



Peace Corps Belize *Press Release*

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PEACE CORPS ... 42 YEARS OF DEDICATED SERVICE IN BELIZE

Forty years ago, 24 Peace Corps Volunteers arrived in Belize. On the 6th of November, 19 of them came back for a reunion in Caye Caulker. All were impressed with the changes that have taken place in Belize and in their respective lives as a result of the two years they lived and worked here.

To keep their experience in perspective, it should be remembered that forty-three years ago, John F. Kennedy, the founder of the Peace Corps said, "...ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country... ask not what America can do for you, but what you can do for America.'

Since these words have been spoken, more than 170,000 men and women have waged peace in more than 137 nations of the world. From Ghana to Guatemala, from Togo to the Soviet Union, from Belize to Botswana, these Volunteers have made a difference to millions of people. Measuring or quantifying the contributions of four decades of Peace Corps service is not easy. But, suffice it to say that Peace Corps Volunteers are the world's largest teachers of English as a Second Language—they teach more than five million the language of commerce and international communication. Today the core mission is the same as it has been since 1961—to help people in other countries build better lives for themselves and their families. But there is another mission that could be seen as more important today than ever before.

Here is how President John F. Kennedy described this mission:

The benefits of the Peace Corps will not be limited to the countries in which it serves. Our own young men and women will be enriched by the experience of living and working in foreign lands. They will have acquired new skills and experience that will aid them in their future careers and add to our own country's supply of trained personnel and teachers. They will return better able to assume the responsibilities of American citizenship and with greater understanding of our global responsibilities.

The first Volunteers arrived in British Honduras (now Belize) in 1962, and for forty-two years have worked as partners in the socio-economic development of Belize and in promoting the friendship that exists between the two nations. In those 42 years, more than 1,600 Volunteers have served in Belize, helping its development by projects such

as building roads, schools and libraries; by installing water systems in rural villages; developing early childhood, special education and vocational education instructional programs; and providing counseling and job readiness skills to thousands of at-risk youngsters. During the 1990s, Volunteers focused their educational efforts on teacher training, curriculum development, HIV/AIDS awareness, information technology, and at-risk youth. Their rural community efforts focused on eco-tourism, alternative agriculture, and environmental education.

The 68 Peace Corps Volunteers active in Belize today serve to accomplish development goals in two major projects: Education and Community Conservation. Volunteers work in Belize City, district towns, and most often in the rural communities throughout the nation. Volunteers and staff work hand-in-hand with local government, non-government, and community-based organizations to train and build capacity toward sustainable solutions to challenges in the areas of health, education, environment, and agriculture. In partnership with Belizeans we promote dignity of people and their capacity to improve their own communities and quality of life. Peace Corps values teamwork, professionalism, accountability, trust, transparency, diversity, effective communication, and respect for cultural differences.

The men and women who have served and continue to serve at PC/Belize, have built bridges of understanding and goodwill between the people of the U.S.A. and the people of Belize. They continue to “dream things that never were and say, ”why not”?”

Volunteers range in age from 21 to 83 years. Some are married couples. Many of them have left their marks behind as a first in many fields. To mention a few:

- Peace Corps Volunteer Lynn Nelson started the Lynn School for mentally retarded children, which later became part of the Stella Maris School.
- Belize’s strong 4H program got a helpful start through the work of Peace Corps Volunteer Christine Dixon.
- With shovels and hand tools, Peace Corps Volunteers John McGarity, Mark Toogood, David Wright, Jeffrey Mohr, Paul Sipe, Jesse Hartz, John Gaffney and Ray Carey built school buildings and teachers houses in remote Toledo Maya villages like Jalacte, Dolores, Poite, Sunday Wood, Corazon Creek and Naa Luum Ca, which could not be reached by modern construction equipment.
- The Belize Junior School of Agriculture in Orange Walk District was established through assistance from Peace Corps Volunteer George LeBard.
- Volunteers working with the National Sports Council helped to launch the first Special Olympics, the Belize Games, Bike and Hike, and the Fun Run. Volunteers also assisted in developing the Annual Primary School Track and Field and the Annual Primary School Football Competition.
- Peace Corps Volunteer Amy Smith assisted Belize Audubon Society in preparing a grant proposal that awarded \$25,000 to Tapir Mountain Nature Reserve to preserve the area’s wildlife.

- Working with the International Rescue Committee, Volunteers working in refugee villages have built more than 35 water tanks and latrines, and more than 40 schools and community centers.
- Peace Corps Volunteers assisted with the development of Guanacaste Park, which was subsequently dedicated in their honor.
- Youth Volunteers (Terri Elders, Karen Smith, Heidi Storz, and Paula Castillo) assisted in the establishment and strengthening of the National Organization for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NOPCAN).
- Youth Volunteers (Peter Bloomfield, Laura Korin, Liz Panessa, Jennifer Jacobs, Maura Varley, Kara Johnson and Sheela Sinharoy), worked in the front lines of Belize's battle with the HIV/AIDS epidemic, providing education and prevention strategies to youth, teachers and women.
- Dozens of Volunteers currently are working with community-based organizations to help strengthen the management of protected areas on both land and sea, and to assist in developing tourism-based activities, so that these communities accrue benefits from foreign visitors to the nations parks and marine reserves.

There are a host of others who accomplished outstanding work in their field, whose contributions have left lasting impressions on all with whom they came in contact. Many have remained in contact with their Belizean host families and counterparts. Recently a group of Volunteers who served in Belize from 1964 to 1966 returned to Belize for a 40-year reunion. Of the 24 Volunteers who completed their 2 years of service in 1966, 19 participated in the 2004 reunion event at Caye Caulker this November. Following the reunion, several return volunteers visited their placement sites and host communities. A few of their memoirs are offered below.

Molly Campbell: Lived in Belize City at the home of Hugh and Ivy Bennett, and worked at the Social Development department with Roy Young and Vince Brown (PCV). My special memories are about the wonderful people of Belize, and their warmth, hospitality and generosity. I can remember sitting on the porch at Miss Ivy and Mr. B's home near St. Johns Church on Sunday afternoons and talking with friends and neighbors who stopped by to visit. Mr. B was a great baseball fan and we used to listen to the baseball games, particularly the World Series, on his radio. I also played softball with the Dunrite team...I was not a very good player, but the ladies put up with me, and we all had a wonderful time. Mr. Young was a wonderful mentor and he helped and guided both Vince Brown and me throughout my two years in Belize City. What wonderful trips we had to Hattieville and other small villages meeting with the city councils and other groups, and meeting many, many interesting people. I also worked with a small group of Girl Guides, and we had many memorable times together including trips to the Cayes, the Pine Ridge Mountains and a special visit by Lady Baden-Powell. All in all, I learned much more from the people of Belize than I gave to them, particularly in terms of gaining a perspective on the cultural values and traditions of a country other than my

own. Because of my experience in Belize I have tried to maintain a broad worldview perspective throughout my life in terms of my values and political views.

Tim Krieger: I was assigned to the Social and Community Development Ministry and assigned to Mullins River, Stann Creek District. My supervisor was Joe Mendez who still lives in Dangriga. My assignment was community development work with the people of Mullins River who had been devastated by Hurricane Hattie. A pig project, the

acquisition of land for the farmers, and winning some battles with the Reconstruction and Development Corporation represented some of our successes. However, I think the real successes were the workings of the second and third goals of Peace Corps. Today I can still go back to Mullins River and be greeted as Mr. Tim and multitudes of people have heard of Mullins River and Belize as a result of my travels and life's work. The experience I had in Belize enabled me to continue development work with Peace Corps in Sierra Leone, Jamaica, Fiji and Tuvalu. I also worked with the Domestic Volunteer Agencies in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Minnesota and Illinois. A great personal success is the fact that I married a Mullins River girl, Marion Sarah Johnston and we have been together for 38 1/2 years. As they say I truly "drank the water"!

Bill Plitt: Many memories, so little time and space. I served as an English and history teacher at St. Hilda's in Belize City, and worked at the Stella Maris School for the physically disabled. I lived in the home of Ms. Leonie Wright and her family: Angelia, Enrique and Vicente Pineda. As a young man, the experience with my friends and students in Belize heightened my awareness of myself and the world in which I live, leaving me a different person than I was before my service. I came to serve. I left enriched. Memories of my "families", both the Wright-Pinedas and the Zaldivars, are filled with feelings of joy, celebration and laughter, and the usual stresses that all true families share. My experiences at St. Hilda's and at Stella Maris led me to a career in teaching in the most culturally diverse settings of our country for nearly forty years which I have truly cherished. Playing on baseball, volleyball and basketball teams with fellow Belizeans, developed lasting relationships that still continue to this day. Working side by side with teammates enabled us all to know each other more deeply than just being a North American or a Belizean. We were friends.

Barry L. Morrisroe - I graduated from St. Michael's College in Santa Fe, New Mexico in June 1964, went into Peace Corps Training at the University of Maryland, and then the outward bound Training at Camp Croizer, near Aracebo, Puerto Rico. Flew into Belize City in October 1964, and after a brief orientation was assigned to Hattieville, 10 miles west of Belize City. I was assigned as a Community Development Volunteer, attached to the Social Development Department, which Mr. Robert Bennett was the Director, and I worked with Mr. Andrew Valentine, and Mr. Roy Young. For the first year I lived out in Hattieville, during the time it was the relocation site of Hurricane Hattie with 20 or so long buildings with 20 apartments on each side of each building. I was assigned to one of those apartments. I worked with the Village Council and in the school teaching Physical Education and Music. Mr. Percy Jones was the Chairman of the Village Council at the time. I also worked in the school over in Burrell Boom. During my second year in country, I was a Social Development Officer for the Social Development Department for the Belize District, where I travel from village to village in the Belize District working with the Departments Community Development teams, working with Village Councils, and local schools. The work included helping the village councils to organize themselves, and to build community improvement projects. After, leaving Belize in June 1966, I went to Lincoln University, in Oxford, PA and helped train BHIII

the next large group of Volunteers that entered the county in September 1966. Since that time I have worked in the Human Services, initially with a Community Action Program in Medford, Oregon; I got my Masters Degree at the University of Oregon, and then for the past 35 years I have worked for the United States Department of Health and Human Services. I have been involved in administering and funding the national Head Start Pre-school program. I will retire from this position on January 3, 2005.

Larry Rodrick, Deputy Director, Peace Corps Belize in 1964-66

I head up an organization called Planned Parenthood of Alabama and just finished a two year partnership with Belize, under our national Global Partners program, working on HIV/AIDS prevention through volunteer counseling and testing. For those who don't know, Belize has one of the highest HIV prevalence rates in the Western Hemisphere. We feel like we made a dent, getting the Belize Health Ministry to introduce rapid testing and some other advanced techniques. It is also notable that Peace Corps Belize had some of its volunteers working on the HIV/AIDS problem.

Sandi and David Miller

David and I lived in Independence Town (Mango Creek) from 1964-65. We taught at Independence College where Mr. Goval Morgan was the principal and Mr. Carballo was the Spanish teacher. The school had two rooms and two grades at that time. We lived in the Belize Estates former hurricane shelter and made good friends with the Curling family across the way. We have maintained close ties with the Curlings through the year and plan to visit Ethel on Placencia while we are in Belize. Fathers Harry Delaney and Philip Pick were the priests in Independence at that time, and we kept close contact with them for many years. Both came to visit us in the States, and Fr. Delaney attended our daughter's wedding. The second year we moved to Orange Walk and taught at Muffles College. The priest was Fr. Richard Steinmetz. We enjoyed getting to know two different Belizean cultures and loved all our experiences. The Peace Corps experience has been a highlight of our lives and influenced our continued public service.



1964
Airport arrival of second
group of Peace Corps
volunteers to British
Honduras (BH II)



November 2004
Reunion participants of BH II
Peace Corps volunteers 40 years
later in Caye Caulker