

Continuing Memories of our Peace Corps Training Days—Minnesota, India III

By John Chromy and Mary Andrews with Photos from Mary, Jay Buffenmyer & Larry Brown
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India III arrived in St. Paul, Minnesota on a blistery winter day in late February 1963. We spent the months of March, April and May on the St. Paul Campus of the University of Minnesota with our base of operations (staff offices, classrooms and men's dorm rooms) in an old dormitory, Dexter Hall. The women in our group were housed in one of the regular dormitories nearby, Bailey Hall. The Training was directed by the Director of the Minnesota Extension Service, Dr. Luther Pickrel. A Training Officer came from Washington periodically to oversee the program and to advise the trainers and us on some of the latest information from PC/India. The University of Minnesota was selected to host our India training for two reasons: a) The University housed a nationally famous South Asia Studies Department and Library b) The University hosted a significant number of graduate students from India who could be employed as language and cross cultural studies instructors.

Classes were held in various buildings and we bused across town to the Minneapolis campus for access to a gym. Below is a photo of many in our group, taken toward the end of training (when the weather was warmer). Pictured in the front row is our Kannada instructor, “Hanu”.



The campus portion of our training was designed to assist us in the technical aspects of our areas of proposed work, to provide a foundation in understanding contemporary India and to provide language instruction in both Kannada (south) and Punjabi (north).

Pictured on the right is the Punjabi class.





On the left is pictured Jack Slattery, Mary Lou Pass and John Briscoe in Kannada class. Below are two photos of the group during a class break.



Below is a picture of the group in a lecture hall waiting for class to start.



The Cross-cultural studies were mostly handled by an

American husband and wife team (the Potters), who both had doctorates in South Asian anthropology or some such. Chromy says, "I vaguely recalls a number of boring classes in which they droned-on with monotone voices describing various aspects of Hindu mythology and some aspects of the culture of village India. I recall them recommending that we all read Kusam Nair's book, Blossoms in the Dust as a means to gain insight into village India. The Potter's succeeded in taking what inherently was a fascinating topic, the five thousand years of Indian history and culture, with its vast contrasts to the American culture we inherited, and made it as

boring and forgettable as possible. Fortunately, some of our Indian language instructors took it upon themselves to explain more explicitly various aspects of Indian culture which was most helpful.”

Included in the curriculum was a sports (mostly soccer and a bit about volley ball and cricket) program designed to give us some exercise and also to give us a working knowledge of sports of interest to our Indian hosts. Mostly, Chromy recalls a soccer instructor as being a slightly maniacal Hungarian refugee from the 1956 anti-soviet uprising. “He made our soccer experience interesting”.

Dr. George Donahue, Professor of Rural Sociology in the Minnesota School of Agriculture gave us about six hours of information on the nature of rural communities, how to identify the key leaders and decision-makers and how to understand the existing social structure and its probable resistance to change. I remember his presentations as being fairly humorous and relatively interesting, for example he gave us the definition of a "Rural Sociologist" as a farm boy who went to college, got a degree and doesn't have a farm to operate, so he teaches rural sociology in order to make a living.

Some technical training was also provided in the fields of health and nutrition, and "intensive poultry production" was introduced to some of the Trainees scheduled to serve in north India where the PC Poultry program was beginning to make substantial progress in the Punjab and nearby provinces.

Embedded in all three phases of the training program were a phenomena Peace Corps labeled "**Field Selection**" which was a protocol of testing, observing, judging and ultimately "selecting or de-selecting" trainees for induction into the Peace Corps. The process was managed by a psychiatrist with the title of Field Selection Officer (FSO) and implemented by two psychologists who were titled Field Assessment Officers (FAOs). The FSO appeared at the training only three times--the first in New York where he described the process to us and added emphasis by stating, "look to the people on your left and your right--one of the three of you will NOT be going to India. Henceforth we only saw the FSO two times, once when he arrived to chair the mid-training "selection boards" and again at the end of training for the same purpose.

During most of the training one or the other of the FAOs was amongst the training staff. They interviewed each trainee, administered the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), observed our behavior, diligence and performance in class and had each of us complete a questionnaire asking our opinions on who in the group would be terrific Peace Corps Volunteers and who would not---they called it "peer evaluation" ---Chromy called it "Bull Cr-p".

Field Selection was finalized on the evening of the last full day of training-the Selection staff and the training staff met late into the evening to conduct a final review---during which some ten or so trainees were "de-selected" and quietly whisked off and sent home. The rest of us woke the next morning with a note under our door that said, "**See you India!!**"



The presence of “big brother”, Dr. Nolan, our selection officer created stress. At one point he is treating us to a celebration with cake. But this event must not have been the final cut since Terry Clayton is pictured and he did not go. Only about 2/3 of the group finally headed to India. Mary Lou is helping to cut and serve cake.

Not all was serious. The group had opportunities to interact with local students as illustrated by Harry trying to get his “date” into the women’s dorm after curfew. Who helped to pull her through the window? Mary Lou! Also a group enjoyed Easter Sunday with an excursion to John Chromy’s home to enjoy homecooked food! Another group went to Donna Anderson’s home in Hinckley, MN. Here are John’s comments: *Easter Sunday of 1963 two carloads of PC Trainees arrived at the farmhouse of Stanley and Mary Chromy just in time for a giant family Sunday dinner. The Trainees were greeted by about ten nephews and nieces (ages 10 to 4) who appeared slightly taken-a-back at the sight of Roger Banks, Willie Hankins, Sammie Mitchell (all handsome black men who had never before been seen on our farm or anywhere nearby). But a hardy welcome by my Father and my Mother and a boisterously sumptuous chicken dinner removed all hesitancy. There followed much conversation, joking and joshing and then a pick-up football game out on the meadow. Three of my brothers and a brother-in-law joined with John Briscoe, John Reid and the others in that time honored manly tradition of vigorous football and much related trash talking! Much too quickly the afternoon drew to a quieter close as the football crew gathered under our maple tree and cold beers were served to all. The entire Chromy Clan gathered to wave goodbye as the cars streamed out of the driveway. It was a day never forgotten by the Chromy family, and as we say in Minnesota----"A good time was had by all".*



These were the early 60’s and folk music was the “in-thing”. Some of us recognized Guy Clark’s talents, but no one would have predicted his successful career in Austin, Nashville and nationally. He celebrated his 70th birthday with the last album, *My Favorite Picture of you* (<http://guyclark.com/music.html>) Evenings were often spent in the student service lounge singing along with Guy Clark (guitar), Harry Andrews (banjo) and Bob Geissel (guitar). Sadly, Guy is no longer with us!



There were also a number of parties...one was at the apartment of one of the Punjabi instructors, Kumar. Seated are Buffenmyer, Arens, and Bette with Mary Lou and Stein on the floor. Below are Roger Banks, Bob Geissel on guitar and Ron Amend.



The entire group is pictured above right. Note that John Stein is sitting with a local girl....every picture of John, in every setting, has a girl nearby! Below is John Reid in a flower garden. Chromy remembers that snow fell on April 23-- with the plants buried in five inches of snow and all the colorful bulbs sitting like satisfied kittens on top of the snow.



One event that did include everyone was this party at a swank hotel (below). Note that all the women were dressed in sari's; our first attempt at tying a sari. We look OK!

Pictured from left to right (Mary Lou, Donna, Mary Ann, Alice, Helen, Connie, Georgia, Lila, Esther and Bina.)

Thus ended the training of India III. We were given ten days leave and final instructions to report to New York's Idlewild (now Kennedy) airport on June 10th for our flight departure to India. And so we went, a long flight some 33 hours in transit with stops in Frankfurt, Beirut, Tehran and

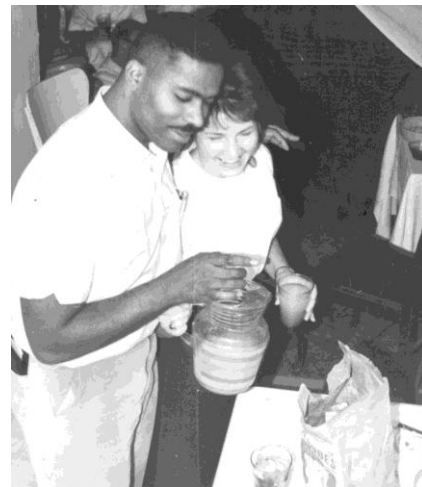


finally Delhi. Forty one new India III Peace Corps Volunteers had now descended upon this ancient sub-continent. Sixty-four of us began training in NYC and forty-one went to India in Peace Corps service. All but one of the forty-one completed their service in India.



Awaiting class.

Mixing drinks with Roger!



Some of the South India group:
Connie, Alice, Hanu, Desmond and
Donna.