

People to People, The Peace Corps in Sarawak

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Introduction

The jubilee year for the United States Peace Corps worldwide was 2011. It was also the fiftieth anniversary of the Three Rivers Secondary School in Mukah, Sarawak, on the island of Borneo, where Peace Corps teachers taught in the 1960s. This account of the Peace Corps in Sarawak is a salute, a sort of cherries jubilee, to the Peace Corps volunteers and to the Sarawak people they knew. When I started this project, with no Peace Corps experience, I knew more about Sarawak than about the Peace Corps. As I've found out, the 1960s and 1970s were a complicated time in a complicated part of the world, not only for the Americans involved, but also for the Sarawak people.

For those unfamiliar with Sarawak, it is about the size of Pennsylvania in the United States, is on the third largest island in the world, and is now a state in Malaysia. Any standard reference will note that Sarawak people belong to a raft of language groups, large and small, and describe most of them as native. The Chinese might be described as non-native, especially in older European reports, despite the fact that some Chinese have local lineages longer than so-called natives who have recently filtered into Sarawak from Indonesia. By religious characterization, we are told that Sarawak Malays are Muslim, but so are parts of other non-Malay groups, such as the Melanaus. Until a century or so ago, the rest, excluding the Chinese and all resident British expatriates, were animists, burdened with some superstition but not burdened with the notion of sin. Since that time many of the animists have become Christians of one kind or another, depending on which brand of missionary showed up in their bailiwick. Quite a few Chinese are also Christians, some having ancestors who became converted in China before they fled to Sarawak over a hundred years ago, but most Chinese are Buddhists or practice some form of Buddhist-related religion. The erstwhile animists were called Dayaks by the British

colonialists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but today the majority of Dayaks are called Iban or Bidayuh while other indigenous groups are called Penan or Orang Ulu. Even Orang Ulu is a grab-bag of up-river Kenyah, Kayan, and other ethnic groups. To complicate this name-calling, marriages have been fairly common between native groups, including the Chinese. In Iban-Bidayuh families, for instance, people may identify themselves as either Iban or Bidayuh, according to personal preference. In contrast, non-Malays who marry Malays become Malays themselves by Malaysian law, that is, become Muslims and so establish Malay-ness in their descendents. All of these groups belong to complex cultures far beyond the vague ideas of many Americans, including some early Peace Corps officials in Washington, D. C. In addition, while there may be places in England that have not changed much in the last fifty years, the same cannot be said of Sarawak. It is now a patchwork of roads, oil palm plantations, logged-out forests, and polluted rivers.

Like the Sarawakians, the Peace Corps volunteers who came to Sarawak also possessed a variety of backgrounds and religions, but all spoke a common language. Unlike the British in Sarawak, the Americans preferred wearing flip-flops and never wore socks. Most of the volunteers were young adults newly out of college who were of European ancestry, but some had other forbearers, such as Japanese, Chinese, Latin American, or African. While the majority of the volunteers were men, a sizeable number were women, some of whom came as part of a team with their husbands. Other women volunteers, like most of the men, were unmarried.

Since Sarawak was the fabled land of headhunters, the mother of one Sarawak volunteer worried that her son's head would be cut off by the natives. As it turned out, the bad old days were gone but not forgotten. Instead of losing his head, a volunteer might gain a head. This happened to another Peace Corps volunteer. He became a man of two heads. The father of a student in a Bintulu school had taken seven heads in his head-hunting career and presented one of them, dried and smelly, to the student's Peace Corps teacher, who had no intention of offending his longhouse host.¹ Imagining what American customs officials would think of it, the volunteer accepted the extra head graciously on the condition that it would remain comfortably among the other wrapped heads dangling from the house beams. The terms were agreeable to both sides. Fifty years later the volunteer still owned two heads, his and that of some unknown Dayak slain before he himself was born. Other Peace Corps volunteers acquired two families, through marriage or adoption, one in Sarawak and one in the United States, but no other volunteer has admitted to having two heads.²

This account of the Peace Corps is for the Sarawak people, for Peace Corps volunteers and other foreigners who worked in Sarawak in the 1960s and early 1970s, and for anyone else who wants to know more about the complicated world events of that era. This includes all former or present Peace Corps volunteers and the people they know today.

Many Sarawak volunteers who subsequently lived overseas have carried their Sarawak experiences with them all over the world. But the majority of people affected

¹ A longhouse is a simple condominium on stilts, with small apartments in a row, all facing a communal veranda.

² E. Turner, personal communication, 15 February, 2011.

one way or another by the Sarawak Peace Corps are those who live in Sarawak itself—thousands of them, the now-graying grandmothers and grandfathers, the former students who have had reunions with their Peace Corps teachers in recent years, and all the others whose careers and outlooks were influenced by the informal Americans who were friendly and, it is rumored, fun.

While a few Peace Corps groups have had miserable experiences in other countries, this was not the case for Sarawak. The volunteers in Sarawak gave of their best and felt that they received in return more benefits than they had ever expected. While this account is not a collection of poignant reminiscences, it is one woven of events both large and small because both dimensions were critical to the events in Sarawak in the years when the Peace Corps was there. These long-ago events give a shared past to the narrative and a shared present both to older Americans and Sarawakians and to their families.

The majority of former Sarawak Peace Corps volunteers are still alive and bright-eyed, being anywhere from 62 to 75 years old. Many remain sincere internationalists. Quite a few of them live and work outside the United States, or did so for a years, some in Thailand or Singapore, others in Japan, Africa, Indonesia, Samoa, England, or India. Even more Sarawak people who knew Peace Corps volunteers are still alive and bright-eyed. Most of them were teenage students in the 1960s and early 1970s, making this group in the over-50 age range today.

While more former Peace Corps volunteers have returned to Sarawak over the years than Sarawakians have traveled to the United States, ties between the two groups have remained strong. Returning to Sarawak is especially prevalent among the Peace Corps volunteers who married Sarawakians and have nieces, nephews, or grandchildren in Sarawak. Others return to Sarawak to see old friends or former students, or to see the startling urbanization and saddening loss of rainforest, or even to see the tourist-industry cultural shows.

Today Sarawak is a world of younger people, in the aftermath of the Cold War, Malaysian federation, the rise of China, the Vietnam War, and globalized consumerism with all its dubious benefits on the planet's environment and on its "gross domestic happiness." This younger generation in many countries is, in some part, a legacy of the Peace Corps volunteers who worked there. But the Peace Corps workers in Sarawak and elsewhere represented more than Western consumerism. In an important sense, they represented man's humanity to man—and woman's to woman.

Acknowledgments

Scores of Peace Corps volunteers, Sarawak people, and others familiar with Sarawak in the 1960s and 70s have been indispensable to the development of this narrative of Peace Corps history by providing personal information, photographs, text materials, and moments of reminiscing over a cup of coffee in Sarawak, California, Oregon, or elsewhere. They are listed in the notes and the reference list. I have been privileged to be the coordinator of all the stories these myriad people have told. I am indebted to all of them. It is difficult to single out those among the contributors who have been of the most crucial help, but I must mention the early support given by Rod Zwirner and Paul Colter; the manuscript reviews provided by Daniel Chew, Kathy Hendrix, Bob Lynn, Cliff Marks, Dick Morten, Matt Seymour, and Phillip Thomas; the long-running conversations with Bob Bergstrom, Ken Shuey, and Matt Seymour; and the facilitating roles of Stu Kearns and Ed Price in Hilo, Don Hall in Corvallis, Florence Enau in Miri, and Ann Appleton in Kuching. Of special importance, Jayl Langub was the prime mover for getting this project started and has remained a lifeline to Sarawak for the project throughout its several years of development.

Abbreviations and Glossary

CCO Clandestine Communist Organization (Sarawak)
CIA Central Intelligence Agency (U. S.)
CT Communist terrorist; a British acronym
CUSO Canadian University Service Overseas
Dayak A general term for Borneo indigenous people
D. C. District of Columbia (U. S.)
D. O. or DO District Office or Officer (Sarawak)
FBI Federal Bureau of Investigation (U. S.)
GSS Government secondary school (Sarawak)
4-H stands for Head, Heart, Hands, Health, focusing on club activities for young farmers
NEPSA New English Primary Syllabus Advisor
NKCP North Kalimantan Communist Party, also called the Sarawak Communist Organization
PCV Peace Corps Volunteer
PEMS Primary English Medium Scheme: for 20-25 school hours per week (Sarawak)
PWD Public Works Department (Sarawak)
RM Ringgit Malaysia: the Malaysian dollar, equal to about 33 cents U. S.
SCO Sarawak Communist Organization
Temenggong a chief of highest rank, higher than a penghulu or headman
TNKU Tentara Nasional Kalimantan Utara (the rebel North Borneo National Army)
Ulu upper; up-river
U. S. AID United States Agency for International Development
VSA Volunteer Service Abroad (New Zealand)
VSO Volunteer Service Overseas (Britain)

Part 1. Americans in Colonial Sarawak

The lives of the Sarawak people that Peace Corps volunteers knew had been shaped by their history. This history included foreign rule from the nineteenth century onward, thereby giving Sarawakians some insight into how foreigners, especially the British, worked and thought. While Sarawak people had had much less exposure to Americans, some of it was notable, although less pervasive than the exposure to Peace Corps volunteers they first experienced in the 1960s.

Sarawak up to World War II: the peripheral Americans

Even before the American war of independence from the British in the late 1700s, Americans roamed the world for trade, adventure, or their own brand of warfare and conquest. In the mid-nineteenth century, the United States was a budding world power.³ It was trade that led the first American sailing ships to Borneo and to Sarawak in particular. Because most of Southeast Asia was then controlled by European empires, American foreign policy focused on more independent parts of the region. Sarawak was then ruled by an English adventurer, James Brooke, the first of several “White Rajahs” who governed Sarawak. For this reason, the United States became the first country to recognize Sarawak as an independent state, despite the fact that most Americans at the time did not know that Sarawak existed. Even today, some Americans—if they have heard of Sarawak at all—seem to think that it is in Africa or Eastern Europe.

This American recognition of Sarawak occurred in 1850 when Joseph Balestier, the first American Consul in the area, arrived in the capital town, Kuching, with a letter from President Zachary Taylor. The letter addressed James Brooke as “Sovereign Prince of Sarawak” and thanked him “in the name of the American nation for his exertions in the suppression of piracy” and for “his humane endeavors to bring his subjects and the neighboring tribes of Malays into a condition of civilization.”⁴ In Kuching, Balestier saluted the Sarawak flag, an act which James Brooke described as “a great honor paid by a great nation.” The salute signaled a stark contrast to the British position, which was to deny Sarawak recognition of sovereignty. The outcome of Balestier’s visit was an agreement of peace, friendship, and commerce, although little commerce ensued. Sarawak’s external trade was largely with Singapore up to the 1960s. It wasn’t much at first—a little gold, antimony, edible birds’ nest, and sago.

A few American naturalists, such as William T. Hornaday and William H. Furness, arrived later in the nineteenth century, and in 1904 “Tuan” Hoover started the first Methodist school in Sarawak.⁵ Except for missionaries, Sarawak saw few other Americans until after the Second World War. During all this time Sarawak was under the influence or outright domination of the British. On one occasion in 1938, the USS *Conquest Pigeon* came up the Sarawak River accompanied by five U. S. submarines,

³ The first official American vessel to encounter Borneo was the USS. Constitution, which visited Brunei in 1845.

⁴ Baring-Gould and Bampfylde, 1989, p. 114.

⁵ Baer, 2011. A variety of Christian denominations existed in Sarawak, confusing some residents. One Iban man asked how they could choose between those that marry but don’t drink and those that drink but don’t marry.

presumably on a friendly visit.⁶ Outside of this rare appearance of the American flag in Sarawak, the United States largely turned its attention to global areas outside of the British Empire where it had more freedom of action. Then in the 1960s, as the British Empire was turning to dust, American Peace Corps volunteers became a noticeable presence in Sarawak, an event that has had effects on Sarawak's society to this day.

The story of the Peace Corps in Sarawak on the island of Borneo has been neglected, in part because no map today shows Sarawak as a nation-state. With its neighboring state, Sabah, it is now grafted onto Malaysia, which gets the international news coverage. But Sarawak was originally an independent land of many cultural groups separated by mountains and river systems, speaking a babel of languages and living close to the natural world of rainforests and seascapes. Later it was nominally controlled by the Brunei Sultanate, still later by English autocratic rule, the so-called Brooke era. This was followed by Japanese occupation during World War II and then full colonial status as a British Crown Colony. Although the Peace Corps arrived in Sarawak under the aegis of the British Colonial Office during this colonial fade-out, it survived there for over a decade after Sarawak was hustled into the chimera of Malaysia. Americans, once peripheral actors on the Sarawak stage, became a noteworthy presence when the Peace Corps arrived. Sarawak had never seen so many young Americans before the 1960s.

World War II events: the red eyes

Into the 1940s, the British controlled Sarawak's foreign affairs but built no defensive positions against Japanese attacks. As a result, in late 1941 the Japanese easily invaded Sarawak. Many people outside of the rural uplands endured harsh treatment by the Japanese, but in return they obtained some Japanese heads to display in their longhouses. The Japanese surrendered to the Allies in Kuching in August, 1945, their last surrender event in Borneo.

A few American military people started showing up in Sarawak in 1944. According to the tale of a longhouse elder, told to a Peace Corps volunteer in the mid-1960s, the upriver people of eastern Sarawak remembered Americans from the time of the Second World War. The storyteller called those Americans "red eyes," to describe how they looked after drinking far too much rice wine (*tuak*) offered by the hospitable longhouse residents. Possible corroboration of this long-remembered event is recorded in a book written by two Peace Corps volunteers, Len Edwards and Peter Stevens.⁷

Under General Douglas MacArthur's Far East Command, then based in Australia, multinational troops harassed the Japanese occupation forces in Borneo in 1944 and 1945 but this did not include any American troops on the ground in Sarawak. However, in June, 1945 U. S. Forces from the Seventh Fleet landed in Brunei and on Labuan Island, off the northern Borneo coast, which was then a Japanese stronghold.⁸ Once captured, Labuan served as a forward base for the Allies in naval exercises against Japanese shipping, during which time a U. S. minesweeper was wrecked and sank off Labuan.⁹ Americans also flew reconnaissance flights, and B-24 Liberators ran bombing raids, on

⁶ Reece, 1998, p. 22.

⁷ Edwards and Stevens, 1971, p. 56.

⁸ Gould, 1969.

⁹ D. Hadhazy, personal communication, September, 2010.

northern Borneo oil installations and Japanese positions in Sarawak towns such as Miri. Town bombing became heavy in the spring of 1945. According to the two Peace Corps writers, Edwards and Stevens, a U. S. Navy plane crashed in late 1944 in Telak, in the Limbang District of Sarawak, with nine American survivors. A Kedayan man helped them get up the Trusan River into Lun Bawang territory where they were helped by Palang Apad and others on their trek to avoid any encounter with Japanese patrols. After the Americans split into two groups, one group headed for the neighboring state of Sabah and its members were killed by the Japanese there, but the four airmen in the other group survived the war and returned home.¹⁰

It was mainly Australian troops who invaded and liberated Sarawak from the Japanese.¹¹ The British discouraged American involvement in northern Borneo, just as General MacArthur insisted that only Americans would liberate the Philippines. As the British had little sea or air power in Southeast Asia during the entire war, the U. S. was the main provider of vessels and aircraft. In particular, U. S. submarines patrolled the South China Sea by 1943, disrupting Japanese supply convoys to and from Southeast Asian ports. A U. S. submarine even “investigated” Kuching harbor in Sarawak in 1944, but it found no Japanese shipping there.¹²

After Japan formally surrendered in 1945, some Japanese army units were still unwilling to believe the war was over and continued to menace areas of Sarawak. U. S. submarines delivered British-style commandos to parts of Borneo, including the Mukah and Bintulu areas of Sarawak, to fight these Japanese as a first step by the British to re-take their former spheres of influence. One of the Mukah commandos was a Eurasian originally from that area who knew the local scene. In the mid-1960s he was again living in Mukah and, as the head of the Mukah District Council, was the boss of a young Peace Corps volunteer stationed there.

During the war, a few Americans were brought to Batu Lintang prison near Kuching after being captured by the Japanese elsewhere, one having been captured as far away as Java in 1942. When the prison was liberated in September, 1945, an American Naval commander, among others, gave a speech to the inmates on that auspicious day.¹³ In general, however, few Americans saw much of Sarawak during the war, except from the sea or the treetops.

After liberation from Japanese rule, British officials returned to Sarawak in large numbers. This initiated a new period of colonialism. At the same time, one result of the Pacific war in Sarawak was an anti-colonial sentiment. Some, but not all, the people in

¹⁰ American airmen were also shot down on 12 January, 1945 in Limbang District and the local people who helped them were severely punished by the Japanese (Horton, 1985).

¹¹ The Baram River area inland from Miri was known to Peace Corps volunteers who taught in Marudi town in the 1960s. The volunteers were told that heads hanging in baskets in longhouses there were Japanese who had tried to escape from coastal areas. For the Japanese, the Baram was “the river of no return” (K. Hendrix, personal communication, 24 September, 2011).

¹² Feuer, 1996, p. 60.

¹³ Reece, 1998.

Sarawak wanted independence from European rule.¹⁴ Outside of this sentiment, the Japanese occupation had little direct effect on much of the population of Sarawak.¹⁵

Subsequent civil unrest about domination by Malaya and the events of Confrontation, the undeclared war with Indonesia in the 1960s, had a far heavier impact on Sarawak, as well as on the new visitors arriving there in 1962, Peace Corps volunteers.

Welcome to Sarawak!

Following World War II, Britain reoccupied Malaya in 1946, valuing it especially for its supply of tin and rubber. In the same year, Rajah Vymer Brooke unilaterally ceded Sarawak to Britain as a Crown Colony, without consulting the people of Sarawak as to their wishes. The British colonial days lasted from 1946 to 1963, although some British remained in Sarawak for years afterward. Like many other official decisions about Sarawak during British rule, the inception of the Peace Corps there was a result of bureaucratic decisions in London, not in Sarawak. Sergeant Shriver, the first head of the Peace Corps, negotiated the Borneo Peace Corps project at the British Colonial Office in London in 1961.¹⁶ While Sarawak was not the first place to receive Peace Corps volunteers, it was a very early destination. Most likely, this was because the British were agreeable to improving education and infrastructure there without a large outlay of British funds, in order to prepare Sarawak to be an ex-colony. The British Foreign Office was then in the process of shifting Sarawak and Sabah to the new state of Malaysia, tacking them on to its former colony of Malaya with its capital in Kuala Lumpur. According to the federation agreement for the formation of Malaysia, Sarawak and Sabah were to be largely autonomous regions. Instead, they became states subordinate to a highly-centralized rule by Kuala Lumpur.

Sergeant Shriver, the “Sarge,” was the first representative of the Peace Corps to arrive in Sarawak. He and his traveling entourage arrived late in 1961. Shriver held a press conference in Kuching that would have been poorly attended except that the British bureaucracy rounded up some government office workers to ask him questions.¹⁷ In the spring of 1962 the first group of Peace Corp-Sarawak volunteers arrived in Hilo, Hawaii for training. They arrived in Kuching from Hilo, via Honolulu, Manila, and Jesselton (now Kota Kinabalu, Sabah) in August, 1962, the men wearing suits, thin neckties, and butch haircuts and the women wearing dresses and stylish hairdos. This first group had 4-H club organizers, some just out of high school; the rest were Bachelor of Arts graduates (BAGs). The college-educated group called the 4-H volunteers “plow boys,” even though some of them were female, and the latter responded with “bags” for the graduates. The “Sarge” paid a second ceremonial visit to Sarawak later in 1962 and met some of these new volunteers in Kuching.

For all Peace Corps volunteers, their first impressions of Sarawak were based on geography. Whether flying into Kuching or arriving by ship from across the South China

¹⁴ Ongkilli, 1967.

¹⁵ A house build for Japanese officers in Bau was later the residence of three Peace Corps Volunteers (K. Lowry, personal communication, 10 January, 2012).

¹⁶ Shriver was amassing as many Peace Corps-welcoming countries as possible in order to get the Corps started with broad global impact.

¹⁷ Morrison, 1993, p. 128.

Sea, their first gaze was of coastal swamps, zigzagging rivers, a broad plain backed by mountain ranges, and gleaming white limestone outcrops strewn near and far.

Peace Corps staff members welcomed each group of new volunteers to Kuching. This small city had British colonial architecture, a lazy river with a Malay village on the far bank, and the Peace Corps headquarters on Rubber Road. In the 1960s Kuching had no Main Street or Holiday Inns. It had a row of shophouses fronting the river, known as the bazaar, a social club started by the British, and the Sarawak Museum, full of natural history and anthropology exhibits that gave Kuching bragging rights for entertaining visitors arriving on a side jaunt off the Asian tourist route. It had Chinese voices in its temples and Arabic voices in its mosques. But Kuching was indeed insular; it did not fret about possible atomic warfare between the United States and Russia and rarely looked beyond the horizon provided by the sea itself, except for trade with Singapore to the west.

Kuching was a friendly place with English “mums” strolling the walkways amidst Chinese school children, the local dogs, Malay fishermen, and a few Dayak traders of forest produce. There was plenty of Tiger beer and good coffee available in the local cafes for the Peace Corps volunteers to enjoy and enticing aromas wafting from *satay*, the local variety of skewered meat served with a savory sauce. New kinds of fruits and vegetables were for sale at the farmers’ market. New kinds of birds and flowers were glimpsed here and there. And Elvis Presley could be heard on the local radio.

Not many volunteers had job assignments in Kuching. Most found themselves in smaller towns or in forest enclaves far from the capital. Towns like Miri, Sibul, Bintulu, Lundu, or Serian were miniature versions of Kuching. All had *kopei kedais* (open-air coffee shops), Chinese retail stores on the street level with living quarters on the floor above, and British expatriates doing colonial jobs or, after 1963, post-colonial “transition” jobs. Several towns had “Olympic-sized” swimming pools, a legacy of private British colonial clubs (gymkhanas). Volunteers could get entry to the pools, and some of them did, although it was not part of the image that their families back home in the U. S. had of Borneo life.

Few Sarawak towns were connected by roads. A crow might be able to fly the 500 miles from the east end of Sarawak to its western tip, but human movement was slow and occasionally risky. To get to Mukah from Miri or to Kuching from Sibul, one took a coastal boat and hoped no monsoon gales were in the offing. Most of the rest of the state was linked together by river travel or simply by walking.¹⁸ In the uplands, river travel meant dealing with rock-strewn rapids, and in the lowlands it meant avoiding drifting debris, sometimes including whole trees washed out of the banks after fierce storms. In the mountainous interior, walking through magnificent forests was usually the only reliable choice, but leeches and the occasional poisonous snake lurked along the paths. When the Japanese invaded Sarawak in late 1941, the news took days of foot travel to reach remote hamlets in the mountains.

On their first trip to the uplands, volunteers often found they were entering a different world. For one thing, because Sarawak people were used to the British, they tried to relieve Peace Corps volunteers of their rucksacks, while the volunteers adamantly

¹⁸ “Borneo Airways” serviced inland towns weekly, weather permitting, with a single-engine plane that landed on dirt-strip fields (K. Hendrix, personal communication, 24 September, 2011).

insisted on carrying their own loads.¹⁹ Visits of volunteers to a longhouse brought them in contact with friendly people who commonly had rotten teeth and poor sanitation facilities, but also had transistor radios, kerosene lanterns, and longboats with outboard motors. In upland areas, longhouse residents at first often didn't know what variety of stranger was visiting them. Common questions were, "Where did you come from?" "Did you come on an airplane?" "How long did it take you to get to Sarawak?" A married Peace Corps woman would be asked, "Why don't you have a baby yet; is it medicine?"²⁰

Some of the Peace Corps volunteers got to know river scenery and forest trails very well. In 1962 and 1963, Ed Price made regular trips up and down the Ngameh River, organizing 4-H club activities, supplying plants for gardens and orchards, and building chicken coops for longhouse Iban. Between 1969 and 1971, another volunteer, Bob Gunderlach, walked all over Lawas District pursuing his task of supervising the new English-language syllabus for every rural primary school there, 26 in total.

Because English was the language of the British, Peace Corps volunteers found themselves among other foreigners in Sarawak. School headmasters could be Anglican priests or New Zealanders working on contract under the Colombo Plan. This plan was a consortium of British Commonwealth countries that was helping Sarawak to improve its educational system. Through the plan new schools were built and staffed, so Peace Corps teachers had co-workers working on contract from India, Canada, and elsewhere. In addition to the Colombo Plan foreigners, other foreigners were volunteers akin to Peace Corps volunteers. Those from Canada were CUSO (Canadian United Students Overseas). New Zealand volunteers were VSA (Volunteer Service Abroad), and those from Britain were VSO (Volunteer Service Overseas).²¹ All three groups were non-governmental organizations. The Peace Corps volunteers had more training and amenities, provided by their governmental administrators, than did the other volunteers. Quite a few Peace Corps people worked in Sarawak for three or four years, while VSOs and CUSOs had one or two year stays. A few Peace Corps and CUSO volunteers came to Sarawak as couples, but the VSOs were single, generally male, and generally younger in age.²² In terms of effectiveness, all these groups were remarkably successful during "the volunteer era." Peace Corps people got to know the other international volunteers well in Sarawak, coalescing into a kind of volunteer subculture.

Since most "mom and pop" stores were run by Chinese, Peace Corps volunteers came to know the Chinese in their neighborhood. These Chinese were prone to ask them questions not only about themselves but about Chinese-Americans, often to the surprise of the volunteers.

¹⁹ P. Stevens, personal communication, 9 October, 2011.

²⁰ B. Blackmer, personal communication, 18 January, 2010.

²¹ Sarawak had received six of the first eight VSOs sent overseas. They preceded Peace Corps volunteers in Sarawak. One Sarawak VSO wrote that it was John Kennedy, not Harold Macmillan in Britain, who "effectively captured the imagination of the young" for overseas work (Riches, 1964, p. 133). It has been said that the VSO idea was to show what the local people could do, but the Peace Corps idea was different: to show what local people and volunteers could do together.

²² One VSO was a dentist, however.

Peace Corps people also got to know Sarawak children well. As was the case for any strangers showing up at a longhouse or hamlet, Peace Corps volunteers were followed wherever they went by curious children, whether to a farm field or to take a bath in the river. Many a volunteer sleeping on the veranda of a longhouse woke up to see a circle of small faces all around his sleeping mat.

Volunteers took to this new life. They also had a high standard of realism. When a Peace Corps official wanted to take photographs of people “in the middle of nowhere,” the volunteer who was the official’s guide was taken aback. He didn’t see rural Sarawak that way at all. On the contrary, during the Peace Corps era, Sarawak had an abundance of giant trees, orchids, fireflies, monkeys, hornbills, and other creatures for Peace Corps people to marvel at. It also had, as some of them discovered, dreaded malaria parasites carried by mosquitoes, noisy nocturnal insects, and stinging ants that were best avoided. Unfortunately, however, while Sarawak still had a few orangutans, many had already been eaten by local people or shot by foreign scientists decades earlier, and the survivors had retreated to distant regions rarely visited by Peace Corps volunteers or the local people.

Despite its allures, not all volunteers had positive reactions to Sarawak. One is reported to have complained, “It’s not like America,” and soon left. Another volunteer, sent to administer anti-malarial pills to longhouse people, first described rural Sarawakians as dirty, indifferent to their unhealthy sanitation practices, and superstitious. But later he became appreciative of their friendliness and community values. Volunteers discovered that Sarawak was full of complex human cultures, not the simple ones Washington policy makers had thought existed in “developing” countries. Sarawakians might not know how to build a skyscraper, but they were well versed in human relations. Notably, by the end of their two-year service in Sarawak, most volunteers had developed a strong affection for the land and its people, a state of mind they have not lost.

Before their two years in Sarawak, all volunteers experienced two to three months of training by the Peace Corps, as described in the following pages. Training had its own “culture.”

Part 2. Training

By the 1960s the United States was the richest country in the world. Anything that happened anywhere which affected its interests became national news and international information, including Cold War fears in the United States about Russia, China, and Vietnam. Some young Americans of that affluent era could afford to take a few years off before getting a “real” job or continuing their education. Some of them became Peace Corps volunteers who welcomed the challenge of international service in troubled times.

Over a decade, some 16 different training groups produced Peace Corps volunteers who were sent to Sarawak. From 1962 through 1968, groups of volunteers heading for Sarawak trained in the vicinity of Hilo, Hawaii, in a complex of wooden and concrete structures that had once been a hospital. They created a Peace Corps encampment, or village, there. Several other Southeast Asian and Pacific Island contingents also trained in Hilo, often at the same time. Training moved out of Hawaii and into the host countries in 1969, but Hilo remained a place of interest for former volunteers even years later. In November, 2011, Peace Corps veterans held a grand celebration at Hilo, probably their last hurrah together.¹

When Peace Corps administrators decided on the Hilo area for training, they took into account its tropical environment and the availability of Asian-focused scholars at the University of Hawaii. It was a good choice. It also introduced mainland trainees to islanders who spoke the Asian languages of Ilocano, Japanese, or Hawaiian.

In 1962, the first group of Borneo trainees was housed in the gymnasium on the campus of the University of Hawaii at Hilo, with their 85 cots sardine-tinned together. It looked like an emergency shelter after a major natural disaster.² But when the third group of Borneo trainees arrived in Hilo, they were housed on the old hospital site. After Hilo trainees built a Southeast Asian-style house as part of their training program, it was used to house volunteers destined for Sarawak and nearby areas. Later a Borneo longhouse was also built for the same purpose.

Most volunteers were college graduates but anyone over 18 could apply. Their motives for joining the Peace Corps were mixed. A few wanted overseas careers and liked the idea of free travel and exposure to other cultures. Most were not yet focused on a career but rather on adventure, altruism, plain curiosity about the world, or a combination of motives. As a bonus, training at Hilo provided them with an introduction to their fellow Americans from all over the 50 states, especially Hawaiians whom they might otherwise never have known.

In the early days of the Peace Corps there were more uncertainties for prospective volunteers than was the case later. The early ones were not told their destination until they were selected for training.³ One Sarawak volunteer had wanted to go to South America and knew nothing about Sarawak until he was in training at Hilo. The Hilo trainees also weren't told if they would succeed in becoming a volunteer until training was under way. Some were “deselected” early on and others later. Still other volunteers

¹ Yeager, 2011. See also <http://www.rpcvhi.org/monument/>.

² R. Bergstrom, personal communication, 14 May, 2011.

³ Borneo trainees learned if they were going to Sarawak or to neighboring Sabah only at the end of training.

decided during training that a Peace Corps experience was not for them and left voluntarily.

A successful applicant to join the Peace Corps was accepted for training after a thumbs-up background check by the FBI and other bureaucratic preliminaries. While every training group was different, the large Group 10 experienced a rather typical period in Hilo.⁴ In 1965 the group assembled in San Francisco from all over the country. For some of them it was the first time they had been out of their home state, so there was a certain eye-popping interest in seeing the Bay Area with its bridges and the Pacific Ocean nearby, plus a goodly amount of beat-style entertainment, often in bars. As their night flight to Hawaii featured free champagne, one future volunteer had such a good time he sang all the way to Honolulu on the plane, mostly on the floor.

After a hop to Hilo, the group found itself in a rural setting complete with a Pacific shoreline, rugged hills in the background, and Filipino and Japanese workers on nearby sugar plantations. The group's workplace was in an abandoned school building in Waiakea Uka, about ten miles from Hilo and apart from other groups then in training. There, the days were indeed "school"—three or more hours for learning the Malay language, health training, and lectures on Malaysian history (but not current affairs) and on American foreign policy.⁵ While training covered Malay and Iban culture in Sarawak, it largely ignored the Chinese, who made up a third of the Sarawak population. In addition, the Malaysian "Confrontation" warfare with Indonesia was barely mentioned although this fracas was then ensnarling Sarawak, Sabah, and Indonesian Kalimantan. Borneo, after all, had the only land border between the two hostile countries.

Although health training early in the 1960s included warnings about poisonous snakes in Borneo, a doctor on the training staff reported several years later that no volunteer in Sarawak had seen a snake. This was in error. Snakes were both seen and encountered, sometimes ominously. One volunteer ended up in hospital due to a snake bite. Two others escaped this fate even though the washroom in their house provided a roost for banded kraits.⁶

Trainees in any group who were heading for teaching jobs in Sarawak were assigned to teach summer school classes at local high schools. Des Hadhazy, a volunteer in training Group 9, taught high school physics in Hilo. Others who did practice teaching in the Hilo public schools were instructed to cover art, singing, story telling, science, and human anatomy.

Since Sarawak had few roads at the time and many journeys were by river or on the South China Sea, swimming was also on the agenda for trainees heading there, including passing Red Cross water tests. Those who had never learned to swim got a crash course. Trainees learned that dugout canoes, a common form of travel in Sarawak, were apt to be hazardous in strong currents or in rock-strewn rapids.⁷

⁴ However, it consisted of couples destined to be 4-H club organizers, single women to be medical technologists, and single men to be community development workers, but no teachers, although teachers dominated other training groups (Blackmer, PeaceCorpsonline).

⁵ By 1965 Peace Corps training included two weeks of political training called WACAS (world affairs, communism, and area studies) pronounced by the trainees as "whack-ass," (Blackmer, PeaceCorpsonline). It was followed by an exam of 60 multiple-choice questions. One aim of WACAS was to make sure the trainees' "grasp of the essentials of Asian communism is firm" (Anonymous, 1966, p. 16).

⁶ B. Bergstrom, personal communication, 9 September, 2011.

⁷ Some training groups received free life jackets, but not the earliest Sarawak groups.

The Peace Corps staff in Hawaii initially had few publications of practical use to trainees for their work assignments in Asia.⁸ To remedy this, they encouraged volunteers from the first contingents sent to Borneo and elsewhere to write about their experiences for the use of future trainees.⁹ For Sarawak, this meant that the first group of volunteers there, in 1962-1963, became in a sense mentors of later groups. Besides writing for so-called training manuals, representatives of the early contingents, such as Ed Price and Fritz Klattenhoff from Group 1, also acted as trainers in Hilo, thus giving a person-to-person continuity to the stream of volunteers going to Sarawak. Fritz Klattenhoff, for example, was a trainer for both Groups 3 and 4 going to Borneo. He devised a seven-point training program on rural development that was used for Group 4 and for later training in Hilo.¹⁰ This program emphasized 4-H clubs, based on the American model. Clubs were to hold meetings using parliamentary procedures, provide demonstrations of farming improvements, foster agricultural competitions, have fun, and sing songs. That wasn't all. Trainees were taught about Borneo crops, animal husbandry, arboriculture, fish-pond techniques, and the repair of outboard motors. Ken Shuey from Group 2, who was a trainer in the mid-1960s, also took his mentoring role seriously. Among other things, he worked successfully to get several deselected trainees in Hilo reinstated as volunteers.¹¹

In addition to school, there were medical appointments for trainees, especially for vaccines to protect people from tropical diseases. There was drinking Primo beer and coming home after midnight singing *Pearly Shells* and also the process of getting to know everyone, from one's roommate to the Filipino workers who might give you a lift in their pickup trucks into town on Saturday afternoon.

In Hilo trainees ate Asian foods, especially rice with vegetables, and either fish or meat. Flavorings included soy sauce, curries, garlic, and chilies. Trainees were taught to cook Asian-style over an open fire at floor level, as was the usual way in rural Borneo. They also came to know Malaysia fruits in Hilo, such as *limau* (lime), mango, and papaya—most of these fruits already growing in Hawaii. The Malaysian foods were new to most trainees, but they took to them well in Hilo and later in Sarawak itself.

When possible, instructors in conversational Malay were from Malaysia. Three were even from Borneo itself in the early 1960s. Some serendipitously happened to be in Hawaii to take university courses there and proved to be of practical help in learning basic Malay.¹² One of the Sarawak teachers bought a ukulele in Hilo, brought it home, and played *Blue Hawaii* on it there. Another teacher was Lucas Chin, later the Director of the Sarawak Museum in Kuching. However, at least one training group learned

⁸ They also had little coordination with the in-country Peace Corps administration, or with the host country officials who originated or implemented the Peace Corps policy (Marks, 1969).

⁹ See, for example, Anonymous, 1963, and Shuster, 1963.

¹⁰ Anonymous, 1964A, pp. 64-65.

¹¹ K. Shuey, personal communication, 26 August, 2010.

¹² Colloquial Malay instruction was prepared by Floyd Commack of the University of Hawaii and used by Malay-speaking informants at the university to teach Commack's taped lessons and drills to early contingents of trainees (Landgraf, 1963). But some groups complained that the Malay taught in training was useless in Sarawak. Training-taught Malay was Malaya Malay, not Borneo Malay or bazaar Malay. In addition, for those destined to work with groups such as Iban, Chinese, or Bidayuh, no language preparation was provided in Hilo. An Iban man later described a volunteer in Sarawak trying to speak the Iban language as a chicken talking to a duck.

“bazaar” Malay, the kind most people in Sarawak spoke daily in its multiethnic towns, only after they arrived in Sarawak.

While John Kennedy saw a new frontier for America in space in the 1960s, the Peace Corps was smitten with the image of the westward-ho frontiersmen of yore.¹³ As a result, there was a whiff of Daniel Boone training in Hilo, with an “Outward Bound” overlay.¹⁴ For Group 10 two weeks of such training took place in the remote Waipio Valley. There trainees were required to wash and bathe in a stream, just as many people do in Sarawak, and those who had grown up in northern states found this challenging. Demonstrations were given on the *halal* Muslim way of killing a chicken and preparing it for the table—not that many volunteers ever did this themselves once they were in Sarawak. Practice in playing American sports was encouraged but host-country games, such as rugby, were not. Several groups learned how to build an outhouse, and they also dug a cesspool to go with it. Long hikes were also on the docket, including a solitary one with an overnight stay in an isolated hut on the beach. Some said training was almost like an army-style boot camp. This seems to have been the early Peace Corps view on preparing trainees for work in Sarawak. Practical training, especially for the vague task of community development, was insufficient, despite complaints by trainees. Those destined for road surveying, however, were taught basic techniques.

To emphasize the “chain of command” that volunteers would encounter in their work in Sarawak, a week or so of training involved the Peace Corps staff acting as District Officer, *Penghulu* (indigenous chief), and *Tua Kampong* (village head) while the volunteers acted as helpful underlings. By this time the trainees were fairly competent in Malay, but the Peace Corps staff acting as the bosses was not. Ironically, trainees talking to each other in Malay had to switch to English to communicate with the staff people.

There wasn’t much time for reading books about Sarawak in Hilo. Books by Somerset Maugham were available, and many trainees did see the photographs of longhouse life taken by Hedda Morrison that graced colonial-era books, some of them showing human skulls dangling from the house beams.¹⁵ If the trainees had not already heard about the “wild men of Borneo,” the Dayak headhunters, they heard about them from their peers during training, but few may have known that such wild men were a mythical category invented and publicized by P. T. Barnum for his freak shows.

While all this was going on in Hilo, many training groups were getting smaller, largely through deselection, as it was called. This was due to the surveillance by a phalanx of psychologists who wrote down secret notes on the trainees in order to assess if they were suitable to be volunteers, that is, how closely they approximated the “ideal” American.¹⁶ For example, Borneo Group 4 endured at least three long interviews by “Assessment staff” and peer ratings from trainees in their own skill group, such as 4-H workers or teachers.¹⁷ Instructors in “school” subjects were required to give each trainee an academic grade and “an overall rating.” Coordinators and the Assessment staff also

¹³ Burner, 1999.

¹⁴ Fischer, 1998.

¹⁵ Morrison, 1962.

¹⁶ One volunteer at another training venue, who went to Ecuador, described Peace Corps training as unique, “having something common with college life, officer training, and a 90-day jail sentence” (Thomsen, 1966, p. 91).

¹⁷ Peer assessment was the most unpopular assignment. Overall, the Peace Corps had “unlimited faith in the expertise of the psychological professions” (Burner, 1999, p. 494).

rated each trainee. To top it off, the Group-4 trainees were administered at least six psych tests. As a result of all this prying, 26% of the trainees in that group were deselected.¹⁸ Trainees in subsequent groups soon learned to “play nice” and tell psych-testers what they wanted to hear, that they were safe bets.¹⁹

Some trainees did not take the threat of deselection seriously until a member of their group was abruptly sent home. But that was just the beginning. When trainees got to breakfast in the morning, they would notice that one or more had disappeared overnight. The “axe men” had been at work.²⁰ “It was like Argentina,” one former Group-2 volunteer said.²¹ There was no chance to say goodbye, and asking “Why?” was not acceptable to Peace Corps technocrats. Even worse, it was devastating to those deselected. Some trainees thought deselection was arbitrary and counter-productive. In fact, after one couple in Group 10 was sent home halfway through training because “they” had become pregnant, the training assessor of the group refused to deselect anyone, much to the chagrin of the Peace Corps administrators.²² This unified group of trainees refused to take psych tests or have psychologists watch their every move. Furthermore, no one in Group 10 *was* deselected at the end of training, except by personal choice. The ones who did stay the course were a successful bunch of volunteers; they all finished their two-year assignments in Sarawak—not one of them left early. Eventually, the Peace Corps administrators realized that deselection during training was a mistake and did their weeding-out before people were accepted for the program, not afterwards.²³

Following three months in Hilo and six days of leave in Honolulu, Group 10 enplaned for Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur en masse.²⁴ Then on to Borneo: with 43 volunteers going to Sarawak and a few to Sabah. It was in Kuching that the Sarawak volunteers first learned a border war with Indonesia called Confrontation was in progress. After receiving two weeks of orientation in Kuching, including an introduction to the Iban language, volunteers were sent out to their work areas, many of them far from the city.²⁵ Liz Kennedy, a medical technician, and a few others remained in Kuching. Then the Group-10 Sarawak experience really began. It lasted for two years, 1965-1967, or even longer for those who extended their period of service. Other volunteers soon followed Group 10. By March, 1967 there were 161 volunteers in Sarawak.²⁶

¹⁸ Anonymous, 1964A, pp. 46-47. For Group 1, about 13% were deselected (M. Seymour, 25 August, 2010). For Group 4, 12 of 42 trainees were deselected (Anonymous, 1964A, p. 47). For group 12, fifteen did not make it to Malaysia (Quaid, 1983, p. 12).

¹⁹ Berlew, 1964.

²⁰ A satirical song about deselection was sung by one trainer, to the tune of Clementine:

Operation Deselection for perfection of the Corps.

If you're no good, then you're dead wood,

We can always get some more.

²¹ Group 2 people were given an envelope at the end of training that said you're in or you're out (K. Shuey, personal communication, 26 August, 2010).

²² Wallace, no date. Deselection led to some uneasiness in Peace Corps Washington, that it was favoring bland volunteers over innovative ones (Burns, 1966; Berlew, 1964).

²³ Searles, 1997.

²⁴ Group 4 spent only two months in Hilo before heading for Malaysia.

²⁵ They were cautioned not to talk about religion, race, nationality, or politics.

²⁶ Quaid, 1983.

The Hilo center closed in 1971. By the end of the 1960s there had been some 20 training groups that had produced contingents going to Sarawak. Training groups generally had smaller Sarawak contingents by 1969, and they were no longer Borneo groups but All-Malaysia groups. Group 24, 1969-1971, was the first to be trained in-country. Its Sarawak members were first trained with others in West Malaysia for a few days and then transferred to Kuching, traveling on an old ship with a cargo of eggs that became noisy chicks on the way to Kuching.²⁷ Much of their training was like that of the vanguard Hilo trainees, with three major exceptions. No one was deselected during training. Frontier hiking in the hills was not on the agenda, as the Peace Corps by then was stressing cultural sensitivity rather than physical endurance. And the Sarawak volunteers enjoyed a tour of large areas of the state under the leadership of former volunteers who knew Sarawak well. While the nooks and crannies of Sarawak interested the newcomers, perhaps the greatest advantage of the tour was communication with the “old hands” who could explain longhouse etiquette, how to bargain at bazaar shops, and what the *kangkong* was that they had had for lunch. And didn’t *paku* mean “nail,” not something you eat?²⁸ These later trainees had access to much more information about Sarawak than the earlier groups had had, but like the earlier ones, their knowledge of Sarawak really began when they arrived at their job location. In contrast, Sarawak people in a particular place saw a series of Peace Corps workers come and go and often remembered all of them.

One thing Peace Corps officials did not do was link up early Sarawak volunteers who had worked in a particular area or school with those who had similar jobs in those places years later. As a result, and to this day, most early volunteers have had little acquaintance with later ones and are unable to share mutual information or memories. Most former volunteers today only know Peace Corps people who were in their own training group or those from other groups who were stationed in their area.

Looking back on their two years in Sarawak, the volunteers who worked in community development (CD) there recommended major re-thinking for future training of volunteers:

During training there were long talks on CD goals and techniques. The techniques (a framework for analyzing communities and locating innovators, etc.) can be very useful...But the mystique, which suggests that our primary purpose should be to cause social and cultural changes in preference to physical accomplishments (e.g., democratization of a community or ‘improving problem solving mental resources,’ etc., rather than focusing on better vegetable farming *per se*) is unrealistic to a two-year Peace Corps tour. If a volunteer is caught by the romance and charm of this mystique, it *can cause him great distress* when he finds his work is not directed at social changes but is ‘task oriented.’ Be very careful about showing the CD mystique as the only valuable way to work in a community.²⁹

Even more basic was the realization by CD volunteers in the mid-1960s that real development work could not be done in the space of two years, the typical Peace Corps

²⁷ Diffily, 1983.

²⁸ *Kangkong* is a kind of spinach; *paku* means both nail and a kind of fern, such as fiddle-heads.

²⁹ Anonymous, 1967 (unpaged).

service period. Such work takes a much longer time. Still, it could truly be said that by 1968 the Peace Corps “had learned more about rural development than it had accomplished, which [put] it well ahead of those many other agencies that [had] neither accomplished nor learned.”³⁰

Turning now to the training of Peace Corps senior staff in Sarawak, it is unclear what training they received before arriving in Kuching. Did they learn colloquial Malay and take classes in Southeast Asian history? What *is* known is that one director was an anthropologist, a second had years of experience in the U. S. State Department, another was a professional photographer who had been in Korea and held the Marine Corps in high esteem, a fourth came to Sarawak after serving as a Peace Corps director in Africa, and a fifth was a former priest. Two other directors, however, had themselves once been Peace Corps volunteers, one in the Philippines and the other in Sarawak itself. As the number of former volunteers available for Peace Corps employment grew in the 1960s, quite a few of them took on staff jobs in various countries. One Sarawak volunteer, for example, became a training project director in Western Samoa. Another became a director in Cambodia.

To sum up Peace Corps training with hindsight, trainees benefited by it in some ways but not in others. An old story about learning is that the children of a rich American couple saw a new girl in the neighborhood climbing a tree and immediately wanted to know her tutor in tree climbing. Peace Corps trainees did have tutors in many activities, but not in tree climbing or many other common Southeast Asian skills. They had to learn Asian skills by living among Asians. Most met the challenge.

³⁰ Hapgood et al., 1964, p. 9.

Part 3. The Light and the Dark Sides

Peace Corps amenities

After the training and travel to Sarawak, courtesy of the Peace Corps, most volunteers got further help to ease them into their work assignments. Depending on the circumstances, the Peace Corps gave each of them a footlocker full of books, a shortwave radio, desk, air-foam mattress, bicycle, refrigerator, first-aid kit, and a kerosene lamp.¹ In a rural area with no electricity, the lamp was useful but usually not the refrigerator. One bachelor volunteer in Miri town had a well-stocked refrigerator—an ample supply of cold bottled beer. With his shortwave radio, a volunteer in the Sarawak highlands in 1968 found he could tune into the disheartening propaganda of “Hanoi Hannah” being aired to the American troops in South Vietnam, as well as to the BBC, Radio Australia, and the U. S. Armed Forces Network.²

Since the volunteers were a healthy bunch to begin with and had been poked by medics with vaccines in training, most of them were never seriously ill. In Sarawak, sprained ankles and skin infections were the main complaints. Peace Corps doctors and nurses there provided medical attention and local hospitals provided free care when required, usually because a volunteer had caught some nasty infection.

Large towns like Kuching and Sibul had swimming pools, dating from the British colonial days, and also daily movies that Peace Corps volunteers could patronize. The Sarawak government provided free housing for all Peace Corps volunteers, unless suitable housing was otherwise available. The first Peace Corps teachers in Simanggang (Sri Aman now) lived in a house with indoor plumbing (faucets and a shower), electricity, and modern toilets, dispelling the illusion that volunteer life was a romantic and wild adventure. The town also could provide Colgate toothpaste, Lux soap, and 7-up. Store purchases were often wrapped in year-old newspapers, including those from San Francisco and Los Angeles, which furnished interesting reading. In contrast, another volunteer had a house with foot-long lizards, a hardwood bed, and a kerosene stove but no bathroom, running water, or sink.

Peace Corps volunteers also provided amenities to each other. They furnished meals and lodgings to fellow workers visiting from other locations. Everyone enjoyed these get-togethers, at least most of the time. However, volunteers who shared a house in Sibul, the largest town in the Rejang River watershed, found themselves being visited too often by their upstream compatriots when they came downriver. Since the Sibul residents had their own work to do, they declared their “guest house” closed except by invitation.

Chinese New Year festivities and the Malay holiday after the Muslim fasting month provided Peace Corps volunteers with an opportunity to sample local delicacies and, in the Chinese case, strong spirits. Dayak *gawai* (festivals) were also enjoyed by volunteers.

¹ The footlocker included books by Martin Luther King, Barry Goldwater, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and John F. Kennedy as well as books on American literature and history, or on Asia. Peace Corps volunteers received more *barang* (things) than did volunteers from other countries. Those from Britain, for example, were not given refrigerators.

² J. Pearson, personal communication, 14 December, 2010. Earlier, in 1963, another volunteer heard of Viet Cong “body counts” on his shortwave radio in Kanowit; his Iban friends congratulated him, not because they supported Americans being in Vietnam but because they approved of warfare generally (E. Price, personal communication, 18 November, 2011).

Sarawak provided movies to Peace Corps volunteers and anyone else who wanted to attend. Some towns had a mobile cinema that came weekly, showing films on a basketball court or in a school building if it was rainy. Chinese films with sword fights and acrobatics were favorites, but British and American films were sometimes shown. Spy films and cowboy films were popular. The British showed “The Mouse that Roared” in their private clubs to invited Peace Corps guests. In addition, the U. S. Information Service and the British Information Service showed documentary films on market days (*tamus*) in Belaga in the 1960s.³

Sarawak people were hospitable to volunteers, often feeding them and bedding them down for the night, especially in remote areas. Longhouse people also provided an opportunity to get a traditional tattoo. Kenyah tattoos, with their swirling designs, were quite popular. In addition, some volunteers who worked closely with rural people found they had been adopted. Ed Price was adopted by *Penghulu* Masam (later Sibu Division *Temenggong*, or leader), who lived in an Iban longhouse on the Negamah River. Nancy Gallant was adopted by Bujang and Samsiah.⁴ And Bob Pastor to this day considers himself a member of a Lun Bawang family living in Ulu Limbang.

The Sarawak environment could be a magical amenity in its own ways. In one case, a volunteer and his friends went down to the beach near Miri one evening:

The long, flat sea bottom at Miri made for long waves that seemed to roll in forever before breaking on the beach. That night the waves were all illuminated from within by countless spots of greenish light. Walking out into the surf, we marveled when the waves would break against our bodies and leave us covered with spots of light which gradually faded away. Pulling my hand through the water left a train of light. Whatever it was that created the bioluminescence was too small to see, but the lights themselves were about the size and brightness of a firefly. We stood in the waves late into the night, entranced.⁵

On more mundane matters, the Peace Corps gave volunteers a monthly allowance of 100 American dollars, equal to about 300 Malaysian dollars (*ringgits*), based on the assumption that this amount would match local incomes.⁶ In large towns, such salaries might soon be spent but in remoter areas there was little to buy. Many volunteers could easily save enough to pay for a vacation getaway to Sabah, Singapore, or even Bali.⁷ Overall, the volunteers were more affluent than most Sarawak people, even disregarding the cameras, phonographs, banjos, tape recorders, or other luxuries the volunteers brought with them or purchased. By the late 1960s, a Peace Corps Volunteer could buy pirated tapes of the Beatles, Jefferson Airplane, or Led Zepplin for pocket change in Singapore on Orchard Road. All this is not to say that volunteers lived in resort conditions. One remotely located volunteer, when asked if he used a latrine, said, “What

³ Langub, 2007. The USIS also maintained a lending library in Kuching where students and others could borrow books.

⁴ N. Gallant, personal communication, 2 June, 2010.

⁵ M. Sullivan, personal communication, 16 March, 2011.

⁶ Group 20 volunteers were given a choice, as an experiment, to set their own level of living allowance. Most asked for \$100 per month, but rumor had it that someone asked for the outrageous sum of \$200 (M. Sullivan, personal communication, 4 June, 2011).

⁷ In 1967 the Kuala Lumpur office of the Peace Corps banned vacation trips to Japan, but the Peace Corps did subsidize “scheduled” vacations to some extent (J. Turner, personal communication, 11 May, 2011).

latrine?” Asked if he drank well water, he said, “What well?” When asked whether children followed him down the street, said, “What street?”⁸

Not all the volunteers’ monthly pay was spent on themselves or on materials needed for their jobs. Quite a few Peace Corps teachers, and even those who had other assignments, gave money to assist worthy students in continuing their education. One volunteer calculated that it only cost him a month’s living allowance to give “scholarships” to three boys from poor longhouse families to pay their school fees for a whole year. In another case, a volunteer quietly paid for the fees, school uniforms, shoes, and pocket change for a boy whose family had virtually no money and managed to survive by foraging and by bartering forest goods for necessities.

No Peace Corps volunteer owned a car. It was Peace Corps policy that volunteers were forbidden to buy cars or, usually, motorbikes. Like Sarawakians, the volunteers generally traveled by foot, bicycle, public buses or taxis, commercial boats on the rivers, or “coasters” on the South China Sea.⁹ Large towns also had daily flights connecting them with the capitol town, Kuching. In the few areas where roads or foot paths were the main arteries of travel, volunteers did manage to buy or obtain motorbikes useful for their work, just as did their savvy Sarawak neighbors who could afford them.¹⁰

By 1970 at least one Peace Corps volunteer was living in rather luxurious quarters. In Binatang he had a large apartment with a balcony, bath and shower, hot and cold water taps, and an Olympic-sized swimming pool near by. What the apartment lacked was window screens. At dusk swarms of sparrow-sized and noisy cicadas, pygmy grasshoppers, or praying mantises would invade the apartment. Amazingly, they were all gone by morning.¹¹

When volunteers finished their two, three, or four years of work in Sarawak, they received free airfare to get back home.¹² In the early years, many cashed in their ticket and substituted flights to Bangkok, India, or London. One pair of volunteers flew to Singapore, bought motorcycles there, and rode them all the way to Paris. Another pair managed to travel for six months to Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand, Burma, India, Afghanistan, Iran, Israel, and Europe.¹³ Later, however, Peace Corps officials changed their travel policy; the return air ticket could only be used for travel directly to the United States.

Returned volunteers who had completed their Sarawak assignment received 500 American dollars for every year of service, to help them reestablish their lives at home.¹⁴ The few returned volunteers who were immediately drafted into the military during the Vietnam War, unfortunately, had to forego this easement into American life.

⁸ Pearson, 1981.

⁹ Some Sarawak people concluded from seeing these ways of getting around that Peace Corps volunteers were as poor as most of them were.

¹⁰ Male 4-H club organizers received motorbikes from the Peace Corps, but the women organizer did not (L. De Danaaan, personal communication, 18 October, 2011).

¹¹ J. Ingerson-Mahar, personal communication, 25 July, 2011.

¹² Those who left Sarawak early, voluntarily or otherwise, also got free tickets home.

¹³ Air travel then was cheap. For example, in 1967 a round-trip ticket between Singapore and Phnom Penh on Royal Cambodian Airlines cost all of 25 U. S. dollars.

¹⁴ In the early years, volunteers received more, 75 U. S. dollars for each month of satisfactory service (Landgraf, 1963).

The light and the dark sides

When Peace Corps volunteers were not swotting up their teaching lessons for their next class or hacking their way through a bamboo thicket to make a jungle path, they invented ways to entertain themselves. One way was water skiing. In Julau a young Peace Corps couple had a dugout “longboat” with a 25 horsepower outboard motor for getting to the longhouses along the Rejang watershed where they were establishing 4-H clubs. Another volunteer did community development work in the Kanowit-Julau area and often visited this couple. One day the three of them decided to try water skiing. While the Rejang River system is not as vast as the Amazon’s, it is a muscular, brown waterway with crocodiles and elephantine forest debris afloat. In the 1960s it was bordered by scattered longhouses and clustered Chinese shophouses in the few bazaars on its banks. The Peace Corps couple took their longboat out on the Kanowit tributary of the Rejang with the third of the trio in tow on a make-shift board, actually a garbage can lid. The water skiing went fine downstream, aided by the strong current, but it fizzled out going upstream. The current was too strong. What the residents in Julau bazaar thought of this escapade is not known, but if they responded in their usual way to seeing foreigners behaving crazily, they would have been amused.

Because food was not plentiful in Sarawak in the 1960s, children were generally stunted. There were no slam-dunkers on any school’s basketball court until a tall Peace Corps teacher joined his school’s team. The team became invincible and won the state championship. At that point, foreigners were suddenly banned from being on student teams. Equality was restored.

Sports were whatever inventive Peace Corps volunteers could dream up. The Sebatan River by the Saratok Secondary School had neither murky depths nor crocodiles in the mid-1960s. Both Peace Corps teachers and their students used to bathe there and play tag. When someone introduced a beach ball into the scene, they developed their own rules for playing water polo. It was an instant success and the boys treated it as a serious competitive sport, like vying to win a school-team soccer game.

Sports sometimes crowded out other aspects of Peace Corps achievements in Sarawak. A prominent Bidayuh recently recalled that all he ever learned from volunteers was to how to hit a softball and how to run the 800-meters at his Kuching school.

Another unusual sport for Sarawak was horseback riding. Cowboy films were a favorite of the secondary school students in Bintulu, so a married couple of Peace Corps volunteers decided to start a Cowboy Club. They got two old nags, Loksa Mana and Chahaya Bulan, as gifts from the Kuching racing club. When the horses arrived at the school on a truck and were unloaded it was an exciting event. The Peace Corps husband decided at that moment to give a demonstration of horsemanship and tried to mount but was bucked off instantly. All the onlooking students and teachers laughed uproariously. But the club was a success. Club members wore cowboy hats, conveniently provided by American relatives of the Peace Corps couple, and the students helped build a stable for the horses. The club even had a hotdog roast at which they sang cowboy songs around a campfire. A year after the couple returned to the United States, their students wrote to them, telling them that Chahaya Bulan had died and had been buried. Several years later the couple received more letters; the students had dug up the horse’s remains and reconstructed the skeleton for a science fair. They also sent photos of their reconstruction.

Peace Corps teachers were adventurous in other ways. At one point, an American church group had sent chemistry sets to Sarawak to help refurbish chemistry classrooms. At least one of these sets got diverted by an innovative volunteer who, with the help of a rural friend, used the contents to make a secret still and produce high-grade moonshine.

A few Peace Corps volunteers got themselves into trouble. In one case a volunteer teacher in Lundu planted marijuana in the school vegetable garden.¹⁵ Two volunteers at another school dressed up in white sheets one Halloween evening and hid out in the darkened boys' dormitory for the students to return from an outing. Jumping around and saying "Boo" did not amuse the boys. In fact, they feared the volunteers were real ghosts.¹⁶

Volunteers roamed far and wide, even to the bright lights of Kuching. When volunteers in outstations came to Kuching on errands or for a weekend, many stayed at the Peace Corps hostel on Jalan Jawa. It was a colonial-style bungalow painted grey with louvered windows and screens. It had a large common room, four bedrooms, a large shower room, and an unused kitchen. It cost *satu ringgit satu malam*, or about 30 cents American per night. One of its assets was furnished by the young Tamil woman who was the housekeeper, or *amah*. She would wash and iron one's clothes for the same price as a one-night stay. The hostel, which volunteers cheerfully called "The Nostril," just because it rhymed, once had a volunteer staying there who spoke Malay with a Brooklyn accent. The Tamil housekeeper couldn't understand him and would discretely ask the other volunteers what he had said. The others couldn't understand Brooklyn-Malay either, but they would translate his English words into normal Malay for her.¹⁷

Because Kuching residents seemed to think that all young foreigners were Peace Corps people, they would direct them to the hostel. In this way it became a United Nations assembly house, hosting Swedes, Canadians, Italians, Aussies, Kiwis, Frenchmen, British, Spaniards, and some Japanese. The Japanese spoke excellent Malay but terrible English, so everybody else politely conversed in Malay with them.

However, most of the roaming done by volunteers was into the *ulu*, the up-river places where people lived in longhouses and where boarding-school students took their teachers home for a visit. In one Iban longhouse, when asked how far the U. S. was from Sarawak, a volunteer said it was 80 days by longboat if you could find some place to tie up at night.¹⁸ In another Iban longhouse, a Miri Peace Corps teacher was entertained by an old woman who had hung two round gourds from her waist and added a long squash to represent an oversized penis. She danced along the longhouse verandah, creating a madcap scene that everyone found uproarious. The young Peace Corps man said to himself, "Toto, we're not in Kansas anymore."¹⁹

The situation for especially well-brought-up Peace Corps women whose work took them to remote longhouses with no latrine or toilet is another matter, particularly if the guests did not speak the local language well. It is perhaps enough to imagine the perils of the poop and pee events to someone's youthful sense of privacy and modesty.

¹⁵ Three volunteers from training Group 24 were sent home for smoking pot (B. Gunderlich, personal communication, 27 May, 2010).

¹⁶ L. Jones, personal communication, 28 January, 2010.

¹⁷ D. Balya, personal communication, 9 November, 2010.

¹⁸ B. Revelle, personal communication, 2 June, 2010.

¹⁹ M. Sullivan, personal communication, 16 March, 2011.

Moreover, the longhouse women were especially curious about one volunteer's roll of toilet paper in her backpack. In dire circumstances, a volunteer woman would retire to the bushes at night to take care of her problem, usually followed by the local livestock, only to find out later that the longhouse people pooped from the edge of the kitchen porch or in the river, downstream of the bathing place. American women who had these experiences remembered them decades later as an exotic, even hilarious, introduction to an international outlook.

Men had similar problems in Sarawak, especially when confronted with a hole in the floor. Standing up to urinate produced wet feet, until it dawned on them to hunker down. While this problem was solvable, the general lack of toilet paper was much worse. Both men and women in the 1960s discovered that small river launches on the Rejang River had outhouses in the stern. They were small, wooden contraptions projecting over the water with a "door" of burlap. The trick was to hold the burlap with one hand and hope for the best. Let us change the subject.

Peace Corps volunteers often looked at the world with a whimsical eye. Some of them to this day use email names that reflect their Sarawak ties, such as borneo-bum, iban, tuan-don, babi-utan (boar-wild), msawarak, and borneo-gal. Even their passwords are related to Sarawak.

Other volunteers were more roguish. One way this was expressed was in response to the newsletter sent out by the Peace Corps-Malaysia staff. The newsletter was called *Pokok-Pokok*, literally tree-tree, so an impish group of Sarawak volunteers started their own newsletter; called *Rokok-Rokok*, meaning smoke-smoke. Not many copies were printed, so *Rokok-Rokok* was passed on from one volunteer to the next.

Far from the light-hearted world, the dangers of life in the tropics were brought home to a Peace Corps volunteer when he was awakened by two neighbors one night because a cobra was near his house. This volunteer, Mike Sullivan, stumbled out of bed and found the neighbors beating it with sticks. As it rose up and spread its hood, one of the neighbors became scared and ran away. Since Mike didn't want an angry snake left in his yard, he helped the other neighbor kill it. The volunteer's housemate, also in the Peace Corps, had been away that week, but he was a nature lover. When he heard that Mike had killed a snake, he was disgusted with him and from then on would never point out a snake to Mike when they were traveling together.²⁰ However, another volunteer, Harvey Toub, ended up in hospital in Kuching because of a snake bite. Earlier, Andy Powers and his survey crew were cutting a road trace through the forest one day when a green pit viper bit one of the workers. Andy whipped out the Cutter Snake Bite Kit he had brought from home and applied suction cups to the two fang marks, obtaining several tablespoons of liquid in each cup. Then the crew semi-carried the victim two miles back to their base camp, a three-hour ordeal. Luckily, the man survived.²¹

Another danger, although not one a volunteer might think likely, was made known to an agricultural worker. This volunteer suggested to an Iban chief that it would be good for him to plant a corn field. The chief agreed but his best corn land was under a curse because his grandfather had learned in a dream long ago that anyone clearing the land would suffer a death in the family. But, the chief said, "If you Christians are brave, you may do the clearing." So the volunteer did, and no one died. Later the chief told the

²⁰ M. Sullivan, personal communication, 16 March, 2011.

²¹ A. Powers, personal communication, 11 May, 2010.

volunteer, “Iban law is too hard to follow. Someday when my children finish school, I’m going to become a Christian.”²²

Danger in tattooing? Ted Pack, a volunteer teaching in Saratok, had his arm tattooed with an Iban design as a way to show his appreciation of Iban culture, especially to emphasize this message to his “westernized” students. When the students saw the tattoo, ink started vanishing from the school library and lamps flickered in the boys’ dormitory at night. Boys soon came to class with their new tattoos, including a beer-bottle label, the Peace circle logo, or their own initials. At that point the teacher lectured the class on the value of tradition and “Pride in One’s OWN Heritage.”²³

Dangerous cicadas? Ted Pack became acquainted with cicadas when he found a “squat housefly” as big as three ping-pong balls sitting on his wall. He poked it and it took off like a buzz bomb, hit the wall at full speed, then the ceiling, and headed for him. He cowered in the corner, but it aimed for an open window and disappeared into the night. Ted soon learned that he needn’t have been worried because cicadas are harmless and stupid, except that they are prone to do their wall-bouncing acts when you are trying to sleep. At that point cicadas tend to lose their charm.²⁴

Bedbugs were also low on charm. One volunteer’s bed was infested with them. The next morning he told his students why he hadn’t gotten much sleep. At tea break, the students solved this problem by taking the bed outside and smoking it with a smoldering mass of grass and weeds.²⁵ Boarding students could also have bedbug problems. In one instance the Peace Corps school matron in Miri, Marian McConkey, was the supreme commander in “The Great Bedbug War.” She had the boys of Dearnley Hostel dismantle their bunk beds, dust them with insecticide, and sun-dry them, then she had them wash everything they owned, including their sleeping mats and pillows. Finally, she disinfected the hostel building. One of the Iban students, Robert Madang, who later became an officer in the Malaysian Rangers, said he received his first military training in that war. The battle was won in a day, with no casualties on the students’ side: “That would have put Napoleon Bonaparte to shame!”²⁶

One dark night another volunteer on the road to a sports event heard a rasping-grinding noise and there in his flashlight beam was an “armadillo” coming towards him. It was some forty years later when he learned that nothing like an armadillo existed in Borneo—Australian marsupials never got that far eastward. Instead, it was a scaly anteater, a pangolin.

The Peace Corps administration had some strange rules for volunteers to follow. One of them was the requirement for volunteers to stand up in cinemas when the Malaysian national anthem, *Negara Ku*, was played. In Miri the volunteers stood up, conspicuously so, since no one else in the audience did. Other cross-cultural differences also appeared. Unlike Sarawak students in the 1960s, Peace Corps volunteers did not believe that they would starve if they had no rice to eat. And unlike Sarawak young men, volunteer men did not hold hands with men, only with women. In a further indication of cultural confusion, a Peace Corps volunteer was asked, “Why am I not white like you?”

²² Price, 1964, p. 336.

²³ T. Pack. I was (almost) tattooed by headhunters. <http://www.tedpack.org/stories/watbhh.html>

²⁴ T. Pack. Stalking extremely small game. <http://www.tedpack.org/stories/sesg.html>

²⁵ M. Seymour, personal communication, 11 February, 2010.

²⁶ R. Manang Langi, personal communication, 5 December, 2009.

She answered, “Why am I not brown like you?” And boy students in their short-shorts were especially bemused by Peace Corps men teaching in baggy, long shorts—hardly the proper British fashion!

Some Peace Corps volunteers of European descent were singled out for “positive prejudice,” especially from people who did not know them. This could be embarrassing, as when a volunteer was waited on in a shop while earlier customers in line were ignored.

As a further indication of a culture clash, Sarawak people liked to let their chickens range freely, even if a predator might eat one, but Peace Corps volunteers usually raised chickens in coops. A Malay teacher in Miri disapproved: “How are your chickens going to have any fun?”²⁷

A Hilton in a rainforest? A volunteer taught primary school in a valley next to an Iban longhouse three days away from Kuching by road and river. Today his school is at the bottom of a lake because the Batang Ai hydroelectric dam was built there in the 1980s. Then a Hilton hotel was built on the lake shore. He said that if someone had told him in the 1960s that a Hilton would be put in such a remote spot, he would have thought they were *gila* (crazy).²⁸

Another bit of Sarawak exotica involved rabbits. Peace Corps volunteers at one school had students raise ordinary farm rabbits as a supplemental meat source. The rabbits multiplied and were later given to the students to take to their family homes as livestock. But rabbits were exotic to Sarawakians. The families kept them as pets.²⁹

One volunteer found that in traveling up the Baram River from one longhouse to the next, the women and the dancing became more beautiful and he became more tipsy. When he was forced by the residents to dance at one longhouse amid alcoholic hospitality, wearing a hornbill feather and wielding a *parang* (long knife), everybody had a good laugh.³⁰

On a darker note, a Peace Corps volunteer at a party given by the District Officer in Miri was told by a Malaysian official how bad the United States was because of its atomic bombing of Japan in World War II. The DO walked up and said he was glad they did, or he and many other people would not be alive.³¹

Another awkward event occurred one evening in a remote area. While movies were enjoyed by Sarawak people in most cases, few people in one upriver area had ever seen one. An excited crowd gathered there to see a government-sponsored film but, unfortunately, it was not a B-movie about cowboys. It was a trashy American flick called “Kitten with a Whip.” The local Peace Corps volunteer was mortified. The Iban said it was bad people doing bad things.

Some Sarawak secondary schools were given young pets in the 1960s. Mukah’s school had a rather large menagerie, but Kanowit’s had only a sun bear cub. It was given by the District Officer who had received it from an Iban. When it was let out of its cage, teachers and students would race around and roll on the ground with it, but as the bear

²⁷ S. Stacy, personal communication, 10 December, 2010.

²⁸ J. Pearson, personal communication, 29 November, 2010.

²⁹ J. Ingerson-Mahar, personal communication, 31 July, 2011. This may have surprised volunteers teaching animal husbandry classes, but it was fairly common in Malaysia to raise a domestic animal and treat it as more than a pet—as a child. Since children are not hit, killed, or eaten, the animal was eventually given or sold to others who did not share such sentiments.

³⁰ M. Sullivan, personal communication, 16 March, 2011.

³¹ D. Hayek, personal communication, 27 July, 2010.

grew up it became fierce and had to be penned up all the time. Soon it got sick and died. All this happened before *Born Free* was written or before “endangered species” became a common phrase. A Peace Corps volunteer still remembers this incident sadly. If he had contacted an American zoo at the time, would it have saved one life?³²

Secondary students talked their Peace Corps teachers into showing them how to dance—the twist, the waltz, anything Western. Then dance nights took place much like any high school “hop” in the United States, with one exception. Boys danced with boys and girls with girls.

Peace Corps life in Sarawak continued to have its surprises. Some of them were comical, others elating, but a few volunteers encountered hazards, even gun battles.

³² K. Shuey, personal communication, 17 March, 2010.

Part 4. Politics and Warfare

When the Peace Corps arrived in the British Crown Colony of Sarawak in August, 1962, the volunteers could not foresee how politics and warfare would buffet their lives there. The only warfare they had heard about was head hunting, the Brooke-era expeditions against fiercely independent indigenous people, and the Japanese occupation.¹ The volunteers were about to witness a more modern approach to enforcing law and order. Warfare was to occur virtually all the time the Peace Corps was in Sarawak.

Much of the modern militarism in Sarawak derived from the “vertical” view of powerful participants, that is, a patron-client relationship.² This was the case for British imperialists versus natives, Islam or Christianity versus other religions, and rich versus poor in general.³ Horizontal relations, in contrast, were common among ethnic groups in Sarawak and also between Peace Corps volunteers and the Sarawak people. Vertical views led to large problems.

Sarawak in 1962 was unsettled in a political sense.⁴ While the British government favored a hasty withdrawal from its colonial empire in Asia, a few men who had local experience, such as Malcolm MacDonald, Britain’s Special Commissioner for Southeast Asia, favored a federation of Sarawak, Sabah, and Brunei. They did not favor northern Borneo being part of a new state called Malaysia. This idea of a northern federation was not acceptable to Britain. In time, MacDonald’s call for a Borneo solution to Britain’s withdrawal from the island was taken up by Sarawak leaders to resist any alliance with the Malay peninsula. In 1962, Sarawak’s leaders were still unsure if it would become an independent state or would lose its autonomy, and local politicians took different positions. This question was particularly acute because Sukarno’s Indonesia was threatening expansion in the region. When a border war with the Indonesian state of Kalimantan called Confrontation started in 1963 Sarawak needed British military aid to counter it. Sarawak could receive this aid only by agreeing to join into federation with Malaya, but not otherwise. As a result, Sarawak went from being a British colony to a step-child of West Malaysia, as some saw it.⁵

At least a few young people in Sarawak were then being educated for longer periods and becoming vocal about their ideas for the future.⁶ Many of them had attended Chinese schools where the impressive rise of Communist China from the debacle of the pre-1949 Nationalist regime was publicized. Within this group, young Chinese became

¹ In a longhouse decorated with a Japanese severed head, Ibans noted that while Americans called them headhunters, it was the Americans who dropped the atomic bomb (J. Orr, personal communication, 1 February, 2010). The first Peace Corps contingent to Sarawak was initially housed at Batu Lintang Teacher Training College near Kuching, which had earlier been the prisoner-of-war camp run by the Japanese.

² Roff, 1974.

³ “Malayans at that time tended to regard Dayaks...and other Borneo peoples as primitive Malays kept backwards and separate by the colonialists” (Morrison, 1993, p. 132).

⁴ Porritt, 2004A.

⁵ This transition occurred in two phases. From 1963 to late 1966, British expatriate officials and military forces controlled Sarawak, although Sarawak was by then a new part of Malaysia. After 1966 Sarawak became Malayized, meaning that Kuala Lumpur officials and the Malayan military were the dominant influences (Leigh, 1974).

⁶ Chew, 2011.

idealistic and then militant to the extent of opposing the formation of Malaysia. They sided, at least as a matter of convenience, with Indonesians over the border in Kalimantan. Contrarily, Sarawak Malays with Malay-medium primary education by and large identified with Malaya or Brunei where Malays were the majority groups, although some Sarawak Malays later grew cool to those from Malaya. Both Chinese and Malay teachers passed on their particular sympathies to their students.⁷

Some have argued that most dissidents in Sarawak were staunch communists who believed propaganda issuing from Russia and China and were bent on the overthrow of government by violence or any other means. Others ask whether in a situation where dissent is not tolerated, democratic norms are not observed, and leaders have narrow interests, the terms “communist” and “disloyal” are also propagandistic. In this view, not all nationalists, civil libertarians, and socialists are communists.⁸ The fact is that there never was a referendum of the Sarawak people as to their wishes about independence versus federation with Malaya.⁹ There were only reports on the acquiescence of high-ranking Sarawak personalities and a nominal guess as to the wishes of all the others in the state.

A disquieting series of events arose out of the wishes of the British colonial leaders and Tunku Abdul Rahman, the first prime minister of Malaya, to envelop Sarawak in a federation ruled from Kuala Lumpur—forming the Malaysia that exists today. Abdul Rahman first proposed this federation in December, 1962, but other events were also conspiring to complicate the future of Sarawak. Not only were many Chinese in Sarawak and elsewhere in Southeast Asia impressed by Mao’s China and the Viet Cong, but American foreign policy was rigidly anti-communist, to the extent of placing military “advisors” in South Vietnam and giving lavish aid to Indonesia in order to suppress communism there.¹⁰ In addition, Malays in Brunei wanted to unite northern Borneo into a “People’s Republic” under Brunei rule. While many people of Sarawak preferred it to be a self-governing nation within the British Commonwealth, their wishes went unheard or were manipulated to foster the goal of Malayan domination.¹¹ For example, to woo Sarawak into Malaysia, Dayak leaders were given a red-carpet tour of the modern facade of Malaya. It was not a complete success. The leaders came home with blistered feet, not being used to wearing shoes. They also felt frozen in air-conditioned hotel rooms. “One was found wrapped in a blanket in a bathtub.”¹² The merger of Sarawak with Malaya was oversold.¹³

Tunku Abdul Rahman was relentless in his pursuit of Sarawak as a member of the greater Malay-Malaysia that he envisioned and intended to lead. He meddled in Sarawak politics even before British colonial rule ended in Sarawak on 16 September, 1963 and

⁷ Mackie, 1974, p. 63.

⁸ See Porritt, 2004A.

⁹ Neither were people in Malaya allowed to vote on the formation of Malaysia.

¹⁰ Communism was not illegal in Indonesia or in Sarawak at the time. The U. S. was also training military officers in the early 1960s in Malaya, at a cost of about three million dollars a year (Gould, 1969, p. 224).

¹¹ Sarawak rural Chinese favored an independent state in part because they were barred from buying land in most locations, preference being given to Dayak communities (Morrison, 1993). Interestingly, to this day, independence is still a hope among Sarawakians.

¹² Siburat, 2007, p. 179.

¹³ Porritt, 2004B, p. 71; Gould, 1969, p. 141. James Gould was the Peace Corps director for Malaysia in 1964-1966.

annexation to Malaya began, despite the fact that Malays were a minority in Sarawak.¹⁴ Moreover, the Sarawak state constitution of 1963 specified that the prime minister was not to appoint the governor, the top state official of Sarawak. Abdul Rahman appointed his chosen Malay ally anyway. He fantasized a cultural commonality for Malaya and northern Borneo, as likewise did Indonesia's Sukarno for northern Borneo and Indonesia.¹⁵ Both men had something to gain by such inventions, but many Sarawakians had something to lose. Before these politicians came on the scene, people in Sarawak identified themselves as belonging to small groups, those speaking a common language and living on the same river or same estuary. They had a sense of place, not of nationality. The idea of a Malaysian nation-state or a Malay culture area ruled by the Malay rajah class was alien to them. Some Sarawakians wanted the British to govern them and protect them from the Malaysians. Sarawak, after all, had never previously been enamored with Malaya, let alone dictated to by Malayan rulers. Sarawakians were as insular as the British had long been about their own island homeland. As late as 1968, a longhouse on the Baram River had only pictures of Queen Elizabeth and Prince Phillip on its walls. Because the residents assumed all white people were British, they told a visiting Peace Corps volunteer, "When you see the Queen, tell her we want her back."¹⁶

This brew of disparate outlooks, involving Malaya, the British, and others, erupted in December, 1962, just as the first group of Peace Corps volunteers were becoming accustomed to their modest jobs all across Sarawak.

The Brunei Rebellion

On December 8, 1962, Brunei Malay rebels of the TNKU, which was opposed to the formation of Malaysia, seized the Brunei oil fields.¹⁷ Four days later they seized the nearby town of Limbang in Sarawak. Britain flew in Royal Marines from Singapore and re-took the captured areas within a week.¹⁸ Four Sarawak Peace Corps volunteers were caught up in these events but only one was captured and had to be rescued.

In Limbang, sandwiched between two districts of the country of Brunei, several foreigners were taken hostage by the rebels. One of the hostages was a young Peace Corps volunteer named Fritz Klattenhoff. He had been four days out of high school when he left San Francisco for Peace Corps training in Hawaii that year.¹⁹ In capturing the town, the rebels had killed four Malay policemen defending their police station and had left their bodies by the road. At gunpoint, the captured District Officer ordered the small police force to surrender. The rebels then seized the police weapons. Because one of the dead policemen had been a roommate of Fritz, he stole out that night and buried his

¹⁴ Also, Malay leaders were surprised that Malays were not more numerous in Sarawak. Beyond that, Abdul Rahman himself thought Dayak languages were mutually comprehensible with Malay (Porritt, 2004A). He also said there was no such thing as an Iban language (Roff, 1974, p. 170n).

¹⁵ One commentator sided with Sukarno's view that Malaysia was not "an authentic national entity" (Jacquet-Francillon, 1965, p. 16).

¹⁶ J. Roberts, personal communication, 4 October, 2011.)

¹⁷ TNKU, *Tentera Nasional Kalimantan Utara*, or North Kalimantan National Army.

¹⁸ As a sidelight, when upriver Iban heard about the attack on Limbang, they hopped into longboats and paddled down to help the British. The British greeted them uneasily. Were the armed Iban friends or foe? After clarification, the British entertained the Iban and sent them home the next day (B. Revelle, personal communication, 2 June, 2010).

¹⁹ D. Morten, personal communication, 15 August, 2010.

friend's body. Fritz was captured the next day and held hostage with the DO, his wife, and two nuns. Confined to the local hospital, Fritz helped care for the wounded on both sides of the hostilities while awaiting his fate. The rebels issued demands that if not met would lead to the execution of the hostages. As it turned out, the Royal Marines arrived in Limbang and freed the hostages just hours before they were to be hanged. Six Marines lost their lives in the fire fight that ensued when the rebels tried to kill the hostages, but all the hostages survived. Fritz received only a minor leg wound during the fighting.²⁰

To prevent any incursion by the Brunei rebels into the nearby Sarawak town of Lawas, another Peace Corps volunteer, Andy Powers, helped the District Officer and the people in the Public Works Department prepare its perimeter defenses. He met up with Fritz Klattenhoff a few days later in Limbang and they traveled together by boat to Labuan Island and then flew to Kuching. Soon thereafter, they were sent to the American Consulate in Singapore for consultation with the Military Attaché and the Political Affairs Officer on the uprising.²¹ After that they got back to work, Andy building roads and Fritz building 4-H clubs. By that time, the British had issued orders to round up suspected communists.²² As a result, more than 1,000 of the Brunei rebels were on the run, into the uplands and over the border into Kalimantan. There they were joined by up to 2,000 young Sarawak Chinese members of the CCO (Chinese Communist Organization), commonly called CTs (communist terrorists) by the British. Kalimantan at that time provided both a refuge from the British as well as guerilla-warfare training.

Following the rebellion, British-led forces moved quickly into Sarawak. These Commonwealth forces were largely Gurkha, Malayan, Australian, and New Zealander, although an Irish Hussars Battalion was posted to Simanggang (now Sri Aman).²³ The Commonwealth forces had anti-aircraft guns at the Kuching airport. They even had minesweepers as far up the Rejang River as Kanowit.²⁴ After a deadly cross-border raid, Gurkha engineers built a helicopter pad and radio outpost at Long Akah to assist in Kalimantan-border surveillance. They also threw grenades in the river there to get fish to eat. Outside one town British soldiers harassed the guerillas over the border with mortar shelling, frightening the rural people living nearby.²⁵ Near Long Jawi, the British forces gunned down retreating raiders and their bloated bodies floated down the river. No one dared to drink water from that river for days²⁶ Soon all the larger towns had British-led troops, as did remote, mountainous areas on the border. As a result, Peace Corps volunteers enjoyed a few booze-fests with the likewise youthful Army lads.²⁷ But some soldiers wondered why the volunteers were not fighting in Vietnam.

²⁰ Fritz was a modest person who rarely if ever mentioned the Limburg troubles even to Sarawak Peace Corps veterans he got to know later back in Hawaii when Fritz was helping train future volunteers (K. Shuey, personal communication, 17 March, 2010).

²¹ A. Powers, personal communication, 6 August, 2011.

²² Many Chinese in Sarawak feared Malay political domination because it had disadvantaged the Chinese living in Malaya. See also Sodhy, 1988.

²³ Sarawak did not have an army of its own. It did have Border Scouts (the Home Guards), virtually all of them Dayaks, plus the Sarawak Rangers. The Rangers had three tracking platoons and support people, 157 Iban and five British in all. The Rangers helped Commonwealth forces after the Brunei Rebellion. During Confrontation the force expanded greatly.

²⁴ B. Barnstorm, personal communication, 2 August, 2011.

²⁵ D. Wood, personal communication, 29 September, 2010.

²⁶ Avalon Ajang Ledong, personal communication, 22 October, 2009.

²⁷ H. Blackmer, personal communication, 17 January, 2010.

In view of these wartime developments, Peace Corps officials issued radios to volunteers working near the border to help them avoid areas where clashes were occurring. Donald Hayak, working up-river on rural projects in 1966, listened to the daily news on Radio Sarawak, the government station, but luckily no clashes occurred in his area.²⁸

The formation of Malaysia and Confrontation

In the 1960s Malaya was anti-communist in part because it had had a communist insurgency following World War II, when it was still a British colony. Britain had taken the lead at that time to fight the insurgents and eventually won. Malaya therefore approved of the American involvement in Vietnam, buying into the domino theory of one after another of the Southeast Asian countries being vulnerable to a communist take-over. This had implications in Sarawak, at that time under British control, when the police station at Tebedu was attacked in April, 1963 by about 20 armed raiders from across the Kalimantan border of Indonesia. This was the start of the undeclared war called Confrontation, or *Konfrontasi*. Among other complications, Confrontation caused problems for Dayaks living near the 900-mile long border because close kin lived on both sides: Iban in some areas, Bidayuh, Kelabit, or the like in other areas. The border was an artificial line invented by colonial rulers that was meaningless to local Dayaks.²⁹

Confrontation had three phases. The first phase was growing Indonesian verbal opposition to the formation of Malaysia, described as a British puppet state.³⁰ Rural Peace Corps volunteers listened to Sukarno's speeches on their battery-operated radios. The second phase was military, after September, 1963 when Malaysia came into existence despite Sukarno's objection. Indonesia then massed troops along the Kalimantan border.³¹ The third phase was the decline of warfare by late 1964, leading to a treaty and the restoration of full diplomatic relations between Malaysia and Indonesia in August, 1967.³² By that time, the British had removed all Commonwealth troops from Sarawak and Sabah and their military defense became entirely Malayan. In essence, the Malayan forces were an occupying army. Although Confrontation officially ended in 1966, the guerilla warfare waged by the Sarawak rebels lasted until 1973. All this warfare resulted in an expensive drain on economic progress.

While Peace Corps volunteers were practicing frugality and the work ethic in Sarawak, the Malaysian military spent RM 1,023 million there from 1963 to 1975.³³ The

²⁸ D. Hayak, personal communication, 27 July, 2010.

²⁹ J. Pearson, personal communication, 1 September, 2011.

³⁰ President Kennedy announced American support of the Malaysian plan in February, 1963 (Sodhy, 1988, p. 114).

³¹ In the first year of Confrontation, 120 cross-border incidents originated from the Kalimantan side (Porritt, 2006). Most of them were largely harassment—lobbing mortar shells into Sarawak and running back to safer ground. See also Fowler, 2006. Infiltrators from Kalimantan were rounded up by Gurkha troops and their Dayak allies in the interior. Many infiltrators were put in a prison across the street from the Chung Hwa Middle School in Miri, where a succession of Peace Corps volunteers taught (R. Lipsey, personal communication, 10 January, 2012).

³² Meanwhile, the United States withdrew aid from Indonesia to pressure Sukarno to end his *Konfrontasi* in Borneo. Sukarno told the Americans to “go to hell,” and the Peace Corps withdrew its Indonesian volunteers to Thailand, perhaps the first time a program was terminated by the Peace Corps. Soon thereafter, Sukarno was overthrown by Suharto, who ended Confrontation by treaty in 1966.

³³ Porritt, 2004A, p. 215.

military also benefitted from the free assistance of Commonwealth forces stationed there up through 1967; those forces numbered 8,000 in 1964.³⁴ The combined military outlay, while of unknown sum, clearly dwarfed the RM 816 million spent on development aid in the state in 1963-1975. Regardless of the hundreds of deaths caused by the Confrontation fracas, the politicians in Kuala Lumpur and Kuching sought a military “solution” rather than a peaceful one to the twin problems of Indonesian bellicosity and the discontent of many Sarawak people about the idea of Malaysian federation.³⁵

Peace Corps volunteers in the midst of turmoil: Confrontation and its aftermath

Peace Corps volunteers were under orders from their administrators not to get involved in politics. They were courteous guests in Sarawak and did not criticize the Sarawak or Malaysian governments publicly, let alone take up arms with the political dissidents. Moreover, some volunteers knew little about Confrontation or its aftermath, except what they read in local newspapers. One volunteer teacher at the Chung Hua Middle School in Miri was told there might be “communist sympathizers” among his students, but he found them to be focused only on acquiring an education.³⁶ Other volunteers were aware of Confrontation only because so many British-led troops were nearby and held parties which volunteers were invited to attend. At Christmas time, all the troop units hosted parties.³⁷

Helicopters used school playing fields as landing pads, attracting much student attention. By 1963 helicopters often flew out of Sibu to look for rebels in the district, prompting a student in Kanowit to ask how long it took a man to make a helicopter. His Peace Corps teacher told him one person doesn’t make it, many people make different parts and others put them together, then all of these people do the same work again and again. This assembly-line answer was satisfactory.³⁸ The helicopter pilots were occasionally helpful to Peace Corps volunteers, flying them upriver to their work areas when their plans coincided. In addition, the British Army took time out one day to transport a volunteer stranded in the town of Song up to Kapit to start installing gravity-fed piped water systems along the Baleh tributaries. The volunteer, Jon Darrah, soon gained the name of Jon Pipe among longhouse people for his work with them.³⁹ Elsewhere, matters were less peaceful.

In 1963 corpses were brought in to Bau from the Kalimantan border, ten miles away, and a Peace Corps volunteer’s house in Bau was surrounded by slit trenches and barbed wire to help protect the nearby District Office from attacks by Indonesian infiltrators.⁴⁰ When a United Nation team visited Bau that year to assess Sarawak’s mood about federation with Malaya, anti-Malaysia demonstrators shouted at the team and

³⁴ Jones, 2002, p. 286n. The combined Sarawak-Sabah force eventually peaked at 50,000 (Sodhy, 1988).

³⁵ Kuching had huge bellicose billboards reading “*Ganyang Penyamun Kommunis*” (roughly, Crush the Communists) (D. Balya, personal communication, 30 August, 2011).

³⁶ D. Staples, personal communication, 20 November, 2009.

³⁷ One Peace Corps volunteer was invited to a Hindu festival by a Gurkha unit at which a water buffalo lost its head with one slash of a Gurkha knife (a kukri) (D. Morten, personal communication, 12 September, 2011). Another volunteer was invited to Scottish country dancing on Friday nights at the Gymkhana Club in Miri (R. Lipsey, personal communication, 10 January, 2012).

³⁸ K. Shuey, personal communication, 12 February, 2010.

³⁹ Quaid, 1983.

⁴⁰ L. De Danaan, personal communication, 12 October, 2011.

shoved their posters into the team vehicles on their way to the District Officer's bungalow. It almost became a brawl, but the military swept through the town from their nearby camp and soon restored order.⁴¹ By 1966, although Bau still had some military posturing by Commonwealth forces, the two Peace Corps teachers there thought the military presence was "more theater than reality."⁴² Yet at the same time, another volunteer building roads and bridges in the area found that the local Bidayuh residents protected him from any trouble with guerillas by warning him when they were rumored to be close by.⁴³ At that time Bau had curfews and also four forward gun positions that boomed all night long. The local Bidayuh, when told that they should inform authorities about "communists," were confused. They had to ask a local Peace Corps woman what the word meant.⁴⁴

The situation was more complex elsewhere. Some volunteers found themselves in the midst of turmoil. An unexpected side effect of these events for one busy volunteer was that his mother did not hear from him for a while and complained to Sargent Shriver, the head of Peace Corps in Washington. He wrote the Peace Corps representative in Kuching, who in turn sent a telegram to the volunteer, "Write Mommy."

By 1967 anti-Malaysia rebels had lost their safe havens in Kalimantan, due to the end of Confrontation. They returned to Sarawak to continue their struggle. As a result, Sarawak then and later had "black" areas versus white ones, the latter being free of rebels. Black areas had curfews and were subject to unannounced house searches. Non-Dayaks in such areas had to hand over their firearms. Food and other supplies were rationed to deny them reaching the rebels.

Many of these black areas had Peace Corps volunteers working in them because by the mid-1960s well over a hundred volunteers had been placed throughout Sarawak.⁴⁵ At the Dragon School near Kuching, where Peace Corps people taught, a 7 PM to 6 AM curfew was imposed after a rebel raid in the area. To ease the tension in this situation, free public films were shown at the school on Sunday evenings. Kanowit also became a black area as the 1970s drew near, with rebel camps in the forest. Peace Corps volunteers teaching at the secondary school at Kanowit experienced night curfews and anti-American sentiments.

In 1963, following the Brunei uprising, school buildings were damaged by gunfire at the Chinese school in Bekenu during a rebel assault on the stockade (*kubu*) there.⁴⁶ When Indonesia publically declared its anti-Malaysia stance, the rebels became more active in opposing the Sarawak government militarily. They also opposed the non-Chinese schools.⁴⁷ Wherever rebels attacked built-up areas, schools had to close or move to safer quarters; this was the case in Tebedu, Gumbang, and Lubok Antu. These developments affected Peace Corps teachers and others in a number of schools. In one case, Ed Putka, on his first day of teaching at a Sibu school, found red-paint slogans on the walls and the basketball court: "Join the revolution," and "Don't go to school where

⁴¹ L. De Danaan, personal communication, 16 October, 2011.

⁴² J. McClay, personal communication, 7 February, 2011.

⁴³ J. Mohrlang, personal communication, 25 February, 2010.

⁴⁴ L. Steedman, personal communication, 11 December, 2011.

⁴⁵ In 1967 Malaysia as a whole had more Peace Corps volunteers than any other country (Quaid, 1983).

⁴⁶ Anonymous, 1963.

⁴⁷ One such case was St. Elizabeth School in Sibu, a girls' school (Munan-Oettli, 1987).

the running dogs are.” Volunteers like Ed found that they had to keep their bicycles indoors, otherwise rebels stole them to make guns.⁴⁸

In Chinese schools themselves, people not associated with the rebels’ cause could be harassed. One Peace Corps volunteer who was fluent in Chinese encountered some hostility in 1965 at the Chinese school in Sibul where she was teaching. Articles about American attacks on Vietnam were “flashed” at her. She soon transferred to Kuching to work there.

When the British brought in troops from Singapore and Malaya to counter the rebellion and curtail raids into Sarawak from the Kalimantan border, schools were taken over by the security forces.⁴⁹ As a result, in Limbang the Chinese primary school took in students of the government secondary school and the mission school there. Similar doubling-up occurred elsewhere, for weeks or longer.

In early 1963, 100 inches of rain fell in 24 days throughout Sarawak.⁵⁰ Rain came down in buckets. The ensuing heavy floods only made matters worse. Riverside longhouses with water up to their house floors had to be evacuated.⁵¹ Fifteen flood-damaged schools required major repairs, but schools on high ground served as relief centers for people whose lowland longhouses were flooded. In Marudi the new, unfinished school dormitories sheltered longhouse families until the waters of the Baram River subsided. In addition, crops and livestock were lost, but the U. S. Food for Peace Program alleviated food shortages by providing wheat and powdered milk to boarding schools and low-lying villages.⁵² Villagers initially fed the wheat to their rescued livestock, but hunger finally drove these rice-accustomed people to eat the wheat themselves. Boarding students found their rice mixed with wheat and had a hard time eating it, but they had little choice.⁵³ Peace Corps volunteers helped to distribute this food, especially to rural schools. In Bau District, one Peace Corps volunteer, Lynn Patterson, took in a family that had lost almost everything in the flood. She also aided relief operations by organizing the distribution of supplies dropped by parachute, for which she was praised by Sarawak officials.⁵⁴ Then later, in 1964, the lower Rejang River area came under quarantine because of a cholera epidemic, further disrupting local life there.

Once Confrontation became a regional flashpoint, Cold War warriors in the United States started to side publically with Malaysia, ushering in a more muscular American presence in Kuching, in keeping with the American fears of communist

⁴⁸ E. Putka, personal communication, 2011. The Sibul area was hard hit by rebel murders of suspected government informers at that time (Leigh, 1974).

⁴⁹ Anonymous, 1963.

⁵⁰ A. Powers, personal communication, 6 June, 2011.

⁵¹ One Peace Corps teacher was on the M. V. Belatok on his way from Kuching to Saratok when the rains first hit. He sat in the captain’s chair in the stern looking at waves and white, muddy water seemingly everywhere, while everyone else on the boat was sick (J. Seymour, personal communication, 21 January, 2011).

⁵² So much food was piled up on the wharf at Mukah that school boys there thought the United States must have mountains of food (Abdul Rashid Abdullah, personal communication, July, 2009).

⁵³ Langub, 2007, p. 200.

⁵⁴ Patterson, 1963.

uprisings throughout Asia.⁵⁵ An American Counsel came to Kuching with an entourage that included “the usual suspects,” CIA and FBI men.⁵⁶ What their duties were in Sarawak is unclear, although American foreign policy without the CIA is difficult to imagine. At the same time, given that the U. S. found itself in the quagmire of the Cold War and the Vietnam War, the Peace Corps administration admonished volunteers never to get involved in political action or to fraternize with U. S. spies, such as any CIA people in Sarawak in the 1960s.⁵⁷ Sarawak volunteers, in fact, were generally anti-war and thus not always politically correct. For example, one Sarawak volunteer maintained that the Peace Corps was a public relations branch of American foreign policy, although others disagreed.

While no volunteer has said that the CIA had influenced or infiltrated the Peace Corps in Sarawak, some local people seemed to have doubts. In Limbang in 1966 a young Peace Corps woman was said to be a CIA agent simply because she took so many photographs of the town.⁵⁸ And a British Army intelligence officer in the state told a taradiddle that a Peace Corps teacher in the 1960s was CIA-connected, perhaps because he taught the esoteric subject of physics and used his empty beer bottles to build a monument to his favorite drink. A teaching volunteer fresh out of graduate school was also momentarily suspected of being a CIA spy. His cover was “blown” when he was observed translating into English the German subtitles in a Saturday-night film at his school. Very suspicious behavior!

At that time in Washington, D. C., the Peace Corps leadership was vociferously opposed to sullyng the Corps with any taint of militarism or spying. Volunteers were told that FBI background checks had been done on them in part to verify that they were not CIA. Free-loading by cloak-and-dagger types on Peace Corps personnel was out. Nevertheless, one Sarawak official long believed that the Peace Corps was a CIA front, or at least was a form of neocolonialism.⁵⁹ This eventually contributed to the removal of the Peace Corps from Sarawak,

Meanwhile, in a successful self-help project near Binatang towards the end of the Confrontation period, Chinese market farmers were given pepper plants and advice to start growing pepper as a cash crop, but the project ended in disaster. This occurred when the whole district was “black” because of rebel activity. Two of the Chinese headmen (*Kapitan China*) of the farmers with whom Dick Morten, the Peace Corps volunteer, had worked, were killed by the rebels. Quite likely the headmen were suspected of being spies for the government. These deaths occurred just after the

⁵⁵ When Abdul Rahman visited the U. S. in 1964, Washington offered military aid to Malaysia to help in Confrontation (Sodhy, 1988). This was not as widely publicized in the U. S. as the tour that year of the Beatles.

⁵⁶ CIA: Central Intelligence Agency; FBI: Federal Bureau of Investigation. Porritt, 2006, p. 85, has a photograph of a Toni Bartolamucci, identified as a FBI man. The American consul in Kuching in 1966 was Robert W. Duemling (Tan, 2008, p. 21). The consulate sent Peace Corps volunteers in Miri an audio tape of the American national anthem. They listened to it on the beach on the fourth of July, 1965.

⁵⁷ In the early 1960s China called the Peace Corps a CIA organization, according to one Sarawak Peace Corps volunteer.

⁵⁸ Sanib Said, personal communication, July, 2009.

⁵⁹ Malayan officials in Kuala Lumpur were also leery of U. S. geopolitics (Maryanov, 1966). In contrast, as late as 1972 the anti-Malaysian rebels in Sarawak were calling any local leader opposed to their plans “an American running dog” (Porritt, 2004A, p. 169). See Windmiller, 1970 on criticism of the Peace Corps and Hoffman, 2011 on Peace Corps foreign policy.

Malaysian “Field Force” had a fire fight with the rebels in the area. Several of the rebels had been killed in that fight and their bodies lain out on the local sports field, presumably to warn the populace to adhere to the government line.⁶⁰ Of more immediate concern to Dick, the police-and-Field Force post in Binatang at that time was near the house where he lived. Often at night its klaxon would sound and flood lights would blaze out, causing Dick to take cover behind a concrete water tank, not sure if the uproar was the result of a drill or of an attack.⁶¹

By 1969 Binatang was under a 24-hour curfew. Peace Corps volunteers were among the many people who witnessed government efforts to make Binatang District “white.” Binatang was said to harbor CT (communist terrorist) rebels who either hid from government forces in the forest or harassed those forces. In 1970 Binatang District still had army roadblocks and patrols. In one case, rebels fired on government troops nearing a CT camp about five miles from Binatang town and then faded away. The CTs abandoned their supplies, presumably provided by Chinese in the area.⁶² In 1972, when the Malaysian army was ambushed by CTs near the Rajang Teacher Training College in Binatang, students ran to the classroom windows to see what was happening. Their Peace Corps teacher yelled at them to lie down on the floor until the fire fight stopped. No one in the school was harmed, but the CTs twice entered the College at night, stringing up propaganda banners around buildings and then setting off bombs on the access road. The CTs also killed several Iban men at nearby longhouses, causing Iban students at the school great anxiety.⁶³ Because of these events plus the curfew, the school was “like an island in a stormy sea.”⁶⁴

During this period, Malayan troops routinely did identity checks of people traveling by boat or road, addressing them in Malay, whether the person understood the language or not. A few Peace Corps volunteers, among many others, were not fluent enough in Malay to answer the soldiers’ insistent questions. Since the Malays were monolingual, such encounters could be tense. Peace Corps volunteers and other residents strolling around towns such as Miri after dark were invariably stopped by military patrols and had to show their identity papers. For these and other reasons, Malayan troops did not always win friends in Sarawak.⁶⁵

After a raid by rebels operating from Kalimantan in 1963, the town of Lubok Antu had a 6 PM to 6 AM curfew enforced by a Gurkha Rifle Battalion which also patrolled the border areas. By 1966 the Malayan Army had replaced the Gurkhas in Lubok Antu, but it rarely patrolled remote Iban areas where *tuak* (alcohol) drinking was the norm, perhaps because the Malay soldiers were teetotaler Muslims. Another town had a helicopter ready to take Peace Corps volunteers out of danger, if necessary.⁶⁶ On one occasion a rumor of rebel activity in the Delok River area above Lubok Antu led to a Peace Corps volunteer being withdrawn to safer ground for several weeks by Peace

⁶⁰ D. Morten, personal communication, various dates, 2010-2011.

⁶¹ D. Morten, personal communication, 12 September, 2011. In Tulai, near Binatang town, armed Malayan soldiers raided its small shops when on night patrol; if the Chinese residents complained, they were labeled communists (M. Addy, personal communication, 30 July, 2010).

⁶² Porritt, 2004A, pp. 183-184.

⁶³ J. Ingerson-Mahar, personal communication, 25 July, 2011.

⁶⁴ J. Ingerson-Mahar, personal communication, 8 September, 2011.

⁶⁵ They were not universally appreciated, sometimes using force or insults on civilians (Porritt, 2004).

⁶⁶ E. Romick, personal communication, 8 October, 2011.

Corps staff.⁶⁷ Other volunteers were likewise pulled out of their scattered work sites for the same reason during this period. But Peace Corps staff were often unaware of military events occurring far from their headquarters in Kuching, and volunteers in remote areas had little or no contact with the staff: “They were on another planet.”⁶⁸

Meanwhile, NEPSA volunteers making supervisory visits to rural schools in black areas checked with the local district office for information on possible trouble in the places they were scheduled to visit. There was some trepidation about visiting schools far from the main roads.⁶⁹

In 1969 rebels painted slogans and put up banners late at night at the Kanowit secondary school where two Peace Corps volunteers were teaching, along with two CUSOs and a VSO volunteer. There was no repeat performance, fortunately.⁷⁰

In the early 1970s, one Peace Corps volunteer of the 1962-64 contingent returned to Sarawak with his family to do research for a graduate degree. He soon became aware that aftermath of Confrontation was still troublesome. Rebels attacked a Malay Army convoy near his study site in May, 1970.⁷¹ As a result, he sent his family home to the United States to ensure their safety. About the same time, a volunteer in Serian lived through night curfews and rebel raids with gun and rocket fire.⁷²

While guerilla warfare ended in 1973 when most of the rebels called it quits, a few of them lingered in the backcountry until 1990.⁷³ By coincidence, the United States also called it quits in 1973, in Vietnam. By this time Sarawak politicians had become more nationalistic, more Malaysian, and less approving of foreigners.⁷⁴ Besides unease about the presence of the Peace Corps, by the 1970s teaching contracts of Indians from India in the Sarawak secondary schools were terminated. In 1972 the Chief Minister of Sarawak, Abdul Rahman Yakub, gave the commencement address at the English-medium teachers’ college in Binatang, largely in the Malay language, and also stonewalled a Peace Corps teacher there he encountered in the receiving line.⁷⁵ Negative attitudes towards outsiders were on the increase.

⁶⁷ J. Pearson, personal communication, 1 September, 2011.

⁶⁸ K. Shuey, personal communication, 12 May, 2010.

⁶⁹ E. Romick, personal communication, 8 October, 2011.

⁷⁰ J. Doerr, personal communication, 26 October, 2011.

⁷¹ M. Seymour, personal communication, 2 August, 2011.

⁷² D. Haldeman, personal communication, 20 October, 2009.

⁷³ For an account of the CCO surrender, see Tan Choe Choe, 2010.

⁷⁴ It had already removed all ex-patriate government officials by July, 1966. See also Sodhy, 1988.

⁷⁵ J. Ingerson-Mahar, personal communication, 28 July, 2011.

Part 5. Rural Development

Colonialism, Confrontation, and politics had major effects on rural development in Sarawak. Rural development projects were started in the 1950s by the British through the work of colonial district officers plus a few VSOs from Britain who preceded the Peace Corp volunteers in Sarawak. Little money was allocated for these efforts, except for the officers' salaries.

Starting in 1962, the Sarawak Development Office, still under the British, took on Peace Corps volunteers for help in rural projects, such as building bridges and latrines, digging wells, and starting community vegetable gardens. The British governor of Sarawak at the time doubted that the Peace Corps would be useful for rural projects. He became convinced of their worth when he attended the 1963 Sibul conclave of Peace Corps workers and their Sarawak 4-H club members exhibiting their many achievements.¹

The Development Office had several departments, including Agriculture, Medical, and Rural Development.² The Agriculture Department had extension officers and Peace Corps volunteers who helped rural enclaves construct fish ponds, pepper plots, and chicken coops. Some of these projects were subsidized by the government. Home demonstrators covered cooking, sewing, and infant care. 4-H clubs did a wide variety of projects.³ Volunteers who taught animal husbandry in schools also benefited future farmers.

The Medical Department had a few Peace Corps rural health supervisors and Peace Corps nurses.⁴ Volunteers working on malaria control handed out anti-malaria pills, sprayed longhouses with DDT imported from Russia, and emptied stagnant water from discarded tin cans and coconut shells in which mosquitoes like to breed. Other development projects, such as latrine building and providing piped water supplies, also had a health focus. Michael Smith's work on latrines and water pipes took him to some 100 villages on the outskirts of Kuching. Some of these villages were quite isolated, to the extent that when Michael mentioned to one old resident that many people in the world did not speak Malay or Dayak languages, the man was astonished. "But with enough betel nut, who cared!"⁵

The Development Department's main focus was minor rural projects for villages, including the self-help construction of mosques or *suraus* (prayer rooms) in Muslim areas, thereby giving a broad meaning to "development." In other cases a contractor was

¹ E. Price, personal communication, 18 November, 2011.

² Toub, 1966.

³ Many 4-H clubs, once formed, did community service even if the whole village did not participate in the work. Some clubs ran fishponds, market vegetable gardens, or pepper gardens, or built sports fields (Toub, 1966).

⁴ In the early years under British officials in Sarawak, American nurses were considered to be less qualified than English ones because the Americans generally lacked midwifery training, unlike the British nurses (Maryanov, 1966, p. 71).

⁵ M. Smith, personal communication, 17 March, 2010. Another Sarawakian was surprised that Americans spoke a common language, not dozens of different languages as in Sarawak (J. Doerr, personal communication, 26 October, 2011).

hired when funds were granted, such as for building a badminton court in a town.⁶ All government projects had to be approved by Kuching before funds were allocated to the Development Officer in each district. Quite a few Peace Corps volunteers supervised these rural projects. Volunteers also led work crews to lay out routes for road and construct the roadbeds and the bridgework involved. One Sarawak official commended a Peace Corps crew cutting through the rainforest to survey the route of a new road, saying that the volunteers were now *his* people and doing a fine job.⁷

Andy Powers was one of the Peace Corps volunteers who worked as a surveyor on road projects. He would spend three and a half weeks in the forest and return to Miri once a month to file reports with the Public Works Department and the Peace Corps staff in Kuching, and to relax a bit. He and his survey team mapped out the route from the Miri road head to Gunong Subis, a limestone outcrop near Niah, a 32-mile stretch. This survey took four months. When Andy returned to Sarawak in 1990, he was driven down that very road, and he saw that it followed the route he had suggested years earlier.⁸

Another volunteer, Kirk Cunningham, worked out of Sibu along the Rejang River system on hydrology projects, such as mapping high flood levels, with a crew of Chinese and Malay helpers, often for a month or two “on the road.” Each trip entailed the use of 50 or so longboats to carry cement, pipes, food, and other *barang* up the many river channels to distant longhouses.⁹

Generally, Peace Corps volunteers worked out of the district offices as de facto development extension agents. They did not make policy in prioritizing projects or allocate funds for a project list. Rather, they were to be diplomats in convincing local groups that a project was worthwhile and deserved local “sweat equity,” known in Malay as *gotong-royong*, meaning self-help. As part of their work, volunteers were often manual laborers themselves on their assigned projects. Sometimes rural projects became success stories, at other times not. In one case, a four-day storm filled a longhouse’s twenty new latrines and water rose almost to the veranda (*ruai*).¹⁰ Elsewhere, a village headman might want special favors during a project or even evade leading a work crew. In fact, in one village it was the Chinese shopkeeper, not the headman, who saw that the work was done. A village might want a bulldozer to make a road instead of working on it by hand. A convenient footpath might be made to a primary school but not increase school attendance, or the path might be washed out in the next monsoon season. A Peace Corps volunteer or a district officer might be remiss in overseeing a project, leading to its failure. The worst glitch seems to have been that funds promised from the federal government in Kuala Lumpur often arrived late or were inadequate, far beyond “a dollar short and a day late.” Nonetheless, when a project was completed, a sign usually went up proclaiming the idea of nation-building, such as “Malaysia Berjaya,” meaning that Malaysia was a success story.

Providing latrines (*jambans*) not only was at the mercy of adequate funding for buying materials, there were also aesthetic considerations. If latrines did not provide

⁶ A case of private development was the sawmill built next to the Kanowit secondary school by Temenggong Jugah, the most prominent Iban leader. The mill was regarded by Peace Corps teachers there as a forerunner of rainforest destruction (K. Shuey, personal communication, 4 December, 2010).

⁷ Anonymous, no date (1963?).

⁸ A. Powers, personal communication, 6 June, 2011.

⁹ K. Cunningham, personal communication, 26 May, 2010.

¹⁰ Read, 1981.

privacy, people were loath to use them. If outsiders built the latrines, people felt no responsibility for their maintenance. If they were put too close to living quarters, people hated the smell. Defecating in the bush or river was better because the rain or the current soon took the smell away. One inducement to change to the new method was the statement that latrines would be appreciated by visiting guests and thus be an asset in providing hospitality. While not every longhouse had access to piped water for molded-concrete, pour-flush latrines, Peace Corps volunteers did make some latrine progress in rural areas, but some learned it was best to avoid the “*jamban syndrome*,” the feeling that it was at least some form of progress, even if no one used the latrine.¹¹

One “development” was certainly a flop. In Saratok, students supervised by a volunteer laboriously dug a fish pond by a rivulet from the swamp, put chickens in coops by the pond, and planted papaya trees on the edge for shade. Then came a drought. No water, no pond, no fish, and no chickens.¹²

Between 1964 and 1970 Dayak people living close to the Kalimantan border were moved to “rubber schemes” at seven sites, including Melugu and Sibintek. These schemes preceded the widespread destruction of rainforest for logging, dam building, and palm oil plantations. The schemes turned out to be failures.¹³ Moreover, these expensive schemes drained funds from the many rural areas that needed infrastructure improvements.¹⁴ At Sibintek, 60 miles from Sibu, a rubber scheme was being developed in 1965 for “landless” Chinese. When a Peace Corps couple arrived there, they found there was no housing. A workforce of Kayans and Kenyans from the border area was clearing the site for roads and houses and living in temporary quarters. The Peace Corps couple was housed in a fertilizer shed. The husband supervised the road-building crews and the wife was assigned some “make-work.” He got dengue fever and she got malaria, but both eventually recovered, despite some hospital misinformation, and left to teach at the secondary school in Saratok.¹⁵

At Melugu, near present-day Sri Aman, three Peace Corps volunteers worked on setting up a relocation scheme for Iban subsistence farmers who lived where raiders from Kalimantan had been active. The Iban were to have a detached house for each family, ten acres for growing rubber trees, and five acres for farming and cash crops. The volunteers who worked to get the scheme ready for the settlers to move in found that it had planning and implementation problems, despite the dedicated efforts of the scheme supervisor. Two of the volunteers, a married couple, left Melugu early for other work and the third volunteer finished up his two-year Peace Corps service there.¹⁶ By that time Melugu had settlers and a school at which another volunteer taught. He had the distinction of traveling during a vacation-time jaunt from inside Kalimantan back across the border to Sarawak. Since this was during Confrontation, it caused some consternation by administrators and the teacher was sent to Kuala Lumpur to be “debriefed.” Fortunately,

¹¹ Marks, 1969.

¹² M. Seymour, personal communication, 11 February, 2010.

¹³ Dimbab Ngidang, 2003. In addition, in July, 1965, 7,600 Chinese were moved to “new villages” behind barbed wire to isolate them from rebels. Some called these villages concentration camps (Kee Howe Yong, 2006).

¹⁴ Morrison, 1993, p. 160. On p. 160 Morrison shows houses in Melugu on bulldozed terraces of scorched earth. Such scenes occur all over Malaysia today.

¹⁵ J. Rooda, personal communication, 5 March, 2010.

¹⁶ C. Marks, personal communication, various dates, 2010-2011.

he was not forced to leave Sarawak because of his cross-border travels.¹⁷ As a parting note on Melugu, when an anthropologist visited the scheme in 1973, he found it still had problems and the people living there were unhappy. They had moved house but lost not only their former resource base but their sense of place—of belongingness.

Good results could also happen. One longhouse was so successful with a community garden and fish ponds that it was awarded free fruit trees and a pig subsidy. Most of the piped water systems installed with Peace Corps help were gravity-fed, but one longhouse successfully got piped tap water into every *bilek* (household) from a well, using a suction pump. Ironically in this instance, some families unnecessarily continued to keep water stored in the traditional way—in large jars.¹⁸ Peace Corps volunteer Glenn Smith and his coworkers attached to the Agriculture Office in Bintulu encouraged Iban longhouse groups to grow vegetables and clean up their living spaces. Once the Iban observed that the vegetables improved their diet, they began making more and larger gardens. The Bintulu group also convinced one longhouse to be a model of cleanliness and then brought in nearby Iban leaders to see the improvements. The good work spread rapidly. “We were there at the right time,” Glenn later said.¹⁹

On the medical side, an outbreak of smallpox in 1965 led to one Peace Corps volunteer, James Redman, walking the hill country westward from the Sabah border toward Kuching, vaccinating along the way, including vaccinating Indonesians living close to Sarawak on the Kalimantan side. He also spent weeks with the Penans in the forest. The vaccines were dropped in ice packs at intervals at designated spots. It was a major effort.²⁰

As a sideline to his rural development work, a volunteer in Marudi provided medical help to a Kelabit school boy who suffered a heat stroke late one day playing soccer and went into a coma. The dresser (paramedic) in Marudi said the boy had to go to hospital in Miri, far down the river on the coast. Gene Bruce offered to transport the boy and the dresser in his work boat, since no other boats were on hand that night. It was a dangerous trip but it saved the boy’s life.²¹

The state’s underlying idea for rural development was to encourage people to stay at home and not chase after modernity, but it was not a huge success. Not only were children spending more of their time in school than in farm work, some parents firmly discouraged their children from learning about farming. The juggernaut of change was strong. From motorbikes and transistor radios it was a small step to the lure of city jobs. By 1967 the Kuching-Serian road that extended all the way to Sibu brought city life even closer to many rural areas. The modernity trend continues to this day in Sarawak. While literacy and medical services have increased, the change from a lean and balanced diet and an active lifestyle to store food and TV addiction is obvious in the obesity and diabetes increasing now in towns all over Sarawak.

The Peace Corps’ underlying idea for rural development was more diffuse and often confusing, or of little practical use to volunteers. The assessment by Group-10

¹⁷ B. McLaughlin, personal communication, 21 March, 2011. After July, 1964 Sarawak Peace Corps was under the country headquarters in Kuala Lumpur, but before that Sarawak had an independent Peace Corps staff (Quaid, 1983).

¹⁸ Toub, 1966.

¹⁹ G. Smith, personal communication, 11 May, 2010.

²⁰ J. Redman, personal communication, 8 August, 2011.

²¹ S. Kearns, personal communication 4 June, 2011.

volunteers of their training for working on rural development exemplifies some of the problems encountered.²² In Hilo, Hawaii the goal set by Peace Corps for this group of trainees was to provide a variety of experiences in community development, emphasizing good agricultural practices and simple techniques for the construction of latrines and wooden structures. While the volunteers agreed with this goal, once in Sarawak they found that implementation was difficult because too little had been taught about Borneo ecology and work conditions or about job know-how. The idea of projects originating at the local level was at odds with the top-down planning, approval, and funding typical of the government in Sarawak. In addition, the academic discussion in training about the primary purpose of community development being to cause social and cultural change in preference to doing a job well was too romantic. “Improving problem-solving mental resources” and the like were unrealistic notions.

Because volunteers working in rural development were underlings of officials in district offices, this impacted on the value of their work. One official might suggest a volunteer “supervise” the construction of a bridge merely by taking photographs of the site. A second might delegate the task of providing a well for a Malay village in a tidal zone, even though the village headman warned that the well water would be salty. The well was dug anyway and the headman’s warning proved to be correct.²³

In the Rejang area, a European District Officer assigned three Peace Corps women teachers to stay at a “backward” longhouse for 2 weeks during their school vacation time. The volunteers were to teach “kitchen hygiene.” But the women did not know the local language or have much longhouse experience. As newcomers, they knew that as “*mems*” they would have been entertained nightly with singing and dancing and *borak* (rice beer) drinking, but not be taken seriously. The women declined the assignment.²⁴

Told to provide “development” lumber for two Muslim Melanau villages so they could construct *suraus*, a Peace Corps volunteer did so, but on follow-up inspection found that nothing had been done and much of the lumber had disappeared. The volunteer had the remaining lumber trucked out, which angered a local official. As a result, complete sets of materials were returned to the villages and the volunteer was tasked with overseeing the work day by day. When all was done, the headman for the two villages wanted payment for the labor involved. This time the local official agreed with the volunteer: no dice.²⁵

In another case, inferior lumber was delivered for a road project but was charged at the #1 lumber rate. After the Peace Corps volunteer reported the discrepancy, it emerged that a district office worker had given the lumber order to a company run by a relative. The District Development Officer contacted the Peace Corps director in Kuching and a “save face” solution was the result: the office worker was promoted and the road project was stuck with the inferior lumber.

In addition, a volunteer’s rural project could fall victim to Commonwealth troop movements during ongoing Confrontation warfare with Indonesia. A half-finished road

²² Anonymous, ms., 1967.

²³ C. Marks, personal communication, 2010-2011.

²⁴ Burns, 1966.

²⁵ D. Morten, personal communication, 14 May, 2010. See also Leigh, 1974, p. 123 for similar situations where so-called rural development favored mosque construction.

provided an easy way for troops in their Ferrots (small tanks on wheels) to move into remote areas in search of rebels, thereby ruining the road. This meant the whole project had to be started all over again.²⁶

The question of inferior lumber did not arise in the Rejang area near Julau for the projects supervised by another Peace Corps volunteer, Tracy Townsend. In the case of footbridges or raised walkways over bogs, a longhouse was paid the price of store-bought lumber but the longhouse people themselves made the lumber from ironwood (*belian*). In the Rejang area, but not in all areas, such projects often started with a longhouse applying to the district office for funding.²⁷ When the money was awarded, part of the funds went for tools and nuts and bolts. One of the “tools” was a man-powered pile driver made with a rope and a pulley. Iban in the area had long used pile drivers for embedding foundation posts for the construction of new longhouses, and Tracy was advised that the method would work just as well for driving posts into the ground in footbridge construction. When a project was completed, all the tools became the property of the longhouse involved. In such cases, the hard-working longhouses not only got a footbridge but they got some pocket money and a useful tool kit. Tracy also took the advice of an Iban woman who told him not to put wooden handrails on footbridges, just use wire, “Otherwise the kids will try to walk on the rails.”²⁸

Cash crops were the focus of Bob Pastor’s work in the highlands above Limbang in 1971-72. He championed both coffee and vegetable gardening by writing a pamphlet in the Lun Bawang language and developing a training course for this purpose. He also wrote to many of the seed companies around the world and received hundreds of pounds of free seeds which were used in the highlands. On revisiting Sarawak in 2005 he saw the success of his earlier efforts.²⁹

Some rural development volunteers found fault with particular western influences they encountered in Sarawak. During his time as a Peace Corps volunteer, Kinky Friedman became opposed to the missionary activities he observed in Kayan country:

They encouraged the Kayans to cut off their long hair, throw away their hand-carved beds, and dance around the fire singing ‘Oh! Susanna.’ I’ve got nothing against ‘Oh! Susanna’—only against the missionaries who told the people to bow their heads and pray long enough so that when they looked up, their traditions would be gone.³⁰

The Malaysian government accepted the Peace Corps mainly to further its goal of economic development, rather than direct aid by Peace Corps volunteers to the poor. In Sarawak, and perhaps elsewhere, Peace Corps successes in rural development were not substantial. On the contrary, an unplanned outcome of rural development in Sarawak was that it tended to bolster urbanism, as many rural people left home for wage jobs.

In all, rural development work was sometimes difficult or frustrating for Peace Corps volunteers, but for the most part and for most of them their local successes were

²⁶ J. Mohrlang, personal communication, 20 February, 2010.

²⁷ In many areas, projects were likely to be the inspiration of a government official, not the end-users.

²⁸ T. Townsend, personal communication, 17 March, 2010.

²⁹ R. Pastor, personal communication, 9 August, 2011.

³⁰ Friedman, 2000, p. 245.

satisfying. Other work by volunteers, such as teaching, provided different challenges under quite different conditions. This will be explored in the following pages.

Part 6. Teaching

In the 1960s pluralism in Sarawak was being pushed toward Malaysian homogenization while in the United States just the opposite was happening. Minorities such as Chicanos and Afro-Americans were asserting their separate identities. Although Black history was beginning to be taught in American schools, the teaching of Dayak history in Sarawak was neglected. Sarawak history largely was the history of Brooke rule and the British colonial period, taught in English.

The main thrust of the Sarawak Peace Corps project was education.¹ The British colonial government had failed to support secondary and college education in Sarawak monetarily. It insisted that Sarawak have a uniform system of British-style education in English but did not pay for it. As a result, the Christian mission schools and the schools financed by the Chinese community were the main foci of education beyond the primary school level. Because the large Chinese population had long favored schooling, most of the Sarawak students at all levels in the early 1960s were Chinese. Dayak students were a mere 30 percent of the entire school enrollment in 1960.² The Anglican school in Kuching, St. Thomas', accepted students from all religions and was notably non-proselytizing, and the Catholic school in Kuching, St. Joseph's, was similar, but few Dayaks then lived in urban areas. Both these schools were started in the nineteenth century for educating only boys. Noticeable progress was made in expanding education state-wide only in the 1960s. In 1963 Sarawak had 916 primary schools and 64 secondary schools.³

Until the early 1960s Sarawak had government primary schools scattered around the state, a few lower secondary schools that taught Forms 1 through 4 (ages 13 through 16), but far fewer upper secondary schools. The government secondary schools all taught in English. The upper schools, which taught through Forms 5 or 6, were largely run by missions. The few government upper schools at that time included Tanjong Lobang (Headland Lagoon) in Miri, the Dragon School on the road from Kuching to Serian, and Kanowit Secondary School, all three of which started in 1959. Several others were started soon thereafter. Secondary schools usually had a majority of boarding students plus a few day students from nearby areas. Even some primary schools in sparsely populated areas had boarders. In addition, Chinese areas had locally run and locally funded primary schools with Chinese teaching in Chinese, not at all in English. The Chinese language was also used at the Chinese secondary schools that were located in the largest towns. The educational isolation of the Chinese schools eventually worked to the disadvantage of their students, as they were not fluent in English and thus not employable as civil servants. Moreover, the Chinese schools emphasized Chinese achievements, including those in Mao, which led some students to favor a socialist state in Sarawak.⁴ Especially during the 1960s, rebellious Chinese youth tried to influence other

¹ In March, 1967 Sarawak had 161 Peace Corps volunteers, 135 (84%) in education, seven in health work and nineteen in development work (Quaid, 1983). An estimated 40,000 Sarawak students, at a minimum, had Peace Corps teachers in the 1960s and early 1970s.

² Chin and Langub, 2007.

³ Shuster, 1963.

⁴ Some Chinese adults favored the rebels out of loyalty to China and fear of domination by Malayan Malays, but others had long ties to Sarawak which had given them prosperity and trade links to Singapore Chinese, not those of the mainland.

Sarawakians to their views, but they had little influence on their age mates, whether Chinese or not, in the English-medium schools that pursued a more “Western” curriculum.

The background to this situation was that for over a century and into the 1960s, government action in Sarawak was mainly territorial defense, including the suppression of headhunting. Both the Brookes and the British colonial regime after World War II favored “law and order” over social services. Education, for example, was secondary at best. The remarkable thing is that the Peace Corps influx into Sarawak occurred at just the right time, when Sarawak finally got into an educational mode. While in theory the Brookes and the British colonialists were absolute rulers, in practice Sarawak had long lived by established traditions, often autonomous. Education, foremost among other events, changed all that. Education was no longer family or village lore, but a formal enterprise and a modern necessity.

By 1963 parents were expecting their children to go to school. It was an educational boom time, especially after the government abolished primary school fees in 1966. This led to increased enrollments and put pressure on the Education Department to open up more secondary schools. As the government had abolished the secondary school entrance exam in 1964, this meant that all students could continue on through Form 4 (tenth grade) if they could pay the secondary school fees. This was not possible for poor families, except perhaps for their first child.

Given this situation, the American contribution to education in Sarawak is difficult to exaggerate. From 1904 when the first Methodist school opened up, through the twelve years of the Peace Corps there, Americans were a key factor in teaching students throughout Sarawak in many subjects, from physics to farming, helping to build an educated workforce. During this time the number of government secondary schools increased to become the dominant type of high school in Sarawak.⁵ Since few Sarawak teachers existed in the 1960s, Peace Corps volunteers helped overcome the teaching shortage until more local teachers could be trained to fill the needs of the education network.

The Peace Corps teachers worked in all aspects of education in Sarawak. Most of them were in secondary schools, but some were in primary schools or helping with primary education indirectly.⁶ They also taught in teacher-training colleges, of which there were three in 1966.⁷

Among the early government full-secondary schools was the Three Rivers School in Mukah, which by 1965 had a school band, a Sea Scout troop, school parliament, natural history society, and a small zoo. Three Rivers was started in 1961 and had its half-century celebration in 2011. Such schools grew to contain not only Forms 1 through

⁵ Curiously, up to 1966 the Peace Corps sent volunteers to Sarawak at times of the year that did not coincide with the school calendar. Starting in 1966, all volunteers arrived in January, the start of the school year. Some of the secondary schools had “moral instruction” to start the school day each morning, with the students standing in groups according to their religious preference. (B. Bergstrom, personal communication, 13 December, 2010).

⁶ At least two volunteers taught in Farmer Training Centers. The students entered after finishing primary school. In 1962, 31 foreigners in Sarawak schools were on Colombo Plan contracts, but the rest were volunteers: four CUSOs from Canada, eleven VSOs from Britain, and eight Peace Corps people. The Peace Corps number increased dramatically in the 1960s.

⁷ The three were Batu Lintang College in Kuching, Sibu College, and Rajang College in Bintang.

5, but also Form 6, a two-year stretch that was at the American community college level.⁸ Because of the scarcity of high schools, only high achievers were admitted to the advanced forms and every fewer students went on to college.⁹ It is worthwhile reflecting that if those bright secondary students had been in the United States in the 1960s, all of them could have become outstanding college graduates. Not only were the Sarawak high school students harder working than American teenagers, they were also more courteous, as Peace Corps teachers soon learned.¹⁰ Teachers were greatly respected in Sarawak. As one Peace Corps volunteer put it, “If the average American teacher were plunked down in a Sarawak classroom, he would think he’d died and gone to pedagogical heaven.”¹¹ One amusing problem Peace Corps volunteers had with students reading English literature was their confusion about what was a fact and what was not. In one class the students invariably asked, “Is it true?”

Virtually all of the headmasters were foreigners in the early years, but Sarawak men gradually replaced them during the 1960s. A headmaster could be a priest or a Presbyterian, Chinese or New Zealander, but all were molded by the British-Empire mode of education.¹² Memorizing, tests, and compartmentalized subjects were the hallowed norms. Headmasters required teachers to follow a rigid “syllabus,” so that students would be prepared for the state-wide tests on its contents. Deviation from the syllabus was not encouraged. A Sarawak school “was not a democracy.”¹³ While primary school teachers had the same children all day long, secondary teachers taught four or five different groups of students. One volunteer, for example, taught English to a Form 1 and a Form 3 class, history to a Form 3 class, and “General Paper” to two different Form 6 classes.¹⁴ Another volunteer taught 33 classes a week, including two math classes at a school near his own.¹⁵

Peace Corps teachers in secondary schools were assigned to teach any subject that was needed, whether they had strong qualifications in the subject or not. Their occasional attempts to improve a secondary school’s teaching were rarely applauded. Moreover, school authorities generally considered an American university degree to be inferior to a British degree. Despite these reservations, most of the headmasters were competent leaders and welcomed the help of Peace Corps teachers—if not their penchant for innovation—especially as few Sarawakians could teach math and science. Even so, one foreign headmaster ordered a new Peace Corps teacher at his school to wear knee-length socks with turned-down cuffs, fashionable with British colonial wallahs, which of course were uncomfortable in the tropics. The teacher managed to refuse without losing his post.¹⁶ It was a socks versus flip-flops culture clash.¹⁷

⁸ The Junior Cambridge exam was the hurdle in Form 4 for entry into Form 5. The Senior Cambridge Exam served the same purpose for entry into Form 6.

⁹ Lynn, no date.

¹⁰ Lynn, 1966.

¹¹ B. Anderson, personal communication, 27 July, 2001.

¹² The new science syllabus for Forms 1-3 of secondary school in the late 1960s was Scottish (R. M. Zwirner, personal communication, 19 October, 2009).

¹³ Carew and Kearns, 1966 (unpaged).

¹⁴ B. Lynn, personal communication, 9 November, 2009.

¹⁵ D. Staples, personal communication, 20 November, 2009.

¹⁶ While the teaching staff did not wear uniforms, all the students did; white tops and colored shorts for boys or skirts for girls. Students washed their own clothes.

¹⁷ Wood, 1981.

The closest contacts of Peace Corps teachers in Sarawak were often with their students. Contacts with school staff or local people were more distant. Rarer yet were contacts with boarding-students' families. This was akin to the American situation in the teaching profession with two exceptions: Peace Corps teachers had no families of their own in Sarawak, but most of them did have close contact with other Peace Corps volunteers in Sarawak at the same time—an acquired family. Especially in rural schools, younger students tended to look at Peace Corps teachers “as a mentor...as a master, or even as a father....Their parents ‘surrendered’ their children’s education to the teachers. Teachers knew best. This feeling was more intense when it came to an *Orang Puteh* (white person) teacher...Even if they had the best local teacher, the *Orang Puteh* teacher would still have the ears of the children and parents.”¹⁸

Richard Dehmel, a Peace Corps math and science teacher at Saratok in 1969-1971, had an unusual rapport with students. He often sat outdoors near the dorms in the evening talking with them about everything of interest. Richard was also exceptional in that childhood polio had made it necessary for him to walk with crutches, even on forest trails. He even managed to climb up notched-log ladders to longhouses with a little help. But he never complained. The Peace Corps wisely let him show how people with physical disabilities could function well overseas. In fact, Richard went on to be a Peace Corps volunteer in Fiji and Lesotho. He was teaching in Botswana when he died of cancer some years later. He was a dedicated teacher.¹⁹

Not all Peace Corps teachers were successful or memorable. But if nothing else, they had an urge to expose their students to a class situation in which the teacher did more than stand and read from a book or syllabus.²⁰ They were also boosters of sports such as softball, basketball, and track. And they took students on field trips to sports meets, different culture zones, and historical sites. They taught “the spirit of adventure.”²¹

Today, however, schooling in Sarawak is less adventuresome and more mechanized, at least in the towns. Many children are now driven between home and school, as witness the traffic jams by school grounds at the end of the class day.

A day in the life...

“Dragon Lagoon” school is a useful fiction for a secondary school with several Peace Corps staff. Like most government schools, it was newly built on a bulldozed site that was surrounded by rainforest. Like its sister schools, it had wooden open-sided general and science classrooms, an office, hostels (dormitories), a dining hall, a library, colonial-style textbooks, a sports field and basketball court, and employee housing.²² The buildings were “cookie-cutter” designs, cheap to plan and construct but functional. Since secondary schools were built on the outskirts of towns, Dragon Lagoon had a few

¹⁸ Avalon Ajang Ledong, personal communication, 7 November, 2009

¹⁹ T. Pack, personal communication, 11 September, 2011.

²⁰ See Maryanov, 1966, p. 71, for constraints imposed on teaching. One teacher at a Chinese secondary school was criticized in Chinese newspapers for not slavishly following the syllabus in her “bridge” class, for students preparing to transfer to English medium in Form 4. But as the students became more fluent in English, they appreciated her problem-solving approach (M. Clark, personal communication, 5 December, 2011).

²¹ Avalon Ajang Ledong, personal communication, 7 November, 2009.

²² Schatz. Ms.

day students that lived nearby, but the majority of the students were boarders from outlying hamlets and longhouses, some spending most of their adolescent years at the school. The school even had electricity, a luxury unknown in rural areas, but lights were turned off by 10 PM all over the school grounds. The Peace Corps teachers lived in quarters attached to the school, as did other teachers, both local and foreign. Quarters for teachers were often government-provided small houses, three rooms plus a kitchen and a bathroom that included a shower, well beyond what most Sarawak people had.²³

The school year consisted of three terms, averaging three months each. The longest vacation period was five weeks from December into early January.

Our Peace Corps teacher, Mr. Sam (whose full name of Samuel Samochevitski was nearly impossible to pronounce), got up early on school days because the students got up early and breakfast was also early. Before breakfast, the students walked a mile to the bazaar (the town business street) and back in the cool of the morning, an exercise event ordered by the headmaster. Sometimes, as this day, Sam walked with them, towering over them at six feet in height. One of Sam's older students asked him why he didn't put pomade on his hair like the rock stars in the movies. Sam said the gooey stuff wasn't healthy for a normal head. Then a new Iban student asked him why the "Peace Corpse" came to Sarawak. The older students avoided grinning with some difficulty, but it was a good question. Sam said, "I know why I came. I'm on *bejalai*, to learn about Sarawak and its people. So you and I are both students. The big difference is that I don't have to sit for any Cambridge Certificate examination." The Iban student nodded. He knew that for generations young Iban men had gone on *bejalai* trips, to see and experience the world.

At breakfast, Sam ate with the students in the dining hall, enjoying their informal chatter there. The food was shared out from the communal bowls on the table, everyone getting an equal portion. This meant that the fast-growing teenagers, as well as Sam, often left the table hungry. For the older students, this was an aching experience they would remember even years later. Tuesday breakfasts were especially hard on some Iban boys; they refused to eat the watery rice porridge on the menu because it was considered baby food in their natal longhouses.

Then came class.²⁴ Mr. Sam brought books from the school library and some of his own to his English class. One of his favorites was a book he had brought from home, written by an American doctor who had described and photographed longhouse life in nineteenth century Sarawak.²⁵ Despite the constraints of the official British-style syllabus, Mr. Sam also squeezed in stories about other lands and other people, much to the students' enjoyment. Shakespeare was studied, of course, but Mr. Sam got his class to write, produce, and act in a play. They even took their play "on the road" to other schools in the area, going by country buses. Sam usually found a vacant seat next to livestock, the major bus clients.

The second class was music. The students seemed to think the idea was to sing loud, not to sing well, but Mr. Sam didn't mind. It was just as entertaining.

²³ Burns, 1966.

²⁴ There were eight classes per day, Monday through Friday, at least 30 minutes each, and Peace Corps volunteers averaged 30 classes a week (Stewart, 1963).

²⁵ Furness, 1902.

Mr. Sam's next class was art, not because he was an artist but because the headmaster assigned him to do it since "there's no one else available." Sam doubted that this was true, but he did know that art was going to be a challenge for him. He hadn't done any drawing since grade school and it had been pretty bad. In desperation, he decided to have the students start by drawing simple shapes. Since he happened to be the chemistry teacher, he thought vials and flasks would do. He filched the glassware from the chemistry room for his art class, and during the tea break in mid-morning transferred it back to the chemistry room, which was his next class anyway. There he lectured on acids and bases and pH, sending some of his weaker students into a daze as the day heated up. No one asked any questions, which was the usual situation, but he had hoped for a few. More than likely the lesson was not well understood and he would have to go over it again tomorrow.

Lunch time arrived at 12:30. Over to the dining hall again. The students lined up outside, some with growling stomachs. Sam joined them in line and they filed inside when the bell sounded. Family-style bowls of rice and plates of vegetables and either fish or meat appeared on each table, along with sweet tea.²⁶ The cooks served boiled-dead vegetables to go with the rice, but at least the rice had been cooked in coconut milk. And it was "red" rice, hand-milled to save the vitamins in the husk and help prevent further cases of beriberi in the school children.

Next came Sam's best class, one for advanced students, mostly boys but a few girls. As usual for Sarawak, the boys and girls sat apart from each other in same-sex groups. The class covered "General Paper." Students were to write essays on "set" subjects to prepare them for the up-coming statewide exam, but they also wrote essays on subjects of their own choosing. One student surprised Mr. Sam with a good essay on the life and work of Martin Luther King. Civil rights was a winner in Sarawak!²⁷

After classes came school duties and sports. Mr. Sam was a devotee of softball and started a boy's team, but the girl students clamored for a team too. He coached both. Before sports, all the students had work assignments. Some worked on the school's flower beds, or in the pineapple plot, but the favorite job was the school vegetable garden, where one could pick a fresh, young peapod and eat it while hoeing weeds. The free-ranging chickens always got underfoot, on the lookout for worms unearthed by a hoe, but nobody minded. Mr. Sam often helped with the garden work, at the same time teaching folk songs to the youngsters there. The students' favorite was "Old McDonald had a farm" because it had amusing noises, such as cluck-cluck here, oink-oink there, and e-i-e-i-o.

Following a quick shower, Sam left the school grounds on his bicycle, pedaling down the dirt track to meet other teachers and local friends for supper at a shop in the bazaar, near the boat dock by the river. A short rain shower provided a cooling breeze for the town.

Fried rice with all the trimmings and beer were on the menu, amid the banter and the background noise of the proprietor's radio playing Malay and Chinese songs. This

²⁶ Marudi students poured the tea over the rice left in their bowls, for dessert (K. Hendrix, personal communication, 12 April, 2011).

²⁷ Another student who experienced the effort to research and write an essay for his Peace Corps teacher, Kay Harris, later studied for a Master of Science degree in forestry in New Zealand. Kay's "pro-active" method of teaching stood him in good stead there (Lek-Lim Chan, personal communication, 17 July, 2010).

was the usual “coffee shop news exchange” found all over Sarawak in every village and town. Today the dinner group included a young Iban from the district office who was making his rounds to longhouses to register births and check the rice harvest. He said that a footbridge across a stream upriver built by a Peace Corpsman working with longhouse volunteers was now well used by farmers and by children walking to primary school. He and Sam talked about how the longhouse people coming downriver for the local regatta the next weekend would have a chance to see their children staying at Sam’s school. In fact, Sam told him, the school had high hopes of winning a race during the regatta. The Chinese son of the shop’s cook, a friend who liked to read Sam’s *Time* magazines, argued that soccer was a more manly sport than baseball. And wasn’t the World Cup more important than the World Series? Sam had to agree. While the shophouse cat with a kinky tail settled close by, waiting for leftovers, one of the teachers, a young Peace Corps woman, told them about giving an American dollar bill to her top student on a state-wide exam in her Form 4 class. The spindly boy preferred the local equivalent of three Malaysian dollars. He said he couldn’t eat the American money, but since *mee goreng* (spicy noodles) cost only ten cents a bowl, he could buy *mee goreng* every day for a whole month. They all laughed.

As the setting sun gilded the river and the forest beyond, Sam left the dinner group early for an overdue haircut next door. The Chinese barber put aside the bowl of noodles he was eating and greeted him enthusiastically with the question: “Do you want a Mohawk or a Beatles’ cut?”²⁸ After disappointing the barber by insisting on a quick trim, he pedaled home in the dark serenaded by a chorus of frogs in the roadside marsh. He got back to his desk in time to listen to the BBC news on the radio and do some cramming for his classes the next day, groaning over what to do with his next art class. The house gecko on the wall by his desk chided him with its *chi-chak, chi-chak*. Then he remembered his father saying, “Don’t sweat the small stuff.”

Soon the lights went out all over the school grounds, except for the glow of kerosene lamps in the dorms where students were still studying. For Sam, lights out was a good excuse to jump inside the mosquito net and think about which corner of Sarawak he could explore in December during his next school vacation. Maybe Mulu where he’d once eaten mousedeer? Or Sematan? He fell asleep soon after deciding on Belaga. One of his students wanted him to visit his longhouse there. It was a wonderful thing to be young and to be in Sarawak.

Nearly fifty years later, a former Peace Corps volunteer looked back on the start of his two-year teaching assignment in 1963:

First, the overwhelming heat and humidity. Leaving Sibu in a dugout canoe with an outboard motor, snaking up the mile-wide Rejang River to Kanowit hour after hour. Growing depression: What am I going to do here for two years? Have I made a big mistake? Then reaching the school jetty where a gang of smiling kids was so excited to see me. They rushed to greet me and my fears vanished never

²⁸ At that time not everyone in Sarawak liked the Beatles. The British Resident (head) of the Second Division in Sarawak pulled the plug on the loudspeakers in a Simanggang (now Sri Aman) club where the local band was playing Beatle tunes at a dance party. The band boys left in a huff (Tay, 2007). But in Marudi secondary school in 1964 there was an epidemic of boys chopping their hair into a Beatle cut; soon the school had three rock bands and school dances featuring both waltzes and the twist, to the tune of “Help,” but not the songs of the Kayan *sapi* (lute) (Hendrix, 1980).

to return. The smiles lasted for the entire two years. Kids with so little stuff and such happy outlooks. How special they were. What a strong part of my life they were!²⁹

This volunteer had been instantly liberated from his American preconceptions and soon found out that Sarawak people thought Americans were the coolest thing since ice cream. In Limbang, people told another Peace Corps volunteer in 1972 that they preferred the Peace Corps to the British because the volunteers worked and lived with local people but the British were above them.³⁰ Also in the 1970s Iban people told the volunteer John Orr that they liked Americans because the two groups were alike: they both ate pork and drank alcohol, unlike the Muslim rulers.³¹

But anti-Americanism did exist elsewhere in Sarawak. By 1972, another volunteer teacher in Kanowit experienced curfews because anti-Malaysia rebels, referred to as communists, were in the nearby jungle. This volunteer happened to have received patriotic brochures from his father, a retired U. S. Air Force colonel, which carried such incendiary texts as the Declaration of Independence. He left them on his desk and they “disappeared.” And when he finished his two-year assignment and preparing to leave, the local people told him they liked him but they did not like America.³² Nevertheless, today, for the former Sarawak students and their Peace Corps teachers, each is the other’s history.

Not all teaching in schools was done by teachers. At Tanjong Lobang School in Miri, Marian McConkey, an older Peace Corps volunteer who was the school matron, tried valiantly to teach the school cook better food preparation methods, despite his “*Ta’ boleh*,” replies (Can’t do). And when treating the Charlie-horses and headaches of students there, she also taught them about health. For sports injuries, especially soccer injuries, she lectured those with sprained ankles she taped up, “Enjoy the game but don’t get hurt.”

Primary schools and the Peace Corps: a word or two...

The words that underlie another form of teaching for Peace Corps people are NEPSA and PEMS. They are related, with NEPSA meaning New English Primary School Advisor and PEMS meaning Primary English Medium Syllabus.³³ Most PEMS workers were Peace Corps volunteers. They advised primary school teachers on the new English-medium syllabus.³⁴ Primary schools could be one room by a longhouse or a large building in a town. In either case, the government provided rice for the school, but not other foods. Primary students could be as old as teenagers, if they had not previously had access to formal education. By 1974 Peace Corps volunteers had introduced PEMS into virtually all the primary schools in Sarawak.³⁵ While hiking all over Lawas District

²⁹ K. Shuey, personal communication, 4 March, 2011.

³⁰ B. Pastor, personal communication, 11 November, 2009.

³¹ J. Orr, personal communication, 1 February, 2010.

³² L Terzini-Myers, personal communication, 1 February, 2011.

³³ PEMS was developed in Australia (Peterson, 1963).

³⁴ Formal schooling was not a state requirement at the time, nor was attendance in class mandatory. Primary 1 and 2 had 20 hours of class per week.

³⁵ Quaid, 1983.

on his NEPSA duties, Bob Gunderlach enjoyed the hospitality of rural teachers in their school quarters, including on one memorable occasion a dinner of monitor lizard.³⁶

Schools started the PEMS program just for Primary 1 (first grade). Teachers might begin the immersion program by saying “Stand up,” while getting to their feet and raising their arms, then “Sit down,” with visual signals until the whole class was chorusing the new sounds and mimicking the movements. Voice and visual signals were applied to teach English throughout the year. The next year, PEMS was taught in both Primary 1 and 2, and so on until all six years of primary school were taught in English. Because children enjoyed learning in this way, the immersion method worked.³⁷ Indeed, it is used today in the United States and elsewhere to teach children a second language.

By Primary 6, students could write a composition such as this one: “Hens lay eggs. Therefore we keep them...They are eating some small insect. Around my house. We want to live under my house. Hens have two legs and two feathers.” Probably “feathers” meant wings, a word the student didn’t know, but just who wants to live under the student’s house is a mystery.

The PEMS program was headquartered in Kuching in an office that also provided school broadcasts in English for primary classes, via radio, as well as providing supplies for the English classes. School broadcasting included language lessons, geography, health, and singing in English. For the youngest children, stories and reading lessons were given in Iban and Malay. Sarawak was a leader in the region in using school broadcasts; moreover, the students liked them.

The headquarters also organized materials for advisors to use in leading short courses for teachers already on the English-medium track.³⁸ The rationale for this effort, outside of the colonial influence from British days, was to unite children from different ethnic groups in a common language. Since government and mission secondary schools were already English-medium at the time, primary school graduates would then be well prepared to continue their education. By February, 1966, 27 Peace Corps volunteers were working in the PEMS program in scattered districts, or in Kuching on the school broadcasting staff.

The first schools to try PEMS were in Kuching itself, but by 1964 each NEPSA in the field had five or more schools to assist, supervise, and furnish with materials. Some of these schools were hours apart by riverboat or by trails to isolated longhouses. For some volunteers this meant more time spent on adventurous trips up the rivers than spent in the schools themselves.

One early supervisor put it this way:

...tromping through the ulu, backpacking up around the rapids on the way to Belaga, fire ants, giant turtles, giant monitor lizards crashing through the brush, clear running rapids and fresh streams...One [longhouse] after another. Fresh cooked, delicious meats. Not so fresh cooked stinky, rotten dog meat. Ceremony. Meetings with parents and longhouse elders. Discussions with teachers. Doing occasional elementary teaching myself. Playground time with the kids. Splashes in the river together....Going a couple of weeks on a river trip with nothing but rice, rice, rice and nothing but more rice, on one of my very first excursions up

³⁶ B. Gunderlach, personal communication, 19 November, 2009.

³⁷ Miranda, 1981.

³⁸ Anonymous, 1964B.

the Katibas. I remember one day thinking, boy am I sick of rice. Longhouse ritual. Rats running. Tuak running. In the end, a life I wanted to stick to and to keep forever. A life. For myself it couldn't have been better.³⁹

In addition to the PEMS program, by 1966 more than 20 Peace Corps volunteers were themselves English-medium teachers in primary schools, both in towns and far away up-country. One couple taught primary school in Lubok Antu for one year and then taught area teachers the second year, in order to have a broader impact. They brought the outlying primary school teachers to Lubok Antu for enrichment sessions. These young teachers, all men, “were eager to learn, asked many questions, shared with each other their problems and triumphs, and showed a lot of enthusiasm for teaching.”⁴⁰ Another couple taught in Batu Danau, a Bisaya area far up the Limbang River. Unfortunately, when they volunteered to continue for another two years, their application was summarily rejected by the Sarawak Education Department.⁴¹

A few other volunteers worked on providing “transition” instruction, meaning a year of English schooling for Chinese children whose primary education had been in Mandarin. The aim was to prepare them to enter an English-medium secondary school. And as mentioned earlier, Sarawak volunteers also taught in teacher training colleges, which offered a two-year curriculum to prepare Sarawakians to be teachers.

All of these assignments were part of the Education Department's mandate to expand the state's school system and prepare students for government jobs left vacant as the colonial British departed. Many government jobs were in schools and in teachers' colleges. At first, progress was uneven because teachers were accepted to training colleges with only nine years of schooling behind them and were not themselves fluent in English. The PEMS advisors were introduced to bridge the gap between inadequate education for teaching positions and the responsibilities of teaching children in English. PEMS was a big program throughout the 1960s, but it ended abruptly in the 1970s.

The reasons for policy decisions about language training were sometimes not clear to Peace Corps PEMS advisors or to the local primary teachers they advised. Primary teachers, in particular, often had more personal concerns. One was the ban on smoking or drinking in Methodist (but not Catholic) mission schools. Another was a reluctance to move to some isolated place among people who did not speak the same language and where their family would be outsiders. In contrast, Peace Corps volunteers who were “planted” in outlying schools were generally not deterred by such isolation, but too few volunteers were available to service many of the existing primary schools. While most Sarawak primary teachers were competent in teaching PEMS materials and in fact enjoyed it, some were afraid of losing their jobs if they were not judged to be successful. However, the few who “failed” often were simply transferred to another school which did not have English-medium instruction. One Peace Corps advisor avoided such possible failure for Malay-medium teachers by suggesting they not switch to teaching in English.

Another problem for Sarawak primary teachers who had PEMS supervisors may have been due to the differences in cultural norms between the two groups. It is possible that Peace Corps supervisors and those in the Kuching head-office were not attuned to the

³⁹ B. Bergstron, personal communication, 31 July, 2011.

⁴⁰ W. Brudevold, personal communication, 24 December, 2010.

⁴¹ P. Knowlton, personal communication, 1 February, 2012.

complications facing local teachers. A Sarawak teacher at a longhouse school would be culturally insensitive if he acted in a dictatorial manner when a student was absent or noisy or—at times—sleepy after a late night communal celebration. But city people in Sarawak generally had little conception of up-river life. One city man was amazed that a Peace Corps primary teacher worked in a roadless area up-river from Lubok Antu town, because it was “so far away.” He couldn’t imagine ever going there.

In all, widespread English-medium primary education was a positive step for Sarawak. Sarawak officials knew that the Malaysian government in Kuala Lumpur would impose mainland Malay as the medium of instruction throughout the country early in the 1970s. At that time, not only would the PEMS program halt, but children and teachers in government schools immersed in English would have to switch to Malayan Malay, whether or not their first language was Iban, Penan, or Chinese.⁴² In this light, the PEMS program was a short-term wonder. But many primary schools had already put children through five or six years of English when the switch occurred, so the program did lead to a generation of adults who are comfortable in English and well attuned to the world outside Malaysia.

The later lives of Sarawak students

Historians have given little attention to understanding how the presence of the Peace Corps has affected any country.⁴³ In Sarawak, we can readily see the effects of the Peace Corps on the volunteers’ students. One effect was in the health professions. When the British after World War II started the modernization of rural Sarawak, this included not only a few roads and schools, it also included what the British called dressers and Americans call paramedics. Today in Sarawak a typical rural health clinic has one or two medical assistants (paramedics), several nurses, and a driver-handyman for transporting patients to a city hospital in a Landrover-type vehicle or a river speedboat. But in the colonial era dressers provided a kind of traveling pharmacy to riverside longhouses, forest-track hamlets, and coastal villages. Some boys in the new secondary schools in the 1960s who had grandfathers who were shamans and fathers who were dressers perhaps took most avidly to the classes in biology and chemistry offered by the Peace Corps teachers who peopled the school science curriculum. This is a thread from the 1960s to the health services available today in Sarawak. Such family traditions of therapeutic work have enriched the Sarawak Health Department.⁴⁴ Today, health providers belonging to such families serve both in rural health clinics and urban medical settings. Peace Corps science teachers were just one factor in this enrichment, but a timely and widespread one.

Traditional midwives were numerous in the 1960s and some girl students later became midwives or nurses. This may also reflect a family tradition, even down to today. Several nurses were educated at the Marudi government secondary school and others came from the school in Debak, both staffed with Peace Corps teachers.

While health services were on the minds of some students in the 1960s, others who had good teachers aimed to become teachers themselves. Both boys and girls did

⁴² Malay dialects in Sarawak were different from the “national language” of Malaya.

⁴³ Searles, 1997, p. 206.

⁴⁴ J. Sandoval, personal communication, 23 November, 2009. Two of Joe Sandoval’s students became medical assistants (paramedics) in Sarawak and one student became a nurse working in Saudi Arabia.

become teachers but the girls, having fewer job options, became the majority, especially for primary schools. Peace Corps teachers and their coworkers at government secondary schools turned out a number of dedicated teachers, including the first Penan to gain teaching credentials at the teacher-training college at Batu Lintang.

The thrust to increase educational opportunities state-wide required a huge increase in the number of citizen teachers. The knowledge and positive personal influence of foreign volunteer teachers was a large impetus to providing manpower for the school system. Woman-power was also a factor. Female Peace Corps teachers in Debak and elsewhere were role models for their girl students who were contemplating a teaching profession. A few boys and also girls later became school principals.

One future teacher had started school in remote Nanga Medamit. Although a star student there, being an Iban and a female she faced large problems of acceptance when she transferred to an urban secondary school, but she persevered and later became a dedicated teacher.⁴⁵

It's been said that the three main interests in Sarawak are politics, business, and religion, or all three together. This overlooks the majority of people's concerns and the variety of their vocations. While many of the school achievers of the 1960s became government employees, few of them became politicians. Except for teachers, government workers who needed professional training for specialized work in fisheries, forestry, and other fields had to leave Sarawak, as it had no advanced academic institutions in the 1960s other than the teacher-training colleges. The same problem confronted aspirants to medical or law or business schools, or for that matter engineering schools that prepared Sarawakians for work with British Petroleum at its oil facilities in Miri. Those interested in a university faculty career had the same problem. Go abroad or forego the idea of academic work.

Since Sarawak's schools were taught in English at that time, going abroad did not involve a language barrier. When a Sarawak science student complained about learning so much English, his Peace Corps teacher replied, "You can't study engineering in Australia in Iban."

School achievers went in all directions. An Iban who became a financial advisor in Australia went to school in Singapore. Another Iban went to Iowa to become an agricultural scientist. A third went to England to study law. Likewise, a Lun Bawang became a district officer after attending university in Canada. A Bidayuh went to Tulane University in Louisiana to study epidemiology. A Peace Corps volunteer took an Iban student from Serupai to the United States, who later became a pediatrician in New Orleans.⁴⁶ A Melanau went to West Malaysia to study rural sociology. The list goes on. An Iban joined the Malaysian Rangers, trained in West Malaysia, and rose to become a high-ranking army officer. Few of the school achievers rested on their childhood laurels or stayed near home. An unavoidable result of secondary education was that villages experienced a brain drain at the expense of urban areas.

Peace Corps volunteers had helped start these achievers on their different paths, but not only in the classroom. One volunteer paid the expense for a boy from a poor-area

⁴⁵ B. Reville, personal communication, 2 June, 2010.

⁴⁶ Joo Chin She, personal communication, 26 November, 2009.

primary school to attend secondary school in a town.⁴⁷ Another volunteer brought an Iban teenager to the United States to go to high school there. Others helped their students to go to college in the United States or elsewhere. In conversation and in writing, Peace Corps people have mentioned these acts almost as an afterthought. It was just a normal part of their daily life in Sarawak.

At the same time, some 70 percent of Sarawak sixth graders in the 1960s did not matriculate to secondary school. Because of the small number of such schools, only 30 percent of primary-six students were permitted to move up. The rest were assigned a failing grade on the qualifying exam.⁴⁸ For the failures, life was quite different from that of their successful peers. In fact, many dropped out before grade six. While the high achievers have provided much information for this study, the 70-percent group is virtually a silent majority. As adults, they may have worked as longhouse farmers or day laborers in timber camps or in a town, living in the squatter settlements on its outskirts.

Notable among the low-achiever group were girls. Fewer girls than boys attended secondary schools. In the Debak secondary school, the Form 1 class of 1970 had 24 boys and 12 girls, and there were two hostels for boys but only one for girls.⁴⁹ By the end of secondary school, classes had few girls left at all. This was a culmination of the trend that started in primary school. James Seymour, a former Peace Corps volunteer, found that primary school teachers in one Iban area encouraged boys to excel. Not surprisingly, girls were overrepresented among the poor achievers and also in the dropout group.⁵⁰ The tendency for girls to get married at a younger age than boys does not account for much of this gender gap. Girls were also quite likely to stop their schooling because they were needed by the family for work at home or on the farm. Families knew that older boys, even as unskilled laborers, could earn enough money elsewhere to send remittances home, but girls were far less likely to be able to do so. Outside of teaching, few government jobs were open to girls.

In the private sector, some menial jobs were available for girls but, as one Iban father explained, better pay came from being a prostitute. In order to forestall this fate, he considered it worthwhile to educate his daughter and improve her chances of a better life; his son, in contrast, could get a wage job even without much schooling.⁵¹ This man, unfortunately, was the exception to the rule in parental thinking. Most favored schooling for sons.

Nevertheless, as one Peace Corps volunteer saw it, education in Sarawak in the 1960s did more for women, rather than less. While men were already more familiar with the cash economy, the wider world, and the prestige of being a village headman or cultural leader, the movement of girls into the schoolhouse next door or the town boarding school greatly helped to free them from subordinate status in a circumscribed area of home turf. Not that women in indigenous cultures were considered intellectually or socially inferior to men. Not at all. Their lower level of schooling did not enter into

⁴⁷ Secondary school and boarding fees were 50 Malaysian dollars per month for those who could pay, but only five per month for poor families and zero for the poorest (Langub, 2007). Primary school fees were abolished in 1966.

⁴⁸ This exam was largely on English and arithmetic, with science, history, and other subjects receiving less attention (Seymour, 1974).

⁴⁹ J. Jalin, personal communication, 9 October, 2010.

⁵⁰ Seymour, 1974.

⁵¹ Hew Cheng Sim, personal communication, 11 October, 2010.

this equation. This may explain the open-mindedness of the many rural women I have encountered in Lubuk Antu, Mukah, Bario, and Tebakang who spoke good English even though they did not have prestigious or lucrative jobs. They may owe part of their language ability and lively interest in strangers to their schooling in the volunteer era, but the groundswell of English-language education and the local admiration of the departing British colonialists at that time may have also been factors.⁵²

To sum up on the later-life activities of Sarawak girls, both indirect and direct evidence suggests that girls did move into broader occupations as a result of their schooling. One category yet to be mentioned is that some of the young women who had had volunteer teachers married foreigners, often Peace Corps men. These wives are worthy of note because they helped to internationalize both Sarawak and the United States. The cases of Peace Corps women marrying Sarawak men were rarer.

In the case of one international couple, a Peace Corps volunteer had married an Iban woman from Undup in 1965. They revisited Sarawak several times later. On their 1980 visit the volunteer's mother-in-law commented favorably on his facility in speaking Iban: "Richard is not as stupid as he used to be." As Richard noted, "I may have left Sarawak, but it has never left me."⁵³

In contrast to this happy view, when a Peace Corps volunteer visited her old government secondary school in Marudi in the 1980s, she found it in disrepair. At a school ceremony there, Malays received Koran awards and a few Chinese got educational awards, but no up-river students received any award. All the school boarders were from up-river but were disadvantaged at the school. There was no adult supervision for them on their class work. In contrast, the Chinese and Malay students all lived at home nearby where families could help them.⁵⁴

⁵² After that era, some say, Sarawak education deteriorated, with schooling being less varied and less interesting to many students.

⁵³ Anonymous, 1985.

⁵⁴ K. Hendrix, personal communication, 21 March, 2011.

Part 7. Peace Corps Women and Men

A Peace Corps woman who had never done any home cooking, learned how to make a pie crust from scratch in Sarawak. She also ran a Girl Scout troop without prior scouting experience, and she got herself adopted by a multi-generation Iban family. Another Peace Corps woman was coaxed by her students into teaching them ballroom dancing on Saturday nights, which was a great success. She also relished the luxury of going to a beauty parlor once a week to have her hair washed in hot water. Although Jacqueline Kennedy hairstyles were popular with Peace Corps women in Sarawak, one of them often went to a beauty parlor to try out more elaborate hair-dos, chosen from old movie magazines kept by the proprietress in the shop.

As far as other forms of entertainment went, the Peace Corps men seemed to own most of the guitars and banjos in Borneo. They were more likely to get tattooed. And it was largely the men who excelled in softball, basketball, and track events.

It's difficult for anyone to stroll through a swamp forest when you're up to your knees in ooze. Likewise, it's difficult for strangers to stroll over a one-log bridge. One not-very-athletic woman tackled a no-handrail log over a ravine leading to a longhouse by sitting down and shinning across. An accompanying student said, "Miss knows 'maths' but doesn't know how to walk." This realization was good for his self-esteem, since he was having trouble understanding algebra. But he could certainly walk.¹ In the same vein, a former student remarked that by seeing Peace Corps men being clumsy in jungle walking while carrying backpacks showed their students that the volunteers had knowledge gaps, just like the Sarawak people. That is, the American men were less like British officials (who had bearers for transporting their kit) and more like Sarawak people themselves. The volunteer men knew they were clumsy; this was proven when traveling with students who kept up "an incredible pace" and bounded down muddy hillsides while their teachers slipped and rolled to the bottom.²

In general, Peace Corps men and women had somewhat different experiences in Sarawak, but not hugely different ones. After Betty Friedan wrote *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 and organized NOW (National Organization for Women) in the United States in 1966, some Peace Corps women undoubtedly read the Friedan book or other feminist writings. But Peace Corps women were already choosing women's equality with men in the work place in 1962 in areas like Sarawak. They did not feel trapped in the domestic, subordinate role of the suburban American housewife with a two-car garage. They may have graduated from colleges that had women-only curfews and no female professors, but they had heard their generation's call for activism about universal human values and rights—a new society. Not unnaturally, they acted on it. They were not "chicks."

They were also not like Sarawak women, most of whom had little schooling, lived in a dense enclave of relatives, rarely traveled beyond the farm field, and always had young children to care for. Peace Corps women traveled alone, without a chaperone. They spent little time at home or in a farm field, and they were definitely not Asian in

¹ N. Gallant, personal communication, 3 June, 2010.

² Edwards, 1981.

their outlook. But one of them did bake a chocolate cake and share it with her students, a new treat for them.³

Over 150 women were Peace Corps volunteers in Sarawak between 1962 and 1974. They came from as many home towns in the United States as did the men and they received the same Peace Corps training.⁴ In fact, the Peace Corps was one of the few American institutions that encouraged women in the 1960s to take up independent roles throughout the world and forego being a file clerk in a neighborhood business office. Even so, the women—but not the men—in Peace Corps training group 4 received special “orientation” on personal adjustment, rules of proper conduct, and relationships on the job and in Borneo society.⁵

Most of the Peace Corps women, like the men, had college degrees and were unmarried, but a fourth of the women volunteers were married and came to Sarawak with their husbands as a team. Still other teams were formed when Peace Corps marriages resulted in Sarawak. The young single women, but not the single men, were considered odd. Sarawak people typically asked the women why they weren’t married, and in rare cases their teenage male students ridiculed them for their single status. In a symbolic response, one Peace Corps woman countered such questions by showing off photographs of her natal family to anyone interested in family matters.

The women volunteers did their jobs well in a man’s world where both American and local officials were skeptical about women’s fitness for Peace Corps work. In those times, some American officials referred to the women as girls, but the men were not called boys. Locally, Peace Corps men, whether just out of college or older, were often called *Tuan* (Sir, or Lord). Peace Corps women were called Miss or *Mem* (a contraction of ma’am), just as English women were addressed in Sarawak. *Tuan* was a loftier category than *Mem*.⁶ While other officials had more egalitarian ideas, the jobs of women in the Peace Corps did include being secretaries, nurses, or medical technicians, just as was the case in the United States. Some men also had gendered jobs, such as road surveying. Non-gendered jobs included so-called community development and teaching.

Still, Peace Corps women faced more discrimination than men, partly because of cultural norms about the roles of females in Sarawak society.⁷ In one case, a Peace Corps woman working as a NEPSA, a New English Primary School Advisor, not only visited schools in her area as part of her job but also spend a fair amount of time in the Education Department office in town. In 1966 she wrote about her experience:

I still recall with pain my first few months in an office previously inhabited by men only. I would come in bright and cheery with appropriate greetings and that was as far as the conversation progressed. The rest of the day was spent catching curious eyes peeking from behind a defense of manufactured work. Even my expatriate boss kept a safe distance, rarely suffering a nod to the skirted invader as he marched past my desk. Happily, they eventually discovered that I was human

³ G. Nyanggau, personal communication, 1 November, 2011.

⁴ Women in some training groups were also told to wear cotton dresses to work and never show bare shoulders; shorts and slacks were permissible at home but never in public.

⁵ Anonymous, 1964, p. 55

⁶ One Peace Corps volunteer was called Tuan Blagu (from *lagu*, song) because he played folk songs on his guitar in the uplands (D. Wood, personal communication, 5 October, 2010). Another was called Tuan Tinggi (lord-tall) because he was six feet, four inches in height.

⁷ Plaut, 1966.

and communication lines opened. But these lines are quite different from what they might have been were I of the opposite sex. I can smile and suggest, I can ask and blunder and still be forgiven because I'm just a woman. But, on occasion when a stronger stand is needed, the fact that I am an educated European manages to pull a little weight. In other words, it is frequently easier for a young woman to operate without threatening the status of men she is working with, and it is possibly easier to make mistakes without losing too much respect [or] effectiveness. Respect and status are very important to the individual and if you can disagree or promote change while leaving them intact, you are ahead of the game.⁸

Discrimination against Peace Corps women in Sarawak might be discrimination against foreigners, or even no discrimination at all—just bad luck. One story unfolded in Mukah, a riverside town by the South China Sea.⁹ In 1967 Mukah had a taxi and buses and an airport for public transportation. Otherwise, people walked, bicycled, or boarded a boat. Travelers always seemed to be transporting a lot of *barang*. *Barang* was stuff. It could be the contents of a suitcase, caged chickens going to market, or one's personal possessions at home. On one particular morning a Peace Corps woman going on holiday waited for the taxi that she had booked a day earlier to go to the dock and catch the launch to Kuching. The taxi arrived stuffed with people and with an over-supply of *barang* on top. The taxi driver told her to take the bus to the dock. Soon the bus went by without stopping, the bus driver shrugging and pointing at the crowd on board. By then the launch had departed, so the Peace Corps woman walked to the airport by the beach to catch a plane and again was disappointed—no room on the daily flight to Kuching. Thus were her well-laid American plans foiled in Sarawak. In another case, a Chinese-American volunteer woman in Serian was considered unfriendly by the local Chinese because she didn't converse with them. The reason was simply that she had never been taught Chinese.¹⁰

Whether victims of discrimination or not, Peace Corps women in Sarawak found they were regarded primarily as Americans, just as the men were. This was as true for Euro-Americans as for Japanese-Americans, Afro-Americans, and all other labeled Americans that constituted the Peace Corps in Sarawak. In contrast, those Sarawakians not aware of the differences between pale-faced countries called all pale foreigners *Orang Puteh*, "white people."

Sexuality also posed problems at times for women. In fact, Peace Corps itself was restrictive about women's roles. Married couples in Group 3 training in Hawaii received special instruction about the Peace Corps' non-pregnancy rule and the availability of contraceptives in host countries, but, as one young man in that group pointed out to an interviewing psychologist, sexual behavior was not discussed with unmarried trainees, a statement which got him a tongue-lashing from another psychologist for wanting to "use" women. This judgment was later over-ridden. He was not "deselected," and he had a successful four years in Sarawak.¹¹

⁸ Quinn, 1966.

⁹ Miranda, 1981.

¹⁰ Lum, ms.

¹¹ B. Lynn, personal communication, 31 May, 2011.

Although pregnancy during Peace Corps service was forbidden, it was considered peculiar in many Sarawak circles for a young married women not to be pregnant or carrying a child around on her hip. Peace Corps women, married or not, had to avoid pregnancy in any way they could devise or be shipped home.¹² Moreover, Sarawak women often asked the American wives about birth control measures. Luckily, some village shops stocked condoms, as volunteers soon found out. Since the shopkeepers had no word for condom, they called it *getah* (rubber) for intercourse with women, but in more male-powered terms.

One area where some women had major problems involved dating. This was especially true in the small towns where a Peace Corps woman, unlike the men, often was the only foreign woman there. Because of the movie craze in Sarawak after the Second World War, Sarawak men had seen slinky sirens in James Bond movies and magazine photographs of glamour girls in skimpy undergarments. They had heard the Beatles singing, "Help, I need somebody." Were these Peace Corps women available for a little movie-style romance? Most of them probably were not. Expatriate men in the army or business or in local government, many of who hid the fact that they were married, were also interested in dating Peace Corps women. But whether Sarawakian or foreign, dating could lead to social problems. Dating too many men was considered by the neighbors as showing "weak moral fiber," but dating the same man several times meant she was "undoubtedly engaged."¹³

Few Peace Corps women in Sarawak talked about their sex problems to staff men at the Kuching headquarters of the Peace Corps, but at least one woman did. She was a teacher in a small town in the late 1960s who had a stalker. The police there seemed to think this was her fault, and the advice she received from a male Peace Corps staff member was ineffectual, "Lock your doors at night." Perhaps he thought that in this way she could solve the problem herself.¹⁴ She did solve the problem herself, but by leaving Sarawak prematurely.

Most "affairs" of Peace Corps women with Peace Corps or Sarawak men were handled discretely and did not reach official attention. In one case, however, an affair may have contributed to the early demise of the Peace Corps in Sarawak, but the facts are unclear even today. Among Sarawak volunteers, the equivalent of a "Dear John" letter sent to a Sarawak official was rumored to be one reason behind the pullout, but other factors may also have been at work, hidden behind the political scenery.

A few Peace Corps women, perhaps half a dozen, married Sarawak men, but far more Peace Corps men married Sarawak women. Young Peace Corps male teachers had teenage female students in advanced classes who were only a few years younger than they were. Mutual attraction flourished. As a result, there are married couples in the United States in which the wife is Kayan, Chinese, Kelabit, Iban, or some other variety of Sarawakian.¹⁵ These families enjoy repeated trips back to Sarawak for extended-family

¹² The Pill, an oral contraceptive, was approved by the Federal Drug Administration in the U. S. in 1960 but the Peace Corps did not provide it to married (or unmarried) women until years later, only after it had provided free condoms for male Peace Corps volunteers.

¹³ Quinn, 1966.

¹⁴ Sexual harassment did not become a crime in the United States until the 1970s.

¹⁵ If the men married by traditional rites, they had no marriage certificate. The British had long accepted these marriages as legal, but some American authorities were perplexed. On one case, the American counsel in Kuching granted a certificate simply because he was told that the British did so. This permitted

gatherings. And some Sarawak relatives visit the American ones in the U. S. One couple, with a Peace Corps wife and a Sarawak Chinese husband, has managed to live in both places alternatively. In another case, the Peace Corps husband has long wanted to move back to Sarawak but his Iban wife prefers living in California.

On a lighter note, since few Peace Corps women were skinny, a Sarawak woman referred to one woman volunteer as “fat.” Betsy Blackmer was not fat but also was not lean like Sarawak women. While she admired their willowy shape, they admired her more prosperous body. In another longhouse, women pinched her arm, to see if the white color of her skin was real.¹⁶

While it was acceptable in Sarawak then, as it is today, for men to go topless, Peace Corps women had other standards. Longhouse women went topless at home but black Maidenform bras were coming into fashion for festive occasions. On one occasion, a young Peace Corps woman was visiting a longhouse with her town-bred teenage students and longed to take off her blouse and bra on a hot day. All she could achieve was a black bra that evening during the women’s dance segment of a celebration. The small longhouse women made a tremendous effort to find a bra that would fit her larger American chest. Her male students, used to seeing her in a prim work dress, looked on during “the fitting” on the longhouse verandah, much to her embarrassment. Despite such odd moments, Peace Corps women delighted in wearing Malay clothes, or Chinese clothes, or Iban clothes. When an American woman went to a seamstress to order such clothes, there was usually a lot of tittering from the diminutive Sarawak woman taking the measurements for fitting such a “giant.” At that time a Peace Corps woman could easily get a custom-tailored *sarong kebaya*, a two-piece Malay dress. Now, Islamic fervor frowns on that attractive attire.

One thing is certain, no matter how she dressed, a Peace Corps woman was always distinct from Sarawak women. Not only was she conspicuous, she had more money, more education, and more possessions than virtually all the Sarawak women she encountered. She regularly slept in a bed, not on a fiber mat, and she could afford to take a vacation in Bangkok. These “perks,” of course, was also available to Peace Corps men. The difference between the men and the women in Sarawak was that the women were not tethered to the home chores of cooking and taking care of children, as might be the case in the U. S. They were out and about, even drinking beer in a “coffee shop,” an activity then considered avant garde or worse for a local maiden. But the American and Sarawak women did interact well, whether in a beauty parlor or inside a local woman’s kitchen, where the flavor of the zesty cooking was the catalyst for mutual education and understanding. Peace Corps men also had good interactions with their Sarawak counterparts, but usually not in the kitchen.

Just as Peace Corps male teachers formed friendships with some of their boy students, so did Peace Corps women with girl students. Several men mentored boys by being house fathers in the boys’ dorms, and several women did likewise in the girls’ dorms. But when one woman house mother mentioned that Americans bathe naked in a

a Sarawak wife to join her husband in the United States (C. Angell, personal communication, 27 January, 2010).

¹⁶ B. Blackmer, personal communication, 19 January, 2010)

room with the door closed, a girl student was horrified: “You mean you can see yourself?”¹⁷

¹⁷ N. Gallant, personal communication, 3 June, 2010.

Part 8. From Kennedy to Vietnam's Shadow

President John F. Kennedy initiated and championed the Peace Corps. He also championed Americans fighting with the Viet Cong in what the Vietnamese call the American war. The Peace Corps benefited American foreign policy and the world to some extent, but the same cannot be said about the war in Vietnam.

The Kennedy assassination

Despite its many wars, the United States has long regarded itself as a peaceful society. This view was evident when President Kennedy initiated the Peace Corps in 1961 and venturesome Americans signed up to work overseas for low wages on worthy causes.

About a year after the first group of Peace Corps volunteers arrived at their job sites in Sarawak they had to face Kennedy's death. Not only was he their president, he had inspired them to join the Peace Corps organization.

On Friday, 22 November, 1963 President Kennedy was shot in Dallas, Texas and died a short time later. It was a very early Saturday morning in Sarawak when the news came over the radio, but few Peace Corps volunteers heard the announcement then. Some were roused out of sleep by their coworkers. In one case, a volunteer was urgently summoned to the District Office in his town to tell him of the death. The volunteer and the DO, who was a young Iban, painfully discussed the tragedy for a long time. Why had it happened? Was it a racist attack? What would the future be like? Certainly the death was a loss for America and the world.¹

Peace Corps teachers in Sarawak saw long faces and heard condolences from the students and staff at their school that day. At one school the headmaster informed the student body at the morning assembly. Most of the students felt great sympathy for their American teachers but a few didn't consider the death of great importance. In Kuching that Saturday, a young Sarawak teacher heard of Kennedy's death on her way to be the pitcher in a female softball game, thinking to herself that it wasn't as if the Queen had died. However, others in Kuching keenly attuned to world affairs were in a state of shock by the news of Kennedy's death.²

One Sarawak volunteer happened to be on vacation in Jesselton (now Kota Kinabalu, Sabah) that day. When wandering around the town center, he was accosted by shopkeepers and pedestrians asking him if he was an American. They all expressed their sympathies over Kennedy's death and their admiration of him and especially of the Peace Corps. He was "blown away" by their concern and support.³

On that Saturday, after volunteers in Kanowit heard the news of Kennedy's death on the Voice of America radio broadcast, one of them recalled:

We were planning to go to Sibu to play rugby...We decided to go ahead...because at least we wouldn't have to hang around the school all weekend

¹ E. Price, personal communication, 23 May, 2011.

² In a remote Bidayuh longhouse that had one radio and a weak battery, all that the people heard was that the president had been shot. They assumed this was Sukarno, the president of Indonesia, and that his death would put an end to the border raids from Kalimantan (L. De Danaan, personal communication, 14 October, 2011).

³ A. Powers, personal communication, 1 June, 2011.

with all that on our minds...The five-hour trip on the Chinese launch [seemed] to take forever. Feeling miserable...as we approached each bend in the river, I felt myself hoping something would be different when we rounded it. But it was the same old forested riverbanks, and then there was the next bend ahead. On that day I really wanted to be home.”⁴

Another Peace Corps teacher, who was thinking of an international development career, listened to the news coverage on the Voice of America the whole day and shuddered to think what would happen to the New Frontier foreign policy of the United States in Asia. The shuddering was later justified, he felt, based on events in Vietnam.⁵

A third teacher later recalled that on 22 November, 1963 violence had not yet begun to escalate in Vietnam. That day, he felt “was the beginning of real violence,” both for the world and, temporarily, for him. That day he stood in the kitchen of his teacher’s quarters, feeling helpless at seeing America’s hopes and dreams shattered, at the same time very angry, and smashed glassware on the floor. “And it left a nice mess for me to clean up later.”⁶

At the Dragon School near Kuching, Putit Matzen, the head student, wrote a condolence letter to Jacqueline Kennedy, dated 26 November, 1963, that spoke of the school’s regard for the president and for its three Peace Corps teachers. The volunteers were described as showing friendliness and enthusiastic help and cooperation.⁷

Sarawak people also reacted to Kennedy’s death in other ways. When the Methodist mission in Sibu held a memorial service for Kennedy, Peace Corps volunteers in the surrounding area, among many others, attended the event.

Other Sarawak Peace Corps volunteers were still in training in Hilo, Hawaii, on 22 November, 1963. Some trainees were finishing their practice teaching that morning. Their students had made leis which they gave to their departing teachers, singing *Aloha Oe* to them that sad day. When the teachers were told that Kennedy had been shot, one trainee recalled:

At first, before we heard that the President had died, we just had a calm discussion in the classroom of what would happen in the unlikely event that he died...And then came the news. We were all shocked and grief stricken—a few kids were almost hysterical. We got through it...There was no more teaching that day.⁸

The training center in Hilo had no television set, but one volunteer teacher, Stu Kearns, wandered down the hill later and was invited into a Hawaiian home to watch the news coverage.⁹ That evening, as the Peace Corps trainees were sitting on the porch of

⁴ K. Shuey, personal communication, 23 May, 2011.

⁵ M. Seymour, personal communication, 23 May, 2011.

⁶ B. Bergstrom, personal communication, 23 May, 2011.

⁷ <http://www.presidentialtimeline.org/html/record.php?id=180> Putit Matzen himself had Peace Corps teachers. One of them, Bob Lynn, taught him when he transferred to Tanjong Lobang School in Miri, which was funded by the New Zealand government under the Colombo Plan. The Dragon School, at the 24th mile on the Kuching-Serian Road, was funded by the Australians; it is now called Kolej Tun Rasak.

⁸ K. Hendrix, personal communication, 25 May, 2011.

⁹ S. Kearns, personal communication, 25 May, 2011. Sarawak also had no television then; it arrived there in the 1970s.

their sleeping quarters and feeling bereft, several cars arrived from town with local people who seemed shell-shocked. They had come to the training area because they felt the Peace Corps people were “a tangible link to JFK” that day in Hawaii.¹⁰

When that training group reached Sarawak they found that a lot of people there wanted to talk about Kennedy. One volunteer arriving at the Marudi secondary school soon after Kennedy’s death learned that it was “as important for my students to tell me where they were and what they were doing when they got the news as it was...for Americans. They pumped me for stories and pictures of him and we mourned him together.”¹¹ The students cherished the Kennedy memorial issues of *Life* and *Look* that the volunteer had brought with her. In addition, a documentary film on Kennedy was shown at the school, which had a tremendous impact on the students there.

Kennedy was not soon forgotten in Sarawak. For example, a year later a student at the Tanjong Lobang School in Miri, Abu Bakar Mattasan, made “an excellent bust of Kennedy and placed it in front of the school.”¹² Nearer to Kuching, another volunteer working on rural road construction in 1965 was struck by the large number of Bidayuh longhouse apartments (*bileks*) that had a picture of Kennedy on the wall. When he asked about this, people simply said it was because Kennedy was a great man.

When a prominent Iban woman, Tra Zehnder, and her daughter Cynthia were in the United States in the mid 1960s, they visited the Kennedy memorial at Arlington Cemetery. There, as they were commenting about the memorial in Iban, a man in the crowd approached them and addressed them in Iban. He had been a Peace Corps volunteer in Sarawak.¹³

Much later, the Kennedy memorial erected at the Peace Corps training site near Hilo on Christmas Day in 1963 was moved to a spot near the library on the University of Hawaii campus in Hilo and given a refurbishing by Peace Corps people when they met there in November, 2011, to remind themselves and others of the importance of Kennedy for the Peace Corps, especially for those who had trained in Hawaii decades earlier.

John F. Kennedy’s death was not the last killing of an American public figure in that era. The deaths of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King followed all too quickly. All three deaths were discussed in Sarawak classrooms. However, one volunteer could provide no answer when an Iban man asked him, “Why do you kill your leaders?” Notably, besides the general sympathy and concern the deaths aroused, John and Robert became fairly common Iban names. In Serian, a Bidayuh child was given Kennedy as a first name in late 1963, shortly after the president’s death.¹⁴

In all, Sarawakians knew more about the U. S. through knowing about John F. Kennedy than by knowing about bombs or geopolitics.¹⁵

Vietnam’s shadow

By mid-1963 some 16,000 American military “advisors” were in Vietnam, as well as two curious Peace Corps volunteers from Sarawak who visited Saigon in the fall of

¹⁰ K. Hendrix, personal communication, 20 July, 2011.

¹¹ Hendrix, 1980.

¹² B. Lynn, personal communication, 11 May, 2011.

¹³ C. Sather, personal communication, 8 February, 2012.

¹⁴ Lum, ms.

¹⁵ Avalon Ajang Ledong, personal communication 7 October, 2009.

1963, just before the Diem coup.¹⁶ Soon the anti-war movement was stoking up in the United States and elsewhere. Vietnam became the first war seen daily on television by Americans and many other people around the world. Peace Corps workers in Sarawak were tuned into this war news, if not on Sarawak radio programs or those of the BBC, then by the rock-and-roll songs of their generation. By 1965 American combat troops were openly involved in Vietnam and the powerful song, *The eve of destruction*, sung by Barry McGuire, became an anthem of the peace movement. This was followed by many others, such as John Lennon's *Give peace a chance* in 1969. Bobby Darin's *A simple song of freedom*, 1969, said what many Sarawak Peace Corps volunteers came to think, "We the people here don't want a war."

The United States was relapsing into large-scale warfare in Vietnam just as the Peace Corps was making incremental progress in Sarawak.¹⁷ The growth and decline of the Peace Corps in Sarawak matched the growth and decline of the American military presence in Vietnam. The Vietnam debacle took place under three American presidents, J. F. Kennedy, L. B. Johnson, and R. M. Nixon, all of whom misled the American public about the status of the war. This match of growth and decline between the war and the Sarawak situation was not coincidental. In the early 1960s Sarawak liked the Peace Corps but by the time the Vietnam Peace Accords were signed between the United States and North Vietnam in 1973, some Sarawak people were telling Peace Corps volunteers that they did not like America, and a few local officials disliked it intensely. Part of this switch was due to the war news itself, but part was due to events in Sarawak, where the United States for a while had a diplomatic staff complete with "operatives" of a spooky nature, it is said. A similar antipathy was growing in the United States. Within a few years after the first national anti-Vietnam rally, held in Washington, D. C. in April, 1965, many Americans turned against the war in Vietnam and against their own leaders in Washington. As the no-win status of the war became clear in 1971, it was not only students and peaceniks, but even U. S. Army veterans who held large anti-war demonstrations.¹⁸

The anti-war fervor in the United States arose from a long history of activism on important issues that had earlier led young Americans to join the civil rights movement to stop racial injustice and led them to balk at educational blandness, parental authority, "Disney values," and being drafted into the army to go to Vietnam. In the 1960s the older generation of Americans thought the Vietnam War was good and smoking marijuana was bad, while the younger generation thought the war was bad and smoking pot was good. Most Peace Corps volunteers were part of this younger generation of activists but took the path to work constructively on international instead of national problems. After the Johnson administration expanded the Vietnam War in 1965, the national organization of returned Peace Corps volunteers (RPCVs) publically joined the opposition movement.¹⁹ When Richard Nixon tried to abolish the Peace Corps in 1970, a

¹⁶ M. Seymour, personal communication, 9 February, 2010).

¹⁷ Though overshadowed by Vietnam, the United States also took unilateral action in Laos.

¹⁸ The book by David Farber, 1994, provides a penetrating view of American problems at home and abroad in the 1960s; it relates to the era's effects in Sarawak. For a more negative view on the war and on the Peace Corps, see Berreman, 1968.

¹⁹ Pollack, 1967. Peace Corps volunteers were generally anti-war (Schwarz, 1991; Fischer, 1998).

RPCV group occupied the Peace Corps building in the capital and displayed a Viet Cong flag.²⁰

In 1967 there were over 184,000 American troops in Vietnam. Soon after the successful Tet Offensive of 1968 by the North Vietnamese, there were over half a million American troops there. By late 1968 the United States had 68 generals in the new “Pentagon West” building in Saigon and it was costing \$400,000 to kill a Viet Cong soldier, using bombs and over a hundred artillery shells. North Vietnam invaded the south and won in 1975, soon after the Kuching office of the Peace Corps closed its doors.

Before that happened, some Sarawak Peace Corps teachers were discussing the war in secondary school classes as part of “current events.”²¹ And at least one Sarawak Peace Corps volunteer was sent home for opposing the war.²² In 1969 he wrote an anti-war letter to the *Sarawak Tribune* and the next day was summoned to Peace Corps headquarters in Kuching. He was on a plane out in 48 hours, having been told Malaysia viewed the letter as interfering in national politics.²³ But it was not the Americans that removed him. In fact, during the period 1966-1968 the Peace Corps Director for all of Malaysia, Sy Greben, was an outspoken critic of the Vietnam War when talking to Peace Corps people (but not when talking to others in Malaysia). He was admired by volunteers in Malaysia for his anti-war stance and his talents in furthering Peace Corps achievements there.²⁴ In contrast, when a Peace Corps staff member stationed in Sarawak wrote a private letter to a State Department official in Kuala Lumpur doubting American policy in Vietnam, he was harshly criticized.

In everyday situations, Peace Corps volunteers in Sarawak had to deal with the Vietnam War in several ways. They had to interact with Sarawak students and adults who had opinions or concerns about American policy.²⁵ They also had to come to terms with their own families and friends in the United States, some pro-war and others opposed to it. One Peace Corps woman in Sarawak was a dove but had a brother who was a hawk. Such rifts in family life were fairly common at the time. The male volunteers, a particularly healthy bunch of men, also had to face the possibility of being drafted into the American military, shipped to Vietnam, and die there. Fortunately, at least one Peace Corps staff member in Kuching provided volunteers working in Sarawak

²⁰ Cullather, 2000.

²¹ S. Stacy, personal communication, 10 October, 2009. In 1968 a Sarawak volunteer wrote an anti-war poem (Linnell, 1981, p. 51):

The baby boom.
Oh. Well.
We turned it into
A soldier boom.
Boom.

²² Another was sent home for going to Vietnam on vacation, flying in an Air America plane with a boyfriend, then returning to Kuching and talking about it (M. McCone, personal communication, 12 February, 2010).

²³ J. Orr, personal communication, 1 February, 2010. Another volunteer was sent home earlier in the 1960s by Sarawak officials, not only for anti-Vietnam statements but also for opposition to the formation of Malaysia. However, by the late 1960s the Malaysian government had already spoken out for peace in Vietnam (Gould, 1969, p. 233).

²⁴ G. Breymann, personal communication, 3 June, 2010.

²⁵ One student at Tanjong Lobang School in Miri wrote an essay paper for a Peace Corps teacher, Bob Lynn, on the comment by the United Nations Secretary-General, U Thant, that the Vietnam War was escalating into a global war (She Joo Chin, personal communication, 20 October, 2009).

with public information on how to interact with their draft boards, how to apply for conscientious objector (anti-war) status, and how to sign up for the graduate record exam to go on with their education back home.

Volunteers were aware that educated Sarawakians generally supported the American involvement in Vietnam. They supported it because their government did so and local news sources reflected that position, but the war was of little concern to them. The minority of Sarawakians that was rebelling against the government, plus their sympathizers, thought otherwise. Nevertheless, when students in Mukah's Three Rivers School learned that a favorite Peace Corps teacher was destined to go to Vietnam after his Sarawak work was done, they were dismayed.²⁶ One former Mukah student was delighted to learn recently that this teacher had survived the war and was still alive in 2011. In another case, the principal of the Kuala Binyo primary school assumed a Peace Corps teacher had been killed in Vietnam and only learned the contrary when the volunteer showed up on his doorstep in Binyo 25 years later.

For young, single Peace Corps men, of more immediate concern than talking about the war was the risk of being drafted.²⁷ Early on, volunteers were "deferred" during their Peace Corps years and even after their term of service, if they continued their education. This was reassuring, as many returning volunteers planned to go on to graduate school anyway. However, American draft boards up to the year 1969 were local institutions, and although one board might defer or exempt all ex-Peace Corps volunteers, another might not, in order to meet its quota of inductees. As the 1960s ended and the 1970s set in, a few Peace Corps men were drafted during their Sarawak years. Fear of the draft became widespread. Being drafted could be delayed by the stratagem of not returning directly to the United States after one's Peace Corps service. Travel to the rest of the world was popular, as was landing a job in another country, but once back in the United States, laggard male volunteers could be arrested. One Sarawak volunteer, Daniel Wood, was indeed arrested and avoided the draft only by slipping away to Canada. Another Sarawak volunteer told his draft board he had spent two years helping peasant farmers grow enough rice to avoid malnutrition, and he wasn't going to help anyone bomb or shoot poor Asian rice farmers. Somehow this impressed his draft board and he was not drafted.²⁸

In 1969 the United States instituted a draft lottery. Men who learned they would be drafted knew they would be deferred for two years if they joined the Peace Corps. Even before that year, young men were openly dodging the draft by joining the Peace Corps.²⁹ When one group of trainees found out they were approved for Peace Corps work in Sarawak, they celebrated their reprieve from the draft by holding a party. Of these, a few did go to Vietnam later. Not all of them survived the war.

²⁶ One history buff among the volunteers said he would like to go to Vietnam to see history in action. An anti-war volunteer pointed out that building concentration camps was also history in action.

²⁷ Married men were largely exempt.

²⁸ N. Gallant, personal communication, 2 October, 2010. Several Sarawak volunteers obtained conscientious-objector status while in Sarawak in 1970-72 (T. Linnell, personal communication, 2 November, 2011).

²⁹ The high re-enlistment rate for Peace Corps volunteers in Sarawak in 1966, extending their two years of service to three or four years, may have been partly to avoid the draft and then be shipped to Vietnam (M. McCone, personal communication, 12 February, 2010).

A Peace Corps teacher in Limbang who returned home in 1974 had two older brothers who had served in the U. S. Army in Vietnam and emerged mentally stressed. They insisted their returned Peace Corps brother should not enlist in the U. S. Navy, which he was then considering doing. Fortunately, he returned to his first interest of teaching, by that time convinced that the Peace Corps was money much better spent by the government in helping other countries and building worthwhile relationships overseas.³⁰

In 1970 Peace Corps workers heard reports of bodies washing ashore in Sarawak from across the South China Sea, perhaps boat people trying to flee from Vietnam.³¹ But in rural Sarawak, Vietnam was not a concern. It was some distant place, “just like England and America were.”³² In rural Sarawak, peoples’ concerns were primarily local, with the state of Sarawak itself in second place, and the notion of an entity called Malaysia a distant third.

³⁰ J. Lehmann, personal communication, 3 November, 2009.

³¹ S. Linnell, personal communication, 15 November, 2009. There was even a rumor that the U. S. wanted to put an airbase in Sarawak.

³² J. Pearson, personal communication, 1 September, 2011.

Part 9. The Triumph of People to People: 1962 to Today

The “volunteer era” of the 1960s and 70s in Sarawak has been little studied, compared to the lavish attention paid to the British period. This era of international history had notable results. One Peace Corps woman said her provincial life of sterling insignificance became significant because of her experiences in Sarawak. The same significance occurred for some Sarawak students because of the presence of the Peace Corps. One former student recently wrote:

Peace Corps teachers brought a very personal touch in delivering knowledge to students, which is far different from the very formal method used by locally-trained teachers...The Peace Corps brought an effective method of learning, both inside and outside the classroom, that stirred the imagination...I would encourage Peace Corps teachers to return to Sarawak to teach our children...We are falling behind the academic standards of other countries.¹

Thousands of today’s professional and government people in Sarawak learned English during the volunteer era in mission or government schools, largely due to the British influence there. Overseas volunteer organizations became vital to this accomplishment, with the Peace Corps providing the most assistance, both in the towns and rural areas. And there were other novelties that soon followed.

As the 1960s drew to a close, Sarawak people became aware of the United States in a new way. They heard on the radio and saw newspaper photographs of Americans walking on the moon. Everyone in Sarawak, it seemed, was amazed, confused, or disbelieving. But they all had questions for their local Peace Corps volunteers about this July, 1969 event. One evening at an Iban longhouse, a volunteer tried to explain how many days it would take by longboat to reach the moon. In a Sekapan longhouse, people asked how far away the moon was. Further than Singapore? And: “Does the moon go around the earth like the way I move my flashlight around my head?” “How much does it cost to send men to the moon?” “Is President Nixon going to the moon?”² Elsewhere volunteers were asked, “Are the Americans going to the sun?”³ One Peace Corps teacher had a telescope which he brought out when the Americans were on the moon and let his students look through it at the moon’s pocked surface. When the students were disappointed that they couldn’t see Neil Armstrong on the moon, their teacher had the task of explaining why.⁴

By 1970, longhouse walls typically sported pictures of the moon walk, along with those of J. F. Kennedy and Queen Elizabeth, but few of any Malaysian leaders. One Iban family even named their child after Neil Armstrong. On a moonlit night in Kanowit, a film of the moon landing was shown on the *padang* (open area) on a large sheet serving as a movie screen in front of some two hundred disbelievers in the audience.⁵ But believers or not, the moon landing helped jolt Sarawakians into thoughts of the wider world in which they lived. Peace Corps volunteers represented entryways into thinking

¹ G. Nyanggau, personal communication, 1 November, 2011.

² Doerr, no date.

³ B. Yarmy, personal communication, 4 February, 2011.

⁴ R. Zwirner, personal communication, 11 October, 2011.

⁵ P. Stevens, personal communication, 9 October, 2011.

about this wider world of human existence, even if no one could actually live on the moon.

Although change in human life is inevitable, one volunteer commented, “We did show some of the young people in Sarawak that grew up in the era of great cultural transition that we, who came from one of the cultures that was somewhat idolized, had great respect for their traditional culture. We consciously sought to do that. And we were sincere...They welcomed us to participate in their culture and we welcomed every chance to do so. I did turn down a dinner of roast dog, however.”⁶ This view was common among Peace Corps volunteers in Sarawak. That is, respect for Sarawak cultures was a hallmark of the Peace Corps there during difficult times.

Both the United States and Sarawak changed dramatically in the 1960s and later. Some former Peace Corps volunteers think that for Sarawak the changes have been a catastrophe. Twenty-five years after the Peace Corps arrived in Sarawak one volunteer returned to find that English was no longer taught in up-river schools; resentments against Malaysia were strong; and the British were being faulted for what they did (that was wrong) and also for what they did not do, namely, leave the people the way they had been before 1963.⁷ He was served the day’s catch at a reception given for him in Kanowit, but the fish were from far up the Baleh River where the water still ran clean. Such early Peace Corps volunteers were fortunate to be in Sarawak before many changes happened there, and they knew it.

One difference between Sarawak in 1962 and in the early 1970s when the Peace Corps departed was that Sarawak switched to education in Malay, even though the British influence continued, and continues today, in that the British pattern of tests and requirements is followed all the way up through university and post-graduate professional training.

Change also occurred in the United States. This was obvious to returning volunteers in the sixties and seventies. Not only did they experience reverse culture shock upon returning home, due to the opulence before their eyes, but the country was in a different mood than when they left. In addition to the civil rights movement, anti-Vietnam protests, and flower people, there were lava lamps, more freeways going everywhere, and Richard Nixon in the White House. Everyone seemed to be smoking pot. By the late 1960s the United States had over 12,000 Peace Corps volunteers who had returned home. While some worked in the anti-Vietnam movement, others were sending books and materials to volunteers still at work overseas, to help them do the best job possible. Volunteers also helped finance their former students to continue their education. A great many of the volunteers returning from Sarawak and elsewhere also educated American audiences with talks about their Peace Corps experience overseas, and they constructed websites and published articles about their host country. For those who had worked in the tropics, many became supporters of rainforest conservation.

In the meantime, Abang Yusuf Puteh, a Sarawak official working in the Education Department, became Establishment Officer in 1966, thereby influencing appointments and promotions in the Sarawak civil service. When he became Deputy

⁶ K Shuey, personal communication, 10 February, 2010.

⁷ B. Bergstrom, personal communication, 3 December, 2010.

Chief Secretary in 1971 he was virtually in control of the whole civil service. Later he became Chief Secretary for Sarawak.⁸

Yusof Puteh decided that Sarawak did not need a “new colonial presence” and started turning down Peace Corps visa extensions when he was with the Education Department. This meant that some volunteers who had applied to work longer than two years had only a few days to prepare to leave Sarawak, even though some administrators in the Education Department wanted the Peace Corps to stay longer than it did in Sarawak.⁹ According to one Peace Corps representative in Kuching, Yusof Puteh also stopped the PEMS educational program. According to Michael Leigh, Yusof Puteh was a man with definite ideas and the intention and power to implement them.¹⁰ By some undiscoverable logic, he decided that the Peace Corps was really the CIA, and thus unpalatable. Even in his last year of life he stuck to his opinion that Peace Corps volunteers were CIA agents in disguise.¹¹ Perhaps because of his influence, and for additional reasons, the Peace Corps left Sarawak in 1974, closing the Kuching office early in 1975, nine years before the Peace Corps left Malaya and Sabah.¹² But the underlying cause of this early exit from Sarawak, like the “x” in algebra, remains unknown.

In addition, in the 1960s Malaysian officials in Kuala Lumpur were uneasy about dealing with the powerful United States and fretted that Malaysia would become too Americanized.¹³ They were more comfortable with British officialdom and its expatriates. At the same time, such Malaysian officials regarded Peace Corps workers in Sarawak as having hardship assignments, which surprised the volunteers. The Malaysians also thought Americans were too pampered and therefore not suitable for living in rural areas. Officials in Sarawak soon learned that was not true for Peace Corps volunteers.

One way to look at these events in a broader context is to note that human groups often set boundaries. You’re either in or out. Tunku Abdul Rahman succeeded in putting a political boundary around Malaya and Sabah-Sarawak, forming a Malay stronghold, or so he thought. Sarawak itself had more fluid boundaries among its people. In some ways Ibans were united, in other ways splintered. One Iban wife living in the United States regarded herself as Iban, not Malaysian. Some Chinese in the 1960s saw themselves as Sarawakians, others saw themselves as overseas Chinese. When the Peace Corps came to Sarawak, volunteers were welcomed everywhere but by the 1970s, because of American power in the world and because of the Vietnam War in particular, the United States became disliked by some people in Sarawak. But Peace Corps volunteers continued to be liked as individuals. They were still within the boundary. And it is individuals acting with each other, not groups, which forge human values. In this sense, the Peace Corps was more acceptable in Sarawak than other aspects of American foreign policy.

⁸ Leigh, 1974, pp. 107, 148-150. Yusof Puteh translates from the Malay as Joe White, so that is what some volunteers jauntily called him.

⁹ P. Thomas, personal communication, 8 November, 2009.

¹⁰ Leigh, 1974. Others regarded Yusof Puteh as conceited but not anti-American, seeing him rather as a promoter of Sarawak Malays.

¹¹ M. Leigh, personal communication, 25 May, 2010.

¹² Nineteen of the last 49 Malaysian volunteers were in Sabah in 1983, the rest in Malaya (Quaid, 1983, p. 19).

¹³ Maryanov, 1966.

A former student at Marudi government secondary school recently observed, “We are more open-minded because of the Peace Corps volunteers. When they told us stories in class, we would sort of travel around the world with them.”¹⁴ The opinion from the United States was somewhat different. One American writer has suggested that the work of the Peace Corps did more to aid the United States than it did to aid “any country in which its volunteers served.”¹⁵ In this context, the returned volunteers certainly helped change American perceptions of people in poorer countries, including the perceptions of Washington policy makers. Today the terms “primitive” and “backward” are not part of the Washington vocabulary. There is no longer any attempt to make “them” be like “us.”

This does not mean that Americans are avid for news of poorer countries, as some Sarawak Peace Corps people found out upon their return home. Whenever Americans asked an ex-volunteer “How was it?” they seemed to expect a short answer. Saying more than “It was good” could lead to a tune-out. But Peace Corps people talking among themselves back in the United States found that they could understand each others’ weirdness; they thought globally, not nationally. Old volunteers in talking to new ones often tell them to be prepared to become a misfit in American society when they return home: “While Americans work for what they see as necessities, people elsewhere can be happy with much less. Most people in the world live without luxuries but many know how to make work fun. Material wealth is not important for a fulfilling life but human relationships, including family support, seem to be a universal need in this crazy world of *Homo sapiens*.”¹⁶

One of the goals of the Peace Corps was to meet personnel needs, such as teachers, in other countries. This it succeeded in doing in places such as Sarawak, but another goal was more difficult to achieve. It was to overcome America’s cultural isolation. As one Peace Corps director in the 1980s put it, “It is a sad fact...that the United States remains culturally isolated...In this sense, we ourselves are citizens of an underdeveloped nation.”¹⁷ Despite the work of the Peace Corps, most Americans even today have much to learn about the 95 percent of humanity that happens to live elsewhere. While a Peace Corps assignment was often the best education a volunteer ever had, it may be a long time before the United States substitutes Peace Corps workers for the other Americans who go abroad and rarely “see” the world, such as resort tourists and professional athletes. In contrast, Peace Corps volunteers learned how to accept people from other cultures on their own terms, not American ones. They have also been critical of American foreign policy, although this was never part of the plan of the Peace Corps.¹⁸ On the Sarawak side, a former student, recalling his years with Peace Corps volunteers in Miri, wrote that the Peace Corps was the best thing that the Kennedy era gave to the world, and he urged Americans again to be what they were in the 1960s.¹⁹

How to describe the Peace Corps effect on Sarawak? The personal connections between Sarawakians and volunteers were not only positive for individuals, they produced circles of trust, outlooks, and mutual benefits—often called social capital.

¹⁴ Chang Yi, personal communication, 3 December, 2009, quoting Zaharah Haji Omar.

¹⁵ Hoffman, 1998, p. 5.

¹⁶ K. Shuey, personal communication, 10 February, 2010.

¹⁷ Wilson, 1993, p. 47.

¹⁸ H. Blackmer, personal communication, 17 June, 2010.

¹⁹ R. Madang Langi, personal communication, 6 December, 2009.

Unlike political capital or capitalism, however, social capital typically fosters cooperation on a small scale. A well-known Sarawak locus of social capital is a rural unit such as a longhouse where cooperation and trust work to the benefit of all. In the Peace Corps era this “longhouse effect” created areas of social capital that have lasted for decades on the participants, but mainly on those inside such networks—especially those in American-Sarawak marriages. People outside of the networks, in both countries, could not readily enjoy these benefits.

To sum up, Peace Corps made a difference in Sarawak mainly on a human scale. The range of personal views by volunteers and Sarawakians is skewed toward the positive. In one sense, volunteers arrived with an advantage in that they were familiar at first glance, being like the other European transplants that Sarawak people already knew. Indeed, some Sarawak people assumed that all pale-faces were British, so it is not surprising that an old Lawas resident always saluted the local Peace Corps volunteer when he saw him in town. In another sense, the volunteers were seen as distinct from other foreigners. Not only were they young and energetic, they were not noticeably hierarchical or averse to manual labor. But they did not change the Sarawak world in any major way—only incrementally. As might be expected, except in education to some extent, the immediate impact of the Peace Corps on Sarawak institutions, economics, and politics was not widespread. It certainly did not make Sarawak pro-American. It seems clear that the notions of individualism, human rights, and representative democracy, although influential on some students at the time, were not translated into major effects in Borneo.

Appendix 1. Writings by Peace Corp Volunteers on Sarawak

(BPP= *The Best of Pokok-Pokok: from Peace Corps volunteers in Malaysia*. Don Lovett and Clayton Gill, eds. U. S. Peace Corps, Kuala Lumpur, 1981.)

Anderson, Bruce (BA was a Sarawak volunteer in Mukah)

Cheating. *The Sarawak Teacher* 1 (2): 25-26, 1965.

Blackmer, Hugh (HB was a Sarawak volunteer at Melugu and Kuchinag)

By mid-1965 Peace Corps training had become something of an industry.

<http://peacecorpsonline.org/messages/messages/467/2018987>

Carew, Brian, and Stu Kearns (BC was a Sarawak volunteer in Limbang, SK in Marudi)

Administration and procedures in the secondary schools, some salient points. In: *Sarawak, the Object of Our Affection*, Peace Corps, Kuching, 1966. (unpaged, 2 pp.)

Colter, Paul (PC was a Sarawak volunteer in Miri)

The Ulu of Borneo, A Diary, 1966-1967. Ridgecrest, California, 1977.

(Available at the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston)

Darrah, Jon (JD was a Sarawak volunteer in the Kapit area)

Going home. In: BPP, pp. 154-157.

Doerr, Judith (JD was a Sarawak volunteer in the Rejang area)

Of men and the moon: a Malaysian memory. Ms. No date.

Edwards, Leonard (LE was a Sarawak volunteer in Lawas)

When ponies come to a village. In: BPP, pp. 185-188.

Far from the maddening crowds. In: BPP, pp. 164-166.

Edwards, Leonard, and Peter Stevens (PS was a Sarawak volunteer in Kanowit).

Short Histories of the Lawas and Kanowit Districts. Borneo Literature Bureau, Kuching, 1971.

Friedman, Kinky (KF was a Sarawak volunteer at Long Lama)

Frequent Flyer. Berkley, New York, 1989. (Fiction)

Jungle fever. *Texas Monthly* 30 (11): 244-245, 2002.

Fidler, Richard C. (RCF was a Sabah volunteer)

Kanowit: An Overseas Chinese Community in Borneo. PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1973.

Chinese-Iban economic symbiosis. Association of Asian Studies, Toronto, 1976.

Goldman, Dick, Ken Lease, and Ruth Sadowski (DG was a Sarawak volunteer in Marudi, KL in Sarikei, and RS in Simanggang, now called Sri Aman)

Behavior, dress, courtesy, and customs in Sarawak. In: *Sarawak, the Object of Our Affection*. Peace Corps, Kuching, 1966. (unpaged, 2 pp.)

Hendrix, Kathleen Burns (KBH was a Sarawak volunteer in Marudi)

On giving—and taking! *College of New Rochelle Alumnae Magazine*. Winter, 1966, pp. 6-9.

Beatlemania reached around the world—even to the jungle of Borneo. *Los Angeles Times*. December 12, 1980.

(No title). In: *Sarawak Hari Ini*, ms., 1985. Pp. 8-10.

- Vanishing forest fells way of life: In Malaysia, the rate of deforestation from logging is the fastest on Earth. *Los Angeles Times*. March 18, 1990 (12 pp.). http://articles.latimes.com/1990-03-18/news/mn-1042_1_forest-department/2
- Malaysian native people feeling bite of loggers' ax. *Los Angeles Times*. March 19, 1990 (10 pp.). http://articles.latimes.com/1990-03-19/news/mn-540_1_native-people
- Kearns, Stu** (SK was a Sarawak volunteer in Marudi)
(No title). In: *Sarawak Hari Ini*, ms., 1985. P. 6.
- Landgraf, John L.** (JLL was the first Peace Corps director for Sarawak and Sabah) North Borneo over seventy years. *Borneo Research Bulletin* 29: 10-15, 1998
Aspects of anthropology and language study in the Peace Corps. *Modern Language Journal* 47: 305-310, 1963.
- Linnell, A. Tom** (ATL was a volunteer and later a Peace Corps assistant director in Sarawak)
Boom (poem written in 1968). In: BPP, p. 51.
Affluence on the sly (written in 1968). In: BPP, pp. 220-221.
- Lum, Raymond** (RL was a Sarawak volunteer in Serian)
Life at Mile 40. Ms. No date.
- Lynn, Robert** (RL was a Sarawak volunteer in Miri)
The secondary school student. In: *Sarawak, the Object of Our Affection*. Peace Corps, Kuching, 1966. (unpaged, 6 pp.)
(No title). In: *Sarawak Hari Ini*, ms., 1985. Pp. 6-7
Teaching among the giants. Ex-Tanjong 45130, online, no date.
- Marks, Clifford** (CM was a Sarawak volunteer in Mukah and Meluga)
A Peace Corps volunteer as an agent of change. Unpublished essay for Urban Planning 475, 1969, University of Washington.
My return to Sarawak: December, 2011. Ms., 2012.
- Mayhew, Susan** (SM was a Sarawak volunteer in the Bidayuh area)
Adopting an Iban baby. In: BPP, pp. 127-128.
- McMurry, G.** (GM was a Sarawak volunteer at Kampung Rayang)
Every season it's *aji*. *Peace Corps Volunteer* 2 (2): 16-17, 1963.
- Miller, Gretchen** (GM was a Sarawak volunteer in Kanowit and Kuching)
My class is too noisy. *The Sarawak Teacher* 1 (3): 23-26, 1965.
- Miller, Gretchen and Barbara Thomsen** (BT was a Sarawak volunteer in Sibul)
PEMS pages. *The Sarawak Teacher* 1 (1): 10-13, 1965; 1 (2): 16-17, 1965.
- Miranda, Stephanie.** (SM was a Sarawak volunteer in Mukah)
It's hard travelin' on lonesome roads (written in 1968). In: BPP, pp. 32-33.
Teaching teachers to *teach* (written in 1968). In: BPP, pp. 68-69.
- Mohrlang, J. D.** (JDM was a Sarawak volunteer in upper Kuching district)
Sarawak. Publish-America, Baltimore, 2002. (Fiction)
- Pastor, Robert** (RP was a Sarawak volunteer in Limbang district)
Luk Nibu Kupi. (Pamphlet on growing cash crops in upper Limbang). 1971.
- Patterson, Lynn D.** (LDP was a Sarawak volunteer near Bau; she is now known as LLyn De Danaan)
My friends the Land Dayaks. *Peace Corps Volunteer* 2 (2): 18-19, 1963.

- Research note: Katang Land Dayak head ceremony. *Sarawak Museum Journal* 27: 25-27, 1980.
- Bidayuh labor exchange. *Sarawak Museum Journal* 33: 55-68, 1984.
- Plaut, Thomas** (The author wrote about Jeanette Killingsworth, a Sarawak volunteer in Julau; photography by Peace Corps Director, Kuching, **Fred Baldwin**)
You can't send a girl there! You *can* send a girl there! *Mademoiselle* July, 1966, pp. 33-40. (Originally published by the Peace Corps Office of Public Information)
- Price, Edwin** (EP was a Sarawak volunteer in Kanowit)
Sarawak. *National Geographic* 126 (3): 334-337, 1964.
- Quinn, Veronica** (VQ Redman was a Sarawak volunteer in Miri)
The feminine mystique. In: *Sarawak, the Object of Our Affection*. Peace Corps, Kuching, 1966. (unpaged, 3 pp.)
- Read, Dave** (DR was a Sarawak volunteer in rural areas)
The yin and yang of rural health. In: BPP, p. 66.
- Reece, Ruth** (RR was a Sarawak volunteer nurse in Lemanak)
Birth in an Iban longhouse. *Peace Corps Volunteer* 2 (2): 17, 1963.
- Rosenthal, Nikki** (NS was a Sarawak volunteer in Serian)
Haiku: like the light from stars. In: BPP, p. 69.
- Rowell, Rich** (No title). In: *Sarawak Hari Ini*, ms., 1985. Pp. 20-21.
- Schatz, Richard E.** (RES was a Sarawak volunteer in Lawas)
Sarawak's economic development since joining Malaysia: a case study of 1966-1968 students at Lawas Government Secondary School. Ms. Submitted to Sarawak Museum Journal.
- Shuster, Donald E.** (DES was a Sarawak volunteer, location unknown)
The system of education. In: *Teaching in Sarawak, a Symposium*. University of Hawaii, Honolulu, and Peace Corps Training Project, Hilo, 1963. Pp. 1-2.
- Seymour, James M.** (JMS was a Sarawak volunteer in Sri Aman and Saratok)
Education in Sarawak under Brooke rule, 1841-1941. MA thesis, University of Hawaii, 1967.
The rural school and rural development among the Iban of Sarawak, Malaysia. PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 1972.
Contrasts between formal and informal education among the Iban of Sarawak. *Review of Educational Research* 42 (4): 477-491, 1972.
Aspects of childrearing among the Iban. *Jurnal Pendidikan* (University Malaya) 3 (October), 1972.
The rural school as an acculturating institution: the Iban of Malaysia. *Human Organization* 33 (3): 277-290, 1974.
Urbanization, schooling and psycho-cultural adaptation: Iban students in Sarawak, Malaysia. *Sarawak Museum Journal* 25 (46): 177-200, 1977.
- Sochaczewski, Paul S.** (PSS was a Sarawak volunteer in Marudi under his previous name, Paul Wachtel)
Soul of the Tiger: Searching for Nature's Answers in Southeast Asia. Co-author: Jeffrey A. McNeely. Doubleday, New York, 1988; Paragon, New York, 1988; Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1991; Sho Koh Na, Japan, 1993; University of Hawai'i Press, Hawai'i, 1995.

The Sultan and the Mermaid Queen: Extraordinary Asian People and Places, and Things that Go Bump in the Night. Editions Didier Millet, Singapore, 2008.

Malaysia: Heart of Southeast Asia. Archipelago Press, Singapore, 1991.

Redheads. Sid Harta Publishing, Australia, 2000. (Fiction, set in a mythical Borneo sultanate called Manusia.)

Shooting orangutans and pondering the universe: Alfred Russell Wallace spent 18 lonely months in Sarawak, writing the precursor to his theory of evolution. <http://www.sochaczewski.com/?p=704>

The literate orangutan: Trying to teach a red ape to write. <http://www.sochaczewski.com/?p=693>

Bruno and the blowpipes: Who will determine the future of Sarawak's isolated Penan? <http://www.sochaczewski.com/?p=683>

Borneo native group scores land claim victory: How a poor Iban longhouse took on Big Timber and won, sort of. <http://www.sochaczewski.com/?p=669>

Jamming in the jungle: This music festival in Malaysia's rainforest draws an eclectic mix. *Wall Street Journal Asia*, June 15-17, 2007.

Under the Volcano: Playing Asia's wildest courses. *Wall Street Journal Asia*, July 28-30, 2006.

Alfred Russell Wallace: On the origins of a theory. *Geographical*. December, 2005.

Sarawak Rainforest Music Festival - Jungle Rhythms. *Golf Vacations*. vol. 33, 2005.

Golf with hornbills. *Golf Vacations*, vol. 33, 2005.

We better collect the birds' nests before the outsiders get here. In: *Writing the World on Globalization*. Terra Nova, MIT Press, 2005.

Singing in the rainforest. *Discovery*, May, 2004.

Jungle rhythms. *Destinasian*, June-July, 2004.

Borneo hole hunters. Distant Greens. *Travel and Leisure Golf*, March-April, 2004.

Alfred, I wanna be like you. *CNN Traveller*, Spring-Summer, 2004.

Making music in the jungle. *International Herald Tribune*, January 3, 2002.

A tribal struggle to preserve what's left of a Borneo forest. *International Herald Tribune*, September 12, 2001.

Being strongest and fastest doesn't make you fittest. *International Herald Tribune*, July 27, 2001.

Bruno Manser: Spirit of the Trees. *CNN Traveller*, Spring/Summer, 2001.

Bruno Manser: Activist for indigenous tribe in Malaysia remains missing. *Earth Times*, March 15, 2001.

Headhunters fight for control of forests: Massacre is one more bloody battle in history of eco-conflicts. *Earth Times*, July, 2001.

Under threat - 10,000 Penans and one Swiss activist. *Gemini News Service*, GV394, April, 2001.

Bruno Manser, Swiss activist, feared dead in Sarawak. *Plant Talk*, July-October, 2000.

Beetle mania. *Geographical*, May, 2000.

Explorer Extraordinaire: The Victorian naturalist Alfred Russell Wallace braved

- all manner of hardship in Southeast Asia to collect rare species. In: *Fables.*, vol. 2, 2000.
- Neck rings and loincloths: Trust us, we know better than you do. *Quest*, Winter, 1998.
- A Borneo village caught in a squeeze play. *Silver Kris*, May, 1996.
- How Borneo's Ibans came to work with the park. *International Herald Tribune*, June 3, 1993.
- Malaysia's rainforest. A journey of discovery. *Reader's Digest*, May (Chinese), July (English), 1982.
- Princess, is this a tuning fork or a toothbrush?—teaching sign language to a Borneo orangutan. *Silver Kris*, 1981.
- Hornbills. *International Wildlife*, 1981.
- Sarawak. *InnAsia*, Summer, 1978.
- Sarawak photo essay. *LookEast*, March, 1972.
- The long way to Long Seridan. *Four Winds*, May, 1972.
- A lumberjack turns artist. *Asia Magazine*, March 14, 1972.
- Baram Regatta. *Asia Magazine*, January 10, 1972.
- Thomas, Phillip** (PT was a Sarawak volunteer in the Belaga area)
Hikayat Panglima Nikosa. Persatuan Kesusasteraan Sarawak, Kuching, 1983.
 (The story of Panglima Nikosa)
Fajar Sarawak. Fajar Bakti, Petaling Jaya, 1985.
 Phonology and semantic suppression in Malay pantun. *Semiotica* 57 (1-2): 87-100, 1985.
Like Tigers Around a Piece of Meat: The Baba Style of Dondang Sayang. IEAS, Singapore, 1986.
 The Honey Tree Song, poems and chants of Sarawak Dayaks. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 21 (1): 251-252, 1990.
Kenangan Budi. Dewan Bahasa dan Pusaka, Kuala Lumpur, 1992. (The writings of Melati Sarawak, the pen name of Mohamad Bujang)
- Thomsen, Barbara** (BT was a Sarawak volunteer in Sibul)
 PEMS pages. *The Sarawak Teacher* 1 (3): 10 and 21, 1965.
- Toub, Harvey** (HT was a Sarawak volunteer in Sri Aman)
Community Action in Sarawak. U. S. Peace Corps, Kuching, 1966.
- Wood, Daniel F.** (DFW was a Sarawak volunteer in Kuala Binyo and Sri Aman)
 I, orangutan (poem written in 1967). In: BPP, p. 43.
 Flip-flopism. In: BPP, pp. 215-216.
 The headhunters attack (written 1968). In: BPP, pp. 228.
 Travels on the river of time. *Discovery Magazine*, Hong Kong, 1990. (online)
- Zaine, Carla Maness** (CMZ was a Sarawak volunteer in Kuching)
Chinese ceramics from excavations in Sarawak. MA thesis, University of Washington, 1969.

Appendix 2. Peace Corps Directors/Representatives in Sarawak.

1962: John Landgraf: an anthropologist on leave from New York University

1963-1964: Joe Fox: a former State Department employee

1964-1966: Fred Baldwin: a professional photographer

1966-1967: Mike McCone: a former Peace Corps director in Africa

1968-1969: Ed McCombs

1969-1971: Vic Joos: a former Peace Corps volunteer in the Philippines

1971-1973: Walter McDonough: a former priest

1973-1975 Alfred Johnson: a former Peace Corps volunteer in Bintulu and later a Peace Corps Staff worker in the U. S. Trust Territories

Appendix 3. Going back to Sarawak

Peace Corps volunteers have returned to Sarawak over the years and have noted changes, whether good and bad. Some of their comments have been given in earlier parts of the text. Fuller comments are presented here.. Urbanization is a recurring theme in the comments, as is deforestation and its trend toward a barren landscape, something like Easter Island.

In 1976, back after nine years:

Going Home

I made my way to Sibul, the main town on Sarawak's Rejang River. After checking into a hotel, I decided to see what riverboat might be heading upriver to Kapit in the near future. To my amazement I found there was now an express launch service that made three trips a day to Kapit. What's more, the trip would only take four hours, rather than the 12 in days of yore. I returned to my hotel determined to catch the 7:00 launch the next morning...

As the huge Caterpillar diesels pushed the launch along I thought back to the stopping and starting of the old riverboats. Somehow the pungency of durians, fighting cocks, pigs, betel nut, rubber, and rice was missing. Also missing was the British soldier taking a potshot at a crocodile with his M-16.

Eventually we started to get in range of Kapit. We passed a school where the parents' committee and I had worked on a *gotong royong* [self-help project] to build some playground equipment. To my amazement the equipment was still intact save the swing which had broken...

That evening as I was wandering around [Kapit] I noticed an extraordinary number of cars and motorcycles. A bit of discreet inquiry bared the fact that there were now 400 vehicles registered in Kapit. This was up from a mere handful nine years ago. The real payoff came, however, when one of my old friends chuckled and told me that there were still only four miles of road in Kapit. Progress takes on many strange and incongruous faces.¹

In 1976, back after eleven years:

I got back to Asia...in 1976, spending two weeks in Sarawak, long enough to watch Kojak on television in Marudi, visit the Holiday Inn in Kuching, and see the lumber camps encroaching on the jungle to the point where I was tempted to say Borneo is an air-conditioned motorized island. Not quite. But they'd better watch out. I came away still loving the place, however, and marveling all over again how lucky we were to have been there... We shared something really special, didn't we?²

In 1972 and 1980, back after six and also after 14 years:

We got the opportunity for long visits to Sarawak in 1972 and 1980, and Peris's father (who speaks no English and had never been out of Malaysia and Indonesia) came and stayed with us in Washington [D. C.] for several months in 1982. Lots of interesting activities with him here; I wonder if he was the first Orang Ulu to ride the Metro?

¹ Darrah, 1981. The quotation is from pp. 154-156.

² K. Hendrix. In: Anonymous, 1985. Pp. 8-10. The quotation is from pp. 9-10.

During our 1980 visit I was concerned by all the building/boom/bustle in Singapore, fearing that Sarawak might be too changed. But the Kuching airport was still laissez-faire chaos, and Ah Ling in the Simanggang open market still knew what to put on the table without even waiting for a request. Because we stayed with relatives in small towns (Debak, Lubok Antu) and longhouses, the changes in Sarawak were less intrusive. But still, the Western-Malayanization everywhere else seemed to have permanently changed the way of life and the atmosphere of Sarawak. Maybe it has finally become one of the states of Malaysia. Or maybe I am sensitive to it...And also, air-conditioned coffee shops: Who needs them?³

In 1981, back after 16 years, but with other visits earlier:

Marudi was 'choked' with all manner of cars, driving in circles around the bazaar as there is still no road from Marudi to any other town. Vast improvements in the rural medical services were evident, as was the increased amount of educational facilities. On the other hand, there seemed to be a wholesale movement of young Kelabits, Kayans, and Kenyahs to the towns, especially Marudi, Miri, and Kuching: longhouses in Baram were full of little kids, middle-aging parents and old people. The timber companies were also still cutting trees everywhere, but the money wasn't staying in Baram.

It was good to see many of my former students in responsible positions, from elementary school teachers through district officers, ranking forestry officers, and major movers in private and quasi-governmental businesses. They all were dedicated to 'improving' life in the Baram and most seemed as at-home in their villages as they did in their Miri or Kuching offices...Oh yes—tuak, burak, and 'sigups' are still abounding in certain ulu areas.⁴

In 1984, back after 17 years:

Miri is booming. The major bazaar has about tripled in size, and housing estates now stretch pretty well unbroken out past Krokop to Pujut.

The Tanjong Lobang side of town is less changed because nearly all the land belongs to Shell or the government. On the Tanjong itself...a lot of quite expensive housing, and more housing estates plus rows of shophouses, as well as a whole teacher's training college bigger than Batu Lintang now adorn/deface Luak Bay.

My difficulty in choosing between 'adorn' and 'deface' is part of some very ambivalent feelings about this sentimental journey...I can't honestly decide whether things have gone to pot or whether it's simply that I'm an older and crankier person than I once was.

There's been a lot of government-sponsored development in town, such as the huge 'Beautiful Jade' shophouse complex...One can see that when they were new they looked great, but now, only five to eight years later in these cases, they all look like nobody from the PWD has done a thing for them since the ribbon-cutting ceremony. Similarly, the old roads, and even some of the new ones, are shockers.

So seeing places was a very mixed pleasure, but seeing people was great. Most of my Tanjong students, in their mid-thirties now, were the last batch of kids who, no matter

³ R. Rowell. In: Anonymous, 1985. Pp. 20-21. The quotation is from p. 20.

⁴ S. Kearns. In: Anonymous, 1985. P. 6. Before his 1981 visit, he trained Peace Corps volunteers in Sarawak.

what their race, could be sure of a scholarship and a good government job so long as they passed their HSC exams. The general trend for them seems to be that they came back to Sarawak with good degrees, had an initial 'happy civil servant' phase, soon became disillusioned with the way politics impinged on their department's work, and finally quit the civil service either to enter politics themselves or to join or start businesses.

For these people...Sarawak is working out very well indeed: being in the first wave of the educated has paid off spectacularly. For people in general, my impression is that Muslim natives are of course better off—but not vastly better off—materially than they used to be, that the Chinese are doing well...but the ulu people, though better off materially in absolute terms, are worse off than they used to be in relative terms, and are more resentful as a group because most of the prosperity seems to be going elsewhere.

And the ulu perspective seems less present in the minds of people in a place like Miri than it used to be. Twenty years ago it seems to me that even total town-dwellers thought of their state as distinctive because of Sarawak's tribal population, but now a lot of Miri people might just as well, as far as their consciousness of ulu life is concerned, be living in Batu Pahat.

Some other travel notes...frozen chicken from Australia, New Zealand and the United States is replacing live chicken as the normal housewife's purchase...the sarong kebaya is nearing extinction: if you're Muslim and female and under 40, you almost certainly wear a baju korong, and if you're really pious you add a wimple and became what less reverent Malay friends of our time call a 'Zorro girl'...the rise in Muslim fervor has been paralleled by what strikes me as a quite unhealthy back-to-the-catacombs sort of fervor among a lot of Christians, especially Chinese...⁵

In 1990, back after 25 years:

Travels on the River of Time

No map of the world shows Kuala Binyo, then or now. When I first arrived there over 25 years ago, a young U. S. Peace Corps teacher, I stepped from the little Borneo riverboat onto a tethered log and from there clambered up a muddy bank into one of the most remote postings of any volunteer on earth. I'd left Bintulu, an isolated coastal town, two days earlier on the geriatric, diesel-powered Sin Swee Kee, whose Chinese captain traded with the jungle villagers on the Kemena River as it flowed out of the forested mountains of the interior and into the South China Sea...I had little idea what lay ahead. I knew there'd be a small residential school at Kuala Binyo and that I'd be the new Grade One teacher. I knew, too,...my class would be comprised of Iban children who had no familiarity with...books, with the effects of electricity, with cars or airplanes or—for that matter—with anything beyond the jungle, including someone with white skin.

Twenty-five years later, I find myself again leaving Bintulu for Kuala Binyo, only this time...I'm riding the Millionekspres, a huge, 2000-horsepower, cigar-shaped jetboat that bears as much resemblance to the Sim Swee Kee as an intercontinental missile bears to a chariot...The boat's VCR plays an old Bruce Lee kung-fu film...but I choose to watch the passing scene from the boat's steel roof and reflect on the changes brought by a quarter-century of development. When I'd lived...in the Malaysian state of Sarawak during the late 60s, I'd heard reports of anthropologists finding tribes of nomadic Penan people who still had no inkling of a world outside the Borneo jungle. I'd heard of a

⁵ B. Lynn. In: Anonymous, 1985. Pp. 6-7.

staggering cave some British explorers had just found in the far interior. I'd heard of the natives' headhunting expeditions...I'd heard, too, about the possibility that oil or gas might be found off the Bintulu coast and that people might one day want to come and log the tropical rainforest. Bintulu seemed such a backwater that I figured it was as unassailable as the dark side of the moon.

But sprawled on the roof of the Millionekspres...I'm forced to recalibrate my predictions. My modern lesson in adjustment began, in fact, above Bintulu as the plane descended over what once had been virgin rainforest...spread uninterrupted for thousands of square kilometers, only stopping at the equally endless white sand beach along the South China Sea outside Bintulu. The forest had disappeared! In its place, the red, lateritic arteries of recent logging roads showed where the jungle had hemorrhaged its timber. The beach at Tanjong Kidurong had been transformed into the moorage for the world's largest Liquefied Natural Gas facility. Six supertankers lay offshore. The coastal casuarinas trees, whose eerie wailing in the north wind had marked the arrival of the annual monsoon, had been replaced by a vast industrial tract...The rumors I'd heard in 1968 had been correct: the year after I'd left sleepy Bintulu, 22 trillion cubic feet of natural gas had been discovered just offshore. Bintulu...had become Southeast Asian's biggest boomtown. Thousands of suburban homes...four-lane highways [with] bumper-to-bumper cars...had replaced the tropical torpor I once knew...

By the time I arrive in Kuala Binyo, still no more than a tiny clearing in the jungle, Bruce Lee has finished drop-kicking about a third of the population of Los Angeles into tomorrow and I have steeled myself for disappointment on a galactic scale. After 25 years, I ask myself, could there possibly be ANYONE who remembers me?

Nothing could prepare me for the words that actually greet me: "I never thought I'd see you again. I heard you were dead." The speaker is graying Roland Khan, the school principal during my tenure at Kuala Binyo and—a year short of retirement—the school principal today. His eyes glisten as he studies me, a ghost from a distant time. I'd spent many evenings with Roland on the porch of his bungalow, listening as he told me stories and myths from his Iban past. His wife had, as a child, narrowly escaped a headhunter's machete when her grandmother had hurled some deadly poison, normally used on the tip of blowpipe darts, into their attacker's eyes.

Seated again on the same porch where I first heard that story, I succumb to those monsoon-portions of rice wine which had fuelled so many previous conversations. I hear from the group of young teachers [the] old story...of the fall from grace. In its rendition here in Kuala Binyo, it is the story of how the modern rewards of civilization...have produced a culture rich in things, but spiritually in limbo.

Says Roland of his tribe, today 500,000 people and a third of Sarawak's population, famed in legend as headhunters, but now facing oblivion: "I see everywhere the Ibans are no longer together. The families are split, the longhouses are split—the kid living at residential schools, their parents at the [logging] camps, only the old people in the longhouses how. We are split even more mentally: between the old ways and the modern ways. I think in 50 years there will be no more Ibans. It makes me sad."

Later that night...I'm drawn into one more little step along the Ibans' winding path to obscurity. When I'd arrived in Kuala Binyo,...the only westerner ever to live there, I'd carried with me my Martin guitar and a repertoire of 60s folksongs...everyone along the Kemena River grew to know and participate in what became my Big Hit... 'Old

Mac Donald Had a Farm.’ One didn’t need an advanced education to appreciate the white man making a fool of himself, quacking, oinking, bow-wow-ing, and clucking. Twenty-five years after I’d taught one of my students, dark-eyed Kuntai Serang, then eight, the rudiments of guitar chords...I find myself standing in front of a microphone in Kuala Binyo with Kuntai’s flamingo-pink electric guitar in my hands and...natives giddy with laughter as I attempt an off-key, mis-chorded version of my old hit. As irony would have it, Kuntai Serang, now 33, is lead singer in a travelling rock’n’roll band. The adults listen and joke...but the children, including Kuntai’s eight year old daughter Liza, sit with their backs averted from the party, their eyes riveted to the gun-play of Miami Vice on TV.

No matter now far I travel into the heart of Borneo, I find that jetboats, logging roads, and electricity have long preceded me. At 92, Jau Ajeng is the oldest man in the Kayan village of Long Bedian, deep in what once was Sarawak’s jungle...25 years before, it took Ajeng a week by outboard motor to reach the coast at Miri. A generation before that, it took nearly a month of paddling. Today, by four-wheel drive jeep and jetboat, he can be dodging serious urban traffic in a couple of hours. But Ajeng, his forearms tattooed and his earlobes stretched toward his shoulders, is half blind. His days of headhunting are over. Above the corrugated tin rooftops of his once-remote village, TV antennas signal the arrival of the Hollywood gods and goddesses. The old spirit is dead. Donald Duck has conquered the world...

Further inland, the silt-laden rivers narrow to clearer streams that flow out of the forested equatorial mountains. The Borneo jungle here is as enigmatic as quantum physics. Arboreal ferns and celadon-colored bromeliads crowd the branches of 180 foot-high hardwoods...Beneath the huge trees the sun is half-eclipsed. The humidity is oppressive; the feeling claustrophobic...Anything is possible. It is at the end of an hour’s hike to remote Mulu National Park—on gratefully-appreciated raised boardwalks—that I reach the massive caves I’d heard rumor about 25 years before.

Only opened to the public in 1985, the subterranean world here remains largely unexplored. Today, visitors can follow pathways into four of the caves...The illuminated pathway into suitably-named Clearwater Cave follows a pristine river for part of its 60 mile-long underground route...But it is at the entrance to absolutely humungous Deer Cave that the words spoken by an exiting park ranger to my erstwhile guide James give pause. “Big snake in there,” the ranger says. “Jaga!” Jaga!”

My aging brain has forgotten many local words but not these: ‘Jaga! Jaga!’ means ‘Be careful!’ I look at James and he looks reassuringly at me, but I notice his flashlight now sweeps the cave’s dim path with increased enthusiasm. “What kind of snake?” I ask. He tells me it would likely be a cave racer. To comfort me, he tells me it is small—only five feet. To doubly comfort me, he adds it is slow-moving and its bite produces cramps and paralysis, but certainly not death. I am not comforted...

“The thing you have to watch out for is spiders,” James confesses.

“Spiders?”

“Yeh. Huntsman spiders. Very bad.” He then proceeds to tell me that the natives used the crushed spiders as the basic ingredient for the deadly poison they apply to their blowpipe dart-tips. He adds that these cave spiders are small and fast...This information does the trick. I no longer worry about snakes...

When I dare lift my eyes toward the ceiling inside Deer Cave...its scale seems so colossal it is almost silly. The cavern, over 600 feet high and three-quarters of a mile long, could house half of America's domed stadiums with room left over for all the world's Taco Bells. Towering trees at its entrance are reduced to puny lime popsicles. Thirty story-high waterfalls...mist the cave's air, adding a certain *je ne sais quoi* to the sliminess of the guano-coated walkway...

At the end of my journey inland, I arrive in a Toyota Landcruiser at the Penan village of Long Win, a remote cluster of a dozen stilt-mounted huts, sheltering 100 people, some of the last hunter-gatherers on earth. The Penan, a long-isolated tribe of 10,000, still roam the forest on week-long expeditions, collecting edible plants and hunting with dogs and blowpipes those animals that have survived the clearcutting of vast tracts of nearby jungle. Tiny, muscular Lihan Gak, with pendulous earlobes and a pair of leopard fangs in the tops of his ears, is old enough to have heard first-hand about a big, big war with lots of soldiers far downriver over 50 years before, but he doesn't know who was fighting or why. His calloused feet are a testament to a lifetime spent barefoot, trying to survive beyond the furthest reach of civilization. Now, he sees—for better or worse—civilization is closing in.

Seated on the floor over supper that night, we talk the politics of logging, jungle cuisine, and the fate of the Penan. All three are inextricably linked...At Long Win, there is a delicious duck cooked in bamboo and some three-star venison. But the wild game, they tell me, is getting scarcer as the forest falls...

As had happened at Kuala Binyo, my appearance among the Penan becomes an excuse for a party. From somewhere in the village, a ghetto-blaster miraculously arrives together with some well-travelled audio tapes. Each of the assembled adults, including myself, are first invited to dance to the soft music of the sapy, the two-stringed banjo of Borneo. I mimic the Penan men, weave arabesques, flap my arms, contort my legs, and earn well-deserved laughter for my awkward imitation...That tape is replaced by some good old-fashioned rock'n'roll. Here we are...trampolining in the sweltering heat on the linoleum-covered split-bamboo floor...to Chubby Checker's 'Twist All Night'...

The following morning, a shy native named Din, whose wooden earplugs and a blue loincloth mark him as a traditionalist, asks if we can give him a lift down the logging road. We drive for a half-hour beneath trees whose trunks ascend 100 feet before exploding in a green canopy of branches...By an unremarkable widening in the dusty logging road, he requests us to stop. We hand him his two blowpipes, his poison-dart case, and his strange, tin backpack holding a week's supply of goods for the hunting trip ahead...

Off to our left, I see a cloud of orange dust, rising like a tornado in the clear morning air. It moves closer, now accompanied by a low growl. Din repacks his gear, hoists the tin backpack onto his shoulders and...disappears into the jungle. A familiar black shape looms out of the approaching cloud of dust, an 18-wheel diesel truck, blasting down the dirt road with another twenty tons of Borneo logs, a juggernaut, moving fast.⁶

In 2005, back after 38 years:

⁶ Wood, 1990.

Eleanor and I went back to visit our [Nanga Medamit Primary School] students in 2005. We tracked one of them down using Google. Once that contact was made, the rest were easy to find. Sarawak has changed a great deal and our students were now talking about retiring from their government jobs...(As sixth graders they had been between 12 and 18 years old). Of my seven alums from [our first year in the Peace Corps], three were working in Kuching for the agricultural department, flying around Sarawak giving advice on how to grow oil palm. The star student from Eleanor's class was now an elementary teacher in Limbang. [The school itself] had gone from five teachers for six grades to 17 teachers with a computer lab and 45 minute access to Limbang by road [compared to five hours by speedboat in the 1960s]. We stayed one night in Nanga Medamit with the former fifth grader teacher. Stephen had gone as far as fourth grade in the 50s. As a boy he had trekked across the mountains to...the teacher training college in Miri...Although Stephen's English was fine, his wife spoke only Iban. Thus, we were amazed when in Stephen's house we saw pictures of [him] and his wife at the Great Wall of China as well as at the Vatican. The Iban tendency to bejalai had gone from travels by longboat to travels by 747s.⁷

In 2011, back after 44 years:

I was a Peace Corps Rural Community Action volunteer in Sarawak from 1965 to 1967. For a long time I had been of two minds about returning to Sarawak. I did want to see how the place had changed over the years and to see if I could reconnect with people I once knew. But I wondered about the wisdom of trying to "go home again" and was afraid of being shocked at the changes. Several of my old Peace Corps mates expressed the same misgivings about going back, about the potential for the changes to break one's heart. So, as I flew into Kuching in December, 2011 it was with some trepidation.

I found that while much has indeed changed, to my surprise much remains the same, especially the food and the people. I think my thoughts about the physical environment had overshadowed the richness of Sarawak's many ethnic groups. Also, in remembering my Peace Corps years I had focused on the frustration of not having had a meaningful work experience, and I had forgotten how much I loved Sarawak. And much of what I loved is still there. Maybe these positive feelings reflect the fact that I did not see the negative changes up close and personal, such as the devastating deforestation. I did fly over some former forestland that had been converted to palm oil plantations, and I crossed some rivers that ran brown with sediments from deforestation, but I did not visit logging areas or the Bakun Dam and its huge reservoir.

This return trip highlighted the mysteries of experience, memory, and consciousness. Our memories are like layers of sediment that are covered by new layers of experiences over many years. But those old memories, those old experiences, are still there, just buried deep in the recesses of one's mind. The many sights, sounds, smells, and tastes I experienced on this trip served to peel back those layers, to uncover those memories. The effect was brought about by *mee goreng* and *nasi lemak* and *air limau*. And certainly the smell and taste of durian, which I absolutely love.

Kuching: This time the landing in Kuching was nothing like that of September 1965, which was one of the most exciting experiences of my life: flying over the wild rivers and jungle of Borneo for the first time and landing at a tiny airfield with a small

⁷ W. Revelle, personal communication, 2 June, 2010.

building surrounded by anti-aircraft guns (because of the Confrontation with Indonesia). Now the guns are gone and the building has been replaced by a large, modern structure. I soon found that the outskirts of Kuching have been transformed into a sprawling city, but the center around the old bazaar seems the same. The open market might now be covered but the basic atmosphere remains.

I attended a dinner in Kuching celebrating the 50th anniversary of Three Rivers School in Mukah. I was not a teacher at the school but I lived nearby for one year and had many contacts with the teachers, so I was very pleased to be invited. Most of the speeches at the dinner were in Malay even though TRS was an English language medium school in the 1960s. And there were many Muslim prayers. On this trip a major change I noticed was that almost all Muslim women now wear the *tudong*, or head scarf. I think it may be more a matter of social conformity than religious orthodoxy.

Simanggang (now Sri Aman): After a few days in Kuching I took a bus to the town where I spent my second year: Simanggang. I also worked and lived for a few months at the nearby Melugu land development scheme. When I moved into town I was the first volunteer to live in the bazaar, above a carpenter's shop. While the shop is gone, the building with its row of shops still remains. The old market with all its food stalls is still there, and the *nasi campor* is still delicious. I stayed at the Hoover Hotel because I remembered it from before, when it stood alone at the edge of the downtown area. Now buildings have been constructed right up to the hotel.

When I went back to Melugu, I could not recognize anything because I remembered it as a barren landscape cleared to construct the homes for the Ibans relocated from the Indonesian border. Now there is vegetation everywhere.

My main feeling upon returning to Simanggang was that I forgot how much I loved it towards the end of my two-year service. I am not sure exactly why. Maybe it was the local friends, maybe the fellow Peace Corps and other volunteers, maybe the exciting combination of Iban and Chinese culture, maybe the food, and probably the fact that by then I had given up any thought of accomplishing any major work and just enjoyed living here.

Mukah: Mukah has been transformed more than Simanggang, mainly because it is connected to the main highway system. Now one can drive to Mukah rather than taking a ten-hour journey by Chinese launch down the Rejang River, then a little longboat through the Kut Canal, then down the Oya River to the coast, and then a little bus or taxi along the beach to Mukah. When I lived in Mukah there were only two or three cars: the priest had one that he drove the few meters to town from St. Patricks School plus the taxi that used to run along the beach between Mukah and Oya. Now there are hundreds of cars in Mukah. By the way, while Mukah has changed mightily, Oya remains exactly the same with its run-down row of wooden shops.

In Mukah some familiar buildings remain. The building that used to house the Mukah District Council office where I worked, the youth club, and the old post office building still surround the *padang*. And while most of the old wooden bazaar has burned down, one row of wooden shops remains. But a new high-rise administration building exists, as well as a completely new section of town with many shops and activities. The old Melanau kampongs that only had dirt paths and small bridges now are served by paved roads.

Where's the Ulu? While I lived mainly in towns during my Peace Corps service I did some traveling to the *ulu* (up river), staying at Iban longhouses. My main disappointment on this trip was that I was not able to go up *ulu* – or more correctly stated: some of the areas that I passed through used to be *ulu* but are now connected to the outside world by roads. It seems that one can drive to most longhouses. Along the main highway one passes side roads with signs for Rh Aseng, Rh David Jackson, or the like (a longhouse, or *Rumah*, is named after the headman). It was strange to see people driving to a *gawai* (a type of celebration, festival, drunken party).

It is more difficult now to visit those areas that remain “up river.” I asked about taking a boat up the Mukah River and was told that it is very expensive. In the “old days” one just went down to the river and hitched a ride in some longboat, bringing a few tins of meat to give to the longhouse for them to cook; they would provide the rice and a place to sleep on the *ruai*.

And the longhouses themselves have changed. Individual entrances for each *bilik* have replaced the entrance up a steep log ladder at the end of the longhouse to the communal area. Now cars are often parked outside these individual entrances. Some longhouses are now constructed out of concrete and start at ground level, rather than being elevated on stilts. (Many new individual homes in Malay and Melanau kampongs are also concrete structures on the ground.)

While I was not able to see the inside of a longhouse, I got the impression that many are suffering from the world-wide trend of the young, energetic, and well-educated moving to cities while the old, infirm, and less educated remain. Some longhouses seemed to physically reflect this trend. While longhouses were never opulent structures they did have a sense of dignity, being located along rivers where the only way to reach them was by the river itself. Another cultural change: I did not see one Iban with a neck tattoo. And, of course, there are no longer any people around with tattoos on their fingers that signify they took a Japanese head during World War II.

The people: I remember the main characteristic of Sarawak as being its many ethnic groups: Iban, Malay, Chinese, Penan, Kayan, Kenyah, etc. That aspect of Sarawak remains. But in addition to seeing this rich cultural fabric again, the main highlight of my trip was definitely meeting many of the people I once knew. I had had absolutely no contact with any of them after I left Sarawak in 1967, so these reconnections are all the more wonderful. Here are some of the reconnections I made:

- Zainal: My first major contact occurred in Kulim, Kedah, even before I arrived in Sarawak, when I visited our former Hilo, Hawaii training-time Malay language teacher, Zainal. He stayed and traveled around the U. S. while the other language teachers headed back home as soon as possible. After he taught our group in Hilo, Zainal moved to Los Angeles to train a group at UCLA. There he met my family and they became friends. Our one day reunion in Kedah was wonderful. He met me at the airport and we went out for a delicious *makan* at a little *kedai* where the memories started to come back. Our separation the next day was quite emotional: who knows if we will ever meet again?
- Rose: She was once a teacher at Three Rivers School whom I had put in contact with my mother, also a teacher, who sent her some American educational materials. They corresponded for several years and Rose sent her a beautiful batik painting of a woman climbing a ladder to a longhouse. That hung in my

- mother's room for years and now is in my bedroom. I had written to Rose to see if she knew about my best friend in Sarawak, Richard, whom I was not able to find on the internet. When I arrived in Kuching, Rose presented me with an eight-page letter from Richard. She had found him through friends; he had moved to Australia in 1989. Richard and I are now in email contact.
- Former softball team members: At the TRS school dinner I was thrilled to meet one member of the softball team that I started at TRS's rival school, St. Patrick's. Gabriel was the shortstop who, at first, would field ground balls by stopping them with his feet. Also, my assistant coach, Dunstan showed up. I was amazed to see him again after all these years and we later had a great visit. He had lived in England for many years and is now back in Kuching where he writes columns for the Borneo Post (where his brother is chief editor).
 - Merican: I was driven to Mukah by a former TRS student named Merican (or "American"—he was born during a Japanese bombing raid in 1944 and the people in the Melanau village thought it was the Americans). He was quite an artist as a student and I still have a little oil painting that he made. He showed me all around the new Mukah.
 - Other Mukah reconnections: I met an old friend and former Malay language teacher at TRS who is now the mayor (*walikota*) of Mukah Division; we, along with others, had a nice fish dinner on the waterfront. I stopped at the *kampong* house of a man who was one of the construction workers on the small bridge that I was assigned to supervise (they really did not need any supervision). At first he did not remember me or working on the bridge, but then he said (in Malay)—Oh Oh yes, you "*makan umai*"—he remembered me eating the local raw fish delicacy. And then he remembered working on the bridge.
 - Kasim: Kasim was also a member of my softball team and then the teenage son of a worker at the Mukah District Council. He had given me one of those little Melanau hats when I left. I had forgotten, until this trip, that I had given him my bicycle when I left Mukah. Two of his sisters met me in Mukah, and I met him in Miri where he is now a ship captain ferrying people out to the drilling rigs off the Sarawak coast. I had a great visit with him and his extended family and had to get used to a man holding my hand again.

Final thoughts: I mentioned the fact that my Peace Corps work experience was not great. I probably should have switched to teaching as several of my Peace Corps group did. But I was stubborn. The former students of PCVs that I met on this trip showed me that a generation of Sarawakians greatly benefited from their Peace Corps teachers, by receiving an English education (the value of which is not to be understated) from a native speaker and by being exposed to the outside world. So maybe my stubbornness in not switching to teaching did not serve me well, but I have no regrets.

I know it is easy to bemoan all the physical changes in Sarawak, with its massive deforestation and loss of native habitat. But we tend to forget that the Peace Corp was designed to bring about development and change. Why should we lament change, which after all is inevitable? Do we really want to keep Sarawak and its inhabitants in a hermetically sealed time capsule, for them not to join the modern world with all its

advances and conveniences? While those exciting days of jungle travel in Sarawak may be gone forever, instead of lamenting change we former Peace Corps Volunteers should be extremely grateful that we could experience Sarawak when there were few roads and it was an adventurous land.

Finally, many people have noted that the third purpose of the Peace Corps (exposing Americans to different cultures) has probably been best fulfilled. I agree, but I would go further to focus on the personal. Looking back, it was not just my exposure to a very different culture that has been significant, but the personal connections that I made. They were rich and deep and have stood the test of time. And that is the most important thing that I take away from my Peace Corps experience, as reinforced by this return trip. I am reminded of the epigraph of Forster's book *Howards End*: "Only connect." That says it all.⁸

⁸ C. Marks, personal communication, 9 February, 2012.

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