

5 years of enduring friendship  
1962 • 2012  
PEACE CORPS | MALAYSIA



# AN ENDURING BOND

Peace Corps 50th Anniversary Celebration in Malaysia

U.S. Embassy Kuala Lumpur  
2012





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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This publication contains a selection of photos and stories pertaining specifically to East Malaysia. A previous publication focused on Peninsular Malaysia was published earlier this year.

The U.S. Embassy Kuala Lumpur made a few minor editorial changes but chose to preserve the original language of the authors. Both American and British versions of English are used in these accounts. The U.S. Embassy is not responsible for the content of the stories.

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# MESSAGE

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**Paul W. Jones**  
**U.S. Ambassador to Malaysia**

## **Peace Corps Malaysia: Celebrating 50 Years of Partnership**



Fifty years ago, a group of 36 young Americans arrived in Kuala Lumpur on a typical warm, humid day to work as Peace Corps Volunteers in villages and towns throughout what was then known as Malaya. Deputy Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak personally welcomed the volunteers, thanking them for providing skilled and trained manpower to assist national development in this young nation.

These 36 Americans were just the start. On August 23, 1962, 60 volunteers arrived in Borneo. By September 1967, the Peace Corps program in Malaysia was the second largest in the world. During the 21 years that the Peace Corps served here, it brought more than 4,000 American volunteers to live and work in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak.

American Peace Corps Volunteers worked hand-in-hand with Malaysians to improve lives and promote livelihoods. Some volunteers taught math, science and English to tens of thousands of Malaysians. Others helped establish agricultural organizations and public works programs, or played critical roles in the fight against tuberculosis and improving public health. These volunteers gave their time, energy and even their lives (six volunteers died during their service in Malaysia) helping the people of Malaysia to develop their nation.

When the Peace Corps program concluded in Malaysia in 1983, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra stated, *“we have been most grateful to [the Peace Corps] for the help they have given us and we feel proud to have met and known them. May this feeling continue for all time... the service they have rendered us will long remain in our memory.”*

The Tunku's comments continue to ring true almost 30 years later. I have been fortunate to travel to almost every part of this beautiful country. All across Malaysia, from Kelantan to Johor, Sabah and Sarawak, or here in Kuala Lumpur, I've heard stories from Malaysian friends across all levels of society about their unforgettable experiences with Peace Corps Volunteers.

Happily, the spirit of the Peace Corps continues today. In January 2012, precisely 50 years after the arrival of the first Peace Corps Volunteers, another group of young Americans arrived in Kuala Lumpur on a warm, humid day. These 50 Americans, part of the Fulbright English Teaching Assistant program, have settled into local communities in Terengganu, Pahang and Johor. They represent President Obama's response to Prime Minister Najib's request for U.S. support for English-language education in Malaysia. Following in the footsteps of Peace Corps Volunteers, these Americans are helping provide the critical English-language skills necessary to succeed in our globalized world while helping rejuvenate the enduring ties among our peoples.

Peace Corps Volunteers and English Teaching Assistants learn so much from their experiences in Malaysia, becoming lifelong Ambassadors for mutual understanding and respect for each other's culture and way of life. I see a strong foundation for further expanding understanding, prosperity and collaboration that benefit both of our peoples. Thousands of Malaysians have studied in the United States. You can find alumni of U.S. universities and exchange programs in every corner of Malaysia. Likewise, thousands of Americans have come to Malaysia for education and enrichment. These experiences have etched lasting memories and remind us that we are connected beyond the material forces of politics and economics. We are linked by thoughts, ideas and conversations. We share an openness of mind, a curiosity about the world and an appreciation for all that we are as human beings.

As we celebrate the Peace Corps' 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary here in Malaysia, we look forward to continuing this heartfelt spirit of friendship and cooperation in the years to come.



**Paul W. Jones**

# MESSAGE

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**Aaron S. Williams**  
**The Director of the Peace Corps**



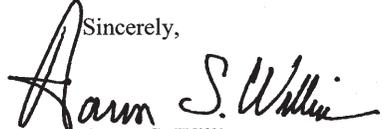
On behalf of the Peace Corps, I would like to extend my profound appreciation and warmest regards to the men and women who served so faithfully as Peace Corps Volunteers and staff members in Malaysia from 1962 to 1983. I am most grateful for this opportunity to thank them for their service to the Peace Corps and to the people of Malaysia.

I would also like to express my gratitude for the tremendous support that Peace Corps/Malaysia received from our ministerial partners within the government of Malaysia. Your generous efforts were instrumental to the program's successful ability to remain relevant, vital, and involved in Malaysian community needs.

Peace Corps/Malaysia Volunteers and staff members worked successfully to build an enduring foundation of friendship and understanding between Malaysia and the United States. I commend those first volunteers and staff members, who, in the early 1960s, set the standard for all who followed after them. Subsequent volunteers and staff deepened and broadened that very special friendship. Working alongside their Malaysian counterparts, Peace Corps volunteers made a lasting impact. To all of you, I say thank you. You reflect the best of the Peace Corps' spirit of service and should be proud of all that you accomplished.

The Malaysian people opened their hearts and their homes to all of our volunteers, and I greatly appreciate the generous hospitality that you extended to our volunteers. You treated our volunteers as family members, and the Peace Corps is forever grateful to you.

Although our volunteers and staff members no longer serve in Malaysia, I believe that the ties of friendship and understanding that were developed between the people of the United States and Malaysia have endured over the past 30 years and will continue to endure in the decades to come.

Sincerely,  
  
Aaron S. Williams  
Director



# RECOLLECTIONS FROM RETURNED PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS, EAST MALAYSIA

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## ***INTRODUCTION:***

*These notes were dictated and prepared by Dr. Norman Parmer, the first Peace Corps Director in Malaysia (1961-1963) with assistance from Sam Hanson, friend and retired employee of Ohio University in January, 2012.*

The Peace Corps in Malaysia began with a visit by Sargeant Shriver to Kuala Lumpur. I believe that was in March of 1961. Shriver had been appointed Director by his brother-in-law, President John F. Kennedy. He visited several Asian Countries, and in each met with government officials and explained what the Peace Corps was intended to be.

At the time of his visits, there were no volunteers and few staff members. Nor, in fact, much of anything. The Peace Corps was mostly ideas in Mr. Shriver's head. The meetings in Kuala Lumpur went well and the Malaysian authorities welcomed the Peace Corps.

Soon after returning home, the talent committee of the Peace Corps began searching for a director for Malaysia. They contacted Cornell University which in the 1950s, with the support of the Rockefeller Foundation, made Southeast Asia an area for research and teaching. Cornell had one of the first inter-disciplinary programs in the United States. This meant that the M.A and PhD degrees continued to be given by the various departments. Southeast Asia became a concentration within these departments. No degrees were offered in Southeast Asian studies. I was one of the earliest students to study Southeast Asia. At Cornell I earned my PhD in history with a specialization in southeast Asia and graduated in 1957.

Because of the reputation of Cornell, the Peace Corps talent committee approached the University for a country director for Malaysia. The basic requirements were that the person must have knowledge of the Malay language, have lived in Malaysia and thus would not suffer culture shock, and have some administrative experience. I was one of the few Cornell graduates who fitted these criteria. In due course, I was appointed country director. My appointment preceded any decision on the nature of the program in Malaysia, the recruitment of volunteers for Malaysia, and the establishment of a training program. Thus, I was sent to Malaysia



*President Kennedy and Sargent Shriver in the Rose Garden*

to discuss Malaysia's wishes and to further orient Malaysian authorities about the Peace Corps. I took with me a memorandum of understanding which was signed by representatives of both governments.

My wife accompanied me to Washington for the job interview. My decision to accept the offer was followed by several additional days in which both she and I were mustered into the ongoing work. Thus, I went through several hundred applications from those who appeared to be potential volunteers for Malaysia while my wife did a good deal of secretarial work.

It was necessary to establish a site for training the Malaysia volunteers. It was decided to hold the training program at Northern Illinois University as I was on the faculty there. The University had been very tolerant and supportive of my Peace Corps dealings, but was unwilling to have me take up residence at another university during the training program.

I was very much involved in planning the training program for the first group of volunteers. In addition to local faculty, we invited a number of authorities from other institutions to teach and prepare the volunteers for their service in Malaysia. The success of the program and subsequent programs was in large measure due to a friend, Professor Patrick White. He was a superb administrator.

Accommodation was a problem in that every dormitory bed was filled. Enrollment at Northern Illinois was rising dramatically in the late 1950s and 1960s. It was then decided to house the volunteers at De Kalb, Illinois' one hotel. This was in the center of the small town and was appropriately named the Rice Hotel. The trainees thought that the name of the hotel was appropriate as they were going to Asia.



*President Kennedy addresses the first Peace Corps Volunteers.*

In the meantime, two additional persons were added to the staff. The first was Lew Butler. Butler had actually been employed by Shriver without any country assignment. Lew became my deputy. He had no knowledge of Malaysia. He was a lawyer in San Francisco and was filled with idealism. The second person was Jay Marianoff. Jay had spent a good deal of time in Indonesia and was fluent in that language. He was friendly and outgoing. In Malaysia he became the staff member who visited the volunteers more often than Lew or myself. Jay was almost always visiting the volunteers. His personality was such that if the volunteer had a problem, they would share it with Jay.

Volunteers, on arrival, spent several days in Kuala Lumpur before going to their assignment. There was some curiosity about the volunteers

among the general public and a desire on the part of some organizations to welcome the volunteers. For example, the head of the labor unions in the country treated the volunteers, on the evening of the second night, to an Indian curry dinner. Although we had experimented with Malaysian food at the Rice Hotel in DeKalb, we had not, I believe, had Indian curry. To many of our volunteers, the dinner was something of a shock. However, every volunteer ate all of the curry. In training they had been told that it would be impolite not to eat all the food. On the third or fourth night, the Prime Minister (Tunku) wanted to meet the volunteers and invited all of them plus the staff to a reception at his home in the Lake Gardens. He wanted to meet each volunteer and I stood by him with our forty volunteers and introduced them. He shook each of their hands.

I had, years earlier (1950's), known him when he was a leading political figure. I was invited to the early meetings of UMNO (the United Malay National Organization). In spite of these few early contacts with the Tunku, I doubted that he would remember me, but he did. After all the volunteers had been introduced and went on to the reception, he took me out on the porch of his home and we sat on a large swing, me to his right. Always informal, Tunku slapped my left knee and said, "Now, Norman, tell me all about the Peace Corps." I proceeded to describe the duties of the volunteers. Tunku then said that if I had any problems, I should go directly to the Minister of the ministry involved. He was confident that any problems could be solved by the appropriate minister. Jay, Lew and myself then proceeded to take the volunteers to their assignments.

Some Peace Corps groups had trouble of one kind or another. By comparison, Malaysia was so trouble-free that we were held up briefly as an example of how the Peace Corps was intended to work.

Our success – as compared to the Peace Corps in some countries – was due to having a smaller group of 40. We were able to visit each place of assignment and speak to the Malaysian for whom the volunteer would work. Those visits were used to clear up any misconceptions the Malaysian might have. Those visits also included a look at where the volunteer would live.



*Sargent Shriver*



*Tun Abdul Razak with Peace Corps Volunteers in Malaysia.*



*Vice President Hubert Humphrey's arrival at  
Kuala Lumpur, 1967*

Mr. Shriver was, I think, an excellent choice to head the Peace Corps program. Excellent, because he was willing to take advice as well as criticism. He had good judgment and was willing to make changes as needed.

Mr. Shriver initially saw Peace Corps volunteers as living and working in primitive conditions. For example, he wanted included in every training program one or two weeks in Puerto Rico. There they would be dropped individually in the forest with a compass and a two-day food supply. The idea was that they would find their way out, each on their own. My differences with “Sarge,” and the “jungle experience” was one example of his acceptance of criticism. I told him that none of the assignments that had been developed in Malaysia involved fighting their way out of the jungle. Moreover, if Malaysians learned of this jungle experience, they would have a good laugh. I insisted that the volunteers for Malaysia not go through the Puerto Rico experience.

And then, on a Sunday afternoon before the training program had actually begun, I got a call from Mr. Shriver. Among other items of information, he told me that he had managed to acquire 30 reconditioned military jeeps in the Philippines. He had arranged for their shipment to Malaysia. I was very upset with this news and said so. Jeeps were unknown in Malaysia except for war movies. I reminded him that earlier, he had envisioned volunteers riding bicycles and local busses to get around. I told him that jeeps were totally inappropriate for nearly every job a volunteer would have in Malaysia. In so many words, I told him that his “Jeeps for Malaysia” was a very bad idea, and that it could even defeat the program. I prevailed and he cancelled the jeeps. Unfortunately,

two of them were already en route and were duly delivered to my house in Kuala Lumpur. There is more to the jeep story, but I shall end it by simply saying that a good Malaysian friend of mine who worked for Cycle & Carriage took them off my hands.

Another reason the Peace Corps in Malaysia was a success was that the Ambassador, the Honorable Charles Baldwin, was the first ambassadorial appointment made by President John Kennedy. When Ambassador Baldwin learned that the Peace Corps was coming to Malaysia, he called his staff together and told them that he was 100% in favor of the Peace Corps. He pointed out that the Peace Corps was an independent organization and that they had no official relationship with them. Nevertheless, if they should have the opportunity to assist a volunteer, they should do their best to provide that assistance. There were several occasions when the embassy was able to provide important help.



*Peace corps training 1965 in Hawaii using a blowpipe.  
Jimmy Enau (left) and Florence (Moon) Enau (with blowpipe)*

## Stories Listed Alphabetically

### GUS BREYMANN, Sabah, 1964-1965

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#### “America’s Chinese President.”

When I taught English at the Government Junior Secondary School (GJSS) in Tawau, all the students were Chinese - the sons and daughters of towkays and farmers who had settled in the area years earlier. Most of them spoke Hakka, a somewhat more guttural and less demanding dialect than Mandarin. The administrative and teaching staff consisted of a delightful mixture of Chinese and Indians. Our principal was Mr. Ngee Kut Keng.

Our job was to remove all the students between Form Three and Form Four for a year of intensive English language instruction. The goal was to prepare them for the Junior Cambridge Examination after completion of Form Four. The “remove class” was an experiment unique to this school. We did not have a great deal of guidance about how it should be conducted. We were given two texts published by the English Language Institute at the University of Michigan and then told, in effect, to teach the students English all day, every day.

They were a willing group and deserved much better than I could provide. As their facility in English improved, some of the students enjoyed making jokes about English words and surnames. Sometimes a word seemed funny to them solely because of its sound. Other times, a word was humorous because its pronunciation was roughly comparable to a salacious term in Hakka or Mandarin.

Lyndon Johnson was president then, basking in the afterglow of his success with the Civil Rights Act and whatever residual affection he acquired when he assumed presidency upon JFK’s assassination. The Vietnam War had not yet begun to strangle Johnson. One of the students in my “remove class”---I think it may have been Lim Seng Neng--- grinned broadly one day and asked whether I was aware that the President of the United States was Chinese. I took the bait and replied that that was news to me. I asked who this Chinese President of America was.

“John Soong,” he said, flashing his ever-present smile.



*Scrabble was a good tool for teaching vocabulary. Here are some students playing the game at GJSS Tawau in 1965.*

## FLORENCE MOON ENAU, Sarawak, 1960s

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### “A Girl from La Jolla”



*Kuching 1966... Peter and Florence Moon in front of the house.*



*Peace Corps training in Hawaii-1965 Learning how to bargain in Malay. Jimmy Enau (Language Inst.) and PCV Sharon Shackelford and Joanne Hann*

When John F Kennedy became president, a new Camelot was born in the United States. The global volunteerism spirit promoted by Kennedy in his historical “Ask what you can do for your country” speech inspired millions of Americans to travel the world to volunteer. One of them was a young, college senior from California – Florence Moon.

Florence was born in Toledo, Ohio and, at eight, moved with her family to La Jolla, California, the Sunshine State of USA. She attended San Jose State College in 1961 where she was caught in the wave of social awareness and global volunteerism under the Kennedy administration. Growing up, her parents made sure that she and her sister did plenty of community service. She had been an active Girl Scout and was a candy striper with the Pink Ladies, a medical auxiliary group with hospital social concerns. By her senior year, she was more than prepared to volunteer in the Peace Corps.

The Peace Corps Volunteer forms she had to fill were, as she puts it, “the most comprehensive character reference forms I ever filled in my life!” The selection process was stringent. Florence had a twinkle in her eye when she received the letter of acceptance. She said that it felt like only yesterday when everything in her world took a whirlwind turn.

She knew of Malaysia from her geography lessons, but still had to look at an atlas to confirm where she was really going! She then went for a physical examination at Moffat Field, saying with her trademark chuckle, “It was almost like signing up for the Army.” Orientation took place in Hawaii. The orientation program in Hilo, the big island of Hawaii, was run in an old school in the middle of a huge sugar cane field. The volunteers

were given canvas cots. On colder days they had to put newspapers under their sheets to keep themselves warm. Makeshift showers provided only cold water, sometimes unbearable on cold November days. Each day was filled with Malay language lessons with teachers from Malaysia like Cikgu Hajjah and Jimmy Enau (who would be her future husband), both of whom were from Sarawak. There were talks on the history of Malaysia and lessons on social customs. However, it was a daunting experience for Florence, who did not enjoy getting polio or tetanus shots every Saturday!

Solo camping was also part of the program, along with learning how to slaughter and dress a chicken. Nobody was spared as everybody had to do it. She had to pluck the feathers off and dress the chicken ready for cooking. For those who had never seen blood, the experience was horrific! Food during training was very simple and plain but they were all in good shape by the end of it. It was during this training that she got to know her future husband, Jimmy. She remembers being very impressed by him when he helped the instructors slaughter a whole cow for a “luau.” They went up a volcano on their first date in Hawaii. She did not realize then that that would change her entire life and that she would remain in Sarawak until today!

The Volunteers went to Singapore and Kuala Lumpur where they were introduced to more “real-world volunteers.” Finally, they were sent off to their various posts and she landed in Kuching – all this in a matter of days. She was given work in the Sarawak School Broadcasting Service and had to share accommodation with Gretchen Miller at the back of the office. For two years she worked for Radio Sarawak and wrote the school radio lessons for Primaries One and Two. Her work included splicing tapes and getting teachers to use the programs for their English lessons.

She and Jimmy were engaged in 1967, marrying in the U.S. in 1968. There, she went to work while Jimmy went back to his studies. In 1976, the couple returned to Sarawak. Florence taught at St. Columba’s Secondary School in Miri for a year. After their daughter Suzanne was born in December 1977, she quit teaching. She was the Headmistress of Sri Mawar Kindergarten from 1985 to 2006. When she finally retired, she was already in her 60s. Jimmy, however, died in 2005. Florence chose to stay on in Malaysia and is now living a very fulfilling life in Miri doing volunteer work. She is a member of the Petroleum Women’s Club of Miri and Inner Wheeler Club of Miri. She tries to keep fit with aqua-aerobics and bowling. She also takes yoga lessons. She successfully edited an anthology of stories written by the Society of Writers of Northern Sarawak (Miri) and another edition is forthcoming.

Even today, it is easy to see Florence as the young energetic Peace Corps volunteer from California. She is still determined to make things right for people who are less fortunate than her. She still has that spirit to speak her mind and put things in order for her friends and strangers. She often goes the extra mile to get things done! Her American values from the 1960s continue to stay with her, and as a Sarawakian relative has said of her, “She is the best among the best.”

*Story courtesy of the Borneo Post.*

## PHOEBE ANN ERB, Sarawak, 1960s

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### “My Simanggang Notebook.”

I am leading a quiet life  
by the reservoir everyday,  
reading my Simanggang notebook.

“Here I am with the others,” it says,  
“in the hold of a freighter ship,  
being shipped like cargo,  
across the South China Sea.

“I’ve come to Sarawak,”  
the notebook continues,  
“it’s October, time for frost and  
pumpkins on porches.  
Not here. It’s stultifyingly hot.  
My little place in the jungle is thick  
with bamboo, banana, cashew  
and rambutan trees.  
At night, under the mosquito net,  
all is lonesome and quiet,  
except for the sounds of geckos  
squeezing between  
the rafters and zinc roof.  
Only my shadow is familiar,”  
the notebook says.

I got used to things though,  
and began to think I  
looked liked everyone else  
until I’d catch my reflection  
in a window in the bazaar.  
Surprised, I’d wonder  
who that white person was.



What’s happened to the others  
I’d meet on the wharf  
for nasi goreng?  
We’d watch the crowds,  
in bright batiks,  
come up from their sampans,  
to go to market.  
Where’s Steve who said  
I was almost beautiful and  
almost as intelligent as himself?

I’ve lost touch with them all.  
I barely remember the students,  
Iban, Malay, Indian and Chinese but  
I still have their names and poems  
in my notebook. Gunit wrote,  
“A fast runner is Lucy.  
When she runs  
Her shadow you can’t see.”

## NANCY GALLANT, Sarawak, 1969-1971

**“Sitting on the ruai in the evening as an old man told stories of Iban heroes is a magical memory.”**

Saribas Secondary School in Debak, Sarawak, was my Peace Corps assignment. I taught mathematics and English for two years, and I learned more from my students and their families than I ever could have imagined. Debak was a great place to live. The school was still pretty new and small enough that we knew everyone. People were incredibly welcoming – from the Chinese shopkeepers, to the Malays in the kampungs, to the Ibans in the longhouses. Halfway around the world from my own family, I found a new home.

Most of the students were boarders, their homes too far for daily commuting. That meant that we became like a big school family, sharing chores and fun as well as schoolwork. Every day students would return to the school after their meal to take part in school chores, study time, games and clubs. And on weekends or holidays, I would often be invited to visit students' families in their kampungs or longhouses.

Living far from the city, we didn't always have electricity or modern conveniences, but we had a lot of fun. Sitting on the ruai in the evening with the pelita flickering as an old man told stories of Iban heroes is a magical memory. Sharing stories with a Malay family about life in an American family brought us all closer. Watching the “aha!” look on a student's face when he finally understood a math problem was so rewarding - and so was the pride in a young woman's eyes when I praised her essay.



*Makan 1971: A farewell dinner at Ali's house before leaving Debak.  
Ali was the groundsman at the school*



*Makan 1999: After 28 years a meeting at Ali's house again.*

Forty years later, my students have grown. Some are farmers and teachers, nurses and doctors, engineers and businessmen – all kinds of lives. When I visited Sarawak a few years ago, it was clear that, even though the distance is far and the years are long, the memory and affection never go away.

## **RICHARD HARVEY**, Sarawak, 1965-1966

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### **“The Love Story of Richard and Habibah.”**

TOWARDS the end of 1964, Richard Harvey who was then a second-year university student, learnt about Peace Corps when recruiters went to campus. The 20-year-old Californian lad - dashing, lively, curious and adventurous - blindly filled up the form and turned it in.

A few months later, a big letter came in the mail inviting him to join the program in Asia, which he had no idea which part of the world that was. The letter, which Richard said was possibly written by a Hollywood scriptwriter, elaborated with decorative details of Sarawak, managed to lead him into temptation. “I remember, there were descriptions like jungles and crocodiles. I was like ‘WOW... that should be exciting’. Unfortunately, the letter is now gone.” Without hesitation Richard deferred his study and with his family’s support, he took the plunge. And so he was sent all the way across to the other side of the globe, about 10,000 miles away from home - to the land of hornbills and headhunters with a strange and challenging language -Sarawak!

Sometime in 1965, Richard arrived in Kuala Lumpur and from there he was sent to Kuching where he had further training with about 50 other volunteers. Richard was assigned to Sarikei where he spent two years. He had to find his own way there. At that time, there was no road to the town. “Everything was by ship. There were two main ones - Pulau Kidjang and Rajah Mas. We booked the deck passage on the Kidjang because we did not have much money, only some allowance,” said Richard.

In Sarikei, he worked with the agriculture office to help the local community, especially youth, improve their livelihood through farming. Equipped only with the very basic of Malay, there was no problem communicating with the people (or so he thought). The problem was while he could make himself understood with his ‘official Bahasa Kebangsaan’ the challenge was the replies from the locals who spoke in colloquial Malay. “When we spoke to people in Malay, they would respond in English. So that did not help us learn more or improve our Malay. But we definitely could get by.”

Volunteers and natives shared and exchanged technical knowledge on farming through the Fun Youth Club, also known as the 4H Club, which they were setting up. Members of the club would decide on what projects they wanted to carry out, for instance raise chickens, plant vegetables or rear fish in ponds. One of the Peace Corps' major contributions, Richard said, was in vegetables farming where they experimented with the seeds brought in from the States. "I learnt more from the locals than what I taught them because they were already very good at what they were doing."

Other than farming, part of the activities also involved community development focusing on health and cleanliness. "It was a rounded program with a combination of activities. At first, it was aimed at the youth but anytime you did anything, the whole longhouse would come out."



*Richard and Habibah on their wedding day.*

It was so exciting, fun and fascinating that young Richard was not homesick at all. When asked if he had ever called home, he laughed and said: "Making a phone call at that time was a major thing. I never did call home." In those days, making a phone call was not a pleasant and simple five second 'pick and dial without even have to look at the keypad' sort of thing. "You have to go to the telephone office and book your call. Tell them the destination you want to call. And they will tell you to come back at a certain time and try to connect you."

So everything was by letter, in plain sheets of paper with matching envelopes or fold-and-mail with matching seals. Richard's mother kept all the letters, those memories that were written in handwriting that never fade until this day. "And later, I bought a tape recorder to record voice messages and mail them home," he said laughing, adding that it was the state-of-the-art communication back then.

During his time in Sarikei, Richard met Habibah at the hospital while visiting a friend and fell in love with her. Habibah was attached with the hospital for nursing training. After completing his two-year service in Sarikei, Richard went back to California. "We were very close already when I left. But we didn't tie the knot because we were still young. I had to finish my degree while she had to complete her nursing training." They kept in touch for a while but somehow lost contact. "But I did not forget about her."

Back in California, Richard went back to school for a little while before he was due for his military service. That was during the Vietnam War in 1968. He was against fighting the war and his experience in Peace Corps did not exempt him from military service, so he was required to do something as an alternative service for the country and opted for community servicing and was sent to Laos, working in agriculture. In the middle of that two-year service, Richard had a leave. "I've never forgotten about Habibah so I came back to Sarawak to look for her. I did not know what the situation was like then, whether she was married or had left Sarikei." Casting his fate to the wind, Richard bravely stepped into the old nurse's house and asked for Habibah.

"Someone went to inform her and when she came out and saw me, she was quite surprised." They had not seen each other for a couple of years. "The spark was still there," Richard said cheekily. After the short visit, he went back to Laos to finish his time and returned to Sarawak. This time, he came back to ask for her hand in marriage. "She was just near the end of her nursing training. So I stuck around until she agreed to marry me. She wasn't too sure at first because she had plans for her life too. Also, I stayed around to convince Habibah's parents that we should get married."

Richard then persuaded his parents to travel to Sarawak and hinted that they might meet his "future wife." His family, who at first refused the invitation, agreed to fly in. "Finally, my parents met Habibah and her family. That was good because it showed that I am genuine and serious about marrying Habibah, not coming here to get a second wife."

The big wedding ceremony was held in Sarikei in 1970, which the whole village attended. After the wedding, Richard brought Habibah back to the States as he had to complete his education, which had been deferred twice. He finally did with a post-graduate degree and later a Master's degree. Habibah spent another year in college to get her nursing qualification and worked as a nurse until her retirement recently. They also spent eight years in Singapore when Richard joined an American company. They have a son who is now living in San Francisco.

About four years ago, during their visit to Sarawak, Habibah's relatives convinced them to stay back permanently. For the past 40 years, the couple had lived in the States and occasionally made trips back whenever time and circumstances permitted so that Habibah could see her family. "She never left Sarawak before, never separated from her family when I brought her to the States. So it was a big thing for her. I understand that. So we try to come back once every three to four years."

And so they moved back to Sarawak. The 63-year-old Richard now spend his time hash running, jungle trekking, travelling and visiting old friends in the longhouses, takes long leisure rides on his scooter as well as fixing and building things.

"There is always something to do and more things to learn. I love the jungles and had always loved motorbikes. Kuching is a wonderful place to live in."

*Story courtesy of the Borneo Post.*

## TED PACK, Sarawak, 1970-1972

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**“I’d missed the chance to be tattooed by a headhunter by a generation or so…”**

If you live long enough with people who practice ritual tattooing, the question of getting one yourself eventually changes, by a process of cultural osmosis, from "Should I get one?" to "When I get one, how big will it be?" I got mine in a longhouse from the Ibans, the famed headhunting "Sea Dayaks" of Borneo. I lived with the Ibans for two years, 1970 to 1972 at a rural boarding school in Sarawak, on the northwest coast of Borneo.

The Ibans ("Sea Dayak" is a term invented by an English anthropologist) have tattooed each other for generations. Some of the tattoos are for decoration, some render one invulnerable to iron or steel weapons, some make him irresistible to women, and all, to hear my students tell it, were strong tests of raw physical courage.

I'd missed the chance to be tattooed by a headhunter by a generation or so – it stopped in the late nineteenth century – but the chance of getting a tribal tattoo was too good to pass up. I wanted a traditional design, small but visible. When I got back to the States I would casually explain how I acquired it to various wide-eyed belles, making light of the pain involved.

One October afternoon Chendang, one of my students, told me if I visited his longhouse that weekend we would meet a man who could tattoo. I accepted his invitation. That Friday afternoon I showered and shaved my arm. You can think and talk about getting a tattoo, but once you've lathered up and shaved the spot, you're committed to the whole affair. Chendang and I took a bus to the bazaar and bought a packet of sewing needles, then were off. We took another bus out of the bazaar. The bus rattled and coughed along the dusty road for an hour, then let us out at a shophouse with a trail leading into the jungle. We walked along the trail for another hour, through secondary jungle, yellow-green rice fields and rubber gardens. Finally, we reached the front door of Chendang's longhouse.



*Getting tattooed. Ted Pack was almost tattooed by headhunters but here Chendang's mother is tapping and Elder Sir is watching closely.*

A longhouse is just that – a long, rambling house built and owned by the occupants. Each family has its own set of rooms, but every family's front door opens onto a big communal hall. If you imagine a loaf of bread, with each slice being a different family's apartment, you'll have a good idea of the structure. Rumah Malupa, Chendang's house, is typical. It's made entirely of wood, roofed with corrugated tin and palm-leaf thatch. It holds 15 families and is 60 yards long.

We were drinking tea with Chendang's parents when an old man wandered in to join us, sitting in a corner sipping tea for twenty minutes - this was the man who was to do the tattoo.

"Tabi Tuai! Nuan udah ngunga mioh ukir itu?" I asked; "Greetings, Elder Sir! You have done many of these tattoos?"

Elder Sir remembered the British soldiers who had come to Sarawak ten years before, several of them with magnificent tattoos. One sergeant had an eagle on his chest. When he breathed deeply it seemed to fly!

Had Elder Sir done a tattoo for a British soldier? ... *No, not exactly... Was I going to go to Singapore? I could probably get an eagle done there ... Very clever, the people in Singapore...*

That would be nice, I agreed, but I wanted a traditional Iban design, something that would fit my arm here in this shaved spot -- see? ... *My name, perhaps? That would fit, and then people would know I could read. Several people Elder Sir knew had had their names done ...*

That wasn't quite what I had in mind either. I asked if I could look over the blocks he used to print tattoos – maybe I could pick a design from them. Elder Sir didn't have any blocks at the moment, but he could make one if necessary; there was a good chunk of wood by the fire. I asked how had he done tattoos in the past, if he didn't have any blocks? Well, he hadn't done any himself, but during his – pointing at his well-decorated arms – he'd watched very closely.

Elder Sir's eyes weren't as good as they used to be, so he thought it best to wait for when the light was better. The next morning, while we were eating breakfast, Chendang had a flash of inspiration, and rummaged around in the back of the room. He came up with a shopping bag from the Kuching Hygienic Plastic Factory, decorated with Iban designs. Great, I said; if those aren't traditional, they should be. Chendang copied one of the designs, a stylized dragon, onto my arm with a felt-tipped pen, and we were set. Elder Sir came in with two eighteen-inch sticks. I tied six needles together while Elder Sir split the end of one stick. He tied the clump of needles into the split end at right angles. He would tap with the second stick.

Chendang's mother mixed cooking oil and lampblack into a thick paste; I added a squeeze of antibiotic ointment and we were ready. I put my arm on a rolled mattress. Elder Sir dipped the needle points into the ink, held them six inches over my arm, blinked,

squinted, then tapped the needle stick down, driving all six needle points into my skin. Then again: dip, aim, blink, squint, tap. A dozen taps in I asked for a pause. Chendang asked me if I wanted a piece of wood to bite on. I told him I'd stick it out a little longer, but could Elder Sir pay a more attention to the edges? Some taps were going wide, and I'd be carrying his mistakes for the rest of my life. Elder Sir didn't know what it was, but he wasn't seeing too well this morning; maybe there was something in the air. Chendang's mother offered her services. She could tap faster than Elder Sir and came closer to the mark with each tap, but not close enough. I suggested she hold the needle right on the design, then tap.

“Here,” I said, “I would hold the needles while you tap.” Chendang wondered if that would be asking too much of me, what with the agony and all. I told him it wouldn't and set my jaw at a steely angle. (I could have told him the pain was a bit less than rumors reported, but who was I to shatter his faith in a traditional rite?) I heard a set of small exclamations, turning around to a group of primary school students that had slipped in to watch. I waved, turned back, positioned the needles, and then Chendang's mother tapped. Eventually Chendang had gotten into the spirit and was ready to take his place. By then the audience was so close I could see the eager glint in their eyes. We shooed the children back before they could even ask to try their hands. We went over the design five times, with a break for lunch, and then finished in time for dinner.

I taught in long sleeves for a week while the swelling went down, then came into class in short sleeves. Instant commotion and concern began; had it been very painful, Sir? I shrugged. Aw shucks, class, we English teachers are made of sterner stuff than you thought. Now maybe we could turn to more important things, like adverbs. Get your books out.

Peace Corps Volunteers are supposed to show an appreciation for other cultures and to ‘Encourage People to Value Their Traditions.’ It'd be nice, I thought, if I could show my students, who adopted so much western culture, that I valued theirs? I didn't have much faith in my ability to influence their taste based on past experiences. I had tried, by example, to persuade them that it wasn't necessary to have trousers so tight that one was uncomfortable when he stood up to recite, nor was it mandatory to put a pound of pomade on hair every morning. One student asked me if I was too stingy to buy groovy clothes, and another showed me a magazine picture of a greasy rock-and-roll star, and asked me why I wasn't that classy.

For once I had an effect, but it wasn't exactly the one I'd planned. A few weeks later, ink began to vanish from the library in quantity and small lamps would flicker in the boy's dormitories after Lights Out. Winston James Dimbap got "WJD" tattooed on his shoulder, two Form Three boys had the "Peace" circle put on theirs, and Edward Delie had his name printed on his arm. About



*Being part of the famed head hunting “Sea Dayak” of Borneo (Iban) dance troupe.*

then I gave a short, pointed lecture concerning ‘Pride in One’s OWN Heritage,’ the ‘Value of Tradition,’ and ‘Thinking for a Minute What a Tattoo Will Look Like in 20 Years.’

As I lectured I noticed Tindin wearing a long sleeved shirt. After a week he too came to class in short sleeves to unveil his new name. There it was in full glory from the inside of his elbow down to his wrist – **ETHELBERT**.

## **FRANK SWETZ**, Sarawak, 1960s

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### **“A Peace Corps Recollection and Lament.”**

I was a Peace Corps Volunteer serving in East Malaysia. Our group, composed of teachers, nurses and radio technicians, was one of the first groups of American volunteers to work in this country. We taught mathematics and science in the local schools, trained teachers, ran rural health centers, established a radio station in the Borneo states and engaged in various rural development projects. However, everyday encounters became two-way learning experiences; even a morning trip to the local market could be thought-provoking. While perfecting my haggling in this exotic atmosphere of smells and sounds, I began to understand simple practices that at first seemed strange but eventually began to make much sense.

The market woman deftly placed my purchased eggs into a cone of newspaper folded over the top and bound them with a string of banana fiber, allowing a loop for carrying. This purchase joined other produce dangling from the handles of my motorbike. All were suspended by strands of banana stalk fiber. Banana plants only bear fruit once, thus there is always an abundance of exhausted banana stalks used for many ingenious purposes – one of which is the making of string.

The judicious wrapping of market goods was just one instance of employing available resources to satisfy a need. Paper bags to carry groceries were unheard of. Indeed, paper was a precious commodity – imported from the United States in great bales of newsprint. From this paper my egg-conveying cone was constructed. For us volunteers, isolated from the United States, such market obtained paper was convenient reading material as many of these pages came from California newspapers. In turn, used paper was collected weekly by Indian merchants who travelled house to house by motorcycles and paid a small fee for their acquisitions. They also purchased any old bottles or glassware. As a result of these practices, there was very little trash. This is one of my first, unexpected observations – developing countries often have little garbage because every item is reused or recycled many times. Accumulations of garbage and trash are indicative of waste and, by association, wealth, so the level of development of a country can be gauged by the amount of garbage it produces.

I also began to appreciate other resource-conserving practices such as taking a bath by pouring/splashing water upon myself using a “dippy bucket”, a quart sized pot-like plastic container. Three or four pourings completed a bath, using a gallon or less of water. Most cooking was done in heavy, curved bottomed pots or skillets; these *kualis* or *woks* concentrate the cooking heat, requiring less fuel. I learned how to dig the earth with a *cangkul*, a broad bladed hoe, which proved more efficient than a western shovel. I also became very comfortable wearing a sarong. This simple skirt was cool for the tropics, easy to maintain, and versatile in its many uses – including public bathing. I still occasionally sleep wearing a sarong.

I found that many daily life practices were based on principles of conservation and efficient uses of resources. For example, the coconut tree supplies over 40 items for daily life from their fruit and wood derived products to attap, rope, salt and toddy, a poor man’s intoxicant. The eventual waste generated by these societies served as animal food or were converted into compost and thus recycled back into the food chain as fertilizer in vegetable gardens.

It is over 50 years since my service as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Malaysia. I have returned to the region several times, pleased to see some of the economic and intellectual developments taken place. I like to think that Peace Corps efforts contributed to some of this progress. But I am also disappointed that my green societies have now become gray societies plagued by accumulations of trash, especially of waste, styrofoam, plastic bags and containers. We learn from each other, but not well enough; even a Peace Corps Volunteer cannot go back.



*Mohamed Taib bin Osman and Zainal Abidin bin Abdul Wahid shortly after arrival at Northern Illinois University in 1962, assigned to teach Peace Corps Volunteers.*



*Vice President Hubert Humphrey’s visit to Maktab Pertanian Serdang, 1967.*

## MICHAEL B. WOOD, Sabah, 1965-1966

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### “A Belated Thank You Note.”

For years I had heard the phrase: “travel broadens the mind,” but I had no idea the wisdom of that saying until I arrived in Malaysia as a young American Peace Corps Volunteer over 40 years ago. Truth to tell, I may not have realized until recently the full impact my two years as a teacher in Labuan, Sabah has had on my life.

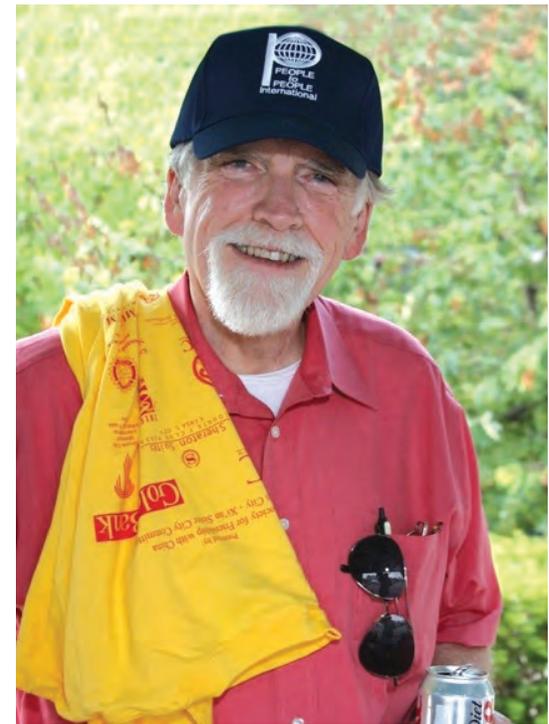
I was assigned to an orphanage where I taught English to 13 year-old boys. The school was a nearly perfect representation of this young country- with Malay, Chinese, Indian and other indigenous local students, each with his own language and traditions. There was a lot of education going on, but to this day, I’m not sure if it was the students or the teacher who learned the most.

On a superficial level, it was just plain fun... sampling new kinds of food, struggling to learn foreign languages, making new friends, using a bike as my primary means of transportation and enjoying Asia’s customary hospitality. On top of that, the students were attentive and respectful. It was an altogether wonderful experience.

However, I think “broadening the mind” means more than that.

What is it about living in a foreign environment that can be so significant in creating the person that one is to become? It may be that such an intense experience can thoroughly challenge personal convictions, re-arranging one’s view of the world and one’s place in it. There seem to be very few absolutes. Ideas about the meaning of relationships, justice, the importance of “things” and many other concepts take their place under the microscope of an in-depth international experience. The very meaning of “development”, one of the specific reasons for the creation of the Peace Corps, becomes subject to reevaluation.

The significance of my years in Malaysia and their effect on me were underscored a couple of years ago. It’s not that my teaching days in Labuan are ever very far below the surface of my mind; they’re always there. Over the years, I have visited Malaysia, and I constantly talk to my family and friends about my experiences there. However,



*Michael B. Wood*

just a few years ago, I received word that one of my students from 1965 was trying to reach me. After some initial mis-steps, I was finally able to establish email contact with Jimmy Tan, now living in Kota Kinabalu. We have exchanged photos and over 25 emails with holiday greetings, family stories and comments on world affairs and economics. It's been quite an emotional ride. Jimmy, I wonder if you realize how much I learned from you and your classmates.

The broadening of my mind continues. During Ramadan a few years ago, my wife and I spent several days in Kuala Lumpur. The high point of the trip was the opportunity to break fast with a local economics professor, Professor Ataul Huq Pramanik, and his family. Although KL's growth into a world-class city is extremely impressive, the personal interactions between people who live 11,000 miles apart are what give such visits meaning.

More recently, I was contacted by Ms. May Maniam, who is originally from Penang but now lives in the U.S. She explained that she was spearheading a project to promote awareness and understanding of Malaysia among young Americans. The Friends of Malaysia, a group of former Peace Corps Volunteers, had agreed to help her out. "My bank account was full, but my heart was empty," she said "and there is a pressing need to broaden the minds of school children." Once I heard that comment, I signed on.

With her encouragement, we began a series of programs at elementary schools and libraries around the United States. Using specially developed materials, including books of Malaysian children's stories, videos of Malaysian animals, large wall posters and years of personal experiences, we tried to light the fire of curiosity about the world in the minds of American fifth graders. The programs were attended by thousands of kids and, from all reports, it was a rousing success.

One of the major goals of the Peace Corps, well known among its alumni, is to help promote international understanding by explaining to Americans at home what we learned in service overseas. That was part of the mission over 40 years ago and it remains so today.

The U.S. is thoroughly western in character and Malaysia thoroughly eastern—irreconcilably different, seemingly—yet many people of both countries share the view that international experiences can shape minds. In addition, both nations demonstrate a strong commitment to democracy and diversity. For these and other reasons, I found in Labuan, in KL and then at home that people's similarities far out weigh their differences. Perhaps one could go to any foreign country to have his mind broadened, but from my perspective, Malaysia was the perfect setting.

So, Jimmy, Professor Huq, May and the rest of Malaysia, please accept this note of thanks, even though several decades late, for contributing to my education and for helping me realize that we are all citizens of the world.



## MALAYSIAN RECOLLECTIONS OF PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

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### CHANG YI, Sarawak, 1972-1974

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#### “The Inspiring Science Teacher of SMK Limbang.”

In 1974, I was posted to SMK Limbang - my first posting after graduating with my teaching diploma. The school staff was small in comparison to today’s school staffing population, but what was most remarkable then was the multi-racial and international makeup of the staff. My first day at SMK Limbang would bring me face-to-face with Jim Lehmann: a six-foot, blond, American teacher. He was wearing a grand batik shirt and carrying a notepad in his hand. If I remember correctly, he also had a whistle dangling from a cord around his neck! It was really surreal. For a while I thought I was looking at a typical American scene from a Hollywood movie. Sitting down on the sofa was another American - Susan Peterson – who looked very serious. She had that “teacher look” as people would say.

James Lehmann, or “Just Jim,” came to Limbang as a Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) and brought up a generation of students who loved science and nature. He, along with the other outstanding teachers of SMK Limbang, were instrumental in raising the standards of teaching science subjects and improving school results.

Jim was still a very fresh young graduate when he came to Sarawak. He arrived in Kuching in September 1972 where he had a 12-week in-country training on the Sarawak educational system, the local *adats* (customs), Sarawak’s history and cultures, the local bazaar, and Malay, and practiced teaching at Bintulu Secondary School. He was in Group 41 of PCVs, a group consisting of 14 secondary math and science teachers who volunteered to teach in Sarawak. His good friend, Christopher Sawan, will always remember how difficult Jim found it to buy size 12 shoes in Limbang. The possibility of not finding size 12 shoes in Sarawak hadn’t occurred to the young American before he left his homeland. Malaysians, or Asians, he discovered, had very small feet, and Jim, upon wearing out his only pair of shoes had to buy a pair of shoes in Brunei and have the front part cut out to let his toes creep out! He could not wait for the December holidays, as he knew only then would he be able to buy a pair of new shoes in his size in Kuala Lumpur. In the meantime, it must had been an amusing sight to see this tall American wearing a pair of improvised shoes, though it really showed his resilience and the students held him in high regard.

In the classroom, Jim made all the difference in the learning of science. He had no problem maintaining classroom control and had his students mesmerized when he taught. Coming from Minnesota, Jim was familiar with farming life and he was happy to spend time in Sarawak. He visited his colleagues' longhouses and loved taking longboat rides down the small meandering rivers during the weekends or whenever he had short holidays. He was very amused when the local people teased him into eating roasted grasshoppers and cicadas. And he did taste a few glasses of local rice wine on special occasions.

In a recent email, he wrote: "I have many memories of my life in Limbang: joining the local karate club and attending the National Tang Soo Do tournament where I won a bronze medal for my level of belt, bicycling every night into town and eating at the outdoor cafes and *kedais*, birthday parties with Susan Peterson, Christopher Sawan and the rest of the teaching gang, Gawai Dayak and the longhouse festival, a mouse deer (now an endangered species) running into our classroom during an afternoon class, Christopher Sawan and I lighting up cigars in protest of the smokers in the faculty room, the exceptional Form 4 & 5 Science students we had, the camaraderie of the teaching staff, etc."

A lot of people asked Jim what Peace Corps was all about or what his experience was. He said: "Obviously, we were all secondary teachers at the time and played that role. But most importantly, it was that unique opportunity to live with, share, and get to know many wonderful people!"

Jim's love for teaching did not end when he completed his tour as a PCV. He went home to go back to college and eventually obtained his PhD. Today, he is a professor of some renown but he says that he "continues to teach, for with five children, teachers get to keep teaching until their children are done with college!"

If Jim decides to visit Sarawak now, he will find that Limbang has changed for the better and the school is no longer the same one he taught at more than 35 years ago. Some older folks have gone from this world, especially the owners of the café who made the special peanut butter buns. Instead of bicycles, the people of Limbang now proudly drive Hiluxies and big Camrys. Motorbikes still roar along the roads but some familiar faces would still be there for him to recognize. One thing is certain: his former colleagues and students would organize a welcome party when he comes back for a visit.

It is difficult to forget a good teacher and a good friend.

*Story courtesy of the Borneo Post.*

## MANAI LUANG, Sarawak, 1965

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### “A White Lady and 4-H Club”

I had been in school for just over four years, and though I passed every English test in class I had very little confidence in my ability to speak to a native English-speaker or, in other words, an ‘*orang putih*’. The chance for me to converse with one came when I returned home from school one afternoon and found out that a petite young *orang putih* lady was going to be staying with us in our longhouse. I was awestruck! I was also a bit apprehensive; how was I going to communicate with her? I was a shy 12-year-old with pimples and worse: I could not really converse in English.

The lady staying with us at Rumah Saban, Sungai Semebak was Ms Patricia Elma Taylor, a Peace Corp Volunteer (PCV) from Kentucky, USA.

She introduced the 4-H club to us - a non-profit organization focused on youth development and agriculture-based projects - and she was our mentor, coordinator and advisor all rolled into one. She was soft spoken – at times, so soft I thought she was speaking to herself. Apart from being our 4-H coordinator, Ms Taylor inadvertently became our window to the world. We had no TVs back then and our only window to the world was the few short-wave transistor radios available! But Ms Taylor gave us what radio could not provide - the opportunity to interact.



We were curious and asked her many questions: her age, her family, the life in the U.S. As teenagers our curiosities were contemporary too: did she know some of the popular singers of the time like Elvis, Skeeter Davis and had she met any of them in person? But the most important lesson was the time difference. Where she came from, she said, people would be awake while we on the other side of the world, would be sleeping. Now that was really scary concept at the time: Iban believe that the world of the dead was the opposite of the living, in that the dead were sleeping while we, the living, were awake!

Our club was named Sungai Padang 4-H Club, after the small stream across from Sungai Semebak. I became a member and my mother was the President. We held meetings whenever Ms. Taylor came and before each meet we recited the 4-H pledge:

I pledge my head to clearer thinking,  
my heart to greater loyalty,  
my hands to larger service  
and my health to better living,  
for my club, my community, my country.

The 4-H club brought us a new way of life - a transformation, if you will. It was the dawn of a new era for the longhouse dwellers. The club encouraged the longhouse folk to look into the cleanliness of the longhouse. We were organized into sub-committees to work on project after project and before long, changes came to our longhouse at Sungai Semebak. We built pit latrines; and though not every household did, it was a good start. We cleared the secondary jungle around the longhouse and dug a big drain along the back of the longhouse that dried up the normally waterlogged area. Along the drain we built a bund where we could stroll in the late afternoon to wind down. It was a dramatic change. The longhouse no longer looked like it was about to be swallowed up by the jungle; we could see from one end to the other. South of the longhouse about a kilometer upstream, we converted a plot of land into a vegetable garden. We planted different type of vegetables: loofah, okra, eggplant. The women learnt how to bake cakes, cook, sew, and even make jam from the bountiful harvest of pineapples and rambutan. Looking back, it was really an awesome achievement for the longhouse ladies. Baking those days required a great deal of skill because we had neither electric-powered nor gas ovens. What those ladies had instead were wood-fired ovens and the effort to maintain a uniform temperature throughout the baking process was the greatest challenge!

With guidance from Ms Taylor and the HDs, however, the women remained resilient and attained a very high standard of competency. They were so proud of their culinary skills that cakes became the mainstay for any celebration from then on. Activities organised by the 4-H club may sound like it was totally all-work-and-no-play but there were social activities too. Inter-club visits were arranged so club members could exchange ideas. There were visits to agriculture stations to learn the finer points of modern agriculture too. To create greater integration among all the 4H-clubs in the Sebauh sub-district, a sports carnival was organised. The carnival was held in Sebauh town. Team sports included events like egg tossing as well as individual events like the high jump. I entered the high jump competition for junior section and won first place, which was easy enough since I was the only competitor!

At night there were individual traditional *ngajat* competitions and *betaboh* competitions for teams. The sports carnival was a great success thanks to all PCVs in Bintulu who came to help as officials. The changes brought by the 4-H club, in particular to the people of Rumah Saban, were tremendous and very beneficial. Even up to this day the 4-H club spirit still lives on – never again do we have domestic pigs roaming under the longhouse, nor any chickens running free. The vegetable garden continues to sustain us till this very day -- though now at a different location – right next to the longhouse.



*LIFE-CHANGING: Members of the Sungai Padang 4H-Club in 1966.  
Manai is standing 4th from right*

But for every hello there has to be goodbye, and it was really sad that Ms Taylor had to return to the US upon completion of her tenure as our 4-H Coordinator and advisor. She had done tremendously well in uplifting the wellbeing of the people of Rumah Saban, having had to overcome linguistic, religious, and cultural barriers. As a parting gift, Ms Taylor gave my mother a custom jewelry bracelet with the map of Kentucky as its lure; I forgot what my mother gave her in return. I hope it was something she could relate to and remember her time in Semebak with nostalgia.

*Today, Manai Luang, 59, is a retiree. He and his wife have three grown children: two sons and a daughter. He enjoys reading, playing the guitar and singing country songs –legacies of the PCV.*

*Story courtesy of the Borneo Post.*

## PHANG CHUNG SHIN, Sarawak, 1964

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### “My Teacher, Bob Lynn.”

Tanjong Lobang School in Miri was one of the first schools to enjoy the services of Peace Corps volunteers and one of them was Bob Lynn, who joined the teaching staff in 1964.

Bob Lynn took over our English Literature class in mid 1965. Two things about Bob Lynn struck me when I first met him. One was his look. Not the dashing American young man I had expected, Bob Lynn actually came across as too simple in his attire, sporting a plain short-sleeved shirt and a pair of equally non-descript shorts but his brown-rimmed spectacles gave him an aura of scholarship, and, (this is important), he smoked a pipe.

Secondly, Bob Lynn was relaxed and easy going with his mannerism so that we, the students, felt easy and relaxed with him. It encouraged us to open up, to engage and to explore. I think Bob Lynn’s classes had given us the vital experience of free learning, free thinking, free sharing, and above all, making mistakes freely.

We welcomed the change and eagerly looked forward to being challenged by Bob Lynn with his engaging questions. Looking back, I can still picture Bob Lynn, pipe in hand, asking, “Mr Phang, does Othello qualify as a tragic hero, if so, why?”



*Bob Lynn, third right, middle row, in Tanjong Lobang School staff photo 1965-66*

Bob Lynn also taught us General Paper, which involved endless essay writing, critical appraisal of passages and paraphrasing. Our papers were marked and returned promptly. It was not easy to score with Bob Lynn but it was also not easy not to improve with the intensive writing and reading drills we received.

It was the most productive and crucial period in my student days. The one and a half years with Bob Lynn, and, I must add, the late Robert Nicholl, the principal who took my history class, not only enhanced my writing, reading and overall language skill, it also amply prepared me well for my university work, which required our own independent research and study.

Bob Lynn interacted very well with us informally. He always smiled and greeted us first and would call us Mr so and so. It was this warm demeanor of his that started a life-long friendship I had with him. I really admired him for his simple lifestyle, making us feel that he was one of us.

This gentleman with a Masters degree from Yale university was completely at ease with his simple living quarters and bare subsistence allowance that we, who were from underprivileged background, found it refreshing and inspiring. Besides teaching, Bob Lynn was himself a very keen learner. He self-studied Mandarin from a book compiled by the Peace Corps and, with the aid of a tape recorder, would speak, tape, and replay words and phrases during his free time.

My help was enlisted to correct his pronunciation and converse in Mandarin with him. It was an interesting experience and I was impressed by his enthusiasm, discipline, persistence, and above all, humility in getting his student to guide him. Always helpful and attentive, Bob Lynn was a good advisor and confidant. I personally told him many of my concerns when I was making choices in the universities I was considering to attend. He offered information, talked about prospects and left it to me to decide, something I would learn to do later in life with others.

Peace Corps Volunteers had two-year contracts with our government, but at the end of his two-year stint at the Tanjong Lobang School, Bob Lynn liked it and asked for an extension and was given two more years. He then moved to Singapore where he first taught in a secondary school before moving on to teach at Nantah, now the Nanyang University of Technology.

Bob Lynn later married a girl from Miri, Siew Jyu, and he said the marriage was the best outcome of his Peace Corps years. They have two children, Teresa and Andy. While he was working in Singapore, he played host to many of us passing through, picking us from the airport, housing us, feeding us, and taking us around. Many ex-Tanjong students fondly remember this. Mohidin, a student, wrote to Bob Lynn: “A very belated thank- you for the welcome and for looking after the five students who were on transit in Singapore many many years ago. We have not forgotten the help and your taking time off to take us shopping.....and it was my first time taking Chinese tea.”

Somehow after Singapore, Bob Lynn and I lost contact. When my eldest daughter, Stephanie, applied to study in the U.S., one of the colleges she applied for was Haverford College, Bob Lynn’s undergrad school. Why? Because I told her that it was a great school and was Bob Lynn’s alma mater. I told her to look up and make contact with Bob Lynn through the college. She contacted the alumni office which gave her Bob Lynn’s number.

She called. Bob Lynn answered. When Stephanie said “I am Chung Shin’s daughter....”, Bob Lynn’s first words were “Son of a gun.....”. A few weeks later Bob Lynn, who was staying in Wilmington, North Carolina, drove all the way to Haverford college to pick her up to spend her spring break at his place. Stephanie also stayed over at their place over Thanksgiving and Christmas a few times over the years she was in the States. Bob’s family drove from Baltimore to attend Stephanie’s commencement at Haverford, met us there, and took us to his home where we spent a few days with them. That, I think, completes the circle of the Bob Lynn-Chung Shin saga.

Peace Corps Volunteers’ stated objective was to “travel overseas to make real differences in the lives of real people.” Many of them have successfully brought about real changes to the lives of those they touched and it went beyond their works in the classrooms, in the farms, and in youth organizations. In opening up to us, in being interested in us like we were their own, in being of help, in making us accept them and trust them, in short, in being great friends, they have contributed tremendously towards our growth and development.

President John F. Kennedy’s lofty aspirations “to promote world peace and friendship through a Peace Corps, which shall make available to interested countries and areas men and women of the United States qualified for service and willing to serve, under conditions of hardship if necessary, to help the peoples of such countries and areas in meeting their needs for manpower” have been ably and amply fulfilled through such great friends and mentors like Bob Lynn.

## CHRISTOPHER SAWAN, Sarawak, 1964-1965

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### “Miss McConkey the Matron.”

In January 1964, Miss McConkey came as a Peace Corps Volunteer to be the matron at our Tanjong Lobang School and stayed until December 1965. She displayed the commitment so typical of PCVs around the world; she was also so good at her work because she loved Tanjong Lobang very much. There are 10 things I remember about Matron McConkey.

Firstly, she embodied the full meaning of the word ‘Matron’. Besides being kind and benevolent, she carried out her duties very well and should be the standard for all school matrons to measure themselves by.

Secondly, she lived in ‘Penelope’, the PCV quarters next to the Girls’ Hostel. These quarters have long been pulled down to make way for development of the school in the last 50 years or so. The quarters were assigned to her so that she could be near the girls, which numbered fewer than a hundred, mainly from the Orang Ulu community and some Chinese from Limbang, Bintulu, the Baram, and Kanowit.

Thirdly, we called her Matron only. I never knew her real name until after I left school. We grew up in a time when it was impolite to call our teachers by their full names, addressing them as Sir, Miss, or just Teacher instead. Perhaps it was because of this, many students did not get to know the names of their teachers.

Fourthly, I can still remember her daily schedule as I observed the routine of her role as matron, executed with military regularity. She would come very early, walking to the school, without fail (I think she never took sick leave), check the kitchen and the refectory and, when school started, she would be in her office. Throughout the day, she would administer to those who fell sick. Despite her strict regimen, those who came under her care would never forget her Florence Nightingale touch, as she was very genuine and personal.

Fifthly, she, together with Mr. Nicholl and Mr. Bob Lynn shared food with us - a very endearing aspect to us local students.



*Miss McConkey and the gang.*

This was partly to ensure that quality of school food was really up to the mark. We were very conscious of their presence and so we behaved very well during mealtime. Perhaps this was how we developed our “fine” table manners. We were very careful and polite diners. It’s something that I have carried with me over the years. When I became a teacher and a parent myself, inculcating fine table manners was my top priority. For this, I have Matron and the leading teachers to thank.

Sixthly, Matron was tall and slim. For a woman in her fifties, she looked very fit and very healthy. She wore nice spectacles and she would ride her bicycle every day too. Her typical attire would be a white blouse and a blue denim skirt that would flutter in the wind as she cycled along the road. She would wear different skirts, but they were mainly blue. I thought she was very American in her colour choice. Her blue and white became like a matron’s uniform in retrospect. I can still see her with her bicycle as if they were right in front of me.

Seventhly, an amusing incident would always come to mind when thinking about Matron. It happened one night when I raided the pantry - my first time - with Edward Gella and Empani Lang. They, along with two others, Tan and Liaw, were having some serious fun trying to get to the lovely biscuits meant for the teachers’ morning tea break. Once inside, we all ate the biscuit ration which Matron had already carefully laid out for the next day but the boys all agreed that we had to leave one biscuit for her. It was Empani who said, “This biscuit is for Matron.” The next day, we peeped into the staff room and sure enough, there was no biscuit for their morning tea. I remember that no fuss was made of it, but Matron ate her one biscuit in a very reflective way. It was very painful to see, and we never ‘raided’ the pantry again. I am not sure if the teachers suspected anyone, but then many attempts had been made to get extra food because food was never enough for growing boys and girls, who did not have any money to buy more.

Eighthly, from three to four pm everyday, Matron would join us in our work party. I have very fond memories of the work party because that was how we repaid our beloved school for what it did for us. We cleaned the school and repaired all the broken furniture. We had a lot of fun working and learning at the same time. We were like a family keeping our house clean, our family being the entire school community, including our beloved Matron. I believe that many of us were indeed very grateful that the school even had a resident nurse to look after our health and well-being.

Ninthly, throughout all the Sports Days she would be there with all her medical equipment ready. It was very reassuring to have her presence there, and Sports Day would just be another memorable day with nothing untoward.

Finally, I remember her as a person who never raised her voice at us. Even though she was not “the fierce type,” we held her in great respect because she was so firm and fair. I felt she was very at home with the girls and the girls with her.

I can still see her very clearly now, if I were an artist I could paint a very fine portrait of her. Any school would be excellent with a Matron like Miss McConkey.



## SPECIAL FEATURE: MY PEACE CORPS STORY

*The following story is by Blair Daly who is currently serving as an EducationUSA Adviser at the Malaysian American Commission on Education and Exchanges.*

Thanks to Richard Schatz, former Peace Corps volunteer teacher in Sarawak, I have had the pleasure of serving as a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) in Malaysia.

Some have called the ETA program, in operation here since 2006, a miniature version of Peace Corps. It is certain that Peace Corps Volunteers received more extensive training and committed to longer periods of service in Malaysia than the ETAs. On the other hand, one of their many commonalities is that both programs have allowed young Americans to share their talents, hobbies, and pastimes with interested Malaysians.

Surprisingly, neither my year of prior experience in Malaysia nor my basic proficiency in the Malay language has opened the most doors to cultural exchange for me as I carried out my ETA duties. The key, out of left field, has instead been my background in baseball, a sport alien to most Malaysians, especially those in the quiet countryside of Terengganu state.

Tengku Ampuan Intan Secondary School (or SMKTAI, pronounced “SMK Tie”) each year achieves outstanding academic results, and its volleyball team is near-dominant. Baseball and softball, however, had never been offered here before. Although softball is technically an official Malaysian school sport, very few schools field teams, largely because of a lack of coaches. After conducting a quick survey to gauge interest, and having confirmed that the school did indeed possess gloves, balls, and



*The team from SMKTAI*

a bat, I declared my intention to start SMKTAI's first-ever softball team. In doing so, I extended a legacy of introducing Malaysian students to the American pastime, which stretches back at least forty years to a Peace Corps teacher named Richard Schatz.

Schatz was one of just three faculty members to open a new rural secondary school in 1966 in Sarawak. In addition to teaching, he coached basketball and – amazingly – horseback riding, but his main focus was on the softball team. The school could not afford gloves, so the athletic American trained his infielders to use their bodies to knock the ball down and then zip it over to first base. Schatz always cherished those years coaching softball in Malaysia, and in 2007 he joyously reunited with his former players while there as a Fulbright Specialist.

It was the following year, in 2008, when the country of Malaysia entered my radar for the first time – through Dr. Richard Schatz, Professor of Economics at Whitworth University. He interspersed lessons on macroeconomics with enchanting and often comical stories from his Peace Corps days in Malaysia, a land which increasingly interested me. With the help and encouragement of Dr. Schatz, I studied for a semester in the Faculty of Social Sciences at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak in 2009. Upon my graduation from Whitworth University, I accepted a 2011 Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship grant to Terengganu, Malaysia.

At SMKTAI, coaching a boys' softball team in the afternoons was a wonderful way to supplement the teaching of English and to build meaningful relationships with students. The extra hours of informal English listening and speaking while playing softball were equally if not more valuable than our forty-minute sessions together inside the classroom. Because softball/baseball-derived terms and idioms pervade American English, the coaching of softball and the teaching of English language and American culture reinforced each other. The SMKTAI softball players not only learned to play the game but also mastered common baseball-inspired expressions, watched movies like *The Sandlot* and *Rookie of the Year*, read baseball-related comics and magazine articles, and sang "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" (a famous baseball song sung at many major league baseball games in the U.S.). They loved to "root, root, root for SMKTAI" and performed their best umpire impressions as they hollered, "One, two, three strikes, YER OUT!" I even prefaced our team tryouts by reading the children's book "The Berenstain Bears Go Out for the Team" and discussing how, in Sister Bear's words, "It's only a game, and the worst that can happen is that we don't make the team."

The cultural gleanings went both ways, as simply being on the field with these twenty-odd guys has provided me new insights into Malay behavior and customs. For example, during one of the first practices I got angry with the players as they suddenly and without explanation quit running and even sat down on the field – right in the middle of a drill! I was caught way off base when it was pointed out to me that the *azan*, the Muslim call to prayer, was sounding, and they needed to stop all activity for its duration out of religious respect. In addition, I visited homes and met families of several players who are eager to reciprocate by linking me to their own way of life. In their villages we sipped from fresh coconuts, barbecued spicy chicken, splashed around in waterfalls,

and “raced” on our motorbikes. Their hospitality was impeccable, and my Malay language skills enabled communication with non-English speaking members of their communities.

Having grown so close to the players during our months of practice, I felt apprehensive entering the district tournament. I feared that our hard work would not be enough to secure a podium finish. Whereas the three other teams had years of experience and were comprised mostly of 15 to 17 year-olds, this was our team’s rookie season and our players were all 13 and 14. After overcoming nerves and emerging victorious from our first two games, we faced off against the district’s top team in the tournament’s final game. At the end of regulation time we were locked at eight runs a piece; to extra innings (overtime) we went. Here, unfortunately, my boys’ greenness showed through, and a couple of base running mistakes cost us the gold. Their disappointment with falling short was evident, but these young Malay boys – Amzar, Izad, Jufri, Ikwan, Zafrul and others – certainly had something to be proud of. When they received their silver medals on stage at a special school-wide assembly, they held their heads high, the pioneers of softball at SMKTAI.



*The first ever softball team at SMKTAI*





## PEACE CORPS: BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

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In February of 1961, President John F. Kennedy established the Peace Corps with the first Executive Order of his administration. The birth of Peace Corps corresponded to a rapidly changing world where new nations were born as they shook off the last vestiges of colonial bonds. At the same time, advances in technology and globalization saw an increasingly connected and interdependent world. Geopolitical realities meant that the security and prosperity of the post-colonial world would depend on the ability of all nations to assist one another in the pursuit of peaceful development.

That early call for volunteers to work in human and economic development would generate a tremendous enthusiasm and response both at home and abroad. The ideal of voluntary service was historically a powerful force that transcended cultural and political barriers; it appealed to the better instincts of mankind and offered hope for a better world. To a large extent the Peace Corps represented that ideal translated into fact.

The initial volunteers, affectionately dubbed “Kennedy’s children” by the press, traveled to Ghana, Nigeria and the Philippines that very same year. In the spring of 1961, Sargent Shriver, the brother-in-law of President Kennedy and the first Peace Corps Director, traveled to a number of countries to both gauge and generate local government support for the new program. In Malaya, he met with Tunku Abdul Rahman, the first Prime Minister, who expressed an interest in having volunteers serve in the development projects of this new country.

As a result of their discussions, an agreement for a Peace Corps program in Malaya fell into place on September 4,



*Vice President Humphrey attending a dinner organized by Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj.*

1961. A formal exchange of letters between the Honorable Mohd. Ghazalie Shafie, at that time Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs and Charles F. Baldwin, the U.S. Ambassador to Malaya cemented the agreement. Four months later, on January 12, 1962, the first group of volunteers, 36 in all, arrived in Kuala Lumpur to begin their two-year service to Malaya. They were welcomed by Tun Abdul Razak, then Deputy Prime Minister, in the National Operations room in Kuala Lumpur. There he stated:

*“We are grateful to the Government and people of the United States for assisting us in this great and important task of national development. This gigantic task needs not only capital resources but also skilled and trained manpower to implement our national plan.”*

And so it began. That first group of volunteers included nurses, medical laboratory technicians, architects, road and soil surveyors, secondary science teachers and industrial arts instructors. Of the 36 volunteers, 20 were medical workers assigned to town hospitals and rural health clinics throughout Peninsular Malaya.

The separate governments of North Borneo and Sarawak, which were under British colonial rule at that time, also requested Peace Corps assistance and Borneo I, comprised 60 volunteers, began their service on August 23, 1962. With the arrival of Malaya II in June and Malaya III before the end of the year, the total number of volunteers increased to 179 by January of 1963. During that year an additional 92 volunteers arrived as part of Borneo II and Malaya IV. The federation of Malaysia was formally constituted on September 16, 1963, but for a variety of technical reasons, the Peace Corps did not have a common administration until July of 1964.

Up to and including Malaya VI, the primary focus of the Peace Corps program was in health, particularly in training nurses and establishing medical laboratories in various town and district hospitals. But the emphasis dramatically changed to education when the Government of Malaysia issued a directive on March 7, 1964, which discontinued the Secondary School Entrance Examination and guaranteed every child the right to a basic education through Form 3 (grade 9). This entrance exam had previously denied nearly 70% of



*Tun Abdul Razak bin Hussein briefing the Peace Corps Volunteers, 1964*

the students from continuing their education beyond the primary level. With the examination eliminated, enrollment at the secondary level (Form I) nearly doubled to 120,000 students as schools opened in January of 1965. The huge influx of students required an immediate addition of 3,900 teachers and the Ministry of Education, among other efforts, requested that Peace Corps also help in overcoming the teacher shortage.

During 1965, Peace Corps Groups IX through XIII, comprising a total of 436 new volunteers, arrived in Malaysia. Two-thirds of the volunteers were assigned to various levels and subjects in the educational sector. Malaysia XII was one of the largest groups in the long history of the program here. Originally comprising 212 volunteers when they entered training in Hilo, Hawaii, they came to Malaysia 181 strong to serve in schools as teachers of Math, Science, English and the Industrial Arts. Although the average age was 25, the overwhelming majority (159 Peace Corps Volunteers (PCV) or 88% of the group) were recent college graduates between the ages of 22 and 25; over 50% of the group were women.

The volunteers in education established a reputation for dedication and competence. More than that, their willingness to serve in rural schools encouraged the then Minister of Education, Encik Mohd. Khir Johari, to urge Malaysian teachers to emulate the sterling example of the volunteers who came so far to serve in the remote areas of Pahang, Kelantan, Terengganu, Sabah and Sarawak. He stated:

*“Shouldn’t this be a challenge to our own men and women? This challenge is all the greater when they are asked to teach not foreign children, but our own children, who will grow up to be citizens of Malaysia.”*

Although there were many volunteers in urban settings, the willingness to serve in remote areas was true of all the volunteers; and many of those working in health and rural development, particularly in Sabah and Sarawak, were in isolated locations. One volunteer in Sabah, Colleen Gillmouthe, was the district health nurse at a government dispensary at Tongud on the upper Kinabatangan River, 300 miles from the nearest government hospital and doctor in Sandakan. For only a few hours a day, she



*Mr. Thong Yaw Hong, Assistant Secretary, Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department, briefing Peace Corps Volunteers, 1965*



*Loading supplies for distribution to farmers 1963, Bandau river*

could communicate with the hospital in Sandakan by radio-telephone. Supplies were transported once a month and the only means of travel was by small, outboard motorboat. The trip required 3 ½ to 6 days of vigorous effort dependent on river conditions. The Peace Corps program had rapidly expanded over those first four years, and 1966 proved to be a year of program consolidation. In order to augment the personal and professional support for the volunteers in the field, the Peace Corps office and staff were increased. The main headquarters remained at Jalan Broadrick<sup>1</sup> in Kuala Lumpur. But regional offices were opened in Kuantan, Malacca and Penang to both assist the volunteers as well as to maintain closer relationships with the state governments. In addition, there were regional offices in Kota Kinabalu (then Jesselton) and Kuching for the volunteers serving in Sabah and Sarawak, respectively.

Only one group was requested for 1966 and they arrived in December of that year. By March 1, 1967, the Peace Corps program in Malaysia was one of the largest in the world. The 558 volunteers were distributed throughout the country in the following programs:

	<b>Peninsular Malaysia</b>	<b>Sabah</b>	<b>Sarawak</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
Education	241	89	135	465	83
Health	33	3	7	43	8
Rural Development	28	3	19	50	9
	302	95	161	558	

<sup>1</sup> The original Peace Corps office in 1961 was on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor of the Lee Wah Bank Building. In 1962 they moved to former Ministry of Education offices located at Jalan Dato Onn, on the present site of Bank Negara. Not until early 1964 did they move to Jalan Broadrick where they remained for 11 years, until November of 1975 when they moved to their last address at 177 Jalan Raja Muda, Kuala Lumpur.

The breakdown for educational programs, which had the highest number of volunteers by far, was as follows:

	Peninsular Malaysia	Sabah	Sarawak	Total
Primary	13	24	28	65
Secondary Arts	21	59	63	143
Secondary Math/Science	80	5	5	90
Teacher Training	43	1	39	83
Industrial Arts	60	-	-	60
Home Science	13	-	-	13
Voc. Trade Schools	8	-	-	8
TV Technical College Teachers	3	-	-	3
	<b>241</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>465</b>

The volunteers who served in the agricultural and health sectors were involved in a multiplicity of efforts. In health the largest segment included 31 volunteers working under the Tuberculosis Control Program. Tuberculosis was recognized as the country's leading communicable disease and the Government of Malaya created a comprehensive program in 1961 to bring it under control. Given the government's concern and tremendous support, the volunteers, acting as catalysts at both town and kampong levels, provided an important contribution to this program. Other health projects included nurses in Sabah and Sarawak working in rural health clinics and a few volunteers assisting as therapists with spastic and handicapped children.

The earlier agricultural programs consisted of volunteers working as road surveyors, heavy equipment operators and engineers who assisted in opening up roads to the rural areas. However, Malaysia quickly achieved manpower sufficiency for these programs and no further Peace Corps assistance was requested after 1965. Later, the emphasis would change to agricultural production, where volunteers worked with poultry and crop diversification on the Federal Land Development Authority. A more organizational role began in May of 1967, when a large group of business management volunteers would come to assist as accountants with pilot project Farm Associations. This would commence a long involvement of volunteers with the farm cooperative movement in Malaysia. In Sabah, volunteers taught agricultural education at Farms Schools, while in Sarawak they worked with rural youth clubs patterned after the 4-H clubs of America.



*A volunteer conducts a special education class for special needs children outside a school.*

Although most Peace Corps rural development projects were in Sabah and Sarawak, Peace Corps Volunteers William and Carol Cull, the request of the northern Malaysian state of Kedah, were amongst the first volunteers to serve as community development workers in rural Malay villages. Their primary task was to encourage local initiative, train village leaders, and improve communications between various state or district agencies with the leadership in the kampongs. Based on their efforts, both Kedah and the bordering state of Perlis requested more volunteers; thus, in May of 1965, Group IX expanded the pilot program and in February of 1967, twenty additional volunteers from Group XV were assigned to kampongs in both states.

In addition to these programs, there were some smaller projects where volunteer assistance was requested. Thus, two people were working with a university computer program; another was organizing forestry in Sabah; and another person was working as a full time warden of rare wild oxen.

The years 1968 through 1970 were a watershed of sorts for the Peace Corps program in Malaysia, primarily in terms of quantity but also in terms of programmatic priorities. Ministry officials stressed at a Peace Corps evaluation that their primary need was in motivation and commitment to public service on the part of its personnel and stated that “further physical development depends on the development of Malaysia’s human resources.” Further Peace Corps assistance would be needed to both train specific personnel as well as to occupy a few positions while other Malaysians secured training abroad. Of the latter, volunteers would primarily be requested to fill institutional positions as middle level technicians to both stimulate and sustain certain development efforts.



*This volunteer operates an applied food and nutrition program.*



*A volunteer teaches heavy construction at Politeknik Ungku Omar.*

Thus a number of factors merged together at the same time and would mold the Peace Corps program for most of the next decade. First and foremost, was the rapid development of Malaysia itself. Under the First Malaysia Plan (1966-1970), the country made giant strides in many areas of socio-economic development, particularly in the consolidation of its educational system. Over the plan period, nearly 15,000 primary and secondary school teachers graduated from local teacher training programs.

Under the Second Malaysia Plan (1971-75) the primary emphasis was to develop and diversify the country's industrial base in compliance with the New Economic Policy. It stressed that "economic expansion would have to proceed vigorously to provide productive employment for school leavers" while "the education and training systems will have to be geared more effectively to enhancing such absorption and to producing adequate numbers of those skilled personnel necessary for the implementation of the NEP." The large and continuing increase of students at the secondary level in the mid-sixties was now requiring an expansion of facilities and courses at higher levels of learning.

In addition to the existing University of Malaya, the University of Sciences Malaysia was established in Penang in 1969, the University Kebangsaan in 1970, and the University Pertanian in 1973. Simultaneously, facilities were increased in the area of vocational education to provide skills for those who left school early. Thus the Industrial Training Institute augmented its apprenticeship training program and the Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA) established four new vocational institutes, in addition to expanding their Institute of Technology.



*A volunteer works with computers at the Division of Irrigation and Drainage in the Department of Agriculture.*



*A Peace Corps Volunteer examining turtle specimens.*



*Training Program in Hawaii: Trainees get some practice at with a carabao plowing.*



*Training Program in Hawaii: Trainees learn to plant.*

In line with the changes in Malaysia, the Peace Corps also underwent a metamorphosis. The most enormous change involved the aspect of pre-service training. For the first eight years of the program, all volunteers were trained in the United States (initially at Northern Illinois University and mostly thereafter at the University of Hawaii in Hilo) before their arrival in Malaysia. But in 1968, Country Director John Pincetich insisted that training was an integral part of both the programming process and the volunteers experience; if it was to be relevant, it should be done in the host country. With the consent of the Government of Malaysia, Group XXI received part of the training at the Tarat Agricultural Centre in Sarawak in May of 1969; and three months later Group XXIV was the first training program completely organized and conducted in the country.

This geographic transfer of training was more than a symbolic gesture for it reflected and enhanced the inherent joint venture of the Peace Corps program. Malaysian Government agencies actively participated in the planning and implementation of the program; in addition, they allowed their own personnel to be seconded as language tutors and provided sites to be utilized as training centers. The further experience of living with Malaysian families encouraged not only understanding but created friendship which many volunteers still cherish. Once begun, the in-country training would remain until the end of the program in Malaysia.

Alongside the transformation of training was a coincident change in programming philosophy. A new Peace Corps administration stressed a policy of “New Directions” which simply meant providing more experienced volunteers for the development challenges of the 1970’s. As the requests for volunteers in Malaysia were increasingly among the higher skill categories, the new policy insured a trend of volunteer placements to more institutionalized and urbanized locations where their skills could be better utilized.

As the decade unfolded, Peace Corps Malaysia would undergo the many changes. From nearly 600 volunteers in 1968, the number decreased to 350 in February of 1972 and further to 284 in July of 1975. The composition of the program at that time reflected both the priorities of the Second Malaya Plan and also the stress on more experienced volunteers. Although 202 volunteers were in education, 79 of them served either at the university or with vocational educational institutes. Another 36 were in Specialist In-Service training courses for Malaysian teachers.

Many of the non-education volunteers were in highly visible positions; people like Gary Barranco, who as a project analyst for the Farmers' Organization Authority assisted in writing the North Kelantan Development proposal, a \$16 million dollar project; or Francis Putz, a biologist with the Forestry Department, who wrote a book, *Review of the Virgin Jungle Reserves*, and contributed a chapter on "Styracaceae" for the book, *Tree Flora of Malaya*; or John Turnow and Bobby Graves who developed a 5-year plan for watershed research for the Forestry Department and conducted one of the first studies in Malaysia on the effects of roads and logging on soil erosion and water quality; or Penny Phillips, who established the first speech therapy clinic in Malaysia at the General Hospital in Kuala Lumpur; or Jeanine Renaud who collaborated with the medical faculty of the University Kebangsaan in establishing a medical laboratory technician training program.

As Peace Corps Malaysia reached its 15th anniversary in 1977, it could look with pride at some individual accomplishments. Furthermore, it could share in Malaysia's pride as having been a small part in the country's tremendous growth over such a short period of time. Speaking at the anniversary ceremonies, the Honorable Tan Sri Chong Hon Nyan, then Minister without Portfolio in the Prime Minister's Department, reviewed the history of the program:

*"I can say that one of the better features of your Peace Corps system is your flexibility and your readiness in responding to requests for assistance with the least possible delay. Such flexibility has helped us to expedite the implementation of some of our projects and programmes. Your type of response has also kept pace with our own changes. As we develop, so do we become more sophisticated in our management and in our technological requirements."*

*"The composition of the Peace Corps volunteers who have served with us from time to time represents these changes. Your initial groups of volunteers consisted mainly of generalists with educational backgrounds in the liberal arts and the*



*A volunteer working on termite control for the Malaysian Forest Research Institute.*

*humanities. Apart from these we now require skills in rather more specific disciplines and your present day volunteers fulfill those requirements. I am not certain if the Peace Corps chronicle these changes for themselves- it would be an interesting economic and social commentary if this were done as it would mirror our own changes in development.”*

*“I believe in this joint effort. Your volunteers can say, when they have completed their assignments here, that they themselves have grown in experience and in maturity, and can feel that they have contributed towards our development. We also trust that they can then return to their own homes with a more sympathetic understanding of the universal precept, so often proclaimed but largely ignored in practice, that this is truly an interdependent world not only in economic terms but in human relationships.”*

If adolescence is associated with daydreams, it is also concerned with the painful process of growth. As the Peace Corps entered its sixteenth year of service it underwent another period of introspection. As the Malaysian government requested more and more highly skilled volunteers, it became difficult for the Peace Corps to match its volunteers to the specific demands. Whereas the Second Malaysia Plan stressed industrial growth as well as general socio-economic improvements, the Third Malaysia Plan (1976-1980) stressed development projects which would reduce and eliminate poverty, particularly in the rural areas. At this time the Peace Corps also established a worldwide priority for its program to concentrate on “Basic Human Needs”, primarily in agricultural and health projects that would improve and increase sanitation, water quality, food production and nutrition.



*A volunteer works as a counselor at the Drug Rehabilitation centre.*

The Third Malaysia Plan commended the Peace Corps, along with other volunteer agencies, for their technical assistance which had “contributed significantly towards programme and project implementation capacity through the assignment of trained, skilled and dedicated manpower.” These agencies were “expected to maintain their contributions at present levels for the duration of the plan.”

After extended discussions, the Government of Malaysia requested Peace Corps to continue seeking specialists with recruitable skills (for example, physical and speech therapists, teacher trainers, psychiatric social workers, drug counselors and deaf educators). In addition, volunteers asked to serve in youth extension and applied food nutrition programs had to have specific degrees or requisite experience. Skill trained volunteers were also permitted to fill certain positions if they meet the pre-conditions. “Skill training” meant that

volunteers with basic degrees or experiences would now be given additional technical skills in training that would allow them to do specific jobs in the host country. Thus, volunteers with a biology or chemistry degree were trained in malaria control at the Center for Disease Control at Atlanta, Georgia; others with a college degree in business would receive with their Malaysian counterparts a month's training in cooperative management from the University of Wisconsin.

All of these programs would take Peace Corps to the end of the decade. But the series of discussions and project reviews with the government in 1976 and 1977 also initiated an irreversible trend towards the dissolution of the program.



*A volunteer teaching mechanical drafting.*

Ironically, it was a non-causative factor in 1981 which would trigger a consensus that the program should be phased out. Faced with a potential decrease in the budget, the Peace Corps considered several options on how to best utilize appropriated funds. One option was to concentrate the limited resources on the countries that needed assistance most; conversely, programs would be phased out in more developed nations. By any yardstick, Malaysia would stand out as a sophisticated nation with ample natural resources and years of consistent economic growth. Given budgetary considerations, it was decided that no further requests for volunteers could be accepted for that year.

As things turned out, the Peace Corps budget was approved virtually intact and all overseas programs were maintained. However, the brief interruption of the process in the Malaysian program resulted in a more substantive analysis of the program itself. Through continued consultations with the Economic Planning Unit (E.P.U.) and various Ministries, it was jointly agreed that the program should gradually be reduced. In 1982 Country Director Gary Brenneman wrote to the Director General of the Economic Planning Unit and confirmed the decision to phase out the program. Citing the state and rate of development in Malaysia, the difficulty in recruiting increasingly highly specialized personnel, as well as the problems related to single input programs, Mr. Brenneman stated:

“There is always some regret when old friends say goodbye but the phase-out of the Peace Corps Malaysia program should not be viewed as a negative event. The Peace Corps was never meant to go on forever and the fact that Malaysia has progressed beyond our ability to supply requested volunteers is a success story. The nearly 3,500 volunteers who have served in Malaysia over the past 20 years and their accomplishments should be the focus of our thoughts. The United States as well as Malaysia has benefited from the Peace Corps program. It is a program which will have an everlasting positive effect on the relationship between the people of Malaysia and the people of America.”

Although the program was winding down, there were 49 volunteers still in the field. The majority of them would complete their assignments in November of 1983, when the program was scheduled to close. Those remaining volunteers were slightly

older (average age of 31), better educated, and with more experience than those who served in the early days, but they shared with their predecessors a sense of adventure and a commitment to service. Of the last 49 volunteers, 20 were in education, 22 in agriculture, and 7 in health related programs. Nineteen of them were in Sabah, while the remainder worked in various states of Peninsular Malaysia.

The Peace Corps would serve for a total of 21 years in Malaysia from 1962 to 1983. Although Peace Corps has ended, the bonds of affection formed over the years between Malaysians and Americans have remained and withstood the test of time. This year, on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Peace Corps program in Malaysia, a new generation of young Americans arrived in Malaysia to continue the tradition of service and friendship the Peace corps began in the early 60s. These adventurous, committed youth, also known as Fulbright English Teaching Assistants (ETAs), will make Malaysia their second home in the states of Pahang, Johor, and Terengganu. In this sense, this account of Peace Corps history is a history of beginnings, and there is a long way ahead in the story of enduring friendship between Malaysians and Americans.



*Prime Minister, Dato' Sri Mohammad Najib bin Tun Abdul Razak greeting an ETA, as U.S. Ambassador Paul W. Jones looks on.*



*A new generation of Americans continue the spirit of Peace Corps through the Fulbright ETA program.*

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All Malaysians and Americans who contributed in myriad ways to the project

## Web Edition

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*The Spirit of Peace Corps Lives On...*