



*OU Peace Corps trainees in fisheries, Class of '84, prepare to take their expertise to a world that needs their help.*

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## THE PEACE CORPS

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# *To Feed a Hungry World*

By JOYE R. SWAIN

They are a special group of students. They never attend class on main campus, never visit the Union, never buy a book from the book store or check one out of the library, never see the inside of the football stadium — but Peace

Corps trainees in fisheries never forget OU. Although they are Sooners for only 10 weeks, the training they receive in Norman and their subsequent experience as volunteers in other countries change their lives dramatically.

6:30 a.m. The late October sky is black with only the twinkling stars and the moon for light. The rising sun won't illuminate the horizon for another hour.

Yet 25 Peace Corps trainees already are hard at work. Guided by flashlights and shivering in the 38-degree morning, they peer anxiously into the murky waters of 15-by-30-foot ponds to see how their fish survived the night.

A frown creases Dea Macavoy's brow. Her pond is stocked with tilapia, a tropical fish. While they are all right now, a drop of just a few degrees could spell disaster — and a cold front is coming in.

Charles Chong has another problem. He found dead fish in his pond. Tracks on the bank indicate a raccoon visitor.

Fish gathered at the shallow end of his pond in search of oxygen worry Kirk Henning.

One by one, each student carefully surveys his or her project and makes whatever adjustments are needed. Only when they are satisfied that all is in order do they pause for breakfast.

They eat heartily, for a typical work day may not end until 11 p.m. During that time they will have stretched their minds, strained their muscles and struggled with seemingly insolvable problems. They may have walked five miles or more, waded into chilly, chest-deep water to drain the ponds, filled and transported heavy tanks of fish from one place to another, all the while having had their motivations, attitudes and opinions questioned and evaluated.

The training is so rugged that, on an average, 23 percent of the trainees fail to complete the OU program.

"The training program has been a culture shock," says Angelo Mitchell. "It's far tougher than I expected."

"I'm used to being on my own," Greg Kirkpatrick comments. "I guess the hardest thing for me has been the lack of control over my own life."

Rees Warne finds the program in general a positive experience. "It can be very frustrating, though," she observes. "Even to get through one day sometimes is a major accomplishment."

Before they leave OU, the trainees



*As part of her training in fish transport, Karen Sundberg digs into the mud of a partially drained South Campus pond to retrieve tilapia, an African perch described "as aquatic chicken," being moved to a heated pond in Oklahoma City.*

will have learned fish transport, seining and stocking ponds, spawning and breeding fish, surveying and site selection, construction of monks (cement drainage systems), fertilization of ponds, feeding fish and much more.

In addition, they have reports to write. "Lately a major problem is with written communication skills," explains Master Trainer Eileen O'Hara. "Volunteers must be able to communicate on paper, because in the field they'll be required to write technical studies, budgets and progress reports."

The trainees seem to thrive on this rigorous regimen. They glow with excitement and anticipation.

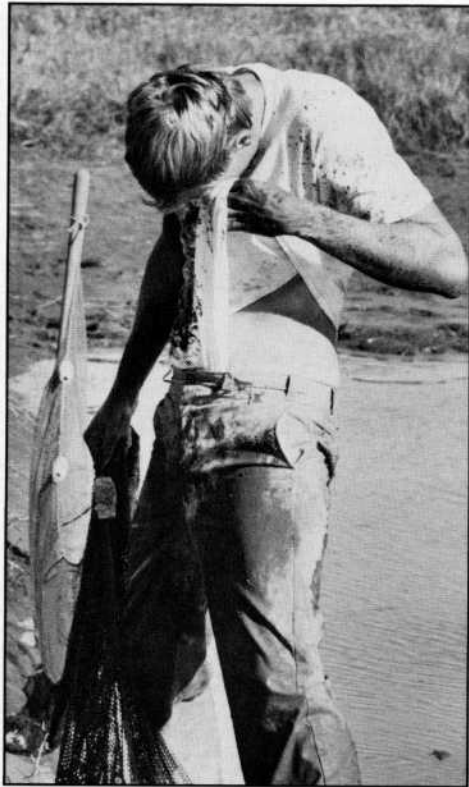
A good deal of their enthusiasm is the result of a very special program originated in 1966 by Dr. Howard Clemens, professor emeritus of zoology and former director of the OU Fisheries Research Center. Funded by Peace Corps training contracts, the Peace Corps program in fisheries started by Clemens has been so suc-

cessful that OU has become the main U.S. training site for Peace Corps aquaculture.

The present trainers, all former Peace Corps volunteers, are enthusiastic about their time with Clemens. O'Hara, for example, came to OU in 1980. "I found it the most exciting educational experience anywhere I know of," she exclaims. Ana (Kiki) Hiott, the other master trainer, worked with Clemens for three sessions. "He's a superior trainer," she recalls, "just an incredible teacher, one of the best I've ever seen."

Prior to Clemens' retirement in 1982, the department of zoology created a new position in fish culture to support the Peace Corps project. Dr. William L. Shelton, associate professor of zoology and current Peace Corps project director, then became the only OU faculty member working with the Peace Corps fisheries program.

The Peace Corps has evolved since its founding in the 1960s. In the early period volunteers often were idealistic



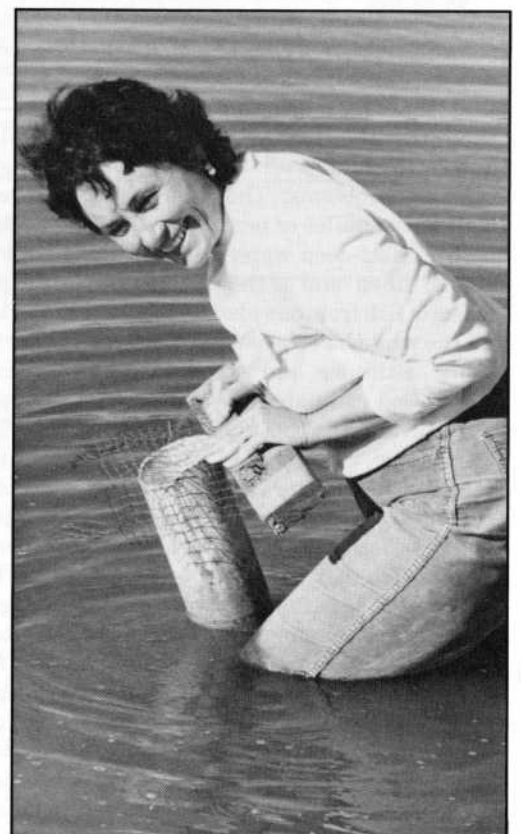
*Mitch McLean discovers mud-in-your-eye is a hazard when seining for carp.*



*Manchester, New Hampshire, native Heather Dowd tests the water of a catfish pond on the University's North Campus to determine dissolved oxygen content.*



*The tilapia and carp in Mitch's net represent the kind of harvest which could mean a better life for fish farmers in underdeveloped countries.*



*Dea Macavoy wades into a draining pond to remove some tilapia for a potential buyer.*



but lacked skills; today the major emphasis is on technical development.

"Cultural exchanges are not enough," says O'Hara. "We want to play a major development role."

Shelton agrees. "We want Peace Corps volunteers to know the art of fish farming so they can help people in developing countries solve their food problems by increasing their fish population."

Trainees in the fisheries program have college degrees. Most have had basic biology and chemistry courses. Bright, articulate, well-educated — the cream of the crop of American young people — most could command high-paying jobs. Yet they stand willing to spend two years at minimal pay teaching people in Third World countries to grow fish.

Mitchell is a good example. "I was testing petrochemicals at a lab and making lots of money, but it wasn't satisfying enough for me. Things in my life were getting stagnant. I needed something more relevant. Raising fish in Guatemala is basic to human needs. Naturally, I joined for those other reasons that other people sign up for — adventure and experience — but also because in the Corps I can make an impact. At this period in my life, that's important to me. I want to help people."

Many, like Daniel Wohl, emphasize what they hope to gain from the experience. "I see it as an opportunity to gain a lot of knowledge, a lot of skills. I'll be able to spend two years in another culture. I'm going to become fluent in Spanish. I'll learn fish farming."

"But I'm not doing it just for myself either," he adds. "I'm doing it because I see a need. Within the program of the Peace Corps, I'll be able to help people. To help others you have to have something to offer. I expect I'll learn more from this than from anything I've ever done."

Janeen Simon injects economic practicality into her discussion. "You can't just go and live in some country for a couple of years unless you have the financial means to do it without working. And it's very difficult to find a way to support yourself, especially in an underdeveloped country. If you want to go someplace to live for a



*Frances Aull, top photo, finds that transferring fish from one pond to another requires getting into your work. At bottom, trainees take a drier route while recording data on the condition of their ponds from the safety of the bank.*

while, you need some organization like the Peace Corps."

Dea and Jim Macavoy, in their 40s and the only married couple in this group, echo some of the same desires of the younger trainees. "We knew the time was coming when our children would be gone," Dea relates. "We didn't want to go stagnant. We wanted to keep growing. On the other hand, I think what makes life worthwhile is helping other people and going outside of yourself."

Her husband Jim brings up another issue most Peace Corps trainees would agree with. "Security isn't a big word in our vocabulary. For me, it's extremely important that I don't let security become a millstone around my neck. I want to feel free to try new

ventures and learn new things about myself and the world.

"We could have easily stayed at home. It's a beautiful place. I have a secure position. Everything is there for us. But we're not oriented toward that. I've found that many people, if they could forego the need for security, would do what we're doing."

But mixed with their idealistic desire to serve others and a strong urge for adventure and self-growth, most trainees reflect a realistic view of what they may accomplish.

"We're all being taught that if we can get one good farm started we're doing a great thing," explains Simon. "Statistics say there's an 80 percent malnutrition rate among children under five years old in Guate-

mala. I'm just trying to help them feed their babies enough so they'll live to be six years old."

Ronald Lopez and Eduardo Cintron, both Spanish-speaking hispanics, wanted the challenge of learning a third language and experiencing a new culture. Although most of their trainee group are going on to Guatemala, Lopez and Cintron chose to go to Zaire in Africa.

After their 10-week stint at OU, the trainees will undergo a second 10-week training session in language and culture in their host countries. Only after successfully completing that training program will they attain volunteer status.

Trainer David Reside's volunteer experience is indicative of what the trainees can expect on the job. "In Zaire," he reports, "I worked with about 80 farmers, but real strongly with about 25. Altogether they built about 100 ponds while I was there. They were getting excellent production from their ponds. I think three or four people I worked with will continue doing fish farming for a long time and that's not bad — three or four lives changed in two years' time. If I could do that every two years of my life, that would be fantastic."

Gustavo Teran, another trainer, had a different experience. Because of his fluency in Spanish, he served as liaison between the Ecuadorian Peace Corps Fisheries Office and the government agency for the development of the Amazon Basin. In that position he conducted feasibility surveys to select a site suitable for fish farming. A Yumbo Indian cooperative made up of 10 villages was selected, and Teran directed the project.

"By the end of my two years," he says, "50 families had begun to raise fish."

That sense of accomplishment makes the fisheries program one of the Peace Corps' most successful projects. "It's easy to see the results," reports Hiott. "We generally get positive feedback because raising fish is tangible; anybody can do it as long as he's got the water and the terrain. I've got letters from volunteers saying that when a farmer advertised he would sell his fish, every single fish was sold in five minutes."

But what happens to Peace Corps volunteers in the fisheries program after they have served their two years is not always so rewarding.

"You expect things to be different when you go overseas," Hiott explains, "but when you return you expect things to be the same, and they aren't."

"It's almost as traumatizing an adjustment to come back to this society as it was to go away," Shelton adds. "Sometimes people have difficulty breaking back into the job market in the U.S. The experience they gained in the Peace Corps is not always marketable in this country. A person who had a job, say in a laboratory, for that

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length of time would have more salable experience than someone who's been overseas."

"We use returnees as trainers," he explains. "It provides us with instructors with recent experience in the field, and it gives the returning volunteer time to adjust and find a job or get ready to go back to college."

Reside recalls his return from Zaire. "When I returned I didn't realize I was suffering culture shock, but looking back on it I realize I was. My family was great, very supportive, and I felt comfortable with them. But it was difficult to talk with friends my own age, acquaintances, and people I'd known before. When I got the call to come back to OU as a trainer, I jumped at the chance."

Hiott adds, "Working as a trainer is a good readjustment, because you're so busy. Remember that while the trainees have a tough, long schedule, the trainers spend time planning and coordinating activities, so their days are even longer and harder."

Eventually many former Peace Corps people go into international

work with organizations such as AID or FAO. Others join government agencies — the Fish and Wildlife Service or the Bureau of Land Reclamation, for example. Others get advanced degrees and teach. Some run their own fish farms or work for large fish-producing companies. A surprisingly large percentage of returnees find their way back to the Norman area. Within a 50-mile radius of Norman, seven former volunteers who trained at OU are currently working in fish farming.

Still new trainees come. "We're working at our capacity right now," Shelton says. "Since our program began at OU, we've handled over 500 people going to some 31 countries. This year alone 147 people trained here for 20 countries. Our first program was for India, but now almost all our programs are for Africa, with Zaire being by far the largest. However, currently we're preparing trainees for Central America and some Caribbean islands also. With 58 ponds available at OU, we can handle only a limited number of trainees at one time. But that's desirable because the groups are kept to a manageable size.

"This is a very cost-effective U.S. foreign aid program," he contends. "It produces a self-sustaining increase in food production with a low initial cost and without continual input from American taxpayers. The trainees receive only \$28 a week during training and very low pay while on assignment."

"We'll have our needs met," Wohl says, "but we won't actually be living on the level of the farmers. Many of the needs of the people there aren't being met. That's one of the reasons we're going. But we're not going to be living in such a way that we're alienated from them either."

And so it goes. From Fiji to Gabon, Tanzania to Costa Rica, Thailand to Western Samoa, Peace Corps volunteers are applying knowledge and methods of fish farming they learned at OU to help people in other countries increase their food supply. Meanwhile, back in Norman, another group is being trained — part of an idealistic yet highly practical project to build a better world. 