

The Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Archival Project
PROJECT GUIDE

[Rev. 10/07]

INTRODUCTION

The Archival Project acts in cooperation with the John F. Kennedy Library to afford former Peace Corps Volunteers the opportunity to include their stories in the National Archives. The Project is an informal network of RPCVs who work directly with the RPCV Collection at the John F Kennedy Library to preserve the Peace Corps' legacy through oral history interviews and the collection of archival materials from those who served as volunteers in the field. In the five years of its existence, more than 40 RPCV interviewers have completed approximately 300 interviews. The Project's basic resource is and will continue to be the unpaid voluntary efforts of those RPCVs who've participated, operating mainly through NPCA Affiliate groups.

Now, as we approach the 50th Anniversary, the Project plans a renewed effort (before it's too late) to seek out those who were the pioneers of the Peace Corps, volunteers from the 1960s. A modest goal for this renewed archival effort is to add 3000 1960s interviews to the RPCV Collection before the year 2011; that would be about 10% of those who served during that period.

This Guide provides the information needed to conduct oral history interviews as a participant in the Archival Project. After orientation and training, the Interviewer works directly with the RPCV Archivist at the Kennedy Library. At present all expenses for equipment, supplies, and shipping are borne by the individual (some NPCA Affiliates provides funds; encourage your group to do so). When you first begin interviewing, please inform the Project Organizer.

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Archivist, The RPCV Collection
The John F. Kennedy Library
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FINDING INTERVIEWEES

Although the Project is emphasizing interviews with 1960s era RPCVs, as the opportunities arise, Project RPCVs are welcome to conduct interviews with others.

1. The simplest starting point is those RPCVs you personally know. Doing initial interviews with friends may make it easier to fully develop your interviewing skills.

2. A good source of Interviewees is the National Peace Corps Association Affiliate in your area. If you are not active in the local Affiliate, you can still contact them and attend a meeting or post a notice in the local newsletter. Affiliates' information can be found at the NPCA website <rpcv.org> .

3. Interviewees can also be found through the NPCA Country of Service Affiliates, also at <rpcv.org> .

4. After you identify an Interview subject, describe the Archival Project and explain the interview process. Interviews usually run 1 1/2 to 3 hours and need to be conducted in a comfortable, quiet environment, free of interruptions and distractions.

THE INTERVIEW

1. Equipment and materials

a. According to RPCV Collection guidelines, all interviews are recorded on audio cassette tape, using **60 minute tapes only** (30 min. per side).

b. Use a cassette tape recorder (not a mini-cassette; not digital audio); all have built-in microphones. It can be a basic desk type recorder (approx. \$30) or a smaller personal cassette recorder (\$40 - \$200). All recorders have a mic input slot if you wish to use an external mic set-up.,

c. In using the built-in mic, test placement of the recorder to best pick up the voices of both Interviewee and Interviewer (usually seated catty-corner).

d. Using battery power gives greater flexibility in interview settings.

2. Facilitating the interview

a. Have a pad and pen with you to jot down notes or follow-up ideas arising in the interview. Be sure to have additional blank copies of **The Basic Data Form** and **The Deed of Gift** (will be completed after interview).

b. Familiarize yourself with the Interview Suggestions (see below).

c. Let Interviewee do the talking. Silences are OK; it takes time to remember.

d. Avoid questions that simply require a Yes/No answer. Use "How", "Why", "Describe", "Compare", "the best", "the worst"; "What happened before/during/after [an event]?"

e. If possible before the interview, suggest Interviewee look over letters, diaries, photos, etc. to jog/provoke memories.

f. It's best to conduct interview with no one else present. Mates, friends, partners sometimes jump in and begin commenting before Interviewee can talk. A third party is a distraction and breaks the conversational flow.

3. Starting the interview

a. Be sure there is a blank tape in the recorder and that the recorder is **on**. Arrange comfortable seating (catty-corner) with the recorder midway between. Get the information needed for your introduction (part b., below).

b. Let the tape run 10-15 seconds. Start, "Today is (Mo/Day/Yr). This is (your name) and I am interviewing (Interviewee) who was a Peace Corps Volunteer in (Country) from (Mo/Yr) to (Mo/Yr) as (Project --- teacher/coop developer/business advisor/etc).

c. **THEN**, start the interview.

4. After the interview

a. Complete **The Basic Data Form** and two (2) copies of **The Deed of Gift**, signed by Interviewee and Interviewer.

b. Label and number each cassette (1/2, 2/2). On the tape itself, number, date, name of Interviewee. On cassette case, number, date, Interviewee, and Interviewer.

c. Mail the interview tapes and forms to:
James Roth, RPCV Archivist
The RPCV Collection
The John F. Kennedy Library
Columbia Point
Boston, MA 02125

PERSONAL PAPERS

1. Either before or after the interview, discuss the donation of personal papers to the RPCV Collection. Personal papers are primarily contemporary accounts (letters, diaries, journals) **written by the RPCV** at the time of volunteer service; also representative sets of photos or slides (carefully captioned). They are as important to the Archives as the interviews.

2. RPCVs wishing to donate papers should first send a list of such items, with a brief description of contents, to the RPCV Archivist either by post or at <james.roth@nara.gov> . Also refer to the Archivist if there are any questions as to suitability of materials.

3 **DO NOT SEND** anything until approval has been given by the RPCV Archivist.

INTERVIEW SUGGESTIONS

For many of us what distinguishes our Peace Corps service is its uniqueness in our lives, so it is not easy to develop a simple list of questions for all interviews. It is hoped that the interviewer can evoke that special quality of each RPCV's experience, which should emerge in a wide-ranging discussion of their service. Keep the focus on the individual's experiences, not on the 'bigger' picture. Try to get specifics and descriptions of people, events, and environments; encourage anecdotes rather than generalizations. When interviewee talks of 'we' or 'they', request the specific identity of who is being referred to.

1. Start interview by letting interviewee describe present family, work, current residence, interests. Then ask interviewee to think back to the year before joining Peace Corps, talk about life then (can include childhood, education, other experiences relevant to becoming a PCV).

2. The most common question, from 1961 to the present, is, of course, 'Why did you join the Peace Corps?' It can appear at various places in the interview and may stimulate memories of the contemporary social and political milieu.

3. How did you hear about the Peace Corps and what made you decide to apply? Describe the process and timing. Did you have a specific country or project in mind?

4. What were your/friends'/family's reactions when you were accepted? Was there any hesitation or reservations? On your part? On their part?

5. What project were you invited to join? How did you prepare yourself and others for dislocation of entering into 2 years of Peace Corps service?

6. Training: Where, faculty, syllabus, technical studies; reaction to other trainees. Language training. The selection process: Surprises, disappointments, enjoyments. Hindsight: Did training prepare you, was it useful to PC service?

7. Initial entry into and reaction to country to which you were assigned: Describe project, PC staff, impression of local people, physical environment.

8. Assignment: Specifics of job assigned, living conditions, typical day, relations with people of country (if possible, speak about individuals encountered there), other PCVs, PC staff; Role of language; Work time vs. leisure time ---- describe both. How life and work changed over the months.

9. End of first year: notable events, reflections after one year, joys and woes, unexpected events, relationships. Health problems? Vacation? Any travel?

10. End of tour: sense of achievement/failure, pluses and minuses in relations and work with people of country; regrets and satisfactions; plans for future.

11. Overall: evaluate your service in light of 3 goals of the Peace Corps:
- a. To provide technical assistance where requested.
 - b. To promote better understanding of the U.S..
 - c. To promote better understanding of other peoples by Americans.

12. Through the years have you continued any kind of involvement with your country of service and/or contact with people from that country? Any continuing Peace Corps involvement? Have you been involved with Third Goal activities? Describe over time to present.

13. Effect on you of your PC service: immediate (change in self, career plans), long term.

Add your own ideas for areas of inquiry or specific questions:

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JOHN F. KENNEDY LIBRARY**

DEED OF GIFT

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interview of: _____

Interviewed by: _____

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I _____ (Interviewee), and I, _____ (Interviewer), do hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title, and interest in the tape recording of personal interviews conducted on _____ (date), at _____ (city, state) and prepared for deposit in the John F. Kennedy Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The tape recording shall be made available for use by researchers as soon as it has been deposited in the John F. Kennedy Library.

(2) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview tape.

(3) Copies of the tape recording may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.

(4) Copies of the tape recording may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the John F. Kennedy Library.

Interviewee (Signature)

Interviewer (Signature)

Date

Date

John F. Kennedy Library
Columbia Point
Boston, MA 02125

Assistant Archivist for
Presidential Libraries

Date

The Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
The John F. Kennedy Library

BASIC DATA FORM - The RPCV Archival Project Oral History Interview

Place of interview: _____

Date of interview: _____

INTERVIEWER : _____

Address (include E-mail and telephone):

Peace Corps Service (country; dates [mo./yr.]; project):

INTERVIEWEE : _____

Address (include E-mail and telephone):

Peace Corps Service (country; dates [mo./yr.]; project):

List and explain unfamiliar names, locations, etc. mentioned in interview:

Interviewer: Write brief abstract of interview on reverse side. For examples, SEE <jfklibrary.org> The RPCV Collection > Oral History Interviews.

EXAMPLES of INTERVIEW ABSTRACTS

(From <jfklibrary.org> ; The RPCV Collection ; Oral History Interviews)

ECUADOR

Chambers, Billie Jean (Ellsworth), 1962 - 1964

Billie Jean Chambers was a Peace Corps Volunteer along with her husband Dave in a Peace Corps Héifer Project in Ecuador from 1962 to 1964. Chambers, who comes from a farm background, joined the Peace Corps before completing the degree program at Western Illinois University. She trained at Montana State University, Bozeman in intensive language, tropical agriculture, and home economics. In the second stage of her training she worked in Puerto Rico because the training camp was full. She worked four weeks in a small village with a local extension agent. In her first year she was assigned to Guayaquil to work with an Ecuadorian extension agent. In her second year, with her husband Dave, she was assigned to a more remote area where she worked more extensively and intensively on her own.

2 tapes. Interviewed by Robert Klein, July 27, 2004.

Collins, Robert M., 1998 - 2000

Robert Collins entered the Peace Corps after graduating from college. He was chosen for an agricultural project in Ecuador. After three months of in country training, he was assigned to work in the town of Zamora in southern Ecuador, but a conflict with the NGO in that community over training for natural agricultural methods rather than chemical solutions resulted in reassignment after the first two months. He was then sent to the town of Maldonado on the northern coast. Here he became very involved with a farming cooperative. Among other things he provided leadership in the cooperative's weekly meetings, helped start a pig raising project, and arranged for the farmers to visit other farming communities to research new projects.

Two tapes. Interviewed by Barbara Hodgdon, July 18, 2004.

Mehrer, Julia, 1963 - 1964

Although Julia Mehrer only served four months in Ecuador, her accounts of training are very descriptive. Mehrer began training in November 1963, with a month in Puerto Rico at an Outward Bound school. The group then was split into Urban and Rural. The Urban group spent a week in San Antonio. The Rural group spent the same period in UNESCO school, "CREFAL" in Patzcuaro, Mexico. Stationed in Saraguro, Ecuador, Mehrer was engaged to a former PC trainee. She married in August of 1964 in Guayaquil and moved to Venezuela.

2 tapes. Interviewed by Robert Klein, April 19, 2002.

Mortenson, Heather, 1998 - 2000

After having to evacuate her Peace Corps position in Sri Lanka, Heather rejoined the Peace Corps in 1998 to serve in Ecuador. She worked as a rural health educator in the mountainous area of Ecuador, near the Colombian border. She worked with World Vision and health promotion, including teaching classes on hand washing, teeth brushing and latrine usage.

2 tapes. Interviewed by Katie Langland October 14, 2006.

ERITREA

Shively, Ellen, 1968 - 1970

An Army nurse (L.P.N.) with five years military experience who decided for personal reasons to shift from "the war corps" to the Peace Corps. Large Ethiopia-Eritrea training program, 1968. Stage in Philadelphia, 6 weeks in Virgin Islands, specialized training in Addis. Served as "dresser" educator for two years in Eritrea. Trained in Amharic but then had to learn Tigrina. After two years in Peace Corps, re-joined military and served in Vietnam.
2 Tapes. Interviewed by Robert Klein, January 14, 2003.

ESTONIA

Ladewig, Roy D. , 1994 - 1996

Roy D. Ladewig served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Tapa, Estonia working on small enterprise development. During his tour he also served in the Air Force Reserve.
2 tapes. Interviewed by Joanne Roll, May 4, 2006.

Murray, Sue, 1999 - 2000

Sue Murray worked as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Estonia on social program development.
1 tape. Interviewed by Ruth Calligan, May 7, 2004.

ETHIOPIA

Curtis, Gloria Gieseke, 1963 - 1965

Gloria Curtis was a Peace Corps volunteer (Secondary Education) in Ehtiopia II. Holding only a high school diploma and four years secretarial experience, Curtis trained at UCLA in the Secondary Education Project and was among the top three in learning Amharic. Assigned as a part of a special team of volunteers who were to establish a university evening school affiliated with Hailie Selassie University in Addis. The new school was in Asmba, Eritrea. Served as administrator of program with three Peace Corps teachers and one Ethiopian administrator. She continued in this role during the second year and added teaching 8th grade English.
3 tapes. Interviewed by Robert Klein, May 5, 2003.

Ferris, George, 1963 - 1965

George Ferris was a teacher in Ethiopia from 1963 to 1965. He trained at the University of California, Los Angeles. Ferris taught Chemistry to High School students to encourage them to become teachers. He taught Algebra in night school to women.
2 tapes. Interviewed by Ernest Zaremba, August 20, 2004.

Mehary, Cynthia Ellison, 1965-1967

Cynthia Mehary had just graduated from the University of Buffalo when she decided to join the Peace Corps rather than take a teaching position. She trained for the assignment in Salt Lake City, which she comments on as an African American woman in the 1960s. As the first woman teacher in a Jesuit co-ed school in Addis Ababa, Mehary taught mostly business subjects.
2 tapes. Interviewed by Frieda Fairburn, July 20, 2006.