after cleaning and roasting made a very good supper . . . if you like iguana. The next day we even had wild turkey to add to our staple supper dish of dried soup.

The river was slowing down now, and we saw the last large rapids on Friday. But it was not until Saturday night when we camped at the mouth of the Manama (Wampu) that we were once again among people . . . the Sumo Indians.

Our allotted time proved not near enough. Soon, too soon, we found ourselves looking for a motor dugout to take us to Ahuas so we could catch the Tuesday flight to Teguc.

We finally located the only one on the river on Sunday, and spent two anxious hours watching and waiting while its owner cranked and cranked to get the motor started (Joe had to help, by cleaning the spark plug) arriving in Ahuas on Monday evening. We were up bright and early the next morning and our way home to Teguc.

Some eighty rapids and three-hundred and fifty miles were travelled during the ten-day trip. A hundred and ninety were in the rubber rafts. Our only common regret was that there just wasn't enough time to explore the jungle. And our only common complaint was too much rowing and not enough floating!"

I believe our last evening was not in Ahuas as we originally had planned, but in Wampusirpi, 50 kms upstream of Ahuas. That night we were taken by soldiers to their commander. They wanted to know who were these bearded guys? And what were they doing here in the jungle? Luckily, one of the soldiers knew me from time I had spent in Puerto Lempira. When he spoke up about me being the construction supervisor of the school in PL, all concerns went away!

Naked Boys

Carol Welsh, Honduras Group I
San Pedro Sula, Cortés 1962-64
~ Palm Coast, Florida

While working at the *Centro Comunal*, I had a woman's club, a boy's club and a girl's club. The boys were about 6-7 years old. We played games once a week, which led to my little book, *Vamos a Jugar* – games that required little or no equipment or instructions.

One day we went for a walk. It was a typical summer day in San Pedro Sula – over 100 degrees plus humidity. We were soaked with perspiration even if we were just sitting. The boys spotted an empty wadding pool. It was in what apparently had been a park. The pool was concrete and about 3 feet deep. There was a spigot and to their amazement, when one of the boys turned it on, water came out! The boys looked at the water, looked at me, looked at the water and then one shrugged and said, "*Es bien. Esto solo Carolina*." With a shout of joy, they ripped off their clothes and played happily in the cool water. I even let them splash refreshing water on me . . . but my clothes stayed on.

February 2011

A Dog Tale

Marlene Martin, La Ceiba, Atlantida 1967-68 ~ Carmel, California

It happened once upon a time, far away in La Ceiba, Honduras, in an era in which Tegucigalpa was a sleepy little capital where donkeys carried loads of sticks down tranquil main streets. The bar where O'Henry wrote was still there.

It was a dark but tranquil night in La Ceiba. I lived in a far reach of the little city next to what we liked to think of as an *estero* where the grand-daddy of ceibas grew. A long, tranquil walk led to the Delta Dairy where the world's best vanilla ice cream was for sale in long, narrow bricks. Remember the package. It will save my life.

As was my pattern after dinner, I walked across La Ceiba down dark, narrow streets with shuttered shops. I felt very safe. Then one night on my way home from Delta with the brick of vanilla in hand, I was half way down a dark, narrow street when far away at the other end of the street, I saw a dog. The dog was walking slowly but not in a straight line. He wandered as he moved unrelentingly toward me. This was animal behavior the Peace Corps had warned us about: weird behavior. I moved as calmly as did he. I clutched the cold Delta brick.

He veered slowly in my direction. I adroitly but slowly moved the other way. His pace picked up. No sudden movements I reminded myself. Remain calm. The dog moved closer and closer, unrelenting in his path. I picked up my pace. So did he. Finally he was right next to me. I kept walking. He opened his muzzle and snapped it closed on my thigh. No growling or barking, just an open and vice-like shut case.

I beat his muzzle with the brick of Delta vanilla. Eventually, he let go and wandered on down the street. I followed him.

At the end of the street was a little shop with the shutters open. I walked in and asked the two men inside about the dog. They went onto the street, looked at the dog and then at each other. Then they said, "I think that is—(I've forgotten the name). Let's say Gustavo Martinez's dog. Something made me think that was wrong. You may have to pick this dog out of a line-up. You are going to have to remember exactly what he looks like, I told myself.

Dog had an ancestor who was German Shepard and perhaps another who was a large bulldog—of the pit sort. A key item: while he looked like a standard issue La Ceiba mutt, he was wearing a collar—a worn, brown leather collar. Remember that, I told myself.

My leg sort of hurt as I walked. I entered the second-floor rental room where my ex (not yet an ex) was reading. "Where is the Peace Corps manual?" I asked in a less than tranquil fashion. "I've been bitten by a dog." We quickly located the thick tome. I looked up "rabies" and read the directions. Broken skin was a bad omen. I had a muzzle-shaped series of bites that leaked blood—mine. "Get help as soon as possible," the manual seemed to scream. Panic seemed like a good plan. My ex was not panicked. "These are only small puncture wounds (about eight of them). We'll just wash them and all will be fine. No need to mention this to anyone."

(He was already on his way out, but not yet my "ex.")

The director of Peace Corps Central America and my Tegucigalpa-based boss were in town. They were very concerned about the puncture wounds. Soon we were in a public health office. A confidence-inspiring doctor (a vet) was in charge. We went to a number of homes—sort of a moving line-up. The Gustavo Martinez dog was not The Dog. At last we found My Dog. He lived in a fenced yard. The Honduran doctor decreed The Dog be confined for 21 days so he could be monitored. Then, if Dog was alive and without symptoms, we would reassess.

The really kind PC staff advised, "Whatever you do, don't tell Mark (our country doctor). He will make you stay in Tegucigalpa and you will start a series of really painful shots. Also you will be bored out of your mind. Let's check on the dog first."

Every day for 21 days, I walked to that home. Often Dog was not in residence. At last on the 21st day, there he was in his fenced yard. He was still quiet and weird but not frothing at the mouth. My wounds had healed.

Building Houses 40 Years Later

Alan Waugh, San Pedro Sula, Cortés 1973-75 ~ Seattle

The third night back in Honduras it started raining as we went to dinner. The warm, earthy, vegetation smell brought back pleasant memories from years ago, and I knew I was in the right place. I hadn't been so sure when the travel instructions said to gather at the Wendy's in the food court at the San Pedro Sula airport.

In June I spent a long week in Honduras with a team of twelve volunteers working for Global Village, the international arm of Habitat for Humanity. Being back was wonderful - the ambience: the waiters in the restaurants; the vendor stalls along the highway selling honey, coco, bananas, ceramics, fish along the road at Lago Yajoa; political signs painted on the rock walls of highway cuts in the mountains; banana trees & tropical plants; and always, the green mountains beyond mountains and big white fluffy clouds.

Twelve of us (eleven from the US, one from Calgary) worked on three concrete block houses for five days along side three crews of three Honduran masons - we did not fully complete a house, but made tremendous progress on all three. We mixed & poured concrete bucket-brigade style for foundations; wheelbarrowed innumerable loads of fill & tamped it down inside the foundations; mixed mortar; and mortared & set concrete blocks in place. I was impressed with the amount of rebar prescribed for the foundations & walls. Members of the recipient families worked with us part of every day.

Bougainvillea across the street; roosters running around next door; neighborhood children, sad, skinny dogs and an occasional horse wandering through the plot about a mile from downtown Siguatepeque purchased by Habitat where eventually there will be fourteen 520 square foot, two-bedroom houses with electricity, running water, and indoor plumbing.

We lived in a dormitory at the national forestry school in Siguatepeque - *Escuela Nacional de Sciencias Forestales*. The covered patio became our happy hour location: come back work dirty & sweaty, a little sore, grab a welcome hot shower, and congregate outside. Someone always volunteered to walk to the Texaco on the highway to purchase *cerveza* and ice, sometimes *cuba libre* in cans. Salva Vida in cans tastes bad, Imperial in cans is decent, Port Royal acceptable. I didn't manage to find Salva Vida in bottles until the last day of the trip, and then and only then remembered why I thought it was such a great beer 40 years ago.

We ate breakfast & dinner at local restaurants (*café con leche, baleadas, carne asada, platanos*, fresh *piña*), one of which delivered lunch on-site most days. The local Habitat staff did well by us in enabling the volunteers to get a sense of Honduras: Monday after work we visited a local potter in her studio; Tuesday after work we played soccer against the Habitat staff - as raindrops began to fall near the end of the game, a double rainbow appeared over Siguat; Wednesday they treated us to lunch at the Habitat office & taught us how to make tortillas; and Friday we took school supplies to a kindergarten near the build site, and played Simon Says with the 5-year olds.

Tuesday was a men's World Cup soccer qualifying match - Honduras against Jamaica in San Pedro Sula - going to work that day we saw street vendors selling Honduras t-shirts and jerseys; the breakfast restaurant waitresses, the hardware store clerks, and lots of people on the street were wearing blue. Our gregarious Honduran driver insisted we could not go out for dinner that night, we had to stay at the Escuela to watch the match, and he ordered

pizza delivered from a Chinese restaurant. Watching the animated, totally engaged driver was almost more fun than watching the game. When Honduras scored the first goal of the match that evening, fireworks erupted in Siguat. The Texaco on the corner projected the video of the game on the large wall of its garage - there may have been 400 people standing on the pavement watching. Honduras *ganó*. ¡Viva Honduras!

Hedman Alas buses still roll. They and many bus companies drive modern, sleek buses with very attractive supergraphics on the side. Saw quite a few three-wheeled, two-passenger vehicles near Progresso and in Siguatepeque carrying people and goods.

Peace Corps exited Honduras because of concerns for Volunteers' safety, and the State Department website for Honduras basically warns people to not travel there. Yet many groups do: four different color-coordinated t-shirted U.S. church groups on the place back to Miami with us. I believe Habitat would not send in teams if it were unsafe. A bunch of retired ex-pats gather every morning for coffee in our breakfast restaurant - they dismissed the Peace Corps decision as political. Our driver/guide's approach is that the people dying must be involved with the gangs and drug trade: the two lawyers killed that week in the Aguan Valley must have been guilty of something. I did not feel unsafe on the trip, and clearly millions of Hondureños are going about living their lives . . . and yet also clearly a bunch of bad stuff is going down in that poor, benighted country.

The official part of the trip ended with a dedication ceremony during which each of the families thanked us for our work: one guy staying cool, one guy getting quite emotional in his language, and the single mom chocked up and cried. A *piñata*, cake & soda - when the marimba trio began playing, more of my 40-year memories flooded back, and I teared up.

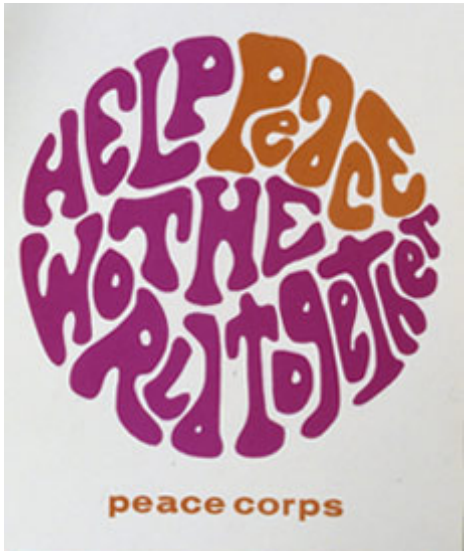
Many Global Village trips around the world conclude with a cultural/historical/environmental R & R activity - in this case, a night in Tela with a guided boat trip to and walk in the national park at Punta Sal. And then an early morning van ride back to the SPS airport and Wendy's (and Dunkin' Donuts and an extravagant duty free store).

Returning to Honduras with Global Village was great for me - so many memories, so many Spanish words I'd forgotten. It was also great for the other volunteers: to try meager Spanish with the masons, to eat unfamiliar food, to learn about Honduras from the fabulous guide/driver. It was a really good group of people, all of whom worked hard, many of whom raised blisters. And the appreciation on the faces of the family members at the dedication was so real, the reason we all went south for a week.

If this article raises your interest in returning to Honduras, Habitat/Global Village has been sending 8 to 10 teams a year to the country - a recent team worked in Puerto Lempira. The next team will be in-country October 26 through November 3, 2013, working in the Lenca community of Quelacasque in Gracias Lempira. More info at http://www.habitat.org/gv/trip/GV14260

The rule of thumb is to work to your capacity, take a break when you feel a need for water or shade, and don't worry about what others are doing - on two Habitat trips there have always been some younger or stronger men who like taking on the really heavy duty work, and there have always been a wide variety of tasks for the less strong such that everyone in the end knows they have contributed.

If you would like to craft your own non-work trip, I highly recommend the guide who served us very well: Gustavo Poublanc, PAL Tours, 1era. Etapa Bloque 3 casa # 18, San Pedro Sula 00504, Honduras, (504) 9986-1078, http://www.copanruinas.com/, infopaltours@yahoo.com, gustavo_poublanc@yahoo.com. Born & raised in San Pedro Sula, he is fluent in English, is very funny, has his own van, is a safe driver, and is an amateur archeologist (loves Copán).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¡Mil gracias to all the former Honduras Peace Corps Volunteers and staff who have written for the Amigos de Honduras newsletter over the years!

¡Alli no más!