

THE PEACE CORPS

On October 14, 1960, President John F. Kennedy spoke on the steps of the University of Michigan Union about the Peace Corps, his plan for a way to provide community service on a global scale. It very quickly became a popular program among college students and recent graduates.

Thetas, of course, were in this mix of individuals. The first Theta that we know of to serve as a Peace Corps volunteer was Janet Everett, Alpha Mu/Missouri. She wrote of her experiences as a teacher in the Philippines in the Winter 1962-1963 issue of the Theta magazine. "Sometimes I am utterly awed at the new awareness which has come to me since I joined the Peace Corps. This is very much in keeping with the purposes of the organization. I'm constantly grateful to have participated in the founding of such an agency."

The second known Theta was Susan Hoyt, Beta Omega/Colorado College. Her article about her experiences appeared in the Spring 1963 magazine. She, too, served as a teacher, but in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. In Summer 1963, two other Thetas, Evelyn Vough, Mu/Allegheny, and Ann Morgan, Delta/Illinois, were identified. By the end of 1969, more than 20 Thetas had served around the world.

And Thetas have continued to serve. A current Theta Foundation trustee, Aimee Billow Forsythe, Nu/Hanover, served in Mali, West Africa, in the 1990s.

Want more? heritage.kappaalphatheta.org/



(Left) Carolyn Combs, BP/Duke, and Colombian teachers in a typical classroom. (Right) Carolyn Combs, BP/Duke, in Colombia in 1966.

THETA AND THE PEACE CORPS

BY NORALEEN DUVALL YOUNG, AX/PURDUE

We recently received an email from Carolyn Combs Gallaher, BP/Duke. She served in the Peace Corps during its early years and asked about other Thetas who might have also served. We were so interested in Carolyn's story that we asked her to share it. And we're pleased to also share what we learned about additional Theta Peace Corps volunteers.

The Peace Corps. The disciplined energy of the name and the chance to serve drew US adults (young and old), from all classes and walks of life. Most of us were motivated by idealism and a sense that we could build a better world than that handed us by the older generation. We had the education, the skills, and mentality. (We felt we were beyond petty prejudice.) After all, it was the Sixties!

A Duke degree, Theta's dedication to service, and a strong curiosity to know the world landed me my first job teaching at the American High School in El Salvador. I became convinced that education was the means to provide impoverished people with the skills that would lead them to a better life.

I returned to the US to enter Teachers College, Columbia, to study mass education techniques. In my research, I discovered a Peace Corps project using television in the public schools, and 1965 found me in Barranquilla, Colombia, working with elementary school teachers in the implementation of television courses into the curriculum. Producers filmed master classes in music, language, mathematics, and social and natural sciences. Master Colombian educators introduced new teaching techniques and course guides that included motivation and follow-up activities. Filmmakers went into the countryside to document historical areas, national treasures, and distinct geographical areas. (Children living on the coast for the first time, perhaps, saw what villages in the mountains of the Andes or farms in the llanos looked like.)

Utilization workers, such as myself, composed the majority of our group. We worked with school principals to design a room for the television and integrate the television courses into their curriculum and also gave workshops for teachers showing how follow-up activities could use the most common and cheapest of materials. We traveled to ETV schools to trouble-shoot problems and supervise and observe the use of the instructional courses. Another component of the group was the "technicos" who helped install and service the televisions which were donated by the Agency for International Development and Phillips Corp.

Wanting to ensure ETV would continue after the Peace Corps left, I began teaching teachers about the use of television in the classroom. Due to this involvement (plus my master's degree in international education from Columbia) I was invited by the National Department of Education to co-write the curriculum and instructional manual for use in teachers' schools. This is an example of the opportunities provided by the Peace Corps to work at highest levels not available to most 26-year-olds in the US.

Challenge, opportunity, experience in working with mass technology that I felt was going to raise the level of everyday people so they could find satisfying jobs that would provide a better life for them and their families (and prevent a bloody revolution) was not all that the Peace Corps experience provided. There was adventure, travel, romance ... but that is a tale to be told in another context. Although I never met another Theta while in the Peace Corps, I hope they were also "out there" serving with the thoughtfulness and caring that our pansy symbolizes.

Archivists note: Researching Thetas in the Peace Corps has revealed that we don't know about all the Thetas who have served. So, I am asking for your help. Send me an email—nyoung@kappaalphatheta.org—with the name, dates, and where they served.