



Friends OF COLOMBIA

NEWSLETTER OF THE COLOMBIA RETURNED PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends of Colombia,

We are entering a new phase of our organization. A recent wave of Colombia II RPCVs have completed their tours of duty and joined FOC. We recently met with those who have settled in the DC area and they bring new energy and enthusiasm to our group. You will be seeing articles written by these younger members in our newsletter and on our website *friendsofcolombia.org*. As you come across these recent RPCVs, please encourage them to join FOC and send us their email addresses.

I am certain that you will resonate with their stories and they are eager to connect with ours. They have a strong desire to keep in touch with each other, with Colombia, and to continue projects in Colombia. They bring with them a fresh perspective and a connection to the digital world of communication which leaves some of us in a state of wonderment.

Along this same line I would like to announce that Michael Band, RPCV

Colombia 2011-2014, will become our new webmaster. He is working closely with Pat Kelly to prepare to take over the position. Thank you, Michael and thank you, Pat for doing all of the leg work needed to redesign and update our website.

Please pay close attention to the plans for a Colombia gathering in Berkeley this June as part of the NPCA Connect conference. Pat Wand has put together informative as well as social events for FOC. Check for details on page 3.

And lastly, we need your updated email and home mail addresses. Send them to Gale Gibson at *foc.memberlist@gmail.com*. Please keep us informed as you make changes.

If you prefer to receive a hard copy of the newsletter, we can accommodate your request by contacting us at the same email address: *foc.memberlist@gmail.com*.

Sincerely yours,
Arleen Stewart Cheston, President



SPRING 2015
ISSUE

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FROM THE *Field*

FINDING COLOMBIA AT HOME

BY MICHAEL BAND, COLOMBIA II-3

I never thought I would miss the oppressive Caribbean heat that was so sticky it felt like strolling through sheets of cotton candy when walking outside. I never thought I would miss all of my neighbors simultaneously playing different songs on their stereos at full volume almost as if they were competing to see who could blow out their speakers first. I never thought I would miss my counterparts asking me why I was sweating every morning when I walked into school, but I did. I missed all of these things the second my shoes crushed through the snow-covered pavement outside of the D.C. airport late in March 2014. The following months I yearned for my host mom's fried fish with coconut rice, the two-hour naps I used to take after lunch, and getting my hands dirty planting trees with my counterpart. As a member of the first two-year Peace Corps group serving in Colombia since 1980, I was finding that readjusting to life back in D.C. to be more difficult than I imagined.

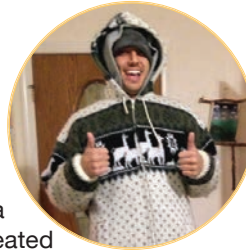
After three months of catching up on my fair share of TV shows and movies I had missed while living in a small town outside of Cartagena, Colombia, I remembered that during a training session over 27 months ago, the Country Director of Peace Corps

Colombia mentioned the name of a group of first generation Peace Corps Colombia Volunteers that had created some sort of network back in the States. Even with Internet access now again at my fingertips, I could not remember the name of this group of RPCVs. That is until one day I was bumping along on the Metro headed toward my internship when Friends of Colombia popped into my head. Once I arrived at work I confirmed this intuition and found the contact information for the FOC president, Arleen Cheston. After over a month of back and forth, I found myself on a bus headed to a FOC board meeting at Arleen's house.

Gathered around a pizza-filled table with the FOC board members, we chatted about Colombia, shared Peace Corps stories and created a plan to unite the first and second generation Peace Corps Colombia Volunteers.

A month later nearly 30 first and second generation PC Colombia Volunteers

(Above) Back in D.C. Michael prepares for the evening dog walk in clothes that hadn't been worn in over two years! (Below) Michael and a group of students plant trees in the tree nursery that was built as part of his secondary project, *Mi Boquilla Florece*.



(Above) Michael hangs out with some of his 4th grade students during a school *recreo*.



“As a member of the first two-year Peace Corps group serving in Colombia since 1980, I was finding that readjusting to life back in D.C. to be more difficult than I imagined.”

FROM THE FIELD (CONTINUED)

ONCE UPON A TIME (CONT'D)

gathered at the Right Proper Brewery in D.C. and exchanged stories of success, failure and cultural faux pas in Colombia. Although the roads in Colombia may now be paved, Volunteers never have too much trouble finding Internet connections, and all Volunteers now have cell phones. The first and second generation PC Colombia Volunteers have a lot more in common than one would think. So here's hoping that this encounter will be the first of many cross-generational FOC events in D.C!



(Above) At a Peace Corps led swim camp, Michael works with one of his 3rd grade students on her stroke.

Please reach out to FOC to verify if there are any second generation PC Colombia Volunteers in your neighborhood, town, city, or state.

FRIENDS OF COLOMBIA HOSTS EVENTS AT PEACE CORPS CONNECT

Friends of Colombia welcomes all Colombia RPCVs at the Berkeley conference to attend these two exciting events on Friday, June 5:

- From 3:30-5:30 p.m. at the University of California, Berkeley's Slottman L11, hear two well-known speakers sharing different perspectives on Colombia. Michael Stanfield, Professor, University of San Francisco, talks about his research on beauty pageants and Sam Farr, U.S. Congressman and RPCV Colombia, shares stories of his recent visits and answers questions about legislation relating to Colombia.

- From 6:30-11 p.m. join fellow Colombia RPCVs for a four-course, sit-down dinner on the Berkeley Marina at HS Lordships Restaurant, 199 Seawall Drive. You may choose in advance either fish, chicken, beef or vegan. Confirm your place with a check for \$65/person made payable to William Miller, 1076 Eagle Lane, Foster City, CA 94404, along with your meal choice.

Get more information on Peace Corps Connect and register for the meetings at <http://www.peacecorpsconnect.org/annual-gathering/berkeley-2015/> Or contact Pat Wand, Friends of Colombia, at patwand@mac.com or mobile 202 375-8349.



Peace Corps Connect Conference
University of California, Berkeley
June 5-6, 2015



www.peacecorpsconnect.org/berkeley2015



(Above) At a Peace Corps led leadership through sports camp, Michael gives these young ladies a few tips on their swings.

“
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”

Project UPDATES



HAPPY 10TH ANNIVERSARY! MARINA ORTH FOUNDATION

In honor of this notable occasion, Founder Maureen Orth, California Congressman and former Colombia Peace Corps volunteer Sam Farr recently joined members of the Steve Bergren family in Medellín to celebrate ten years of groundbreaking work the Marina

Orth Foundation has undertaken to improve the quality of education in underserved communities. Students, teachers, parents and community members all participated. The children of our five schools showed their thanks by demonstrating, in a series of lively interactive stations, what they have learned in both classes and clubs. There were bilingual performances in English and Spanish, as well as a thank you dinner attended by the Governor of Antioquia and city officials. Maureen Orth even received a Mayoral Proclamation!

MY RETURN TO MEDELLÍN

BY U.S. REPRESENTATIVE SAM FARR (D-CA)

In travelling to Medellín after 50 years, there is much emotion in rediscovering a place where for two years I served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Castilla, a hillside barrio with little water or light, no school and thousands of displaced people. At first I wondered if I could make it a year; after a year I didn't want to leave. Upon returning to the U.S. in the 60's, I experienced culture shock; in February 2015, I was once again suffering culture shock at the changes in Medellín. Poor hillside barrios now have two and three-story brick buildings, paved steep streets into the barrio, water and power. It is an ideal place for skateboards. Now there are motor scooters and motorcycles everywhere, many driven by women. Parents pick up their kids from school and wear helmets for safety.

Cars, buses, cycles and scooters create traffic jams. But Medellín has dedicated bus lanes, surface metro systems, bridges over urban infrastructure, and gondola cars to lift residents and tourists to the top of their steep neighborhood hills. I am in Medellín to support my Peace Corps companion, Maureen Orth, in celebration of the 10th Anniversary of her rural schools' success through her Foundation Marina Orth. This

school is community-built for kids who would not have had the opportunity to learn to read or write, yet with Maureen's help they have immersed themselves also in English and technology. She has helped the school obtain a laptop for each student, which they learn to repair. Many of her rural students are doing very well, competing with other schools in robotics competition.

Maureen's foundation is supported by Colombian and American colleagues, as well as corporate foundations. Graduate students from the U.S. come to teach. They are smart, fluent in Spanish, and enjoy the cross-cultural teaching and living experience. Some are former PCVs who

(Below) Congressman Sam Farr addressed attendees at the Foundation's thank you dinner.



(Above) Foundation founder Maureen Orth and students work on laptops.

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PROJECT UPDATES (CONTINUED)

MY RETURN... (CONT'D)

enjoy the City of Eternal Spring. Americans are even thinking of retiring in the area since the historical violence is under control. Medellín is an exciting city with superb medical facilities and a research center for kidney, heart and trachea transplants. Its Medical School is associated with Harvard's. There are cultural events, great restaurants, and an international airport. Medellín's coffee country will be the next Tuscany. Maureen is preparing her students for tourism and other jobs in an expanding economy. Her Foundation is partnering with Colombian foundations to start schools in an area called the Choco, just below Panama. It is dense jungle, with very poor Afro-Colombianos and Indian tribes residing on rich land. The Choco has lots of rivers (360 inches of rain a year), gold and other mineral resources ... but no roads. There are hundreds of miles of an untouched Pacific coastline, all waiting to be developed responsibly for eco-tourism.

The tours of Maureen's school and the new ones that have asked her to partner brought tears of joy to my eyes when seeing the awards and accolades she and her team received from the community. The kids range from preschool to high school, all poor, so neat in their uniforms, so practiced in their English and their performances.

Maureen and I share a long history: two 20-somethings in 1963, after President Kennedy's death, apply to the Peace Corps and train in Urban CD at Columbia U's School of Social Work in NYC. We meet on a plane in San Francisco, one from Carmel and Maureen from Piedmont, with common friends. We both end up assigned to Medellín, Maureen to a barrio on the south edge of town and me to a large barrio in the north end. She lived in an upstairs apartment from the family below. I lived with a partner, Scott Hutton, in a small house with no windows but a raised cement patio in the back, giving us a million-dollar view of the Aburra Valley. Maureen was invited to help build a school, and through one

brick at a time with *campesinos* doing all the work by hand, that four-room school got built. Today, it is a multi-story school for elementary students in the morning, middle school in the afternoon. Each child's computer cost US \$248, a real bargain. Maureen needs hundreds more, so check out her website at www.fundaorth.org.

A take-away thought from my return to Medellín: Maureen's schools are the least costly, best managed, community-involved project in the world. I want to expand UC Santa Cruz's school garden project training center to help it. And, I want to convince Gov. Jerry Brown that California and Colombia, particularly Antioquia (the state), and Medellín, could start a partnership to send trained, retired people to live and do on-the-job training there, sharing ideas and upgrading their skills while enjoying cross-cultural living in a wonderful country.

(Below) Students performed traditional Colombian dances and first graders sang Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes and B-I-N-G-O in English. Christina Morgan, widow of Colombian Peace Corps volunteer Steve Bergren, met the first two recipients of the Bergren scholarship to study engineering in Medellín.



(Above) Children in Nuquí, Chocó

“
(Maureen's) Foundation is partnering with Colombian foundations to start schools in an area called the Choco, just below Panama. It is dense jungle, with very poor Afro-Colombianos and Indian tribes residing on rich land.
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After PEACE CORPS

EL PUTA CABALLO A HORSE STORY YOU WILL NOT FORGET

(PART 2 OF 2)

BY MIGUEL LANIGAN, COLOMBIA I

I was running late this day and arrived at the stable after most of the horses were already rented. The stable was located halfway up the only paved block in Andes. It had been paved in concrete to allow the publico bus/cargo trucks to make it up the steep grade to the central plaza during the rainy seasons. In my fledgling Spanish, I told José, the stable owner, that I needed to rent a horse for the day and part of the night.

“Bueno señor,” he said, and hollered to the stable hands below, “Triaga ‘El Gris’”. “Bring the gray.” I translated.

Oh no, I thought, not that gray horse again; she was the worst horse in the stable. Someone had broken one ear so that it permanently flopped to one side. She had a hernia the size of a cantaloupe on her left side that swelled alarmingly at anything faster than a slow walk. Her fetlocks were badly damaged, and her lower lip drooped so that her yellowed teeth were always on display.

“No señor. No,” I said emphatically, “not the gris.”

“Bueno,” he said obligingly, and hollered below to forget the gris and to “Triaga el Puta Caballo.”

Again I translated tremulously . . . “Bring the whore horse!”

A couple of minutes later, two stablehands led the whore-horse up from below; each tightly holding his side of the bridle. The horse was big, brown, muscular and supremely pissed. His eyes darted, his ears rotated like radar dishes. Oh Christ, I thought, the macho test the cultural anthropologist back in training had told us to expect was upon me.

Out in front of the stable both stablehands continued to tightly grip the bridle waiting for me to mount. Another attendant lowered the stirrups to accommodate my much longer gringo legs. The stirrups, as usual, were metal and looked like they came off a suit of armor for a small knight. They were favored by the *campesinos* since they protected the bare feet of the Colombians who

normally rented. Another bummer — my size 13 Sears Roebuck, square-toed boots barely fit into the metal stirrups a couple of inches.

Up the street I could hear people calling out to others seated at the plaza having their morning “tintos” coffee break that the gringo was going to ride the whore-horse. Several left their coffees and hurried down the steep stretch of concrete to watch the fun. For me, it wasn’t fun — I was scared shitless, but of course couldn’t let them see it — this was my macho test.

I threw my saddlebags over the saddle, put my boot in the teeny stirrup, and swung up into the saddle. Puta Caballo was so mad he was trembling all over — that was good since it covered up my own trembling. I picked up the reins with the long, thick, flat leather strap at the end and, in a bold voice that belied my fear, I nodded and said “bueno.” The two *vaqueros* let go of the reins and, knowing what to expect, jumped out of the way. Puta Caballo didn’t disappoint them. Freed from restraint, he flattened his ears, dropped his head and jumped straight up like a horse in a Remington painting. His iron horse shoes sparked on the concrete as he spun and bucked. So frantic were his leaps, his hind legs slipped out from under him and he plopped down on his haunches with me sliding off behind him, but still standing and hanging onto the reins. The attendants rushed in and grabbed the bridle while the horse struggled to his feet. My saddlebags remained on the saddle. With great reluctance, I jammed my boot inside the bitty armored stirrup and, once again, swung up into the saddle. Puta Caballo was nothing like the docile horses used in our training — this beast was insane.

“Bueno,” I said in a faux strong voice. By now the adrenaline was being mainlined into my bloodstream. Puta Caballo lowered his ears and went bonkers again, with the same results — me standing on the concrete firmly gripping the reins.

Once again, the stablehands grabbed the bridle, and once again I reluctantly climbed



(Above) Miguel Lanigan on horseback.

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AFTER PEACE CORPS (CONTINUED)

A HORSE STORY, PART 2 (CONTINUED)

on the beast for the third time — only this time I had a plan: I noticed he always lowered his ears just before he started his manic bucking. This time, however, as the ears were going down, I snapped the leather strap at the end of the reins down hard on his head between his lowering ears. Puta Caballo was so stunned he froze and stood perfectly still with his head lowered and his legs splayed out, which suited me fine. I gave him a kick with my heels to put him in gear. He took a couple of faltering steps and when he started to lower his ears again, I flicked the leather strap off to the side of his head where he could see it. His ears went up and he took a few more halting steps up the concrete road toward the plaza where I could see the coffee drinkers pointing and talking. The *campesinos* that had gathered in front of the stable to watch the fun nudged one another and commented about the “muy bravo caballo” the gringo was riding. A few steps further on the ears started down, and again I flicked the leather strap by his face and the ears went back up. He continued up the road toward the plaza and the cobblestone road out of town.

And so I, and a very reluctant Puta Caballo, reached the plaza and rigidly rode past those sitting at tables having their morning tintos. We stutter stepped the two blocks to the edge of town. Behind us I could hear the buzz of conversation about el Peace Corps volunteer riding the whore-horse.

The town stopped abruptly two blocks on where the road made a sharp turn to the left so that we were out of sight. I was so amped with adrenaline by then I did a completely irrational thing — I reverted to the brute the Marine Corps had trained me to be: I slid out of the saddle, pulled the reins over the horse’s head, and punched him as hard as I could on the white blaze in the middle of his forehead. The horse was as stunned as I was — this was something entirely new for Puta Caballo. “OK you son-of-a-bitch, it’s you and me”, I warned him, and pulled the reins back over his head, pulled them in as tight as I could so that his head was pulled in tight against his chest, and remounted.

“OK, let’s do it,” I said. Much to my surprise and relief, Puta Caballo had had enough of the American gringo’s way of horsemanship and

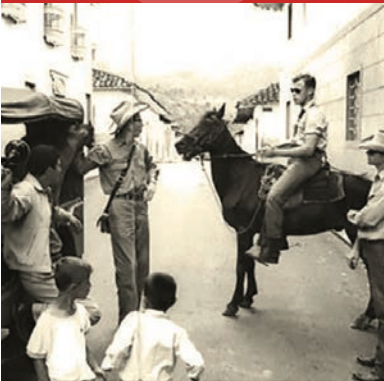
set off at a decent pace just nice as you please. I looked down at my swelling knuckle thinking that what I did was really dumb.

I turned off the main dirt road and we started up a trail to get to one of the three villages I was to visit that day. I was delighted that this strong horse went up and over two hills before he showed signs of blowing. All the other rental horses became packhorses halfway up the second hill. So I got off and we walked along for a while to give him a rest — I think he appreciated the act. We crossed over a small stream. I stopped to let him have a drink and another breather.

It was already dark when I left the last little village and headed back down the slick mountain trail to the road that led back to Andes. It had rained and the narrow mountain trail, carved in the side of the mountain, was slippery. Rainwater had washed away dirt exposing large slippery round rocks. I gave Puta Caballo a loose rein so he could lower his head and see where he was going. Several hundred feet below me I could barely hear the San Juan River babbling over the rocks in the riverbed. I was relaxed and lost in thought when Puta Caballo suddenly reared up and, while doing a one-eighty so that we were now going back up the trail, he twisted his head down and clamped his big grass-stained teeth on my left knee. “Goddamn you son-of-a-bitch,” I screamed out to the night. Royally indifferent to my curses, the beast plodded back up to the top of the hill.

By the time we arrived, I had cooled off. OK horse, that was fair; I did you, you did me, fair enough, we’re even.” I slipped the reins over his head and led him back down the trail to the road beside the river. Again, he was nice as you please and offered no resistance when I remounted. So he and I placidly made our way back through that dark night to Don José’s stable, each of us thinking, I’m sure, about the dinners that awaited us.

The next time I needed to rent a horse, I boldly strode into José’s stable and commanded, “Triaga el Puta Caballo”. José smiled — I had passed my macho test, and besides, Puta Caballo was strong and I figured we had reached an understanding.



(Above) Colombia | PCVs depended on horses to reach their rural sites.

“
The campesinos that had gathered in front of the stable to watch the fun nudged one another and commented about the “muy bravo caballo” the gringo was riding.
”

Books, BOOKS, BOOKS

FRAGMENTS OF THE CORPS: A PEACE CORPS MEMOIR

BY JERRY NORRIS, COLOMBIA VI

In this collection of stories from his days as a volunteer (64-68), and later on as a staff member in Colombia, John Greven takes the reader on an insightful trip through a country and a people he came to love.

John's introduction to Colombia as a volunteer is something that few current volunteers experience. He arrived in Bogotá nearly a month after his group due to a problem with his security clearance. The Peace Corps Regional Representative hands him a ticket, saying: get a flight to Barranquilla this evening, then find a cheap hotel near the marketplace. Next, catch an airport taxi early for a flight to Magangué. When you land there, take a bus, then a boat. Now, remember this sequence: **plane, bus, boat!** Follow these directions and you will soon find yourself at your site in Magangué.

Along with two other volunteers, John lived on the edge of a slum barrio in a one-story house. One rainy night, they heard scraping noises on the roof, then footsteps; they had no sleep that night. The next day, they sent for the police who went up to the roof. They called for the volunteers to join them, showing them a length of bamboo with a thin cord tied in a loop at either end. The police demonstrated its use: it was a garrote, an efficient device to kill someone by severing his neck. The police advised the volunteers to move, which they promptly did.

For John, Magangué became a place where he came of age. In this time and place, he perfected his Spanish language skills to the point when he began to dream in this idiom, relate jokes with just the right emphasis on their punch lines, became animated as he spoke the language, and felt comfortable in any social situation. Still, mistakes were commonplace, as when he said: "estoy muy embarazado", believing that he was trying to express embarrassment rather than pregnancy.

Like his fellow volunteers, John fell into storytelling, especially where they traded their experiences with parasites. In gatherings, they would try to top one another with lurid tales of mythic proportion. But one night, at a dinner with a Regional Representative, they met their match. As the volunteer stories became more lurid, he got up and soon returned, holding a five gallon glass jug which he placed in the middle of the table. There, he said grandly: "this is one section of a twelve-foot tapeworm they took out of me!" As John relates it, no one spoke — the Rep. had trumped them all.

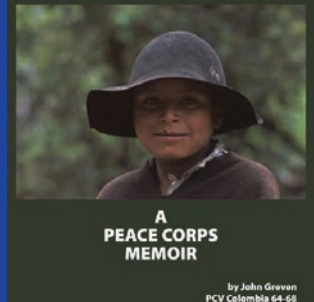
Another of John's stories is of a woman wronged by a man. One day as he was on the river bank, he noticed two boats obviously racing each other for shore. The man's boat hit the bank first and he started frantically running up it. But in the mud he was fast losing traction. A woman was in the second boat and when she landed, John noticed she had a pistol in her hand. She spread her feet and calmly fired four shots into the man, who staggered and fell.

She then walked over to the police station, as John relates it, in rather a Sunday-type stroll, and surrendered her still smoking pistol to a Capitan who was rapidly strapping on his ceremonial sword. The gathering crowd quickly began to speculate on why she had shot this man, most of it having to do with her avenging the death of her child. By noon the next day, she was released from police custody and the homicide was officially declared "for legitimate defense of virginity" with a fine of 500 pesos (or \$32.87 US). The man she shot had promised to marry her but then backed out, a fatal decision. John thinks to himself: Wow, a life here is worth only \$32.87!

With boundless enthusiasm, John charged into new projects only to see them fail. He learned to shift his goals from project achievement to that of organizing people



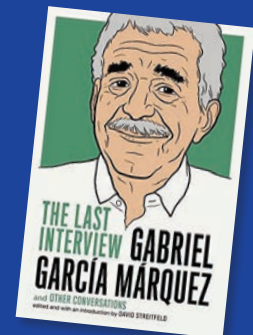
FRAGMENTS OF THE CORPS



*Fragments of the Corps:
A Peace Corps Memoir*
is available on amazon.com.

John J. Greven
21220 Bluebill Lake Ct.
Crest Hill, IL 60403

Readers' Pick



THE LAST INTERVIEW
BY GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ

BOOKS, BOOKS, BOOKS (CONTINUED)

FRAGMENTS... (CONT'D)

to engage themselves in ownership. He relates the story of how AID initiated an electrification project in ten villages. A large generator from America was dropped into each village, then AID would observe how quickly the village electrified their streets and homes. Five years later, when AID returned to study the results, it found that in nine villages the generators were rusting and abandoned. However, in one village, where the Peace Corps volunteer had worked hard to engage the people in building an enclosure for the generator, and purchasing their own wires, poles and electrical fittings, the town was all lit up and functioning as planned. The lesson learned here: these people owned the project: the AID-provided generator was simply a catalyst for their collective action.

After his formal Peace Corps service was over, John and a fellow volunteer asked to extend so they could continue making films as an educational tool on community development projects. They were surprised when PC/Bogotá agreed, but then said they would be unable to continue as volunteers; they would have to become local-hire staff with basic salaries. This also allowed them to borrow filming equipment from the US Embassy. Afterwards, they filmed several community development projects and

brought them to local villages to show people how the concept actually worked in other villages.

John relates how one volunteer invited Jayne Mansfield to attend his birthday party — and she did indeed come down from Hollywood for it! She had been scheduled to fly to Chile and decided that a stop-over for a volunteer could be fit in. She came straight from the airport to the party in Bogotá and proceeded to dance up a storm with the birthday volunteer in her white vinyl mini-skirt and tall boots.

Because of John's command of the language, he was hired by the producers of *The Adventurers*, then being filmed in Colombia, much of it in Cartagena and the main plaza in Bogotá. This brought him into close contact with one of its stars, Ernest Borgnine, who spoke Spanish fluently and is married to a Mexican woman. After a shoot, Borgnine would sit with the crew of Colombian workers, conversing at length with them. To John, this movie star seemed completely unaffected by his fame.

Fragments is accompanied by startlingly beautiful black and white pictures of various scenes in Colombia, provoking for many RPCVs a trip down memory lane.

Fragments is available on amazon.com.

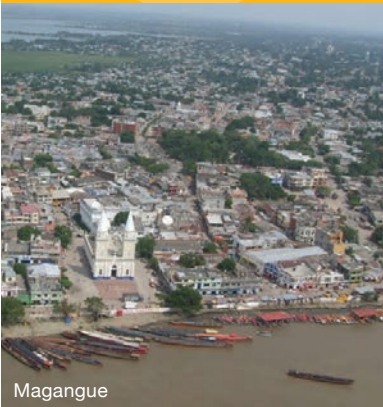
UPCOMING PEACE CORPS COLOMBIA REUNIONS

50th Reunion of **COLOMBIA VIII** (1963-1965, Rural Community Development and Health Education), to be celebrated in conjunction with Peace Corps Connect, June 5-7, Berkeley. For information contact Pat Wand, patwand@mac.com.

COLOMBIA I will meet in Galveston, TX, October 13-16. For more information, contact Tom Mullins moonmull4@gmail.com.

COLOMBIA GROUP 22 (Cooperatives) will be having a reunion October 13-15 in Gloucester, MA at the Cape Ann Marina Resort. For information contact Robert Archer raa10s@hotmail.com.

The **SCIENCE/ENGLISH TEACHER TRAINING GROUP** (1965-67) will hold their 50th reunion in Albuquerque, NM, September 24-27. For information contact Barbara Seigal barbseigal@aol.com.



Magangué



