

EXPERIENCING WURZWEILER AND THE PEACE CORPS By Fran Heller

I served as a Peace Corps volunteer from 1981 until 1983 in a rural extension program in Ecuador. I partnered with a "visitadora social," the Ecuadorian equivalent of a social worker.



Fran with girls at Farewell party in 1983

Because of the remoteness of the location, her visits were infrequent, and I assumed her role practicing "social work" without the benefit of having had any training in social work theory, practice or evidence based interventions. I knew when I finished my service that I wanted to become a social worker but lacked the time and resources in those days to pursue my MSW.



Raising funds for a community first aid kit with Chicho at the Rodeo Montuvio 1982

Nearly 20 years later, I was accepted in 2001 as a full-time student at the Wurzweiler School of Social Work. I chose Wurzweiler because of the ability it gave me to marry my love of working in a



Visiting with Don Segundo in 2002

Latino community (Washington Heights) and to also pursue the study of Jewish Ethics and other related subjects. The education that I received and the practical experience that I had in my internships- first working with Latino elders in a community senior center and later, receiving an American Cancer Society fellowship to train as an oncology social worker, enabled me to grow as a social work clinician. Now I am practicing

in end of life and palliative care at a major university teaching hospital still working with a large percentage of

Latino patients.

In January of 1982 a family in my village gave me the gift of my first laying hen in celebration of my first wedding anniversary. It became the foundation of a program that I developed to cost-share and to vaccinate all the chickens in the community. Twenty eight years later, on Valentine's Day I helped that same family to have the father, now dying of end-stage-renal disease in the US, be admitted to a hospice unit in a NYC hospital. I was able to advocate for them as a result of our enduring Peace Corps relationship, now with tools I gained in my social work education, my professional experience as a palliative care social worker and my personal love for the people in a small rural Ecuadorian village who welcomed me with opened arms and to whom I will forever be indebted. My work and my life have now come full circle.



Reuniting with Jacinta and family in 2002