



PEACE CORPS CALLING

AS A TOP PRODUCER OF VOLUNTEERS, GW HONORS 50 YEARS OF THE PEACE CORPS.



BY CAITLIN CARROLL



WHEN FRANK ALMAGUER, MA '74, LEFT THE UNITED STATES TO SPEND TWO YEARS IN BRITISH HONDURAS (NOW BELIZE) IN 1967, HE WAS JOINING A YOUNG ORGANIZATION IN ONLY ITS SIXTH YEAR OF SENDING AMERICANS ABROAD WITH THE MISSION TO PROMOTE PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP. NOW, 50 YEARS AFTER PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY INITIATED THE FORMATION OF THE PEACE CORPS, 200,000 AMERICANS HAVE SERVED AS VOLUNTEERS IN 139 COUNTRIES. NEARLY 1,100 OF THOSE VOLUNTEERS HAVE BEEN GW GRADUATES.



“Those two years as a volunteer gave me a strong sense that I was cut out for this kind of activity,” says Mr. Almaguer, who went on to a four-decade-long career in international development and to become U.S. ambassador to Honduras. He now serves as the secretary for administration and finance at the Organization of American States.

GW has ranked No. 1 among medium-sized universities producing Peace Corps volunteers for three years in a row, according to the corps’ annual rankings. There are currently 72 undergraduate alumni serving overseas. Fifteen alumni from GW’s graduate programs are also serving, placing the university fourth among graduate school Peace Corps providers.

“George Washington carries on a proud tradition of being Peace Corps’ top-producing university in the medium category for the last three consecutive years,” says Director of the Peace Corps Aaron S. Williams. Mr. Williams will be the keynote speaker at GW’s celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Peace Corps on Sept. 17, during Alumni Weekend. “Peace Corps service provides the opportunity to become a global citizen in the 21st century and builds meaningful leadership experience that will help launch a career in the public sector and beyond.”

From Mr. Almaguer, who completed his service 42 years ago, to alumni who are just returning from abroad, GW volunteers share their stories of Peace Corps service.

ALEX GORDON, BA '81

SERVICE: PARAGUAY, 1991–93



COURTESY ALEX GORDON

The Paraguayans in my very rural site of Santa Librada happened to be extremely shy and reticent people. My first two weeks in the village were very quiet, with me doing what I could to meet and talk with anyone who would engage me. I was not sure whether anyone really wanted me there.

One night, a tornado hit my hut, causing me to jump out a window and seek shelter in the school until the following morning. The next day, I and many of the community members went out to see the damage.



While mine was the only hut in the village severely damaged, the local town lost hundreds of homes. As we all stood looking at all my clothes and newly bought furniture scattered around a field, everyone waited in silence to see my response. They told me later that most thought I would just get on a bus and that would be the end of my time there.

I knew it was a pivotal moment in my tour, so I took a deep breath and said that I was just lucky I was not hurt. Everyone applauded, and I told them I would go to the Peace Corps office to see about getting funds to replace my things. When I returned two days later, they had rebuilt my hut (much stronger than it had been), fixed all my furniture, washed and ironed my clothes, and painted the walls.

PHILIPPA WOOD, BA '08

SERVICE: GUATEMALA, 2009–11

For International Woman's Day I organized a parade and festivities for all the women who lived in San Vicente. We had free women's health services afterward and a workshop about domestic violence.

We were planning on having about 50 women show up for the parade. Each had to bring a sign explaining why they were proud to be a woman. More than 150 women attended the parade, all of whom had worked very hard on their posters, which said things such as: "Woman too can be the mayor of San Vicente" and "We are proud to raise our children and ensure them a future we never had."

ANMARIE EMMET, BBA '74

SERVICE: LESOTHO, 2002–04



I celebrated my 72nd, 73rd, and 74th birthdays in Africa. I had spent 50 years in banking and was retired when I left for the Peace Corps. I went from living in a three-story townhouse in Foggy Bottom to a thatch-roof hut with no running water and no electricity. For my service, I

disseminated information about HIV and AIDS.

I thoroughly enjoyed the experience—in many other cultures, older people are revered. Gray hair is not a sin.

Because Lesotho is a mountainous area in Southern Africa, it gets cold. My most prized possession in Africa was a sleeping bag. We were able to bring warm blankets to the sheep and goat herders (mostly young children), who slept on the ground out in the open. Their thanks in words and looks still warm my heart.

DONALD MOOERS, JD '86

SERVICE: SIERRA LEONE, 1982–84



I worked with more than 1,500 farmers in the Tane Chiefdom of Sierra Leone to improve the production and storage of rice, cassava, and potatoes. A study completed several years after I completed my Peace Corps service credited the programs I brought to the chiefdom

with a 300 percent increase in cassava and potato production.

The two years were full of tragic lows—especially children dying of preventable diseases—and incredible highs. A special moment that still brings a smile to my face took place in my final week in the village, when the chiefdom elders surprised me by putting me before a large crowd and initiating me as the first outsider named a section chief of Tane Chiefdom. I was put through an intricate ceremony where I left behind my former identity and took on my new role and new name. At the conclusion of the ceremony I was paraded through the streets to applause from all.

Following my Peace Corps service, I spent over a decade working in international development, diplomacy, and policy that took me to more than 90 countries. Today, I continue serving people from around the world as an immigration attorney.

KAREN BRUNBAUGH, BA '03

SERVICE: NICARAGUA, 2004–06



I led workshops at Casa Materna, where I focused on myth-busting about women's health. Throughout my service, I changed my approach.

At first, I was focusing more on what I had to give, not really on what the women needed. I had the lofty (and very American)

sense that I was doing everyone a favor by coming to a hot, dusty Nicaraguan pueblo to impart knowledge. I realized I had to find a way to empower the experienced moms to share with the inexperienced ones. The difficulty was to get them to share accurate information, not the myths that have been passed from generation to generation about the evil eye or how to prevent crossed eyes by taping string to a child's forehead.

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—ROBERT SHEPHERD

Peace Corps has affected my life and career choices in every way possible. I gained more self-confidence and improved my cultural awareness, both of which have helped me aim higher and achieve greater. After my service, I became an AmeriCorps program director in Washington, D.C., training and placing young D.C. residents in the public schools as mentors, tutors, and role models. This fall, I return to nursing school and hope to continue my service in the health industry.

FRANK ALMAGUER, MA '74

SERVICE: BELIZE, 1967-69



JUAN MANUEL HERRERA/OAS

I helped farmers who produce sugar cane and other local crops to market their products and maintain good business practices. While I was there, I met another Peace Corps volunteer who was teaching in the area. She and I are celebrating our 40th wedding anniversary this year.

I've enjoyed a long career in international development with USAID, in policy direction as an ambassador, and in international management with the Organization of American States. I doubt any of this would have happened without the Peace Corps experience.

ROBERT SHEPHERD,

GW ANTHROPOLOGY AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS PROFESSOR

SERVICE: NEPAL, 1985-87; CHINA 1989-92; INDONESIA 1994-96



COURTESY ROBERT SHEPHERD

I could be a poster child for the Peace Corps. I think the fundamentals that I took away from the experience are that even in an obscure place in the middle of Nepal, human relations are fundamentally the same, but values are much different. This hit me in the face every day.

As a professor, I sometimes talk with GW students about the Peace Corps. I tell them: If you think you want to work in international development, there is no better experience. The Peace Corps humbles people and makes us realize that “development” issues are not simple. Be cautiously optimistic, but don't think you can save the world. You will receive much, much more than you give.

JERRY PERKINS, BA '70

SERVICE: PANAMA AND NICARAGUA, 1970-72



COURTESY JERRY PERKINS

I worked in agricultural development—raising corn, tomatoes, and hogs—and in organizing marketing and buying cooperatives in Panama for about five months. I was in Nicaragua from April 1971 to February 1972 and was in charge of distributing relief supplies to farmers whose small farms had

been buried by the Cerro Negro volcano.

As the person in charge of relief supplies, I was responsible for the survival of the 120 families who lived in the community. Peace Corps made a huge difference in my life and career decisions. It was the reason I returned to my native Iowa and became a journalist. **GW**



COURTESY PEACE CORPS