Not long after President John F. Kennedy established a corps of talented volunteers who would spend time in developing countries working toward progress and peace, the organization began to make its mark on the UCLA School of Public Health.

This year, both the school and the Peace Corps turn 50. That their anniversaries coincide is fitting, since so many of the school’s faculty and students were shaped – and, in many cases, inspired to pursue careers in public health – by their Peace Corps service.

Among the first of the school’s future faculty to volunteer for the Peace Corps was Dr. Roberta Malmgren, currently a member of the school’s Department of Epidemiology faculty. Malmgren spent her two years of service (1963-65) in Tanzania teaching English, math, science, East African history and geography to seventh- and eighth-grade students. “I wanted to accomplish something that mattered,” Malmgren says. It was a life-changing experience. “The Peace Corps was a hard act to follow. It made me want to learn more about the world and to stay involved in work that makes a difference to other people. Public health was a natural because it’s so focused on improving conditions in the world.”

As a Peace Corps volunteer in the Philippines (1968-71), Dr. Donald Morisky first served as a university chemistry/physics instructor, then directed an effort to integrate an inductive science class into the high school curriculum. Morisky ultimately stayed a year longer than he had originally planned to take part in a new role for Peace Corps volunteers – involvement in public health. After a month of training in family planning program activities, he was responsible for developing a follow-up assessment for women on oral contraceptives. Following the experience, Morisky went on to pursue a Ph.D. in public health, and to spend much of his career returning to the Philippines to conduct research.
The Peace Corps experience made a lasting impression on **DR. DEBORAH GLIK**, professor of community health sciences, who served in Togo, West Africa from 1970 to 1973. As what was then called "a health girl" she worked with physicians, nurses, health assistants and teachers to educate the population on health issues. Glik (shown center top) served from 1970 to 1973. Right and center bottom: Dr. Jessica Gipson’s service in the Dominican Republic from 1999 to 2001 had a profound impact on the way she thinks about public health.

The Peace Corps experience pointed more than one faculty member in the direction of public health. **DR. ANNE RIMOIN**, assistant professor of epidemiology, says she never considered going into science until her Peace Corps service. After earning her undergraduate degree in African history in 1992, Rimoin was placed in Benin, West Africa, where she spent two years as a coordinator for the guinea worm eradication program. “That’s how I became interested in epidemiology and public health,” Rimoin says. “It brought home to me the importance of using basic epidemiologic methods to solve a problem.” Notes Rimoin, whose career is now dedicated to helping to build the capacity for surveillance of emerging infectious diseases in the Democratic Republic of Congo: “That’s essentially what I’ve been doing ever since.”

**DR. JESSICA GIPSON**, assistant professor of community health sciences, says her Peace Corps experience as a community health extensionist in the Dominican Republic (1999-2001) had a profound impact on the way she thinks about public health and international development. Gipson designed, administered and analyzed a community health census to assess existing health beliefs and practices within more than 150 households of Elías Piña, a community on the Dominican-Haitian border; participated with a local non-governmental organization in the training, monitoring and evaluation of 15 female health promoters in an HIV/AIDS/sexually transmitted infection education and prevention program; and played a key role in the development of a four-month course dedicated to improving self-esteem, gender awareness and knowledge of reproductive health and family planning. “Perhaps most important, I learned the importance of ‘confianza’ [trust] in the building of both personal and professional relationships, as well as the need to remain flexible, humble and open to new ways of thinking about and implementing community-driven, collaborative public health programs and interventions,” Gipson says.

**DR. PAUL ROSENFELD**, an environmental chemist who teaches courses at the school on risk of exposure to environmental contaminants, got his start...
on the Caribbean island of St. Kitts, where he did his Peace Corps service from 1991 to 1993. While there, Rosenfeld taught environmental studies at the elementary and high school levels; built three anaerobic digesters converting organic waste to methane; and quantified the island’s plant and animal species for the World Wildlife Fund.

MARTHA WHITMORE was inspired by her experience as a Peace Corps volunteer in Peru (2007-09) to pursue a dual master’s degree in business and public health at UCLA. In the small agricultural community of Corire, Whitmore worked with local nurses and physicians to educate community and student leaders about nutrition; HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections; and general health and wellness. After completing her M.B.A./M.P.H., Whitmore hopes to design and manage large-scale international development programs, building on her experience in southern Peru.

ASHLEY KISSINGER was part of Rural Home Preventive Health, which works in conjunction with the Ministry of Health of Guatemala to teach rural, indigenous families about preventive health and simple technologies to improve family health conditions, including improved wood-burning stoves, water systems and latrines. The experience was both challenging and rewarding. “I found that development and intervention are not for the easily discouraged, but for those who can celebrate small victories while still grasping a larger picture,” Kissinger says.

As a Peace Corps volunteer in Guatemala from 2008 to 2010, ASHLEY KISSINGER was part of Rural Home Preventive Health, which works in conjunction with the Ministry of Health of Guatemala to teach rural, indigenous families about preventive health and simple technologies to improve family health conditions, including improved wood-burning stoves, water systems and latrines. The experience was both challenging and rewarding. “I found that development and intervention are not for the easily discouraged, but for those who can celebrate small victories while still grasping a larger picture,” Kissinger says.

Kissinger returned last July, inspired to pursue a career in public health. She is currently working toward her M.P.H. in the school’s Department of Environmental Health Sciences. Shortly after beginning the program, she met Malmgren. Although their Peace Corps experiences were on different continents and separated in time by nearly half a century, the bond was immediate. “I often meet volunteers when they come right out of the Peace Corps,” says Malmgren. “They’re one-third my age, but we have the same views and perspectives.”