

# CORPS PRINCIPLES

*Since its founding fifty years ago, the Peace Corps has inspired thousands of volunteers to serve the world. Dozens of Roaring Fork Valley residents have been among them.*

STORY BY **DEXTER CIRILLO** PHOTOS BY **DEREK SKALKO**

**O**n June 6, 1963, President John F. Kennedy delivered the commencement address at my graduation from San Diego State College. It was an unprecedented moment for a streetcar school, where most of us were more conversant with the daily surf report than world events. Before 30,000 people in San Diego State's Aztec Bowl, Kennedy spoke on education and public service, reiterating his oft-quoted inaugural message: *Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.*

For me, the answer lay in another Kennedy legacy: the Peace Corps, which he had established on March 1, 1961, to "promote world peace and friendship." Trained volunteers would spend two years providing technical assistance to countries in need, while advancing intercultural understanding and respect.

*"Te amañas, señorita? Are you happy? Do you like our country?"*

It was a mantra I would hear daily for two years in Honda, "the city of bridges," located on the Magdalena River in Colombia, where I arrived in September 1965 at age 23. Frankly, the first month, I wasn't sure. Honda was smack in the middle of the torrid zone with 150 days of rainfall and temperatures that never dropped below ninety degrees. The rain was providential, though, filling the cistern in the two-room house I rented. It was the water I used for bathing and cooking, as running water and

electricity were random events I soon learned not to count on. There was also no refrigeration, so we all went to the market at five o'clock every morning to buy food for the day.

I wasn't in Colombia a month when Carmen Palma de Montoya knocked on my door, asking if I needed someone to do my laundry. She was seventy-five years old and illiterate, and one of the wisest people I have ever encountered. I invited her to live with me for the next two years as my *dueña*—a housekeeper and, more importantly, a chaperone—allowing me to navigate the cultural mores of a male-dominated Latin country.

People often ask about the living conditions in the Peace Corps, the climate, what you go without. But those are the easy things to adjust to. Being in a fishbowl is much harder. As an American blonde in a brunette town, my every move was visible and a source of endless curiosity. But

after several months, I was a familiar figure at Sunday Mass (though I stood out as the tallest), and at the health clinic and the hospital where I taught child care and nutrition, and on my bicycle when I rode out to the villages on the banks of

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the Magdalena to organize mothers' clubs, leaving Honda's ordered Spanish Colonial architecture for the lush tropical jungle. I became the

## Juliane Heyman

A chance meeting with Sargent Shriver in 1961 in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) led Juliane Heyman to an unexpected career in the Peace Corps. With master's degrees in international relations and library science, Heyman had

been contracted by other organizations to establish a library and train librarians for two Academies for Rural Development in Pakistan. Shriver, the Peace Corps' first director and visionary, was scouting Heyman's village as a site for future volunteers.

Impressed by Heyman's grace in adapting to the dominant male culture of her village and

her meager living conditions, Shriver invited her to join the Peace Corps staff upon her return to the United States. Heyman became the first female training officer hired and worked for the Peace Corps from 1961 to 1966, becoming deputy director of training and university relations for NANESA (North Africa, Near East, and South Asia).

An Aspen resident for forty years and author of *From Rucksack to Backpack*, a memoir that charts her family's escape from the Nazis and her world travels, Heyman is currently engaged with the Peace Corps' fiftieth anniversary celebrations. (See [peacecorpsconnect.org/resources/peace-corps-50th-anniversary](http://peacecorpsconnect.org/resources/peace-corps-50th-anniversary) for events.)

charge of the townspeople, and they became mine.

I would spend two years working in public health and community development and would leave Honda with a new school, a literacy program, several mothers' clubs, and many friendships. I would take away a lifelong interest in other cultures that spawned a career dedicated to promoting the literature and culture of minority groups in the United States.

Mine was the first generation of *hijos de Kennedy*—Kennedy's children. This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Peace Corps. Since its inception, more than 200,000 volunteers have served in 139 countries around the globe, with some 8,700 volunteers currently serving in seventy-seven countries. Of them, more than forty volunteers have returned from abroad to the Roaring Fork Valley, enriching our own community in much the same way.

Aspen attracts seekers, individuals unafraid to be in the presence of something larger than ourselves. The foreign cultures we Peace Corps volunteers experienced opened our hearts and minds to new ways of viewing the world. Here, the mountains in their timeless grandeur remind us daily that we occupy a small place on the planet for just an instant. But it is that knowledge that inspires us to service and to make the most of our time.

On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Peace Corps, *Aspen Sojourner* salutes all of the returned Roaring Fork Valley volunteers for their service to the international community, as well as to our own.



**Dexter Cirillo**  
**COLOMBIA**



## Ann Hotchkiss Johnson and Samuel Johnson CHILE and COLOMBIA

Samuel Johnson and Ann Hotchkiss met as Spanish majors at Middlebury College in 1963. After his graduation, Sam served in the Peace Corps in Colombia from 1963 to 1965. When she graduated, Ann served in Chile from 1966 to 1968. Sam initially worked in community development, later as Peace Corps leader in Colombia, introducing new volunteers to their work sites. Ann worked in rural community development with a land-distribution program founded in 1962 to address the enormous inequities between Chile's landowners and its vast peasantry.

"Those were highly charged political times in Chile," Ann recalls. "A big part of the population was very anti-American. People called me an imperialist and colonialist and constantly asked me if I was a spy."

After a few months of escalating tensions, Ann transferred to a Head Start program on the outskirts of Valparaiso, a coastal region where many Chileans were relocated after a devastating earthquake in Valdivia in 1960. "Everything was in a state of flux for the families, and we tried to help the children cope and get ready for school," she says.

The couple married in 1969 and pursued graduate degrees. It wasn't long, however, before Latin America summoned again. In 1977, Sam accepted a position as program director for a nonprofit promoting children's rights in forty-eight developing countries, while Ann provided support for breast-feeding mothers through volunteer organizations. The pair would spend the next twelve years serving the underprivileged in Bolivia, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Ecuador.

"The Peace Corps experience left me with a permanent appreciation for the honor and pleasure of being able to be of service. In some ways, it becomes a way of life," Ann says. The Johnsons have continued that way of life in Carbondale since 1989, working as court interpreters for Garfield County until their retirement. Ann has continued her volunteerism working with Lift Up for the past twenty years.



### ROARING FORK ROLL CALL: LATIN AMERICA

Don Glidden, 1963-1965, Peru

Samuel Johnson, 1963-1965, Colombia

John Hoffman, 1964-1966, Colombia

Hugh D. Wise III, 1964-1966, Brazil

Dexter Cirillo, 1965-1967, Colombia

Ann Hotchkiss Johnson, 1966-1968, Chile

Judith Colby, 1967-1969, Belize

Robert Colby, 1967-1969, Belize

Christopher Faison, 1967-1969, Colombia

Don Sheeley, 1970-1972, Costa Rica

Griff Smith, 1970-1972, Guatemala

Jerry Krebs, 1978-1979, Paraguay

Mike Walter, 1998-2000, Ecuador

Sam Prudden, 2010-present, El Salvador

## Griff Smith GUATEMALA

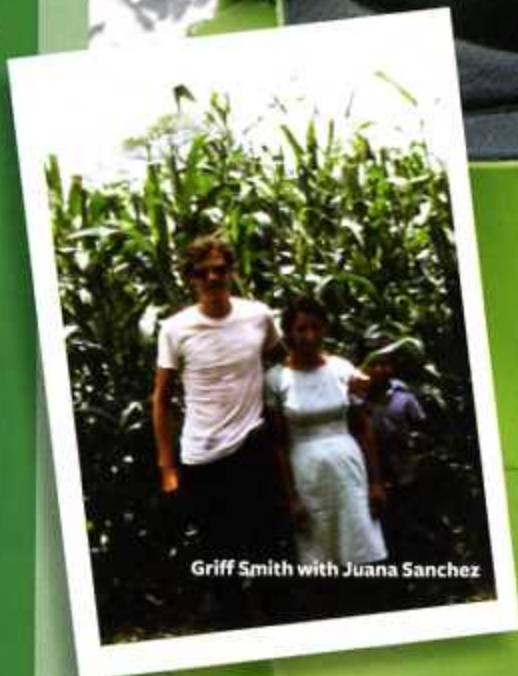
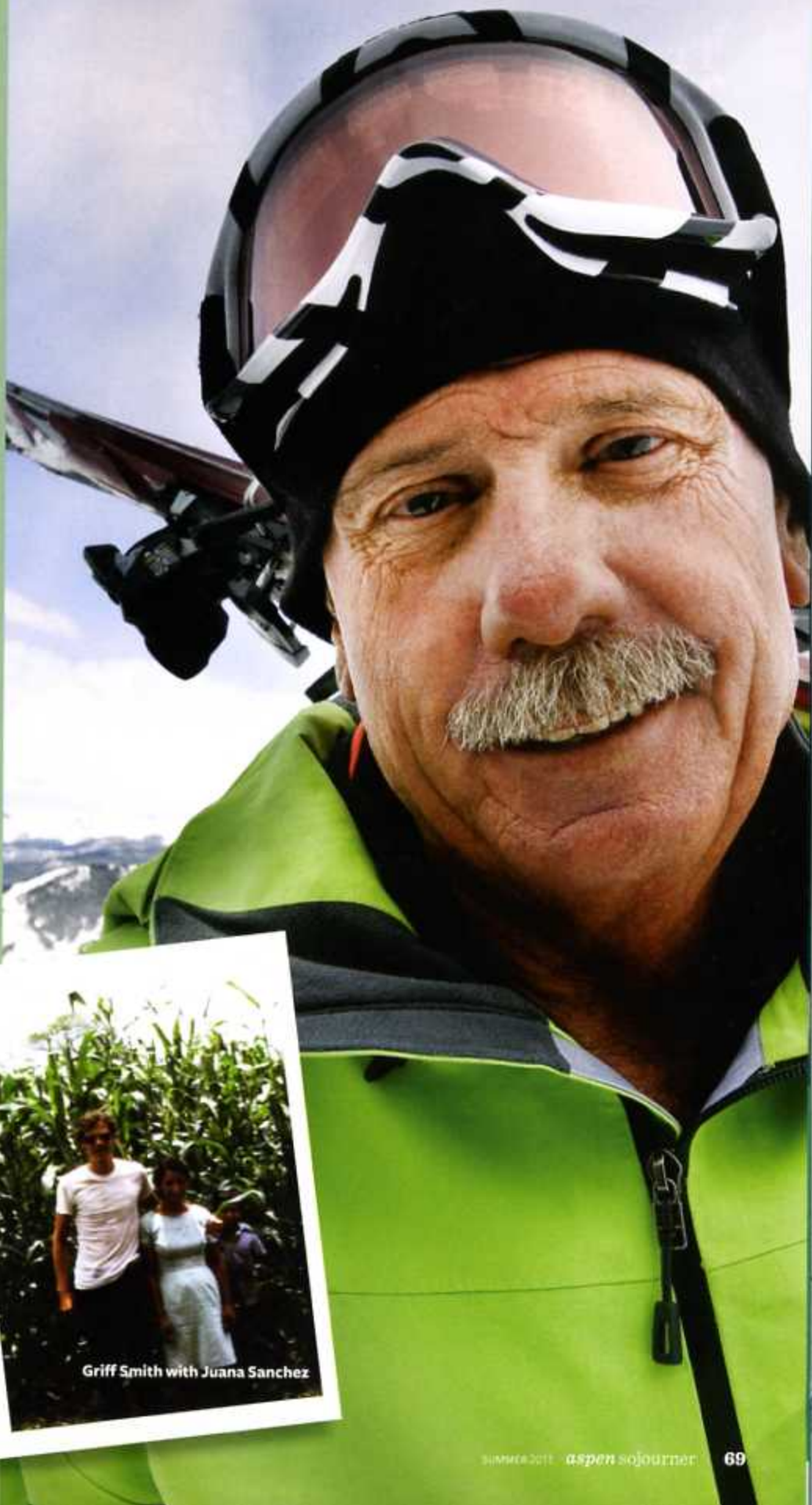
Griff Smith's abrupt introduction to Spanish came with his Peace Corps training in Puerto Rico. "On the first day, the Spanish instructor came in and told us to find a family to live with in the *barrio*," he says. "That was the last day we spoke English for three months."

After training, Smith served from 1970 to 1972 in Guatemala, working in an agriculture extension program. "Corn was a big crop, because tortillas are a staple of the diet," he says. But the population knew little about hybrid corn, so Smith introduced a pilot program to help rural farmers winnow out the most successful seed.

Smith lived in the center of the rural agricultural reform area called El Arisco, sharing one of three government houses with the local school teacher. "Every day, I walked down the road to Juana Sanchez's thatched-roof house for my meals that cost twenty-five cents each," he says. "I ate tortillas for breakfast, lunch, and dinner."

In 1976, Smith returned to Guatemala to administer disaster relief after a devastating earthquake killed 23,000 people.

Smith has combined his love of Latin culture with his passion for the mountains. He has summited Argentina's Aconcagua, has led high-altitude snow and ice expeditions to Bolivia, Peru, Argentina, and Ecuador, and has taken a sabbatical at the Catholic University in Lima, Peru (where he married his wife, Judy) to study Spanish literature and archaeology. In Aspen, he has been one of ten guides for Aspen Mountain Powder Tours since 2002, the year he retired from a three-decade career as a teacher, then principal, at Aspen Middle School. Smith also serves as volunteer coordinator for Bariloche, Argentina, one of Aspen's sister cities, organizing cultural, medical, educational, and technical exchange programs.



Griff Smith with Juana Sanchez

## Travis Fulton TUNISIA

When Senator Edward Kennedy and Congressman John Tunney asked to visit the most remote Peace Corps location in Tunisia in 1967, their small plane carried them 300 miles to the edge of the Sahara Desert to meet Travis Fulton. There, Fulton taught English to Bedouin children in Tozeur, a palmy oasis and supply city for caravans crossing the Sahara in ancient times.

An exotic mix of ancient Roman, Arabic, Islamic, and French influences, Tozeur would one day serve as an otherworldly backdrop for *Star Wars* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. For Fulton, the exotic locale meant an exotic diet: sometimes camel meat, perhaps beets, maybe even a pile of birds that had been caught by smearing lime on the tree branches.

Later, Fulton transferred to the coastal town of Tabarka, where he lived in a two-room home built on the curvaceous ruins of an old Roman bath. More critical was the on-site stable, which became home to a purebred Arabian stallion Fulton acquired. Fulton rode 150 miles across Tunisia with just a saddle and a jacket to bring the steed to Tabarka. "Crossing the country on such an animal is a wonderful way to be with the people," he says.

In Tabarka, Fulton founded a wood shop for local craftsmen, launching a cottage industry of wood carving and presaging his own future as an artist. "I noticed people carving animals for sale to tourists with very rudimentary tools," he says. Through the Peace Corps and CARE, Fulton procured donations like hand saws for the shop.

In 1969, Fulton moved to Aspen to become a sculptor. Over his forty-year career, he's created sculptures and landscapes that grace public and private spaces in Aspen and around the country, including the striking granite and metal sculpture outside Mezzaluna, and, with the late Nick DeWolf, the world's first computerized dancing water fountain on the Hyman Street Mall.



Travis Fulton (far right) meets with Senator Edward Kennedy in Tunisia.

## Bill Stirling KENYA

He is Aspen's first four-term mayor since World War II, a staunch environmentalist, and a supporter of an eclectic array of nonprofits. He has been honored with multiple community awards and regularly moderates author readings at Explore Booksellers. And he founded Stirling Homes in 1978, where he is still the owner and a broker.

When asked about his extraordinary service to the Aspen community, Bill Stirling points to his father, an Episcopal minister, and to the Peace Corps, which enlarged his vision of the world beyond the segregated South where he grew up.

Stirling served as a settlement officer from 1964 to 1966 in the first Peace Corps group in Kenya, which had just earned its independence from Britain and was in the process of buying and redistributing European land among Kenyan farmers. He worked with the Kipsigis tribe, a cattle people related to the legendary Masai, developing farming co-operatives. "It was a tenuous time in Kenya," Stirling says, "but we were young and had that Yankee can-do spirit. That is the genius of the Peace Corps."

With two other volunteers, Stirling shared an abandoned European farmhouse that looked out over a vast marshland. "I had never lived in a place so enormous and so quiet," he says. The nearest town of Sotik was twenty miles away, where locals did their banking out of a truck that came periodically, a highlight in a town with 100 people and one provisions store.

Upon his return to the U.S., Stirling continued in the Peace Corps spirit of giving, teaching English to inner-city dropouts in storefront schools in Harlem, ultimately taking twenty-five students to Ghana and Kenya in 1968 for what he calls "a mind-bending connection with their roots."



### ROARING FORK ROLL CALL: AFRICA

James Breasted III, 1962-1963, Côte d'Ivoire

Andy Hanson, 1962-1964, Liberia

Barbara Lorah, 1962-1964, Eritrea [Ethiopia]

Bill Stirling, 1964-1966, Kenya

Travis Fulton, 1967-1968, Tunisia

Tom McCloskey, 1968-1970, Malawi

Gary Kreutzer, 1973-1974, Zaire

Robert Pazik, 1974-1977, Niger

Maureen Richardson, 1983-1985, Tanzania

Mariangela Causa Steindler, 1992-1994, Tunisia

Matt Wells, 1993-1996, Côte d'Ivoire

Heather Brown Ryerson, 1995-1997, Uganda

Annie McDaniel, 1997-1999, Zambia

Clare Bastable, 1998-2000, Côte d'Ivoire

Garry Pfaffmann, 2000-2002, Lesotho

Yuri Horowitz, 2006-2008, Mali

Matt Kuhn, 2007-2009, Cameroon

Sarah Kuhn, 2007-2009, Cameroon

## Kim Scheuer SRI LANKA

Kim Scheuer likes to talk with her hands—in two languages. She is fluent in sign language in English and Sinhalese, the official language of Sri Lanka, where she served in the Peace Corps from 1986 to 1988. Her brother is deaf and was not taught sign language as a child, motivating her to pursue a graduate degree in deaf education.

In the Sri Lankan town of Balangoda, Scheuer shared a four-bedroom house with thirteen members of a Sinhalese Buddhist family, where she learned to eat from the family's communal dish with one hand and sign with the other.

Despite full acceptance as a member of her host family, Scheuer struggled to accept the "dependent and subservient roles of women." Initially, her family would not allow her to go out unaccompanied. When she bought a bike for greater mobility, she "shocked the whole village because they had never seen a woman ride a bicycle before."

Scheuer taught at the Yasodora School for the Deaf and Blind, where she faced down further cultural prejudice against deaf people. By the end of her two years, Scheuer had helped develop a finger spelling system for the Sinhala script and published *Sinhala Sign Language/Finger Spelling Alphabet Book* and the *Sri Lankan Sign Language Dictionary*, the first books of their kind in Sri Lanka. She also organized a massive rally for the International Day of the Deaf to coincide with a television show she produced, *When One Doesn't Hear*, which aired throughout Sri Lanka.

In 1998, Scheuer joined Aspen Medical Care, where she is a family-practice physician. She has served on the boards of the Aspen School and Camp for the Deaf, and at Silver Lining Ranch, where she was camp physician.



### ROARING FORK ROLL CALL: ASIA

Bill Lorah, 1962-1964, Pakistan  
John Barbee, 1965-1967, Afghanistan  
Polly Pollard, 1968-1970, India  
Deborah P. Overeynder, 1974-1977, Thailand  
Kim Scheuer, 1986-1988, Sri Lanka  
Michelle Lefebvre, 1997-1998, Jordan  
Roger Maggard, 1997-1998, Jordan  
Brian McNellis, 1997-1999, Philippines  
Tatyana Stevens, 1998-2000, Turkmenistan



## John Barbee AFGHANISTAN

IN 2006, JOHN BARBEE went to Afghanistan as a consultant for the Initiative to Promote Afghan Civil Society. It was his third trip to the country he served as a Peace Corps volunteer forty years earlier. "I landed in Kabul in 1965 in search of a new experience," he says. And he found it: "Afghanistan was still in the tenth century then," Barbee states. "The country suffered a plague of public health problems resulting from lack of sanitation, including a 65 percent mortality rate for children under five. The Afghans traditionally didn't name their children until they were five. Until that time, they belonged to God."

After a year in the remote Hindu Kush area, Barbee found greater contact with the Afghan people when he moved to the newly created Laghman Province to coordinate community projects, including the construction of schools and safe suspension bridges.

Barbee could have no contact with Afghan women. "If you visited someone, the men and boys served you," he explains. "We never saw the women in an Afghan home." He would later confront that challenge when the World Health Organization initiated a vaccination program to eradicate smallpox in Afghanistan. Barbee used teams of all female volunteers to vaccinate Afghan women and children.

With roots in Colorado—his grandfather was a mine manager in Leadville and Aspen, where he grew up—Barbee returned to Colorado in 1969 when a pituitary tumor left him legally blind, leading him into a career in counseling and consulting.

On its twenty-fifth anniversary, the Peace Corps beckoned again, and Barbee returned as associate director in Malawi in 1987, then continued in the Peace Corps' upper ranks as a regional coordinator in the Central Asian Republics, then as country director in Tajikistan.

Today, he lives in Glenwood Springs, where he continues his commitment to vulnerable populations at home and abroad through many volunteer projects.



John Barbee, with his friend Chunchar, in Afghanistan.

