



# Peace Corps at 60

Inside the Volunteer Experience



PROJECT • SPACE





# Peace Corps at 60

## Inside the Volunteer Experience

February 16 – August 9, 2021

American University Museum, Washington DC

Presented by Museum of the Peace Corps Experience





*To all those who opened their hearts  
—and our eyes—  
we dedicate this exhibit.*

**Museum of the Peace Corps Experience**





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# Welcome

American University is the home of changemakers—people who look at a challenge in the world and take action. In honor of that tradition, and of AU's role in shaping one of the most important international organizations of the last half-century, the American University Museum is curating and sponsoring, with the Museum of the Peace Corps Experience, an exhibition celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Peace Corps.

In March 1961, American University and University of Michigan students cohosted a conference to advise Sargent Shriver and his team as they planned the Peace Corps to fulfill President Kennedy's vision for the nation's young people: to serve their country and the cause of peace by living and working in the developing world. The event took place in the former Cassell Gym, which stood on the current site of the American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center.

The conference was sponsored by the National Student Association, with broad support from American University administrators and students. Approximately 500 representatives from student and youth groups—from more than 300 schools in 45 states—gathered at AU to discuss the framework for the new Peace Corps. The event featured forums, panels, workshops, and speakers, including then director Sargent Shriver and numerous senators and members of Congress. It proved instrumental in the successful launch of the Peace Corps.

American University maintains strong connections and engagement with the Peace Corps to this day. We are proud that AU consistently ranks among the top two schools for preparing volunteers from midsized universities and graduate schools. This commitment exemplifies our community's dedication to inclusivity and enacting social



justice, which takes on even greater importance today as we grapple with global crises that affect health, economic security, and racial justice.

In this spirit, the exhibition will be both a celebration and a critical look into the efforts of young idealists to create a better world, especially as seen from the vantage point of today. Working in collaboration with the Museum of the Peace Corps Experience, the School of International Service, and the Peace Corps Community Archive in the AU University Library, the American University Museum reached out to current AU students who are returned Peace Corps volunteers. Their contemporary perspectives help frame the exhibition and our understanding of the role of the Peace Corps in addressing challenges old and new.

The Peace Corps is urgently needed and newly relevant in a changed world. Honoring its founding, and the changemakers who built it, is a critical element of creating the path forward for a mission and an organization that impacts lives in every part of the world.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sylvia M. Burwell". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Sylvia M. Burwell  
President, American University



Thank you for joining the Peace Corps family in celebrating our 60th anniversary.

*Peace Corps at 60: Inside the Volunteer Experience* celebrates the spirit of service of more than 240,000 volunteers, their uniquely personal journeys of resilience and transformation, and the everlasting connections they build between cultures.

For the past 60 years, the Peace Corps has sent volunteers to 143 countries around the world to assist communities in need. The experience is life-changing, and volunteers return to the United States with stories and lessons to share for a lifetime. In the years to come, we will continue the legacy envisioned by President John F. Kennedy and built by Peace Corps volunteers and our country hosts. This exhibit is a testament to that legacy.

I hope you enjoy it!

*Jody K. Olsen*

Jody K. Olsen  
Director, Peace Corps





As the Peace Corps community celebrates the 60th anniversary of the agency's founding, this exhibit showcases objects and stories that engage the viewer to understand Peace Corps in action, working together with local communities and promoting cross-cultural respect.



The exhibit brings the volunteer experience home for enjoyment and education. Its virtual reach extends to audiences throughout the world. Former volunteers share their encounters with once unfamiliar objects, their exposure to new ideas, and lessons they learned from host country counterparts. Implicit in these stories is the transformative nature of these encounters for volunteers and for their families, friends, and colleagues in the US and abroad.

*Peace Corps at 60: Inside the Volunteer Experience* illuminates the core values of Peace Corps. In today's changed world, these values are more important than ever.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Glenn Blumhorst".

Glenn Blumhorst  
President, National Peace Corps Association







# Peace Corps at 60

At his inauguration in January 1961, President John F. Kennedy issued a challenge to all Americans: “Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.” The 30 individuals whose objects and stories we showcase in this exhibit represent a sampling of the nearly 240,000 mostly young people who answered Kennedy’s call to volunteer their service at key moments in history.

From its inception, the Peace Corps has offered an alternative path for advancing peace and promoting friendship among nations. The agency’s implicit idealism seems almost quaint in the context of the international conflicts, refugee crises, pandemics, and environmental disasters that have afflicted our planet over the past six decades. We face extraordinary challenges in our country and our world today.

Difficult times demand reflection and questioning of status quo. At this milestone in its 60-year history, the Peace Corps has a chance to redefine its role and confront some tough questions: what difference has it made—and how can it continue to promise positive change in today’s complex world? How should the agency address the concerns of its critics around race and power dynamics? Is the Peace Corps still relevant in a rapidly evolving global community?

The original 1961 legislation that created the Peace Corps laid out three goals for the agency:

1. Help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women.
2. Help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the people served.
3. Help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

Born in the crucible of 1960s activism—an era that witnessed historic changes in civil rights, gender equity, racial equality, and an anti-war movement—the Peace Corps offered a new concept of national service. It posed the possibility that, collectively, Americans can understand that what unites us is more vital than what divides us.

The Peace Corps became one of America's grand experiments to determine whether our common humanity is real or imaginary.

The agency had a single, audacious strategy: to uproot resourceful Americans and place them in unfamiliar cultural settings in developing countries around the world. To do what, exactly? The answer to this question was left largely to the volunteers and to the host governments and citizens who welcomed these American strangers into their midst. It was assumed (or hoped) that, together, they would devise a common mission to solve local problems related to health, education, agriculture, or other areas of pressing need.

To many, the Peace Corps symbolizes the essence of youthful idealism, even if primarily from the perspective of White, middle-class college graduates. Countless essays and books have been published, and numerous films, videos, and oral histories produced, about various aspects of the Peace Corps—its early impact on US foreign policy, its highly visible failures, and its slow, painfully won triumphs. The documentary *A Towering Task: The Story of the Peace Corps* (2019) is the first attempt to convey a comprehensive history of the program.

Of course, volunteers themselves have much to say about the Peace Corps.\* Their perspectives are as plentiful as their numbers, shaped by unique circumstances but also by how they view the world—and how the world views them. Among volunteers with

diverse identities—whether by race, ethnicity, ability, religion, or sexual orientation—challenges may be greater at home or abroad. Stories from these volunteers have been less visible in the prevailing Peace Corps narrative.\*\*

In the span of six decades, the agency's influence has reached across the globe. Overseas service has transformed the lives of thousands of volunteers and the people with whom they lived and

worked. The Peace Corps surely has a powerful story to tell—but how can it be captured in all its multifaceted complexity?



Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Sharon Keld © 2017 / International Calendar 2020.

\*[american.edu/cas/museum/2021/student-voices.cfm](http://american.edu/cas/museum/2021/student-voices.cfm)

\*\*[american.edu/cas/museum/2021/many-faces-of-peace-corps.cfm](http://american.edu/cas/museum/2021/many-faces-of-peace-corps.cfm)



Peace Corps volunteer John Hutchison tills field with an ox-drawn plow. Chad, Doum Doum 1966–68. Courtesy of John Hutchison. (See story, page 56.)

Nearly 20 years ago, the Museum of the Peace Corps Experience was created to collect objects that Peace Corps volunteers purchased or received as gifts during their service. In recent years the museum also began gathering the stories behind objects. These vignettes bring dimensionality and life to inanimate items by placing them in the context of real places, people, and events. They also offer insight into the uniquely reciprocal relationships, built on exchanges of friendship and generosity, that develop between volunteers and their country hosts. The meaning of the objects is rooted in that reciprocity: by telling their stories, they remain significant even after the relationships may have ended.

The objects and stories featured in this exhibit were selected from the substantially larger collection of the Museum of the Peace Corps Experience. They represent only a snapshot across 60 years, six continents, countless cultures, and some 240,000 vantage points. Collectively they reveal the essential components of what it means to be a volunteer: immersion and adaptation, bridge building between cultures, and service to our human family. The Peace Corps may adjust its mission in the future, but the agency will always be shaped by the volunteers and their hosts, confronting challenges together.

John C. Rude (Ethiopia 1962–64)  
Alison Kahn (Benin 1976–77)





# MUSEUM OF THE PEACE CORPS EXPERIENCE

## A Brief History

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In 1999 Martin Kaplan (Somalia 1962–64) of Portland, Oregon, had a big idea. Why not preserve and exhibit the memorabilia that Peace Corps volunteers bring home from their countries of service?

“I knew from my own experience that all the stuff you brought back would just stay in boxes and nobody would ever look at [it]. As people started to get older, the things would just disappear—and I didn’t see any reason for that to happen.”

Kaplan proposed his big idea to Bill Stein (Niger 1990–93) at a local Peace Corps association potluck. Stein went home and wrote up a concept plan to form what became the Committee for a Museum of the Peace Corps Experience. “We wanted to be able to tell the real stories,” Stein said.

The committee signed its charter and became a 501(c)(3) in Oregon in March 2000. A series of museum-sponsored temporary exhibits followed, including a major event for the 50th anniversary at the Oregon Historical Society.

“Our vision at that time was to have the museum in Portland,” Stein said. “But to build something like this you need several million dollars . . . so that vision was never realized.”

“We wanted to be able to tell the real stories.”

— Bill Stein (Niger 1990–93)

By 2015 in Washington, DC, Patricia Wand (Colombia 1963–65) was fielding inquiries about the need for a national museum after she helped launch the Peace Corps Community Archive at American University Library. She invited Nicola Dino (Ecuador 1994–97), then committee president, to Washington to promote the Oregon group’s vision at the 2016 Peace Corps Connect conference. That was a game changer. “From that day,” said Dino, “we went national and the ball really got rolling.”

Opposite: Farmer takes a break while his camel grazes. Chad, Doum Doum 1966–68. Courtesy of John Hutchison. (See story, page 56.)





Students pose with handmade instruments outside school. Courtesy of Betty Hiebert, Lesotho, Ha Tlali 1993–95. (See story, page 33.)

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In 2017 Glenn Blumhorst, president of the National Peace Corps Association, invited the museum to share exhibit space in Peace Corps Place, the NPCA's new headquarters.

How many returned Peace Corps volunteers (RPCVs) does it take to create a museum from scratch? Answer: a virtual village of committed and multitalented volunteers from around the country. Twenty years after its inception in Portland, the museum project continues to build on the founders' vision and grassroots efforts.

“ . . . all the stuff you brought back would just stay in boxes and nobody would ever look at [it]. As people started to get older, the things would just disappear—and I didn't see any reason for that to happen.”

— Martin Kaplan (Somalia 1962–64)

Developing a web-based virtual museum and collecting objects and stories from RPCVs are underway. Future plans include acquisition and renovation of a historic school building in Washington, DC, to permanently house a state-of-the-art museum.

I think it's an important story to tell—of this experiment in people helping people that came out of a certain era in the 60s. I don't think *this* era would spawn a program like Peace Corps today, so I'm glad it's still around."

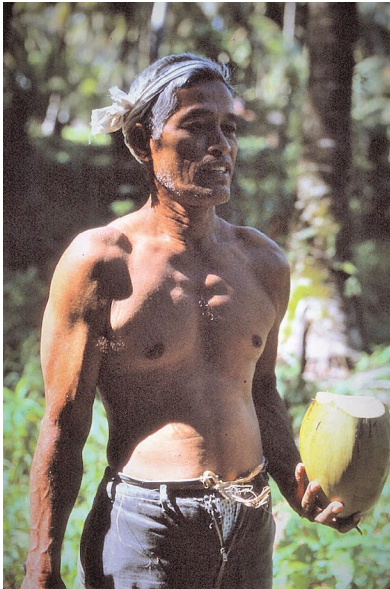
— Bill Stein (Niger 1990–93)

A partnership with American University's Peace Corps Community Archive supports the collection and preservation of primary source materials—letters, journals, photos, audio and video recordings, and other documents donated by former volunteers—for the benefit of researchers. Working with Many Faces of Peace Corps and the RPCV

Oral History Archive Project, the museum collects stories from volunteers representing the spectrum of American diversity.

Through the web-based virtual museum, an international audience—including Peace Corps country hosts—see themselves reflected positively in the objects, stories, and lessons that American volunteers carry home. And visitors discover a fresh worldview and the value of service.

The 60th anniversary brings great urgency to the museum's goal of making Peace Corps values more visible. Now more than ever, these times call for greater understanding of one another.



Worker finds thirst-quenching milk in a fresh coconut. Courtesy of Jack and Anne Weiss, Micronesia, Chuck Lagoon 1966–68. (See story, page 29.)

Learn more about the Museum and how to contribute money, an object, or a story: [museumofthepeacecorpsexperience.org](https://museumofthepeacecorpsexperience.org)



# PEACE CORPS TIMELINE 1961-2021

1960

## OCTOBER 1960

Presidential candidate Senator John F. Kennedy announces idea of Peace Corps (PC) at University of Michigan (UM)

1961

## JANUARY 1961

President JFK inaugurated

## MARCH

President Kennedy signs executive order establishing PC as a pilot program; appoints R. Sargent Shriver as director

UM and American University (AU) students hold conference at AU to advise Peace Corps director Sargent Shriver

## JUNE

First Peace Corps volunteers (PCVs) begin training for Colombia and Tanganyika (now Tanzania)

## AUGUST

First PCVs depart for Ghana

## AUGUST

Berlin Wall erected

## SEPTEMBER

President Kennedy signs PC Act authorizing the program and \$40 million budget

1963

## NOVEMBER 1963

President Kennedy assassinated

1964

## SEPTEMBER 1964

PCVs featured on cover of *National Geographic* magazine

1966

## JUNE 1966

Number of PCVs and trainees in the field hits historic high: 15,000-plus

## SEPTEMBER

Lillian Carter, mother of future president Jimmy Carter, volunteers for PC in India

1968

## JANUARY 1968

Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia

## APRIL

Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. assassinated

## JUNE

Robert F. Kennedy assassinated

1969

**JULY 1969**

Apollo 11 lands on moon

1971

**JULY 1971**

President Richard M. Nixon incorporates PC and other programs under new federal agency, ACTION; nominates PC director Joe Blatchford as head

1972

**FEBRUARY 1972**

President Richard M. Nixon visits China

1974

**AUGUST 1974**

President Richard M. Nixon resigns

1975

**APRIL 1975**

Vietnam War ends

1977

**OCTOBER 1977**

President Jimmy Carter appoints Carolyn Robertson Payton as first female and first African American PC director

1979

**1979**

Returned Peace Corps volunteers (RPCVs) form National Council of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (NCRPCV), precursor of National Peace Corps Association (NPCA)

1981

**1981**

NCRPCV marks PC 20th anniversary with first national conference in Washington, DC

**DECEMBER**

PC assumes original status as an independent federal agency

1986

**APRIL 1986**

Chernobyl nuclear disaster

1987

**1987**

5th Beyond War Award to 20,000 current and returned Peace Corps volunteers

1988

**SEPTEMBER 1988**

PCV Barbara Jo White (Dominican Republic 1987–89) creates World Map Project

1989

**NOVEMBER 1989**

Berlin Wall falls

1990

**JUNE 1990**

First PCVs to Eastern Europe (Hungary and Poland)

1991

**JANUARY 1991**

First Gulf War begins

**AUGUST**

World Wide Web released to general public

**DECEMBER 1991**

Soviet Union  
dissolves

1993

**JUNE 1993**

First PCVs to China

**JULY**

President Bill Clinton  
appoints Carol Bellamy  
(Guatemala 1963–65)  
as first RPCV PC director

**NOVEMBER**

European Union created

1994

**APRIL 1994**

Apartheid system in  
South Africa ends

1995

**AUGUST 1995**

PCVs and teachers in  
Romania create first  
Camp GLOW (Girls  
Leading Our World)

**DECEMBER**

Crisis Corps  
(precursor to PC  
Response) formed

1997

**FEBRUARY 1997**

First PCVs to  
South Africa

1999

**WINTER 1999**

Columbia River PC  
Association (now Portland  
PC Association) members  
form committee to  
create a PC museum

2000

**MARCH 2000**

Committee for a Museum  
of the Peace Corps  
Experience (CMPCE)  
signs charter as an  
Oregon 501(c)(3)

2001

**SEPTEMBER 11, 2001**

Terrorists attack World  
Trade Center and Pentagon

2003

**MARCH 2003**

Invasion of Iraq;  
second Gulf War begins

2005

**SEPTEMBER 2005**

PC Response deploys  
PCVs to Gulf Coast after  
hurricanes Katrina and Rita

2010

**2010**

Total PCVs serving since  
1961 reaches 200,000

**DECEMBER**

Arab Spring

2011

**2011**

Peace Corps nominated  
for Nobel Peace Prize

**MARCH**

PC 50th anniversary

**MARCH–JUNE**

*50th Anniversary of  
the Peace Corps* exhibit  
hosted by MPCE at  
Oregon Historical Society

- US and international historic events
- Peace Corps historic events



- 2013**
- JUNE 2011**  
PC featured at annual Smithsonian Folklife Festival, Washington, DC
- JULY 2013**  
Black Lives Matter movement organizes
- DECEMBER**  
South African president and activist Nelson Mandela dies
- MAY**  
PC approves assignments for same-sex partners
- 2014**
- FEBRUARY 2014**  
Russia annexes Crimea
- OCTOBER**  
Malala Yousafzai wins Nobel Peace Prize
- 2015**
- JUNE 2015**  
US legalizes same-sex marriage
- JULY**  
PC streamlines application process and applicant choices
- 2016**
- SEPTEMBER 2016**  
CMPCE introduces museum project at 55th anniversary PC Connect national conference, Washington, DC
- 2017**
- OCTOBER 2017**  
*#MeToo* movement gains prominence
- 2019**
- SEPTEMBER 2019**  
*A Towering Task: The Story of the Peace Corps* documentary premieres at John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, DC
- 2020**
- MARCH 2020**  
World Health Organization declares coronavirus (COVID-19) a pandemic
- MARCH**  
PC evacuates and closes service of 7,300 volunteers in 62 countries due to COVID-19 pandemic
- 2021**
- FEBRUARY-AUGUST 2021**  
*Peace Corps at 60: Inside the Volunteer Experience* exhibit cohosted by MPCE and AU Museum, Washington, DC
- SEPTEMBER**  
60th anniversary PC Connect hosted by NPCA, Washington, DC





# INSIDE THE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

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## Objects and Stories



## SLEEPING MAT

c. 1967.

**Weno, Chuuk Lagoon, Micronesia. Pandanus fiber,  
76 1/2 x 36 1/2 in.**

**Collection, Museum of the Peace Corps Experience.  
Gift of Richard Sundt, Micronesia, Rongelap Atoll 1967-69.**

In much of the world people take their furniture for granted. In the Pacific Islands, people take for granted the unnecessary of furniture. I discovered this when I met my first challenge as a Peace Corps trainee on Udot Island in the Chuuk Lagoon.

We lived in a spare little western-style cabin. A utilitarian mat covered the floor. There were no beds. I was unprepared for sleeping on the floor, especially on that rough mat. When I learned that the local Udotese slept on well-crafted mats fashioned from plaited leaves of the native pandanas tree, I found just the right one in a local shop so I could sleep like a native.

After three months of training, I boarded a field ship in Majuro that would take me 400 miles northwest to Rongelap Atoll. In 1954 the US Navy evacuated residents of Rongelap after fallout from a hydrogen bomb test on nearby Bikini Atoll contaminated the islands; three years later, some of them began to return home. In 1967 the atoll's main





and only inhabited island had a population of about 120 residents who lived on three square miles of land. My assignment was to start a coconut rehabilitation project.

I began adjusting to living—and sleeping—in my new home. One day a woman from the neighborhood came to my door with a gift. She had made me a pillowcase embroidered with flowers and leaves. An inscription, written with a marker, said, “*Ememlok ijen ko aö, ilo ien ne ij babu*”—“My place is better with this pillow when I go down to sleep.” Indeed, it was!

Several months later the owners of the house next door returned to Rongelap. As a gesture of friendship, the husband offered me a foam rubber mattress that he had brought home. He said it would help me sleep like a *ribelle*—a foreigner. I immediately placed it under my mat. Who needed a bed?

In 1985 the people of Rongelap had to evacuate again. The land remained too irradiated for human habitation, a determination that came too late for the many islanders who suffered radiation illnesses. If human-generated disasters have made life difficult for residents of these low-lying atolls, the Marshallese long ago learned to adapt and harness their limited resources to fashion a sustainable and self-sufficient way of life—something I learned from them, something we all aspire to achieve.

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## JIMMA STOOL

**Garage people, mid-twentieth century.**

**Jimma, Oromia, Ethiopia.**

**Wanza wood, 12 x 12 x 12 in.**

**Courtesy of Courtney Arnold,  
Ethiopia, Asebe Teferi 1964–66.**

We entered our Ethiopian mountain town as part of Peace Corps’ third wave of 300 volunteers. Lightbulbs glowed dimly through windows as we entered Asebe Teferi, near Dejazmatch Wolde Gabriel aba Seitan secondary school. Behind a grove of coffee trees and a shepherd’s one-room house was our new home.



The walls of our house were built of rough-hewn eucalyptus stuffed with straw and a blend of mud and cow dung. It was punctuated by seven cheerful, blue wooden shutters and four doors. We filled the living room with furnishings from the local market.

While we were at school, 15-year-old Amina cooked, shopped, and swiped a broom at neighborhood chickens, which chirped and pecked through our house. After school and on weekends, our home was surrounded by curious and eager students—Amhara, Somali, Oromo, Gurage, Egyptian, and a few with Greek, Armenian, Italian, or Turkish backgrounds. We offered a room in the back of the house to two older students, both named Mohammed. The Mohammeds became our trusted guides, interpreters, and counselors on Ethiopia's cultural complexities.

One of our household furnishings was a three-legged wooden stool from far-off Jimma. This kind of stool is used in homes and coffeehouses in rural Ethiopia and has become popular in small hotels and coffeehouses in larger cities. Gurages, who are best known for carving these stools, shape them with an adze from one piece of wood from the wanza tree. Since we returned to the United States, the wooden stool has been a familiar piece of living room furniture as our children grew up. Just as in Ethiopia, it has witnessed the lively gatherings of friends and family together in our home.

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## FANS

**c. 1979.**

**Lower River Division, The Gambia. Grass, 18 x 12 1/4 in. each.  
Collection, Museum of the Peace Corps Experience.  
Gift of Paul Jurmo, The Gambia, Pakalinding 1976-79.**

My education in mosquito affairs began on the first night in my village of Pakalinding. I had arrived after a 100-mile ride from the capital with my furniture in the back of a truck. Sweaty and tired at the end of the day, I finally climbed onto my foam mattress, which was covered with a newly purchased mosquito net.

The next morning I awoke to find a half dozen mosquitoes on the inside of my net trying to escape through the fabric. I slapped them between my hands only to discover that they were engorged with my blood. My neighbors later explained that the modern type of mosquito net I'd bought in the city had gaps just large enough to let hungry mosquitoes in—but when the insects were engorged, the

holes were too small for them to escape. For their own nets, villagers used a much more densely woven cheesecloth-type fabric. Needless to say, I bought a more tightly woven net as soon as possible.

Thus began a three-year relationship with *suusuulaa* (“mosquito” in Mandinka)—and learning how to deal with her. Peace Corps volunteers took a dose of chloroquine phosphate once a week as a prophylactic against malaria. Without this medicine, we would have suffered from headaches, fever, chills, nausea, diarrhea, or possibly death—symptoms all too common among our Gambian neighbors.

As a young volunteer, I lived with a large Gambian family. Each night they welcomed me to sit outside in the dark with my landlord and other adult male family members and friends. We would chat, pray, and share a pot of sugary tea. Frequently a small boy was assigned to fan us gentlemen to cool us and keep the mosquitoes away.

Such fans were ubiquitous tools in Gambian households. Village women wove them from local grasses using techniques handed down over generations, supplying their families and sometimes selling them in the market for extra income. They were multipurpose—used to shoo insects from people and food, to lessen the effects of energy-sapping heat, and to serve as a bellows to start the cooking fire. During intense daylight hours a fan could also function as a sun visor.

Forty years later, I appreciate that these simple, everyday devices were artistic, health protecting, environmentally sustainable, income generating, and culturally rooted. They were beautiful artifacts of a rich, communal way of life and represented many of the best qualities of the Gambian people.





# KAVANGO ART BASKETS

c. 2011-13.

Kavango, Namibia. Makalani palm, grasses, dimensions variable.

Collection, Museum of the Peace Corps Experience.

Gift of Alice Impraim, Namibia, Rundu 2011-13.

I have always loved baskets, especially colorful ones. Before my Peace Corps service, I had collected quite a few from Ghana, the country of my birth, and other parts of the world. I viewed my time in Namibia as an opportunity to serve—and to add to my basket collection.

Basket weaving in Kavango has been traced back to the early 1900s, when Namibia was a German colony. The colorful baskets are woven from the *makalani* palm, along with local grasses that grow in the Kavango region. Basket makers use the traditional coil technique. To obtain the shades of brown, purple, and yellow, palm leaves are prepared and placed in boiling water with bark and roots of various shrubs and trees.

Tradition calls for these baskets to be woven by women in a communal manner as they sit outside their homesteads. Baskets are used for harvesting, winnowing, transporting, and storing grain.





As a Small Business and Entrepreneurship Development (SEED) volunteer, I worked with a group of 15 persons with disabilities—blind, hearing impaired, or missing limbs. My goal was to help them set up a bakery as an income generating project. Fortunately my love for baskets turned out to be a big boost for my bakery project.

My roommate, a Peace Corps Response volunteer, coordinated basket production with a local women’s cooperative known as the Kavango Basket Weavers. She purchased the baskets from the cooperative to sell to trading companies in the United States. I bought and shipped baskets to the US and sold them to my church members, former coworkers, and neighbors in California. Each buyer received a beautiful basket in return for a few dollars, and they knew the money would go to a good cause. I was able to raise enough funds to purchase equipment for the bakery, and the rest was deposited in the bank as a rainy day fund for my friends with disabilities in Namibia.

Today basket weaving continues in the Kavango region, providing jobs and incomes that support hundreds of families—and even whole communities.

The bakery also thrives. And just think: it was my simple love for baskets that brought these ventures together and gave them new vitality.



## DECORATIVE BOWL

**Elizabeth Bako, Sara Madjingaye, c. 1969.**  
**Sarh (formerly Ft. Archambault), Moyen-Chari, Chad.**  
**Gourd, beading, pyro-engraving, 3 1/4 x 6 1/2 x 6 1/2 in.**  
**Collection, Museum of the Peace Corps Experience.**  
**Gift of Marla Bush, Chad, Ft. Lamy 1968–70.**

I was probably one of the few Peace Corps volunteers who ever requested Chad. Although I had lived in North Africa, had a master's degree in African studies, and traveled extensively on the continent, I knew little about Chad. I just knew I wanted to go there.

In one of my letters home, I quoted a foreigner working in Chad who said, "Chad does not have anything of artistic interest." That person must have overlooked the ubiquitous, humble calabash.

A special 1970 edition of *Jeune Afrique* featuring Chad noted that calabashes were a major Chadian art form. Multipurpose vessels, they are used for storage, food preparation, and serving; as ladles, drinking vessels, containers for milk and other products—even as part of musical instruments. They are decorated by women in a myriad of tribal styles and techniques and are a source of pride and wealth.

I was immediately struck by their presence and beauty. From day one I started collecting and displaying them in my home. I ate out of calabashes in the homes of Chadian friends and used them as serving dishes in my home. My appreciation must have been noticed, as Chadian friends and students chose calabashes as gifts. Others I purchased in homes, from market women, or in the little tourist market.

One special calabash came from a visit to Ft. Archambault where I stayed with a Peace Corps couple. A couple of students of a volunteer friend came to visit and one of them, Elizabeth Bako, gifted me this gourd. It has traditional pyro-engraved patterns, but it was personalized by Elizabeth with bead stitching and beaded cords for carrying. By the end of my time in Chad, I came home with a large collection of calabashes. Some of them now reside in the permanent collection of the Baltimore Museum of Art.



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## COCONUT BOWLS

c. 1961-63.

**Negros Oriental, Philippines. Coconut shell, 2 x 5 1/2 x 5 1/2 in. each.**

**Collection, Museum of the Peace Corps Experience.**

**Gift of Elinor Dobbins Capehart, Philippines, Zamboanguita 1961-63.**



## COCONUT SPOONS

c. 1961-63.  
Negros Oriental,  
Philippines.  
Coconut shell,  
bamboo, twine,  
dimensions  
variable.  
Collection,  
Museum of the  
Peace Corps  
Experience. Gift  
of Elinor Dobbins  
Capehart, Philippines,  
Zamboanguita 1961-63.



Before the road between Dumaguete City, capital of Negros Orientale, and our village of Zamboanguita was paved, before electricity, water, and sewers were available, we pumped water by hand to a storage tank on the balcony of the second floor of our four-room house.

We were four women PCVs living together with the woman who owned the house. She also cooked, cleaned, and did the laundry. This was a village of fishermen, subsistence farmers, and small harvesters of coconuts. The first group of volunteers in the Philippines were all “teacher’s aides” because the Peace Corps wanted to get a large number of volunteers into the country.

My rural primary school students made coconut bowls and spoons from a coconut shell and bamboo for the handle. My roommates and I hoped our students might be able to sell the coconut bowls if we helped them. They lacquered several of the bowls to show the rich colors of the coconut shells.

In the Mountain Province on the island of Luzon, artisans produced carvings of birds, animals, fruits, and weavings. I bought a wooden doll from a carver whose house was open to visitors. I asked whether he had anything he might have made for himself. He thought a moment, stepped out of the shop, and came back with a doll wearing a brass fertility symbol and carrying a baby. The symbol was in the shape of a uterus and fallopian tubes.

I then committed a cultural faux pas by admiring the earrings of the elderly woman in the household. The earrings bore the same

fertility symbol and were made from old Spanish coins. She started to struggle to remove one of the earrings. I tried to say, “No, please don’t take them out”— but we did not speak a common language. I later learned that in this locale, when someone admires something you have, it is a cultural obligation for you to give that object to the admirer.

She told me through a family interpreter that she was glad to pass them on. She’d worn them since she was a girl, but her daughter had shown no interest in these old things. When I returned to the US, I had the earrings made into pins—one for my mother and the other for me. After my mother died, the pair of fertility earrings was reunited.

## CARVED BIRD

**Mid-twentieth century.**

**Chuuk Lagoon, Micronesia. Coconut, 8 x 5 1/2 x 5 1/2 in.  
Collection, Museum of the Peace Corps Experience. Gift of  
Jack and Anne Weiss, Micronesia, Chuuk Lagoon 1966-68.**

Anne and I had been married only four weeks when we entered Peace Corps training in Key West, Florida. We received intensive training in the Chuukese language and learned methods for teaching ESL (English as a Second Language). Once we arrived at Chuuk High School, I taught math and outboard motor mechanics, as water travel was essential in Micronesia. Anne taught girls sewing, nutrition, and health.

One item we brought back that closely reflects Micronesian culture is a student-crafted bird image made from a coconut shell.

A common greeting in Chuukese is literally translated as “there is food” rather than “hello.” Such was the significance of the coconut in daily life. With machete in hand, your Chuukese friend might climb a nearby palm to bring down a ripe coconut. You



drink the milk. You eat the chopped meat. You take some of the fiber with you to use in place of toilet paper. Everywhere you go—from your sleeping mat to thatched roofs, woven baskets, or the rope in the dugout that transports you to another island—coconut goes with you. Dried coconut, called *copra*, is Micronesia's most important agricultural export.

The bird represented in the student's gift also reminded us that Chuukese people can navigate open oceans in their sailing canoes—*without* GPS. In addition to reading the waves and stars, they observe nearby birds to find their bearings.

Six days after returning from Micronesia I was drafted and sent to fight in Vietnam. Both were life-changing experiences—but of the two, I would say that the Peace Corps changed me more profoundly.

## MEDICAL KIT (1964)

**Metal, assorted medical supplies, 2 2/3 x 13 1/2 x 10 in.**

**Collection, Museum of the Peace Corps Experience.**

**Gift of H. James Whitaker, Iran, Sari 1964–66.**

30 I was issued the medical kit shortly after my arrival in Iran in early 1964, just prior to being dispatched to my service site—a small town called Fuman near Rasht, the provincial capital of Gilan Province.

I was assigned to the agricultural extension service, which meant many visits to villages. I'd often notice children's appalling health issues, such as suppurating external infections, burns that weren't healing, ophthalmic infections, vitamin deficiencies, diarrhea, etc. There was no access to health care for the children—only home remedies, which usually worsened the conditions.

So ignoring Peace Corps Iran policy, which prohibited nonqualified volunteers from rendering medical assistance to local people, I began taking the medical kit with me on village visits. I treated whatever cases I could. I also arranged for leaflets to be printed in the local language explaining the location of minimal government health facilities available to the poor. I distributed these leaflets wherever I traveled.

My rudimentary yet wide-ranging medical services were greatly appreciated and, to my amazement, often effective. (Was it simply a placebo







effect?) I quickly exhausted the contents of my medical kit, so I began replenishing them with my own funds, buying medicine at pharmacies in Rasht.

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Soon these remedies were exhausted as well, so I appealed for assistance from a wonderfully personable Iranian physician in Rasht who had been enlisted to care for the area's Peace Corps volunteers. He started providing me with supplies, eventually, and unbeknownst to me, lobbying the Peace Corps physician in Tehran to unofficially ship replenishments for my medical kit. This arrangement continued until I contracted pneumonia and was hospitalized in Rasht's primitive provincial hospital under the care of that same Iranian physician. Upon my recovery, I was transferred to another province.

With a bit of subterfuge I retained the medical kit when I departed from Iran. (Returning your medical kit was a condition for clearance to depart, but I simply claimed that my kit had been lost.) I included it in my allowed shipment for home.

Amazingly, despite multiple upheavals and the loss of most of my possessions over the decades of my international career, my Peace Corps medical kit somehow passed from one safe haven to another. Upon completing my travels and life as an expatriate, I found this precious kit among stored possessions.

## *BAGANNA*

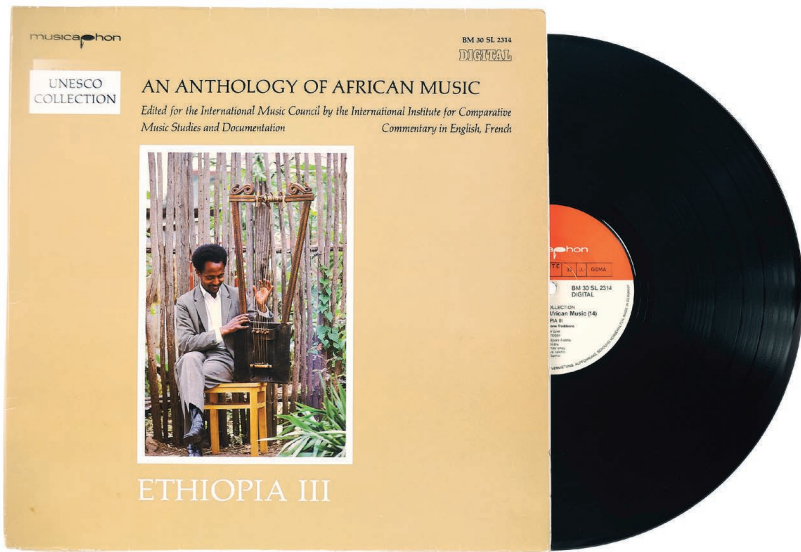
Mid-twentieth century.

Eritrea, Ethiopia. Wood, animal string, hide, 43 1/2 x 17 x 10 in.

Collection, Museum of the Peace Corps Experience.

Gift of Cynthia Kimberlin, Ethiopia, Mendefera 1962-64.





## TRADITIONAL ETHIOPIAN MUSIC RECORDING

***Ethiopia: Three Chordophone Traditions, An Anthology of African Music* series, UNESCO Collection, France, 1985. Recorded by Cynthia Tse Kimberlin in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 1972. Vinyl, 12 1/4 x 12 1/4 in.**

**Collection, Museum of the Peace Corps Experience. Gift of Cynthia Tse Kimberlin, Ethiopia, Mendefera 1962–64.**

**Audio: “Selamta” by Alemu Aga, 1972; from *Ethiopia: Three Chordophone Traditions*.**

I was a member of the first Peace Corps group to Ethiopia—and the first American woman of Chinese descent to serve as a volunteer. I was first assigned to Mendefera. The name Mendefera derives from the high hill in the center of the town and means “no one dared.” For the town’s inhabitants, it is a reminder of the resistance by the local people against colonization. I taught science at St. George Middle School and, after school, English to working adults.

During our two-month summer leave, a number of volunteers decided to visit South Africa. A good friend of mine was delegated to inform me that I could not travel with them because of South Africa’s apartheid policy. Of all the moments when I was reminded of my unique status, this blatant racism was the hardest to bear. I simply

could not believe such discrimination actually existed, nor could I understand why my Peace Corps colleagues would want to visit South Africa when they knew other Americans could not.

I spent my leave in Egypt where the sun shines all day. I didn't realize my skin color had changed to a dark copper brown until I returned to my classroom in Asmara. My students beamed with amazement and shouted something that startled me: "You're brown like us!"

Music from Eritrea was unlike anything I ever heard. It captivated my attention and imagination so much that I set about recording it. This foreshadowed my future career as an ethnomusicologist.

In 2000 I took the Tigrinya songs I recorded back to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and played them to some young people I met. They did not know these songs, but some of their parents and grandparents did. The songs were not familiar to them due to the political turmoil from 1974 to 1991, following Haile Selassie's removal in a military coup. The military regime that replaced the emperor banned love ballads, religious songs, and musical instruments associated with religion.

The ban prompted me to publish some of my 1972 field recordings of prerevolutionary music, resulting in the 1985 UNESCO recording *Three Chordophone Traditions*. After 1991 the ban was lifted.

This music is an historical document of an oral tradition. One could say I am returning these songs to the people who first gave them to me, whom I still feel privileged to know. I hope that the next generation will enjoy these songs and pass them on.

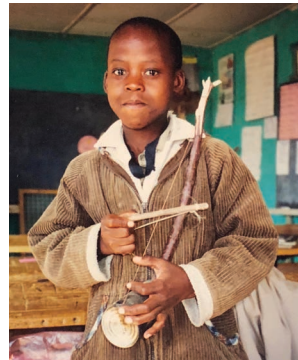
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## **MAMOKHORONG**

**Basotho people, c. 1994.  
Maseru District, Lesotho. Metal can,  
stick, string, 10 x 21 x 3 in.  
Collection, Museum of the Peace Corps  
Experience. Gift of Betty Hiebert,  
Lesotho, Ha Tlali 1993-95.**

I had planned to travel after retiring from a long career in elementary education. At age 63, I volunteered for the Peace Corps.

One of a group of 30 education volunteers sent to Lesotho in 1993, I served as a resource teacher in rural primary schools. I taught on a rotating basis at five different elementary schools, one of them a little mission school up in the mountains. I had to hike in along steep and





rocky trails that turned slick when it rained and navigate a series of stepping-stones across a creek, with Doc Martens on my feet and a pack on my back. I'd spend the night on the mountain and hike out the next day.

The weak economy had taken its toll on Lesotho's rural schools and attending was a privilege out of reach for many. Teenage boys, who under other circumstances might have been my students, wandered the hillsides, wrapped in colorful Basotho blankets, herding sheep or goats or cows. Herding was their contribution to their family's source of wealth. What was the incentive to go to school?

If the country was poor, Lesotho has a rich heritage of music and dance. As small children, the Basotho learn their people's songs and dances. I loved their movements and their beautiful harmonies, and they would perform for me at the drop of a hat. You would hear music everywhere—at home, in the village, at school, at church. The herd boys even had their own musical traditions to pass the time and calm their animals. They would sing and play the *lesiba*, a stringed wind instrument, and the *mamokhorong*, something like a one-string violin played with a bow made from cow or horse hair.

The students would bring their instruments to school to practice and for show-and-tell. One boy let me buy this mamokhorong he'd made out of a can, a piece of wood, and a wire. I was fascinated by the handcraft, by their ingenuity, how they made things out of nothing. To have so little and to be so proud—they didn't want you to see the hard part. The music was a gift, something they could give to me.

I've been back four times. My friends here have donated money for libraries and tuition. Now we're supporting a soup kitchen that my friend is setting up in her village. It's been a big part of my life.





## TIN FLUTES

**Mid-twentieth century.**

**Northern Sierra, Ecuador. Tin, red paint, 1/2 x 12 x 1/2 in. each.**

**Collection, Museum of the Peace Corps Experience.**

**Gift of Anne Bluemel, Ecuador, Cayambe 1976-78.**

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One of the most valuable lessons I learned during my Peace Corps years was that people who endure the worst that life brings them will try to take time away from their day-to-day struggles to enjoy a little merrymaking. Parades, parties, religious processions, celebrations, and performances in homes with family and friends offered occasions for music. Instruments included guitars, panpipes, flutes, and drums. The sounds varied with the people who were playing, whether they were indigenous, low income, upper society, youth, elderly, or from different parts of the country.

The men in my adopted family were the primary musicians, playing mostly guitars, but they knew a lot of the Ecuadorean songs and music. Traditional music included pasillos, which told of hardships and lost love.\*

A close Ecuadorean friend gave me two rare tin flutes and told me a story that partially explains why I never heard or saw these instruments being played.

Traditionally both flutes were played simultaneously in the mouth of one musician, who fingered holes separately with each hand. Sometimes other instruments would accompany the flutes on melancholy songs about heartaches, unbearable living conditions, and harsh treatment of *campesinos* (peasants). Occasionally while music was playing, people said they were “provoked” into drinking *aguardiente* (firewater)—a drink typical in the Sierras, with 40 to 60 percent alcohol content.

\*[tinyurl.com/y58jkkhb](http://tinyurl.com/y58jkkhb)

I asked why the flutes were never played in public and heard an explanation that I cannot verify: I was told that more than 30 years earlier, in the 1940s, flutes were banished by the government because the sad music had prompted too many suicides. It seems more likely that over many generations, the difficult skill of playing two flutes simultaneously stopped being passed down, except to a tiny number of musicians.

I'm content to let the mystery of Ecuador's rare tin flutes remain unsolved. They remind me that some people may fall into despair, but others enjoy music as a small respite from their daily struggles.

## ALFREDO GUTIÉRREZ ALBUM

**Alfredo Gutiérrez *Si Supieras*, Discos Fuentes, Colombia, 1975. Vinyl, 12 x 12 in.**

**Courtesy of Peace Corps Community Archive, American University Library, Donated by Cathie Maclin Boyles, Colombia, Sucre 1975-79.**

I spent almost five years in Colombia working as a nurse. During my first year I worked in a small town named Sucre on the Mojana River, a very isolated town accessible only by boat or canoe. The principal means of livelihood was ranching. On Sundays the *rancheros* would come to town to socialize. After too many drinks, they would often gallop up and down the main street, shooting their pistols in the air.

I was the first American to visit, much less live, in Sucre; thus, I was quite the curiosity. Fortunately I was befriended by a lovely local family who took me under their wings. I spent most evenings playing cards with them, having long talks, or just sitting with them in rocking chairs outside their front door. I worked at the town's hospital, but my main work was traveling up and down the river with one of the physicians and several rural health promoters to provide basic health services

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to isolated communities. I also helped distribute food with the Red Cross and Civil Defense during periods of severe flooding.

Once a year Sucre celebrated its patron saint, Santa Catalina, with a festival. Through his connections, the mayor attracted Alfredo Gutiérrez and his band to perform at the evening festival. Alfredo Gutiérrez was a Colombian singer famous for his *vallenato*, a kind of folk music originating in Colombia along the Caribbean coast. Gutiérrez can be considered the Johnny Cash of the *vallenato*. He is still admired today throughout Latin America.

For this special occasion, the town built a makeshift outdoor venue large enough to hold the entire population. The festival grounds included a stage, tables and chairs for the audience, a dance floor, and a bar.

As his band played during the evening Santa Catalina fiesta, Gutiérrez spotted me, the only *gringa* (slang for American woman) in the crowd. He asked to dance with me numerous times during his breaks, and he promised me that he was going to compose a song for me.

I knew Alfredo had had way too much to drink, but later in the evening to my surprise—and everyone else's—he belted out his first rendition of “La norteamericana”—composed on the spot especially for me. Later Gutiérrez polished the song and put it on his next album. For months the song was popular on the radio—and I became a celebrity all over the Colombian Caribbean coast.





## “La norteamericana”

*De los Estados Unidos  
Ha llegado a esta nación,  
Pero Cathie se ha metido  
Dentro de mi corazón.  
Yo le digo que la quiero,  
Y ella me dice que sí.  
El inglés yo no entiendo,  
Pero mi corazón sí.*

*Lo que yo menos pensaba  
Que me pudiera pasar  
Que me fuera a enamorar  
De una norteamericana.*

*I love you, I love you, my love,  
Yes, my love.  
I love you, I love you, my love,  
Yes, my love.*

*Para la perla de la Mojana!*

*Cuando me le declaré  
Que mucho la estaba amando,  
Se lo dije en castellano  
Y me contestó en inglés.  
Esa gringa es una diosa,  
Linda norteamericana,  
La conocí en la Mojana  
Y en mi corazón reposa.*

*Lo que yo menos pensaba  
Que me pudiera pasar  
Que me fuera a enamorar  
De una norteamericana.*

*I love you, I love you, my love,  
Yes, my love.  
I love you, I love you, my love,  
Yes, my love.*

## “The North American”

*From the United States  
She has come to this country,  
But Cathie has found her way  
Into my heart.  
I tell her that I love her,  
And she tells me that she  
loves me too.  
I don't understand English,  
But I understand my heart.*

*What I never expected  
To happen to me  
Was that I would fall in love  
With a North American.*

*I love you, I love you, my love,  
Yes, my love.  
I love you, I love you, my love,  
Yes, my love.*

*For the pearl of the Mohana!*

*When I told her  
How much I loved her,  
I told her in Castilian  
And she answered me in English.  
This gringa is a goddess,  
A beautiful North American.  
I met her in the Mojana  
And she will stay in my  
heart forever.*

*What I never expected  
To happen to me  
Was that I would fall in love  
With a North American.*

*I love you, I love you, my love,  
Yes, my love.  
I love you, I love you, my love,  
Yes, my love.*

## “AMERICAN IMMIGRANT”

Craig M. Chavis Jr., 2020.

Courtesy of Craig M. Chavis Jr., Peru, Tambogrande 2014–16.

*Land of the free and home  
of the brave,*

*Built on the backs of others—  
the poor and the enslaved.*

*Supposedly, meritocracy  
reigns free, with the cream  
rising to the top;  
But fallacies like trickle-down  
economics have been  
exposed; drop by drop.*

*I was told to stop questioning,  
turn a blind eye, and always  
obey;*

*Sadly, I never knew what my  
country was, until I decided to  
move away.*

*Red, white, and blue; it all  
seemed so perfect.  
But for months I doubted my  
decision to leave; was it all  
worth it?*

*See, I was programmed to  
believe that I knew it all.*

*Thankfully I was incorrect, and  
my ego disintegrated like leaves  
in the fall.*

*Not looking back, I naively  
moved forward and boarded  
that plane;  
Unprepared for the unknown,  
unprepared for change.*

*Goodbye America, my once  
forever home;*

*I was born a nomad, why should  
I resist my calling to roam?*

*Never in my wildest dreams  
could this have been true.  
That I would discover my life's  
calling after serving in the  
Peace Corps in Peru.*

*I was now an American  
Immigrant, isn't that quite odd?*

*Not for me, I answered my  
calling, which came directly  
from God.*

*Now paying it forward to help  
those in need,  
My mission is simple; live life  
on your terms and escape  
from a system that's built  
on greed.*

*Looking back, this all seems so  
farfetched—a fantasy, a dream  
But I was rewarded for staying  
the course and embracing  
the unseen.*

*So, when you arrive at the  
next crossroads in your life,  
respond and don't react;  
Take the road less traveled,  
you won't regret it—trust me  
that's a fact.*

## CAMEL BELL

Mid-twentieth century.  
Somalia (also known as  
Somaliland). Wood,  
6 1/4 x 6 3/4 x 3 1/2 in.  
Collection, Museum of the  
Peace Corps Experience.  
Gift of Martin Kaplan  
(Founder, MPCE), Somalia,  
Borama (Amoud) and  
Las Anod 1962-64.



## KNIVES

Tumal people,  
mid-twentieth century.  
Somalia (also known as  
Somaliland). Metal, wood,  
leather, dimensions variable.  
Collection, Museum of the  
Peace Corps Experience.  
Gift of Martin Kaplan  
(Founder, MPCE), Somalia,  
Borama, Amoud 1962-63  
and Las Anod 1963-64.



## STUDENT'S SCHOOL PROJECT

Omar Mohamed, c. 1969.

Hargeisa, Northern region, Somalia (also known as Somaliland). Colored pencil on paper.

Courtesy of Stanford University Libraries and Jeanne D'Haem, Somalia, Arabsiyo and Hargeisa 1968-70.

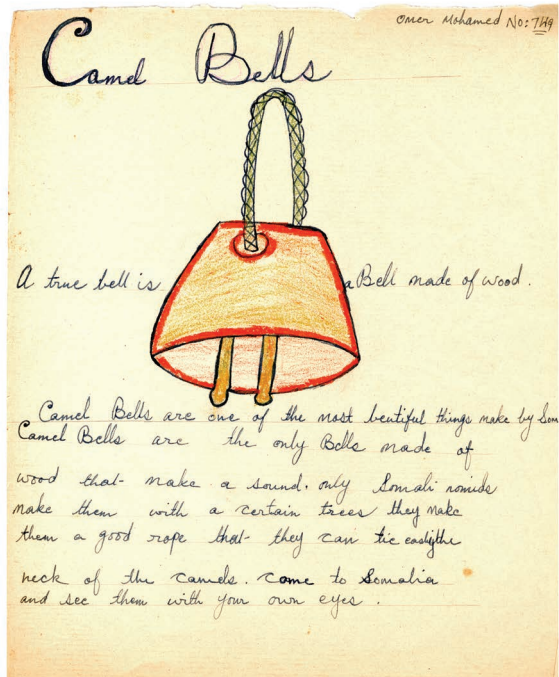
I was the English teacher at Ahmed Gurry School in Hargeisa, Somalia, in 1969. For one lesson, I shared magazines from the US with my class and pointed out the advertisements. After I explained the elements in an advertisement, my students were asked to study them in the magazines and then to create one about Somalia. Soon after I collected these student papers, all Peace Corps volunteers unfortunately had to leave Somalia due to a military coup. I never had the opportunity to grade and return them to my class. Perhaps one of my students will see them in the museum exhibit!

Omar Mohamed created an advertisement for camel bells like the one donated by Martin Kaplan (see page 41), another Somali volunteer. Omar will tell you what is special about a camel bell:

### "Camel Bells"

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*A true bell is a bell made of wood. Camel Bells are one of the most beautiful things made by Somalis. Camel Bells are the only bell made of wood that make a sound. Only Somali nomads make them with certain trees. They make a good rope that they can tie easily on the neck of the camels. Come to Somalia and see them with your own eyes.*





## STUDENT'S SCHOOL PROJECT

Mohamed Attayeh Ahmed, c. 1969.

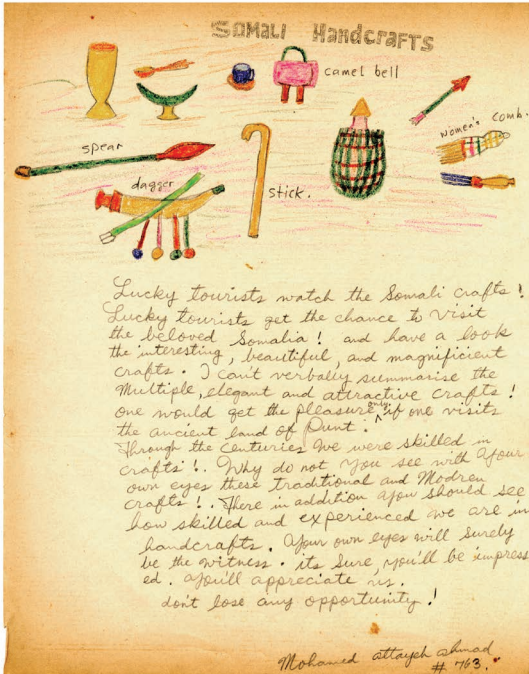
Hargeisa, Northern region, Somalia (also known as Somaliland). Colored pencil on paper.

Courtesy of Stanford University Libraries and Jeanne D'Haem, Somalia, Arabsiyo and Hargeisa 1968-70.

Mohamed Attayeh Ahmed created this advertisement about Somali handicrafts, such as the spear donated by Martin Kaplan (see page 41):

*Camel Bell, Spear, Dagger, Stick, Women's Comb*

*Lucky tourists watch the Somali crafts. Lucky tourists get the chance to visit the beloved Somalia! Have a look at the interesting, beautiful, and magnificent crafts. I can't verbally summarize the multiple, elegant and attractive crafts! One might get the pleasure only if one visits the ancient land of Punt. Through the centuries we were skilled in crafts! Here in addition you should see how skilled and experienced we are in handicrafts. Your own eyes will surely be the witness. It's sure you'll be impressed and will appreciate us. Don't lose any opportunity!*



## PHOTOGRAPHS BY FOTO COLOMBIA STUDENTS

c. 2016–17.

Cartagena, Colombia.

Courtesy of Alyssa Galik, Colombia, Manzanillo Del Mar  
2016–18.

Cartagena has always been a place of contradictions, a city of *realismo mágico* (magical realism), where Gabriel García Márquez set his novel *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985). Cartagena is the poorest city in Colombia, yet it's also the epicenter of luxury and wealth.

While teaching English in the primary and secondary schools, I thought about how I wanted to spend my off-work time. Manzanillo was fighting to preserve its culture, and telling the story of this struggle through photography could be a powerful creative outlet for my students.

As members of a primarily Afro-Colombian community, the people of Manzanillo were extremely proud of their ethnic heritage—even more so, it seemed to me, than in other communities within Colombia. I wanted my students to grow up knowing that their stories were unique and valuable, even amid encroaching development as Cartagena's wealthier residents moved into the area.

A few years prior to my arrival, Outside the Lens\* (OTL), a non-profit group located in San Diego, California, had donated a dozen digital cameras to Peace Corps Colombia. OTL developed the curricula

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1. Posing in the school playground, photo camp enthusiast Luis, age 13, looks forward to a career in technology or the visual arts.
2. Fresh flowers adorn a girl's braids, one of the ways in which students dress each other's hair.
3. Young photographer Miguel Arias, age 9, pauses in the neighborhood of El Vecino.
4. A brightly painted house typifies the local preference for a colorful palette.
5. Kids play along the Guayapito, a shallow stream that runs through the Manzanillo mangroves and empties into the Pacific Ocean.
6. Murals decorate the entrance to the combination primary and secondary school.
7. A boy plays with his pet bird.
8. Empty bleachers at *la cancha* (sports field) await fans for a weekend game against a neighboring pueblo. In Manzanillo baseball is as popular as soccer.

\*outsidethelens.org



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for photography workshops focused on self-expression, showing students how to capture daily life in their homes and villages.

My efforts in Manzanillo began in September 2016, but other PCVs set up photography workshops in their own sites. We passed the cameras along every month or so to the next volunteer who wanted to get involved. The amazing artistry produced in these workshops is displayed on the Outside the Lens Colombia website and on OISTE, Peace Corps Columbia's digital magazine.\*\*

Sometimes the story behind a photo is as powerful as the image itself. Luis Mario, my most enthusiastic attendee, said he hoped to become a visual artist when he grew up. Several months later he was part of FOTO Colombia, the culmination of our workshops, bringing together Colombian and American teenagers in a weeklong camp to focus on peace building and reconciliation. The 2016 Colombia Peace Deal with FARC (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) had just been signed six months previously, and the collaborations between the Colombian and American teens produced some moving photography and stories.

It's said that a picture is worth a thousand words, so I'll let the children of Colombia tell their own story. Enjoy this small sample of their creative talents!

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## SNAPSHOT OF A HEALTH VOLUNTEER

**c. 1994–96.**

**Pimampiro, Imbabura, Ecuador.**

**Courtesy of Rosemarie Ricks, Ecuador, Pimampira 1994–96.**

I was born in the Republic of Panama and grew up speaking Spanish. In Ecuador I was assigned to an area where the fetal and childbirth mortality rates were extremely high. As an RN/CNM, this was a fantastic assignment.

The welcome mat was not obvious during my first weeks in Pimampiro. The local Catholic priest had cautioned the community that I was an evangelist. I decided to attend Mass, sat in the back row, and went to receive communion. The word spread and the priest became a friend. Many women came to the clinic for prenatal and postpartum care.

I traveled to outlying villages, such as Chalguaycua and Sanchipamba, and gave talks about sanitation, nutrition, and the impact of hygiene on health. I identified the local midwives and

\*\*otcolombia.weebly.com and oistecolombia.wordpress.com



provided information that led to changes. Ultimately these efforts reduced infections in these communities.

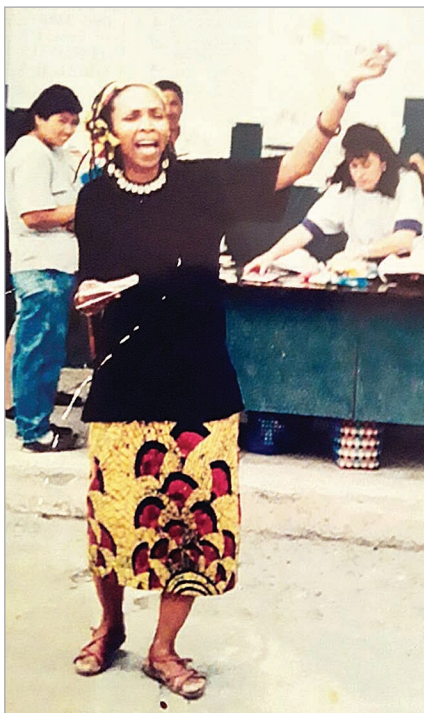
I visited the Black community of Chuga whose residents were referred to as *morenos* and “lost people.” These were some of the most beautiful Black people I’ve ever seen. I was able to relocate the clinic from a hot, desolate, dirty spot of pavement to a more suitable site. The *morenos* came to see me in large numbers for pre- and postnatal visits.

Boosting self-esteem was important. I said, “You folks look like me. I’m not lost—and neither are you. In this community we have problems that we’re going to solve together.” Instead of drawing water where garbage accumulated, I told them to draw their water upstream and boil it. With simple measures, illnesses decreased.

Everywhere I went I talked about diet, washing hands, and basic sanitation. After a talk at a school in Pimampiro, a young boy followed me and said, “You told us boys have two eggs, but I have three—and one of them hurts.” He had a hernia, and I was able to arrange surgery for him.

I persuaded merchants to support health fairs in local schools. They were a huge success. I also was responsible for training and supervising 13 midwives. Over time fetal and maternal death rates began to decrease.

Besides my ability to speak Spanish, I enjoyed another advantage. As a Black American from Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn, I understood that poor people usually have to fight to get what they deserve. The Peace Corps didn’t teach me this. Life did.





## RICE POT

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**Early twenty-first century.**

**Madagascar. Aluminum, 7 1/4 x 13 x 9 1/2 in.**

**Collection, Museum of the Peace Corps Experience.**

**Gift of Teena Curry, Madagascar, Mananjary 2010–13.**

When my fellow volunteers and I arrived at the Girls Leading Our World (GLOW) camp, the cook assumed that we would bring a pot large enough to make rice for 25 or 30 people. All I brought was a small rice cooker. After a few moments thinking how to solve this problem, we were able to locate a church in town that was willing to lend us a very large pot—too large to carry back to camp with my bike. No worries: I brought it to the camp in a rickshaw.

Both pots may be considered as metaphors for a very special aspect of our group of Peace Corps volunteers: we were true examples of the American melting pot. I was born in India and grew up in the US. The others at our GLOW camp included Asian American, African American, and Mexican American volunteers. We also had several members belonging to the ethnic group that attendees *expected* to be the leaders at the Peace Corps GLOW camp: White Americans. The girls and chaperones did not expect so many brown faces that resembled their own in a group of American volunteers.

Many people who now live in Madagascar originated from both Africa and South Asia. A number of Malagasy people look like me, and I was often assumed to be a local Malagasy. There were some benefits to this. I could blend into crowds, escape curiosity or harassment, and bargain for lower prices. On the other hand, people expected me to be familiar with their customs and language. I think I was able to gain deeper trust in sensitive situations—for example, when mothers came to the clinic to discuss their pregnancies or to have their children vaccinated.



Teena Curry riding a rickshaw in Madagascar, August 2013.

When it comes to interactions with people who are different from us, we each carry our small, individual pot. The Malagasy people had scant knowledge of American history or diversity, and I had limited knowledge of their customs and beliefs.

The third goal of the Peace Corps is all about creating a large melting pot—a *huge* pot that includes all of humanity, too big for your typical rickshaw or even for a lifetime of travel and service. I learned from my Peace Corps experience that the more we understand others, and the more deeply they understand Americans (in all their colors), the safer our world will become.

## WINE JUG

**Early twenty-first century.**

**Georgia. Clay, 10 x 4 x 4 in.**

**Courtesy of Rebecca Madden-Sturges, Georgia, Sagarejo 2005–07.**

My Georgian family's house sits amid lush vines of watermelon and grapes. After more than 8,000 years of winemaking, farmers here still ferment grapes in large earthenware vessels called *qvevri*, which they bury in the ground until the wine ages to perfection. Most families, like mine, grow grapes and make their own wine. And they still serve it out of clay jugs. If these earthenware vessels distinguish the

winemaking tradition in Georgia, the rituals around wine drinking are a big part of Georgian social life. I especially loved the communal supper parties.

A *supra* (tablecloth) begins with the host laying a cloth on a table or on the ground and setting out abundant platters of food. Every *supra* revolves around multiple rounds of wine toasts. The designated toastmaster, or *tamada*, proposes the first toast and topic for discussion. Guests may respond, one by one, around the table. And then the *tamada* makes another toast, followed by more discussion, and the cycle repeats until late in the evening.

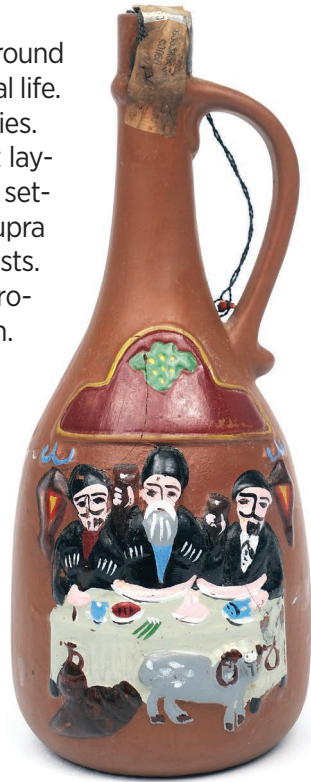
I attended many *supras*, but one in particular stands out. It was a birthday celebration for me hosted by my family and attended by my Georgian counterpart, Sopiko. The conversation around the table that evening took a turn that would set the course of my Peace Corps experience.

I had an idea, which I proposed to Sopiko: why don't we help renovate the obstetrics-gynecology wing of the local hospital? It was badly in need of restoration and new medical equipment. Sopiko took my idea to the doctors. The hospital community was ready to commit to find funding. And so was I.

The lead surgeon and I met regularly to plan what the US embassy dubbed the "Grand Project." I wrote a grant requesting funding to implement our plan. Our efforts paid off: the nonprofit Counterpart International donated \$250,000 worth of slightly used hospital equipment, and the US State Department awarded \$10,000 towards the renovation.

My Georgian counterparts worked cooperatively and community organizations in Sakartvelo and government offices joined forces to complete the project in fewer than six months. Today the new hospital wing is equipped to ensure the safe delivery of babies and protect the health of all women in the community.

I propose a toast to all those, especially young women, who will take their big ideas to the *supra* table one day and discover, as I did, that they can change the world.





## COAL POT

c. 1970s.

**Choiseul Quarter, St. Lucia. Clay, assembled, 10 x 8 x 8 in.  
Collection, Museum of the Peace Corps Experience.  
Gift of Deborah Manget, St. Lucia, Choiseul 1978-79.**

In 1978 the Peace Corps sent me to St. Lucia to teach home economics to middle school girls. I felt confident in my ability to teach three of the four subjects. Textiles and sewing, interior design, and child care were familiar to me. The fourth subject, cooking, was going to be a challenge, however. I was not familiar with St. Lucian fruits, vegetables, or protein sources—most of which were prepared with a coal pot, an implement I had never seen before, let alone used. They seemed mysterious to me, ancient compared to the charcoal grills I used in my backyard.

Coal pots are used throughout the Caribbean, but the Choiseul Quarter of St. Lucia is considered the original home of this cooking style. Soon after I arrived, I noticed the smells of charcoal cooking were evident everywhere I went.

Women shape the pots from clay along riverbanks, leaving holes in the lower section. Charcoal is placed in the top bowl of the coal pot and lit from under the holes (page 52). Once the coals are red hot, a cooking pot is placed directly on top of them. Ashes fall through the holes to cool in the lower lip, and more coal is added as needed. The deep, rich flavors of the ingredients mixed with earthy, smoky overtones guarantee a delicious meal at any time of day.

My concerns about teaching culinary arts were relieved by my students, who taught me the intricacies of preparing meals with a coal pot. I was glad I turned the tables and allowed them to become my teachers. This improved

their self-confidence and created a special bond between people of very different backgrounds. Thanks to my students, I have become an accomplished cook using the coal pot method.



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Replica of original object.

## SLING

c. 1979.

**Lower River Division, The Gambia. Grass, dimensions variable.  
Collection, Museum of the Peace Corps Experience.  
Gift of Paul Jurmo, The Gambia, Pakalinding 1976-79.**

When I first saw the slings, I thought of David and Goliath. Young boys, probably 7 to 12 years old, would go out into the field, sit under a tree, and keep the weaver birds from eating the millet crop by flinging pebbles at them with handwoven grass slings.

Protecting the crops was one of the jobs given to boys—an example of the gender- and age-related responsibilities expected of Gambian community members. In this case, growing crops in a fragile Sahelian environment required a tremendous amount of work and significant financial investment. If weaver birds, beautiful though they might be, eat much of the crop when you're not looking, families have wasted their investment and lost an important source of food and income. The boys and their slings thus had an important role to play in crop protection.

I told the boys that I thought the slings were cool, and they showed me how to use them—although I attained nowhere near their skill level. Intrigued, I asked if I could get one of them to show my family in America. A few days later, the boys returned with a new sling made just for me.



## DEVIL'S MASK

**Mende people, c. 1970.  
Kenema, Eastern Province, Sierra Leone. Blackened cottonwood, raffia fringe, 37 x 20 x 5 in. Collection, Museum of the Peace Corps Experience. Gift of Michael Colombo, Sierra Leone, Bunumbu 1969-70.**

After two months of training, I was sent to the Eastern Province of Sierra Leone to the small village of Bunumbu, with a population of about 200 people. I was considered suitable as an agricultural development worker because of my experience with home gardening.

It was not long before I found out that the villagers weren't really interested in learning new farming techniques. They were used to the way they had been farming and weren't about to change. Instead, I learned that a top priority for them was to get fresh, clean drinking water. I helped to procure pumps from the American Embassy and CARE, then helped to install them over existing wells where water was being pulled up by hand.

Our next project was to create a new gravity-feed water system in the next town over. We met with town leaders, and with help from every able-bodied person in the area we built a dam and a reservoir, then laid a two-inch pipe stretching a half-mile to the village of Pejewa. It took us about a year to complete.

The devil's mask has been used by the Mende people in Sierra Leone for thousands of years. I picked up a replica for a few dollars





from a marketplace in Kenema, Sierra Leone, as the real masks are only worn by devil dancers. Devil dancing is a common feature of ceremonies, such as weddings, funerals, and the Islamic feast of Ramadan. These dancers are men from the Poro Society, a secretive social group common in Liberia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, and Sierra Leone.

The typical devil dancer is dressed from head to toe with raffia palm straw and the devil's mask on his head. At a ceremony I attended, while the devil danced and spun around to the rhythm of the drums, women and children would taunt him and strike at the straw with their hands. The dancer would try to grab the arm of one of the menacing pranksters and knock them to the ground. Being caught by the devil scared the hell out of the mischief makers, who ran away as fast as they could. These escapades would cause the crowd to roar with laughter.

When the new gravity-feed water system was complete, the town celebrated. A cow was butchered to supply food for the celebration. The sound of drums filled the air, along with the sounds of people dancing, laughing, and telling stories about their ancestors. The event required two devil dancers to match the joy of the occasion.

## HOE

c. 1979.

**Lower River Division, The Gambia. Wood, recycled metal, 16 1/2 x 4 1/4 x 6 1/4 in.**

**Collection, Museum of the Peace Corps Experience. Gift of Paul Jurmo, The Gambia, Pakalinding 1976-79.**

It was something I saw every day: farmers walking to and from their fields carrying handheld hoes. With short handles made from tree branches and blades handcrafted by a blacksmith from recycled metal, these implements were used to cultivate peanut, millet, and other crops. This was backbreaking work.

In my three years of service I tried it once. I was about 26 years old, relatively fit, and experienced in gardening. I went out to the field with members of my host family and used one of the hoes to help weed my landlord's peanut crop. After a fairly short time in 95-degree sunlight, I took a break in the shade and soon thereafter dragged myself back to my mud-block



house, guzzled some water, and took a prolonged nap. It was one of the many instances when I realized how incredibly strong the Gambian people were.

## BIT AND HARNESS

**Kanembu people, mid-twentieth century.**  
**Lake Chad Region, Chad. Iron, leather, dimensions variable.**  
**Collection, Museum of the Peace Corps Experience,**  
**Gift of John Hutchison, Chad, Doum Doum 1966–68.**

## SADDLE, BLANKET, PILLOW, STIRRUPS, AND STRAPS

**Kanembu people, mid-twentieth century.**  
**Lake Chad Region, Chad. Wool, leather, cotton cushion pad,**  
**iron, dimensions variable.**  
**Collection, Museum of the Peace Corps Experience.**  
**Gift of John Hutchison, Chad, Doum Doum 1966–68.**

I was introduced to my horse, Balzac, upon my arrival in Doum Doum. Doum Doum was a village of 200 where I was assigned as part of the Peace Corps' first project in the Republic of Chad. I was one of a group of about a dozen generalists who were expected to turn the region into the breadbasket of Equatorial Africa. Balzac was provided to me by the government of Chad for transportation during this project.

Several months later, in the Massakori market, I purchased a camel named Gunther for the equivalent of \$40. I parked Gunther next to Balzac in my *zanna-mat* courtyard. I also became the owner of two oxen and two \$5 donkeys who carried water from a well to my house three kilometers away.

The Chadian government, in collaboration with the French organization SEMABLE, wanted to grow wheat in the reclaimed Lake Chad bottomland to supply the national flour mill in Fort Lamy. We were challenged to introduce the oxen-drawn plow into the agriculture here. Even though Monsieur Grimal, the director of SEMABLE, proudly referred to our group as *agents de modernisation*, we did not succeed in transforming the agriculture of the region. (Lake Chad has diminished in size by 90 percent since we were there in the 1960s due to climate change, population growth, and unplanned irrigation far beyond the lake's shore.)



My neighbor El-Hadj Mbodou Wuli became my super-farmer colleague. He gave me part of his farm to work on, installing a small well with a water-lifting *chadouf* apparatus. He and his family became my family. When it was time to do a plowing demonstration in a neighboring village, El-Hadj's family would ride on our two oxen, I rode on Balzac, and El-Hadj would walk alongside all of us. My Chadean government counterpart, Mohamed Djibro, would ride my camel, Gunther, along with the plow that we used for our demonstrations. We arrived at each village appearing to the residents as a veritable traveling circus.



El-Hadj was also my patient tutor in the Kanembu language. With him I learned of the wisdom and humor that permeate their language and culture.

After my service I became a professor of African languages and linguistics at Boston University. I often think of the curious fact that my academic career in and about Africa began with my four-footed housemates Balzac and Gunther.



## ALPARGATAS

Mid-twentieth century.  
Pasto, Nariño, Colombia.  
Jute, cotton, 1 x 9 1/2 x  
3 1/2 in. each.  
Collection, Museum of the  
Peace Corps Experience.  
Gift of Patricia Wand,  
Colombia, Buesaco  
1963-65.



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Perhaps the simplicity of the sandals or the fibers in their composition caught my eye. I remember being totally intrigued from the first time I saw them in Colombia in 1963. Many *campesinos* (farmers), both men and women, wore them in town. Outside along the paths and in the fields, people mostly walked in bare feet.

I learned later that *campesinos* walked barefoot from their mountainside houses and slipped on sandals before they entered the village. I wondered why.

I referred to the sandals as *zapatos* (shoes), but my friends corrected me. It turned out they had a special name: *alpargatas*, a word I had to practice to pronounce. When I asked my friends about alpargatas, they responded, "Why would you care? Only poor *campesinos* wear them."

"They look comfortable," I said, "and I want to buy a pair."

The women giggled at the thought of a *gringa* (White woman) wearing alpargatas, but they directed me to the larger marketplace in Pasto, capital city of Nariño, 38 kilometers from Buesaco.



Alpargatas are made from natural fibers easily found in many environments. The soles are braids of jute sewn together; the tops are woven heavy cotton. A heel strap and sturdy twine tied over the ankle keep the sandals on your feet while walking.

In the traditional Pasto marketplace I found a pair that looked like it would fit. The lady selling them was overcome with disbelief when I asked to try them on—and more incredulous when I told her I wanted to buy them. I asked her what to do about the missing piece that went over the ankle. She answered, “Use any old piece of rope.”

Finally, within the privacy of my house, I tried walking in my new alpargatas. The rope soles were coarse and uncomfortable. The heel and sole did not match the contours of my feet. I couldn’t stretch or flex my toes naturally. The rope bit into my ankle when I walked.

What a revelation! The alpargatas were not nearly as comfortable as they looked. Suddenly I understood why campesinos walked bare-foot until they entered the village: they slipped on their alpargatas when they needed to protect the soles of their feet or to be dressed appropriately when they came to village market day.

## ALPARGATAS

**Sierra, c. 1994.**

**Tumbaco, Sierra, Ecuador. Leather, penko cactus fiber,  
1 1/4 x 3 1/2 x 9 1/2 in. each.**

**Courtesy of Nicola Dino, Ecuador, Juan Montalvo 1994–97.**

As Peace Corps trainees, we learned about the local culture through special programs at the training center in Tumbaco. I remember one particular performance by an indigenous dance troupe from Otavalo, a well-known center for the arts. The dancers wore beautiful costumes, but it was their *alpargatas*, the traditional sandals worn by Otavaleños, that grabbed my attention. (The daughter of a shoe repairman, I have always had a weakness for shoes of any sort.)

I had to have a pair.

My generous North American woman’s foot outsized even the largest Otavaleños men’s sandal size. I would have to have my sandals custom made for me. One of the Peace Corps trainers directed me to a local sandal maker. I went to his house, carrying with me a multicolored woven belt that I’d picked up at a market, hoping he could use the material in my sandal uppers.

The sandal maker placed two dirty, white sheets of paper on the floor and asked me to step on them. Then he swiftly traced an outline of my bare feet. Two weeks later I had my very own pair of alpargatas, which fit me like a glove—and tortured my feet. The uppers felt stiff and the sturdy leather soles were inflexible, and the cord that ran across my ankles cut into the tops of my feet. I could barely make it across the room in them. How could anyone walk in these things, let alone dance?

I so wanted to wear my alpargatas, and I did try to break them in. But the mountain village of Juan Montalvo—where I lived and worked as a nurse and health care educator, traveling between sites on foot—had just one paved street. The only footwear that stood up to all that walking on rocky paths and protected my feet from weather and bug bites were hiking shoes.

So I set aside my alpargatas.

But I finally broke in my Otavalo sandals. I've been walking in them for the last 20 summers since I came home. On my feet, they keep me grounded in my Peace Corps experience. They remind me of the lesson I learned from the Ecuadorean people—that perseverance pushes you to overcome obstacles, however uncomfortable they may be. They remind me to be humble and resourceful, like the people I came to admire and love.





## **KAWAL**

**Kanembu people, mid-twentieth century.  
Lake Chad Region, Chad. Wood, goatskin,  
dimensions variable.**

**Collection, Museum of the Peace Corps Experience.  
Gift of John Hutchison, Chad, Doum Doum 1966–68.**

Advised by my neighbor and host farmer, El-Hadj Mbodou Wuli, I purchased the Kanembu wooden desert sandals in the village market. The sandals are called *kawal* or *kafal* in the Kanembu language. They are designed for walking in the sand around Lake Chad. Once you purchase the carved wooden base, you head to the leather worker to get goatskin straps sewn into the sandals. They are tailor-made to the size of the owner's feet.

Mbodou Wuli informed me that with desert shoes, one can walk on top of the sand, like the camel, rather than sink into it. The shoe is designed to emulate a camel's foot: the shape of the sole and the edge around it keep the sand from slipping out around the sides. Mbodou Wuli knew about walking in the desert—he had performed his Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca and back to Chad on foot. He walked for almost three years to accomplish this. Mbodou Wuli earned his El-Hadj title the hard way.

The fact that I have given the rest of my life to a career in and about Africa is linked to my friendship with El-Hadj Mbodou Wuli. He was the *muezzin* of the village. His house and the mosque were near my straw-hut compound, and I woke up every day to his morning call to prayer. He showed me the ingenuity necessary to thrive in an environment that can be extremely menacing and challenging.

Mbodou Wuli shared a portion of his farm with me and I made a demonstration vegetable garden. Each morning we would get up early, put on the kawal shoes, and walk the three, sandy kilometers to the farm. His wife would bring a polenta-like meal made from millet with vegetables, beans, and sometimes even a meat sauce. We would eat the midday meal together in the shade. After some rest, and more work, we put our kawal shoes back on and walked back home in the *kati* (sand).

I was not able to change the world, and my desert shoes are all worn out now. However, my friend El-Hadj Mbodou Wuli changed my life forever. He was a most remarkable man.

## **SUKA DUBU**

**Tuareg people, mid-twentieth century.**

**Niger. Leather, beads, 2 1/2 x 4 1/2 x 10 1/2 in. each.**

**Collection, Museum of the Peace Corps Experience.**

**Gift of John Hutchison, Chad, Doum Doum 1966-68.**

*Suka dubu* is the name in the Hausa language given to the ornate stitched sandals made by Tuareg women in Niger. The word “suka” means piercing, sewing, or stitching. “Dubu” means 1,000. So the name “one thousand stitches” refers to the large number of stitches involved in making them.





## SLIPPERS

n.d.  
Thailand. Silk,  
embroidery, leather,  
3 x 3 1/2 x 10 1/2 in.  
Collection, Museum  
of the Peace Corps  
Experience.  
Gift of Karen Schmidt,  
Thailand.



## SLIPPERS

Mid-twentieth century.  
Sierra Leone.  
Embroidery, fabric,  
leather, 2 x 4 x 12 in.  
Collection, Museum  
of the Peace Corps  
Experience. Gift of  
Thomas Gihring,  
Sierra Leone,  
Magburaka 1962-64.



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## AMULETS (BRACELET, BELT, NECKLACE)

c. 1979.  
Lower River Division, The Gambia. Leather, written prayers,  
dimensions variable.  
Collection, Museum of the Peace Corps Experience.  
Gift of Paul Jurmo, The Gambia, Pakalinding 1976-79.

If I go to The Gambia, my name is Kemo Sise. It was a common Peace Corps practice when I was a volunteer to adopt the name of a member of one's host family. Sise was my host family's name, one commonly found in Mandinka communities in The Gambia and Senegal. Kemo was the grandfather, the patriarch of my extended family.





He was a respected elder and religious leader. As such, he was one of the holy men who inscribed the prayers sewn into the amulets, or *jujus*, commonly worn in The Gambia in the 1970s. Jujus were leather pouches containing handwritten prayers. They might be worn on a string around one's arm or neck—or a baby's waist.

I think my landlord named me after Fa Kemo (Father Kemo) because they thought I was a learned man, as I was working on an adult literacy project. I took it as an honor to be named after the leader of my extended family and the village's religious community. With that honor also came the responsibility of not doing anything to dishonor Fa Kemo's name. In my memory and my heart, they remain one of my families. They are still a big part of me after 40 years.

I grew up as a Roman Catholic during a time when Catholics wore a scapular on a string around the neck. A scapular was basically a small plastic pouch containing a picture of the Blessed Virgin Mary or other holy figure and a little prayer. Every child in my Catholic school would be given a scapular and wear it, well, religiously. When I saw amulets worn in The Gambia, I realized that they were very similar to the scapulars of my Catholic youth. Such lightbulb experiences are one of the beauties of Peace Corps: discovering how similar different cultures are at their roots.



## SHIFTA'S HAT

c. 1969.

**Arabsiyo, Northern region, Somalia (also known as Somaliland). Sewn burrs, black feather, 2 x 6 1/2 x 8 1/2 in. Collection, Museum of the Peace Corps Experience. Gift of Jeanne D'Haem, Somalia, Arabsiyo and Hargeisa 1968-70.**

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On a truck from Hargeisa to my teaching post, I sat on a crate. "Your mother must have offended a *jinn*," a woman said. "Only a jinn would make a person white like the devil!"

Later I felt hot air on my ankle and peered into the crate. It was a lion, suffering and nearly unconscious. The Somali would not sit near the lion, nor would they offer it food or water.

Several men on horses appeared. They stopped the truck and shouted something I didn't understand. After everyone got off the truck, I pried the crate open, wet a corner of my scarf with water, and lowered it to the suffering animal. Angry at the abuse of this poor lion, I shouted, "*Wham-a hii?*" ("What's going on?")

One horseman rode over to me. "*Muga-Ah?*" ("What's your name?"), he asked.

"Jeanne," I replied. Revived, the lion began to sit up. "*Muga-Ah?*" I asked him, enjoying his surprise when he saw the lion.

"*Shifta, Wa Shifta,*" he replied. He handed me his hat of brown burrs, signaled his men, and they quickly rode off.

When I got home to my village, headmaster Abdillahi visited with two teachers, Subti and Abdul Kader.

“Everyone is talking about you, Jeanne,” Abdillahi said, shaking his finger in my face. “Do you Americans know about the Shifta? They are bandits. These Shifta were planning to rob the truck. Didn’t you see the guns?” Then he laughed. “This Shifta had never seen a White woman so closely before. He saw that you were not afraid, and you were sitting on a lion. He thought you might be a jinn and ran away!”

“That’s not what happened,” interrupted Subti. “The Qur’an tells about Mohammed and a prostitute at a well. She saw a thirsty dog and dipped her shoe into the water for the dog. Mohammed said her sins would be forgiven because of her kindness. The Shifta thought you brought a message from God.”

“No,” said Abdul Kader. “The Shifta saw this White woman. The passengers said, ‘That’s Jeanne.’ He thought they said *jinn*. He gave you his hat so you wouldn’t put a spell on him.”

This hat reminds me that we see through the lens of our own culture. Even under the bright African sun, we walk in darkness.

## BALE OF CLOTH

c. 1982–83.

**Yarya, Kono District, Sierra Leone. Cotton, 4 x 9 x 9 in. Courtesy of Christine Pearson-Musa, Sierra Leone, Yarya 1981–83.**



## SPINDLE

c. 1981–83.

**Yarya, Kono District, Sierra Leone. Cotton thread, 1 1/4 x 1 1/4 x 14 in. Courtesy of Christine Pearson-Musa, Sierra Leone, Yarya 1981–83.**

People in rural villages in Sierra Leone supplemented manufactured clothing with garments made from locally grown cotton. After I observed the process of making clothes during the early 1980s, I appreciated the craftsmanship that was involved.

The cotton bolls were deseeded, and the women spun the fiber into heavy thread using a drop spindle. They dyed the thread in shades of blue, brown, or black, and then the men wove it into fabric on handmade looms. It was sold in smaller pieces, called bales—each





4 inches wide and about 20 yards long—which the seller measured by extending his arms sideways and counting out 10 full arm lengths. The tailors, all men, sewed the 4-inch strips together with a foot-pedal sewing machine. This fabric, called country cloth, was used to make clothing and blankets.

I worked with rural farmers to build fishponds. In the upcountry area of Sierra Leone where I lived, men and boys wore tunic- or hip-length country cloth shirts, short pants, and caps. I wore long pants and occasionally a country cloth shirt. (Although the women did not wear country cloth, I ordered some shirts, and no one objected when I would appear in one.) I never wore shorts because women were not supposed to show their legs—and also because I rode a motorcycle so I could travel to wherever I was needed.

I was surprised that the handspun fabric was not too warm for the tropical temperatures considering that we were eight degrees north of the equator. Garments made from country cloth were thick, but because they were 100-percent cotton they were comfortable in the heat.

Cotton may function as one of the pillars of global manufacturing, but it also represents the inventiveness of small communities of spinners, weavers, and tailors. I admired the artisans in my village, and I grew to love the country cloth of Sierra Leone. I understand that cotton no longer is grown and homespun clothing has become rare in Sierra Leone. Sadly, the weaving of country cloth is becoming a lost art.

## HUIPIL

**Doña Tomasa Sique Mulul, c. 1988–91.**

**Baja Verapaz, Guatemala. Cotton, approx. 19 x 22 in.**

**Collection, Museum of the Peace Corps Experience.**

**Gift of Catherine Blumhorst, Guatemala, San Miguel Chicaj  
1988–91.**

Guatemala is a country full of iconic postcard images, from the smoking volcanos to the colonial-era cathedrals of Antigua. The most iconic image of all is a Maya woman proudly wearing the *huipil* (WEE-peel)—a traditional woven blouse worn by indigenous women of Guatemala. The huipil was the most individualistic piece of a woman's ensemble.



Weavers produced the garments on a backstrap loom as a single panel, which was then doubled over and sewn up the sides, with room for the arms. A hole was cut into the fabric for the head. In addition to the huipil, every Maya girl would wear a *corte* (skirt) from the time she was able to walk.

According to Maya tradition, people were taught to spin cotton into yarn and weave fabrics into textiles by the Maya moon and earth deity. The goddess is often portrayed in carvings wearing a traditional backstrap loom. Weavers wear the loom strapped around their back and waist and then fastened to a tree or similar object. Maya women consider it their sacred duty to continue the custom of weaving their own clothing as wearable art.

As time has passed, each region has customized the huipil, creating gorgeous diversity with colors and patterns. Each town and village invented its own patterns of eagles, spiders, flowers, and other natural themes, sometimes with lace or embroidered edges. When a woman wears a huipil in Guatemala City, it is obvious to all which region she comes from.

I never was able to master carrying baskets on my head or patting out tortillas, but I thought I should at least try my hand at weaving. I sat for long hours on a rush mat in the courtyard of the family compound with Doña Tomasa, one end of the loom strap circled around my back and the other attached to a tree. Chickens pecked away at my feet while children crept up behind me to touch my blond hair.

Doña Tomasa patiently guided my fingers to lift the warp to allow the threads of the weft to create a design. Eventually I produced a small weaving—certainly not enough for a huipil but enough to satisfy me (even though Doña Tomasa said my weaving looked like it might have been made by a drunken spider). I cherish this huipil that I wore while Glenn and I were Peace Corps volunteers in Guatemala.

## **RUANA**

**Andes Mountains, c. 1962.**

**Lenguazaque, Cundinamarca, Colombia. Wool, 32 x 42 in.**

**Collection, Museum of the Peace Corps Experience.**

**Gift of Kay Dixon, Colombia, Medellin 1962-64.**

Ron Atwater, a Colombia One volunteer, organized a *ruana* cooperative at his post in Lenguazaque in the Departamento de Cundinamarca in the Andes Mountains. These ruanas of 100-percent virgin wool were perfect for the Andean climate.

The process began with raising sheep for their wool. The sheep were sheared and their wool spun into yarn. Then workers dyed the yarn with natural dyes. Finally artisans wove the yarn into a ruana using a special loom. A totally manual process! At that time, the best craftsmen could complete about five ruanas daily. The final products in an adult size weighed about five pounds and were sold in open markets in Medellin.

Ruanas from this co-op were sold at the Hotel Tequendama, Bogota's premier four-star hotel. I placed an order, with crossed fingers, and was thrilled when my order was fulfilled. It became the ultimate keepsake from my time as a PCV. It was perfect for my Antioquia lifestyle: a shawl for cool days or chilly nights, a blanket for my bed, a pillow, a picnic blanket, a seat cover when riding in a *chiva* (open-sided bus). Easily stored by tossing it over the single Adirondack chair in my apartment, it's also a room decoration. The one-size-fits-all feature is not to be underestimated!

During the 1960s ruanas were exported and sold at Saks Fifth Avenue in New York City for premium prices. Today ruanas in multiple fabrics and colors are worn all over the Western world. The word "ruana" is now part of the fashion lexicon.

The Colombian people have survived many years of civil war and violence. The ruana reminds me of their persistence, courage, and tenacity in their struggle for progress and development.







## “MARIA CLARA” GOWN

c. 1963.

**Philippines. Satin, white applique, other fabric, 64 x 60 in.  
Collection, Museum of the Peace Corps Experience.  
Gift of Ann Jealous, Philippines, Siniloan 1963–65.**

While settling into teaching with my Filipina co-teacher, Helen (whose family I eventually lived with), I noticed similarities and differences between our cultures. Filipinos embraced values I shared, including family, justice, friendship, community, hard work, and trust in God.

I no longer felt the urgency of time: I carried a book so I could read while waiting an hour for a bus to arrive or a social function to begin. Filipinos value feelings more than things, and it was good to learn that I could be happy with few possessions. People tended to accept realities they could not change.

As a tragic consequence of 333 years of Spanish colonization and 48 years as a US colony, light complexions were favored and Spanish ancestry was judged more positively than indigenous. This focus on skin color differences was very familiar to me as an African American. When I walked in the sun, a fellow teacher would hold an umbrella over my head so I would “stay beautiful.” Of the two young children in my family, Anabel, the one with the lighter complexion, was pronounced “beautiful,” while her darker-skinned sister Beverlylyn’s beauty was never mentioned.

In December 1963, teachers in our district dance troupe surprised me with a Maria Clara gown. A traditional Filipino dress—also known as *traje de mestiza* (mixed heritage) because it incorporates indigenous and Spanish influences—it’s named for the mother of national hero José Rizal, who led the revolt against Spanish colonial rule in the 1890s. The dress, like me, is a mixture of Black and White heritages. I danced in that dress for nearly two years, and although I’ve worn it only a few times in the US, it is one of my most cherished gifts.

Peace Corps training had not prepared us for the impact of leaving people with whom we’d formed such deep relationships. One image continues to break my heart. Helen wrote me that after I returned to America, Anabel left home on several occasions to nurse her feelings of abandonment. The family would find her standing in the rain at the bus stop, waiting for her Tita Ann to return.

I’ll always be grateful for the impact the Philippines and its people had on me. And I’ll forever treasure the memory of folk dancing with my fellow teachers in my Maria Clara gown.





## CENTRAL AMERICA AND MEXICO

VOLUNTEERS

25,285

(10.59%)\*

1	Belize	1962–present
2	Costa Rica	1963–present
3	El Salvador	1962–1980, 1993–2016
4	Guatemala	1963–present
5	Honduras	1962–2012
6	Mexico	2004–present
7	Nicaragua	1968–1979, 1991–2019
8	Panama	1963–1971, 1990–present

## SOUTH AMERICA

VOLUNTEERS

32,595

(13.65%)

9	Argentina	1992–1994
10	Bolivia	1962–1971, 1990–2008
11	Brazil	1962–1981
12	Chile	1962–1982, 1991–1998
13	Colombia	1961–1981, 2010–present
14	Ecuador	1962–present
15	Guyana	1966–1971, 1995–present
16	Paraguay	1966–present
17	Peru	1962–1974, 2002–present
18	Suriname	1995–2013
19	Uruguay	1963–1973, 1991–1997
20	Venezuela	1962–1976

## CARIBBEAN

VOLUNTEERS

13,601

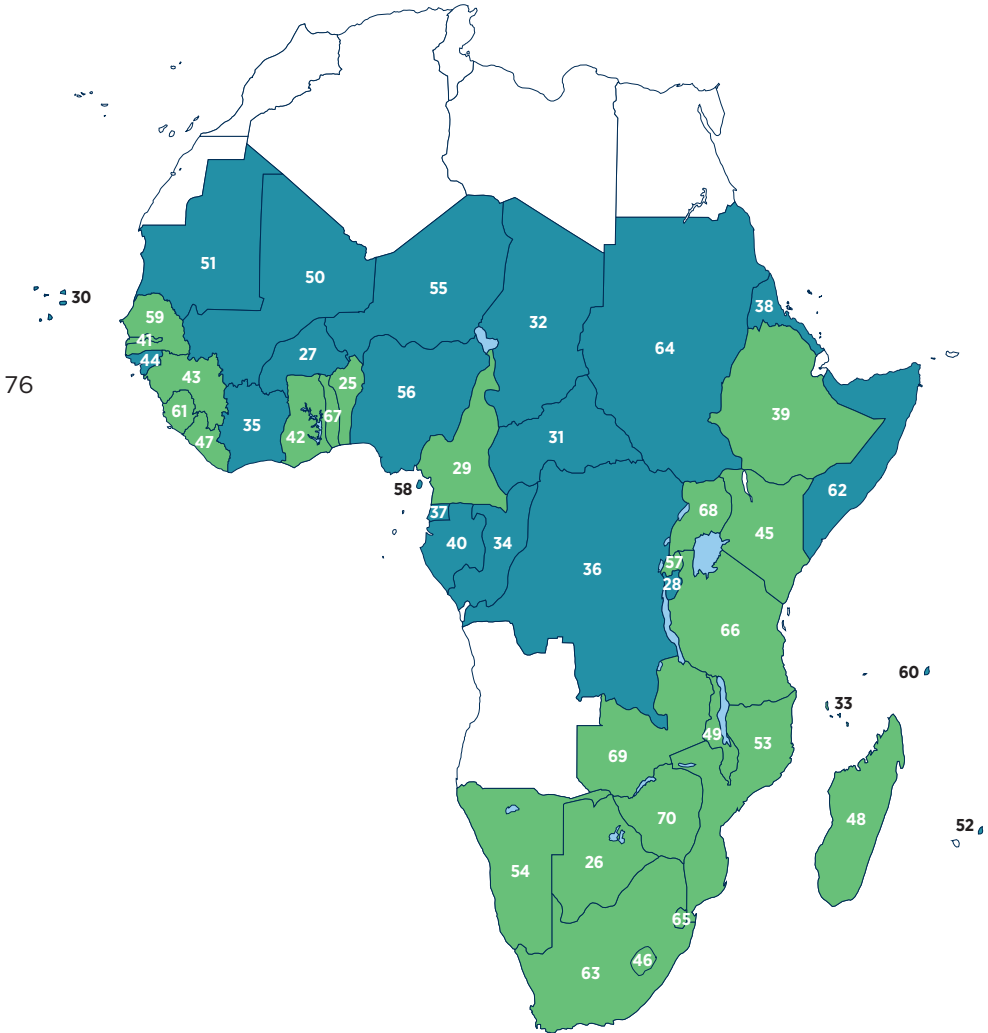
(5.70%)

21	Dominican Republic	1962–present
22	Eastern Caribbean:	1961–present
	Anguilla	
	Antigua/Barbuda	
	Barbados	
	Dominica	
	Grenada/Carriacou	
	Montserrat	
	St. Kitts and Nevis	
	St. Lucia	
	St. Vincent/Grenadines	
	Turks and Caicos	
23	Haiti	1982–1987 1990–1991 1996–2005
24	Jamaica	1962–present

\*Percentage of total volunteers who have served in region since 1961. Peace Corps cites 240,000+ volunteers since its founding. [peacecorps.gov/countries](http://peacecorps.gov/countries)

**AFRICA**  
VOLUNTEERS  
**85,663**  
(35.88%)

25	Benin	1968–present
26	Botswana	1966–1997, 2003–present
27	Burkina Faso	1967–1987, 1995–2017
28	Burundi	1983–1993
29	Cameroon	1962–present
30	Cape Verde	1988–2013
31	Central African Republic	1972–1996
32	Chad	1966–1979, 1987–1990, 1990–1998, 2003–2006



■ Current country  
■ Former country

33	Comoros	1988–1995, 2014–present
34	Congo	1991–1997
35	Cote d’Ivoire	1962–1981, 1990–2003
36	Democratic Republic of Congo <i>(formerly Zaire)</i>	1970–1991
37	Equatorial Guinea	1988–1993
38	Eritrea	1995–1998
39	Ethiopia	1962–1977, 1995–1999, 2007–present
40	Gabon	1963–1968, 1973–2005
41	The Gambia	1967–present
42	Ghana	1961–present
43	Guinea	1963–1966, 1969–1971, 1985–present
44	Guinea–Bissau	1988–1998
45	Kenya	1964–2014, 2019–present
46	Lesotho	1967–present
47	Liberia	1962–1990, 2008–present
48	Madagascar	1993–2009, 2009–present
49	Malawi	1963–1976, 1978–present
50	Mali	1971–2012, 2014–2015
51	Mauritania	1966–1967, 1971–2011
52	Mauritius	1969–1976
53	Mozambique	1998–present
54	Namibia	1990–present
55	Niger	1962–2011
56	Nigeria	1961–1976, 1992–1995
57	Rwanda	1975–1993, 2008–present
58	São Tomé Príncipe	1990–1996
59	Senegal	1963–present
60	Seychelles	1974–1995
61	Sierra Leone	1962–1994, 2010–present
62	Somalia	1962–1970
63	South Africa	1997–present
64	Sudan <i>(now North and South Sudan)</i>	1984–1986
65	Eswatini <i>(formerly Swaziland)</i>	1969–1996, 2003–present
66	Tanzania <i>(formerly Tanganyika)</i>	1961–1969, 1979–present
67	Togo	1962–present
68	Uganda	1964–1972, 1991–1999, 2001–present
69	Zambia	1994–present
70	Zimbabwe	1991–2001

# EASTERN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

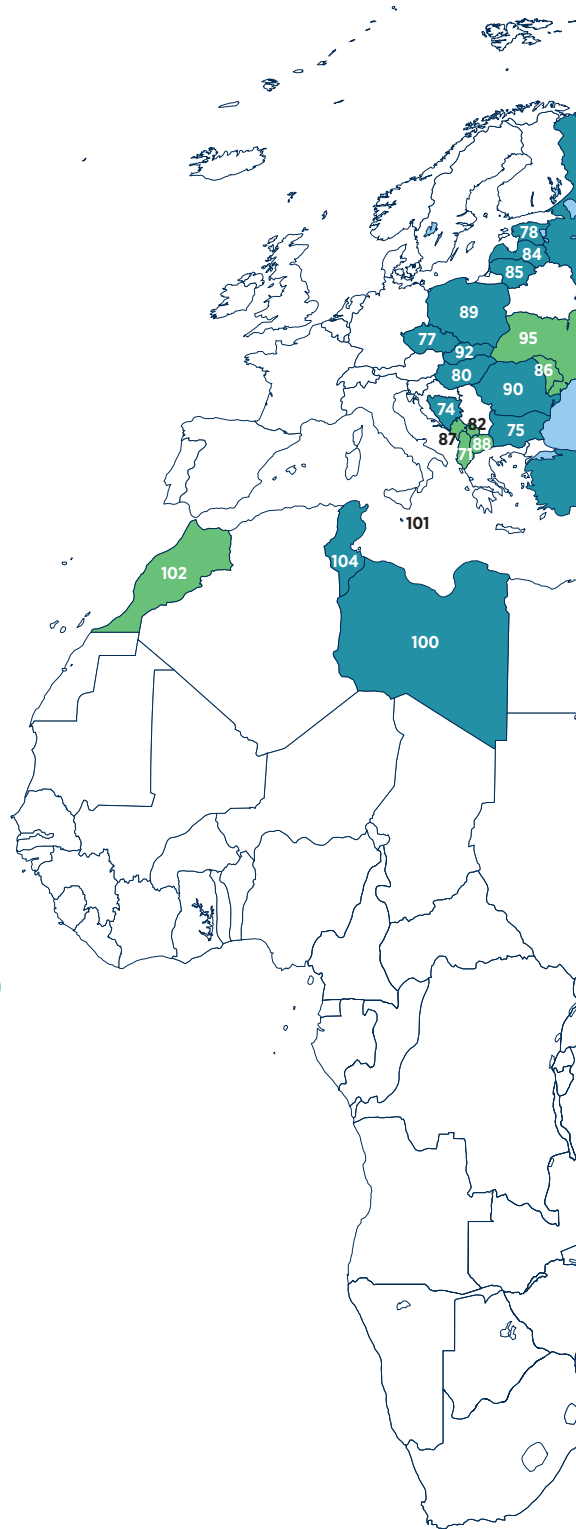
VOLUNTEERS

# 20,753

(8.69%)

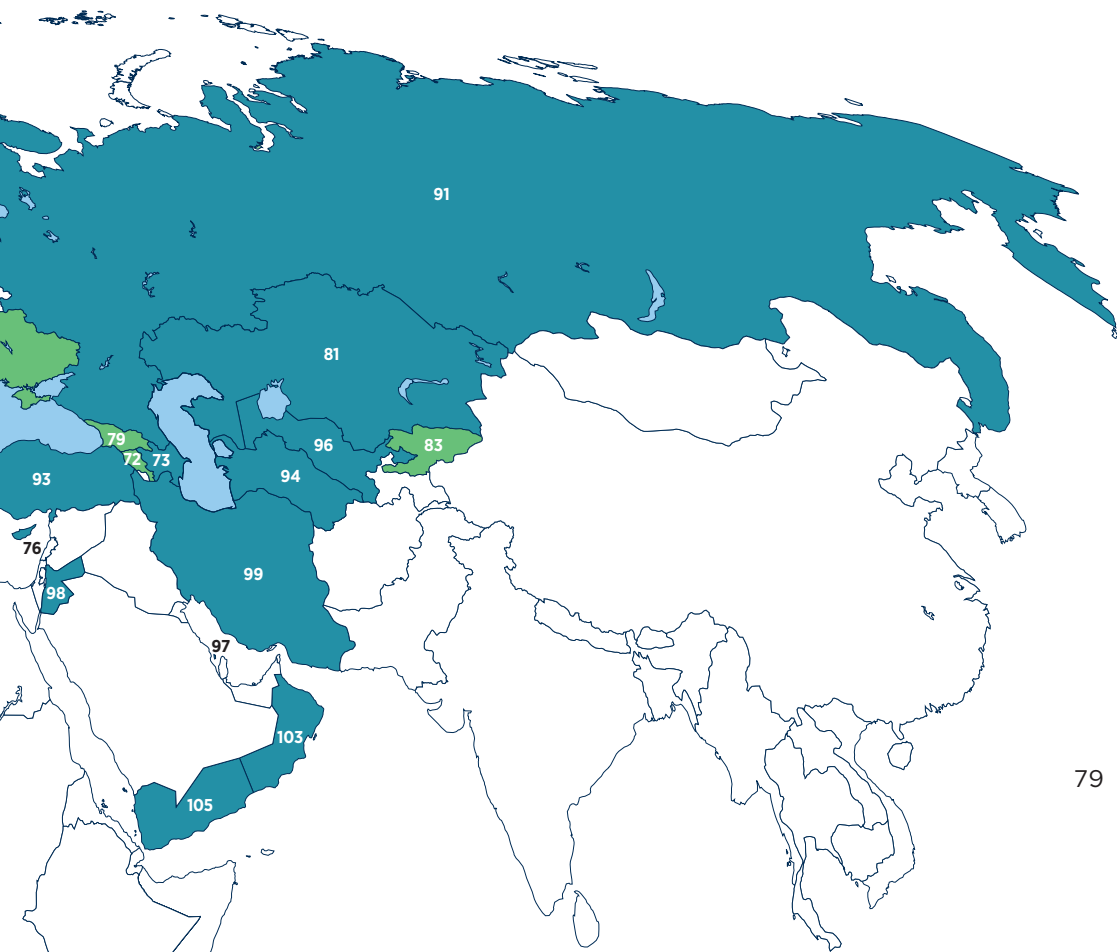
78

71	Albania	1992-1997, 2003-present
72	Armenia	1992-present
73	Azerbaijan	2003-2016
74	Bosnia and Herzegovina	2000-2002
75	Bulgaria	1991-2013
76	Cyprus	1962-1964
77	Czech Republic	1990-1997
78	Estonia	1992-2002
79	Georgia	2001-present
80	Hungary	1990-1997
81	Kazakhstan	1993-2011
82	Kosovo	2014-present
83	Kyrgyz Republic	1993-present
84	Latvia	1992-2002
85	Lithuania	1992-2002
86	Moldova	1993-present
87	Montenegro	Opening 2020
88	North Macedonia <i>(formerly Republic of Macedonia)</i>	1996-present
89	Poland	1990-2001
90	Romania	1991-2013
91	Russia	1992-2003
92	Slovak Republic	1990-2002
93	Turkey	1962-1971
94	Turkmenistan	1993-2013
95	Ukraine	1992-present
96	Uzbekistan	1992-2005



■ Current country  
■ Former country





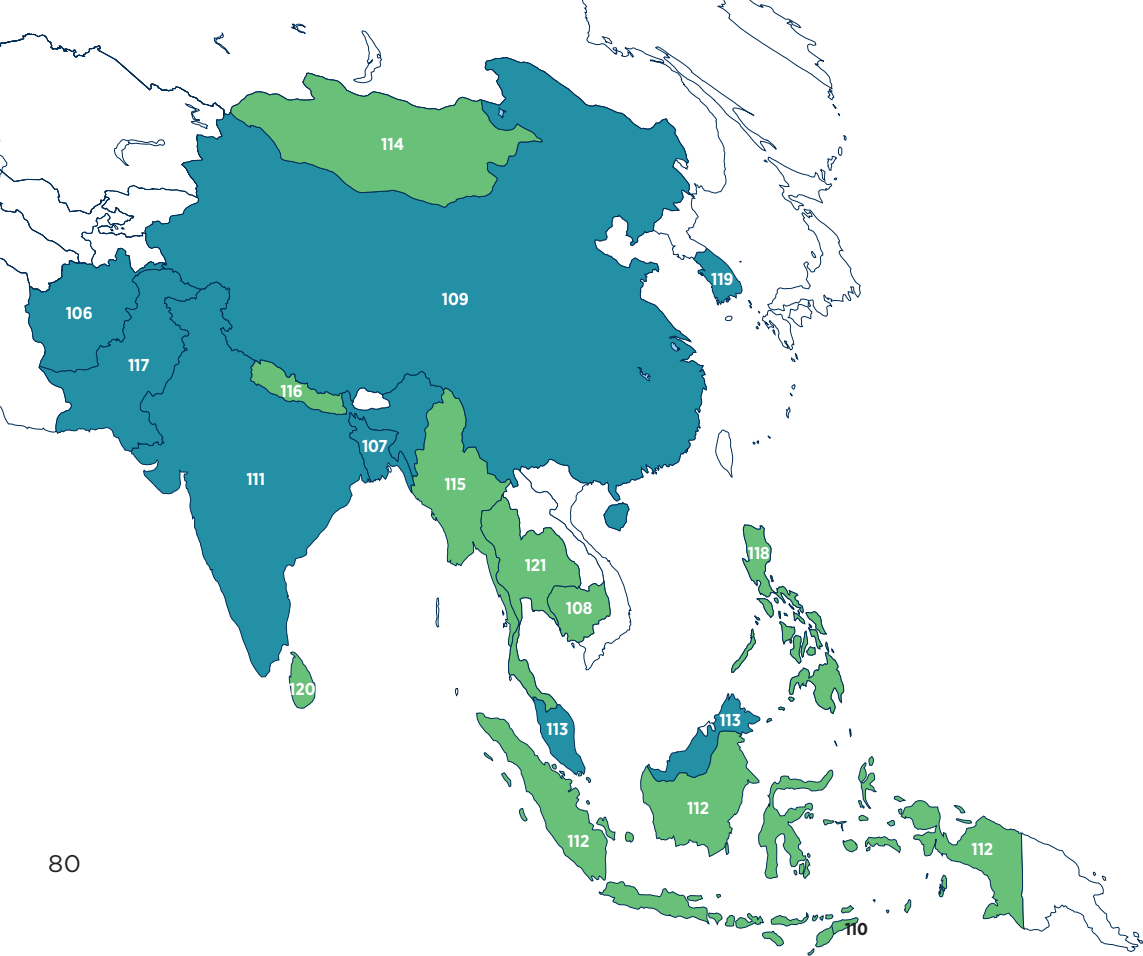
## NORTH AFRICA AND MIDDLE EAST

VOLUNTEERS

**10,846**

(4.54%)

97	Bahrain	1974-1979
98	Jordan	1997-2002, 2004-2015
99	Iran	1962-1976
100	Libya	1966-1969
101	Malta	1970-1975, 1990-1998
102	Morocco	1963-present
103	Oman	1973-1983
104	Tunisia	1962-1996, 2013
105	Yemen	1973-1994

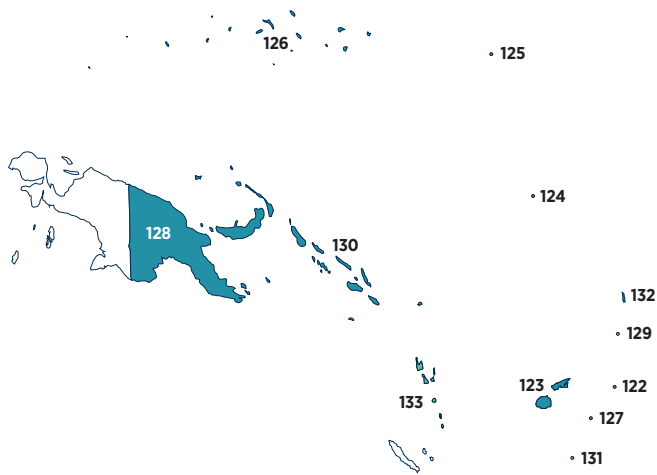


80

**ASIA**  
VOLUNTEERS  
**36,393**  
(15.24%)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 106 Afghanistan                          | 1962-1979  |
| 107 Bangladesh                           | 1998-2006  |
| 108 Cambodia                             | 2007-present                                     |
| 109 China                                | 1993-2020  |
| 110 Timor-Leste<br>(formerly East Timor) | 2002-2006, 2015-present                          |
| 111 India                                | 1961-1976  |
| 112 Indonesia                            | 1963-1965, 2010-present                          |
| 113 Malaysia                             | 1962-1983  |
| 114 Mongolia                             | 1991-present                                     |
| 115 Myanmar                              | 2016-present                                     |
| 116 Nepal                                | 1962-2004, 2012-present                          |
| 117 Pakistan                             | 1961-1967, 1988-1991                             |
| 118 Philippines                          | 1961-1990, 1992-present                          |
| 119 South Korea                          | 1966-1981  |
| 120 Sri Lanka                            | 1962-1964, 1967-1970,<br>1983-1998, 2018-present |
| 121 Thailand                             | 1962-present                                     |

- Current country
- Former country



## PACIFIC ISLANDS VOLUNTEERS 13,638 (5.71%)

122 Cook Islands	1982–1995
123 Fiji	1968–1998, 2003–present
124 Kiribati	1974–2008
125 Marshall Islands	1966–1996
126 Micronesia ( <i>Federated States of</i> ) and Palau ( <i>Republic of</i> )	1966–2018
127 Niue	1994–2002
128 Papua New Guinea	1981–2001
129 Samoa	1967–present
130 Solomon Islands	1971–2000
131 Tonga	1967–present
132 Tuvalu	1977–1997
133 Vanuatu	1990–present

# Acknowledgments

Many hands and minds contributed to this exhibit, which represents years of collecting, commitment, and hard work by a dedicated group of volunteers.

The exhibit team provided singular skills and a collaborative spirit. Kudos especially to Patricia Wand (Colombia 1963–65), who envisioned a Peace Corps 60th anniversary exhibit at the American University Museum and coordinated the effort.

The collection team—Deborah Manget (St. Lucia 1978–79), Marla Bush (Chad 1968–70), Peter Deekle (Iran 1968–70), Nicola Dino (Ecuador 1994–97), and Judith Madden-Sturges (Peru 1964–65)—tirelessly reviewed, selected, and accessioned objects.

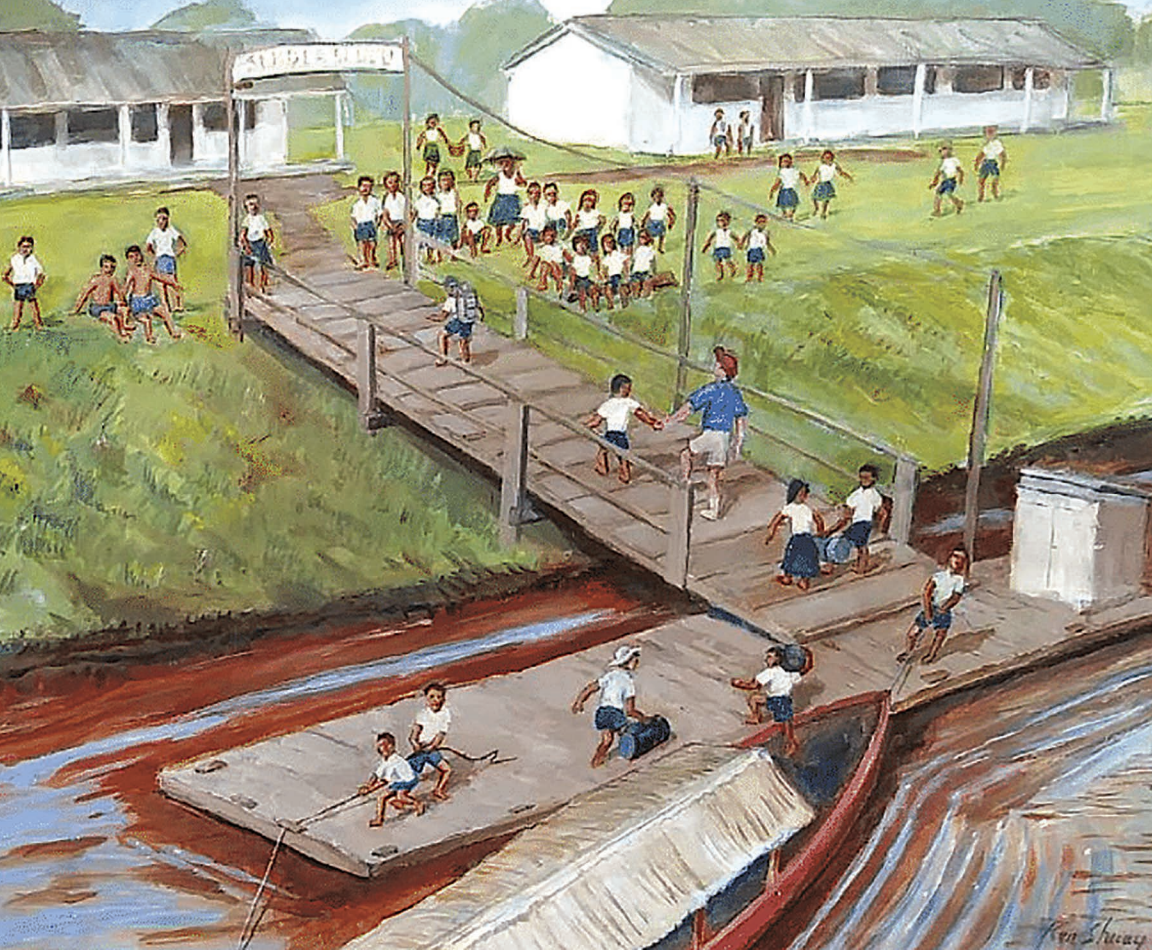
Story editors—John Rude (Ethiopia 1962–64), Jeanne D’Haem (Somalia 1968–70), and Alison Kahn (Benin 1976–77)—helped each Peace Corps volunteer shape a personal narrative around their unique object.

Researchers—Avriel Glass (Indonesia 2019–20), Bill Saphir (Thailand 1967–70), and Elizabeth Arrazola (Morocco 2019–20)—meticulously checked facts to ensure accuracy.

We extend special thanks to Jack Rasmussen, director of American University Museum, who believed in the project, committed resources, and served as our guide and mentor. Alexandra Schuman, CAS/MA ’21 art history and Alper Initiative for Washington Art Fellow, patiently and creatively curated this unusual exhibit, bringing order to complexity.

Other AU Museum staff—Elizabeth Cowgill, Jessica Pochesci, Kevin Runyon, and Kristi-Anne Shaer—smoothly executed the final steps toward installation. Leslie Nellis, assistant archivist and curator of the Peace Corps Community Archive





Ken Shuey (Malaysia 1963–65), *The New Teacher Arrives*. Oil on canvas, 22 x 28 in.

at AU Library, researched events and continues her commitment to preserve Peace Corps written records.

Finally, we recognize the RPCV Oral History Archive Project participants and the many volunteers who support the Museum of the Peace Corps Experience. The latter include nearly 800 members, financial contributors, and individuals who have donated objects and stories, along with those who contribute to marketing, web development, and two significant initiatives—the Many Faces of Peace Corps and the Bibliography of Peace Corps Authors. This exhibit could not exist without their prodigious gifts of time and talent. We thank you one and all.

— Museum of the Peace Corps Experience



First published in conjunction  
with the exhibition  
*Peace Corps at 60:  
Inside the Volunteer Experience*  
February 16–August 9, 2021  
American University Museum  
Project Space Washington, DC

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ISBN: 978-1-7347788-8-5

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**Museum of the Peace Corps Experience,  
60th Anniversary Exhibit**

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Museum of the Peace Corps Experience is  
grateful for the support of National Peace  
Corps Association and affiliate groups.

Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural  
Heritage and Peace Corps provided map  
and timeline data. International Calendar  
photographs are courtesy of RPCVs of  
Wisconsin-Madison.

Printing of this catalog is underwritten by  
a Peace Corps Community Fund grant.



4400 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC 20016  
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The AU Museum Project Space, launched in summer 2019, is dedicated to working with academics and nontraditional curators to create exhibitions addressing special topics of interest across the university and the greater Washington community.

**PROJECT • SPACE**