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WOMEN IN THE PEACE CORPS

BY SARGENT SHRIVER

Sometime ago, it was in the Fourth Century B.C. I think, a Greek genius wrote an opinion about you ladies with which I disagree. The world was still flat and apparently so were the women, for I can think of no other reason for him to take so narrow a view. This sentence survives in a fragment of one of his works:

"A woman should be good for everything at home, but abroad, good for nothing."

I am not going to tangle with Euripides any more than to say that the Peace Corps has 119 women abroad who are doing first rate work in an impressive variety of tasks.

We have 88 more women in training who will be overseas by the first of the year.

If we count the men, and I presume you are interested in men, the Peace Corps now has 654 persons in training or abroad and almost a third of them, 207 to be exact, are women.

Many people are not aware of the number and distribution of Peace Corps projects since it was created by President Kennedy on the first of March and subsequently established by Congress.

We have 51 volunteers teaching school in Ghana and 37 performing the same task in Nigeria. Thirty-five volunteers are surveying roads and mapping geological characteristics in Tanganyika.

In the Philippines 128 are teaching elementary school children in small villages. Sixty-two volunteers are helping Colombian villagers establish community life and 45 are in the rural areas of Chile acting as demonstrators in a program of instruction by radio.

Sixteen volunteers are on the island of St. Lucia in the British West Indies. They are teaching animal husbandry, improved crop techniques and the principles of home economics.

We have in training 63 more volunteers for the Philippines, 32 for West Pakistan, 32 for East Pakistan, 80 more for Nigeria, 32 for India, 46 for Thailand, 41 for Malaya and 51 for Sierra Leone.

I am happy to tell you we currently have under consideration a cooperative project with your organization, the YWCA. It would expand your work in one of Santiago's low cost housing developments.

Let me add here that the YWCA antedated the Peace Corps in proving Euripides was rather cranky about women. We know of the YWCA's good works abroad and long distinguished history it has had. Indeed, many of our finest volunteers come to the Peace Corps with a record of service overseas with the YWCA.

We hope that by New Year's week, YWCA-Peace Corps volunteers will be in training and that by Easter, they will be on their way to Santiago to work in the San Gregorio housing development.

We like this project because it will help people to realize more fully the values of community life. We also like it because the YWCA and the Peace Corps will be working with Chileans who will take what they have learned from neighborhood to neighborhood.

The statistics I gave you a few moments ago do not reflect the real face of the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps is not a conglomeration of numbers, like a three to one vote of approval by Congress, like a \$30 million appropriation, like a goal of 2300 volunteers in training or overseas by next June. You cannot know the Peace Corps simply by knowing that so many are in such and such a country and so many more are going to other countries. But you can tell the Peace Corps by its volunteers.

They come from every section of the United States, from every social level and from every income bracket. Their education ranges from a doctorate to an apprentice's certificate.

But they have many things in common too. They are skilled. They know how to do as well as to teach. They are intelligent. Some go through the equivalent of a year's college training in ten weeks. They are healthy. They take physical training, some of it arduous, and must pass a thorough physical examination.

These qualities I expected when I first began to meet them--skill, intelligence and health. But I was surprised at their freshness, whether young or middle aged. I found they have humor as well as health, intuition as well as intelligence and spirit as well as skill.

Take Elizabeth Roseberry who is 53 and comes from Pottsville, Pennsylvania, and Lillian W. Hollander, better known as "Lil". She is 51 and lived in Detroit. They are now in training for a project in Sierra Leone.

Miss Roseberry is an outstanding authority on textile chemistry. She received her bachelor's degree in 1929, her master's in 1936 and her Ph.D. in 1941, all from Pennsylvania State University. From 1953 to 1959 she was dean of the college of home economics and professor of clothing and textiles at the University of Cincinnati.

Miss Hollander received her bachelor's degree from Rutgers University and her teaching certificate from the New School for Social Research here in New York. She got her master's degree from Columbia University Teacher's College. She has been a teacher of the 8th grade for 28 years.

These two women got up at six o'clock this morning at the Peace Corps Training Center in Puerto Rico. In ten minutes they had washed their faces, patted their hair and turned out for muster in their bathing suits. Freddy Lanoue, the swimming coach, believes there is nothing like an early swim in the creek to lighten a girl's step and tighten up her middle.

There isn't another girl in the project over 27.

Two weeks ago when Miss Hollander got up for the first time and put on her bathing suit, she told Lanoue that things were going to be rather awkward. She said she not only did not know how to swim, she had never been in the water except for her bathtub.

"Now Lil" Lanoue said, "just lower your ballast right in here." She did and now, Lanoue tells me, she can swim a mile. She's also a good rock climber. Whoever said frailty they name is woman certainly had not met anybody like Lillian Hollander.

I want to tell you of another pair of volunteers who went to Ghana and tickled the Ghanaians with the immediacy of their participation in the nation's life. They are part of a group of 51 volunteers who landed at Accra on the 29th of August. The group was met by a number of high government officials and a corps of newsmen. The volunteers assembled outside the plane and sang a hymn, a sort of national anthem, in Twi.

The officials were delighted and so were the newsmen. The singing of the song was taped, broadcast and rebroadcast over the entire nation. Flowery speeches could never convey the spirit of the Peace Corps more than their hymn to the country they came to serve.

The next day Laura Damon of Buffalo, New York, and John McGinn of Alameda, California, scored another hit with the Ghanaians. Laura is 23 and was a librarian. She graduated from Smith and speaks French fluently.

John also speaks French fluently. He is 24 and was an assistant teacher of speech and art at the University of California. He received both his bachelor's and master's degrees from the University.

They were invited by their hosts to join them at the Lido, which I understand is a kind of ballroom and night club in Accra. During the evening there was a dance contest. The dance was the High Life, which is an extraordinary exercise demanding stamina, verve and a thorough knowledge of gyration.

Here the dance would be considered exotic. There it is not precisely the Lambeth Walk, but it is perfectly respectable.

Laura and John had done some practising at the University of California where they trained for the Ghana project. I am happy to announce their success as a measure of our training procedures. They won second prize and the affection of their Ghanaian friends for gallant effort.

I think you should know that the Peace Corps does not consider love, or even romance, as a bar to service. In the camp at Puerto Rico are two young couples.

One couple are Carl and Elizabeth Ehmann, both 27 years old. He is a graduate of the Harvard Law School and she has a master's degree from Radcliffe.

The other couple are Gregory and Sandra M. Barnes of Monticello, Illinois. He is 27, she is 26 and both are graduates of the University of Denver.

They are sharing a tent which is separated by some boards. The Ehmanns call their side the Caribe and the Barnes call their side the Hilton.

I have mentioned the teachers who are training for Sierra Leone and the teachers who are now at work in Ghana. Do not think that teaching is the only use we have for women in the Peace Corps.

We have volunteers who are serving as nurses, laboratory technicians, librarians, linguists, youth counselors, sociologists, and research assistants. The list is a long one, but the list of those needed is even longer. Eventually the Peace Corps will need almost as many kinds of skills as are provided by women holding jobs in the United States.

The Peace Corps cannot hope to fill all the requests it has had and will receive. The need is too staggering. The Peace Corps cannot, nor was it established, to put staggering numbers into the field. We are not in the numbers business.

But we are in the business of using as best we can every qualified and trained volunteer we have. In the last three days there have been a number of newspaper stories about one of our teacher volunteers in Nigeria.

Someone picked up a postcard she had written, copied this private correspondence and circulated the copies as an attack upon the Peace Corps. She regrets the postcard and the hullabaloo it has caused. So do we.

Nevertheless, we do not think this isolated incident will affect the work of the Peace Corps in Nigeria nor her service with the Peace Corps after this difficulty is resolved.

I want to emphasize that she has neither resigned nor tendered a resignation to the Peace Corps, nor do we wish her to.

In addition, I think it is strange that a special student meeting should have been called at the University College of Ibadan to discuss her postcard. Only 150 students of a student body of more than 1500 attended the meeting.

They passed a resolution condemning Miss Michelmore as a threat to the nation and an agent of "Yankee Imperialism." This is familiar rhetoric. It is not surprising that certain groups are working by mind and mimeograph to destroy the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps is loving, living, breathing evidence to the falsity of positions upon which they depend.

The ferocity of the attack, the alertness to an opportunity for assault and the crescendo of old abuse are the best measures of the value of the Peace Corps and of the depth to which it is piercing.

The incident of the postcard may or may not have diminished Miss Michelmore's ability to perform her teaching tasks in Nigeria. That is still an open question which our Ambassador and the Nigerian Government is studying.

What is clear is that the dust up is not going to obstruct the Nigerian Government's program to increase the number of volunteers and keep increasing it as fast as possible. We have two more groups in training here, at the University of California at Los Angeles and at Michigan State University. Both groups should be at work in Nigeria before the end of the year.

We are now beginning to seek volunteers possessing experience and knowledge specifically requested by a country seeking Peace Corps assistance. In order to respond to these needs, we want to have as wide a selection of talents as possible to draw upon.

Therefore, I urge you to act upon this principle and I urge you to tell your friends and your local YWCA groups to convey this message: If you want to serve your country by serving in the Peace Corps, fill out a questionnaire now and send it to us.

You can obtain a form from Post Offices, universities, members of Congress or by writing Peace Corps 25, Washington, D.C. The next Peace Corps tests will be held November 28 and in order to be sure of taking the test you should have a questionnaire into our headquarters before that time.

Those who have joined the Peace Corps have chosen to serve their country. They have all asked themselves, "What can I do?"

The Peace Corps is their answer.

I am convinced that faith in democracy, that belief in a civilization based on the dignity of the individual, that readiness to serve another person are waiting to be tapped, and have been tapped, by the Peace Corps.

"Yours was the first revolution", Ashadevi, a spiritual woman associate of Ghandi said to me in India. "Do you think young Americans possess the spiritual values they must have to bring the spirit of that revolution to our country? There is great valuelessness spreading in the world, and in India, too. Your Volunteers must not add to this. They must bring more than science and technology. They must be carriers of your best values and ideals. Can your Peace Corps tough the idealism of America and bring that to us?"

My answer was "Yes".

It is not easy to serve in the Peace Corps, for the tests are thorough, the interviews are probing, the training is rigorous. But a volunteer's contribution comes at a critical hour in the life of the world. And if anyone asks why this should be done, why this choice should be yours or theirs, then recall the words of Edward Everett Hale more than half a century ago: "I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something."