



GLOBAL NETWORKS

Becoming a Citizen of the World: Peace Corps Retrospective

by Warren Master

In 50 years the U.S. Peace Corps has touched countless lives and has created citizens of the world who foster a global network.

In September 2011, the U.S. Peace Corps celebrated its 50th anniversary. Thousands of volunteers came to Washington, D.C., to reconnect with old friends and participate in anniversary events on the National Mall.

Having served with my wife, Karen, as Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) in Turkey in the mid-1960s, we joined more than 30 members of our group (Turkey-12) at this global reunion. There, we caught up and reflected on how this experience influenced our lives.

Peace Corps Training

Training is the first major step in a Peace Corps journey. Ours began in the summer of 1965, when the Turkish government requested volunteers to work at a central medical center and in the squatter settlements (*gecekondular*) ringing Turkey's capital, Ankara. In response, the agency brought together 114 trainees at Portland State College. All but eight were in their early- to mid-20s; most were just out of college. We split exactly down the middle by gender, and hailed from 33 states and all regions of the country. While we were a diverse group in terms of gender, regional geography, college majors, and even age (with five trainees ranging from 52 to 70), we included only two

African-Americans and nary a single Asian-, Hispanic- or Native American.

Almost all of us found training both stimulating and helpful—stimulating because it exposed us to wonderful people from across the United States and helpful in that the substantive training, including a daily physical fitness regimen, turned out to be indispensable: Turkish language instruction (360 hours); area studies in Islamic civilization and Turkish history (70 hours); and American studies, world affairs, and communism (75 hours).

After more than two months of training in urban community development (UCD), we learned that the program had been scrapped and that we would now train another month or so for a tuberculosis (TB) control assignment. By January 1966, we were in Turkey.

Living and Working in Turkey

When we arrived in Ankara for in-country Peace Corps orientation, it was the dead of winter. Snow surrounded us as did the pungent odor of coal ash wafting across the capital's long, semi-arid basin and the *gecekondu* neighborhoods. Within a week or so, many of us took off in different directions. All but a small cluster of medical professionals who stayed behind in Ankara would be assigned to TB programs in impoverished areas ringing the major cities of Istanbul and Izmir (in the west) and Adana (down south).

A Ground-level View

Karen and I were assigned to Ceyhan, a town of 40,000 and one of 11 provincial sub-districts of Adana, with 20 villages scattered throughout the nearby Taurus Mountains. Every weekday morning our daily commute by foot took us through largely unpaved, residential streets and light commercial neighborhoods—oftentimes with entertainment provided by colorful passersby and the piercing calls of itinerant peddlers.

Rural TB Control in Adana Province

Once settled in at the TB dispensary, Karen and I sorted out how we could add value to the project's core team—consisting largely of the doctor, nurse, lab technician, Jeep driver, X-ray technician, remote needle-giver and motorcycle medicine deliverer, and dispensary superintendent. While Karen took charge of administrative and logistical matters within the dispensary, I focused on reaching out to neighborhoods within the town and each

of the 20 surrounding villages by going house-to-house and monitoring for the presence of tuberculosis.

Typically, Hasan, our driver, Hussein, the X-ray technician, and I headed out to the villages wearing our white, medical smocks. The three of us arrived unannounced because there were no telephones in these hamlets at the time. I would proceed to explain the purpose of our visit to the village headman and council of clan elders over freshly brewed *çay*. If all went well, Hussein would set up the tripod, and each clan leader would shuttle his flock to him for chest X-rays. Sometimes, we would go through an entire village in one day. Other times we stayed up in the hills a night or two.

Life in a Squatter Settlement in Ankara

Within five months of arriving in Ceyhan, our work for the annual cycle was complete. We relocated to Ankara and retrained for other assignments: Karen in childcare and later English as a Second Language (ESL); and I in teaching English to pre-med students at Hacettepe University.

Ironically, we were grudgingly given permission to move into one of the *gecekondu* settlements (*Gülveren*) for which our original training program was designed, renting a two-room flat in a mud-brick abode perched atop one of the hills on Ankara's southeastern rim. Off we went to our respective downtown jobs every weekday, returning to *Gülveren* every evening to participate in community life any way we could.

By early 1967, Turkey's internal political debate heated up over America's growing influence and involvement in the country. So...we moved again, this time to the center of Ankara. Later that spring, we observed a political rally decrying the hundreds of American PCVs suspiciously living and working among Turkish communities all across the country.

Nevertheless, we completed our two-year tour teaching, traveling, and enjoying another side of Turkey. We traveled widely both within Turkey and, inasmuch as Peace Corps policy precluded us from traveling west (such as to Greece or any other European country), to less-travelled roads to Iran, Iraq, and Israel.

Back in America as a Global Citizen

After returning to the United States, I completed my graduate studies and took a job organizing community action programs in Appalachia for the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity. This was my first step toward a

Reflections from Turkey-12

Meet three other members of our T-12 cohort—Scout (Sara Fritzell) Hanhan, Al Handy, and Eileen McCarthy.

Scout (Sara Fritzell) Hanhan, Childcare Specialist

Scout began training as a recent Stanford graduate with a degree in psychology. She was assigned to a tuberculosis dispensary in Istanbul, where she gave shots, took X-rays, and generally assisted the two social nurses who were her co-workers. She lived and made visits in the *gecekondu* to educate TB patients and their families about how to live with the disease.

Then, when the TB program closed down, she was retrained in childcare and started working at a children's home on the other side of Istanbul. Here, she worked with two groups of preschool children, including one group with special needs. After completing her volunteer tour in July 1967, Scout joined the Peace Corps staff as director of the Child Care Program and moved to Ankara, where she stayed until August 1970 when the Peace Corps left Turkey all together.

In the meantime, she married her husband Uğur in 1968 and gave birth to their two sons. The family stayed in Turkey until 1977. Next, they returned to the United States where Scout worked as a social worker in a speech and hearing clinic before going back to school to get her PhD in Early Childhood Education. She remained in this field until 2003, when she retired as associate provost of undergraduate education at the University of North Dakota.



Al Handy, Helping the Disabled

Al grew up in Lafayette, Alabama, and graduated from North Carolina Central University with a BS in Physical Education prior to joining the Peace Corps. In Turkey, he was assigned to Ankara's Hacettepe University Hospital where he taught average daily living activities to people with disabilities, including such tasks as getting out of bed, dressing oneself, and using artificial limbs. In Ankara, all of Al's neighbors were Turks.

One night a young Kenyan knocked on his door and, believing Al a fellow Kenyan, shared that he wanted to go to America to continue his education. Al (an African-American) told Michael that if he ap-

plied to American universities and was accepted, he would help him achieve his goals. In 1968, after Michael was indeed accepted, Al purchased him an airplane ticket to the United States and sponsored his education. Michael went on to earn a master's degree and a PhD in engineering and has worked extensively throughout the world in water resources. He later returned to Kenya, where he started a school and now serves in a government position in Nairobi.

In 1970, Al spent a summer as a PCV in Peru working with victims of a massive earthquake. A decade later, Al visited Michael and his family for their sweet reunion in the Rift Valley. (See photo in left column.)



Eileen McCarthy, Creating Social Work Program

Eileen came to PCV training at age 28 after listening to Sargent Shriver speak at her Fordham School of Social Work graduation in New York City. She was assigned to establish a social work department at Hacettepe Hospital in Ankara and create a graduate social work program at

Hacettepe University. Along with her Turkish counterpart, Nüket, who also had completed her master's degree in social work in New York, Eileen used the community organizing technique she had been taught in Portland to interview all the doctors and administrative staff at the hospital to find out what they thought social workers did and how they would use the services of a social work department.

She traveled widely while in Turkey, and when she returned to the United States, Eileen became a social worker at Catholic Social Services in San Francisco. She stayed there for 34 years in a variety of capacities. When she retired in 2002, Eileen rejoined the Peace Corps for another two years, this time to work at a women and children's clinic in Gabon, Africa. Speaking French now, she gave prevention talks focused on common illnesses such as malnutrition, dysentery, malaria, and HIV.

On her way home from Gabon in 2004, Eileen stopped in Istanbul where she was able to reunite with both her Turkish roommate and Nüket, and their husbands. While there, she learned that Hacettepe Hospital still has an operating social work department and now offers a graduate degree of social work through the university as well. No one she spoke with remembered her or knew that Peace Corps had been there at the instigation of their program. For Eileen, that is as it should be.

30-year career in federal service and subsequent public management consulting both in the United States and in Nigeria, South Africa, and Bosnia.

Along with active participation in our local community's sister city exchange program, hosting and mentoring international exchange students and participants, and opening our home for extended periods to other young people (most with an international connection), I can discern a "global citizen" pattern that mirrors similar choices in other T-12 memoirs (see Reflections, page 48).

Looking Back

From its inception, the Peace Corps has had three primary purposes:

1. help ordinary Americans learn more about less-modernized, non-Western cultures
2. help others become more familiar with ordinary Americans (beyond tourists and military personnel)
3. impart a technical contribution that aids international development.

Judging by the individual memoirs 45 years after our sojourn in Turkey, returning PCVs felt they had met all three purposes to some degree. We had come to appreciate Turkish culture and people more keenly from the intensive four-month training, our integrated work and living experiences, and our extensive travels within Turkey and surrounding countries. Similarly, most of us achieved a level of intimacy with our workplace counterparts (colleagues and students) and neighbors who allowed us to impart to Turkish citizens a realistic understanding of ordinary Americans. We all played some modest role in aiding Turkey's development, albeit oftentimes offered by 20-somethings learning on the job.

Moreover, we returned to America with a more expansive world view than the one we had brought to Portland, Oregon, several summers earlier by

- ☒ learning another language
- ☒ listening to other interpretations of what makes the world go round
- ☒ acculturating to another way of life
- ☒ understanding and finding workable solutions for others' daily problems
- ☒ taking on unaccustomed roles at work and in the community
- ☒ reaching out to locals and behaving as ambassadors of the United States



- ☒ wrapping our heads around the unmistakable interrelatedness among the human race.

Additionally, one can readily see the social and work-related patterns shared among retired PCVs:

- ☒ **Public service**—government employment, nonprofit and NGO pursuits, teaching, social work, community mental health, physical therapy, international assignments
- ☒ **Hosting exchange students** and professionals from around the world
- ☒ **International community involvement**—Sister Cities, community service organizations, church groups
- ☒ **Outreach to young people**—typically students, often from foreign countries, who need help during a leg of their journey (sometimes a long leg)
- ☒ **Frequent or continuous international travel**—learning new languages, becoming acquainted with new places and cultures.

Three years ago, Karen and I hosted another exchange student, a Future Leaders Exchange Program student from Kyrgyzstan who spent his senior year at a nearby public high school. He is now in his junior year at the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek. Our deal with him is to attend his May 2013 graduation, kick around Kyrgyzstan for a week or so, and then take him to Turkey for our first trip back since 1967.

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