

RPCV 25th Anniversary REUNION

The 25th Peace Corps Anniversary celebration held in Washington on October 3-5, 1986, attended by 4-5,000 RPCVs was clearly a "once in a lifetime" event for all who attended. In addition to visiting and partying with old and new friends, there was a constant schedule of planned events which included: presentation by Phillipines' President Aquino, Sargent Shriver, Bill Moyers, Lorretta Ruppe and other dignitaries; a series of policy and program updates related to specific countries; host-country sponsored receptions and events (Thailand's was a night event at the Reflecting Pool in front of the Lincoln Memorial); awards to RPCV's; huge picnics on the mall complete with music and dancers from many nations; panel discussions on the Peace Corps and U.S. policy in general; a march to John Kennedy's grave site (about 7,000 marchers) and a memorial service at the Arlington Cemetary amphitheatre for the PCV's who died while overseas; and a concert at the JFK Center, with Harry Belafonte as m.c. In addition, Group I Volunteers (about 6-700 of us) stayed on for a fourth day on October 6th for a breakfast reception, a tree-planting ceremony at the National Arboretum, and a lunch at the Sam Raybur Office Building with Cong. Sylvio Conti as m.c., and speakers as diverse as Vice President George Bush and Senator Ted Kennedy.

Probably each of us were touched in different ways by this whirlwind of activity. What I enjoyed most was visiting with friends from Thailand I -- exchanging faded memories of the same event (Is that really how it happened?); How many children do you have? You haven't changed a bit -- although all of us had! Finding out that our stamina and ability to absorb Thai beer had diminished after 25 years. And promises to keep in touch and gather again in five years.

However, in retrospect, the most exhilarating thing was the continual sense of commitment and attachment to the Peace Corp idea. It permeated the discussions, the speeches, the resolution the awards and the atmosphere of events. One had a sense, that if asked, many would have volunteered anew on the spot. It's hard to forget the standing ovations for Sarge Shriver, Father Theodore Hesburgh, and Ted Kennedy, who left the luncheon in tear after a standing ovation was given when he said, "My brother, Jac if he were here today, would be proud of all of you." I believe each RPCV was touched by the experiences and emotions of the celebration. It was more than any of us anticipated and somehow it was a renewal of our individual and collective commitments to the ideals of service and peace exemplified by the Peace Corps.

Sumner Sharpe, RPCV  
Thailand I

SS/dms  
OH Forms  
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