A Reflection of Service in the United States Peace Corps

by

Joseph C. Leuer

RPCV Guatemala, Fisheries, 1986-1988

The Toughest Job You'll Ever Love. That motto, sitting on a recruiter's table in the student common area, caught my eye in 1985 as a college junior majoring natural science. I was looking for a new adventure and a way to serve my nation, having just been notified that I was to be separated from the Reserve Officers Training Program because of a permanent hearing loss in one ear. Disappointed at having one door of opportunity closed, I was eager to move on with creating a future beyond the college dormitories. I thought, "*The toughest job*—how could this be any tougher than the Army summer training program I just completed?" *A job I could love* was a phrase I could understand. My eyes focused on the poster boards and brochures of all the happy, smiling faces of the volunteers working in exotic locations. I attended the first meeting, watched enticing videos and spoke with the recruiter. I learned that this was not something one joined, but one had to be invited to become a member. This elite selection process intrigued me and drew me in. I was sold, however I now had to spend the next year selling myself to the Peace Corps, filling out applications, interviewing, health screenings, and demonstrating a willingness to offer myself up to the global needs of the Peace Corps. I received my letter of invitation in early 1986 and immediately accepted the fisheries program but without any knowledge of which region of the world I was going to work. I wanted adventure and throwing myself into the unknown was feeding my appetite. I was in, but I had no idea of the life changing experience the Peace Corps would have on me.

U.S. Ambassador Alberto M. Piedra swears in Joseph C. Leuer as a PCV, Guatemala City, Guatemala, 1986.

For the last 21 years, I have reflected on my Peace Corps experiences and how they collectively have shaped my worldview, helped me better understand human nature and embrace differing opinions and ways to solve issues, and define how and where I spend my money and free time. I am a different person due to the Peace Corps. This is a lesson that I continue to share with those who want to hear about my experiences or are interested in being a Peace Corps Volunteer. The Peace Corps is as much about giving as it is about receiving. It is an unfortunate reality that we usually get more from our experience than what we leave behind once our active service is complete. As such, one must have

Emilio Sanchez, then, with his chickens and fish pond, c. 1987.

Emilio Sanchez, now, with Joseph C. Leuer during a return visit in 2004.

a deep, selfish reason to serve versus a shallow, altruistic reason because at the end of the day, when one is deathly sick, facing failed projects or rejection, experiencing culture shock, or the million other issues associated with Peace Corps service, it is your own deep seated selfish reason that keeps you in the game. It is this determination that will make you a successful volunteer while serving others that have greater needs than yourself. This is a lesson that I learned and one that I apply everyday to include carrying out the Peace Corps life-long 3rd goal—helping promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

The Peace Corps continues to live within my soul. However, I wonder had I known that the adventure I sought as a young man would have such a deep lasting impact on my life, if I would still have had the fortitude to accept my invitation. *The Toughest Job You'll Ever Love*, you can bet your last dollar.

Fish farm in the Aldea of Belen, Esquipulas, Chiquimula, Guatemala.

Joseph C. Leuer with Rosa and her first partial fish harvest. c. 1988.

Joseph C. Leuer with his long-time friend, Rafael Rodriguez and his new born son Alan Jose, in 2004. Mr. Leuer trained Rafael to manage the fisheries projects when his service was completed in 1988.