

Highlights of our IndiaIII Reunion, February 2022 Luquillo, Puerto Rico (by Mary Andrews)

Fifty-nine years after we first met in New York City, a group of IndiaIII diehards gathered for a one week reunion in Puerto Rico. We had visited Puerto Rico nine years earlier for our 50th Anniversary. Both trips were wonderful! (Pictured below: Harry Andrews, Connie Hankins, John Chromy, Mary Andrews, Joe Bette and Linda Bette)



Luckily, Joe and Linda Bette have a home in the hills southeast of Luquillo. This time we all stayed with them and enjoyed the wonderful views of the ocean and tropical mountains that surround them. We were a small group—Joe and Linda Bette, Connie Hankins, Mary and Harry Andrews and John Chromy (who joined us while living in San Juan for the month). Additionally, Harry and Mary’s neighbors Lynne and Cyndi Mark joined us (see picture below). They were the co-hosts of the India/Nepal Tour and both RPCV’s. Lynne had served in Nepal and Cyndi in Benin.



This was a laid-back leisurely reunion...lots of beach time, hours-long meals, leisurely drives through the cities, barrios and countryside and many happy hours! We “Norte Americanos” rented a car at the

airport and met Joe in Luquillo for a guided drive back to his house on a narrow winding road. The views from his house are “to-die-for”! Sitting on his roof patio with a drink in-hand is a million-dollar experience.





Looking back on the week, the most memorable experiences were the conversations. We would sit around the table, either at the house or in a restaurant, and talk for hours. We not only shared experiences of our time in India, but of our many travels and jobs afterwards. I learned four new things about us—one, that Bob Geissel had visited and lived with John Reid in D.C. soon after he returned from Antarctica; that Connie with her two small

children visited Bina and Cecil Davis in Missouri; that Linda and Joe kept in-touch with Lila Schoenfeld by letter until just recently (we think she must of passed); and that Donna had traveled to the Punjab while in the PC and caused much gossip because she stayed with Gary Harms (alone) while Joe was out-of-town! It seems that every time we meet we learn more about each other!



One afternoon and evening John Chomy joined us for the traditional curry dinner—a mainstay of our reunions. After dinner we made phone calls to three people whom we had hoped would have joined us. We talked to Donna Anderson in the midst of packing her 45 year’s worth of belongings and moving to a retirement community (the actual movers were coming to take her furniture and the last of her “boxes” the next day); to Bob Geissel who has also recently moved closer to the eastern shore of the Chesapeake Bay; and to Tom Arens who had hoped to be in the Nepal but was waiting—out the virus restrictions. All three are doing well and sending greetings to all of us. We were concerned about Tom’s home in Santa Rosa, CA. It sounds like he lost a garage and his guest house, but the fires skipped his residence. He also lost two large redwood trees near his house.



We are always amazed at how beautiful the beaches are in Puerto Rico. One day we took the public ferry over to Culebra Island and the famous “Flamenco” beach. It

was a little busier that we remembered in 2013, but still lovely. Hurricanes have damaged much of the infrastructure there, but they are slowly rebuilding. They now have two beach kiosk and a two-hole bathroom/changing room! The long sloping pure sand (no shells) beach and gentle surf are great for families. The graffiti covered tank is still there, but sunk into the sand a little more! This beach was once a target practice area for the military and much of the island is off-limits because of un-exploded ordinance.



The other beach that we enjoyed was in Luquillo. We would often walk a half mile in each direction of our beach chairs. Parts of that beach have very rough surf, but on the plus-side, it has towering trees that offer great shade, (and amazing pina colada stands)!



The major event of every day was the choice of and experience of going-out to eat. Joe and Linda cooked the first night but afterwards we visited many memorable restaurants. We had unbelievable Tuesday night fish tacos at the



yacht harbor, great Puerto Rican fare on two occasions plus live music on “jazz night” on the beach, wonderful coconut shrimp near Rio Grande, and of course Lolita’s Mexican fare.

One day we did the tourist trek into Old San Juan. It was fun to see the 500 year-old buildings in the walled city. Old cobble-stone roads show the wear with deep ruts. Cruise ships were parked along the wharf and tourists were shopping and visiting among the street bars and cafes.

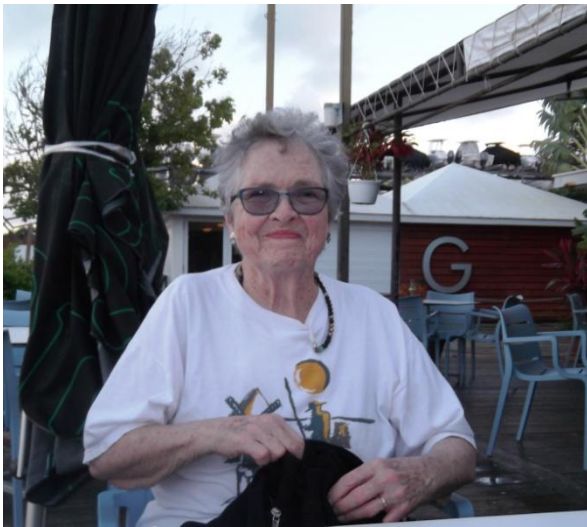


On our final day we wanted to go the El Yunque National Park. But two things interfered—one, we could not get into the on-line reservation system although Linda tried every morning for three days and two, even when we drove-up to the gate to see if we could get in, a water main had broken and everything was closed! So we drove around on the public road and enjoyed the rain forest environment. As it was Sunday, many local families were also parked along the road picnicking in the forest and on the river banks.





Pictured above: all of the RPCV's on the trip: Cyndi and Lynne, Mary and Harry, John, Connie and Joe.



Highlights of some of our conversations:

We struggled to remember the names and stories about other trainees that we worked with in training. Because Larry Brown had recently written a short excerpt about George Araujo, we all shared stories of interactions with him. Mary remembers being ahead of George on that famous over-night venture. *He was dropped off a little ways behind her. After she got her fire going, he comes running into her camp. He was frightened and hungry and didn't know what to do! So he stayed with her that night.*

Connie had found a letter that she had written to her mother about the 4-day trek. So we read the letter and looked at the map. We are still trying to identify the names of who was in our "female" group. It was at least Connie, Mary, Donna, Georgia and Flora, plus one other???. We started our trek in Lares (due west of Camp Radley). That initiated attempts to identify other groups...but neither Harry nor Joe could remember who was in their group. I found the following picture of Hank's trek group. It was in the "memories of training in Puerto Rico" that I wrote long ago. It looks like Brisco, Hankins, "Teddy Bear"



Thompson, Keith Walter and John Stein were in that group (plus photographer who might have been Jay Buffenmyer since he sent me some of his pictures).

Many stories were shared about Terry Clayton and his misadventures in Puerto Rico. Harry and Mary shared that when they arrived at Mary's home in PA after returning from their travels-home they found Terry Clayton and his younger brother visiting with Mary's family. The Claytons were driving cross country and remembered Mary's address in Western Pennsylvania. So Terry and his brother stayed and

attended their wedding! *They decorated our car ("just married")!*

We tried to remember potential reasons why some in our group never made-it to India. People had some wonderful comments that Virginia Parker made: *What is that word Namas something? Virginia asked after one language training session! In Puerto Rico she said, "I don't trek".*

Harry remembered being introduced to Elijah Ramsey. He said, *Iislijaramsyfromlousinna*. And Harry couldn't understand a word he said. Joe commented that he roomed with Elijah and Elijah never would look him in the eye...said *he was taught never to look at white people directly in the eye...always look down!* Elijah said that when his sister finished 8th grade that she was so smart that they asked her to teach first grade! Another memory of Elijah was that he sank to the bottom of the pool during drown-proofing...he had no body fat!

Chromy shared thoughts about training and the testing and deselection process. At one time his job in the Peace Corps was recruiting, selection and training. Cyndi and Lynne who only knew in-country training and nothing other than self-selection-out where incredulous about our stories. John mentioned that the selection process that we endured didn't last long as it was overwhelmingly disliked. *Mary noted that both she and John Briscoe had to take the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Index Test twice because their results were "inconsistent"!* *We wondered what kind of volunteer impact Guy Clark or Reggie Cridler would have made???*



Connie brought some pictures/papers that she found in her “boxes”. Two or three photos were from our first reunion in Kentucky. Ronnie Amend was in those pictures...which led to wonderful stories about Ronnie. It seems that Joe and Linda crossed paths with him in New York City often and Joe was stationed near him in the Punjab. Ronnie was assigned a Poultry development position but being a city boy, couldn't tell one end of a chicken from another! We laughed about his lack of expertise in Ag, but great linguistic skills! Mary and Harry ran into him at the American Express Office on Connaugh Circle

in 1972 or 73. *We went up the stairs to exchange traveler's cheques and heard that unforgettable laugh of Ronnie's. He was in-line ahead of us. At that time he was living in Delhi on a Fulbright to study Sanskrit as part of his PhD.*

One of the papers in Connie's collection was an insert in the Peace Corp Magazine written by Hankins while in India. *His comments were about being a Negro volunteer in India. It is a masterpiece of diplomacy talking about being proud to be black in America.*

Joe recalls seeing the new list of language groupings one evening in MN (meant to group people by language skill) and he jumbled the names. The next morning the language instructors noted that something was wrong as poor trainees were mixed with the best! (pictured is *Briscoe, Mary and Slattery—in a South India group!*)



We encouraged Joe to tell his story of crossing through Afghanistan and Iran/Iraq on the way home from India with Pat Cantlon. When you see him, ask him to repeat it. It is a very funny story! But also on that trip home, we had promised Joe



and Pat that we (Harry and Mary) would meet them in Rome for Easter (now this was before cellphones!). Lo and behold we arrive in Rome and were camping in the campgrounds overlooking Rome when we meet Joe and Pat and Pat's sister Colleen! (Pictured is Harry with our TR4A at the campgrounds) We latter traveled with them through the Alps and across Gothard Pass in the snow! *Mary and Harry traveled with Connie and Hank through Africa, up the Nile on barges and through the Aswan Dam*

and then left them in Luxor. Harry and Mary continued through Egypt, across the Mediterranean and into Greece. Then traveled by train across Europe to pick-up the car in London. This was our return through Europe with the car. Later we shipped the car from Germany and returned to the US via student ship.