

Memories of our Peace Corps Training Days India III

John Chromy writes: **First 30 days of PCV, January-February 1963**

Nearly 50 years ago--in late January of 1963, I flew from Minneapolis to New York City to meet up with the 72 member India III group. The flight was my first airplane flight ever, and for a 20 year old Minnesota Farm Boy it was exciting.

Does anyone remember the West Grand Hotel we assembled at on west 67th street??? As I recall, "Grand Hotel" was substantially a misnomer,.but it was good enough for the Peace Corps. I remember meeting there Mary Lou Pass, Donna Anderson, Desi McCollough and Ernie Petersen. Nobody else lingers in the New York cobwebs of my mind.

Remember clearly Dr. Nolan, Field Selection Officer sitting on the table in the front of the meeting room and "explaining" the Peace Corps selection process to us--"Look to your left, look to your right--one of the three of you will NOT be on the final flight departing for India." That put the fear of God (or at least the Peace Corps selection process) into me. Nice welcome to the Peace Corps. (In the end, he was more than right, only 41 of the original 72 ended up being sworn in as part of India III). A couple of days in New York and then it was off to Camp Radley in Arecibo, Puerto Rico.

John Chromy writes: **Memories of Puerto Rico, February 1963**

I am much looking forward to the last week in January, 2013 with olde India III comrades. However, I was saddened to note from Joe that Camps Radley and Crozier exist no more. I had visited the area two years ago and saw Camp Crozier (and the swimming pool in which we were taught "drown-proofing") pretty much intact. I am disappointed because I was looking forward to:

- a) maybe an overnight stay in the screened cabins and being awakened at 5:30 am by Camp Radley staff and the sent out on a one mile run on mountain roads. "*All right you guys, anyone not here is not here!*"
- b) coldwater showers after the morning run
- c) a quick breakfast then off to the Cliffs for some serious roped climbing lessons followed by rappelling off the 90 foot cliff
- d) the an early afternoon drown-proofing lesson a the pool or in the ocean front of Arecibo
- e) All this followed by either an overnite camping stay in the forest or an evening of square dancing in the main dining hall and the next day we could canoe across lago dos Bocas, rappel off the dam and then a quick 15 mile hike across the Cerro de Punta mountains

Oh well---all that will be missed this second time around--sigh--tho we may be better for it.

I still remember Mary Anne Domkowski and Donna Anderson being terrific square dancers, John Reid pouring chlorine in his boot to ward off *balarzia*, a group of "super high speed' hikers made up of Terry Clayton, Desi Mc Collough and several others racing to break a record for completing the three day hike across the mountains; Bob Geissel, Harry Andrews and Guy Clark

on their guitars/banjo (or was that in Minnesota??); Cecil and Bina Davis leading us in singing "On the Banks of the Ohio" while riding in the van down to Arecibo; Saturday night in the Plaza of Arecibo where it seemed the whole town was in the Plaza; taking the "Publicos" into San Juan on our one weekend off; the fun of meeting fellow trainee George Arujo who was a former professional boxer from New York; being enormously impressed (as I still am to this day) in meeting Ernie Peterson, the big guy Iowa farmer who had survived the Korean war and was now joining the Peace Corps.

I probably once remembered more, but the ravages of fifty years cause memories to fade (or blank out). Anyway, look forward to going to the Abajo forest, seeing Lago Dos Bocas and the dam again and eating a terrific Puerto Rican lunch at the restaurants on the lake. Nora and I look forward to seeing many of you there. *Hasta en mi viejo San Juan.*

Mary Andrews writes: **We were so naive!**

I just want to echo what Chromy has been saying about New York and Puerto Rico. What a blast! And the Peace Corps footed the bill for our vacation! I, too, had never flown before and this would be my second flight, the first coming into NY. I remember descending from the plane in San Juan and being engulfed in that balmy tropical air....something that you can't anticipate nor describe.



The whole *Outward Bound* experience was just one big adventure for me and for many of us in our twenties....perhaps not so comfortable for the elders in our group. I remember thinking that cold showers were not so great...but all the sunshine, and new activities and new friendships

compensated. Of all the pictures that I took throughout the training and volunteer period, only a few have survived...and believe it or not, I do have some old black and whites from Puerto Rico that I scanned. Remember the skits that we created for our farewell/ thank you to the staff? Well here are the female high steppers—JoAnn Nute, Donna, Mary, Maryanne, Esther and Connie.



And not to be outdone....the male talent. I especially like the creative costumes! Bette, Peterson, Clayton, Pine???, Hankins, Louden, Scripko???, and Spencer???



Don't ask me why I have this picture of one of the trekking groups....perhaps Harry took the picture.



Was there something else going on in Puerto Rico???



Desmond McCullagh's description of the four-day trek, Feb 13-17: "The Long Road Home" as printed in the one and only "Newsletter" that was written over the weekend instead of the San Juan trip. (*Beware Dessie is a little dramatic*).

With the sun beating down upon their brow, a group of young determined Peace Corps Trainees stood atop the largest mountain in Puerto Rico—the Sierra de Punta (4300 ft)—awaiting the start of their four and a half day trek which would take them in direct contact with the people of Puerto Rico, and give them a basic understanding of the people, customs and culture of the country. (*These must have been the official objectives, because in reality it was an exercise in self control—not killing your teammates!*)

Heading for the base of the mountain, they retrieved their heavy packs and started off on their long and educational journey. Heading into the foothills of the Sierra de Punta, they crossed one mountain after the other, each requiring a little more effort. They paused for a short lunch of oranges and grapefruit and to converse with the people; then continued on their way. As the sun set in the west, they began to close in on their first check point—crossing a river and climbing a never-ending hill, they approached their point. Tired and weary, they set up camp at an escuela, among the hustle and bustle of the children. After a hearty meal of C-rations, they retired for the night only to experience a sleepless night on the hard and unmovable ground. (*or was it the concrete floor of the schoolroom*)

As dawn drew near, they bounded from their sacks, devoured a fast breakfast of coffee and crackers and headed for the hills, only to find trails that once existed no longer in evidence. In their place were dirt tracks heading north-south-east- and west. After a frustrating conversation with the natives in broken English and Spanish, they continue on their way. As the sun rose at high noon and beads of sweat dripped from their brow, they stopped for a short rest at a tienda to relieve their parched throats with a cool cervasa or refreshing coke. This magic formula sparked new life into these young trainees and they pushed on for the second check point. By midafternoon they reached their objective and decided to push-on for number three. They found themselves at dusk in the middle of the Sierra de Gullarte, one of the largest mountains on the island! They decided to find a paved road which they knew would lead them to the Villa Perez, their third check point. So they continued the long grind up the mountain, pausing only to shift the weight of their packs and wipe the beads of sweat from their brow. They reached the top of the mountain, a sigh of satisfaction echoed through the silent night. The trekkers continued their tireless pace, clicking the kilometers off one after another. Within two miles of Villa Perez, they stopped for the night and pitched their bedrolls in a grassy region of another escuela.

On the third day, they rose to a sun filled sky and a gathering of local people. The trekkers ate a fast breakfast of C-rations and cocoa and started on their way. Within fifty minutes they reached the third check point which was an Esso gas station. They then headed up the main road for a few hundred yards and once again cut into the mountainside and continued their climb. By mid-day they had reached the middle of their fourth check point and paused for a quick lunch off the land. Then once again they hit the trail and continued their climb. By four o'clock they found themselves in a complete maze of hills, tracks, roads and swamps. After each member of the group consulted the map, terrain, etc, they decided which way to go and started out again. (*I bet that was a great discussion!*) With clouds beginning to fill the sky, they traveled under increasing cloudiness for several hours. By dusk the rain began to fall and within a few minutes it became a torrent. With the help of a village policeman and the kindness of a tienda owner,

the trainees were given refuge in a hayloft of the latter's barn. As they settled for the night, and as they drifted into dreamland with memories of the passing day, the rain continued to patter on the roof.

They awoke to the distant cry of a rooster, with the sun splintering through the cracks of the hayloft. After tending to their blisters and various other foot ailments, they hoisted their packs and were on their way. Being the fourth and final day of the journey, the trekkers were in high spirits. They marched through swamps, up and down hills and by midmorning reached their fourth and final check point. After notifying camp, they were heading-in, the trekkers joined another group and started the final phase of the long road home. By nightfall they were within a few miles of camp and settled in a grassy area of the woods. They built a fire and finished their C-rations, then settled back to laugh and joke while recounting to each other the experience of *the long road home*. (*Any of you who were in Dessie's group can give us the real story!*)