

Journey to Seattle: September 21, 2025

Reflecting on Five Decades of Peace Corps Friendship

By
Ron Dizon

As I board Delta Flight 1573 to Seattle to attend a meeting of Peace Corps/Food for Work/USAID Operational Help volunteers, I am reminded of the profound significance of this journey. This gathering represents more than just a routine meeting—it's a continuation of a tradition that has spanned nearly five decades, connecting individuals who have dedicated their lives to service across the globe.

The quinquennial get-togethers, which began in 1978, have become sacred touchstones in our FFW/Operation Help community, moments where we pause to reflect on our extraordinary accomplishments and formidable challenges that have shaped our collective experience. These reunions serve as living testimonies to the enduring Peace Corps Mission, where stories of triumph, resilience, and transformation are shared among those who understand the unique calling of international service.

What makes these gatherings truly special is how they reinforce the lifelong friendship bonds that transcend time, geography, and circumstance. The connections forged through shared purpose and mutual dedication to improving lives around the world create relationships that remain unbound by the passage of years, continuing to inspire and sustain us long after our formal service has ended.

The Rest of the Story: Peace Corps Transition in Afghanistan

In the fall of 1972, a significant transition occurred for Peace Corps famine relief volunteers in Afghanistan. After the termination of the Peace Corps' Food for Work program, **Ambassador Robert Gerhard Neumann** made a strategic decision that would reshape the volunteers' mission. Recognizing their unique qualifications, he reassigned these volunteers to USAID's newly established Famine Relief initiative, known as "Operation Help".

Strategic Reassignment

Ambassador **Neumann's** decision was based on the volunteers' invaluable assets: their acquired language skills and deep understanding of Afghan cultural intricacies. These Peace Corps workers, having lived in the provinces, possessed insights that made them ideally suited for this critical USAID initiative.

Royal Documentation Project

Jim Hicks and the author were specifically assigned to work in the Communication Media Section in Kabul. Their mission was to produce a Photography Book for King Zahir Shah of Afghanistan, who wanted to document his personal involvement in the success of these humanitarian programs.



A Pivotal Meeting

It was during this assignment in Kabul that Jim Hicks and the author met Jerry Rosenthal, Chief of USAID's Publication Division, from Washington, D.C. This meeting proved significant, as Rosenthal expressed his desire to travel to the remote provinces of Gulran and Farah which resulted in my temporary assignment to assess the livestock, medical and nutrition needs of the Nomadic Kuchis of Afghanistan. This convergence of experienced volunteers, royal documentation efforts, and high-level USAID leadership represented a crucial moment in the humanitarian efforts in Afghanistan transition from the Food for Work program to Operation Help Program marked not just an administrative change, but a recognition of the Peace Corps volunteers' evolved role in addressing Afghanistan's Famine challenges. Their grassroots experience and cultural competency positioned them as essential bridges between American aid initiatives and Afghan communities during this critical period.

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[Jerry Rosenthal's account of his sojourn to Afghanistan](#)

War On Hunger Magazine March 1973



Agency for International Development USAID

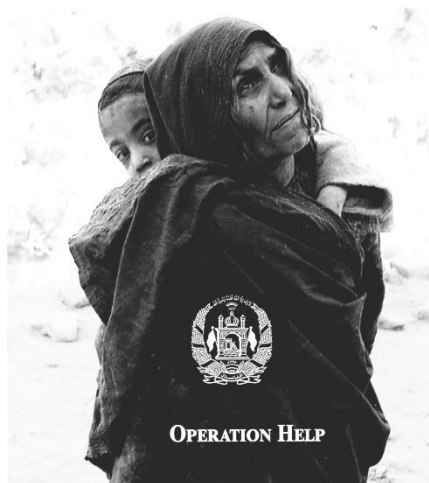


Image by Jim Hicks & Ron Dizon

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[Operation Help Book 1973](#)

