

SPEECH BY

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NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF RETURNED PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS & STAFF

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Mine is an impossible task. To describe the challenge facing the Peace Corps is to describe the most profound problems facing the entire world, and the problems within each one of us which prevent us from fulfilling our potential to overcome those problems. In a mere speech, I am not able to fulfill an assignment of that magnitude.

Forgive me, if, then, I say that you know as well as I that hunger, disease, poverty, fear and anxiety afflict more human beings now than ever in recorded history. You know we live face-to-face with total disaster and death through nuclear war. You know that all of us in the Peace Corps constitute merely a handful of persons seeking perfection in a world population of billions struggling for mere survival.

"Oh! Lord, your sea is so vast and my boat is so small!" the mariner said. We have faced that fact throughout Peace Corps history. Yet thousands of us have been meeting here in Washington to discuss the future with hope and faith. That in itself is a triumph. At these 25th Anniversary Ceremonies we have experienced strengthening of faith and resolve. Yet I still say on this 25th Anniversary of the Peace Corps, who knows what should be said? Where to begin? Where to stop? I have concluded that no one knows for sure. Like the beginning of the Peace Corps itself, we can only speak our minds, reveal our hearts, and say our prayers. So, here goes.

First, let's agree that no one in 1961 would have predicted that the Peace Corps would last five years let alone 25. Most of us just hoped we would get approval from one Congress and survive to the next.

We never had a multi-year authorization, let alone a multi-year appropriation for anything. Every year was do-or-die. And every year more than 25% of the Congress voted against us!

We had famous enemies: -- Otto Passman, H.R. Gross, Homer Capehart, Bourke Hickenlooper, and others. Some famous Democrats as well as Republicans were skeptical: -- Eleanor Roosevelt, Richard Russell, Richard Nixon, Walter Judd, Edith Bolton, Gerry Ford.

We were not accepted like apple-pie and motherhood. Nevertheless, we were nervy, even presumptuous.

Can you believe that we had some 400 Volunteers overseas at work before Congress ever approved of the Peace Corps! That result was accomplished using Presidential Discretionary Funds. We used less than \$10,000,000 to hire our entire staff, at home and abroad, select and train the Volunteers, ship them overseas, and arrange all our operations in seven countries! Today no one could do that politically or financially. Those were truly the good old days!

Secondly, everyone at the Peace Corps headquarters was a volunteer...except me. I'm the first and only draftee in Peace Corps history! Kennedy made me do it! But Moyers and Wiggins and Josephson and Mankiewicz and Morris Abrams, Sally Bowles, Nan McEvoy, Pat Kennedy, Lee St. Lawrence, Frank Williams, Harris Wofford, Bill Haddad, and a hundred others, voluntarily showed up and went to work, some without being asked, all without any assurance of permanent positions, many without getting paid. They simply appeared. They

responded to the idea. Most of them had never heard of one another. They didn't even know where the Peace Corps was located in Washington. They just asked 'til they found us. Most of them had never worked in any Governmental position anywhere. They simply walked in the door, sat down, and started to do whatever needed to be done. Best of all, for the first few months, we didn't even have an Organizational Chart! Everyone talked with everyone, and gave out their own ideas and opinions. The lights burned all night long.

Then Warren Wiggins protested. He said all our Volunteers from within the Government were going to quit. They were suffering culture shock. They didn't know who was above them or below them, whom to report to, or whom to give orders to! The chaos was un-nerving. So, I said, "Warren, please get us an Organizational Chart and I'll sign it"...That's the way we became the best organized Agency in Washington. We had a perfect chart and perfect free spirits, who despite the chart, continued to think, imagine, support, suggest, criticize and create.

All of our policies, even when written down in lucid, unequivocal English by our gifted General Counsel, even with Shriver's signature affixed thereto, all of our policies were conspicuously labeled as "Interim Policies". They were thus subject to change immediately as we learned from experience how to improve them.

Third, we started the Peace Corps without knowing whether anybody in the world wanted it. That takes some chutzpah. We had no market research department, and no one able to explain what the Peace Corps was all about except ourselves. So we did it ourselves.

We traveled to our potential customers (the nations of the less developed world). We made deals with them for future delivery of volunteers...persons whom none of us had ever seen! Fortunately, we succeeded -- But, let me emphasize, the host nations gambled with us! Their leaders had the courage to trust what we said. Kwame Nkrumah, Pandit Nehru, Julius Nyerere, Ramon Macapagal, Azikiew of Nigeria, Jomo Kenyata, Lleras Camargo of Colombia, and Romulo Bentencourt of Venezuela, all were heroes of the first Peace Corps days. We could never have succeeded without their cooperation. The Peace Corps has always been a two-way street. The USA, then and now, can do little for peace without help from other nations.

Fourth, the name of our organization, "The Peace Corps", was bitterly contested. "Peace Corps" was not the most popular title. The most experienced advisers scoffed at that name. They wanted a solid bureaucratic title -- like "The Agency For Overseas Voluntary Service".

Conservatives opposed the word "Peace"! They maintained it sounded wishy-washy, vague, and weak. The Communists, they said, had corrupted the word "Peace" by applying it to every political initiative, and even to every war they got involved in.

The left-wing disliked the word "Corps"! They said it sounded militaristic. The famous "German Afriker Corps", victorious almost everywhere under General Rommel, was fresh in their minds. "Corps" sounded like a scourge.

Finally, I decided we'd use both words, put them together, and get the best out of both of them: -- Peace because that was truly our business -- and Corps because it showed that we were not individualists, but a group!

Today I recommend that we remember that beginning. We risked everything then in a leap of faith that the Peace Corps would succeed -- We risked everything that Volunteers would respond. We were dedicated thus to the pursuit of peace -- which means we oppose the idea that war is inevitable! We believe that with God's help we can get rid of war! We are a Corps, a band of brothers and sisters, united in the conviction that if we work hard enough to eradicate our fears and increase the reach of our love we truly can avoid war -- and achieve peace within ourselves, within our nation, and around the world.

And we all think that everyone in the Peace Corps, and everyone who has ever worked in the Peace Corps, is a special person, who given a chance will overcome any problem! In believing this about each other, in believing this about all Peace Corps people, we are giving reality to the words of Martin Luther King, Jr.. He said: --

"Everybody can be great because everybody can serve.
 You don't have to have a college degree to serve.
 You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve.
 You don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve.
 You don't have to know Einstein's theory of relativity to serve.
 You don't have to know the second theory of thermodynamics to serve.
 You only need a heart full of grace and a soul regenerated by love."

Martin Luther King, Jr. was right: -- "Everybody can be great because everybody can serve."

President Cory Aquino in her life and presidency personifies Martin Luther King's insight. She is serving her people, negotiating with her enemies, not killing them, spending her life, her fortune, and her sacred honor for peace. Cory has the true Peace Corps Volunteer spirit! She is seeking peace not with a sword, but with her soul! She is one of us. No wonder we love her!

Now, please answer this question: -- When our U.S. House of Representatives voted on an emergency appropriation to help this woman and her nation, why did that bill pass only with a miserable majority of two votes?

Must we wait until the Communists threaten to take over that friendly country by force before we act decisively and with vision?

Why shouldn't the Congress dramatically offer to recruit 1,000 former Philippine PCV's and send them on an emergency basis to help Cory Aquino and her people?

Congress agreed to send 600 PCV's to Central America. Why not send 1,000 experienced in the Philippines as a "strike force for peace" under Cory Aquino's direction. Or must we wait and then belatedly spend \$150,000,000 in ten days as we did in Grenada (more than the Peace Corps' entire annual budget) to remedy temporarily a situation involving only a total population of 100,000 people!

1,000 Peace Corps Volunteers in the Philippines, even 5,000, would be dramatic proof that we intend to defend and strengthen democracy through peaceful, mutual, personal service, not only with money and arms!

Peace cannot be maintained in the less-developed world, nor Communism stopped there or anywhere else by self-centered preoccupation with our own problems and safety, or by reliance primarily on force of arms. We cannot police the world. But we can begin to liberate it from despair and fear and anger by making economic development and mutual service the hard core of our foreign policy, and of our national defense!

A PCV now serving in the Philippines delivered the message accurately when he wrote...

"The Philippine people achieved a moral victory of world significance, led by a widowed housewife, reluctantly turned into a modern day Ghandi. My own faith, he wrote, in Christian morality, in non-violent struggles for peace, in women as leaders at least as capable as men...have all gotten a booster shot from this experience..."

Many have said that Cory Aquino's victory was a miracle... that she herself is a miracle. I say "yes" to both these propositions.

I say further that in the Peace Corps we are celebrating here this weekend the birth, life, and continued existence of another miracle. I mean we are celebrating a happening, a movement, a reality which cannot be fully explained scientifically, mathematically, sociologically, or politically. A miracle transcends logic. Quantitative amassing of facts does not reveal its nature. Miracles, by definition, are inexplicable by normal human reasoning. They transcend ordinary reality. They surprise. They shock. They un-settle

Of course, some people believe that miracles are just fantasies, or isolated aberrations, or hallucinations. They are not real; they are not hard-ware, or even soft-ware. They don't make any real difference because they don't affect action; they have no measureable, quantifiable impact; they produce no results!

But what about the results produced by a man named Moses who allegedly received some tablets of stone from a mysterious, unseen personality named Yaweh atop some mountain in the Middle East? Isn't there a whole nation in the Middle East to which we give several billions of dollars per annum, a nation based on the belief that descendants of this man, Moses, and his legendary predecessor, Abraham, are a special people with a special destiny and a special role in world history? Are they all crazy, these people living and dying on the basis of a whole series of miraculous events shrouded in pre-history and myth?

What about the millions, even billions, of human beings who follow the dictates of another person who never died but zoomed up into outerspace on a horse-drawn chariot 1,400 years ago? Mohammad was his name...and he's more influential now over half the world than Ronald Reagan is even in Orange County.

Isn't it strange, inexplicable, that these mysterious persons with their miraculous histories continue to affect so many human beings today?

Are all those billions of people crazy? And those millions of Christians who believe in miracles...are they also crazy?

Yes, it is true these miracles surpass normal human experience. But don't we live, and die and dream and hope based on such extraordinary phenomena?

Isn't it fair to say that Jefferson's sentences "We hold these truths to be self-evident -- that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with inalienable rights..." were transcendent phrases at a time when the overwhelming majority of human beings did not believe that "all men are created equal" -- not to mention "all women", or all Blacks!

Yes, you may respond, but his words were not "miraculous". Historians can give us all the historical background and explanations of how those words came from Jefferson's life and culture and mind.

But no one can say or explain exactly how Jefferson produced those words and that document at that moment! Nor can anyone explain how Shakespeare could produce his sonnets or even a single line "To be or not to be...that is the question". We say those men were geniuses like Einstein. But that description doesn't explain the miraculous quality of their words, or the results produced by their words!

We are dealing with a similar phenomenon in the "Peace Corps"... not a phenomenon of equal importance, let me hasten to say; but, as a little star is still a star, so may it be said that the Peace Corps is a miracle, a little one perhaps, but still a genuine one! For surely it was an intuitive flash of the spirit" which prompted Kennedy to say to himself, "Yes, the idea of a Peace Corps is right. It fits the times. It strikes the right note. I resonate to the concept. People will respond"...

How did he know that? He didn't really "know" it as one knows the facts of history or the accuracy of an algebraic equation.

He knew it as Picasso knows the line he draws, or Yeats the word or phrase he chooses for a poem.

Kennedy "knew" the Peace Corps idea was right and timely, and evocative just as he "knew" that "Ich bin ein Berliner" was right and timely and evocative and unifying and inspirational...just as he "knew" that "We shall put a man on the moon in this decade" would lift men's souls and minds and hearts!

To believe in men and women, to believe they can surpass themselves, to believe that ordinary people can become extra-ordinary, to believe in young men and women, and know they can accomplish miracles -- these were part of Kennedy's character and vision. Fully aware of human weaknesses, yet confident in human capacities, never judgemental, rarely condemnatory, always hopeful, Kennedy had the nerve and personal self-confidence to ask for the best from the American people; and he got it!!

The miracle also is that the people still respond to his vision though Kennedy is long dead. The miracle is that decades of war, Presidential prevarication and disgrace, budget cutting, and the cynicism of power politics, still have not killed the dream nor stanchd the flow of those willing to volunteer and serve. We must look further than to politics or economics or national security or finance, further even than to the vision of one great man, to discover why the Peace Corps still lives.

Let's ask, "Why, really, are "we" here?"

Why have "we," been honored by the presence and words of that star out of the East, Cory Aquino?"

She did not equally acclaim other American enterprises.

Why do Presidents from distant lands and island empires still ask our President for Peace Corps Volunteers?

Why can Peace Corps Volunteers live everywhere today, unprotected, unarmed, defense-less, free and open, and yet never be assaulted or terrorized?

Why did Nehru of India, and Nkrumah of Ghana, and Nyerere of Tanzania, Sukarno of Indonesia, Leopold Senghor of Senegal, the King of Thailand, the King of Tonga - socialists, capitalists, kings, and commoners, rich and poor, welcome the Peace Corps?

Why are PCV's still "The Wanted Americans", not "The Ugly Americans"?

It is not because of me, nor was it ever because of me. I had the challenge and the joy of meeting and convincing all the powers and potentates. I had the marvelous opportunity of working with all the creative people who put the Peace Corps together. I welcomed the first Volunteers and visited them abroad. I challenged and cajoled the Congressmen and the Senators. But as I said, I was only a draftee! Kennedy called me and made me run the Peace Corps. Yes, he left me alone. He gave me no orders or advice. But, still, my friends, I was only a draftee. You were and are the Volunteers. You made the Peace Corps a success. I applaud you. I respect you. I cherish you, and yes, I love you!

Yet the very difference between a draftee and a volunteer, that very fact, enables me today to see clearly, to discern and describe, why you, the Volunteers, and the Peace Corps itself, is such an extraordinary reality. A blind man appreciates sight more deeply than those with eyes.

What do I see?

I see two worlds: -- the Peace Corps world, and our world here at home. I see that most of us Americans have lived most of our lives in "the world" here in the USA. Unlike the Peace Corps world overseas, our USA world, is dominated by the lust for power: -- economic, political, cultural, bodily, and scientific power! Because of our preponderant strength in all these areas, we enjoy a peace of sorts. Like the Roman Empire we enjoy an Imperium within which a Pax Americana exists.

- . We have avoided direct open warfare with our principal competitor for world dominion.
- . We have survived so far the threat of nuclear holocaust.
- . We have been spared famine, slavery, and pestilence in our own land.

But international terrorism aimed at us and our friends is spreading. International distribution of narcotics aimed at us is spreading. International poverty and even destitution is increasing. Its victims increasingly threaten our oasis of plenty.

Our expenditures for war mount almost out of anyone's control. Tension mounts...in our world.

The Peace Corps world is different: -- Much of it is poor, threatened, hopeless.

Within this endangered and impoverished world, when even one PCV appears and begins to work humbly, compassionately, effectively for humanistic goals, every one spontaneously realizes that this is a person whose very presence and conduct bespeaks the existence of another America than the one I have just described -- an America without violence, fear, and force...an America of compassion, concern, and yes, of competence! PCV's know what they are doing with their hands as well as with their hearts. Their courage, their generosity, their spirit tells the world what American democracy, rather than American power, is all about. PCV's are the representatives, the true followers of Jefferson, Adams, Hamilton, Franklin, and all the other intellectual and moral leaders who created the U.S.A.. PCV's represent the promise, not the power, of America.

The leaders of early America were lionized throughout the world not for their strength in military or economic matters but for their moral vision of a society ruled by reason and faith...a just society for all men and women, not just for Americans. "A decent respect for the opinion of all mankind" caused them to address their Declaration of Independence to the entire world!

They were like the Jewish people, who though extremely small in numbers and weak in economic and military terms, always spoke to all mankind! It's no accident that "shalom" the Hebrew word for peace means "complete" or "round" -- all inclusive -- applicable everywhere and to everyone around the world. Similarly, the Russian word for peace, "mir", is also their word for the "world" -- for the round, the complete.

The word "Peace" for PCV's represents the same conviction, -- namely, that peace must encompass the whole of the world, and it must encompass the whole of our lives, our bodies, minds, and souls! PCV's understand that the only way to overcome an enemy is to help him become other than enemy...to help him get rid of his fear and anxiety to bring him into a world of non-violence. Forgiveness and understanding of his problem is the only way to bring cure and solace to his mind and heart...to disarm him by freeing him from his anxiety.

Mahatma Ghandi understood that fact. He believed that all life is one...that we are all in a sacred, cosmic family in which each member must help to elevate the whole from a selfish and destructive level to a productive and spiritual one through sacrificial participation in the common needs and struggles of all! He said that if love be not the law of our being then the whole of his philosophy and life falls to pieces.

Yet his love for his enemies and for the poor won independence for India. Cory Aquino's love may yet achieve shalom for the Philippines!

Yes, money will be required. Yes, a stable military under civilian control will be required. But without her sense of selfless service she would fail.

Once again, she's like the Peace Corps.

The Peace Corps seeks peace through service, not through economic strength or military power. Service is the heart and soul and substance of the Peace Corps. Service is a discredited word these days. Who wants to be a servant? No one! Service implies servitude, failure to achieve even equality, let alone dominion. Yet the Peace Corps exists to serve, to help, to care, for our fellow human beings. It works its magic from below, not from above. It concentrates on basics - food, health, education, community development. Peace Corps Volunteers are rarely in capital cities, rarely seen with gilded potentates. They are almost un-American in their willingness to serve in the boondocks.

Peace Corps Volunteers come home realizing that there are billions of human beings not enraptured by our pretensions, or practices, or morals...billions of human beings with whom we must live in peace. PCV's learn that there's more to life than money, more to life than the latest styles in clothes, cars, or cosmetics.

Suddenly I realize I do have a response to the original title given me for my speech. They asked me to talk about "the challenge of the Peace Corps". The challenge is simple to express, difficult to fulfill: --

PCV's stay as you are...be servants of peace...work at home as you have worked abroad, humbly, persistently, intelligently. Weep with those who are sorrowful, rejoice with those who are joyful. Teach those who are ignorant. Care for those who are sick. Serve your wives...serve your husbands...serve your families...serve your neighbors...serve your cities...serve the poor. Join others who serve.

Serve, Serve, Serve! That's the challenge.

For in the end it will be the servants who save us all.

X.X.X.X.