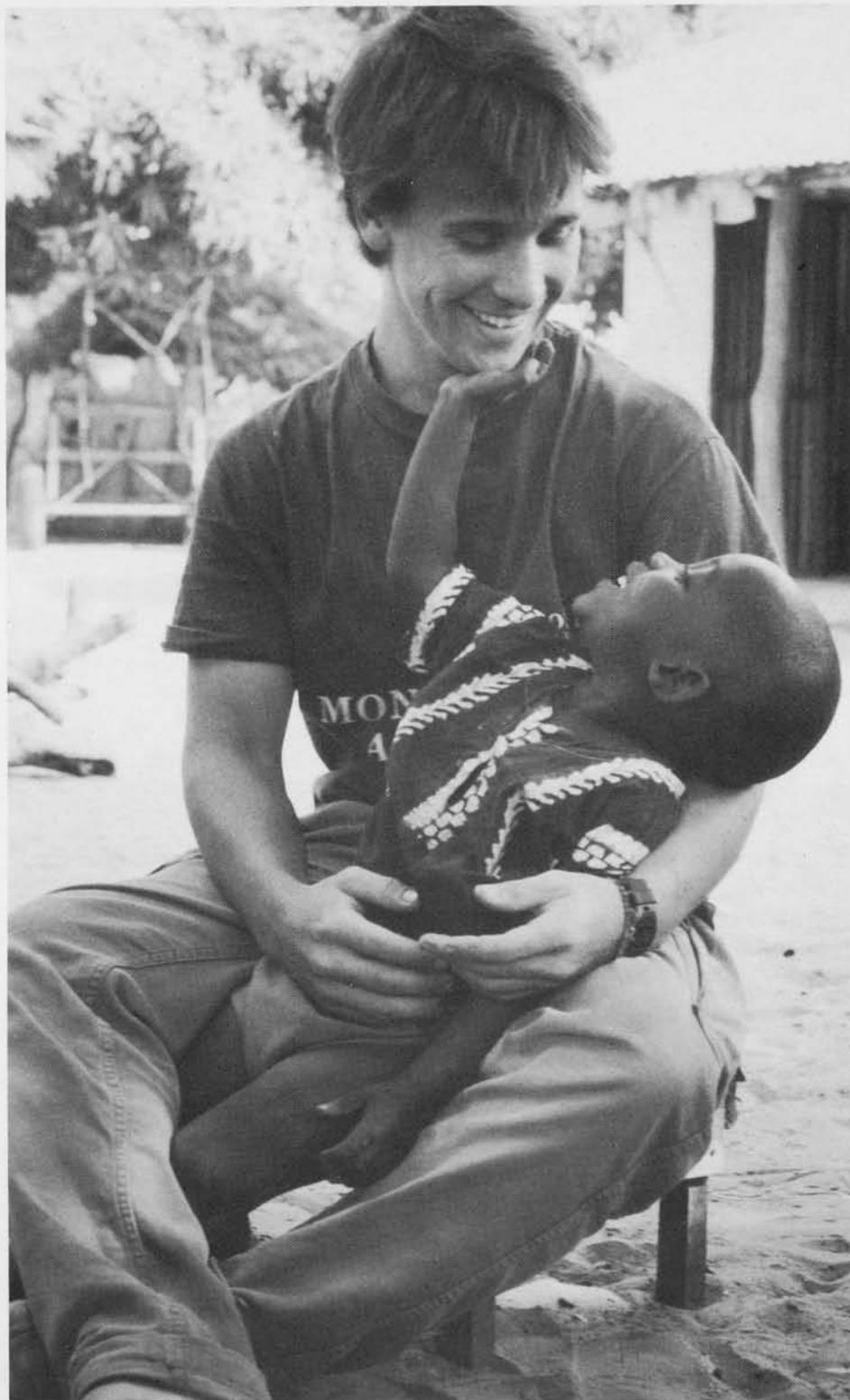

PEACE CORPS: The Living Legacy of John F. Kennedy



Peace Corps Volunteer John Weiss and Abdou Njie in the village of Kerewan, The Gambia.

"To those peoples in the huts and villages of half the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery, we pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves, for whatever period is required — not because the communists may be doing it, not because we seek their votes, but because it is right...And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you — ask what you can do for your country."

President John F. Kennedy, his inaugural address, January 20, 1961

On Nov. 22, 1963, two high-ranking Peace Corps officials, Bill Moyers and Elizabeth Forsling Harris, were in Texas, but not on Peace Corps business. Moyers, though still in his 20s, had been tapped by President Kennedy to go quietly down to his native state and take charge of cooling off the heated political atmosphere among the Democrats there. Kennedy believed that Moyers, then deputy director of the Peace Corps, could do this as a result of his having been Vice President Lyndon Johnson's aide for many years. Moyers knew the people involved. He had the political skills to smooth things out between conservatives headed by Texas Gov. John Connally, and the liberals, led by Senator Ralph Yarborough. The point was to make certain that the President's trip to this politically crucial state was free of political rancor. Moyers worked out of Austin. His friend and Peace Corps colleague, Betty Harris, worked out of Dallas, where she had lived for many years and in which she was politically well connected.

That morning, as Harris waited on the tarmac for Air Force I to complete the 15-minute flight from Fort Worth, she remembers thinking what a great job Moyers had done. "Kennedy's motorcade had moved through Houston, San Antonio and Fort Worth with great crowds, warm greetings, well organized events and a minimum of public squabbling among the politicians," says Harris. "And in Dallas, the single event, a luncheon, was sold out. The moment the wheels of Air Force I hit the runway, the sun broke through the clouds. I allowed myself a little institutional conceit," she recalls. "Aha! The Peace Corps has done it again!"

Later, after the bright Dallas morning was shattered by a shot which reverberated around the world, Betty Harris found solace in her thought.

"In a small sense that thought eased a bit of the shock as the next few days passed," she says.

Being part of the Peace Corps, that unique program which had become both the stylistic and the spiritual epicenter of John F. Kennedy's administration, had been invigorating and satisfying.

Today the Peace Corps is the living legacy, the fulfillment of President Kennedy's dream to share the American vision of freedom with people throughout the world. Thousands of men and women of all ages, colors and creeds are now serving in 65 countries around the globe. These pages contain the thoughts of those who went before and their memories of the man who launched a grand experiment to serve all humankind.



President Lyndon Johnson greets Peace Corps Volunteers Maureen Orth, Samuel Farr and Brenda Brown at White House, 1964

"My Peace Corps acceptance letter was dated Nov. 22, 1963," says MAUREEN ORTH, a free-lance journalist in New York who was then a student at Berkeley. "I could scarcely believe it. The letter was signed by Sargent Shriver. I smeared the signature to see if it was real. I wondered — did he sign that letter on that morning? Or was it put on one of those machines that signed for him, on a machine that kept humming throughout that awful day? In the end, it really didn't matter. That letter was a 'sign' I couldn't refuse.

"When I reached my *barrio* in Medellin, Colombia, pictures of President Kennedy with a black border were everywhere, hanging on the walls of shacks with dirt floors, on the walls of the community center, with that famous quote, 'Ask not what your country can do for you...' These words were both the theme and shared part of my time with the Colombian people I worked with for two of the best years of my life. That not only provided me with a sense of purpose then, it gave me memories which motivate me still."

Maureen Orth is a freelance magazine writer.

"How many of you are willing to spend ten years in Africa or Latin America or Asia working for the U.S. and working for freedom? How many of you who are going to be doctors are willing to spend your days in Ghana? On your willingness to do that, not merely to serve one or two years in the service, but on your willingness to contribute part of your life to this country, I think, will depend on the answer to whether we as a free society can compete."

Senator John F. Kennedy on the Presidential campaign trail, University of Michigan, October 14, 1960.

"I was in the chorus that answered him."

Maureen Carroll, Peace Corps Volunteer, Philippines I, 1961-1963

"S o long ago — but something you never forget," recalls DONNA SHALALA, who was in Iran I, the first group of Peace Corps Volunteers who served in Iran from 1962 to 1964. "A few days after the assassination we were in the city of Ahwaz. A beggar who regularly bothered us for money approached me — I was still numb and reached into a pocket to give him a coin. 'Oh no,' he said in Farsi, 'I just wanted to tell you how sorry I am about your young president.' I burst into tears. And there on a back street in an old Iranian city stood a weeping young American being comforted by an old beggar. It seemed right."

Donna Shalala is chancellor of the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

T OM SCANLON has been back from Chile for three months. He was a student at Columbia University, going for a master's degree in international relations, a direct result of his experience as a Peace Corps Volunteer. "I was studying in Butler Library when a fellow student came in and told me that Kennedy had been shot and killed. I went to church. What else could you do? The next day I took a bus to Scranton so that I could be with my family and not have to grieve alone. While I was there, Pat Kennedy, head of Volunteer services at Peace Corps headquarters, called me and asked me to come to Washington and represent the Peace Corps at the President's funeral on Monday, Nov. 25th. Apparently, Ralph Dugan, who was Kennedy's man on foreign aid reorganization, had decided who should represent what agency at the funeral. I did not at that moment understand why I had been chosen, or that I had been only one of two who had been chosen. I still don't know why, but the fact is, I and a young lady named Brenda Brown, who had just returned from the Philippines, were 'it.' We were told to hook up with John Glenn, the astronaut, and his wife, who were representing NASA and would be seated near us at St. Matthews Cathedral. We would thereafter be taken in their car. Hard to believe when you're 23. And there, up the aisle at St. Matthew's, came Haile Selassie, the emperor of Ethiopia, Charles deGaulle, the president of France, Willy Brandt, the chancellor of West Germany, and U Thant of Burma, the secretary general of the United Nations, and every other world leader — just 50 feet away.

Brenda and I drove across Memorial Bridge in John Glenn's car and walked up the hill to the gravesite at Arlington Cemetery.

I couldn't quite absorb it all at the time. But I am now overwhelmed by the fact that two young anonymous Peace Corps Volunteers in the program's early days — before it had been totally accepted — were given equal access and seating at the president's funeral to world leaders, cabinet members, national heroes, members of the family. How could one not continue to be nostalgic for a president who could inspire the setting of such a priority?"

Tom Scanlon is president of Benchmarks Inc., an overseas development firm based in Washington, D.C.

P eace Corps country director HARRIS WOFFORD was rushing to the American embassy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, after hearing about the assassination of President Kennedy. Wofford was hoping to find the U.S. ambassador, Ed Korry, there and to make arrangements to fly to Washington, D.C., for the funeral aboard Emperor Haile Selassie's special jet (There were only two 707s in Ethiopia in 1963 and both were assigned to the emperor).

While such privileged arrangements were not options for any other Peace Corps country director in the 46 countries the Peace Corps then served, Wofford knew both



Peace Corps country director Harris Wofford in Ethiopia, 1963

"Ethiopia needs no new Kennedy monument. The president's memory is enshrined forever in the work of the Peace Corps."

Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, at the White House, Washington, D.C., on the day of President Kennedy's funeral, November 25, 1963.

President Kennedy and the Ethiopian emperor personally. The Emperor greatly admired the Peace Corps. Wofford had worked closely with Peace Corps Director Sargent Shriver on the Civil Rights section of the 1960 campaign. He had been a special assistant to President Kennedy in the White House. He would be welcome on the plane. But when Wofford ran into his deputy, Edward Corboy, he was informed that the Ethiopian leader had decided not to wait for two days. He was leaving immediately and was on his way to the airport.

Wofford was in informal, summer clothes; he lived miles away and could never hope to change. He and Corboy dashed to Corboy's house near the Embassy, grabbed a dark suit of Corboy's, lept into the Peace Corps jeep, and Wofford changed into Corboy's suit as Corboy careened the jeep into the airport entrance. Both men heard a telling noise and looked down the runway in dismay. The emperors' jet had just become airborne.

With hundreds of other Peace Corps people and other members of "the American community" in Ethiopia, Wofford attended a memorial midnight mass at a Coptic church in Addis Ababa, where the Peace Corps presence was as much beloved and appreciated as anywhere on earth.

Harris Wofford, former president of Bryn Mawr College, is secretary of labor for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

SAMUEL FARR was a 19-year-old native of Carmel, Calif., and "descended from a long line of politicians" when he became inspired to join the Peace Corps. It was during the presidential campaign of 1960. Even though this young idealist was not old enough to vote at the time (the voting age was 21), Kennedy's "ask not" rhetoric fired him up. When he had graduated from Willamette University in Oregon in 1963, he went east for training at Columbia University's School of Social Work for service as an urban community development worker in the city of Medellin, Colombia, in a group known as Colombia VIII. There he would become a friend and colleague of Maureen Orth. President Kennedy had been killed while Farr was in training. For him, an important time of healing was when the citizens of Medellin arranged a memorial mass for Kennedy on Nov. 22, 1964, at a huge basilica. Farr says that a school outside Medellin was at this time named for Orth — Escuela Marina Orth — in honor of her hard work there and in posthumous thanks to President Kennedy for sending her.

Samuel Farr is a California assemblyman from Carmel.

ALLEN MONDELL, was a Peace Corps volunteer in Sierra Leone from 1963 to 1965. "I've spent the last 11 months making films about the life and death of John Kennedy for a museum scheduled to open in early 1989 on the sixth floor of the former Texas School Book Depository," Mondell says.

"Twenty-five years ago I was a teacher in Sierra Leone because of John Kennedy. On Nov. 22, I was visiting some Peace Corps friends in the capital city of Freetown, looking forward to a concert and weekend on the beach. Here is what I wrote in my diary that Sunday following the assassination. Reading it so many years later, I wish I had been more honest and profound. These films are giving me a second chance.

"About 7:45 p.m. we were getting ready to go to hear the Dorian Quintet when their British friend came to the house and said the President had been assassinated. Of course, none of us believed him until he told us to put on the radio. We heard the main summary of the BBC news telling us of his death. We looked at each other and



Deputy director Warren Wiggins and President Kennedy, 1961, leaving White House to greet first Peace Corps Volunteers to go overseas.

"We have seen enough of warmongers. Let our great role in history be that of peacemakers... "All of us have admired what Dr. Tom Dooley has done in Laos. And others have been discouraged at the examples that we read of in *The Ugly American*...the United States is going to have to do much better in this area if we are going to defend freedom and peace in the 1960s..."

"I therefore propose that our inadequate efforts in this area be supplemented by a peace corps of talented young men and women, willing to serve their country in this fashion...as an alternative or as a supplement to peacetime selective service, well qualified through rigorous standards, well trained in language, skills and customs they will need to know..."

Senator John F. Kennedy in his major foreign policy speech at the Cow Palace, San Francisco, November 2, 1960.

didn't know what to say, except that we wished we were home, although there was nothing to be done, I don't think I've ever felt closer to America than when I heard of the President's death. Damn it's hard to believe that an act like this could be perpetrated in the United States in 1963. I feel so far away and helpless."

"What I was too ashamed to write down in my diary then was that many of us gathered together that evening at our friends' home, and after comforting each other, we listened to music and gradually began to dance. It took a few years for me to understand what we had done and get over the guilt."

Allen Mondell is a filmmaker now based in Dallas.

DONOVAN MCCLURE covered presidential candidate Kennedy's major foreign policy speech on Nov. 2, 1960 at San Francisco's Cow Palace. In it, Kennedy proposed the Peace Corps for the first time. McClure remembers sheer pandemonium, particularly among the young in the huge audience. But at 29 he assumed that he himself was too old for such a thing and ought to pursue his career in journalism on the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Two years later he was serving as country director in the West African nation of Sierra Leone with 128 Peace Corps Volunteers, mostly nurses and teachers, in his charge.

"When the assassination of President Kennedy came, Sierra Leone did exactly as the United States, shut everything down and mourned for three days," says McClure.

President Kennedy never visited an African nation, McClure points out. "Even so, his death set off mourning that was the equal of that in the U.S. Everyone was in tears, President Kennedy was young, the volunteers were mostly young, Sierra Leone was newly independent. Therefore, somehow we were family, and Kennedy's death was literally a death in the family."

Donovan McClure is a senior vice-president of the Kamber Group in Washington, D.C.

As a Peace Corps Volunteer leader, TOM DINE was in Calapan, the provincial capital of Oriental Mindoro, a volcanic island of the Philippines, on a working visit to other volunteers. He stayed overnight in a boarding house with the idea of catching an early morning plane back to Manila. As he came downstairs to breakfast at 7:00 a.m., he thought it was strange that there was not the usual boisterous conversation among the other guests. "It was hushed. Filipino gathering places are never hushed. I tried to figure out, culturally, why. That's what Peace Corps volunteers have been trained to do. I then heard this statement on a radio: 'A female judge has sworn him in.' I thought, 'Something is wrong. Something bad has happened.' The owner of the boarding house came over to me and told me that President Kennedy had been shot and killed. His eyes were filled with tears. He and the others were already grieving.

"I got to the airport — a grass landing strip. Everyone there was pacing around, trying to figure out how and why this had happened. The Filipinos were very saddened. To them, Kennedy was 'our president.' The Philippines is a Catholic country. The U.S. was then America the Great. It was one thing for there to be violence in the Philippines, they felt. It was quite another thing for an American citizen to shoot a young, handsome leader who everyone loves, one who created the space program and the Peace Corps. For the Filipinos, as for Peace Corps Volunteers everywhere, there was a double sadness over the death of Kennedy.

Disappointment with America did not start with the bombs in Vietnam. It started with

the assassination of Kennedy.

Tom Dine is executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

PATRICIA MCDERMOTT KASDAN had recently returned from a teaching assignment in Philippines II and was on her way to Hofstra University on Long Island to give a recruiting talk for the Peace Corps. Standing in line at Pennsylvania Station, she saw a man run wildly out of a bookshop onto the concourse screaming, "Kennedy has been shot! Kennedy has been shot!"

"Everyone in line rushed into the bookshop," says Kasdan, where a radio was giving a report from the Dallas motorcade that followed Kennedy's car to Parkland Hospital. We all stayed in the bookshop listening to reports from the hospital. Everyone was on their knees, praying, crying. And then came the announcement that Kennedy was dead. At that point, everyone was weeping, strangers were embracing, comforting one another. I have no idea how long it took. I did get on the train and went to Long Island to Hofstra only to find it closed down. Everyone had gone home. The women who had arranged my recruiting talk kindly took me out for a cup of tea and we sat there for about half an hour commiserating.

"I returned to the city. It was transformed. Broadway was dark. All theatres and shops were closed.

"After the funeral, I began to get letters from people I had known as a Peace Corps volunteer in the Philippines. Beautiful letters as if President Kennedy was a member of my family. That identification still exists."

Patricia McDermott Kasdan is a research psychologist in the Department of Psychiatry at George Washington University School of Medicine in Washington, D.C.

ALEXANDER SHAKOW, at 26, was the youngest Peace Corp country director when he arrived in Djakarta, Indonesia, in May 1963. He was to oversee 30 young physical education coaches. This group was known as Indonesia I. The Peace Corps was welcome in Indonesia because President Sukarno believed that President Kennedy had settled a territorial dispute between the Indonesian and Dutch governments in Sukarno's favor. To underscore the new feeling of good will, President Kennedy invited the group to meet with him and Peace Corps director Shriver in the Rose Garden at the White House before they went overseas.

The 30 Volunteers were coincidentally together with Shakow on a retreat in the hill above Djakarta when somebody picked up on a short wave radio that Kennedy had been assassinated. "It was a very moving and sad moment," says Shakow, "because this group very much felt that they were the legacy of John F. Kennedy. It's a lucky thing we were all together. It would have been so difficult to know how to deal with that news if they had been scattered. As it was, we could grieve and hope together and renew a personal mandate felt to have been given this particular group by Kennedy."

Alexander Shakow is a senior official of the World Bank.

"I have visited thousands of volunteers around the world during my tenure as director. And I see the same stars in their eyes, the same dedication to service present from the beginning of Peace Corps. Volunteers are indeed America's proudest boast."

Loret Miller Ruppe
Director
1981-present

This "Living Legacy" essay was compiled by Coates Redmon, author of "Come As You Are: The Peace Corps Story" published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. The essay may be reprinted in its entirety or in part without prior permission.



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