

## WOBURN'S PIECE OF THE PEACE CORPS

by Marie Coady

"The toughest job you'll ever love.", are the words the Peace Corps has chosen to define itself. No one will argue that it's a tough job fighting hunger, disease, illiteracy and poverty around the world, but that is the mission of Peace Corps Volunteers. To complete the Peace Corps mission Volunteers give up all the comforts of home to live in a mud hut on an Ethiopian desert or in a frame house at the edge of an African rain forest. Even if a Volunteer lives in an apartment in a large city, chances are it will have electricity only some of the time and the plumbing will be iffy at best. Volunteers in the Peace Corps have taken President Kennedy's words to heart and are answering the question, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."

Despite all these negative aspects Volunteers return after their two year stint, knowing they have participated in something not only worthwhile but deeply moving. According to one returning Volunteer, being forced to survive on the same terms as the residents of his host country helped him develop leadership, resourcefulness and sensitivity. It made him "...stop looking at the differences and start seeing the similarities."

There must be something magical about giving up everything familiar to confront the unknown that has kept this program alive since 1961 and attracted more than 140,000 Volunteers. Today there are 6,500 Peace Corps Volunteers in 90 countries---and soon the city of Woburn will be able to claim one of them as its own. Right now a young man on the West Side of Woburn is preparing for his journey into the unknown. He is in the last stages of the process and expects to leave home and hearth in mid-July. He checks in with his sponsor from time to time to get the list of countries that are available for Summer Volunteers. On his last call he was told that Ethiopia, China and Malawi,---a tiny country in southeast Africa very close to Madagascar where Nancy Coutu, the Peace Corps Volunteer from Nashua, New Hampshire, was killed last month---are the three countries where positions will be opening for him to fill.

You can bet this bit of news didn't give his family the warm fuzzies, and I can vouch for that on a very personal level. The Peace Corps' latest recruit is my son, Sean Coady. I've thought a lot about how worried I'll be and how sad I'll feel to get a "Good-bye" hug that will have to last for two years. But then I looked at who Sean is, I and know it can be no other way. He is a giver not a taker. He is steady, dependable, resourceful and sensitive. I realize I can't keep that all to myself.

Sean is also curious and loves to travel. He has taken many treks that have given me sleepless nights like the archeological dig only two miles from the Gaza Strip in Israel, a trip through Thailand all by himself, and backpacking through the Costa Rican rain forest. At least this time he will have a support system in the country where he is assigned and after three months of intense training in the culture and traditions of his host country, will know the language. He may even get to live with a host family. Well, I can dream, can't I?

As my husband and I make the announcement to family and friends about Sean's decision to join the Peace Corps, we get many different reactions. One relative claimed, "Why would he do such a thing?" as if he had decided to become a serial killer. Another said naively, "I hope he gets someplace close to home." While another expressed sympathy for us and said she hoped "...he didn't get in a country where he would be surrounded by foreigners.". Most though are supportive and impressed, some just shrug and say it's what they would expect from him. They are the ones who know him well.

To make this decision Sean is giving up a position at the Theology Department at Boston College and scooping ice cream at Carvel on Sunday nights. I know it's a strange combination but once he starts something he tends to stick with it, and the people around him will do whatever it takes to see that he does. Although Sean is only twenty-seven, he's been at Carvel for twelve years and at Boston College for nine. After he graduated from BC, the Theology Department didn't want to lose their work study protégé, so they created a position in the department to keep him close.

I'd like to keep him close too, but I'm letting go to watch him soar.

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