

Charlotte Lipson '61

of the Peace Corps

Reports from Peru

"I very much hope," Charlotte writes from Cuzco, Peru, "that you like the article, for I can't tell you how pleased I was to be given this opportunity to show my appreciation of Hunter. It was at Hunter, by the way, at a Student Council meeting, that I first heard the Peace Corps discussed."

Since September 1962 I have worked as a Peace Corps Volunteer with the Peruvian government's Plan Nacional de Alimentacion Escolar in Cuzco, the ancient capital of the great Inca civilization, a city of 80,000 people, nestled in the Andes 11,000 feet above sea level.

The Plan Nacional is administered by the Peruvian government, using American surplus food served in breakfasts of bread, cornmeal and bulgur wheat cereal, and reconstituted powdered milk with cocoa, to children in public primary schools. During the last school term from August to December '62, 182,000 children throughout Peru benefited. We plan to increase this number to 300,000 by the end of this year. The ultimate goal of the program is to serve both breakfasts and lunches to all Peruvian schoolchildren within the next ten years. The purpose of the school-feeding is to increase school attendance, decrease drop-outs, and eventually to eliminate the 90 percent illiteracy rate. During 1962, wherever school breakfasts were served, attendance increased between 35 and 150 percent.

Here in Cuzco, working closely with our Peruvian coordinator, my Peruvian "counterpart," and several other volunteers, I have had in my charge 28 schools, each of which has its own cooking and serving facilities.

Most of the schools in this city are overcrowded mud-brick structures containing small dark classrooms lacking electricity, with only one or two latrines for as many as 700 children. Most of the school structures are owned by private individuals (rather than by the gov-



Charlotte and her Children

ernment), who refuse to make improvements; in two of the worst cases, the school principal is also the landlord.

The children are ill-clothed, usually barefoot, and unkempt. Frequently they suffer from vitamin deficiency diseases, as well as from many of the diseases associated with poverty and malnutrition, such as tuberculosis and parasitosis.

Because of the unhygienic conditions in the schools, the contaminated water supply and the communicable diseases of the children, our greatest worry is that the breakfast program may inadvertently be the starting point of a disease outbreak of epidemic proportions. Visiting all of my schools regularly over a period of months, my Peruvian "counterpart," an ex-teacher familiar with the schools' personnel, and I have established the following health precautions in the schools:

1. All of the cooks have had medical examinations and have seen demonstrations that we have given, in regard to proper handling of the foods.
2. All water used in food preparation is boiled for 20 minutes.
3. Dishes and cups are sterilized in boiling water.

One of the greatest problems is to convince students, parents, and teachers that milk is health-giving and that it will not hurt the children's stomachs, for in Peru children rarely drink milk; they characterize it not only as being frequently harmful but as a food for "sissies." In one school 700 children are served the milk with cocoa, and it is said that this prevents stomach upsets;

while in another school the principal asserts that it is the cocoa which causes the children to fall ill, when they do.

An important part of my job involves talking to parents' associations, and helping to form such groups in schools where there are none, for the parents are expected to cooperate by paying about 20 cents per month towards the cost of the salaries of the cooks and of the kerosene for the stoves. In some instances parents are asked to volunteer their aid in the serving of breakfasts and also to form committees to visit the bakers (each school contracts with its own baker), to see that the latter use the first-quality flour that they are given for the rolls, and that these are of regulation weight.

Through this close supervision of all facets of the program, we have prevented the type of scandals which have occurred here in the past, when United States aid did not reach the people for whom it was intended. The original skepticism which greeted us has long been erased by a profound gratefulness on the part of our Peruvian friends. At parents' meetings now we are no longer greeted by a timid unbelieving silence, but are often embraced by the Indian mothers and fathers. Many of them speak only the ancient language of Quechua (these Indian parents comprise about 52 percent of the Peruvian population).

As to the more personal side of my life here, it is very much as it was in the States. I live in a fairly new apartment, but without bathing facilities, hot water, or central heating (Cuzco's average temperature is about 45°). Nevertheless it is comfortable and cheery

and a favorite gathering place for the more than thirty volunteers stationed in Cuzco and the nearby provinces.

Not all of us are working in the breakfast program; other Peace Corps projects include building homes and schools, forming credit cooperatives, university teaching, and demonstrating modern farming methods. Therefore, when we go get together we find a great deal to talk about.

My Peruvian friends include teachers I have met in the schools, children of local doctors and lawyers, parents of schoolchildren, and Mario, a formerly barefoot 12-year-old, who offered to show us the tourist delights of this fascinating city when we first arrived. He has been a constant companion ever since.

For recreation we may go to one of the six local movie theatres which show current American, French, Italian, and Mexican films, visit the Inca ruins of Sacsahuayman in the hills surrounding the city, or attend a Peruvian party. We are always asked to dance the twist and also to show our proficiency in the local folk dances, the *huayno* and the *marinera*.

Moreover, since Cuzco is a tourist center, we are at times invited to have informal chats with American tourists interested in our work. Many volunteers from other South American countries and parts of Peru also come here on vacation.

Despite one's frequent feeling of helplessness at the all-pervading poverty and living conditions which make the worst New York slum tenement seem palatial by comparison, on the whole I find my work and life here to be most rewarding and often very gay.

A Schoolroom in Peru



ACTIVE IN THE PEACE CORPS

We are indebted to Barbara Maria Sussman '61 for the names of twenty-three Hunterites now in the Peace Corps.

Edward E. Archer, Somalia; Edith Joan Barksdale, Philippines; Eleanor Beatty, Pakistan (Health); Patricia Browne, West Pakistan; Roberta Cooke, Chile; Dennis Bernard Doris, Jr., Pakistan; Charlene C. Duline, Peru; Sheldon L. Golden, India; DeLaine Ophelia E. Gona, Ghana; Phyllis E. Jackson, Philippines; Stanley N. Laser, Ecuador; Charlotte Lipson, Peru; Jean Patricia Lopez, Nyasaland; Harold A. Mayerson, Dominican Rep.; Susan Ruth Mennis, Colombia; Lois S. Mirkin, Ethiopia; Paul Gilbert Seidman, Costa Rica; Gioia Shebar, Nigeria; Joseph Sklar, Peru; Gloria G. Small, Liberia; Geraldina Traina, Philippines; Leon Weintraub, Liberia; Anna Celcia Zentella, Costa Rica.

Barbara Susman herself is filling a twofold job at present: working on summer projects of the Corps, and studying at law school.