

THE HULL TIMES

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Judge warmly honored for Peace Corps efforts in Chile

By Maria Judge

“Thank you for your service to our country,” Ambassador Arturo Fernandois told Hull’s Eleanor Judge at a Washington, D.C. reception honoring the 2,500 Peace Corps volunteers who served in Chile between 1961 and 1998.



Although my mother’s name cannot be found on any official list of volunteers, the 20 men and women who served in Chile under the direction of Dr. Jerome Judge would agree that his wife Eleanor played an important role in their Peace Corps experience.

Last weekend she was the guest of honor as 14 of the “Chile III” volunteers gathered together to celebrate almost five decades of friendship and to reflect on what the Peace Corps meant to them.

It was the summer of 1962 when a telegram arrived in the Irish home where we were spending my father’s sabbatical from the University of Notre Dame. It contained an invitation from Father Ted Hesburgh, asking Dad to head up Chile III. We returned to South Bend and Dad immediately went off to Purdue to begin training his volunteers. Mom immediately went into labor, delivered her seventh child, then plunged into post-partum packing.

Dad flew on ahead to Santiago to make arrangements for his immediate family of eight, and his extended family of 20 volunteers. A few weeks later, in the middle of November, five family friends in five cars drove Eleanor, Andrew, Maria, Brigid, Cecelia, Rory, Valentina, and Justin to get the boat train.

Eleanor and Ambassador Arturo Fernandois of Chile...

At the dock in New York City the next day we were met by our eight steamer trunks, new refrigerator, automatic washing machine, and four cases of disposable diapers. Mom, after all, had a 10-week-old infant, and a 19-month-old toddler, along with several bedwetters. After three eventful weeks at sea, we arrived in Chile. Dad had rented a large house in a comfortable section of Santiago, across the street from the Uruguayan Embassy and two doors down from the Yugoslav Embassy. The house came complete with housekeeper, laundress, a twice-a-week gardener, and an unfortunate infestation. In an early letter to her sister, Mom wrote that we were living in decaying elegance, "with a chandelier in every bedroom and fleas in every bed."

We got to know the volunteers of Chile III when they came to the house, and learned about their work. They were involved in setting up productive cooperatives around the country, and they reflected on their experiences when they reunited last weekend.



Eleanor presides over dinner in Santiago, Chile in 1963. Walt Harrison is at left front and John James is on the right rear... [Photos courtesy of Maria Judge]

David and Leo worked with furniture and sewing cooperatives in Valdivia, but also recalled how they had an opportunity to introduce peanut butter to the country when they showed a local candy shop owner how to make it. Walt set up garbage and recycling cooperative in Osorno, which made him realize he could do anything he put his mind to. Pat was assigned to work in five villages in the north that she traveled to in a Jeep that once rolled down a mountain and nearly dumped her in the river. Lucille set up the daycare center in La Victoria, a large slum on the outskirts of Santiago, which then enabled the children's mothers to work in the sewing cooperative set up by Darwin and Tom. Jan did social work, Nelson worked with fishing cooperative, and John and Ed were assigned to a women's cooperative, fishing cooperative, and a wood-working shop in Ancud. Several of the volunteers went on to become teachers, a career they were inspired to pursue because of their Peace Corps experiences.

We spent three days together last week, sharing these stories and memories and realizing the impact the Peace Corps had on so many lives.

In introducing Mom at the dinner Saturday night, one of the volunteers read a letter from a man in Chile whose family was helped by the Peace Corps projects. Heriberto wrote how much he admired Mom and Dad, and how pleased he was when they came to his daughter's baptismal reception and brought champagne. He also recalled they left their son behind and returned about 30 minutes later to collect him from the bedroom where he was sleeping in his carry cot.

Heriberto's memories are as strong as those of all the Peace Corps volunteers from Chile III.