Dear Friends of Colombia,

Friends of Colombia is very excited about a new venture. This year, in collaboration with Peace Corps Colombia, we inaugurated our Peace Corps Volunteer Field Support Project. We created criteria for Volunteers to apply for a grant from FOC which will help to support a particular project in the field. Through this mechanism we were able to fund new community projects.

The first program funded is applicable not only in Colombia but perhaps in the U.S. as well. PCV Maya Cross and a Colombian colleague have launched an educational program to attack the problem of bullying in schools. Maya and her colleague saw an opportunity to address some of the scars of the years of community strife from ongoing violence. Just now under way, you can read about this innovative program on page 2 of this newsletter.

Two other efforts new this year include funding the purchase of 12 Video Beam Projectors for PCVs to use in the field (long gone are the movie projector with which many of us struggled). We also funded an in-country conference for PCVs being trained in a business model to be used in their sites.

FOC has launched its 2017 Fundraising Campaign. It is with your generous support that we are able to continue to support our projects and entertain new ones. You will receive a letter in the mail reviewing FOC donation opportunities, including a membership form. In addition, you may go to our website, friendsofcolombia.org to renew and/or donate through PayPal.

FOC is looking forward to more opportunities to engage with Colombia in the New Year.

And remember, we CAN make a difference in struggling communities in Colombia.

Arleen Stewart Cheston
President, Friends of Colombia
DESIGNING A PEACE CORPS PROJECT
“WORKSHOPS FOR PEACE” TO HELP STUDENTS RESOLVE CONFLICTS

BY MAYA CROSS, COLOMBIA II-8

While there are many similar towns across the north of Colombia, there isn’t any other town quite like Manatí. This town is hot, really hot, like really, really hot. You could be forgiven if you think I’m referring just to the weather. It’s not just the constant 110° heat index that makes this town hot; it’s also the calor humano. Calor humano is directly translated as human warmth, and defined by Costeños as the helpful and caring spirit of the people here.

I feel the calor humano in this town every day, by the neighbors that never miss the opportunity to ask about my family in the States; the bus passengers that always guide me to the correct destination; or the little girls that visit my house every day after school looking for hugs. This calor humano is what has allowed me to fall in love with and feel at home in a town so different from my native Atlanta. This is what has made this community such a great place to spend my two years as a teacher trainer Volunteer in the Practical English for Success program from the cohort of CII-8.

I met Katy Rodriguez Najera, community representative and director of the project, Workshops for Peace (Talleres por la Paz), in August 2016. As one of the most participative citizens of Manatí, Katy was naturally curious as to why a gringa had decided to move to Manatí. We soon discovered that we were very similar people, both with the passion and dedication needed to conduct an impactful project in the town we both adored.

During a Peace Corps project design conference, Katy and I learned how to design projects focusing on the assets of the community. It was during that conference that we knew that we wanted our project to bring people together and capitalize on the best of Manatí—the calor humano. It became evident that our project would require the participation of different organizations and institutions of the community and that we would focus on training young people to realize their role as peace makers in their interactions with others.

Below is a description of the project we designed, which has been funded by Friends of Colombia. The project launched in October of this year.

TALLERES POR LA PAZ

With the devastating 50-year armed conflict coming to a close, Colombia is embarking on a journey of peace building. The project, Workshops for Peace (Talleres por la paz), seeks to extend the efforts of peace building...
Colombia has some of the worst bullying statistics in the world. In fact, 1 out of every 5 students in Colombia has reported to be a victim of bullying. After a period of informal interviews and observations, the community has determined that bullying and exclusion of peers is a significant problem in the school setting.

In the absence of guidance from home, the school becomes the principal provider of lessons on values and peace in the students’ lives. School staff happily assume the role of teaching students about life skills and values, but do not always feel successful in their attempts.

This project aims to address this pressing community need with a two-step approach, that involves a student teacher training program and subsequent practicum situation where the student teachers will be required to design and lead a children’s workshop. For the first part of the project, (the student teacher training), a group of student teachers, school staff, and community members will attend a training on the facilitation of groups in the presence of diversity. The 3-day training will be facilitated by an experienced human processes development facilitator who will teach the participants facilitation techniques and how to design student workshops based on experiential education theory.

In the second part of the project, the student workshop, 32 children from the ages of 10-13 from the two main schools in town, will attend a three-day workshop based on the principles of generating empathy between classmates, teamwork, and peaceful conflict resolution. The children who attend the workshops for peace will leave with a better idea of who they are, how to work in a team, and how to be empathetic and inclusive to all types of people.

The project strives to be the spark that opens a dialogue in the community about the importance of including others who are perceived to be different from the group. The project aims to guide student teachers into realizing their role as peace makers in the classroom and to feel empowered by the skills gained and practiced throughout the project to be agents of change for peace in their future classrooms.

Each organization involved in the project has developed a detailed project sustainability plan that aims to multiply the information throughout as many community members as possible in the years to come.
During the 1960’s and 1970’s, the early years of the Peace Corps in Colombia, thousands of Volunteers were assigned to rural community development projects. At the same time, local, armed conflicts known as La Violencia lingered on at a low simmer. Thousands of Colombians were affected by these political wars. The lowest official mortality count stood at 365,000 in a country of less than 14 million people. That was nearly equal to the 390,000 U.S fatalities in World War II from a population base of 145 million! Still, amid this carnage, some communities were able to withstand this onslaught. Why? This is the question that FOC Board Members Pat Wand and Irv Dubinsky sought to answer at pivotal meetings this year.

Pat attended the Peace Corps Connect Conference in Denver this past August, and in early October, Irv attended the Symposium, Resisting War, at the U.S. Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C. In both cases, the seminal work of political scientist Oliver Kaplan, Assistant Professor at the School of International Studies, University of Denver, and author of Resisting War: How Communities Protect Themselves, served as the focal point for discussion.

Pat reports that Kaplan’s research contains demonstrable examples of “municipalities with active juntas comunales [which] were more effective in resisting violence and maintained more stability and solidarity than those municipalities with no pre-existing community-based leadership. That is, where Acción Comunal had been active through previous decades, municipalities were able to cope more effectively.” Pat goes on to comment that “juntas were more likely to be seen as inclusive, representing local issues and speaking with authority on behalf of the entire community. They advocated and implemented collective strategies that mitigated the divisive approach of external terrorist groups. And … juntas continued their record-keeping practices, managing information and preserving local history.”

From the Symposium, Irv learned that Professor Kaplan’s field research carried him to small villages where the FARC was and to other villages where both the FARC and the Colombian Military would come from time to time. He wanted to see how communities dealt with these incursions. Kaplan then explains “how local organization and cohesion enabled both covert and overt nonviolent strategies, by juntas comunales.

It begs the question: What were the long-run effects of hundreds of Peace Corps Volunteers assigned as rural community developers in the 1960’s and 1970’s? This led to a spirited discussion in Denver, and it continued in Washington, DC at the Institute of Peace. See the adjoining The Peace Keeping Role of Acción Comunal as the discussion continues.
THE PEACEKEEPING ROLE OF ACCIÓN COMUNITAL... (CONTINUED)

including avoidance, cultures of peace, dispute resolution, deception, protest, and negotiation. These ‘autonomy’ strategies helped citizens retain their agency and avoid becoming helpless victims by limiting the inroads of armed groups.” He found “examples where communities were able to negotiate no-gun zones, corridors of peace, nonviolent guards, and alcohol and drug-free zones. In this manner, such strategies reduced violence by about 25 percent in Colombia.”

Perhaps there is no greater proof to underline Kaplan’s research than that which can be found in some of the communities of violence identified by Orlando Fals Borda in his ground-breaking book: La Violencia en Colombia. In 1961–62, Colombia I and II CD volunteers were assigned to one such community, La Plata, Huila. They were followed by more CD and then Co-op Volunteers from 1963 onwards. Operating out of this village of some 3,000 inhabitants, Volunteers formed juntas in the violence-prone areas of San Andres, El Congreso and La Florida. Then, through their locally elected leaders, they initiated schools and marketing cooperatives—which 55 years later were still functioning! In all this time, though FARC continued to operate in these areas, it never made inroads into these communities—each of which was almost totally bereft of any presence by Colombia’s central government.

For further information about Oliver Kaplan’s work, see coverage by The New York Times https://mobile.nytimes.com/2017/08/03/opinion/farc-colombia.amp.html and his complete presentation at the Institute of Peace https://www.usip.org/events/resisting-war-how-communities-protect-themselves

... Kaplan discovered that some villages suffered more disruptions than others when armed actors surrounded them and attempted to take control.
BACK TO COLOMBIA: A FULFILLING RETURN

BY EDWARD H. LADON, RURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT 1967-1969

For the last seven years I have been returning to Colombia to work with Colombian peace activists and community builders. And it has been a remarkably gratifying experience. Originally, I went to Colombia in 1967 as a Peace Corps Volunteer to work in rural community development. Working as a Promotór (Community Organizer) with the Oficina de Acción Comunal, I managed to learn a thing or two about communities, became familiar with several cultures in Colombia, and happily acquired a half decent facility with Spanish. It was a relatively tranquil time.

Forty-three years later, in 2010, I returned to Colombia as a kind of “global citizen diplomat”—this time helping campesinos recovering from conflicts between guerrillas, paramilitary groups and the Colombian army—conflicts that had grown and intensified during the decades since my early Volunteer years as a community organizer. I was now charged with lending a hand to community leaders seeking to rebuild community trust, to mend the wounds associated with traumatic events, and to foster greater organizational efficacy.

When I returned to the U.S. in 1969, I began an academic and work career that prepared me for this new challenge in Colombia. I started graduate school, left after a year to do conscientious objector service for two years in a state hospital, and finally returned to the University of Virginia for my PhD in School, Community & Clinical Child Psychology. Because of my proficiency in Spanish and my experience with Hispanics, I was then able to land an internship and later a position as a Staff Psychologist/ Director of Consultation and Education at the Worcester (MA) Youth Guidance Center.

More importantly, I was able to join and help build an Hispanic Mental Health Team, and continued to work half-time in Spanish for nine years. I then joined the Pediatrics Department at UMass Medical School, and continued to provide services to families coping with chronic and terminal illnesses—many of whom were Latinos. Through most of the subsequent years, like many of my peers, I was busy pursuing a career and raising a family. I also heard about all sorts of nasty stuff going on with drug cartels in Colombia. So, while I had a very warm spot in my heart for Colombia, for decades I never got back.

Happily, after various other career ventures and some illness, I got to a place where I was largely retired and looking for some interesting volunteer opportunities. In December of 2010, I was fortunately invited to join with five other Mediators Beyond Borders volunteers to collaborate with a wonderful Colombian community organization, SembrandoPaz (Sowing Peace), dedicated to helping campesino communities in the Montes de Maria area, about two to three hours south of Cartagena. Many of these folks had suffered greatly in the 2000’s, during conflict between the guerrillas, paramilitary groups and the Colombian army— with some villagers massacred, and many others displaced to other parts of the country for several years.

During that initial trip, I was truly inspired by SembrandoPaz’s remarkable leader, Ricardo Esquivia, as well as the highly dedicated staff at SembrandoPaz.

... I was truly inspired by SembrandoPaz’s remarkable leader, Ricardo Esquivia, as well as the highly dedicated staff at SembrandoPaz.
several months later I hosted Ricardo on a visit to my home in Denver. A Tanenbaum Foundation “Peace Maker in Action,” Ricardo did presentations about the situation in Colombia at Regis University’s Institute on the Common Good, the Colorado Bar Association, and with a group of Mediators in Boulder. Not long after, I had the opportunity to meet and begin collaborating with some of Ricardo’s outstanding associates. These included Rosa Jimenez, who directs an Observatory for the Study of Forced Displaced Persons and a Masters program in Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Cartagena, and fellow psychologist Paul Stucky of JUSTAPAZ, who has long been engaged in peace building efforts with church and community organizations throughout the country.

Going back to Colombia about once a year since 2010, I have now had the opportunity to engage in a variety of interesting and hopefully useful activities. These include: a five-day workshop on Meditation/Conflict Resolution with graduate students at the University of Cartagena; and, in partnership with Paul and SembrandoPaz staff, several two to three-day workshops on Trauma Recovery and Community Rebuilding for leaders from approximately six Montes de Maria communities; and, again with Paul and staff from another wonderful peace building organization, Puentes Para La Paz (Bridges for Peace), a similar workshop for community leaders in the state of Arauca, near the northeastern border with Venezuela. FYI—these workshops have usually involved a “train the trainer” orientation, and with continuing organizational support have begun to be led by local leaders in their villages. One of the most thrilling things that I have encountered is that Acción Comunal groups are still alive and well in at least some communities and many of the leaders with whom I have worked recently speak positively of their involvement in them. Obviously, with the new peace accords in place and FARC alumni returning to communities, there is more work to be done and I hope to be able to keep being supportive in whatever way I can. If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me at edladon@gmail.com.

NOTE: SembrandoPaz develops academic tours that facilitate opportunities for conversations with peace builders, journalists, community leaders and former FARC members. In the planning stage is a small, inexpensive small-group “Peace & Conflict” tour to Cartagena, Sincelejo, and Bogotá. For more information, contact me at edlado@gmail.com or call me at (303) 905-5566.
In June 1964, at age 18, Dennis entered the Peace Corps as its youngest Volunteer when he received an invitation to train for Rural Community Development at the University of New Mexico. His story is one that will resonate with many former Volunteers, as he transits through the academic, Outward Bound, and vagaries of de-selection processes in the training program before finally being taken out to his site in rural Colombia by Neil, a Volunteer Leader. It is Nilo, Cundimarca—and Dennis is its first Volunteer! Neil stops the jeep in the town square and they go off to find the Alcalde. Neil had visited Nilo earlier to determine if it would be a suitable site. But, the Alcalde is confused with the introductions, having believed that Neil would be posted in his town rather than Dennis. No one knew Dennis was even coming.

Nilo has no running water, no electricity (save for a generator donated by the Army which provided occasional power), no junta, only two or three houses with kerosene-fueled refrigerators, one faux ‘restaurant’, no markets for fresh fruits and vegetables, no telephone service, radio, or TV, and virtually no vehicular transportation, excepting three buses that carried passengers to and from nearby towns. When Dennis inquires of Neil “How do I get around?” the response is: “a pie”. Later in the day, as they were having a drink in a local bar, a man joins them. He has a large house and offers Dennis a room. With that, Neil gets into his jeep and leaves Dennis to initiate RCD in Nilo. Dennis spends his first year as a Volunteer fighting off bouts of self-doubt, loneliness, and persistent intestinal illnesses, yet positive in attitude and forward-looking. Then a telegram from CARE/Bogotá arrives, summoning him to appear at once. Dennis is informed that someone—he is never told whom, has written to CARE, claiming that Dennis isn’t doing anything of value at his site. CARE states that he should return home to the U.S. immediately. Dennis doesn’t agree and CARE allows him to think it over for a few days.

Dennis goes to the Pension Montreal in Bogotá (fondly recalled by many Volunteers as ‘The Pit’) to assess his future. He meets Chris, an ETV Volunteer, who is developing an innovative program with the Laubach Literacy Foundation and the National Ministry of Education. They hit it off and Chris suggests that he talk with the Director of the ETV program to see if he can transfer into it. CARE officials readily agreed.

In his second year, Dennis successfully finds his footing and becomes Supervisor of Graphics and Illustrator for ‘El Lorito Profesor’, the title of a brand new ground-breaking TV series that would be taped in the TV Nacional studios and be aired on Colombian Educational TV. Eventually, via the ETV Program, it ran to 20 taped episodes.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9>>
BOOKS, BOOKS, BOOKS (CONTINUED)

Returning home at age 21, Dennis is hired by Peace Corps Washington to be on its staff at Brandeis University, then hosting a training program for a new group of potential Volunteers. Once that assignment is completed, he enters Penn State University, but his studies are soon interrupted by a draft notice. Ever the Captain of his own destiny, Dennis enlists in the Army and serves in Vietnam as a decorated Information Specialist. Afterwards, he goes on to graduate school and a professional career as an Art Teacher and Learning Enrichment Specialist in the State College Area (PA) School District over a 30-year period.

Any RPCV reading this book can easily say: Thanks for the memories, Dennis; we’ve been there. In far too many circumstances, your story is our story, too.

Notes: The title, Tears of the Virgin, is taken from the artwork above the altar in Nilo’s Iglesia San Jose, in which Mary is holding her crucified son. Dennis’s book is available on Amazon.

SAMI THE WOOLY: THE MOST BEAUTIFUL DOG IN THE WORLD
BY JAY HERSCH, GROUP 22, CO-OPS

A REVIEW BY JERRY NORRIS, GROUP VI, CO-OPS

In this seductively enticing book, Jay Hersch inadvertently poses the age-old question: Do we own dogs or do dogs own us? It is obvious when one gets through his accounting of owning dogs over some four decades what that elusive answer is. But … you’ll have to read this book and learn for yourselves. Jay’s book is a celebration of Huskies in word and image—and the imagery via color photography is startling and comforting on the eye! Along with his wife, Pat, they were initiated in 1976 to dog ownership when they found Quya, their first Siberian Husky, followed by seven beautiful and loving Huskies over the next 40 years. In this time, along with ushering three boys into adolescence, their family-oriented home was equally welcoming to animals. Two of the newest Huskies were Togi and Zar … then Sami entered the clan, the fifth in line of acquired Huskies, and also the subject of the book’s dedication. He was only three and a half months old when they got him from a breeder in Egg Harbor, New Jersey. On the ride back to their home in Reston, Sami cried all the way, nestled in Pat’s lap.

Of Sami’s many enduring qualities, one was his ability at jumping—which he did once by leaping over Jay’s head! And the other was his primal howling voice—usually set off by Jay’s slow sonorous baying which would then encourage Sami to join in, transporting both of them into some unearthly place that only they could share together.

Sami’s unexpected early passing from an aggressive cancer strain was a family affair, no less so than if he had been an equal member at their dinner table. His pain was their pain, felt all the way through to Jay and Pat and their three sons, Michael, Jamie and Eric. To each, Sami was an exceptional friend with a special connection to people; their ready acceptance of him into the family became a life-long learning experience in the full and certain knowledge that when we share this environment with others, we become one in concert with it.
IN MEMORIAM

FREDERICK F. (BUCK), THORNBURG
GROUP VI, CO-OPS

BY JERRY NORRIS, GROUP VI, CO-OPS

Buck Thornburg died September 19 at the age of 77. Initially, Buck was posted as a Co-op Volunteer in Group VI, assigned to work with the Cafeteros Regional Office in Cucuta, then involved in a rural electrification program. It didn’t take him long to realize that this posting was essentially a ‘coals to New Castle’ affair. Although he was comfortably ensconced in a fine set of offices, Buck understood that he hadn’t volunteered to be comfortable among Colombian professionals who knew more about cooperative concepts than he ever hoped to learn. He wasn’t going to let that define his time in Colombia. Rather than bemoan his inappropriate co-op placement, Buck took the initiative and applied to become a member of Group IV, a Physical Ed Group, where his considerable talents as a teacher and coach were productively put to immediate use in Medellin.

Upon returning home, he earned a graduate degree in economics and finance at the University of Notre Dame, then a JD degree from Indiana University, graduating Magna Cum Laude. After the private practice of law, Buck then transitioned into the corporate world, serving on the Board of Directors as Executive Vice President of The Wackenhut Corporation, a company that had operations in 66 countries with 86,000 employees. After retirement, Buck re-focused his creative energies on academia, where he served as Vice President of Institutional Advancement and General Counsel for St. Thomas University in Florida. Even with this time-consuming activity in retirement, Buck still found the opportunity to serve as the Vice Chair of the Citizens Advisory Board for the South Florida-based PBS radio and television stations.

Through all these career progressions, Buck continued to ‘caucus’ with Group VI, joining it for several reunions over the past decades—whenever he could find time away from his 14 grandchildren. He usually signed off e-mail communications with his signature “a multitude of thanks.” Now—right back at you Buck, for your infectiously gregarious presence in our lives amid a roiling world in which you always found shards of possibility upon which to lead a life of purpose and meaning. You will be greatly missed and fondly remembered at the Group’s 2018 Reunion.
FRIENDS OF COLOMBIA MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please complete one form for each member.

Date __________________________________________________________________________

Name __________________________________________________________________________

Name in Peace Corps __________________________________________________________________________

Address __________________________________________________________________________

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Phone __________________________ Email __________________________ Fax __________________________

Dates of Peace Corps Service __________________________ Group # __________________________

Site (include city, village, department) __________________________________________________________________________

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

☐ New  ☐ Renewal

☐ Annual Individual $ 25.00 $ __________

☐ Annual Couple $ 40.00 $ __________

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☐ Donation to FOC for projects in Colombia $ __________

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