

Corps Values

For most of today's students, the Peace Corps has always existed. But when President John Kennedy launched the program in 1961, it was considered visionary—and not a little risky. We were sending our nation's youth into service to promote global peace and intercultural awareness—laudable ambitions by most standards—but often to regions of the world where war, famine and unsanitary conditions posed real dangers.

Now, as the Peace Corps celebrates its 50th anniversary, much has changed in the world. And much has not.

"Volunteers continue to work on pressing issues like poverty and hunger and preserving the environment," says Janice Laurente, a spokeswoman for the organization. According to its website, the Peace Corps has three goals: helping the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women; helping promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served; and helping promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

Serving in the Peace Corps always has required courage, compassion and commitment. From the start, University of Denver students have stepped up to the challenge. Beginning with Kevin Dixon (BA '62), more than 400 DU students and alumni have participated in projects all over the world; today's students have worked in countries ranging from Burkina Faso to Ukraine.

In 2011, DU ranked No. 2 among colleges and universities participating in the Peace Corps' Paul D. Coverdell Fellows program, which permits returned volunteers to pursue master's or doctorate degrees in more than 60 universities around the country at a reduced cost. The Josef Korbel School of International Studies also sponsors students in the Master's International program, which allows students to begin coursework on campus, serve in the Peace Corps for two years on projects related to their studies, then return to campus to finish their degrees.

No matter when or why they joined, or where they went, one theme stands out among Peace Corps volunteers: The experience helped shape the direction and flavor of their lives.

"I think I told myself that it was something I couldn't do; it was something too exciting that I wouldn't be able to be a part of," says Sandra Meek (PhD '95), who taught English in Botswana from 1989–91 as a Peace Corps volunteer. "You just go and figure it out when you go. It really changed me as a teacher, a writer, an editor and a person."

For half a century, the Peace Corps has provided DU alumni and students with a life-changing chance to serve.

By Laurie Budgar

Judy Bennett

DU experience: BA sociology '69

Peace Corps assignment: Advising nongovernmental organizations in Ignalina, Lithuania, from 1999–2001

Hometown: East Bloomfield, N.Y.

Current position: Retired director of the West Ontario County American Red Cross, now living in Rochester, N.Y.

You're never too old

Judy Bennett is proof positive that the Peace Corps isn't just for twentysomethings. At the age of 52, and with a lifetime of experience in nonprofits, she began serving in Ignalina, Lithuania, in 1999 as an adviser to nongovernmental organizations. On the side, she also helped develop tourism there and taught English to adults.

Though she had toyed with the idea of joining the Peace Corps when she was younger, Bennett says she wasn't prepared then to commit to the two-year obligation. But when she turned 50, "I rented a little cabin on the coast of Maine for a few days and decided to divorce my husband, sell my house and do some kind of international service work," she says. "I [still] liked the philosophy of the Peace Corps, the support that it gave, and I was ready for the commitment."

Bennett says she reapplied for another two-year stint about three years ago, but she did not clear medically.

Instead, she and her current husband now work on water projects in the Dominican Republic with the Rotary Club. "We talk about ways we could do something similar to the Peace Corps. He's up for the challenge, and I would love to live in another country again. Now that I'm 64, I'd like to be somewhere where I have running water. I'm not as adventurous as I used to be."

—Laurie Budgar





Rebuilding in Botswana

Tony Carroll's determination to join the Peace Corps grew in part out of a family tragedy. In 1968, his older sister was killed in a car accident. One week after the funeral, her acceptance letter from the Peace Corps arrived.

"That gave me more inspiration," he says. "I was old enough to remember the creation of the Peace Corps and how much it meant to my older sibling's generation."

In 1976, he found himself standing on a dusty African airstrip in the fourth poorest country in the world, tasked with helping newly independent Botswana rebuild after decades of neglect.

Tony Carroll

DU experience: BA economics '75; JD '84

Peace Corps assignment: District officer in Botswana from 1976–78

Hometown: Albany, N.Y.

Current position: Managing director of Manchester Trade Ltd., an international trade consulting firm in Washington, D.C., and adjunct professor in the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies

volunteers," says Carroll, who served as district officer, spearheading a multimillion-dollar development aid program, including construction of schools, hospitals, roads and clean water systems. "Here I am, 23, and being asked to right a ship that had been sinking for decades."

Today, Carroll uses the skills he learned at DU and in Botswana in his work as an international trade and investment adviser specializing in sub-Saharan Africa. He also has dedicated countless pro bono hours to nonprofit organizations working to improve health, ease trade and deter corruption in Africa.

In August, Carroll left for Botswana to take his daughter, a freshman at Vassar College, to the village where it all began for him.

Her plans after college?

She's thinking of joining the Peace Corps.

—Lisa Marshall

Adjusting to Kenyan standard time

Second-year graduate student Theresa Munanga has volunteered in different capacities since she was 14. "I love helping people—it's one of the things I'm most passionate about," she says. Her other great passion is computer programming. At DU, she is pursuing a degree in digital media studies; as a Peace Corps volunteer, she created a program that helps people learn to use a computer without needing a teacher.

"It was life-changing, and I decided I want to do that as a career," she says.

Set to graduate in March 2012, Munanga also wrote and published a book, *No Hurry in Africa: Life as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Kenya* (iUniverse.com, 2010), about her Peace Corps experience. "Basically, it's the emailed newsletters I sent home once a month, plus my journal entries during the time," she says. "It may not be the best book in the world, but it's the type of book I was looking for to read before I left for the Peace Corps."

In the book, Munanga writes of the Kenyan concept of time: "They have a saying in Kenya that 'the watch is yours, but the time is mine.' In the Peace Corps, we were trained that if we want to set up a meeting we must keep in mind that they will be late. Kenyans are very polite people and won't want to disappoint you, so they'll say, 'Yes, I'll be there at noon,' but what they don't tell you is that at noon they first have to feed their children, hang the wash on the line, etc., before they can leave their homes. So they will come when they can."

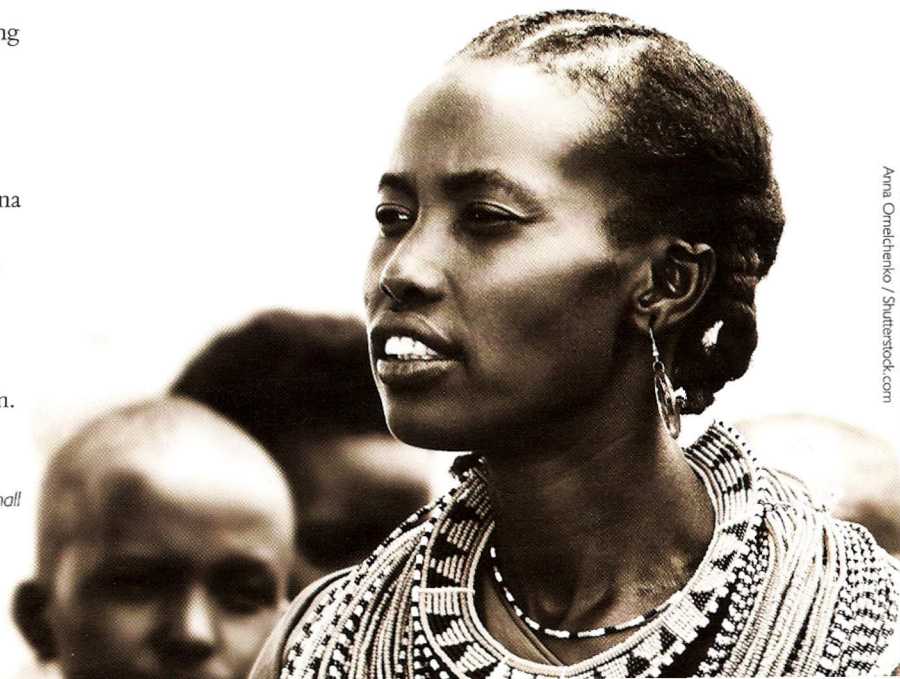
Theresa Munanga

DU experience: Currently a second-year graduate student in digital media studies, with an emphasis in instructional design

Peace Corps assignment: Information communications technology volunteer in Kenya from 2004–07

Hometown: Kauai, Hawaii

—Laurie Budgar



Helping developing countries move forward

Mary Jane Parmentier was already hooked on international travel by the time she was 20. She had spent her junior year (at Southern Connecticut State University) abroad in Spain. "My year there sort of woke me up politically, and this propelled me on into graduate school focusing on international studies," she says.

So it didn't take much to convince her to join the Peace Corps when the opportunity arose. She spent two years teaching English to 11th and 12th graders in a rural village outside of Marrakesh, Morocco. That's also where she met her husband, Bill, a fellow Peace Corps volunteer. When she returned to the U.S., she joined the DU community, first as a study-abroad coordinator, then as a PhD student. Since earning her PhD in 1999 she has been on staff at Arizona State University, where she teaches graduate-level courses in international development at the school's Consortium for Science, Policy & Outcomes.

In her classes, Parmentier focuses on the role of technology in international development, which she says is just as important as basic needs like food, shelter, clothing and medicine.

"If you ignore new information and communication technologies, then countries are going to move further and further behind the rest of the world," she says. "In Malawi, infant mortality began decreasing just because of a program that would allow women to text when they were going into labor, and an ambulance would come and get them. Education is the real key to bringing a society ahead. You also can't go into a village without clean water and food and say, 'Here is a computer.' You need both."

—Laurie Budgar

Mary Jane Parmentier

DU experience: Study-abroad coordinator from 1989–95; PhD international studies '99

Peace Corps assignment: Teaching high school English in Morocco from 1986–88

Hometown: Cheshire, Conn.

Current position: Senior lecturer in international development and international politics at Arizona State University, with a focus on technology and socioeconomic and political development, particularly in Latin America and the Middle East





Kevin Dixon

DU experience: BA physical education and recreation '62

Peace Corps assignment: Established physical education programs and coached basketball and baseball in Medellin, Colombia, 1962–64

Hometown: Norwood, Mass.

Current position: Retired property manager, now living in Spokane, Wash.

Blazing a trail for Pioneers

Kevin Dixon (BA '62) is pretty sure he's the first Peace Corps volunteer from the University of Denver. He didn't know that when he signed up in 1962, but about a decade after he returned from service, he was in town for a conference.

"I went to DU and talked to my old basketball coach, Hoyt Brawner. He was so enthusiastic that I was the first volunteer," Dixon says. "He went into great detail about how the FBI had come out and interviewed people at the school about me—whether there was anything negative about me that would embarrass the United States if they sent me overseas."

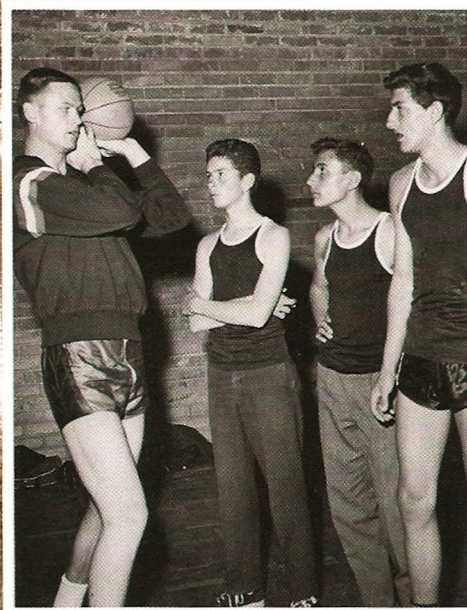
Dixon wasn't an obvious choice for the Peace Corps. He had never traveled outside the U.S. He attended DU on a basketball scholarship and played on the baseball team, and he majored in physical education and recreation—not English or pre-med or any of the other skills that were in high demand in developing nations. He was an all-star first baseman in an amateur league, but "nobody was knocking on my door," he says.

So he applied for the Peace Corps, and in the early summer of 1962 he was accepted, with an assignment to set up sports programs at the University of Antioquia in Medellin, Colombia. When the university was on break, Dixon and his fellow volunteers traveled elsewhere in Colombia, hosting basketball clinics and exhibition games.

Today, Dixon's family has deep connections to Colombia. He met his wife—also a Peace Corps volunteer—in a barrio there. And his now-grown daughters are returned volunteers themselves.

The experience, he says, "opened up a lot for me in the world," including a lucrative job in Saudi Arabia, where he set up women's programs and Little League teams to help retain contractors. "I didn't think anything of going—didn't even give it a second thought," he says. "I knew how easy it was to travel, and how to be a guest in a foreign country."

—Laurie Budgar 



 Read stories of more DU Peace Corps volunteers at bit.ly/DUMagPeaceCorps