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Following is text of an address to be delivered  
by Peace Corps Director Jack Vaughn on Tuesday,  
September 27, 1966 at Town Hall in Los Angeles.

"WHY JOHNNY CAN'T."

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

There are two kinds of Volunteers in the Peace Corps: People from California; and people from the rest of the country.

Sometimes I'm convinced the former outnumber the latter.

Californians are just like Americans -- only more so.

They are attuned to change. They expect the unexpected.

So people from Los Angeles shouldn't be too fazed if the theme of my remarks this afternoon is shifted - from "Games Nations Play" to another topic.

I assure you I shall not be playing games.

I have come to pick a fight.

My remarks are entitled, "Why Johnny Can't."

And my fight is with...Mother.

Each year, thousands of remarkable Americans - most of them relatively young - just out of college - embark upon an exciting, two-year adventure, touching their own lives intimately - and moreover, touching the lives of literally thousands of people among whom they will serve in other lands.

In part, I want to speak with you this afternoon about those young Americans.

I also want to speak about many who never enter Peace Corps service - and deliver a message to parents who may have made the way impassable.

Let me make my purpose clear: I've been seven months on my favorite job. Publicly, I've grappled with simple, easy issues like Peace; and War; and the lives of people in other lands.

But this month - this week, in fact, we take on a big challenge. A new cycle gets under way. It is the time of renewal for the Peace Corps: the beginning of the recruiting year, looking forward to next Spring's period of greatest influx.

Therefore my remarks this afternoon constitute the kick-off of Peace Corps' 1967 Recruiting Campaign.

We know we're in the right Town Hall for the purpose. Almost 3800 Californians have served in the Peace Corps -- more than 1600 have come from colleges and universities in the Los Angeles area. Our books show the Los Angeles area as Number One in the nation, as a source of Peace Corps Volunteers.

Moreover, Town Hall members - and their families - comprise a group of active, committed people, interested in the world around them enough, even, to suffer speeches with dessert. Perhaps we ought to start off aiming a recruiting effort across this lectern, squarely at you.

I suspect your dependents will keep you at home, however, and so instead I am going to ask you to serve, as the lawyers say, in loco parentis - "in place of parents."

Your offspring for this hour is a whole generation of young Americans.

Dozens of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers will be speaking with that generation during the coming months, on college and university campuses throughout the United States.

However, I want to begin this year's Recruiting Campaign by talking sense with their parents.

Make no mistake - you are part of "the scene." Many people seem to have accepted the idea that this younger generation differs from all others in the high degree of rejection it aims at its parents.

Perhaps. But we have yet to be convinced. Dealing with young people as intensely as we do, we find the hand that rocked the cradle has a firm grip on the britches. It is uncertain, in each instance, whether that hand is pushing or pulling, or whether the britches are occupied by someone who is struggling with the pressure, or is propelled by it.

We are all aware that a complex pattern of attitudes is formed in this process. The end product is of vital importance to a successful Peace Corps effort overseas.

But the struggle which creates those attitudes is of equal concern to us, for it is an integral part of the long decision-making process which leads a young person to, or away from the Peace Corps.

At this point, Mother, don't tell us to mind our own business.

This is our business; and we are minding it very much.

Let's look at some fundamentals:

Every person who serves as a Peace Corps Volunteer overseas is on the job in precisely one and only one condition of servitude: He is a Volunteer.

No one has to enter the Peace Corps. No one has to apply.

No one has to go to training, even if he is among the one out of six who are invited. No one has to complete training.

No one has to go overseas, even if he finishes training.

No one has to stay overseas.

No one has a contract to be a Peace Corps Volunteer. A contract defines a limitation of free will. A Peace Corps Volunteer keeps his free will, unencumbered. That's because we want only people who want to be there, not people who have to be there.

Let me repeat: The Peace Corps is a free-will outfit. We do not welcome any notions which create social pressure to induce Peace Corps service. For one thing, that means that the Peace Corps is just no place for draft dodgers.

But the concept of free-will goes deeper. We have learned, for example, to be on guard when young married couples enter training with less-than-equal enthusiasm for the Peace Corps idea. When one partner is there just because the other one wants to serve, staff officers at home and overseas suddenly find themselves laying in a supply of aspirin.

In other words, Peace Corps service is the wrong act to just "go along with."

Notice, I am not ruling out "uncertainty." Healthy trepidation - cautious curiosity - are probably the best basis for the humility and patience Volunteers will need in coping with sensitive beginnings in other lands.

Free will and uncertainty are first-rate partners. This nation has thrived on them. They imply decision made, step by step. They offer progress on a distinctly human scale, through minor tactics rather than grand strategies.

That's the way the Peace Corps is organized. That is also the way Volunteers perform most effectively overseas. Their service is itself an act of free will. They exemplify it to those among whom they live in other lands. And uncertainty, under such conditions, is a well of opportunity more than it is a shadow of confusions.

It is our job, in administering the Peace Corps, to assure that such service continues, in a setting of free will.

But in no small part, our agency exists as a vehicle of opportunity for the idealism of every American who can qualify for Peace Corps service. And I think we ought to do our best to assure, in such case, that free will cuts both ways. Specifically, I think we ought to examine whether people who consider, and then reject, the idea of Volunteer service overseas, are also expressing their own free will.

We have no shortage of Peace Corps Volunteers. We continue to grow.

But we need to grow more surely - and faster. For years the Peace Corps was stalled on 42 countries. Dozens more had asked, but there were just not enough people to go around. Now we are in 50 countries, and climbing.

Moreover, the tasks Volunteers are asked to undertake now are no minor projects. Whole agricultural development programs in India; nation-wide public health programs in Latin America. These are not the work of a Kiddie Korps - but of a critical mass of people, who individually make an example, who together make the difference.

We need those people.

Moreover, it is our belief that an important number of young people would like to enter Peace Corps service, but are dissuaded, for one reason or another, from doing so.

It's not that the message isn't being received. We were aware that nearly two-thirds of a recent sampling of American college seniors had actually considered Peace Corps service at one time or another, and then either applied or rejected the idea.

We took a close look at the ones who turned away, and were struck by the fact that they were hardly different from those who did apply.

They seem to head into precisely the same service professions Returned Volunteers favor when they complete their service overseas: government, teaching, and social work. A high proportion went into graduate schools. Relatively few entered business.

They tend to graduate in the liberal arts, rather than in science and engineering.

Most important, it appears that the sentiments, the attitudes and the interest of a high percentage of this group resemble closely those of their classmates who do volunteer. The appeal of Peace Corps service is strong for them - at times, even stronger than for those who actually apply.

The difference between the two groups can be summed up less-than precisely as follows: Those who volunteer seem curious about the future. The others are more inclined to worry about it.

More exactly - seniors who like the idea of the Peace Corps but reject the chance to serve, place more value on a head start in their careers.

I have no doubt that such is indeed the case. Two years can seem so terribly long and important, when they constitute a relatively larger proportion of your total age. I am appalled, incidentally, at how they shrink later.

At any rate, we poked about a bit further.

And we discovered Momma.

Looking to a group of young people who had applied to the Peace Corps - in other words - gone just about the whole route - and then declined to accept

an invitation to training - we were informed that negative attitudes from parents bore particular weight. Moreover, it was from the family that the greatest amount of disapproval was expressed.

As you might suspect, the negative attitude takes a variety of forms - all of them especially powerful when added to concerns about the future.

First of all, young women applicants often hear that it's just "odd" for young ladies to be "way out there among all those strange people."

Translation: "It isn't safe. Stay home and marry a nice young man."

Answer: Our gals tell us they feel safer on their sites overseas than they do on the streets of many American cities.

On the other hand, social life certainly is different. We're told that women Volunteers seem to find relief from the social pressure of viewing every escort as a potential husband. The stylized ritual of dating is broken. People find norms for themselves. Roles become more personal, and less, assigned. Young ladies seem to discover what they are really like, and not what they ought to be like. One Returned Volunteer reported that a time came when she could actually say of herself, "Here I am. This was me, all along." And she rather liked the idea.

Equally important, our gals tell us, is the quality of future mothers we are likely to be returning to the United States. Helping people gently; restraining the urge to direct - waiting to be asked, after confidence is gained - this, says one, is "like Dr. Spock for illiterates."

On the other hand, for the young men the most common expression of family concern has to do with his career.

The most graphic illustration I have come across is the story of one Volunteer who said,

"When I told my family I wanted to join the Peace Corps, my Dad took out a ruler, held it up and said, 'These inches measure just how far you ought to go in life. If you go into the Peace Corps, you will be just so far behind'", indicating several inches at the low end.

That Volunteer served with remarkable distinction in Latin America. He is a key member of the Peace Corps staff right now. In my own estimation his father should have appraised the young man's career with a yardstick instead of a ruler.

Let's look at careers:

It is impossible, knowing this group, to avoid having supreme confidence in their futures. We simply do not yet have figures to compare the incomes of Returned Volunteers, against those of their classmates in like courses, who remained behind. Some day, I'd like to check that.

But: 11,000 Volunteers have successfully completed service and returned from overseas. Grant me, if you will, a number who are recently returned - and let's limit that period of grace to 90 days. Grant me, moreover, a number who recently completed summer jobs and are just getting back into schools.

I am willing to declare that out of those Returned Volunteers remaining, you can count on two hands the number whom you and I might agree are unemployed as of this moment.

One Volunteer commented on that figure: "Well I guess we have a lower kook rate."

I guess they have.

Businessmen at home and overseas have caught on to the natural selection which successful Peace Corps service entails. As is the case with many colleges and universities, businesses are beginning to send representatives abroad to interview Volunteers even before they return. And our Career Information Service keeps full time just passing bulletins to the field about job opportunities.

They can hardly keep ahead of the mail from home. For example: A third of all returning Volunteers continue their education, and colleges and universities from Hawaii to West Berlin offer a total of over 300 scholarships and fellowships exclusively for Peace Corps Volunteers. One first-rank graduate school wants the name and address of every returning Volunteer in order to invite applications for the approximately 300 grants it offers each year.

The Ford Foundation awards \$1,500 study fellowships each year to persons with experience in developing countries who wish to prepare for future work in those areas. Last year, returning Volunteers won 85% of those awards.

Returning Volunteers seem to be turning heavily to the teaching profession. In fact, twice as many teach, when they leave service, than had planned to do so when they entered the Peace Corps. Keen competition has developed for their services. California, among other states, offers special waivers and salary inducements.

New York State recently established a Director of Peace Corps Affairs, with marching orders to "go get 'em."

Let me add, incidentally, that frontiers in teaching may be right around the nearest corner. Several offers of school principalships and other high

posts have already been received, for Volunteers willing to take on the challenge of slum and other tough-situation schools in several cities. Salaries as high as \$10,000 have been offered. It seems as though adventure is a very marketable commodity.

The issue remains: What did they lose by volunteering for the Peace Corps? What does a young person lose if he or she spends two years in useful service, and returns with fresh - and more mature - conclusions about the future?

After five years of watching, I am ready to conclude that young people who "defer" or "break" their careers to serve in the Peace Corps, defer little and break less. Rather they enrich their lives beyond measure, and return better prepared to meet, or better, to originate, adult responsibilities.

But: Over half of those who enter the Peace Corps report that they change their career plans during the time they are overseas.

Let me ask you: When did you decide on your career?

For that matter, what made you decide to move to Los Angeles? How many of you would have liked to make a change?

Volunteers are anything but aimless. They are strong bent on achievement. We see that in the field, just as we have learned in testing that the quality in a job which they prize above all is that it offers a challenge, and a chance to solve problems.

Thus you may have encountered press reports of dissatisfaction among Returned Volunteers, about work at home.

Indeed there is. Who here is totally satisfied with their own work? And if anybody here can claim that - I'd like to talk with you about taking off

for a few years to serve on our staff.

Volunteers have become accustomed to digging away at problems. They have had to cope with everything but routine.

Unfortunately, Americans seek constantly to streamline procedures, to reduce all effort to routine. For the Returned Volunteer - there has to be, often enough, a period of adjustment.

Better still - some just won't adjust: the Volunteer has learned of himself, in two years, more than most young people are going to learn in five. He has been developing his potential in tough situations. Small wonder that he craves more responsibility. After all, he has had to shoulder far more responsibility than his contemporaries at home. He knows he can do it.

Small wonder, moreover, that the Volunteers seem increasingly attracted to the problem situations at home. Others may appear too easy for them. Thus they were attracted to teaching, and social work, and to the areas of human service more and more the responsibility of local and state and Federal governments.

If a young man knows he can make his mark, he will want to make it on something other than an organization chart.

More than a third of those who apply and then decline to serve admit to something called "parental distress."

Volunteers tell us this often comes through the form of Dad advising privately - but on no uncertain terms - that Mother will be worried, or vice-versa.

Translation: "All right Tiger, back in the tank!"

For the kind of people who volunteer for the Peace Corps this can be a telling blow. The very qualities of reason and patience which make for excellent Volunteers, also make young people considerate of parental feelings.

Thus, the very group who might serve best overseas, is also the most vulnerable to parental distress. Coupled with their own honest uncertainties, the battle is in doubt before it even begins.

I don't believe it is unfair to conjecture a bit about the uncertainties of parents themselves. Naturally, the hesitation they have conveyed to their youngsters may have been a lifelong process. Or, it might appear in striking exaggeration when faced with this new situation. Either way, I suggest that many fears held out for the offspring may in fact be the fears of the parent - at being separated from a child; at having to bear added worries for two years; or just, at being somehow a part of something strange and different.

I suggest that parents who sit back and let their children make their own decision will have nothing to lose but their apron strings.

If they do otherwise - Johnny can't - and probably never will.

I am willing to guess right now that stiffening parental confidence this year could effect an increase of between 10 and 20% above normal annual increment in Volunteer strength overseas.

If that doesn't sound like much, let me remind you that at going rates, it would enable us to match Peace Corps programs in at least five new nations of more-than-moderate size. Or, we could match our entire current plan for all of India, man-for-man, in some other country.

And, at a reasonable rate of 1,000 persons for each Volunteer overseas, we could touch the lives of one and three million more human beings.

You see- the Peace Corps can be the critical mass that makes the difference.

But this is as true for our fellow Americans at home, as it is for the people of other lands.

Whatever we guarantee ourselves in our laws - we have never guaranteed our spirit. We keep that supple with exercise. As no other example in our time, our free will is embodied in the growing tradition of these remarkable people, the Volunteers. And our every new measure to thwart uncertainty is as child's play, compared with their mature acceptance of it.

No one has to enter the Peace Corps - but many people "have to" - because they wouldn't miss it for the world.

No one has to light a candle, when it would be easier to curse the darkness, or go running back to someone else's light.

No one has to shatter the mold, to cast it better.

No one has to give - and in the giving, get.

No one has to. But with the confidence and the respect he deserves from all of us...

Johnny can.

THANK YOU.

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