Breaking Down Barriers

1945 - 1975

30 years of voluntary service
for peace with
Service Civil International

Edited by Olivier Bertrand
January 2008


PAX

SERVICE CIVIL INTERNATIONAL (SCI)

***SCI**: Founded in 1920 by Pierre Cérésole, from Switzerland*

***IVS**: International Voluntary Service is the name of the British branch of SCI*

***Aims**: (paraphrased from the SCI constitution of the 1945-1975 period)*

a. *to promote mutual understanding through practical service by bringing people together, irrespective of nationality, race, caste, or religion to work for peace;*

b. *to spread across the barriers which divide men, a new spirit which makes it a moral impossibility for one country to make war on the other and to provide an alternative to military service.*

***Structure:** (during the 1945-1975 period)*

Each member country had its own National Secretary and National Committee. Each branch elected a delegate to the International Committee (IC), which also included co-opted members. The IC was supported by an International Secretariat, European and Asian Secretariats, and various Working Groups.

Recently, in 2006, a few long-term SCI volunteers from three continents met again after, in some instances, as many as 45 years. They found that, despite very different origins and pathways, their SCI experience had had a decisive impact on their life and outlook, with many of the same values and ideals still enduring. That gathering formed the genesis of this book.

Taken together these stories represent a significant contribution to the history of SCI and, more generally, document the commitment, voluntary spirit and idealism of young people of that generation. They can provide useful food for thought to those who are volunteers today.

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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FOREWORD

Service Civil International (SCI) was created after World War I by Pierre Cérésole, a Swiss conscientious objector, with a view to work for peace and mutual understanding through the development of a voluntary civil service which would eventually replace the military service. To this effect, SCI was the first movement to organize workcamps with an international participation for emergency relief activities or for the benefit of underprivileged people. After World War II, SCI developed with 43 branches active around the world while many other organizations followed the example and attracted a large number of young people to workcamps.

A few former volunteers who met recently recalled their memories from their experience with SCI, what they had gained from these experiences and the impact that it had on their lives. And they realized that after four or five decades they still had many things in common, despite the variety of origins and of pathways. It was then decided to collect memories from a number of people who were volunteers with SCI during the period 1945 to 1975.

They were primarily those who had served as long-term volunteers abroad, or who had participated in several short-term camps outside their countries. After the pioneers who created the movement in the `20s and after the interruption due to the war, they were the second generation, who contributed actively to the expansion and internationalization of SCI. They were enthusiastic and dedicated and they firmly believed in its ideals of peace, non-violence and mutual understanding across national boundaries, through hard work done together. This experience had an impact on their future direction.

This is not a history of Service Civil International. It does not attempt to give a detailed description of its numerous and varied activities during the period under consideration. It is focused on some aspects of the life of those who participated in them and on the way they feel about it today. However, these individual stories have to be placed in the context of the development of SCI and sometimes in the broader historical context.

As it was necessary to limit the scope of this study, it is focused on the story of volunteers who were very much involved, in a lasting way and at the international level. Their pathways often crossed each other. This selection

means that little attention has been given to the more limited and short-term experiences.

We had direct interviews with or received written contributions from 30 volunteers, belonging to seven different countries, primarily the United Kingdom and France, but also from Asia, Africa and the US. The majority was in English, the others in French. Although they referred to a common questionnaire, they are extremely different in terms of contents, length and style. It was decided to reproduce them as they are, in order to keep their original flavour. The contributions came from people who are living today, with one exception. But it was also felt that some references should be made to a few significant figures of SCI, who played a role in the story of these volunteers.

Since the participants had been volunteers at different times and in different countries, it was difficult to organize their memories in a coherent way. We have put the emphasis on individual stories, in order to show how the people have evolved and what has been the coherence of their lives. These individual stories are grouped in accordance with the region where the volunteers had their major investment and in a chronological order.

On this basis, the document is organized as follows :

Chapter 1 recalls the origins of SCI, particularly the role of its founder, Pierre Cérésole and identifies some of the problems which were met initially in the implementation of the concept of civil service and with which the volunteers of the second generation were likely to be faced.

Chapter 2 is focused on Europe, where SCI was first developed after World War II. It gives an account of the experiences of volunteers who contributed to this development and who participated in workcamps in the initial phase of post-war reconstruction.

Chapter 3 concerns Asia and particularly India, where SCI volunteers went already before the war (1934) and where a branch was established as early as 1957. The first part includes memories of Asian volunteers who were the leaders of SCI activities in the region. The second part includes those of long-term volunteers (mostly from Europe) who worked in Asia.

Chapter 4 is focused on North Africa and particularly Algeria. The first memories describe the beginning of SCI activities before the Independence of Algeria (1962) and their dramatic interruption during the independence war. The second part recalls the large-scale workcamps organized after Independence for the reconstruction of Algeria and makes some reference to activities carried out in cooperation with local organizations in the three countries of North Africa.

Chapter 5 includes a few memories from long-term volunteers who worked in Western Africa and from those who organize a regular relationship with African countries.

Chapter 6 puts the various contributions in perspective and suggests some conclusions.

This work was planned and implemented in close cooperation with Phyllis Sato, who had the entire responsibility for collecting the contributions and writing the presentation on Asia. I am grateful to David Palmer and RL for their contribution to the editing of the English version of the other chapters and to Arthur Gillette for his Preface and for his help. Of course, I would like to thank all those who took the trouble of writing a contribution or giving an interview.

Olivier BERTRAND

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PREFACE

"WILLING SLAVES"

Have you ever wondered about the etymological origin of the words "voluntary service"? There are probably several possibilities. The least unlikely, however – and as far-fetched as it may be in light of our present usage - stems from two Latin words *voluntas* and *servus.* Connect the notions they represent and you get a result that can be roughly translated as "Do willingly the work of a… slave"! Oh, and for about the same amount of compensation.

Unremunerated service has been and still is at least occasionally viewed (e.g. by parents or peers of some volunteers, not to forget certain host communities) as curious behaviour. Yet, from a longer-term historical perspective it is no aberration. In virtually all pre-industrial societies and communities mutual self-help labour contributed to general survival, and more particularly that of vulnerable individuals and groups. To a degree (and here and there), the tradition continues to this day. In some African contexts, for example, teenaged boys are entrusted with the maintenance of widows' huts. Their reward? The knowledge that they have helped needy neighbours, and the community recognition accruing to them in their transition to (pre)adulthood. Similar examples can be found Asia and Latin America, and even in certain industrialised country contexts. Remember the traditional collective barn-raising in the film *Witness*?

Observe the annual autumn grape harvest at small scale (single family) farms in the Italian province of Tuscany. "How", you wonder, "can such modest farmers afford to hire the swarms of labourers required to bring in the harvest before the weather turns?" In fact, no money changes hands: everyone shares a host-provided luscious lunch, and the knowledge that "their turn" has either already happened or will soon happen.

Industrialisation is the "villain" in this interpretation, with its increasingly monetarised value systems: "What did her dress cost?" "How could he afford a new car?" - *having* rather than *being*, not to forget the isolation and anonymity that have frequently resulted from urban life, a concomitant of industrialisation.

I don't mean to paint an over-rosy picture of pre-industrial societies, where life tended (tends) to be short and hard, but also shared.

And as is clear from the testimonials to be found in this volume *sharing* is at the heart of the individual and collective experience of volunteering with Service Civil International. From the start, that experience has tended to be unconventional. The very first SCI workcamp, begun in 1920 at the war-ravaged village of Esnes, near Verdun in eastern France, welcomed volunteers from a variety of backgrounds including two Germans who had been *Wehrmacht* soldiers. The villagers found the team curious but, egged on by Madame X (a relief worker), were not happy about having "enemies" helping rebuild houses, repair roads and so on. After five months, the team received an ultimatum: they could continue working only on condition that the "enemies" be sent home. This challenged a basic principle inspiring the experience, and so the camp ended prematurely.

Over the years, SCI has often found itself at the giddy borderline in a dialectic between reality and principle and, like at least some other voluntary service organisations, its teams have definitely tended to cause more raised eyebrows than shrugged shoulders.

As a university student near Boston, and at a time when at least de facto racial segregation was still rife in many parts of the U.S.A., I took part in many Quaker weekend workcamps in the Hispano-Black suburban slum of Roxbury. I will never forget the look of disbelief (no shrugged shoulders there!) in the eyes of a Puerto Rican head of a single-parent family when she realised that a group of white Harvard students was going to repaint her grimy flat. Our reward? A first-time and first-hand venture into a ghetto.

This kind of reciprocal enrichment is a real step forward compared with traditional philanthropy, under which mainstream society extends a helping hand to the "underprivileged" hoping to help them join a basically unchanged mainstream.

Not that SCI suddenly appeared as a full-blown innovation on all fronts simultaneously. If my information is correct, the cooking at the 1920 Esnes camp was left to a Dutch girl. But gender stereotypes have steadily eroded. Many of the male volunteers (including me) in an international SCI team that helped build the foundations for a school at a Ukrainian *kolkhoz* during the summer of 1960 were put to shame by the sheer energy and physical strength with which a girl volunteer from Leningrad dug trenches, mixed cement, etc. She was a professional ballet dancer – and all of about 1m40 tall! When her turn came for kitchen duty she laughed and said (or words to that effect) "I couldn't cook my way out of a paper bag!" I think she may have ended up washing dishes.

Politicisation is an issue that rears its head repeatedly in the pages that follow, and remains at times, for SCI and other volunteer bodies, a delicate question with few if any obvious or easy answers. The 1956 Soviet crushing of the Budapest uprising (just when East-West workcamping was beginning symbolically – but at the time this was a startlingly strong symbol - to "rust" the Iron Curtain) and the later Prague Spring invasion left many with this quandary: "If we continue to participate in exchanges with the Eastern Bloc, are we not lending tacit support – or at least turning an inadmissible blind eye - to the Soviet 'might is right' policy? BUT if we *don't* continue, won't we contribute to shutting down one of the very few civil society channels of mutual communication and cooperation?" And, for SCI's French Branch, a major *cas de conscience* in the 1950s was the brutality and overt racism of the Algerian War, with its inane propaganda: I remember one poster stuck up in post offices around Paris that said "The Army – artisan of Franco-Muslim fraternity!"

The conundrum that at least some of us tried to grapple with, and put (with hindsight) in rather too stark terms, was "Which is better: a church full of sinners or an almost empty monastery?"

A related issue raised in following chapters: how far should SCI go in attempting to mainstream volunteering? In the mid-1960s the then U.N. Secretary General U Thant said "I am looking forward to the time when the average youngster – and parent or employer – will consider that one or two years work for the cause of development either in a far away country or a depressed area of his own community, is a normal part of one's education." "What," some of us asked, "are the borders we must not cross – i.e. how much 'water' should we allow into SCI's 'wine'?"

Again, there were no simple answers. But, in a way, that did not and still does not bother me. In my experience, one of the virtues and values of participating in SCI was to be faced regularly with hard, cutting edge issues, both philosophical and practical. This constant individual and collective questioning of oneself and one's co-workers has – I like to believe – helped keep me on my toes; and doubtless one reason why, aged 69, I am still a "willing slave".

A final point on mainstreaming: of late, a new kind of international tourism has begun to complement, if not replace, conventional sun-sea-and-sand holidaying in the Third World by First World citizens: *tourisme solidaire* or 'solidarity tourism'. An example is Bali where, until the recent terrorist bombing of discos and other foreign visitors' hangouts, few if any Balinese other than servants and taxi drivers were to be seen (or allowed?) in the seaside tourism enclaves. Unexpectedly, the shock of the bombings produced a positive reaction: today foreign families can travel for a weekend to the

lovely upland interior of Bali, take part in farm work and sample local delicacies they have helped (and learned how) to cook.

As far as I know, SCI had no direct role in launching such activities. But over 80 years of SCI workcamping have helped create an atmosphere conducive to this kind of welcome innovation.

Arthur GILLETTE[1]

Former Director of Youth and Sport at UNESCO

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[1] His contribution is in chapter 2.

Chapter 1
THE ORIGINS

1.1 Pierre Cérésole and the first workcamps

The strong personality of Pierre Cérésole is at the origin of Service Civil International. He was born in 1879 in Lausanne (Switzerland), in a large, well-educated and happy family, which regularly received writers and intellectuals. His father had been the President of the Swiss Confederation for one year. After graduating as an engineer, Pierre had worked for some time in a large manufacturing company, but he was not interested in a career and spent a few years travelling around the world, doing various jobs, including hard manual work. He was very concerned with moral and spiritual issues based on Christianity but he also had a very independent mind.

In 1917, while World War I was going on and Switzerland, although a neutral country, was making military preparations, Pierre began to make public statements in favour of conscientious objection and refused to pay the military tax. He was prosecuted on various occasions and was several times in jail. At the end of the war, he participated in meetings of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, an international pacifist organization of which he was the secretary for a short period. During one of these meetings, a young German had said: "We have discussed enough for two days; it is time to act". He explained that his father had contributed to the destructions of the war in France and that he wanted to participate in the reconstruction.

Pierre Cérésole was deeply impressed by this statement, which exactly met his own concern for action, as a service (the origin of the SCI motto: 'Deeds, not words'). In 1920, it was decided to organize the first reconstruction workcamp near Verdun[2], with the participation of German volunteers, despite the reluctance of local inhabitants for whom the Germans were still the enemies. During the following years, other similar workcamps were organized in Switzerland and in neighbouring countries, mostly to help people after natural disasters (floods and earthquakes). International volunteers participated in these camps.

[2] City in the Eastern part of France, where the most deadly fighting with the Germans had taken place.

In 1931, Romain Rolland, one of the very few writers who had stood against the war, had invited Pierre Cérésole to meet Gandhi, whose non-violent ideas and actions against the British colonization in India were very close to Pierre's interests. And Gandhi recognized Pierre as a brother. Links were thus established between India and the first leaders of SCI. The latter were particularly concerned when a dramatic earthquake affected the Bihar region in India in 1934. Pierre went to that country and got in touch with local personalities, including Rajendra Prasad, then president of the Congress Party and later president of the Indian Union. With a small group of volunteers, Pierre participated in a workcamp and contributed to the mobilization of the authorities and of the population. At the end of the camp, Rajendra Prasad said: "The simple fact that European people, 'sahibs', are doing this type of humble work with Indian people is as such a revolution which is astounding for the passer by and which gives all its meaning and its value to the project"[3] .

During the same period, a general assembly of all the SCI volunteers and friends was held for the first time. It elected a Committee and decided that there should be a paid permanent secretary. This was the beginning of a process of institutionalization, which implied the existence of headquarters, of regular meetings and of a bulletin. At the same time, branches were established in various European countries. But their resources remained very modest for quite a long time; they came mostly from donations received in connection with specific workcamps, following natural disasters. Apart from the usual 'pick and shovel' camps, SCI participated in actions to help Spanish refugees in Spain and in France, during the civil war. This work (mostly the organization of canteens) involved an important outside support and was for some time done on a very large scale.

W.W.2 limited the development of the organization, which included around ten groups in 1939, but it was accelerated post war when SCI became a truly international organization. Unfortunately, Pierre Cérésole, could not participate as he had died in 1945. It is this second period in the history of SCI and the story of the second generation of volunteers which is dealt with in the following pages.

[3] Hélène Monastier: *Paix, pelle et pioche, histoire du Service civil international de 1919 à 1965* (Service civil international, 1965). Also: Hélène Monastier, *Pierre Ceresole d'après sa correspondance*, La Baconnière, Neuchâtel, 1960. And Arthur Gillette: *One Million Volunteers*. Penguin, 1968.

1.2 Influences[4]

At least five major sources of inspiration could be mentioned at the beginning of SCI:

- Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) the American philosopher who published a book on Civil Disobedience and was jailed for a short period for refusing to pay taxes which he did not find justified. He seems to have inspired a number of actions of civil disobedience until our time: the Danish resistance to the Nazis, the struggle against Apartheid in South Africa for instance. During the 70's, he was re-discovered by a new generation of activists against war[5];

- William James (1842-1910), another American philosopher, whose writings were read by Pierre Cérésole. During a conference in 1906, he suggested to create a civil service for all young people, to replace the military service[6]. The idea was to enrol for the service of peace "the enthusiasm and the heroic qualities of the young people"[7] .

- Leon Tolstoy (1828-1910), the famous Russian writer, published from 1904 (First revolution) different anti-militarist and non-violence

[4] On this question, see: Jean-Pierre Petit: Service Civil International: Quel héritage ? Approches

[5] Internet site: thoreau.eserver.org.

[6] *The Moral Equivalent of War"* Speech given at Stanford University, 1906.
"I do not believe that peace either ought to be or will be permanent on this globe, unless the states, pacifically organized, preserve some of the old elements of army-discipline. A permanently successful peace-economy cannot be a simple pleasure-economy. If now -- and this is my idea -- there were, instead of military conscription, a conscription of the whole youthful population to form for a certain number of years a part of the army enlisted against ..
Such conscription, with the state of public opinion that would have required it, and the many moral fruits it would bear, would preserve in the midst of a pacific civilization the manly virtues which the military party is so afraid of seeing disappear in peace. We should get toughness without callousness, authority with as little criminal cruelty as possible, and painful work done cheerily because the duty is temporary, and threatens not, as now, to degrade the whole remainder of one's life. I spoke of the "moral equivalent" of war. So far, war has been the only force that can discipline a whole community, and until an equivalent discipline is organized, I believe that war must have its way. But I have no serious doubt that the ordinary prides and shames of social man, once developed to a certain intensity, are capable of organizing such a moral equivalent as I have sketched, or some other just as effective for preserving manliness of type. It is but a question of time, of skilful propagandism, and of opinion-making men seizing historic opportunities.

[7] Hélène Monastier, in J.P. Petit: Le service civil.

brochures, which had a great impact. He corresponded with Gandhi.

- Romain Rolland (1866-1944), French writer, Nobel Prize of literature in 1915, was among the very few who stood against the war. He published in 1914 a collection of writings for peace, where he wrote: “A great nation assaulted by war does not have only its borders to defend, but also its reason”. He went to India and established a close relationship with Gandhi.

- Of course, Gandhi (1869-1948) was a major source of inspiration and (as mentioned above) was met by Pierre Cérésole both in Switzerland and India. During the same period, he was using a non violent approach to fight against the British colonization. But he could not avoid the bloody partition which took place with Pakistan in 1947.

At a more practical level, Pierre had also the opportunity to observe the experiences of civil service implemented in Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon countries, of voluntary services practiced by the Quakers and the refusal of military service by a Swiss compatriot: J. Baudraz. Nevertheless, the workcamp organized near Verdun in 1920 remains the first practical example of a voluntary service, with international participation, conceived as a substitute for the military service[8].

It was important to look back at these origins to have a good understanding of the spirit which inspired the creation of SCI, but also some of the issues which were raised by the early implementation of the concept, issues, which will be mentioned again in the following pages.

1.3 Issues raised by the early implementation of a civil service

Independence and pragmatism

Pierre Cérésole’s correspondence and his biography by Hélène Monastier show that his principles were rather radical, but that he was often quite pragmatic in their implementation.

Concerning religion: Pierre was very faithful to the principles of Christianity, close to some Christian movements and to Christian friends, but he was also independent towards the Protestant church (to which he

[8] Arthur Gillette.

belonged initially), as an institution and was also very critical for its attitude with regard to the acceptance of war, which he felt was a betrayal of its principles. In any case, he did not see SCI as a religious organization.

With regard to politics, whereas Pierre had been initially supported by the Christian socialists in Switzerland, he always maintained a distance from the most radical members, so it was clearly on a humanitarian basis and not a political stand that SCI worked with the Spanish refugees during the civil war.

Pacifism

Sometimes Pierre Cérésole also had a pragmatic attitude towards pacifism. During the first large workcamp organized in Liechtenstein in 1927, there was a discussion on the emphasis of pacifism of SCI, while support was expected from authorities. Pierre was in favour of some concessions and insisted on opening the movement to everybody, whatever his/her opinion. Another example: Pierre was always a great admirer of the Quakers, who shared his pacifist convictions. He had been accepted as a member of the Religious Society of Friends, however he did not always agree with some of their extreme positions. In 1939, just before the war, the British Government had passed a Military Training Act, offering to conscientious objectors the opportunity to do an alternative civil service. Some Quakers felt that the State should not impose any kind of service, whether civil or military. Pierre did not agree and did not see the adoption of a civil service as a compromise.

Similarly, when in 1938 the General Assembly of SCI decided to adhere to the World Union for Peace, Pierre Cérésole disagreed. He wrote that the very specific character of SCI was in contrast with the vague goodwill or chatting of some pacifist organizations and that SCI members might be disappointed to realize that they were part of a more vague movement. Although Pierre would personally agree with some of their statements, he felt that they were not part of SCI's domain.

Independence towards institutions

The independence and pragmatism which were characteristic of SCI's action at an early stage also applied to the relationship with the institutions, among them the national armies. In India, Cérésole cooperated closely with the British administration, as well as with the Indian nationalists. This paved the way for the future cooperation with the administration of the independent India. In 1930, he had readily accepted the assistance of the

Swiss Army, which provided equipment for emergency workcamps, on the condition that SCI refrained from anti-military propaganda.

Although he was a radical pacifist, Pierre Cérésole admired the organization and the discipline of the Army. His brother, who was a colonel in the Swiss Army, played an important role in the management of the first workcamps and he was the leader of several of them. This position was not very different from that of William James, who said that the civil service that he recommended should maintain, in a pacific civilization, the male virtues that the military are afraid to see vanishing during peace periods. In 1922, a petition for a civil service in Switzerland made it clear that work should neither be less demanding, nor less rigorously organized than the military service.

Working conditions

With such a concept, it is no surprise to read the numerous references made to hard work in the early workcamps. Pierre Cérésole wrote that it was another good side of the military: they take order seriously. There is an order which belongs to things and not to rules; it has to be respected. He also wrote: “A truly hard service with ten men only is better than a sentimental stroll in the woods”.

Despite a strict conception of discipline, Pierre had an open mind and was always ready to accept criticisms. He published in a SCI leaflet the negative comments received from volunteers on the lack of competence of leaders and on the inadequate selection of participants.

From the beginning, females participated in workcamps. It was considered as a rather advanced practice. But they were assigned to a specific role, which reflects the culture of the time[9]. It was believed that hard manual labour should be for males only and that females had a specific role to play. Those who were voluntary housewives and brought a family spirit in the camp were called ‘sisters’.

Goals and efficiency

There is of course a wide distance between the very ambitious goals assigned at the beginning to SCI by Pierre Cérésole and his friends and the rather modest scale on which activities were taking place, in terms of number of camps and of number of volunteers. This remains true, even taking into account the unusually large camp which took place in

[9] Jean-Pierre Petit , Hélène Monastier : op.cit.

Liechtenstein in 1928 (710 volunteers). This has remained an issue until this day, which raises the question of the efficiency of SCI.

At the end of the action which took place in India before the war, R. Prasad had said: “Although the work of SCI was not undertaken on a very large scale, it was beneficial for us and brought us nearer to each other”. A letter written by Pierre Cérésole shortly before his death gives a more general answer: “For the SCI, it is not the material result which is important (number of houses rebuilt, of hectares of land cleaned, nor even of lives saved), it is the example of the only way to salvation: the absolute service - whether it is the Christian service, the service of God or of the Spirit”

On this issue as on the others, it will be interesting to see what has been, and is to-day, the perception of volunteers who participated in SCI activities, at different periods and coming from different cultures and countries.

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Chapter 2
AFTER THE RECONSTRUCTION OF EUROPE: A WORLDWIDE DEVELOPMENT

2.1 An overview of SCI development after the war

Until World-War II and for some time afterwards, SCI was a purely European organization, despite its international aspirations. Volunteers and branches were European and the International Secretariat was in Europe. In view of the position of this continent in the world at that time, this situation could seem quite natural. Therefore, there is some justification to include in the same chapter the memories of volunteers who participated in workcamps in Europe and of those (usually the same) who contributed to the establishment of an international structure as leaders and staff members.

The development of workcamps and particularly of SCI has always been affected by the historical context. During the war, surprisingly, there were many projects and the number of young people involved was hardly decreasing[10]. But this covered very different types of workcamps, none of them international, and inspired by contrasting ideologies. Some of them were sponsored by governments in countries defeated and occupied by the Nazis; they had a highly nationalist and sometimes almost fascist inspiration. On the opposite side, the British Government having allowed conscientious objectors to participate in civilian activities for the defence of the country, a number of them worked in such programmes. The British branch of SCI was involved in them.

Apart from these, in a context of conflict and of travel limitations, SCI activities were reduced to a minimum. According to Ralph Hegnauer[11], nothing was left of the old SCI at the end of the war, except for a few former activists in Switzerland.

If then we look at the post-war period primarily from a European perspective (specific features of the context in other continents will be

[10] *One million,*op.cit.

[11] See below on the life of this important figure.

described in the following chapters), five major trends can be identified, which had an implication for SCI and are therefore relevant for this study. To cut it short, the following list leaves aside other contextual events, such as natural disasters.

- During the initial period until the beginning of the 50's, the priority for European countries was *reconstruction* and relief work for displaced and poverty-stricken populations. The magnitude of the problem was such that it was beyond the capacity of governments and the contribution of voluntary service organizations was particularly welcome.

- The fall of the *Iron Curtain* between Western "capitalist" and Eastern "socialist" countries had several implications for our story. It made travelling and exchanges between the two sides very difficult and it created an atmosphere of fear and of suspicion. With the fear of another war, the issue of peace came again to the forefront and all attempts to undertake international activities with participants from both sides looked suspicious

- Decolonization, the end of colonial empires built by European powers in the XIXth and early XXth century, took place from the late 40's (India) to the early 60's (Algeria)[12]. This process affected SCI, since it often took place in a climate of violence, which again gave a meaning to the fight for peace and non-violence which sometimes hampered SCI's action. Memories of Indian volunteers in chapter 3 and of Nelly on Algeria in chapter 4 illustrate this point.

- In relation to the decolonization process, there was a growing concern for poverty and *development* in so-called 'Third World' or 'Southern' countries. With its goal of social justice as a factor for peace, SCI was naturally concerned.

- During the late `60s and the `70s, there was a lot of ideological and political turmoil among young people, especially in Europe and America. They were questioning the new consumption pattern of the West, some of its values and traditions, especially with regard to authority. They opposed the war in Vietnam and supported the decolonization process. Many of them were SCI volunteers and sometimes leaders, so that it affected the orientations of the organization and sometimes the atmosphere prevailing in the camps

[12] The seventies for the Portuguese colonies.

The development of SCI during the same period could itself be summarized by four major trends: expansion, organization, diversification and internationalization:

1. Expansion

To meet urgent needs through actions which were particularly relevant to its scope, the *growth* of SCI involved an increase in the number of workcamps and of volunteers in more countries and the establishment of new branches. Relief work started already in 1944 in Palestine, Egypt and Greece. In 1945, relief and reconstruction work was carried out by international voluntary workcamps in France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands. "British volunteers poured across the channel and spearheaded the revival on the continent. Working successively in Belgium, Italy, Czechoslovakia, Holland, Britain, France, Greece, Austria and Germany, SCI teams cleared away rubble, built bridges, dykes, hospitals, laid out sports-grounds, re-decorated children's homes and aided self-help workers' cooperative housing schemes"[13]. In August 1946, 450 volunteers coming from 12 different countries participated in 25 workcamps in 10 European countries[14]. In 1947, there was a recognition of others in Belgium, Germany (Federal Republic) and Norway.

In view of the magnitude of the problem and with many people (particularly the young ones) who wished to participate in this effort, not only experienced organizations (like the Quakers) were involved. There was a proliferation of new movements, many of them along the same lines as SCI, while in Eastern and Central Europe; youth was mobilized *en masse* in huge workcamps. "The principal feature of the history of workcamping in the fifteen years following the Second World War was the adoption and adaptation of voluntary manual service by a plethora of organizations of differing ideologies… Service Civil International no longer occupied its pre-war position as the main current in the multiple stream of idealistic workcamping. It was but one among many movements using workcamping to further the ends of their own ideologies. To cater for the numerous young people who wanted to render social service but not to forward a given ideology, non-ideological sponsors did hold workcamps without having an ideology, but that was precisely because workcamping was no longer wedded or even closely related to the single civilist ideology. It had become an activity that any youth movement could organize. In the idealistic stream of its

[13] Ibid.

[14] Monastier, op. cit.

development, as in the economic, workcamping was no longer a movement. It was a method"[15]. But SCI remained specific for its stronger commitment to peace and conscientious objection (see the concluding chapter).

2. Organization

Until the war, SCI had been a very informal movement. Its expansion necessarily required a structure and more *organization*. In 1946 a meeting of European branches decided to set up an International Committee with an international president and a full-time secretary. The same year, there was the first joint meeting of European branch secretaries. An international constitution was adopted at the 4th Delegates Meeting in 1948.

In view of the proliferation of organizations, a Co-ordination Committee for International Voluntary Workcamps was established in 1948 in the framework of UNESCO, with SCI playing a leading role.

Several memories reproduced in this chapter, but also in the following ones, illustrate the life and role of the leaders who contributed to the structuring and organization of SCI during this period. They started by volunteering in workcamps, until they were asked to become staff members, either on a voluntary basis, or with a very small allowance. They kept the same voluntary spirit and sometimes were volunteers again after a full-time work with the organization.

3. Diversification

According to the Co-ordination Committee, the end of reconstruction was a period of agonizing re-appraisal in view of the sudden dearth of manual projects. The dilemma was one of finding appropriate jobs for volunteers[16]. It was one of the factors which contributed to the *diversification* of SCI's action. In the post-war period, relief work, rubble cleaning and reconstruction were the priorities. During a second stage, week-end camps were organized, mainly for the re-decoration of housing for old and needy people. As shown by the memories which follow, these camps often provided young people with the first opportunity to know SCI, its spirit and its methods. Disaster aid has been an early and continuous activity of workcamp organizations, especially for SCI (Orléansville, 1954). The French Branch had set up an International Emergency Action system,

[15] Gillette, op.cit.
[16] Ibid.

through which it could launch an action within twenty four hours of notification.

The Cold War gave another opportunity for SCI to put into practice its principles of international cooperation and understanding for peace. It played a pioneering role in organizing East-West workcamps with participants from “socialist” and “capitalist” countries, including in the Soviet Union and in Eastern countries, jointly with local organizations. This action was often looked at with suspicion, but it helped the young participants a great deal to have a better understanding of the life and of the people on the other side. This is illustrated in some of the contributions below (Dorothy Guiborat, Nelly Forget).

The following memories are focused on what was also a new form of service during the post-war period: long-term volunteers (LTVs) from Europe going to Asia, Africa and America and the other way round. In many cases, they were doing a social service, but traditional “pick and shovel” camps were also going on. More recently, there were new developments, such as the exchanges between France and Africa (Femmes et développement, see Nicole Paraire.), or the work for handicapped youth (Dorothy Abbott/Guiborat, Jean-Pierre Petit).

4. Internationalization

There was some progress of *internationalization* immediately after the war, with the arrival in Europe of a number of volunteers from America[17]. Shortly afterwards, there was a large-scale development of SCI in Asia, which is dealt with in the following chapter and then in Algeria, Latin America and Africa. An early report by Dorothy raises some of the problems resulting from this extension to new countries :

“Until 1948, SCI was working in one developing country only: India. In the late 50’s, it was active in four African and six Asian countries. It became then increasingly important to analyse the problems and the needs of these countries and not to be satisfied, as it was common in the past, to think that what is good for Europe is also good for the rest of the World. Fortunately, very few people still think in this way. But many have not yet undertaken the effort to find how to prepare ourselves carefully to be well prepared for the conditions prevailing in these countries, so that the work of SCI would bring a lasting and diversified assistance to the communities”.

[17] See the story of Arthur Gillette in this chapter and of Phyllis Sato in chapter 3.

2.2 *Re-building Europe and initiating a new development: the pioneers*

Some of the SCI old hands, who had been involved in pre-war activities, played a major role in structuring the movement and in organizing and leading the workcamps. Unfortunately, they were no longer alive when this work was undertaken, but their names should be remembered and they are referred to in some of the following memories and in subsequent chapters:

Ralph Hegnauer (1910-1997) born in Switzerland, was initially a bank employee and worked in Argentina. In 1937-39, he participated in the relief work organized by SCI for the Spanish refugees from the civil war. There he met his future wife Idy, who was also involved with SCI for the rest of their life. In 1944, Ralph became secretary of the Swiss branch. During the following years, he organized various workcamps in Europe and supported the development of the French branch and the start of a German one. In 1949, Ralph and Idy were put at the disposal of the Quakers to assist the refugees in Palestine.

The same year, Rajendra Prasad, the new President of India, asked the British branch (IVS) to send volunteers to work for refugees. But to break with the colonial past, IVS preferred to give the leadership to Ralph, who worked with the first Indian volunteers and in Pakistan. Idy was also part of the first post-war team in India.

In 1952, Ralph became International Secretary (jointly with Dorothy Abbott). He participated in several workcamps in Lebanon, until he was asked not to come, because the SCI approach was not compatible with the fight with Israel. He contributed to the start of East-West exchanges with the Communist countries and of the work with North African countries.

In 1972, Ralph was succeeded by Thedy von Fellenberg as International Secretary and worked as an accountant until 1980. But he continued to work for SCI as the Treasurer, Vice-President and President and he started building the SCI archives.

Ralph was always a peace activist and he wrote books on non violence and an autobiography.

Willy Begert (1913-1971), also born in Switzerland, took part in his first SCI workcamp in the Grison mountains in Switzerland at the age of 21. The

following year, he participated in the action to support the miners in Wales during a period of chronic unemployment. In 1938, he became Secretary of the Swiss branch of SCI in Zurich. He joined the 'Neutral Swiss Committee of Aid to Spain' to help the refugees from the civil war and continued this work in France in 1939-40. With the invasion in France, he went back to England where he again took care of children who were victims of war. In 1943-44, he took part in the distribution of food and clothing for the Greek refugees as an SCI volunteer. He was the first International Secretary of SCI in 1946, where he was assisted by his wife Dora and the first Secretary of the Co-ordination Committee in 1951 (see Dorothy). But he preferred the field work and was a volunteer in Algeria with SCI for two years. He later became a UN community development expert in Morocco and in Cameroon.

Ethelwyn Best, (UK), 1893-1993**,** was a long-term volunteer in India (1949-1950) and representative of SCI in India (1954-57)

Pierre Martin, 1912-1998 *(see chapter 4).*

With the expansion of activities and the development of institutions, these pioneers were joined by young volunteers who were given similar responsibilities at an early stage. The first ones, whose memories follow, were Dorothy Abbott/Guiborat and Nelly Forget, whose memories appear in chapter 4. They participated for a long period in different workcamps in Continental Europe, immediately after the war, under very hard conditions. With this experience, they were asked to assist in the organization of the movement in Europe and at the international level. During a second stage, they became long-term volunteers, one of them in North Africa, the other in Asia (memories follow in the respective chapters).

Many of those who contributed to this work also had the opportunity to work in Europe, but for a short period and their main investment was elsewhere. This is why their entire story will appear in subsequent chapters.

In several instances, volunteers of this first generation had done other voluntary work before joining SCI. When they participated in their first workcamp, a number of the volunteers from this generation wanted to come out of their isolation, related to their location, their family background

and, above all, to the travel limitations resulting from the war. Many of them had a direct experience of war and of violence, which was a motivation to participate in a concrete action for peace. And they usually had been living under difficult conditions, which prepared them for the hard work which was expecting (expected of) them in the workcamps.

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Dorothy Guiborat, 1946; LTV in India 1950-1952; International Secretary 1952-1958

After graduating and working professionally for two years, Dorothy joined the Friends Relief Service (Quakers) and worked in Germany, then Poland during the immediate post-war years. She discovered SCI in 1950 and worked for two years in India. On returning to Europe, she was elected joint International Secretary and continued in this job for seven years.

I first heard of SCI when I was working with Friends' Relief Service (Quakers) in early 1946, in South-East Poland, far from the peaceful Essex village where I had been brought up in England between the two World Wars. As I think back, I remember how we were wonderfully free, but also how hard were the physical conditions of life: no gas or electricity for instance. My parents came from London and my father continued to work in that city, but both wanted a country life. We had a big garden like everybody else, flowers and vegetables, an orchard, a dog, a ferocious pony and numerous cats. Later on, we had a tennis court which we made ourselves. There was no school, so my three sisters and I and a few other children walked to the next village, having a lot of fun on the way and were often late, especially when the pond was frozen or there was snow. There were no cars. School ended early and we loved wandering over the countryside or slipping under the barbed wire into the woods, returning home with arms full of bluebells in the spring or bags full of chestnuts in the autumn. There was no home-work.

Things were more serious at Brentwood County High School, but I had learnt to enjoy life and loved school, especially languages, history and sport, hockey and netball in winter, tennis and cricket in summer – for everybody – and matches against other schools on Saturday mornings. I then studied French and Latin at London University, with a final year in

Oxford, marvellous Oxford, after evacuation from London during the Blitzkrieg.

I was expected to become a teacher, but finally decided on a branch of social work – housing – which made a further two years' training necessary, in London's East End and Rotherham in the Midlands, where living conditions left by the industrial revolution were disastrous. The training included elementary building construction, accounts and preparation for social work. I liked the combination of technical and human. My first job was in Birmingham and it was there that I came to know the Quakers and joined their evening classes preparing for work in ex-Nazi Germany with deportees from Eastern Europe, who were living in deplorable conditions. Return to their home countries was uncertain as the Soviet Union began taking over.

In East Europe

The war was ending. I resigned from my job, had a further 3 months' physical and cultural preparation in London (Mount Waltham) and our team finally left in 1945 for Holland. This because the Quakers could not accept the Army's non-fraternisation rule for relief workers going to Germany. There, at an orphanage near The Hague, we looked after young children whose parents had either been executed as collaborators or were in prison. After three weeks, we were, nevertheless, transferred to Germany and set to work in camps near Wolfenbüttel. Conditions were bad and our first task was to obtain from the local ex-Nazi authorities blankets, DDT, school material and so on, then to work with the camp authorities to get things in place. It would be many months before the Balts, the Poles, the Ukrainians could return home, or go elsewhere (ten years later, I was on an old American troop-ship accompanying the last Ukrainian refugees to the United States).

While in Germany, I visited Bergen Belsen and other recently evacuated concentration camps, afterwards meeting a few survivors being cared for in Goslar, where we had been transferred from Wolfenbüttel. The utter horror of these camps, and especially Auschwitz which I saw later in Poland and where three million Jews had been exterminated, left me in despair. At that time, we thought that this could never happen again, anywhere in the world.

Less than a year late (in 1946) I was in Poland. I had been learning Polish for some months and could work without an interpreter in the villages. I was one of twelve members of a British Quaker team and our main work, at first in Kozienice, was to distribute food and clothing regularly

in about fifteen villages, often totally destroyed as the German-Russian front had swayed back and forth on both sides of the Vistula. The Polish Authoritiés had distributed building material, but there were many widowed families that needed help. There was also the school to rebuild.

David Richie, well-known initiator of week-end workcamps in the slums of Philadelphia had joined our team and organized in 1947 in Lucimia on the Vistula the first international voluntary workcamp in Poland. SCI and IAL (the Swedish workcamp organization) sent several volunteers. I left the Kozienice team to join in the workcamp. Then Stefa, a Polish student, and I took on the job of recruiting for future camps and visited universities all over the country, while Alun and Mistek found suitable work projects. So we had camps the following spring and summer and during the week-ends.

In autumn 1946, all foreign relief teams were forced to leave and a year later I was sadly expelled too. It was difficult but possible to keep in touch with Warsaw friends throughout all these dark years (and to this day). The communist regimes in East Europe organized ideological workcamps for hundreds of young people, mostly nationals or from other East Europe countries, though it admitted some West Europeans, including SCI members.

Paris

During the autumn of 1949, a Polish plane landed me, solitary passenger, in Brussels. From there, I took the train to Paris and was offered a job as liaison secretary for the nine organizations, including SCI and AFSC (Quakers), whose aim was specifically ‘for peace'. (By now, the workcamp method was being used extensively with various aims). It was very interesting work as it included staying for short periods in different camps – from Finland (KVT) right down to Greece, then getting to know the people in the secretariats and editing a monthly Newsletter for all. My office, or rather my desk, was at the Paris Headquarters of AFSC. I was not far from SCI’s International Secretariat, where I met Willy and Dora Begert, SCI’s first International Secretaries. From them, I heard about the work in India and, as my year with the liaison bureau was coming to an end, they encouraged me to apply to IVSP, the British branch of SCI in charge of work in India during the first years following Independence.

India

In November 1950, after a long sea journey on the moribund Scindia line with Bent, an SCI Danish carpenter, and time to read the Bhagavad

Gita and to learn more Hindustani, we were welcomed to Bombay (Mumbai) for a few days by Fali Chotia, then set off by 4th class train to the new township of Faridabad, near Delhi, being built for Indian refugees from the newly created Pakistan. It was hot and the dust, oh the dust. Ralph Hegnauer was in charge, a severe leader, hard on himself as he was for all the team. Constantly in mind was SCI's vocation to demonstrate how an international constructive service could replace national military service. Not only the Indian workers on this immense site, but also important visitors from New Delhi, were impressed by these unusual Europeans.

Following this short briefing and a day's visit to the Taj Mahal, Bent and I took the train – days and nights, first to Calcutta, then on to Gauhati in Assam, terminating by boat, up the immense Brahmaputra river to Tezpur, by bus to North Lakhimpur and Land Rover through the jungle to Pathalipam. Here took place the first of a series of workcamps re-building schools with local bamboo after the terrible earthquake and floods that had devastated the low-lying region of North-East India between China in the North and Burma in the South.

Everything had been well prepared, thanks mainly to Mr Bhandari who had been an active member in South India of the Gandhian movement for Independence. He had been sent to Assam by Gandhiji and started a dispensary and a school in the remote village of Barama. He was loved and respected by all. Our camps were added to his other tasks by the local authorities. His wife and I became great friends and exchanged letters for more than 50 years. The children and even the grandchildren keep in touch. I also remember the help to SCI from Amalprava Das, an outstanding social worker who had founded the Assamese branch of the Kasturba (Gandhi's wife) Trust for women's work in the villages: she sent a member of her team to work with me, both of us mostly in the kitchen.

Sometimes I went on visits, squatting on the ground and chewing betel-nut by way of communication. I also broke stones with the local women on the road-side when an occasional Englishman would whiz pass in his car, smothering us with dust (for there were still a few tea-garden managers and missionaries in Assam). They lost no time in sending a delegation to our camp to inform me that my behaviour was "below the dignity of a European".

The all-European team, led by Pierre Oppliger (he called me "the sister") was soon joined by small groups of high school boys from Norht Lakhimpur, Laksmi, Profulla and others, given time off to work a couple of weeks with us. Then Max from the US, Seiji from Japan, PK from N. Lakhimpur and others joined us. When the school was built we moved on

to another village and then there were two teams, working in different places.

During the hottest months and heavy monsoon we worked in the beautiful green valley of Khajjiar, surrounded by snow-capped Himalayan mountains. There, North of Chamba and not far from Kashmir the men laid a pipe-line to bring water from a mountain spring to the village, more than a kilometre away. A small group of volunteers from a well-known boys' high school in Delhi joined us, and two from Assam and work began with about 15 volunteers, including Idy Hegnauer and myself for the cooking. We both had counted on doing some other work as well besides all the domestic chores and were rather disappointed. We made endless chapattis at one point, late with breakfast and reprieved by Ralph. Idy threatened to return to Switzerland, which I think she did. She was a most warm-hearted but determined person and I missed her. The root cause of the friction was again the role assigned to women volunteers. I wonder if Devinder, who was in the group from Delhi, remembers these incidents? All in all, the camp was successful and the water from the spring reached its destination.

Between these two camps, I was back in much-loved Assam, further east, near Dilbrugarn, still school building. Then back to Delhi. After two years in India, I had been offered a job with the recently created women's section of Bharat Sewa Samaj, but did not take it up for several reasons; including treatment I needed at the London hospital for Tropical Diseases. I would have loved to stay in India.

International Secretariat

I travelled by sea from Mumbai to Naples, where I left the ship to visit Pompei, Rome, Florence … and so to Paris. There I was offered the job of International Secretary, in partnership with Ralph, who had taken over from Willy and Dora Begert. (Willy had created the Coordination Committee for International Voluntary Service under UNESCO's umbrella and was now working there full-time). Ralph would be mainly at the Zurich headquarters, while I would stay in Clichy, near Paris, where the French branch let three rooms to the IS. It turned out to be an extremely interesting and challenging job and I stayed for seven years (from 1953 to 1960), not paying much attention to the poor living conditions. Friendships were rich and varied. Devinder das Chopra (see chapter 3) was there for a short time, together with Mohammed Sahnoun (see chapter 4). Yvonne Elzière came in on Saturday to do the accounts; Asian volunteers arriving in Europe would stay for a week or two, likewise some of the European or American (see Phyllis Sato and Valli Seshan chapter 3) volunteers going to India.

The work as International Secretary kept me in touch with the European branches (about ten in 1953); Asian groups, the US group and Algeria, the CCIVS and workcamp organizations in general. Also under UNESCO's Youth Department (see Arthur Gillette, below) which gave a yearly travel grant for Asian or African volunteers. UNESCO was interested in my efforts to include women volunteers and two grants in 1957 enabled four volunteers to come to Europe: Valli (see Claire, below) and Rohini from India, Alice Appeah and Rose Kwei from Ghana. Valli became well-known all over SCI, first in Europe and then particularly for her work in India and as Asian Secretary. Alice was deeply attached to promoting women's status in Wes Africa.

I was interested in starting leaders' training camps. At that time they were regarded with some suspicion by some of the older Swiss and French members of SCI, but the German branch and others were in favour and helped to find suitable places for manual work, plentiful in those post-war years, with study and discussions in the afternoons. Dorothea Woods (a former AFSC work-camper) from the UNESCO's Youth Department came to some of the camps and helped lead discussions.

Another series I called "Orient-Occident" and there we concentrated on bringing together Asian, African, Middle East (Arab countries and Israel) volunteers. We worked together on the same pick and shovel job in the mornings and in the afternoons, with the help of outside speakers, discussed burning issues which separated our countries. Once on a bus in Germany I was explaining to a local passenger who we were when she said astonished: "Are Jews there too?" We rarely in SCI spoke of the Holocaust. Was it too close, too terrible or did we then think that it would never happen again?

Has SCI ever thought of in general of forming follow-up groups with the local people in places where we worked? We were, doubtless, too busy, too inexperienced. I know I neglected follow up, even among the volunteers. Now Jean-Pierre Petit's preparation and follow up work with North Africa (chapter 4) and Nicole Paraire's (chapter 5) with West Africa are admirable examples of what can be done. I did however, when I visited traditional camps, ask them to reserve one evening for discussing a peace-related theme and this was usually well-accepted in spite of some branch secretaries' doubts. There was always the lurking danger of being just workcamp organisers.

At one particular camp in Switzerland, just down the road from Lise Cérésole's home – she had found us a place to stay – we concentrated on practical problems facing women volunteers in Asian and African countries when we were told to do "social work". Paulette Rabier (see chapter 4), a

nurse and teacher who had been working in Tunisia and Algeria was there for First Aid and Hygiene, a doctor from the WHO visited us, a dressmaker came for several afternoons to teach us how to cut out and sew basic garments (shorts and shirts), Alice Appeah showed us Ghanaian cooking and so on.

From the United States to Pakistan and Algeria

There was not always enough money (subsistence) to pay to International Secretaries and during my six months' compulsory leave period I got a job on an old troop ship taking the last war deportees (Ukrainian) to the "promised land" of America. Oh, the joy and emotion as we approached New York, the Ukrainian national anthem rang out as we fell on our knees and contemplated the glorious sunrise beyond Manhattan's skyscrapers! I had been invited by the Quaker Social Order Committee to take part in their week-end camps in Philadelphia slums, then went down to the on-going work in Mexico and El Salvador. The main aim of this work was to introduce privileged young Americans to social problems, both in the U.S. and in Latin America. I returned to the States in time for the first US-SCI camp there. It was held in Indianapolis, where Bob Stowell had organized work for the group in a cooperative of Afro-Americans building their own houses. Bob emigrated soon afterwards to New Zealand, far from the incredible difficulties of the McCarthy period. Other outstanding volunteers carried on after him and developed SCI in the US.

As far as I am concerned, Ralph was not particularly interested in work study groups and each of us concentrated on what we had most at heart. But we met regularly to discuss the overall picture after exchanging copies of all our correspondence. We prepared International Committee meetings together and probably quite a lot of other things. For instance when Ralph joined in Lebanese activities I went to Israel, where we had volunteers, to join a camp run by AFSC. We had different temperaments however and though we had worked well together for years, suddenly the weight of his personality got me down and we went our different ways. I stayed in Clichy and Noël Plattew joined me at the Secretariat. Ralph became international President I think. His life-long allegiance and contribution to SCI was very important and he influenced many volunteers (men certainly, rather than women, I think).

It must be in 1957 that I was invited by the CCVIS to a big UNESCO sponsored workcamp Conference in New Delhi. From there, I went on to a work and study camp near Calcutta, led by a professor from the university

who had been taking his students regularly to work in the villages. From there I went on to Barama Ashram in Assam, to see the Bhandari family.

SCI had started work nearby in Pakistan two or three years earlier and I appreciated this opportunity to see the work that had been done and the follow up. It was strange to be a lone woman in Karachi – object of curiosity among the men (only) in the crowded streets or among the women in the buses, where they were huddled together in a small enclosed space in the front, just behind the driver; or elsewhere in accompanying the “begums” in their beautiful silk saris, to see the social work they sponsored.

Continuing by train up the Indus valley, I next visited the village of Barbaloi where Marius and Marianne Boelsma had left an indelible mark. It was a bit frightening never to be met at all in these strange places, for the atmosphere was very different from anywhere else I had been. Did they not want me to come, though I had written and been accepted? Where should I sleep and eat? I was an enigma to fellow passengers, but it was thanks to them that at last I got to people’s homes and was welcome! I had read books about Islam and extracts from the Koran, but the reality of practical life was still very unfamiliar to me. At one place, I was introduced by my host’s wife into the ‘purdah’ world at a sort of club for women. It was fascinating and friendly.

My Pakistani friends in Lahore (whom I knew from UNESCO) did not meet me either, but I found their house in the end. They guided me round this beautiful town where life, at least among the educated people, was more open to strangers. I think it was in Lahore that I discussed with Minjah, our first Pakistani SCI secretary, questions relating to the exchange of volunteers. All that was a very long time ago.

Algeria, though essentially a Muslim country, had at this time a large French minority. I had been in Algeria for about six weeks in 1954, in Algiers where most of our members lived and at the workcamp near Orléansville, after a terrible earthquake which had destroyed many villages. While the men helped to re-build, I accompanied an Algerian nurse in the team along barrow mountain tracks to different villages where we were greeted by numerous barking dogs. They alerted the people and then only we get to work.

During the war for independence SCI was regarded with suspicion by the French Authorities in Algeria. When individual members were arrested, limited financial help was collected by the International Secretariat, coming mainly from Britain and Switzerland. I transferred this aid to Simone Chaumet on the spot, who took the risk of getting it to friends in prison or to their families in need. It’s profoundly sad but necessary to add that Simone

was shot in the lawless period towards the end of the war, along with Emil Tanner, former SCI secretary (see Nelly Forget, chapter 4).

Back to Paris

My second child Daniel was mentally handicapped and finally this problem took precedence over everything else. My husband went along with my efforts to get some education for him and tackle other problems, but he really had little time or aptitude for this. Years later, when Daniel was about twelve years old and getting an appropriate education I started a club for leisure time (week-end) activities for mentally handicapped teen-agers and young adults, under the auspices of the French organization for handicapped people, but also of the French branch of SCI. The latter was never very interested, but the General Assembly gave its approval and a number of individual volunteers were keen, including Michele Lelarge, and we assembled a good team. Some SCI members were high school teachers and got their students interested, others heard about us elsewhere; Ali, the a student and now a University teacher in Fez, will never be forgotten, nor Mohamed, a nurse, living and working in France.

Our club, “Loisirs et Intégration”, lasted for about 25 years with regular and very varied activities, two week-ends a month and several holidays abroad. We also arranged educational visits for organizers between France, England and North Africa. We sent several volunteers abroad, to Denmark, to the US. Parents of the handicapped and friends would cooperate by inviting us all for a hot meal on winter days, when we went to museums or shows in their part of Paris. I should mention that other SCI branches, particularly the British, worked with handicapped people on a much larger scale, as reconstruction was no more a priority and social problems were coming to the fore.

2.3 *European leaders and volunteers in the `60s and `70s*

Nigel Watt, 1954; LTV in Europe 1955; IVS staff 1971-1976; General Secretary of IVS 1975-1984; Director of CCIVS 1992-1998

Nigel Watt’s first work with International Voluntary Service for Peace (IVSP, the British branch of SCI) in 1955 led him to a life-long career in voluntary

service and organizing work, including a stint as General Secretary of the British Branch of SCI and International President of SCI.

First contact

I had heard of IVSP (the name of IVS until 1960 or so) when I was at school - a Quaker school. At the age of 18, in 1954, I was a conscientious objector (we had military service in those days) and in 1955 I enrolled as a 'long term volunteer' with IVSP (SCI) as part of my alternative service. My first workcamp was at Glasgow, Scotland (painting poor people's homes), followed by Millisle, N.Ireland (painting an orphanage), Vorarlberg, Austria (building a road), Metz, France (helping build homes), Worms, Germany (more homes). All this lasted about 6 months. At the Metz camp the leader (a very harsh one) was Etienne Reclus, secretary of SCI-France. At the Worms camp were Devinder Das Chopra, Sam Bala Sundaram (from Sri Lanka) and Ben Korley (the first African volunteer to be invited by SCI and a founder of VOLU Ghana – Voluntary Workcamp Association of Ghana).

This time was the most positive experience during my alternative service and, as I already loved train travel and learning languages, made me get very excited about internationalism and basic development.

Experience outside Britain

While at university I led another camp in the UK, at Wolverhampton; then in 1960 I went to India for 8 months as a volunteer teacher at Vidhya Bhavan, Udaipur (not with SCI) but while I was there I met in Delhi Devinder who was AS by then, and Valli, not yet Mrs Seshan. I also took part in a workcamp at Cherian Nagar, Madras.

I then went to teach in Zambia for 10 years. Together with John and Louise Melbourne, a British couple who had met at an IVS camp on Fair Isle, we tried to encourage workcamps - and the government got interested and organised some 'nation building' camps.

Career with voluntary service

On my return I looked for a job and got one, as London Regional Officer for IVS (Sept - Dec 1971). I was promoted to Overseas Service Officer (1972-76) and finally General Secretary (1976-84). I was International President of SCI from 1985 to 1989.

From 1992 to 1998 I worked as Director of CCIVS in Paris. I have helped CCIVS since then as a volunteer and have been on their EC since 2004.

I am currently ('benevole') secretary of Youth Action for Peace UK.

So, you see, it's not a quick question of filling a form and voluntary service has in fact been my career; a very satisfying one.

I have achieved a few things such as assisting the start of workcamp movements in Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique and a few tries elsewhere.

Comment on SCI

Its message, philosophy, ambience are wonderful. Its organisation has been weak at times, usually due to lack of funds, but occasionally personalities. One criticism I would make is that SCI tends to think it is superior, purer than any other voluntary organisation (I remember feeling smug when I was in it!). It is certainly stronger in terms of its convictions than many of the national organisations but now that I am in YAP I think we are as ideologically pure, though perhaps even more chaotic!

I've had a happy life and have lots of friends all over the world and I have SCI to thank for a lot of that.

. . . . .

Thedy von Fellenberg, 1956; LTV in India 1961-1962; International Secretary 1970-1976

Thedy von Fellenberg, was a LTV (Long-Term Volunteer) to India in 1961 and later the International Secretary of SCI from 1970-1976, moving the office to Bodio, Switzerland. Quoting from him, he has been a "lifelong volunteer". His post-SCI focus was on ecological issues and the Palestinian conflict. He retired to Bern, Switzerland with his wife, Therese.

First contact and motivations

I met SCI for the first time 50 years ago, in 1956, when I participated in the action of students from Bern University for the people of Budapest. Waiting for my departure for Hungary, I met a man who looked stern but friendly, who was also waiting for his visa. He was Ralph Hegnauer, a Swiss like me, but a radical conscientious objector. He explained the goals of SCI: to promote friendship between peoples, through actions together for underprivileged people. I liked the idea. I have remained faithful to this ideal all my life, as a 'lifelong volunteer'.

After 50 years devoted to various activities, it is not easy to formulate my initial motivation. I was born into a rather bourgeois family and a socially privileged environment. (Pierre Cérésole had family links with my family). My father was a lawyer, but he was critical of the privileged class, although we were part of it. I was influenced by Calvinism, and, coupled with the tolerant spirit which prevailed at home, we generally felt that we were here on Earth, not only to have a pleasant time, but also to use our privileges to help the people who were not so fortunate as ourselves. At the same time, as a young man, I was also very critical of the church. I was looking for a kind of solidarity which was not connected to a religion or a class, not elitist and above all which would imply a concrete action. All this brought me to SCI, but also my meeting with a strong personality such as Ralph.

After our first meeting, Ralph, (who at that time was on leave from SCI) wanted to send me abroad. But I had to start by an experience at home – in Switzerland. This was a pick and shovel camp in the Bern region (Jura Bernois). I was very surprised to be the only Swiss! Then Ralph wanted to send me with a team in Egypt, in the Suez area which had been destroyed by the British-French military operation. But I was the only one who could get the Egyptian visa; the other volunteers were refused the visa for political reasons (Jewish affiliation). The project therefore fell through.

LTV in India, Sri Lanka and after

I then became interested in a service in India. As I was very idealistic, I thought that I could fight against poverty "with two healthy arms and legs". In the meantime, I participated in a camp in Belgium, in the mining area, to help a community of ragpickers of Emmaus (started by Abbé Pierre these groups of poor people worked to collect and sell things that people give away). Here I was, a young man from a good family background, with a group of unemployed alcoholic tramps! In the meantime the Swiss branch was hesitant to send to India a bourgeois, or even an aristocrat, as

representative of a proletarian SCI! When I said that I could go at my own cost, even by riding a bicycle, they finally agreed.

I worked in India for one year, beginning in 1961: in Cherian Nagar (Madras), with the Tibetan refugees (Simla), in Trivandrum (Kerala) and in a camp in Gujarat. But right after my arrival, Devinder and Valli (the Asian Secretaries) sent me to Sri Lanka as a member of an international team visiting the island in order to pioneer SCI there. Despite a charismatic leader, D.A. Abeysekera, it was a failure.

I was rather frustrated during all the time of my stay in India. Once, exhausted by the cold, the lack of money and of a useful work in the Himalayas, I even 'deserted'. But despite my weariness, I promised to respect my commitment and to complete my one year contract. Later on, I was so fed up with SCI that I started tramping around the world. But when I was in Japan, I became a close friend of Phyllis and Sato and I joined a SCI workcamp in South Korea and did some service in a farm in Hokkaido. That was all.

There would be a thousand anecdotes to tell. Two of them refer to the house building project in Kerala where I was camp-leader. My health was not good, I was suffering from asthma resulting from the humid climate and since I could not sleep during the night so I was going out in the city, but there were barking dogs all around me.

When Valli visited us at the workcamp, I was complaining about the useless work. She was not impressed and she said: "Work is not important. How many Indian friends did you make?" In fact, not a single one. And when I visited the project later, nothing was left of the work after our departure. But people were comforting me, saying: "This is not important. What is important is that you were here with us".

International Secretary, 1970-1976

Being elected on the recommendation of my sponsor Ralph, I was in charge of the international coordination for six years. I gave up my career initiated earlier with the Swiss Government to work for international cooperation, as I did not want to be part of the political establishment even though our team was 'progressist' (far left). It would have been difficult for SCI to find somebody competent for a very modest salary.

When I took over the responsibility for the International Secretariat, Sato had told me: "You will walk on fire". Indeed, I was in the middle between 'the left' (Italians, Germans, Belgians) who wanted a politically engaged SCI and 'the right' (UK, France, Switzerland) who only wanted to

serve the poor people. For the 'progressive', I was a 'reactionary', for the more traditional members, I was too much open to those who were looking for the cause of poverty. I managed more or less, but it is possible that my bourgeois background and my education contributed to put me a little bit aside.

The amateurism of SCI and the fact that voluntary work did not imply any serious commitment were discouraging for me. As an active person, I felt that I was wasting my time. I should underline two points:

The transfer of the International Secretariat to the mountain pasture, in the Italian part of Switzerland - Bodio, a rather unique experiment - was beneficial in three ways:

- The natural surroundings involving a lot of manual work prevented me from being submerged by a paper bureaucracy. It always brought me some fresh air;

- I was not alone, as I was assisted by a team of international volunteers, from Asia and Europe, who were living with my family and we had a lot of visitors;

- Some people appreciated the originality of the office of an international organization being located in a natural environment. For instance the Canadian organization for development, CIDA, used to give every year $10,000 to SCI.

The drawback of this arrangement was that it was difficult to be at the same time a farmer and an administrator. When I was working in the field, I was thinking about Bangladesh and emergency actions and when I was visiting SCI branches, I was thinking that I should make hay. From this period as SCI Secretary I keep a deep friendship with Valli, Phyllis and Sato, J.P. Petit, Bhuppy, Deena and others – a lifelong friendship.

With one year of volunteering in projects and six years in charge of international cooperation, I participated in all kinds of workcamps: the mining region in Belgium, the Tibetan refugees in India, slums in Kerala, rural work in Sri Lanka, service in South Korea, Japan, Czechoslovakia, Armenia, Croatia and Switzerland. This normally implied manual work, sometimes tough (which I liked), sometimes exceedingly easy going. In many cases the organization was poor and there was not enough thorough discussion. I should add that I was not the type of person who is a sparkplug (animator) for group comradeship and social life, and am therefore not the 'workcamp type'. I am rather a 'loner' and serious.

The later period

I did not keep an active role within SCI. After resigning and coming back from the mountain I devoted all my time to ecological issues, which seemed to me increasingly important. The battle will be less for social justice and peace: the very survival of humanity is being questioned.

But the spirit of lifelong volunteer did not leave me. When civil war started in Yugoslavia in the 90's (I was 59) I went to Croatia as an SCI volunteer and the following years I went to Bosnia, Serbia and Kosovo. With the Intifada in Palestine, in agreement with Pierre Cérésole's ideas, I went there in 2003 as an observer for the Ecumenical Council and, in order to see the other side; In 2004 I was in Palestine and also visited Israel. And I am still a militant at 71.

I kept (or resumed) the links with SCI in creating the 'Ralph Hegnauer Solidarity Fund', which collected 100,000 Swiss Francs for innovative projects and also with the group of old SCI people with Valli, Phyllis and my wife, Therese, who supported me during all my life.

Final thoughts

If I am asked what the value of SCI to-day is, it is always the individual attitude of volunteers allowing for friendship with people from different cultures and also to show solidarity with underprivileged people through a concrete action. From that point of view, nothing has changed. But taking into account the thousands of NGOs who work for peace, it is no more the ideology which is important, but compassion and learning another reality, curiosity for other countries, and solidarity.

What will be left of SCI for the rest of my life is the simple or even naïve ability to work anywhere regardless of borders and without any personal ambition.

My expectations were too high initially. After the end of my voluntary work in India, I was completely disillusioned: I thought it was not serious. The amateur character of SCI and the fact that the voluntary work did not imply any obligation were discouraging for me. As an active man, I felt that I was wasting my time. Therefore, I left and went back to university in Switzerland, obtaining a doctorate.

Why is then that I was a candidate for the job of International Secretary, thus giving up the opportunities for a successful career? Convinced as I was of the strength of NGOs to 'change the world', I thought that I could 'improve' SCI by taking an international responsibility. But there

again, I came to understand that I had neither the personal qualifications, nor the 'power' to reform SCI. Many young people thought that "the voluntary work does not imply any obligation".

There are everywhere good and bad organizations and people. But, strangely enough, among the number of organizations with which I have worked, no other had had such an impact on all my life. This is despite – or maybe precisely because of - the lack of professionalism, the weakness and, I would say, the naïve character of SCI. This is precisely this deeply moving simplicity which has been warming my heart in spite of all my disappointments; a concrete service for those who are suffering, regardless of their colour, religion and culture, based on love and compassion.

'The movement'

As a whole, the goals, organization and methods of work of SCI are still adapted to the needs and spirit of the day. But, in view of its structural and financial limitations, it should rather focus on the training and motivation of volunteers, rather than on the concrete result of its contribution. Nevertheless, a minimum of efficiency is necessary; to give the volunteer the impression (and satisfaction) that he/she has done a good job. The concrete experience of the daily life of distressed people, of problems of ecology and – what is missing – of life in areas at war; all this is more important than ever, since we might live increasingly in a 'virtual' world, far from reality. This may also help us to give a new meaning to our life, a feeling of being useful and competent and a desire to be committed to something."

I remained faithful to the SCI ideals during all my life, as a 'lifelong volunteer'. I am 71 and I am going to a meeting of former volunteers. All of them have been friends for life.

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Franco Perna, 1961; European Secretary 1967-1970; International Secretary 1976-1980; International President 1981-1985

Franco Perna, an Italian activist, had his first SCI workcamp experience in Poland in 1961. From 1967 to 1970 he was European Secretary of SCI and

he succeeded Thedy von Fellenberg as International Secretary in 1976 until 1980. He then was International President from 1981-1985. He remained active in many organizations working on social issues and for peace.

Before learning about SCI I had been involved in work camping with other organizations (Italy, North Wales, Northern Ireland and Palestine, 1955-60), especially through the ecumenical movement. It was only in 1961 that I had my first experience with SCI, taking part in a project to build a rural school in Poland. Those years I worked as European Youth Secretary of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IfoR), based in London, and wanted to develop my knowledge of Eastern Europe. SCI was the only organization sending volunteers to the East in 1961. It was a very positive experience, adding a different dimension to my involvement in other East-West projects, such as the Christian Peace Conference in Czechoslovakia and a visit with Church people in the USSR.

One little story about the work camp in Kowalewo/Poland. We had two leaders, one from the West and one locally appointed by the Rural Union of Polish Youth. The Polish leader would only give instructions, but he himself would not undertake manual work until the volunteers decided that only those who worked would eat. Next day, reluctantly, he agreed to join the rest of us and, as the days went by, he even started enjoying this type of activity!

There were also heated and long (everything had to be translated into 3-4 languages!) discussions in the evenings, especially on the concept of peace in the West and in the East. Some of us affirmed the Christian understanding of peace: 'If someone throws a stone at you, you will respond throwing back a piece of bread'. To that the immediate reaction was: 'No, we in the socialist society, to a stone will reply with a bigger one'. We must not forget that the world at the time was dominated by the cold war.

I was European Secretary for SCI, in charge of coordination, especially for placing each year some 5 to 6.000 volunteers in summer workcamps, through a clearing house, first in London (1967), then in Luxemburg, where we moved the European Secretariat until 1970. Although based in Luxembourg, I did travel around Europe and beyond considerably, especially in Asia where - at that time - nearly half of SCI branches and groups were situated. There was great vitality and diversity in carrying out SCI ideals.

Admittedly, my practical involvement in SCI has been mainly in manual work, occasionally combined with peace issues. In the '70s, however, many projects, particularly in Europe, were organized in the social and environmental field. Visiting some of these camps, I often come across volunteers with a strong criticism of local authorities for not doing their job properly, using the voluntary input simply as cheap labour. So much so, that some of them - holding strong social and political views - would not always feel welcome on particularly 'sensitive' camps. Sometimes such situations engendered tension between the volunteers and SCI, on one hand, and between our movement and project sponsors, on the other.

Our very motto, 'Deeds, not words', had not exactly the same meaning everywhere. In Europe, where SCI was more politicised, many volunteers would even suggest to change it into, 'Deeds and Words'.

I remember that in some countries, such as the Netherlands, several local groups would refuse to hold a workcamp without first undertaking a sort of socio-political analysis of the area concerned. Not to mention countries like Italy and Korea, where all activities in the name of SCI were suspended by the International Committee because of strong political stands taken, disregarding the general trends of the movement which always stressed tolerance of different views. 'Diversity in Unity' was, in fact, the theme of a well attended international seminar held in Delhi, India (1979). Although in some cases, for example Spain and Portugal, cooperation with certain official youth organizations was refused. Only in 1981 concrete steps were taken to resume SCI activities in those countries.

In 1970, because of financial difficulties, the office in Luxemburg and the Clearing House had to close and the European branches took many more tasks. I came back to SCI as International Secretary, taking over from Thedy, from 1976 to 1980. From 1970 to 1976, I had done free lance work with the European institutions and the United Nations (in Geneva and in Iran). In 1981, I was elected President of SCI, until 1985 and I remained fairly active after that in a non official capacity. From 1983 to 1993, I worked with the Quakers as Europe and Middle East Executive Secretary, still based in Luxemburg. In 1994, I came back to Italy, although I have also been living in Britain and France for long periods. I have always worked internationally and travelled a lot (in nearly 80 countries). My children live most of the time abroad.

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Frank Judd, 1960-1966 General Secretary of IVS

Frank Judd graduated from the London School of Economics and was president of the UN Student Association in the `50s, then an officer in the Royal Air Force in 1957-59. From 1960 to 1966, he was Secretary General of International Voluntary Service, the British Branch of SCI. Labour Member of Parliament from 1966, Minister from 1976 to 1979, he has been a member of the House of Lords since 1991.

My time with SCI/IVS was amongst the most exciting and enjoyable periods of my life. Having completed my military service, I was determined to work for the promotion of peace and international understanding. Community building was also for me a strong commitment. I had secured an early release from the Royal Air Force in order to be a candidate for the Labour Party in the 1959 general election – in fact, I was the youngest candidate, stood in a very conservative constituency, and lost! What was I then to do?

It was providential that just at that time IVS was advertising for a new Secretary General. With some trepidation, I applied. My fears were that, with its strong pacifist traditions, and many people having served their 'alternative service' during and after the war in IVS, my Royal Air Force service would count against me. But it did not. My interviewers seemed more interested in my previous international student activities when I had been President of the United Nations Student Association and a member of the Executive of the International Student movement in the UN – a role which had taken me to China in 1956.

Anyway, the spirit of Pierre and Ernst Cérésole prevailed! Pacifists and non-pacifists could be peace workers together. Friendships forged in IVS/SCI with pacifists have been amongst the most enduring and important I have had: Ralph and Idy Hegnauer, René Bovard, Valli Seshan, Douglas and Kathleen Childs, Derek and Jean Edwards, Dorothy Guiborat, Willy and Dora Begert, Roy and Judy Payne and others were amongst them and later, these friendships strongly survived my time as a defence minister. There were also warm and good friendships with the non pacifists like Roger and Mickie Briottet, Jeff and Zitta Smith and Harry and Joyce Zion.

In the 1960s what was special about the IVS/SCI cause was its scope. Peace was seen as rooted in solidarity, mutual service and a sense of community which knew no bounds. We had weekend workcamps organised by local groups in urban areas serving the elderly, frail and

excluded; we had recidivist prisoners coming out of gaol to join teams redecorating the homes of the elderly; we had summer international projects in mental hospitals and residential centres for those with learning difficulties; we worked in the remote Scottish highlands and islands, especially Fair Isle, putting in water and electricity supplies and making tracks. Even then, in the midst of forbidding years of the Cold War, we had East-West camps. One of my closest cousins met his Czech wife on just such a project.

In 1959, IVS had twelve international projects in the United Kingdom; in 1966, we had 120. This extraordinary growth in activity was vividly demonstrating that, notwithstanding the grim nuclear and ideological stand off which overshadowed everything, there could be vision, hope, idealism and intercultural fun in building meaningful links across sometimes awesome frontiers in a spirit of solidarity and service. Yes, there were crises, arguments – rows even – locally, nationally and internationally, but that was all part of the community building.

We were also sending long term volunteers to serve in Asia, Africa, Mauritius and the Seychelles – before an airport had even been planned – and we had Asian volunteers serving in the UK. The real, effective, collective experience ran from immediate local neighbourhoods, across Europe to the world as a whole. Humanity was humanity; service was service; it could be short term or long term; it could be anywhere. This in itself was a very significant concept. Frankly, I was sad when later in its history IVS, at least, felt compelled to reorganise into two organisations – one concentrating on longer term service in the Third World and one on Europe. I believe that this was to undermine the inclusive vision of humanity as a whole. Work on the poorest, most demanding parts of the poorest countries was part of a commitment which was every bit as demanding in Wales, London, Birmingham, Belfast or Scotland.

All this, literally at times, breathtaking activity was made possible by a wonderful army of staff, volunteers and committee members. Inspiration was the motivating force. For me it is still moving when, on the most unexpected occasions, in the most unlikely places, people come over me and say : “Frank, do you remember – we met in IVS or SCI?” I know SCI played a huge part in shaping me. And I know its relevance is at least as pressing and imperative in the grave challenge of 2007 as it was in the 1920s or the 1960’s.

Chapter 3 includes the memories of several volunteers who, at some stage, had an administrative responsibility in SCI as an institution, in addition to their long-term volunteer service.

2.4 *East-West workcamps*

As mentioned by Dorothy Guiborat, they were a major concern for SCI, but also for the Coordination Committee and particularly for Arthur Gillette, as a volunteer and later as a UNESCO staff member. Other memories of these camps may be found in the text from Valli Chari/Seshan, Devinder das Chopra (chap. 3) and from Max Hildesheim (chap. 5).

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Arthur L. Gillette, 1958-1960 CO with CCIVS; 1960 East-West Exchange; 30 year career with UNESCO

Born in the US, Arthur Gillette came to France in 1958 to complete his university studies. He worked as a conscientious objector with the Coordination Committee for Voluntary Workcamps, of which he became Secretary General, before joining UNESCO where he became the Director of Youth and Sport. He participated in a number of workcamps with SCI and other organizations.

It is hard for those who did not live during the Cold War to imagine the intensity of the mistrust and fear engendered by that particularly sombre phase of human history. Young Westerners were taught that the USSR and its allies were out to dominate the world through subversion and such violent episodes as the Korean War (will we one day know how that clash really started?) and – mirror-fashion – Easterners learned that "capitalist/imperialist war mongers" sought to destroy their countries.

I was born and grew up in the eastern U.S.A. and one of my earliest media memories is watching, aged about 12, live broadcasts of the U.N. Security Council during which Soviet Foreign Minister Andreï Vishinskii ('Mr. Nyet') repeatedly vetoed measures supported by a majority of its other Members. The summer I was 15, my compatriots Julius and Ethel Rosenberg died on the electric chair for having "betrayed atomic secrets" to the Soviets (will we ever know if they did?). American Boy Scouts were actively encouraged to denounce "red" activities they might come across.

Luckily, my parents had strong internationalist leanings and were, for example, founder members of the local chapter of the U.S. United Nations

Association. So I grew up in a context that didn't equate Russians or Communists with the devil. The secondary boarding school I attended was similarly open-minded – the Russian language was even taught there! – and certain teachers (hardly Communists since at least some were Quakers) were badgered by the witch-hunting Senator Joseph McCarthy. Self-reliance and service were part of the school's curriculum and it was only natural that, when I moved on to Harvard College (located near Boston), I contacted the American Friends (Quakers) Service Committee and started weekend workcamping in Roxbury, a Boston Black/Hispanic ghetto.

SCI weekend workcamping in Paris

I came to Paris in 1958 for my third university year, and found the educational system intellectually challenging – but also rather arid, and seeming to operate in isolation from reality. And what a reality it was with the Algerian War in full swing! One evening, after Sorbonne choir rehearsal, I actually saw an Algerian shot dead just next to St-Séverin Church.

What could I, personally, do to help relieve the harshness of the time? No, the miniscule Paris Quaker community didn't organise workcamps, but it did direct me to SCI's French Branch. And my weekend workcamping resumed.

The projects could be physically demanding: get to an address at, say, the Bois Colombes suburb by 8.30 a.m. Sunday; move all the furniture and other objects of an impecunious widow into the stairway (often leaving the beneficiary somewhat aghast at seeing her lifetime's possessions thus disturbed); wash down grimy walls and ceiling; apply paint to the living room; swallow a quick bite to eat at midday; paint the bedroom and bathroom (and fix defective plumbing into the bargain); move furniture and possessions back to their place; rush back to my pension de famille just in time for supper. But there was also the undeniable satisfaction of having done something immediately and concretely useful.

Many of my French contemporaries at the Sorbonne scoffed at what they deemed the naivety of such hands-on initiatives. "Sure, there are poor and lonely old people whose apartments need repainting. But that's why we pay taxes!" they argued airily. "You volunteers are just enabling the State to shirk its responsibilities!"

That didn't discourage us. In retrospect, and to a certain degree, I think we unconsciously announced the youth/student uprising ten years later, in

the spring of 1968. A main difference was that our protest was expressed, in accordance with SCI's motto, with deeds, not words.

One thing led to another and I spent the following year as a subsistence volunteer at the UNESCO-based Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Workcamps (later 'for International Voluntary Service' - CCIVS) and got in more workcamping – France, England. There was much discussion among Committee member organisations about the appropriateness – even real possibility - of promoting volunteer exchanges between the Cold War blocs. Some bodies argued that sending Western volunteers to the East was tantamount to exposing innocent youngsters to propaganda and brainwashing.

East-West exchanges

Having been co-responsible for what was probably the first East-West service project (converting a Warsaw bombsite into a playground, 1955), SCI obviously didn't share this reticence. And it spearheaded efforts – generally in cooperation with the Budapest-based World Federation of Democratic Youth – to expand East-West volunteer exchanges: Polish and French workcamps in 1956, and a first one in the USSR, in 1958.

During the summer of 1960, I joined the SCI team (led by Henri Majewski) that took part in the second USSR camp to build the foundations of a secondary school at a collective farm in the central Ukraine. It was my first East-West project, and a real eye-opener! Although convinced enough of the project's value to have signed on for it, at least some of us Civilists felt, at the outset, a bit like Columbus's sailors venturing into uncharted seas. "What," we wondered with somewhat giddy apprehension, "if the world turns out to be flat after all and we sail off the edge?"

The Soviet and other volunteers, totalling about 80, gathered in Moscow for an overnight train trip to the Ukraine. At first there were rather awkward 'getting-to-know-you' conversations in the different sleeping compartments assigned to us. "So you're an American learning Russian, are you?" one Soviet asked me, a mite suspiciously (read "Aha – you're probably CIA"). Another Westerner countered to a language student from Leningrad: "So you are specialising in African studies?" (read: "Hmm, probably to spearhead Communist penetration of newly independent countries in that continent.")

A Russian team leader tried to break the ice by giving a somewhat formal speech about promoting mutual understanding among young people from different political blocs. I remember thinking "Yeah, he must be a Party spy, or perhaps even from the KGB". His speech having been met by stony

silence, he laughed and said: “OK, look here, everybody, let’s get teamwork moving right now by, err, working together to meet a challenge!”

The ‘challenge’ was to see how many of us we could fit into a single train compartment designed for eight people. We reached 19! The ensuing hilarity definitely thawed the ice and we broke into song. At that point, a train conductor arrived to see what all the ruckus was about. He scolded the Russian team leader so scathingly that I decided our companion certainly couldn’t be a Party spy or KGB agent. At the camp, he turned out to be my convivial tent mate. On the collective farm, we worked hard as a united team and met our construction targets. And, frankly, had a good time into the bargain: the world was round after all!

That autumn, I was surprised to open an issue of the popular American weekly magazine Saturday Evening Post and find a half-page photo of our workcamp, accompanied by a lead article presenting the project as a vile Soviet plot to beguile unsuspecting youth from non-Communist countries. That was just as slanted and ill-intentioned Cold War journalism as contemporary Soviet media claims that President Kennedy’s recently-launched Peace Corps used volunteers to promote neo-colonial capitalist infiltration of the Third World.

In fact, the evenings during our Ukrainian project were devoted alternately to Soviet and Western presentations, followed by relatively frank discussions among the campers. To be sure, the Soviet ‘side’ touted such accomplishments as the Virgin Lands rural development scheme; but nobody prevented Westerners from describing such ‘taboo’ themes as multi-party democracy and Christian pacifism.

I later participated in East-West volunteer projects (not all via SCI – but certainly in a Civilist spirit) in Czechoslovakia, the USSR (Russian Federation, and Kabardino-Balkarian Autonomous Republic) and the German Democratic Republic. East-West workcamping was beginning to bloom. In 1966 alone, 100 Czechoslovak young people participated in SCI-IVS projects in Britain. At about the same time, Polish volunteers joined a long-term SCI volunteer project in Algeria that one of them termed ‘a laboratory of co-existence.’

To be sure, SCI’s and other bodies’ East-West volunteer exchanges did not single-handedly stop the Cold War. But I think we proved that mutual distrust (not to forget reciprocal ignorance) was not inevitable. Even if only for project participants, and the relations and friends to whom they described their adventures and in the words of SCI’s then (1966) European Secretary Janet Goodricke, there emerged “ground for hoping that international rust has at last begun to get the better of the Iron Curtain.”

The personal impact

I doubt that most human beings are radically shaped by a single kind of experience. It is living through, and mulling over, different if convergent clusters of experiences that shape one's character, and life goals and commitments.

In my case, SCI workcamping and other volunteering stints were definitely a cluster of experiences that oriented me. It was natural, for example, that I did my two years' conscientious objector civilian service at the CCIVS, where with other, like-minded (and also expenses-only) colleagues we stressed two main priorities: development of East-West exchanges and promotion of and leader training for Third World volunteering.

That in turn led me to join UNESCO where, during a varied career that lasted some 30 years, I strove continuously to favour deeds more than words i.e., innovative practical results more than time-worn declarations of good intentions – this, in a context humorously described by a woman delegate to one of the organisation's biennial General Conferences, as 'constant textual harassment.'

And 'textual harassment' abounded. One example: in the second half of the 1960s, we obtained a General Conference green light and funding to mobilise international (East-West, we hoped) teams of long-term volunteers for UNESCO field projects in developing countries. Some project directors were enthusiastic about the idea and, through CCIVIS, we obtained suitable young candidates. But the venture stumbled and ultimately failed when the Legal Office vetoed their draft contracts, arguing that the sacrosanct UNESCO Manual made no provision for such an activity!

When I retired from UNESCO in 1998, one country's Ambassador to the organisation laughingly informed me that a very-high-ranking UNESCO official had disdainfully told him (not realising we were friends): "Ah yes, Gillette, a hard worker but too concerned with down-to-earth details, like a Boy Scout's 'good turns'." That was meant as something of an insult; I took it as a compliment!

2.5 *Working with conscientious objectors and immigrants*

Although the international experience of the next volunteers has been limited, their memories are reproduced here because they were involved in experiences which have been very significant, especially for the French branch.

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Emile Bernis, beginning 1948 workcamps in Europe and Algeria; member of French National Committee 1960s

Emile Bernis, born in the South East of France, met SCI in 1948 and participated in many workcamps in France and in Algeria, one of them with

the first conscientious objectors who were allowed to perform an alternative civil service.

After the end of my training as an electrician, I completed my military service in 1947. A few months later, I was called up by the Army, which was mobilizing again some of the reservists, in connection with the large-scale strikes which were taking place at that time. I did not answer[18], because I disagreed with such a role of the Army, in connection with the specific context rather than as a pacifist (I was not a conscientious objector at that time and it was not a widespread idea during that period). I had informed SCI and offered to participate in a workcamp and I wrote: "One year is enough to learn how to shoot against people who do not have the French label. I believe that it would be a fair compensation to work for several months for something else than war. I therefore wanted to work with you. And now, 'they' would like to teach us how to shoot at French people. Never mind. I know that I am not the only one to say "no". But I feel that it would be unfair to stay quietly at home when my mates spend bad days in the barracks. This is why I insist on joining your work".

My first workcamp was in Roissy, North of Paris, in March 1948. The project included different activities for the renovation of a building and of a property used by SCI. What I remember is essentially the friendship with the participants. This workcamp was followed by many others. One of them was in Vercheny, in the South-East of France, where I met Nelly Forget (see above), with whom I am still in touch to-day.

[18] This did not have any consequences with the Army.

In 1948, I was in the workcamp of Tagmount-Azouz, near Tizi-Ouzou in Algeria, on which Pierre Martin[19] has written a book. He wrote in a letter to the French Committee: “This workcamp is not quite typical of SCI, but I believe that will trust me to adapt it to the local customs, which are so different from the European ones. That it is hard to realize whether one is away in terms of space or of time. And although the customs are so specific, we find here people who have knocked about the world and can speak English or German. We also find a concern for justice, equality and democracy that you can find only in Switzerland. I feel that it will be hard for us to leave this country”.

This project was to build a house in the village, whose inhabitants could not afford to pay; it included earthwork, looking for construction stones with the villagers, and maintenance of a fountain. I remember an Algerian volunteer, Nourredine, who was fully integrated with the life of the group. We were there to be with the villagers and to work with them. Their reactions were positive. Much later I came back to visit them and I had a very warm reception.

At the end of the workcamp, the local police officer invited the volunteers to eat a couscous and he said: “Ah, if only France, instead of sending all these soldiers, had sent a team like you in Algeria, we would have been subdued a long time ago”. Another comment came from Albert Camus, the Nobel Prize novelist, who was a supporter of SCI and wrote: “This success is encouraging for me personally. A writer who wants to be a witness sometimes feels he is lonely. One may have doubts. But you are demonstrating every day that men can meet each other, that the dialogue is always possible and that loneliness does not exist” (P. Martin, ibid.).

During the following years, I participated in various SCI workcamps in France, near Vézelay (Burgundy) and at Ceillac (in the Alps). My main contribution was my participation to the workcamp in Pressignac, in Dordogne (South-West).

This workcamp was an important moment in the history of the French branch of SCI. Following a hunger strike by Louis Lecoin, a friend of SCI, supported by the movement, General de Gaulle had given his agreement to a status for conscientious objectors. He also promised that a solution would be found for those who were in jail at Mauzac (Dordogne), where they were treated as ordinary criminals. SCI then offered to the Ministry of Justice to organize, as an experiment, the first workcamps for

[19] P. Martin : *En Kabylie, dans les tranchées de la paix,* Beyrouth, 1953. Quotation from : *50 ans au service de la paix. Les mémoires de la branche française*. Travail collectif coordonné par Etienne Reclus, SCI, 1980.

conscientious objectors. In April 1962, through Henri Roser[20], buildings for holiday camps were put at the disposal of SCI to receive objectors and volunteers. After this experimental project, SCI was in charge in 1964 of the organization of activities for conscientious objectors in Brignoles (Provence)[21].

I took a three-month leave without pay to be the leader of this camp, which received around twenty objectors, then imprisoned in the Mauzac jail. The aim was to start the construction of a village club. There were two types of volunteers. the Jehovah's witnesses, who refused the military service for religious reasons and the conscientious objectors, who were pacifists and who were striving to give a meaning to their commitment on the workcamp.

There were discussions in the camp, but no organized group discussions like those in the typicial SCI workcamp. While the technical leadership of the workcamp was entirely within my field of competence, I was not able to take over the discussion of SCI aims and methods. At that time, there was no training inside SCI to prepare the team leaders for this responsibility. This situation occurred again in 1987 in Ceillac, where I was again the team leader.

Although the conscientious objectors were no more in jail, there were nevertheless warders who were supposed to look after them. For instance, it was forbidden to take pictures. I did nonetheless, but I was scolded. The warders had been selected for their good will and they lived in the same house as the others.

After the end of my leave, I left and the leadership of the workcamp was taken over by Pierre (Pierrot) Rasquier[22]

I have also been a member of the National Committee of the French branch during the 60s. I have seen its evolution in relation to the national context: recognition of conscientious objection, work with the slum in Nanterre and so on. To-day, I see that there are less traditional "pick and shovel" camps and more actions for unprivileged people. This requires a qualification and a training and it is less easy to achieve a cohesion of the

[20] Henri Roser (1899-1981), a Protestant minister, has been a most respected president of the French branches of SCI (from 1949 to the late 60's) and of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (see above, chapter 1). A friend of Pierre Cérésole, he stood as early as 1923 for conscientious objection and was strongly committed to the issue, as well as the criticism of the war in Algeria, together with the Secretary general, Etienne Reclus.

[21] .*Mémoires de la branche française, op.cit.*

[22] He was famous for his dynamism and dedication. He organized a team of volunteers who could be called in case of emergency. He left memories of his life and experiences.

group and to develop a team spirit than when everybody works together with a pick, a shovel and a wheelbarrow.

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Claire Bertrand, 1959

As a student, Claire Bertrand participated in two workcamps abroad in Norway (1959) and Lebanon (1960). But her main experience with SCI was the work in a North African slum near Paris, during the Algerian war. She, along with Olivier, were SCI representatives in Thailand when Olivier was posted there with UNESCO. Claire has been active with Amnesty International.

I have known SCI in 1959, through a friend who was going to a workcamp in Norway during her vacations. I was 22, living in Paris and studying pharmacy. Contrary to the rules according to which a previous experience in France was required, SCI agreed to my participation to this camp. At that time, I was just interested in doing something for my vacations. It was a traditional workcamp, to improve a house for handicapped people near Oslo and the sea. The work was rather hard – levelling the earth for making a playground – but the conditions were particularly pleasant: accommodation was provided by the local community, there was no cooking and the food was good.

We finished the work around five o clock and we used to go to the beach. There were around 20 volunteers, among them an Indian girl, Valli (see chapter3) who became a lifelong friend, a Dutchman, very young British volunteers and two Lebanese girls. We had interesting discussions, which were an opening for me. As a whole, it was holidays abroad, for two or three weeks, in a pleasant atmosphere, which fitted with my ideas and met my desire to do something useful. But I am not sure whether our work had been of much use.

When I came back to Paris, I started going to week-end camps, partly because the Lebanese volunteers had told us that they would organize a workcamp in their country the following year. I was very keen on going there and I assumed that a previous experience of work in France would be a pre-requisite to go abroad. We were renovating flats of old people (at that

time, they were the poorest group) and we completed the work, usually in one day. It was very satisfactory for the volunteers and for the old people to get such quick results. And it was an opportunity to become aware of their living conditions.

Work in the slum

But very soon, and until the Spring of 1961, I started going during the week-end to a slum near Paris (Nanterre), where an SCI team was helping Algerian and Moroccan migrant families. The war in Algeria was in full swing and the atmosphere was very tense. Monique Hervo, who was in charge of the project, was living there with another volunteer, Marie Ange Charras. She was deeply committed to the Algerian cause and in close contact with the nationalist party (which was of course forbidden). The French branch of SCI, while sympathetic to Algerian independence, did not wish to take a clear political stand, so that the work in Nanterre proceeded in a rather independent way[23].

Our small group was coming regularly to help Monique Hervo and Marie-Ange Charras, who were working primarily with the population and their problems with the bureaucracy. We were doing manual work to repair the barracks, especially the roofs in corrugated iron. From the point of view of the work to be performed, this was a typical SCI workcamp, but we were working only during the week end and without any international participation, however, the workcamp was international in terms of the people for whom we were working. And if the work was done between volunteers, the close relationship maintained by Monique with the people contributed to our good integration. I was seldom going with the people for their administrative affairs. It was very unpleasant, as the bureaucrats did not welcome us and we felt powerless[24].

[23] Monique Hervo has published several books on the period (1959-1962) spent on the slum, where thousands of pieces of corrugated iron were mixed with broken bricks. She describes the Algerian war transferred to the slum: « While the story goes on, the life of Algerian people, later on of all North Africans becomes harder and harder. Poor health conditions, narrowness and fear are always there. With the increasing horror of the war in Algeria, the climate in the slum becomes harder. In 1961, the war becomes more intense and the repression increases. The people in the slum are subject to arrests, searches and brutal raids by the police. Some men disappear». Monique Hervo, Marie-Ange Charras*, Bidonvilles*, Paris, Maspero, 1971. Also: *Chronique d'un bidonville, Nanterre en guerre d'Algérie*, par Monique Hervo, préface de François Maspéro, éditions du Seuil, 2001 p., ".

[24] "What was most shocking for Moniaue Hervo was possibly to know that a few yards away, there were quiet and careless French people". MFI Hebdo, 29.11.2001.

I never felt that the work was too hard. I think that it was of some use and that the Algerians could not have done it, because they did not have the money to buy the materials. But what was important was the fact that we were there with them and the feeling of solidarity that there was on both sides.

The work in Nanterre was far more interesting for me than the summer camps. I felt that it corresponded better to the SCI ideology. In addition during that period I was going to various meetings where we had lots of discussions, particularly about non violence and the Algerian war. I admired the way Monique and Marie-Ange were committed and the work was for me a type of commitment with regard to the Algerian war.

During that period, I kept in touch with Valli, who was in Paris with the International Secretariat for training. When I remember it to-day, I feel ashamed to think of the conditions under which she was living: she was very isolated, apart from the presence of Dorothy, there was no comfort and no heating and she was for the first time away from her family and faced with a cultural shock, for instance due to the fact that she was a vegetarian, something unknown of at that time in France. But I felt very near to her.

During the summer of 1960, the two Lebanese volunteers met in Norway invited us to participate in a workcamp which they organized in Beit el Din, the Druze region of Lebanon. The travel was an extraordinary experience for me. I took a boat which called at various ports in the Mediterranean. I was sleeping on the desk, with the Greek families and their chickens. I met another volunteer, Rob Buijtenhuis, who became a lifelong friend and with whom we were shopping for our food in every port.

In Lebanon I discovered another face of the world. Until then, I was an admirer of Israel, of its socialism and its kibbutz. Now, I met volunteers (including a few girls) coming from various Arab states. They gave me a completely different version: some of them had to escape Palestine. It was a hard fact which could not suffer any discussion. It was my first contact with the Arab world. Concerning the Lebanese, it did not look so different, but I discovered very different traditions, particularly concerning the relationships between boys and girls and the pre-arranged marriages, which were often discussed. I feel now that the differences between Europe and the Middle East are even wider to-day in this respect.

Contrary to the workcamp in Norway, this one was very inefficient, since we had to build a school with an architect who was often away and with materials which arrived very late. At the end, when they arrived, we had to work very hard and quickly, under a burning sun. Nevertheless, the

building was not finished. If there was little work during most of the time, we had a lot of discussions, some of them organized, others informal..

However, this workcamp was a real opening for me. I learnt a lot about the relationship with others. More generally speaking, there is no doubt that the workcamps after Norway (which was following the Western model) has been an extraordinary opening on the others and on another world – the one where I wanted to live. The spirit of SCI was in harmony with my interests at that time, for development issues and for the Algerian war. I remained faithful to this spirit, even though I hardly participated in other workcamps and had other commitments.

In 1961, I had a contract with SCI to become a long-term volunteer in India, to participate in the Kasauli project for Tibetan refugees. But I gave up because I got married (with another volunteer met in Nanterre). Nevertheless, we kept in touch with SCI when we stayed in Thailand, where we tried to start SCI activities, together with Valli, Devinder and Sato. I briefly participated in a workcamp, where we were supposed to dig a well with local volunteers recruited by the Protestant mission. The work was not very hard, but the living conditions were difficult and I don't think that the project was successful. I also participated in week-ends with handicapped people and I was in touch at that time with SCI volunteers in Thailand.

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Chapter 3
ASIA AFTER WORLD WAR II

3.1 Introduction: 1947-1956

In the aftermath of the war, the huge geographic region of Asia was undergoing its own cataclysm. Large areas were engaged in independence struggles, whereas other areas were torn by the Cold War as socialism, communism and capitalism vied for dominance. Strict foreign exchange laws and stringent visa requirements made travel within Asia very difficult. In those circumstances the spread of SCI activities faced strong headwinds, always remained small, and some countries remained completely closed. The first step was in India - a consequence of Pierre Cérésole's earlier earthquake relief efforts. There was always a general compatibility of SCI's aims with the non-violent movement for Indian independence and Gandhi's methods. Many second generation volunteers were inspired by this movement, and also wanted to learn more about eastern philosophy and religion.

Achievement of independence in 1947 required a compromise that caused a division of the Indian subcontinent. Predominantly Muslim areas were incorporated into West Pakistan and East Pakistan, with the area of Kashmir (ruled by a Hindu maharajah with a majority Muslim population) still disputed until this day. This Partition caused an enormous displacement of persons - between 12 and 15 million people - as Hindus fled the new Pakistan, and Muslims the new India. In the process at least 1 million people were killed. With the refugees pouring in, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, President of India, (familiar with SCI's work in 1934) asked SCI's assistance. SCI replied that they would undertake that action, on the condition that they could also work in Pakistan, thus honoring SCI's principle of even-handedness. That was accepted and the first team began work in 1949. A Swiss SCI member, Pierre Opplieger, who had taught French to Indira Gandhi when she studied in Switzerland, was in India, and had entrée to high circles and knew Vijaylakshmi Pandit (sister of Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India) and other prominent officials.

The first teams worked in Faridabad, a township set aside for refugees outside of New Delhi, and worked outside of Karachi. Because of the

intense heat prior to the monsoon season, other worthwhile projects were pursued in areas at higher elevation seasonally. These early workcamps continued the pick and shovel tradition of SCI – manual labor that did not compete with local labor, with a lifestyle that mirrored local conditions. Women were called sisters, and were in charge of the domestic side, including washing the men's clothes and sewing. Some outsiders were critical of white men doing the work of coolies, especially as they may not be as effective, given their intolerance to the heat and unfamiliar diet.

Nonetheless, there were larger issues at stake. In this post-colonial period it was important symbolically to show that white people, formerly associated with the overseers and officials, would work side-by-side with Indians or Pakistanis. Additionally, within the Indian society, used to the caste system and a supply of servants, physical work was seen as beneath the more educated. Therefore, an early SCI objective was to demonstrate through 'Deeds, not words' the dignity of manual labor, to break down prejudices and blur the lines of superior/inferior. SCI volunteers travelled by bus or fourth class train, (then third class when fourth class was abolished), ate local food and usually slept on the ground or floor in the workcamps. SCI's non-sectarian stance was also emphasized. Its demonstration of what could be done by ordinary people, without government mandate, was compatible with Gandhian ideals, so it was not an entirely foreign idea. Dorothy Abbot Guiborat, Devinder Das Chopra, Marius and Marianne Boelsma were among these early volunteers and their reflections can be found following this introduction.

Early teams of Western and Japanese volunteers actively recruited students to join them by speaking at colleges and holding meetings. The Oppliegers were the unofficial SCI contact point for several years. Pierre Opplieger later was the representative for Swiss Aid Abroad and made his home permanently in Almora, UP. Gradually, a core of experienced Indian volunteers grew and in 1952 a group was formed with Ethelwyn Best designated as the Representative of the British Branch and financed by them. [Ethelwyn had been a member of the first team in 1949-50 but had had to return to England following an injury sustained in a bus accident in the hills.] Her role was to co-ordinate the programs of the LTVs (Long-term volunteers), encourage the development of the young group whose members could only help in their spare-time, fund raise and act as liaison with potential projects and officials. She had her office in Mehrauli (on the outskirts of New Delhi) near the famous landmark of Qutab Mihar. Beginning in the early `50s a small, but steady stream of Indian and Pakistani volunteers were sent to workcamps in Europe. Local groups became active in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. As the cadre of experienced volunteers increased, the number of foreign volunteers was

reduced, and the length of service reduced from 24 months to 18 months. By 1956 a team consisted of 3 volunteers for 18 months.

3.2 Establishment of the Indian Branch

In 1957 the group achieved Branch status with Parashiva Murthy debuting as the first Indian National Secretary. The National Committee moved the SCI offices to Faridabad, outside of New Delhi – the site of the first post-independence work. Officials gave SCI three Quonset huts that had once been used in the relief work. One was reserved for the office, and personal quarters of the Secretary. One was for women volunteers and the other for male volunteers. However, there were no phones and bus service to Delhi was unreliable and round-about so any business in the city took all day. Furthermore, local members could not easily gather, so the low cost of the office and housing was at the expense of efficiency. The office returned to New Delhi in 1958 to share the garage of the National Youth Hostel Association, later joined by the Asian Secretariat, finally settling in K5 Green Park for the last four decades.

Valli writes about the Indian office: "Affectionately referred to as 'K5' by SCI volunteers from everywhere, it is the number of the house where the SCI-India secretariat is situated in New Delhi till now. It is a place/home from where myriads of SCIers lived, worked, discussed, made decisions for SCI (and themselves?!) for nearly four decades!!"

In the early 70s, administrative work was done by Bhupendra Kishore (then new National Secretary of SCI-I), Fiona Williams (Ferguson), a British LTV and Valli Seshan (Chairperson) who formed the 'office team'. Valli writes: "In 1971 there was a crisis as SCI had just been asked to vacate their premises, the garage of the National Youth Hostel Association, under whose patronage it had been since moving to New Delhi from Faridabad Town. I approached Fr. Loesch, a German Jesuit priest who headed the Indo-German Social Service Society (still exists). He had been in India for several years and was a good friend and supporter of SCI. My request to him was for a recommendation for the use of garage space at any of the Catholic agencies, using his influence. Fr.Loesch was amused that the request was for a garage again. He suggested that we explore the possibility of a rented accommodation and come back to him. Soon after, he informed us that a spacious two-bed room house was available in Green Park for 450 rupees a month (about US$10). Fr. Loesch generously wrote out a cheque for two years' rent and gave it to us. None of us could have expected that four decades later, K5 would almost be the 'property' of SCI India. (The landlords left India and the tenants are there by default.) K5 is in

a flourishing part of New Delhi today. Looking back, it feels like a dream. Fr. Loesch passed away even before the 2 years were over. Had he lived, he would have been happy and not so happy with all that SCI managed to do well/and not so well in the following years from the premises he bequeathed to SCI."

Phyllis Clift (Sato), Hiroatsu Sato and Valli Chari (Seshan) below and Thedy von Fellenberg (chapter 2) write about this period.

3.3 Establishment of an Asian Secretariat - 1959

Looking ahead to the future, the International Committee of SCI decided that spreading SCI workcamps to other Asian countries required a full-time, experienced person. Fortunately Devinder Das Chopra had returned to India after having gone to Egypt and Lebanon on a UNESCO grant in 1955 then to Europe for SCI for the next 2 ½ years. He undertook the mandate to strengthen and spread SCI in Asia as the first Asian Secretary, starting from an office in his home in May 1959, moving the next year to a garage room adjacent to the Indian Branch office on the Indian Youth Hostels' premises. Valli Chari (Seshan), who had recently returned from 2 years with SCI in Europe, joined him in 1960. The Indian National Committee had not thought that a woman could fulfill the travelling duties of the Indian Secretary and declined her application. Devinder had no such reservation and was eager to utilize her experience. At separate times both visited the fledgling Japanese Group encouraging the efforts that Hiroatsu Sato had begun in 1958 on his return from India. They sent foreign volunteers to Japan and funds. (See Elizabeth Crook and Cathy Hambridge Peel on pages following this introduction). The Asian Secretaries brought Anowar Hussein from Dakha to New Delhi in 1960 and he recruited others to attend the 7th Orient-Occident Training Camp in Ceylon (Sri Lanka now) in 1961. The Asian Secretariat also began work in Nepal, Malaysia and Thailand.

Meanwhile, new refugees were pouring into India, this time from Tibet as the Dalai Lama fled in March, 1959 after being unsuccessful in attempts to reach a peaceful settlement with the Peoples Liberation Army of Communist China. The Asian Secretariat and Indian Branch both devoted effort to help in this emergency situation, and settled their efforts on helping children in Kasauli (near Dharmasala). Kalyan Singh Ghosh of the Central Relief Committee requested SCI's services and Devinder laid the foundation, selecting a house for the children's Nursery. Elizabeth Crook writes an account of her work as a nurse there (after the Introduction), and for nearly 5 years, Indian volunteers, Japanese volunteers and Europeans

continued to work in Kasauli until the Indo-Pakistan War made travel difficult.

3.4 Changing role of long-term volunteers

SCI was adapting its modus operandi to the changing needs. The emphasis on demonstrating an alternative to military service had lessened, and indeed a few countries had already ended their draft system. Foreign exchange restrictions rigidly imposed in the immediate aftermath of WWII were lifting, making travel much easier, enabling a larger supply of volunteers. Although SCI was the granddaddy, many other organizations started workcamps, ranging from those run and funded by governments, religious groups, or associations such as the UNA (United Nations Association). Still, SCI's unique international aspect, with its network of branches and groups staffed by people from their own country, which sent representatives to the yearly International Committee meeting, as well as its independence from government money, allowed SCI to continue to play a vital role. Nonetheless, it needed to adapt to remain relevant. Community development was a new buzz word. The U.S. Peace Corps was established in 1961 and similar programs sprung up in other countries. The British government took a new approach and initially recruited and funded volunteers to be sent to projects run by existing organizations, and IVS (the British Branch of SCI) was one. First this was through the Lockwood Committee, and, later, under the arm of the Ministry of Overseas Development.

It is never precise to say which came first – the chicken or the egg. Opportunities for long-term projects always existed and now there was a means to fund personnel for these projects. The Indian Branch had been introduced to an opportunity in Madras in 1958 by the long-time SCI supporter and later Indian Representative to the International Committee, Father Pierre Ceyrac who knew the Mayor of Madras, Mrs. Tara Cherian. The project, called Cherian Nagar, was in a slum. In addition to the Kasauli project run by the Asian Secretary (1961-1965), the Indian Branch began work in a leprosy colony in Orissa, called Hatibari in 1961- 1962. (See Elizabeth Crook, Cathy Peel and Bhuppy's accounts of Hatibari and Kasauli on following pages) By the mid-`60s there was the Rapti project (an agricultural one) in Nepal begun in 1966, Pahayria (also agricultural) in Sri Lanka, Kimpu (on a co-operative farm) in Japan, as well as volunteers placed in other projects in Thailand and with the East Pakistan Branch. (See the Kobayashi report for Kimpu and Ann Kobayashi for Thailand and Roger Gwynn for East Pakistan). Volunteers from these projects also

participated in short-term workcamps, but there were no longer just the all-rounder volunteers going from workcamp to workcamp.

3.5 Asian Secretariat changes location

Devinder and Valli moved on from their pioneering work the end of 1964, though both of them remained in the development field. That seemed to happen over and over: other organizations recognizing the valuable experience and perspective of former SCI volunteers or office staff, then hiring them. Devinder became a field director with the Peace Corps in India, then worked many years with UNICEF. The American Committee for Tibetan Relief tapped Valli for their representative; subsequently she co-designed a program for SEARCH in Bangalore and in later years has served on numerous boards and worked as a consultant.

Since there had already been strong development in the Indian subcontinent, the International Committee recommended that the Asian Secretariat be moved more mid-way between India and Japan. Hiroatsu Sato was appointed as successor in 1965 and in the fall of 1965 attempted to establish the office in the capital of Malaysia. Workcamps had been organized there and in Penang, but eventually the government refused to sanction an office and in 1967 it was moved to Singapore. (See Sato's history). Before leaving Japan Sato followed up with returned South Korean participants to Japanese workcamps, and assisted them in organizing a work camp in South Korea. He also followed up with contacts Ethelwyn Best had made with Buddhist groups in South Vietnam, but the growing conflict and impossibility of going to North Vietnam made the International Committee decide not to send volunteers to South Vietnam, despite requests. There was a robust exchange of volunteers helped by a generous grant from the Friendly Fellowship Foundation and LTV placement courtesy of the British government. (See Shigeo Kobayashi, Ann Smith Kobayashi, Cathy Hambridge Peel on following pages.) However, the Indo-Pakistan War of 1965 made travel impossible between India and Pakistan, and severely limited volunteers from travelling to neighboring countries. This hampered exchange within the sub-continent for several years.

A series of severe cyclones struck East Pakistan and triggered the emergency response that marked many SCI branches' scope of activity, especially the French Branch. The Asian Secretariat assisted the local group and helped with fund raising. Eventually a long-term project at Moudubi, to construct a cyclone shelter, was undertaken and many of the responding students eventually became the backbone of the Bangladesh Branch. (See Roger Gwynn's reflections)

In the middle of 1966, Ataur Rahman, was appointed as Assistant Asian Secretary to head a sub-office in Colombo, Ceylon. Then in December of 1966, Masahiro Shintani joined Sato in Malaysia as the second Assistant and made the trek to Singapore the following March. When Navam Appadurai was appointed Asian Secretary in 1968, Shintani-san continued to maintain the office in Singapore until the Appadurais and Ataur were able to make the move in 1970.

Navam and his team carried on work in increasingly tense times. In 1971 East Pakistan separated from Pakistan and the ensuing civil war also involved India, and again there were a large number of refugees. Both the group in the new Bangladesh and the Indian Branch were very active. (See Juliet Pierce and Linda Whitaker). In 1972 a royal succession occurred in Nepal creating turmoil with student strikes and suppression of reforms. There were long simmering tensions between North and South Korea, and increasing communal tensions between Singhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka. This was against the wider backdrop of the Vietnam War that cast a tense aura over the whole region, making visas harder to obtain and it caused divisions within SCI regarding activism and pacifism – especially within Europe. Throughout it all SCI members in all those countries (except North Korea and Vietnam) continued to organize workcamps and long-term projects.

In 1972 the Asian Secretariat made another move, back to Colombo. The Singapore government, following the earlier thinking of the Malaysian government, became concerned about SCI's advocacy of alternatives to compulsory military service. As Singapore had a compulsory military training for young school leavers, they requested SCI to change its constitution that emphasized peace or leave the country. There was no debate and the office shifted again. Ataur had already left to engage in relief work in his newly independent homeland. Navam continued on as Asian Secretary until 1978 in Colombo.

Navam Appadurai (1920-1983), born in Jaffna, Sri Lanka to teachers at Jaffna College, was the fourth of eight children. He was orphaned at age twelve. However, to keep the eight children together, the college allowed them to continue living on site. The siblings made a pact that the oldest would each be individually responsible for the education of a younger sibling. Because of that promise, Navam turned down a scholarship to study medicine abroad and instead turned to teaching while completing his Bachelor's degree, so that he could contribute financially. Upon graduation he went into government service, married Rubina Hensman in 1948, and

then entered the Department of Social Services. This early work with marginalised people in various parts of Sri Lanka sparked his life-long passion for social justice.

Navam first came in contact with SCI in the early 1960s when he was stationed in Anuradhapura, meeting Devinder Das Chopra and Valli Chari (Seshan) in the course of organising a joint work camp with the Department of Social Service and SCI. Navam became one of the founder members of SCI Sri Lanka and attended work camps in India and Central Asia. In 1968 Navam took early retirement from government service, and became the Asian Secretary, running the office from Colombo until he could move his family to Singapore in 1970. However in 1972 the Singapore government raised objections to SCI's pacifist stance, so they had to return to Colombo. He retired in 1978.

Navam continued working in the field, and was working on a paper for the Marga Research Institute, a think tank, about the escalating tensions between the Tamils and Singhalese when he died of a heart attack. Just two weeks after his death, widescale rioting and civil strife engulfed Sri Lanka. He is survived by his widow, Rubina and four daughters Suhendrini, Shirani, Arulini and Lilani. (Extracted from a pamphlet assembled by Roger Gwynn entitled *'For a Better World'* containing memories of Navam's life by family and friends.)

A.S. Seshan (1925-1989) was born in colonial India in the south, and, like many others in SCI, followed a rather unusual path for someone from his background at that period in history. Growing up he pursued many interests, and his versatility led to skill in diverse areas: sports (as a cricketer), music (playing the flute), painting, photography, and bridge to mention a few. Family legend had it that he did everything his sisters could, including knitting and crochet.

He entered SCI India in his formative years, went to Europe as an LTV in 1953-54, became editor of PAX-India (SCI-India's newsletter), and took a special interested in publishing, fund-raising, workcamps and organizing special events. Over the course of his life he made significant and creative contributions to SCI, such as his role in the 50th anniversary celebrations of the Indian Branch and as a member of the International Secretariat (IS) team in Bangalore during the `80s. In fact, he had sent off at the train station some participants from the Asian Secretaries meeting, held in conjunction with the International Committee meeting in Bangalore in 1989, the night before his death from a heart attack.

To the many visitors to his open house, Seshan was able to instil the SCI spirit and encourage many new, young members, while also acting as a devil's advocate and challenging all to look at their motives. He was uncompromising on his stand for the 'weak' and 'powerless' in society and a passionate believer in peace. He was at once a rebel and a gentle human being.

In the New Year message from the IS in 1986, following its designation by the United Nations as the international year of peace, Seshan wrote about Spinoza's definition, "peace is a virtue originating in spiritual strength" as being as relevant as ever. He referred to writings by Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein indicating that people must primarily see themselves as members of the human race – of a common biological species – whoever they may be. Seshan noted with gratification in that letter that SCI members had been steady in their conviction of peace and had been carrying on silently - practising peace as a virtue in spiritual strength. Seshan himself had an undiminished belief in Peace and SCI's efficacy.

He took his degree in library science in India, and worked in the British Library in London following years of experience in the British Council in India. He completed his Master's degree as a documentation specialist in the U.S. in 1960. His professional stints saw him with the Indian Council of Agriculture, the Asian Institute of Educational Planning in India and with UNESCO in Panama. However, his most cherished venture was after his retirement at age 52 engaging in farming near Bangalore.

His widow, Valli, continues to live in Bangalore and their daughter, Suprabha, is involved with environmental issues and is a mainstay of the Gurukula Botanical Sanctuary in Kerala.

Mohammed Ataur Rahman (1942-2003) was born in pre-independence India in a part that became East Pakistan when Ataur was five years old. His paternal uncle was a government physician and an active social reformer and brought Ataur to Dhaka to live with his family for his secondary education. Ataur completed his M.A. degree at Dhaka University in 1964. As a student he was inspired to devote time and energy to the betterment of his young country and to combat poverty. He joined the Pakistan Workcamp Association while at university. In 1962, his friend Anowar Hussain, joined by Ataur and other like-minded friends, set up their own voluntary service group affiliated with SCI which became the East Pakistan SCI Branch. Ataur was active in the fledging branch and helped organise workcamps and cyclone relief work.

In 1966 Ataur became the Assistant Asian Secretary to focus on development in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and India, while the main office was in Singapore staffed by Sato. He joined the newly appointed Asian Secretary, Navam Appadurai, in the temporary office in Colombo in 1968, and moved with him to Singapore in 1970. When he returned to Dhaka for a visit in 1971, following the civil war that spawned an independent Bangaldesh, he was taken into military custody as a possible secessionist agent. Fortunately he was released the next day for lack of evidence. However, the experience solidified his resolve to stay and help rebuild the country and to promote peace and prosperity.

In 1972 Ataur joined the team of Quakers working in an area severely affected by the war, and soon became the main field coordinator. Together with fellow workers, Ataur formed his own organization, Gono Unnayan Prochesta – GUP (People's Development Initiative) in 1973 with financial support from the Quakers. In 1976 Ataur married Sultana Begum (Dolly) who also was active in the GUP. The GUP became very successful and grew into a large organisation, employing several dozen full-time workers offering a wide range of rural development programmes with outreach to tens of thousand previously neglected and underserved people. Ataur also set up a peace centre (Shanti Kendra) which he had hoped to develop into a peace university.

Ataur suffered a major stroke while on GUP business in Britain, and died twenty months later in a Leeds nursing home. He is survived by his widow, Dolly, and their two sons, Ashique and Abeed.

(Extracted from a pamphlet assembled by Roger Gwynn called 'His Life in the Service of Peace'.)

3.6 Golden period in SCI-India

The words 'perfect storm' have come to mean a coalescing of separate events that when combined together produce catastrophe. The opposite of that appeared in the late `60s through the `70s in India, producing a 'golden period'. This may have been duplicated in other countries but we don't have contributions for this book that detail them. One event was on the occasion of SCI's 50th anniversary celebration in 1970. The Delhi government had undertaken slum clearance, and SCI began a long-term project with those slum dwellers who were resettled in Nangoli colony. 50 volunteers (to mark the 50th anniversary) were assembled for 100 days to build a dispensary building. Another event was the assumption of National

Secretary (NS) duties by Bhuppy Kishore, assisted by a succession of British LTVs (John Hitchins, Fiona Ferguson, Liz McClean) in the office to assist in fund-raising, correspondence and publicity.

This potent combination of a strong and creative NS, with very able LTVs, created a vibrant atmosphere. The Walks for Peace organized by the office not only raised money but generated publicity and attracted more volunteers. The office in K5 became a magnet. Another event was Valli Seshan assuming chairmanship of the National Committee. She was able to inspire a new direction and secured Bhuppy's cooperation. The Seshans also had an open house at C8 in New Delhi, and that became an immense help for LTVs to be able to interpret their problems, get advice, feel at home and get re-energized. Another open house was developing in the South at Visionville outside of Bangalore, receiving visits of Indian and foreign LTVs and hosting short-term workcamps, and later orientation for incoming and outgoing volunteers. Long-term projects had been added in Bihar, Vedantangal and Shahdara and in 1971 there was relief work with refugees from East Pakistan. (See Martin Pierce, Juliet Hill Pierce, Fiona Ferguson, Solveig Starborg, Marie Catherine Petit and John Neligan) The long-term projects and their challenges, the active workcamp schedule, the dynamic office, the committed LTVs and the open houses all combined to touch many peoples' lives in deep ways.

In 1974 an Exchange Program was initiated by the Indian Branch as a means to solve the visa problems. Since 1 year visas became so difficult to obtain, programs were planned for three month periods, and a steady stream of Indians were also sent to Europe. A State of Emergency was declared in India in June 1975 and lasted for 18 months with a suspension of elections and civil liberties. This had an effect on SCI activity and also meant the demise of Visionville as long-term visas were rescinded.

3.7 Summary

With the advantage of hindsight it is possible to see the huge changes that have taken place in the Asian region, and the re-ordering of challenges between 1947 and 1975. In the post-colonial countries and in isolated, defeated Japan there was a hunger for change after WWII. Young people in the West also had a hunger to reach across barriers, hoping that international understanding would prevent any future war. When societies become so thoroughly convulsed by war and defeat, people begin to say no more. SCI provided a tiny, but deeply effective vehicle for ordinary people, who were thirsting for peace, to become bridges and to work at grass-root levels. The no nonsense physical labor in workcamps, not only demonstrated the dignity of manual labour, it also enabled a bond to be

formed because manual labour transcended the barrier of language and culture. Anybody could do it. The diversity in participants - not just in nationality but from regions within the host country - could lead to misunderstandings but the process of overcoming them, even just the attempts, also led to hope. Impressionable students had their eyes opened to how vast segments of their fellow countrymen lived and in many cases this affected their choice of career.

Those years of heady hope gradually were overlaid by the intractable problems not solved by independence or peace. International politics also affected the course of events. In addition to the active wars – struggle over Kashmir, China's occupation of Tibet forcing out the Dalai Lama in 1959, the Indo-Pakistan War of 1965, stalemate on the Korean peninsula, civil war and formation of Bangladesh in 1971, the Vietnam War, and communal tensions within Sri Lanka – the Cold War also left its mark on the region. SCI continued to play a role, and the development of long-term projects throughout the region enabled SCI to meet a new challenge. Particularly when the projects were easily accessible by local members, such as the Nangoli project outside of New Delhi, a cross-fertilization could occur. However, SCI was at the mercy of governments for obtaining visas for volunteer exchange, and chronically short of money, therefore its efforts waxed and waned.

In the 21st century, population has increased throughout the region creating new challenges. On the other hand, strong economic growth has raised the overall standard of living considerably and is setting the stage for a major shift of power. Instant communication by means of mobile phones, faxes and the internet have brought big changes. It is a totally different environment from the period of 1945-1975. Can the low-tech of workcamps meet the hi-tech times? The next generation, or heirs of those who passed through the countless workcamps and long-term projects in India, Pakistan, Japan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Thailand, and South Korea may find meaningful ways for ordinary persons to connect. It may be that the need to make connections across barriers, especially of religion, will be the genesis of SCI work in the 21st century.

Refer to Chapter 2, for Dorothy Abbott's period in India, 1950-1953 and Thedy von Fellenberg's time in India

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Devinder Das Chopra, 1951; Asian Secretary 1958-1964

Devinder Das Chopra first came into contact with SCI in New Delhi, India in 1950 and attended work camps in India as a college student. In 1955 he went to Egypt with a UNESCO grant to attend the Co-ordination Committee for International Voluntary Service (CCIVS) program, then to Lebanon and subsequently to Europe with SCI, returning to India in mid-1957. On his second return he became the first-ever SCI Asian Secretary, opening work and contacts in Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Malaysia and coordinating work in India, Pakistan and Japan. In 1965 he joined the Peace Corps staff in India, later Christian Children's Fund and ended his career with UNICEF, serving in Hyderabad and Yemen. After retirement he became Chairperson of the Indian Branch and served as a SCI International Committee member, while living outside of New Delhi with his wife, Sudesh.

My involvement with SCI -1951-1965

First contact with SCI

Representatives from SCI came to my College, St Stephen's, in late 1950. Ralph Hegnauer (Swiss) talked to the assembly of about 400 all-male student body; he spoke with a heavy German accent. Some elements were lost to the assembly I am sure! The team of Max Parker(US), Franz Schenck (Switzerland), Wolfgang Gerber (Germany) and Dorothy Abbott (UK) as far as I can recollect, was asked by the Principal to meet with the interested students later in the staff room. About 24 of us met them and asked questions. The SCI work in Faridabad near Delhi, in rehabilitating refugees from West Pakistan, was mentioned and the upcoming work camp in Khajjiar, Himachal Pradesh was referred to and invitations for us to join in, later in summer.

Some of us active in the College Social Service League; began our introduction to SCI in Faridabad followed later to the workcamp in Khajjiar. All that came to pass in 1951. It was during that time one got introduced to the Quaker Centre located near our College and one met Horace Alexander and Marjorie Sykes (both also SCI members) as well as Roshan Lal Aggarwal who was active with SCI in Faridabad. He taught Hindi to SCIers and members of the Friends Centre.

The Oppliegers (Mary and Pierre) were regulars at the Quaker Centre. Pierre Opplieger was the first formal SCI representative in India, the liaison

between the government and the SCI team. Pierre had taught French to Indira Gandhi when she studied in Switzerland, and established important connections. That is how the railway concessions for SCIers – half price of the 3rd class fare - came into the statute book. This facility for all SCI-ers from anywhere in the world, still exists and has been a boon for people traveling to workcamps.

The silent Meets at the Friends Centre, the weekend camps and the Khajjiar workcamp had a major impact on my life then and beyond. Apart from the week-end camps, I joined SCI service every summer while the rest of the family vacationed in the hills. The fifties wrought a major change in me while studying for my Masters. SCI for me became 'education beyond the classroom'. I had become aware of life's realities and realized that a shot at Government service or the private sector was not my 'cup of tea'. With an understanding and an open family, I was allowed to go my way though, I know, my father was disappointed that I was not going in for the Foreign or Administrative service in Government. The 'halo' to go that route I suspect had been affected by what I went through during the first seven years of the fifties. SCI had got me hooked! A look back, even 50 years later presents no regrets! Yet, there were times when I commiserated with myself, had I taken the right decision since 'social work & community development' were unlikely to present any shining career one was opting out for! The reality in fact is that SCI-work provided me, what I should say "a peg", values and a vocation in the long run! For that and more, one will ever remain beholden to the many SCIers I associated with under our skies. Their passion, commitment, and the very concept of 'conscientious objection to military service' were eye-openers for most of us fed on 'Ram-dhun' and Gandhian precepts of living and serving others in difficult circumstances. The LTV's simplicity of dress and food contrasted with their high ideals, character and values – on occasions and subjectively speaking, I have wondered where that breed has gone! Or, is it that I have so changed, grown with age and cannot identify that kind with ease any more?!

The other impact was to forget one's "refugee" status, (our family had lost everything during the Partition) since one saw abject poverty as one got exposed to India's hinterland, through those early years with SCI. An exposure then triggered for me, in those early days, tough vignettes of rural India and Pakistan. The inequalities that exist in our society can never be ignored, for sure. But to have lived amidst it all and among the have-nots carried its own depressing message and impact. To have lived with those who came from overseas carried its immediate message to some among us. One felt smothered (inspired or overwhelmed?) by that, as I did. The passion and style of living followed by the team was so simple, but with

such rich values, as demonstrated by the SCI –LTVs like Ralph and Idy Hegnauer, to cite one example, it left a life-long impact on my thinking. The inequalities and low economic standards left one kind of depressed. In particular where food, clothing and shelter for the common folks are concerned, one felt helpless. Yet, it also made one recognise that one must find ways to do something about it, if that could ever be possible. (This I saw then and now half a century's 'look-back' remains an unrealistic and an unfair expectation from a non-profit like SCI or any other.)

That feeling and urge has remained with me ever since the days of the fifties and the sixties. The government uses the term 'BPL', that is 'below the poverty line' population, for subsidised schemes and food ration cards throughout the country. The numbers of the 'have-nots' today may be the same as the then total population of India in 1951-52 – say about 350 million. The country now is over a billion, and still rising!

My background provided motivation to join SCI

Our family had migrated as refugees from Lahore in 1947. We had lost everything and the family was concerned with finding new roots and earning a livelihood. It struck me odd that the outsider (foreigner) was concerned to give up his peace for the sake of the refugees or the poor rural folk here, in strife torn India. The least one could do was to be concerned and to do our part for our own. Post Khajjiar, my first work camp, I wrote an article for the 'Stephanian' magazine of the College. The Principal had us, the SCI-ers, over at his residence where we talked about our experiences. The subject of conscientious objection, Franz's cycle trip to India and the poverty of the hill folks got discussed at length. These issues it was clear had made an impact on our young minds. Of the six who went from College, two (Absalom Peters and I) for sure became loyal followers of SCI's ideals. My grandfather had me sit with him and talk about what we had accomplished in Khajjiar, what the white folk and we ate and how our weeks had been spent in the hills. The values imbibed from the dignity of labour, taking turns to cook our meals and clean our utensils, work with the team to make a pipe line for their drinking water supply from a mountain spring, were all new events and experiences for the family and I to go over as something unique. I was then (and now), reminded of how a middle aged man, with swollen feet, had spent a day with us in Lahore in 1944, having walked and trudged from Burma, seeking help during those WW-II years. How my grandparents and parents had helped him has remained with me ever since. Did this exposure and sensitivity during my first 10 years leave me with a message and concern for the rest of my life?

Why need I have got my 'destiny' entwined with SCI's here, just a few years later, from 1951 onwards? It was so writ, I think.

My early SCI work in India

The discussions at the camp in the evenings on SCI's relationship with India in the past, the issues of Peace and non-violence, camp fires, visit with the Ghumans near our Forest Rest House (he was a Sikh Colonel in the army with a Scottish wife, an architect Principal running the Delhi School of Architecture), and the weekend hike to the beautiful town of Chamba, enlarged our view of the world and our surroundings. We paid Rs 100 (I forget the exact amount) for the 6 weeks' food in the camp and had already paid for our rail and bus travel up and back home. (In 2001 I took my family and our grandson to Khajjiar. The pine trees, the rest house, the village with its temple all were there with a better upkeep. The pipe line we made did not exist any more replaced by the State's pipeline.) This excursion cum learning process led next to working on the week-ends at the Ashok Vihar, Mehrauli, in making a Youth Hostel under the leadership of St. John (Jack) Catchpool, Director of the Quaker Centre. He had involved the US and Indian staff of the Technical Co-operation Mission (TCM) of the US Embassy and its Ambassador, Chester Bowles. I never knew then that 50 years later I would be living in its vicinity!

Weekend camps in Faridabad, short term camps in Mandodhar TB Sanatorium (where Mrs. Indira Gandhi and Madame Louise Morin of the All India Radio-French service visited us for half a day), a work camp in Musiaree, near Murree in West Pakistan, Sewagram, near Wardha in Maharashtra, etc. are all experiences that enlarged my view of the India I belonged to and its poverty belt which one normally would never have been exposed to, really speaking. In Mandodhar, near Sanawar-Kasauli hills, we renovated the TB Sanatorium where we met with Pierre Opplieger, Bijit Ghosh (later Director School of Planning and Architecture and for many years the President of SCI-Inida) and Dr Indera Paul Singh, Anthropologist, just then returned from Germany, who later became a long standing Committee member and supporter of SCI.

Ethelwyn Best from the UK had become the SCI Representative, based in Faridabad. She came home to convince my parents that my volunteering and going to Pakistan to attend the Musiaree work camp was in the right spirit and safe. Based on her word and surety, the family sanctioned my going along with a few others like Absalom Peters. (Since 6 of us from College had earlier been part of a goodwill delegation to Forman Christian College, Lahore with the sponsorship of Jack Catchpool and support of our Principal, this permission became easier. Also one already had the Indo-

Pak passport to proceed on the SCI mission.) The work of stone cutting and road building in Musiaree was tough; it was a unique experience among the West Pakistanis with Marius and Marianne Studinger –Boelsma as the camp leaders. At the community, people-to-people levels, friendly relations were an easier proposition than what one reads in the press over the Kashmir issue or the occasional communal riots. Knowing Punjabi and being non-vegetarian further helped one to integrate amongst the Pakistanis, though differences on why India should not keep J&K (Jammu and Kashmir) became points of heated discussion at times in the evenings. I remember sharing the view that Pandit Ji's (Nehru, the Indian Premier) ploy was to talk of a plebiscite but that it would never take place, ever since India had agreed to get divided in order to win freedom. In fact, they had gained Pakistan literally on a platter thanks to the white man's role of divide and rule! Such frank and aggressive views were not conducive to goodwill among our Pak friends. One explained how the division invited an aggressive onslaught of the majority community (Hindus) while the minorities (including Muslims) had felt discriminated against for centuries – this was to be their rationale and justification for a new nationhood. Divide and rule took its toll and we have not seen the end of it all, yet! Divisions continue still.

Those were the years of learning indeed. As I look back I do marvel and value the fact that my parents allowed me to go to Pakistan, as early as 1952! In terms of physical accomplishment on the ground through such SCI services, one cannot say all that much. Those were sometimes days of hard work. The learning experience to listen, to hear the other's viewpoint brought home, time and again the meaning of the term: 'every coin has its two sides. To accept and reconcile is not easy yet, in life that is the way out … but I (like many others) have remained a slow learner or impatience has set in now, with age!

Going abroad with SCI – 1955-1957

The period 1950-'55 saw me do my post graduation and bag the Certificate Course in German language. SCI services literally affected my career and future growth that created a cleavage of sorts in the family. There was a fair urging to go in for the Indian Foreign Service or the Administrative service and become a Government officer. While all this was under review, a telegram from Dorothy Abbott arrived offering me a UNESCO fellowship to attend Co-ordination Committee for International Voluntary Service sponsored work camp in Sirs El Layyan, Fiume in Egypt, followed by two SCI camps in Sidon and Hezzeen in Lebanon. Advice sought from our Vice Principal, Mr Walker, as to whether that would be the

right course of action, he said: “Six years in College is equal to six weeks overseas—Go” and I quoted that to my parents!

That then led to my movement out which has kept me on the march, literally all these fifty years-- 1955-2005. In Sirs-el-Layyan Eric and Moira Dickson and Hans Peter Mueller handled the work camp attended by the Egyptian, Jordanian, Palestinian, West European, Indian and Pakistani volunteers. Group discussions were largely anti Semitic and anti Anglo-American and blamed them for having left the Palestinians homeless. That cleavage, discord, death and destruction in the Arab lands has remained with us for half a century.

My point made to my peers, from time to time, in Egypt or Lebanon, (and years later in the other Arab states where I served the UN) that they accept the creation of Israel, as we Indians had accepted the division and creation of Pakistan, I was ridiculed by the youthful participants. A John Shiber or a Mohammad said we were a weak people and ought to have fought such a division. That a Gandhi could never ever be a solution to their situation – as it has not been in south Asia, they would retort. No peace maker has ever made a difference in the Arab world. (In 1957 negotiating potential projects for SCI’s International Secretariat in Port Said after 4 weeks of discussions everything fell apart because the host government would not accept SCI volunteers with a Jewish background.) Were they, my peers in workcamps right, I question myself, half a century later? Because today, after four wars, a further division (Bangladesh out of East Pakistan) and the nuclear threat on the threshold within the Indo-Pak scenario, it carries its own treacherous message in the coming decade and beyond. Friendships and mutual respect at a people-to-people level can certainly get replicated, over time. Yet, power politics within a nation or with one’s neighbours will dog our steps, continually. Idealism of the individual activist is fine. It cannot come through where potential combatants wield the ultimate power – UN or no UN!

I returned home for a few months and was immediately involved in the newly formed Indian Branch activities and looking back see how the skills learned then were helpful later on. We were putting together a Constitution and its bye-laws, and we all learned how to conduct meetings and committees, and how to fund raise. One such event was the first international Ball that A.S. Seshan and I organized at the then Wenger’s Restaurant (where I was to first meet my future wife, Sudesh, in 1960!). The ball was inaugurated by the British High Commissioner to India, arranged by Seshan since he worked for the British Information Services at their Library.

My first formative years, in voluntarism left me starry eyed, now when I look back. The 'cherry on the cake' may be the UNESCO fellowship and the next two and a half years in and out of SCI in West Europe. It, however, left me mid-stream, career wise, as I look back now over the years. Unsettling yes it was and my buffer through the years was our joint family system. One somehow carried on!

Back again to Europe, then Asian Secretary

Returning again to Europe, I joined the Russian international workcamp Kupinov-Ukraine (Aug-1958) where Albert Guiborat (Dorothy Abbott's future husband) came in as a volunteer, he brought a note from the International office of SCI, as to whether I would be willing to serve SCI in opening an Asian office, based in Delhi.

I talked with my parents in Delhi and my grandfather in Manchester (at that time), and then decided to move on to Poland - Cisna II (unending road making) workcamp under George Douarte's leadership, and ending finally at Clichy-based SCI office in September 1958. Learning of a different kind: report making, writing the Minutes, including other chores of an NGO was 'a training' of sorts. It is then that I attended the Ablon East West workcamp with Polish volunteers. Living in Clichy's top floor in winter was not easy. My winters in Europe and part of my field work at LSE-London (where Frank Judd's mother taught me) amongst the old peoples' welfare.-.all that and more decided for me that the West was never going to be my 'cup of tea' to ever settle down. The SCI – International Committee decided to take me on as an 'understudy to the IS' which role I fulfilled from September to March/April 1959. (During that time I served for a short while in Le Moulins where M. Ton Ton ran the show.)

The Asian office was set up from my home in May 1959 and operated from there for the rest of that year. It functioned later from a garage in 3, East Park Road, New Delhi from some time in 1960, and where the SCI-Indian Branch operated as well. Valli joined me there as Assistant Asian Secretary. Those were the days of advocacy in India and our neighbouring countries. SCI's name in selective quarters carried one far. Work among the Tibetan refugees was pioneered by Vithal Rao and I at the refugee camps in Assam. The support and advocacy at the right quarters by good friend Mrs Freda Bedi did the trick at the highest levels!. The Central Relief Committee (CRC) and the concerned Ministry in the Govt. allowed only the SCI volunteers from India or overseas to work amongst the refugees. SCI's reputation led to Mrs Tsering Dolma (HH Dalai Lama's sister) request through the CRC for SCI to set up the Kasauli Nursery for the very young since the Dharamsala Nurseries were over crowded and infants were

dying. LTVs from Japan, France, UK etc. rendered some dedicated service and for which SCI was known far and wide. One's advocacy depended on that. The rest of it was moving papers, running around and doing what is called in bureaucratic parlance, co-ordination work—with the national branch and the other NGOs and so on!

Facilitating and programming for the LTVs coming to India followed by Sri Lanka and Pakistan and exchange of volunteers to Europe became one of the tasks, among others. Pioneering SCI style service in Thailand and Malaysia was not easy. Receptivity by the local NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations) or institutions remained our weak links. Pakistan (West) too remained lukewarm despite repeated visits. While East Pakistan with Anowar Hussain and Ataur Rahman with others, moved forward with great ability. SCI struck roots in Sri Lanka, Nepal, East Pakistan, with the Indian and Japanese branches providing good volunteers in the region and beyond to Europe. LTVs from the U.K. started to outnumber the ones coming from the other European branches. Grants from the Lockwood Committee had facilitated that process with an enlargement of volunteer service in that country. Volunteer placement process with other local NGOs became one option for us. Dynamism of the IVS- the British branch - and legitimate "rumblings" from our end at the Asian office and Sato san became an issue during 1963. I was by then getting frustrated with my role getting defined as an "activist"& an AS.!

Working on shoe string budgets, archaic communication channels, traveling by ship to Japan or to Europe (considering what it is now), five years of trying to achieve the unachievable (!) had to come to a conclusion.

I finally put in my written intention to leave the Asian Secretary's post, giving Ralph Hegnauer my formal resignation Nov-Dec 1963, in Marly LeRoi ICM meeting, 12 months ahead of time, that is, to be effective end 1964. Thus an era for me came to a conclusive end. I had been a 'paid' activist before moving on to pastures afresh.

Post SCI career

I set up a lathe manufacturing unit, bequeathed the same to my brother and started working for the Tibetan refugees, voluntarily, later joining His Holiness the Dalai Lama's office professionally, as a General Manager in the resettlement of Tibetan refugees in setting up a lime hydrating Plant in Sataun, Himachal Pradesh, near Dehra Dun. After setting up the Plant, I moved away in November-1967 to join the US Peace Corps as Associate Director in Bhopal-M.P. The above act was based on their repeated

requests to join and after they asked me to visit the Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) in the field.

Looking back on my time with the Peace Corps in India, I now realize that all my previous experiences, especially in the non-bureaucratic world of SCI with its emphasis on reconciliation, enabled me to change the course of the Peace Corps' demise in India. As a direct result of the war that produced the new nation, Bangladesh, in 1972 Moraji Desai ordered the Peace Corps out of India. As I was then the officiating Country Director (as the American was away on a long home leave), I took the initiative to arrange a meeting with Mr. Santhi, the senior most Joint Secretary in the Department of Economic Affairs of the Ministry of Finance, charged with handling the Peace Corps. I counseled that it was best to convert the 'throw-out' dictum to a phased withdrawal – allowing those already serving to stay and those en route to quietly go to their projects, but with no replacements. In this way useful projects could have time to transition without causing an unwanted disruption of services, and an acrimonious public fight in the press could be avoided, avoiding India's getting a bad name with a popular programme with the American public. Mr. Santhi (God bless his soul – he was an honourable senior civil service man and a poet in his own right) agreed to all that I had to say and oversaw its implementation. There was, however, some fall-out with the Americans, as I was summoned three days later to meet with Mr. David Schneider, Deputy Chief of Mission for the U.S. in India. He was not pleased that I had not first consulted with the Embassy before meeting Mr. Santhi, and this should not happen again. Yet he also appreciated what had been done and agreed with it. I told him that it was NOT in my job description that I would have prior consultation with the Embassy before I did my job, and my loyalty was to my flag and the volunteers. Period. We parted as friends! In the end, instead of volunteers being kicked out in early 1972, they were there until early 1975.

For me those had been happy and productive years where support to PCVs and American colleagues created understanding and friendships right through life. However, sadly it caused some alienation from SCI as SCI-ers, of some standing, and friends among them, shared their sense of disappointment that I had joined the Peace Corps. Some saw it as contrary to SCI philosophy and a sell-out, plus there was a general anti-Americanism at the time. Later, my years with UNICEF's Special Child Relief Programme, and the Christian Childrens Fund (CCF) provided me with satisfying job opportunities. Service with UNICEF again brought my professional career to its formal conclusion in 1994.

Concluding thoughts

Work for Peace, creating opportunities for volunteers the world over through organizations like SCI and many more, is a blessing in free and democratic societies. My association with SCI through my younger days saw me through in my professional jobs in all that I did, later. Voluntary service, idealism or SCI staff 'salaries' prepared one for professional tasks elsewhere! (It was not easy to function from Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur on a shoe-string budget cum salary I must say here!) Pastures new provided less of idealism and more of managerial programming and volunteer support with literally hundreds of PCVs and staff because they were blessed with immense resources. Thus, with the spirit of SCI (deeds, not words; dedicated fieldwork, honesty of purpose and integrity) one got valued and accepted in the communities one worked with. I was most proud of administering programmes where thousands of hand pumps were provided to rural and urban slum communities. This taught me how project approaches should evolve into policy, and thus help 'go to scale'. We also provided water seal latrines and affordable healthcare including immunizations and oral rehydration training to mothers and health workers, women's income generation, provision of basic services in scores of small and medium towns, learning and working in districts with mothers and malnourished children with high levels of kwashikor (protein deficiency causing distended bellies, etc.) and marasmus (extreme malnutrition) due to floods and drought. etc., had immense practical, real effect for a large number of people and provided one a sense of having lived up to the standards demanded and expected of each other. My formative years with SCI proved to be a major and a positive factor whether with the office of His Holiness, or the US Peace Corps, the Christian Childrens Fund or UNICEF. It is because of that background and 'training' in SCI that one could move through life! It could never have been otherwise because one could have stagnated in a government or a private sector job in India or even overseas! (In the process, perhaps, a wee bit of India - and I - gained! One normally never says that I know - but I do say it now!)

SCI continues here and elsewhere, with the usual gusto and disagreements on what is acceptable and what is right and what is 'not so right'. I know this from close quarters having picked up threads in the course of the past 9-10 years. SCI is rightly concerned with the very high turnover of volunteers (in Europe) with very few staying on in the fraternity. From Asia I am part of the Volunteer Management System (VMS) team that is trying to find ways to enlarge the core groups of SCI, everywhere. Two years ago I was nominated (unanimously) to take over as President of SCI. An honour, indeed. In view of my years (not that I am that old!) I declined and withdrew at the last moment. I became aware of the generation gap

one has with the current youth and the leadership. I may have caused a disappointment to some of our good friends. But that is easily forgotten. And it was such a pleasure to have met Thedy von Fellenberg at the ICM after 45 years!

I continue to provide time to the LINK magazine of UNICEF, the India Alliance for Child Rights, the Consumer Forum and SCI here and elsewhere…And I always carry with me the image of scores of inspired and highly motivated, good Volunteers. One wishes there was less of stultified, old leadership in the Indian branch of today and more of the young faces and leadership to manage and run the show! The Japanese branch has kind of "weakened" over the years. The Sri Lankans manage their work with some agility despite the issues of war and peace in their lovely island. Malaysian branch has been very active with a dynamic leadership. The movement may have grown to double the number of the earlier days. SCI, all said and done continues to 'muddle through' with a weak financial base, high idealism, continuous evaluations, and strategic planning in its work for peace. One will move on, but there will always be an SCI!!

One query I will throw up before I close: why is it that SCI truly speaking has not been able to 'strike root' in the Islamic world (with the exception of Bangladesh and Malaysia)? 'Investments' of time, human resource and funds were made but to what end? And, why not? Is it where we may have failed, or they have failed us?

In concluding my reflections of my past in SCI and beyond, the following seven issues stand out, also as the challenges of this century:

- SCI service witnesses deep friendships and a genuine respect for each other, despite differences.
- Goodwill, love, respect and friendship beget as much--plus a sense of fulfillment.
- Peace and harmony are viable within oneself and by serving others, rarely otherwise.
- Human rights require practicing and experiencing, not just talking about them.
- Bending State policy to provision basic services to the needy helps to go to scale from pilot projects.
- SCI ideals and practices will continually enrich human endeavour, howsoever small.

– Religious tolerance, gender issues, child and girl's rights must get safe guarded.

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Marianne Boelsma-Studinger and Marius Boelsma, West Pakistan 1952

This is reprinted from the book "We Shall Live in Peace" published by the Asian Secretariat to commemorate SCI's 50th anniversary (1920-1970) and is included because it describes work in Pakistan. Marianne Studinger was an LTV from Switzerland and Marius Boelsma from The Netherlands and they later married. They remained active after returning to The Netherlands.

OUR SCI SERVICE IN PAKISTAN

1952-1954

By

Marianne & Marius Boelsma-Studinger

My (Marianne's) first service, in Pakistan, was at Lalukhet satellite town of Karachi. Coming from Switzerland this was a new and exciting world. The international group built houses for refugees from India. There was also a needle work class for girls. Here we were helped by some Pakistani ladies, especially Mrs. Razvi and her daughter. We lived in tents in a desert area. The new houses for the people went up around us. We had many friends and many onlookers, mainly children who were interested in these queer people. We represented some five nationalities and were particularly lucky to have Mehdi Razvi with us as a long-term volunteer. His translations were of immense value as none of the others understood or spoke Urdu in the beginning.

Our next service (Marius had meanwhile joined the team) was held at another, prospective, satellite town, Latifabad near Hyderabad-Sind. Again refugees were to be resettled here, but contrary to the situation at Lalukhet no refugee had as yet moved into this hot, dusty and bare area. The group

itself lived in a number of the model pacca (substantial) houses built by the government. In these we were exposed to temperatures rising over 110 degrees Fahrenheit, without any fans but with plenty of desert sand being blown into rooms and kitchen with open door and window-holes. Water for drinking and washing had to be fetched from the building-ditches! Here we lived for a great many months in practical isolation, because very few refugees could be persuaded to come and build their own houses

with us. When eventually we had to leave not one refugee had been resettled, nor had any house been completed. It was an extremely difficult project, and we were saved from utter frustration only by an excellent team spirit. We shall never forget the sing-song evenings around the Tilly lamp with the thousands of mosquitoes and other beastly insects joining in the choir!

The third service was at the twin village Babarloi-Dhuan in Khairpur State. Our team now consisted of one American, four Europeans and four Asians, of whom one, Mehdi Razvi, from Pakistan and one, Sathyanarayan, from India. We lived in tents under date palms. It was somehow an experiment for SCI, because here we made an attempt at community development, now a fashionable term, then a new approach to development work. This started a discussion within SCI whether the movement should intentionally embark upon such projects in emerging countries. The Baharloi service proved that an SCI team could be of great value to the local community if it integrates itself by living among the people and heed their 'felt needs'.

Our group got the confidence from the authorities as well as from the different factions in the village. So we were able to lessen frictions between these groups and got the government more interested in the villagers and their concerns. Our dear friend, Hassan Habib, active and interested from the beginning of SCI in Pakistan, was a great help in this project. We shall never forget our attempts to hatch chickens with an incubator, the skepticism of the villagers and the failure of the enterprise because the thermometer was wrong. We got sick of eating eggs that would not hatch! Fortunately, the Pakistani poultry expert who came to our rescue was a more competent machine hatcher and managed to convince the villagers. Our efforts with a domestic science school met with more success, and we even managed to persuade the government to appoint a Pakistani teacher. All in all we had a lot of work and had a lot of fun with the village people.

Because of the paralyzing heat of the Khaipur summer we moved to higher grounds. At Musiarree, in the Murree hills, we found ourselves building a one mile road together with the villagers. Here an ardent wish was fulfilled: a good number of Pakistani college students participated in

the camp. The way of life of their rural country men was a revelation to all of them. We were moreover joined by two experienced SCI members from India: Devinder Das Chopra and Absalom Peters. The villages themselves provided the necessary skills and general enthusiasm for the project was great. One Sunday some eighty people were working at the site. Within two months the road and a twenty foot bridge were completed. The example was stimulating and other villages started to build their own roads and bridges. In this service it was proved that an SCI team can successfully function as a catalyser for self-help projects.

At our last camp in Pakistan, at Baharwal in the Punjab, we stayed for only a few weeks, because our term of service was over. We were then married in Lahore, Ethelwyn Best and aPakistani friend acting as witness. During our honeymoon in India we took part in one more camp in Bihar where we helped villagers whose village had been flooded by the notorious Kosi river.

What had all these services on the sub-continent in common? They were all work camps. We shared picks and shovels, tears and laughter, hopes and concerns with our fellowmen in need.

What did those who we came to help gain from our combined efforts? Only the few houses, the bridge, the school, the road, which we hope all still exist? Was also anything immaterial and immeasurable created? We do not know for sure but we believe that some more understanding and tolerance, some reconciliation and positive relationships were brought forth between people who used to think in negative terms from sheer ignorance or factional or nationalistic thinking.

We do know, however, what we ourselves gained by giving ourselves completely, living and working with so many different people for a common cause, without worries about personal material gain, by just being there and with it. Apart from an immense widening of our horizon and erasing our prejudices, it taught us that, whatever one's origin, solidarity gave us a satisfaction and happiness that will never fade. This we still believe is the greatest value of SCI: that it provides the opportunity to live and work with and among culturally and socially vastly different people on a **basis of equality.** Such profound experiences keep alive the hope for a brighter future of mankind.

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Hiroatsu Sato, long-term volunteer in India, 1956; Asian Secretary, 1965-1968; Visionville 1968-1976

Hiroatsu Sato left Japan for India in 1956 and on his return organized the first SCI workcamp in Japan in 1958 and was a founder of the SCI Japan Branch, later becoming Asian Secretary in 1965. He started Visionville in southern India in 1968 and after moving to the USA in 1976 he was active in reviving SCI activities there in the early 80s. He died in September 2001 and the following is written by his wife based on many conversations.

Crucible

Sato came of age in a country struggling to rebuild after two decades of disastrous wars. As a schoolboy, he believed in Japan's mission in the world: to prevent China from being carved up by Western nations, to liberate colonies, to ensure unhindered access to oil, and to develop a co-prosperity sphere in Asia. In 1935, his family accompanied his father, a respected professor and believer in Japan's mission, to Manchuria where he would design a secondary education system. Sato spent most of his primary school years there, in a Japanese enclave, but gradually the reality of Japanese military tactics in China cracked the façade of idealistic intentions. After his father protested, he was fired and was forced to evacuate his family on his own through the Korean peninsula onto a boat for Japan during the height of the war. Later this was seen as a blessing in disguise because colleagues who had remained were imprisoned by the Soviets. However being uprooted, and thrust back into Tokyo, under almost daily bombardment by American B-29s, had a lasting impact on Sato's psyche.

Sato turned 15 just after the war ended – a year short of being pressed into military service to defend the homeland against the American devils. His class was sharpening bamboo sticks to use in their defense. The myth of Japan's invulnerability included the belief that their islands were divinely protected, proof of which they had never lost a war nor been occupied. Much of what Sato had believed in – or had bought into – was shattered. He realized that the public had been duped. Under the guise of just sounding slogans, leaders had been consolidating their power and became as ruthless, rapacious, and inhumane as those they set about replacing. That loss of innocence combined with the severe hardships of never having enough to eat, his father's loss of employment (he was put on a list of collaborators after the war and barred from teaching) intensified his sense

of struggle. His eldest sister died of tuberculosis, followed soon after by his father's fatal stroke. The life insurance proceeds, meant to take care of the family lasted only two months because of rampant inflation. Sato had just been admitted to the prestigious Tokyo University (Japan's equivalent of Oxford or Harvard) School of Foreign studies that trained diplomats and bureaucrats. Through the help of government subsidies, former colleagues and students of his father, and part-time jobs both Sato and his younger brother completed university. This was the crucible in which Sato's trust, his beliefs and his resolve were formed.

LTV to India, 1956-1958

India became his first window on the new world. Attracted by Gandhi's practice of non-violence and a non-military approach to attaining independence, he joined a Gandhian study group in Tokyo. From this group, a Japanese parliamentarian, Madam Kora who knew international SCI, recruited promising young Japanese for LTV (long-term volunteer) service in India. Seiji Maie was the first Japanese recruited in the early 50s, and 1-2 other Japanese went out every 18-24 months. Sato began the process of applying for a visa ten years after the war ended, 1955. First he had to face censure from his extended family for relinquishing his responsibilities as the eldest son, giving up the traditional career path that his education had guaranteed, and becoming a volunteer. But his crucible had propelled him to another level of responsibility – beyond family or country to that of a citizen of the world.

Strict foreign exchange controls limited travel abroad to businessmen and government officials. Sato's travel to India, by freighter to Calcutta, was paid for from a grant given to SCI to send 2 Japanese to the Kengeri Training Workcamp sponsored by CCIVS (Co-ordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service) in the southern state of Mysore (now Karnataka). Knowing that CCIVS had some relationship to UNESCO, Sato thought this was some high-powered meeting. He brought with him a small metal trunk and 1 metal suitcase, packed with white shirts, 2 suits, work clothes and all sorts of supplies. Instead of a high-powered meeting, he found the most diverse group of people he had ever met and he marvelled at how hard everyone worked. There was someone from the Philippines, from Indonesia, an American couple, Henriette from the Netherlands (the other SCI LTV), Hans Peter Muller, Jean Bazinet, Indra Paul Singh, Indian SCI member and teacher, as part of the assemblage. After the workcamp, CCIVS took them on a study tour, introducing them to other projects and tourist sites. A factor that obviously struck Sato then, as he referred to it often, was the range of contacts – from very high government officials to

lowly farmers – from lavish receptions to a tumbler of hot milk. He learned to be at ease in all situations and find the common humanity – often harder with officials. It was a life-long lesson.

In the `50s the LTV's role was to be in all the workcamps organized, and be available to give talks to local groups and student groups but in between one could pursue their own program. Sato spent time at Sevagram (Gandhi's Ashram) and also joined a month-long walk (pady yatra) led by Vinoba Bhave who followed Gandhian principles. He was collecting land, the Bhoodan movement, to redistribute to the landless and his appeal to landowners was to treat him as another son. Sato was absorbing rural India, but felt a big handicap in not speaking Hindi or fluent English. The utility of a workcamp was reinforced for him because there language did not matter.

In March, 1957 at a workcamp in Orissa state I (his future wife) joined up with the SCI team, having finally been granted a visa, and met Sato for the first time. Although he had majored in English studies at university, his spoken English was very limited. Later he told me listening and speaking English was his most tiring activity but trumping that was his frustration at not being able to communicate. Since I had spent some time in England with another SCI Japanese with very poor English, somehow I was used to the accent and incomplete sentences. Sato wanted to participate in some of the evening programs beyond singing *'Moon Over Ancient Castle'* in Japanese, when we shared information about our countries. One-to-one, without time pressure, he said it was easier to express himself, so he requested that I take notes and then present Japan to the other workcampers. With increased opportunity and my patience, he became more fluent and soon dispensed with a spokesperson and the hint of his persona as Asian spokesperson in SCI meetings emerged.

In 1956-57, LTVs were given a pocket allowance of Rs. 20, around $4 monthly and when travelling a food allowance of Rs. 2/8 annas (before going on the decimal system). Sato was a smoker and virtually all of his pocket money went to cigarettes. At that time there was a lot of counterfeiting both of coins and bills so one needed to learn how to test coins and examine bills. Unfortunately Sato had been given a Rs.20 bill that all the vendors refused, but he was desperate because he needed that money. We hatched a plan that the next time we were in Delhi and in Connaught Place where one could find nice restaurants that were dimly lit, we would pass on this bill. Our plan was successful and the relief and happiness remain vivid memories.

Another vivid memory was crossing no-man's land into Pakistan in 1957. Foreigners could still travel overland from Europe to India and some

took buses or cars, or even hitchhiked, though the Kyber Pass was noted to be very dangerous. However, there was no direct route between India and Pakistan, so when Ethelwyn Best sent Sato and myself to Pakistan as the international representatives for a workcamp, we had to take a train to the border. Then we had to get down and walk across an empty patch to a guard house, and show our visas to the guards. We were the only ones, so over cups of tea we were told what to see and told to separate as I must now travel only in the Ladies Compartment. In Karachi we were recipient of the legendary hospitality and heard the reciprocal hardships caused by the Partition that uprooted so many people. There was a small, but vibrant SCI group with some returned from Europe, and there was hope for an exchange with India.

At our last workcamp in Srimadhopur (Rajasthan), a number of significant things happened. First of all, our replacements had arrived – Joop Koning from the Netherlands, Jean Sueur from Switzerland and Henri Majewski from France – and we realized that this ever-unfolding adventure was drawing to a close. This rare period of a somewhat vagabond existence was ending. We were valued just for ourselves or at least because we were foreigners, so we fulfilled expectations just by being. 'pressure-free'. Additionally' we felt we were old hands – having learned to bargain, how to stake out the wooden luggage racks as a berth on long train journeys, to carry water in earthen jugs to cool it. Sato said that he realized how little one needed to live on, especially in a tropical climate and that he could be at home in a variety of circumstances. Second, was the first contact with Valli Chari in her first workcamp. Sato was impressed by her ability to express herself without being too aggressive – independent but still Asian. She carried an enthusiasm for new concepts and a special energy that also caught the visiting International Secretary's, Dorothy Abbott Guiborat, attention. Sato also caught Dorothy's attention. She encouraged Sato to organize a workcamp in Japan upon his return.

In the final weeks of our team in India, I had decided to return home via the Pacific, instead of Europe. We left Calcutta together bound for Yokohama on a British-India ship; he travelling deck class but with an upgrade to take Chinese meals, and me allowed no lower than second class, but with a choice of Chinese meals. Rangoon (still open to foreigners), Penang, Singapore and Hong Kong were our ports of call and helped us transition to the fast modernizing post-war Japan. He became a tour guide of Japan for me prior to my departure for the States. We both decided that this adventure could not end so I signed up to return to study Japanese in the fall, and married on my return.

SCI in Japan

Four months after he returned to Japan in 1958 Sato organized the first small workcamp, with only Japanese participants, on a small island in Tokyo Bay, an overnight boat trip from Yokohama. The National Self-Defense Force (an army was prohibited in the Constitution, but a Self-Defense Force was permitted) selected an uninhabited area of the island to build a missile testing site. Islanders were deeply divided, and various political parties sent in outside organizers for protests. Sato found that child care while women worked in the fields was an issue, and the group collaborated in getting land for a kindergarten, and in subsequent workcamps worked on building a playground and assisting. Families from both sides of the divide were engaged in the venture and cooperation cooled tempers. Students who attended were impressed by this constructive, practical activity and formed the core of later work in Japan. In September after that workcamp, I came to study Japanese and we married in Tokyo.

Sato continued to organize a variety of workcamps, especially Leadership Training camps and even wrote a leader's handbook, later translated into English, so there was a pool of leaders. Taking from the French Branch's example of relief work, after an earthquake in northern Japan, SCIers raised money at railway stations and sent a team to help. The first Asian Secretary, Devinder Das Chopra, visited the Group in 1961 after the birth of our second daughter and subsequently arranged for Indian MTVs to come – Atma Singh and Kurian Paul were among those and we recruited among American students in Japan, thus gradually internationalizing the camps. Around this time students from South Korea came to participate in Japanese workcamps, and eventually these experienced ones began to organize activity in South Korea. Valli Chari, from the Asian Secretariat, also visited in 1963 and stimulated interest, promoting an exchange of volunteers.

During this period our home was the gathering place and contact point, even after Japan attained Branch status – 1962 I think. With a growing family we supported ourselves by teaching English in our home, making subtitles for "B" Japanese movies exported to Hong Kong and translating scripts for dubbing American TV programs. We could set our own schedule, and Sato was able to go to workcamps and help the new Secretary, Fumi Ono, who came daily to our house. Increasingly, LTVs who had finished their time in India, took the MM (Messargeries Maritime) boat line on to Yokohama – like Thedi von Fellenberg, Elizabeth Crook, Cathy Hambridge Peel and Ann Smith Kobayashi (from Thailand).

Asian Secretary, *1965-1968*

Once Devinder and Valli decided to move on from the Asian Secretariat, Sato was approached. A month after our third child was born, in 1964, he set off by boat to Vladivostok, across Siberia to France for the November International Committee Meeting (ICM) where his appointment was finalized and he met the International Secretary, Ralph Hegnauer. Because of tensions between India and Pakistan and Ceylon, visas to travel to each other's country were difficult so the ICM asked Sato to explore setting up an office outside of India. Since Devinder had made good contacts and initiated workcamps in Malaysia, that seemed a promising location. First, Sato returned by boat, via India for a handover of important information, and stopped off in Taiwan to explore some contacts there. For the next six months the office operated out of our home, as we awaited a response from the government in Kuala Lumpur for residence visas. Finally, a letter came suggesting that we come on a temporary visa and pursue it in person. We disembarked in Singapore on the day it separated from Malaysia, in 1965, with confused custom officials finally accepting our Malaysian tourist visas.

Thanks to a grant from an American foundation to promote exchange of volunteers within Asia, there were resources to stimulate activities. It also meant that Sato was on the road (strictly speaking air as our toddler would point to a plane and say 'Dada' from seeing him off on planes) half of the year. There was promising activity in Thailand, Nepal and Ceylon, with cyclone relief work in East Pakistan, in addition to all the usual SCI meetings. Fortunately Masahiro Shintani was appointed Assistant Asian Secretary in December 1966, spreading out the office work and travel. Just 3 months after his arrival, the Malaysian cabinet finally made a decision not to permit the Asian Secretariat to establish an office in Malaysia. They wanted SCI to disavow work with conscientious objectors, because they were concerned that pacificism meant communism (this was not long after the British had quelled a communist insurgency there) and questioned Sato's travel to South Vietnam where he explored work with Buddhist groups. As an American I could enter Singapore without a visa so was sent to talk with Singapore officials. Being a duty-free port, they had no problems with SCI and immediately granted us permission. The same day I found a lovely old house on stilts, with servants quarters that could be used for an office, about 10 miles west of city center. The office was relocated within two weeks and proved much more accessible. Singapore was a port of call for the Messargeries Maritimes boats so volunteers could easily drop in.

After visiting so many SCI long-term projects, Sato began to question their inherent structure, with its built-in turnover creating a distance from the

local community. An alternative formulated in his mind for an agricultural project. He envisioned permanently settling on the project site in the role of a “good neighbor” to model new agricultural techniques so that development would occur organically. Resigning in early 1968, succeeded by Navam Appadurai, with Masahiro remaining in Singapore, Sato went to India in late 1968.

Visionville, 1968-1977

Sato found land 17 miles from Bangalore and Visionville was formed. He and other SCI LTVs established an Asian Regional Training Center at the farm – a big name for a program that gave orientation to incoming and outgoing M/LTVs and hosted workcamps. We were also fortunate to have LTVs working with us on the farm plus the initial assistance of Kurian Paul, and looked forward to the day when two other couples, the Seshans and Parashiva Murthy plus family, were able to join in a co-operative venture.

We started from scratch: having a temporary house built, drilling a well, making irrigation facilities, bringing in electricity, etc. Aided by the fruits of a steep learning curve, the overgrazed, eroded land was gradually transformed into a working enterprise. Over time it seemed that trust was being built, and small effects were seen, validating Visionville’s initial premise. However, other forces were working under the surface as the traditional power structure began to feel threatened. Month after month passing by the unfinished one-room school in a nearby village, Sato inquired about the hold-up. He was told money had run out – actually had been siphoned off by a corrupt leader. Sato proposed to provide labor through a workcamp if the leader would raise some money for their expenses. It was completed but also it had offended a powerful person. Rumors were planted that Visionville operated a counterfeiting press, and that with the steady stream of foreigners observed, it was a CIA outpost. That fed into the paranoia caused during the Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi. Policy was to deny visas to non-government sponsored individuals, especially those living in village areas so we got a letter telling us to leave with only what we could carry.

After denial of an appeal to the Home Ministry, we left Visionville in late November of 1976. As we prepared to board our plane in Bangalore, on the other side of the glass partition, the Parashiva Murthy family was walking to baggage claim. Their move from Canada to India had been in the works for over three years, and they decided to come despite our impending departure. Martin and Juliet Pierce were the ‘Visionville liaison team’ and transmitted the wheres and whys of daily operations. Subsequently the

whole property was sold to a poultry factory which later went bankrupt and now the land has been reclaimed by bushes.

Sato looked back on Visionville as a rich learning experience and felt that the 'tuition' paid was well worth while, infinitely better than university. Aside from practical learning, and village customs, the living and working together with so many people willing to question one's own and other's foibles created a rare atmosphere. There was no place to hide or disappear. Crops and livestock are relentless taskmasters. In retrospect, being in touch with nature's cycles, yet stimulated by other seekers, meant we were provided an environment never replicated in urban settings.

Before his death, Sato also likened the rise and fall of Visionville, as well as many other things he had been passionate about, to the Hindu concept of 'lila'. The 'play of life' reflected in building sand castles at the sea shore that are wiped out by the incoming tide and built again the next day. The thing that remained, however, was his feeling of connectedness to other people. Some were brief encounters, others were paths that crossed again and again. We all enrich each other's lives in ways unbeknownst to us, and a lifelong association with SCI has been a good catalyst for that phenomenon.

Conclusions

Being accurate as to how Sato distilled his long SCI involvement is a challenge because either they are intertwined with mine or the echoes of what he repeated over and over until it finally became mine. As trite as it may sound, the 'Deeds, not words' became our organizing principle and has remained a solid lifelong principle. The mechanism of a workcamp also has not lost its appeal as a tool of bringing people together to do something practical. Contrary to those who said that projects were hard to find in a modernized society, Sato felt there was more need than ever. In the U.S. he led its first workcamp with a Navajo community and one in a Philadelphia ghetto with tense racial divides. With increasing polarization today, I know Sato would be sure to find a project to bring Muslim, Jews and Christians together. He remained fully committed to the reconciliation roots of early SCI, believing that working and sharing meals together in challenging conditions was vital in combating the propagandizing media that demonizes the 'other'. Even if it is only a small number, the effect can gradually expand mirroring Pierre Cérésole's dictum: "If it takes a thousand steps, begin the first one today".

On an organizational level, Sato remained active as a member of the International Committee and International Executive Committee during

various waves of issues. Sato, along with Valli, was a vocal critic of 'Eurocentrism' within SCI. This was manifested by its willingness to send large numbers of Europeans to Asia and Africa (because government grants were there) without receiving volunteers from those countries. A token exchange program was not enough in his opinion. He often faulted European branches for looking at the world through its own prism, rather than as an international body. He was very sensitive to unspoken assumptions of superiority or subtle paternalism that he felt lay just beneath the surface in attitudes towards Asia.

During the period when many SCI Branches and Commissions began taking what he saw as 'sides' and were looking at injustices caused by other countries rather than at the injustices in their own backyard; he emphasized the principle of reconciliation. Some called this being a 'purist', but Sato thought it was an immutable principle of SCI. He recognized that SCI needed to be forever evolving and adapting to changing conditions such as the move away from the initial 'pick and shovel' workcamps in the `30s to the work-study camps in the mid-`50s and long-term projects. However there were certain core principles that needed to be retained, or SCI's reason to exist would dissolve into being a generic social gathering. A unique aspect of SCI that Sato found valuable was its national structure. The Secretaries and committees were from that country, so knew its customs and ways of doing things. Yet these national branches did co-operate. He used to contrast it with the Quaker Centers in India, Japan or Singapore. Their members were nationals, but the head was usually British or American and followed their mother country's structure. Initially aid organizations followed this pattern, and he felt SCI had something to offer because its local staff had an intimate knowledge of local conditions.

As an individual Sato was forever marked in his formative years by how he had been lied to by politicians and by Japan's defeat. In his last years he said, however, that he was still hopelessly Japanese – in his training and culinary preferences. Yet he also felt that he was a citizen of the world and could be at home anywhere. His SCI involvement had become his new crucible.

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Phyllis (Clift) Sato, long-term volunteer to Asia, 1956-1958

Phyllis (Clift) Sato, was part of a 3-person team of LTVs (long-term volunteers) in India-Pakistan in 1957-1958; married fellow LTV, Hiroatsu Sato, shared in SCI office duties in Tokyo, Malaysia and Singapore from 1960-1968, was part of Visionville in south India from 1969-1977 and helped in reviving SCI-USA during the 1980s. Her post SCI years were spent in Virginia.

London 1956

Two months after graduating from college (in 1956), sleeping bag and rucksack on my back, I stood scanning the foggy platform at Waterloo where a much delayed boat train from Southampton had deposited me. The Secretary of IVSP (International Voluntary Service for Peace, the British branch of SCI), Michael Sorenson, had written to say he would fetch me to their hostel at 19, Pembridge Villa, near Kensington Gardens. My odyssey had begun the previous fall when I had met an American Quaker in Washington D.C. As part of the work-study program of my college (Antioch) I was working on the India desk of the International Cooperation Agency, and researching in my free time for my thesis on grassroots community development in India. I wanted to go to India but was rapidly becoming disillusioned with the bureaucratic approach that was both unwieldy and political. I had my feelers out to find other avenues to go to India - the country of Mahatma Gandhi and the successful non-violent independence struggle (my primary interest).

This interest had a wider genesis arising out of my ‘grand tour’ of Europe the year before. Being impecunious students, my old high school friend and I fulfilled our travel dream by hitch-hiking and youth hostelling for 4 months. An unexpected dividend was the deep impact of some conversations with fellow youth hostellers – lots of Australians and Germans – and with some of our rides. Memories of the war were still fresh and cars were to be shared. One German driver related his POW (prisoner of war) experiences and his dreams for his 14 year old son to be able to travel. He exhorted us to promote such opportunities, so that young people could meet each other and create an environment where wars would be unthinkable. That seed was planted in me and enriched by the success of non-violent ways to ‘struggle’, so India beckoned me.

My Quaker friend suggested work camps and gave me a newsletter from SCI-India which contained the editor’s name and address - A.S.

Seshan. Warmly replying to my inquiry about volunteering, Seshan explained that long-term volunteers (LTVs) had to apply through the British Branch but he would recommend me. Since there used to be a 'home' rule, meaning you had to have workcamp experience in your own country before LTV service, I was told I could do this in England, even though I already had had lots of weekend experience with the Quakers and a short-term work camp in Germany with IJGD (International Jugend Gemeinschaft Dienst) the year before. I think they also wanted to vet me before sending me on to India as they had had a string of a few recalcitrant LTVs – one who refused to return, one who wanted to take an elephant back home overland and were the antithesis of the cohesive, disciplined teams of Ralph Hegnauer and Dorothy Abbott's day.

Arriving at the tail-end of the summer season I was immediately sent to back-to-back workcamps. The first was in Bethnal Green doing 'redecoration' at a community center. Devinder Das Chopra, from India, was the leader of that very international workcamp and I remain in touch with him to this day. I met my first Japanese ever - Noby Yamada, sent to Europe as a Medium Term Volunteer, and an Israeli, Meyer Rubenstein. There were no English women, and I recall only one Englishman, who was being sent to Africa. He was very helpful with culinary tips and taught me how to make 'toad in the hole'. Somehow, being the first woman on the scene, I was designated co-leader (a recent replacement for the term Head Sister) and that meant I was in charge of the accounts and cooking. I had to wrestle with unfamiliar shillings and pences, greengrocers where I had no clue about the appropriate range of price and worst of all my poor cooking skills. Boiling water, frying an egg and opening a tin of soup were my forte. Happily there were two French women, a Swedish one and Rose from the Gold Coast (now Ghana), so together we struggled and managed to feed the crew and even take turns at painting. The next camp was one of a new breed – work and study camp, though I can't remember the study topic now – at a youth hostel in the Cotswolds. Happily the wife of the warden managed all the food with campers' help in cutting preparations and cleaning up.

At the conclusion of my British workcamp introduction I remember being convinced that this is the way I wanted to go. Sometimes the work project seemed a little vague, and chaotic, but the format was very democratic and the rather basic accommodations seemed to cement bonds by roughing it together. Fascinating snatches of conversations happened every day and mutual understanding seemed imminently achievable. However, from a 50 year perspective, I realize we were a self-selected grouping, with the common glue being a desire for mutual understanding, so we were already biased.

Back at the IVSP hostel/office at the end of the summer season, Michael put me to work typing and filing. The 1956-58 LTV team for India, Hiroatsu Sato from Japan, Henriette von Brynn, from the Netherlands and myself was set. Henriette had come to the office/ hostel for final briefings before she flew out to co-represent SCI (with Hiroatsu Sato) in the CCIVS (Co-ordination Committee for International Volunteer Service) project in Kengeri, Mysore State (now Karnataka). The opportunity to meet her beforehand made the prospect of going to a country where I knew no one seem less daunting. As she was bringing a soprano recorder with her, she suggested I buy one so that we could play duets together and have some access to music. Little did I know that it would be 7 months before we could actually play duets together as I was stuck in Europe waiting for my Indian visa. While waiting, Dorothy Abbott, the International Secretary, suggested to Michael that I come to Paris to help out with the clerical work of the International Secretariat and receive some orientation as she had been in India.

Paris-Clichy, 1956-1957

The summer before I had spent some time in the student quarter of Paris and remembered the broad boulevards, graceful bridges and lovely open spaces. It did not prepare me for the starkness and grayness of the depressing environment in Clichy, home of SCI offices. I learned one of SCI's tenets then – that we live at the level of the people we are working with. In one of the several buildings around a courtyard that contained several latrines for the inhabitants, the French branch, staffed by Etienne Reclus, occupied the ground floor with rooms for his family, and a small dark communal kitchen. The International office was on another floor, with a small room adjoining it housing the secretary and the top floor was an unfinished attic with many cots for any volunteer passing through. Lying on my cot I could see the sky through the many cracks in the wall and at night hear the rats at work. I remember recalling Dicken's novels. The spartan living conditions were more than made up for by the friendliness of people, especially an English-speaking Dorothy who knew so much about SCI and who was an advocate of many innovations. We take women in administrative positions for granted now, but in 1956 she was still in the pioneering mode, especially in heavily Swiss influenced SCI, and in retrospect I suspect Dorothy had to overcome traditional expectations of a woman's place. She had the 'fight' and vision to do that. Additionally, she was responsible for bringing in a subsequent tier of activists.

Normally we think it is the big events and big ideas that stand the test of time. But in my four months in Clichy, I remember small things. Dorothy

taught me to take the tea pot to the kettle, rather than bring up the boiling water from the ground floor to the tea pot in the office. The mid-morning tea break, with biscuits, was always a highlight during which we would discuss the day's mail. In the evening, I remember finishing *The Brothers Karamazov*, several Henry James novels and Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*, sitting close to the coal-fired stove in the office before trudging off to the cold attic.

After Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, a crisis deepened, leading to an Anglo-French invasion the end of October, and many items became difficult to buy - among them coal, and we had to ration stove times. One of our efforts to keep warm was to go swimming (in American terminology) at the public indoor pool a brisk 25 minute walk away, where we could wash our hair afterwards. Coming back from one such expedition, we were greeted with a little kerosene stove in front of the door, with a note saying it was courtesy of friends from the French branch. I had always thought them rather aloof and uncommunicative, but that one act won me over for life. On top of the Suez crisis, the USSR moved into Hungary on November 4, 1956 to put down their revolution. The French branch became active in helping refugees resettle in Paris, so my weekends became full of weekend workcamps. It also gave me an indelible sense of how close everything was in Europe, without oceans on both sides to act as insulators, so that when one country sneezed, another one felt it.

As part of my orientation, Dorothy arranged, through her contacts at UNESCO, for me to go to a Pakistani family's apartment off the Champs-Elysees a couple mornings a week to help the wife clean, learn some Urdu, and Pakistani cooking. On paper that sounded good, but in practice it was dismal. The wife, who had minimal English, was used to having servants, and me, I was used to not being treated like a servant and housecleaning was not a priority for me. I had helped my mother do spring and fall cleaning when we washed the windows, but this woman wanted me to wash windows weekly, and dust and sweep whenever I was there. That seemed pointless to me, as there was just the two of them, yet she would point out a streak or a place I had missed. Initially she gave me food in the kitchen but finally her husband insisted I eat lunch with them at the table. It became another indelible experience and genesis of a lifelong sympathy for servants, yet in fairness to her, over weeks we both worked out more accommodation to each other.

Back to London - 1957

Just as I was feeling acclimated to my surroundings and looking forward to spring in Paris, word came that my Indian visa had finally been

granted and I needed to make final preparations from London. I arrived back to a sea of change. Due to rising real estate prices it had made sense to sell Pembridge Villas and move further out where it was cheaper, and use the gain for operating expenses. The replacement building, 72 Oakley Square, was in need of workcampers for fixing it up. Instead of the previous hostel, we had a makeshift environment and everyone pitched in with the painting. Another change was occurring. It was around this time that IVS dropped Peace from its name, leaving the official name of the British Branch as International Voluntary Service. Not being a party to these discussions, I gathered one motivation was to disassociate itself from left-wing groupings. I thought it a pity that peace was thought to be tarnished. Yet it was also argued to me that "peace" was not in the parent name of SCI and each should have three letters. Yes, everything can be rationalized.

Continuing with the little memories, I recall feeling so at home back in an English speaking country, reveling in understanding all the conversations around me despite the damp, chilly London days of late February. I felt so unrestricted. I was told to go to the library to bone up on health precautions, and to read up on ways to prevent dysentery while cooking in India. I also got requisite vaccinations and a physical declaring me fit for the tropics (but the doctor told me I should be bearing children in my prime - 22 years old - not going off to India). In between everything else I remember taking advantage of stall prices for the Royal Ballet, and the play that was the rage - *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne. Somehow the passage of time, combined with the winter months, had contrived to dampen my original enthusiasm for going to India. I was tired of living out of a small rucksack. There was that small voice tempting me to change my mind and go back home to get on with a career. But my stubbornness and reluctance to break a commitment kept this only a dialogue in my head, and nearly 50 years later I marvel at how changed my life (and my children's and grandchildren's) would have been if I had given in to that temptation.

India - 1957

With the Suez Canal still closed, the Polish Steamship that SCI usually used was not operating, and the ones going around the Cape were as costly as airfare, so I flew to Bombay (Mumbai). To this day I can still feel the welcome blast of heat as I deplaned, and my immediate uplift of spirits as the brilliant blue sky arched overhead. Anything seemed possible in that friendly climate. Even the shantytowns lining the road into the city did not seem depressing because the outdoors compensated.

After settling in at the YWCA, I was told I had a visitor – Jerome Diniz, the SCI representative in Bombay, who had missed me at the airport. Since I was expected at a workcamp in Orissa already in progress he took me to the train station to get my concession ticket (1/2 price off an already ridiculously low 3rd class fare) for the next day. When Ethelwyn Best (British representative of IVS/SCI) met me at the Delhi train station 24 hours later, she later told me she thought my choice of colors in blouses was odd. But it was a white blouse that had turned dirty gray from the soot blowing in the windows that had only bars on them, with shutters that could be lowered in case of rain. She treated me to a cycle-rickshaw that took us to the SCI office in Mehrauli. Rickshaw-wallahs were never confused because one could always say Qutab Minar (an ancient obelisk) and be dropped off to find the former Buddhist center, now SCI, amidst ruins of temples. Ethelwyn used kerosene lanterns, fetched water from a well, and we had unique cool, odor-free latrines left by previous generations of monks. That night she pulled charpois (stringed cots) out for us to sleep under the stars. I have never enjoyed the full moon as much as my time in India. In many venues the moon did not have to compete with electricity and at times one could actually read by moonlight.

Again I was shuffled off after one night to get to the 'service' where Henriette was eagerly awaiting the presence of another woman. Train journeys were always this pot-luck adventure introducing a hodge-podge of interesting people. In my first segment there was a young couple with a baby. The wife explained that she had gone back to her home for her confinement as is the custom, and her husband told me that he had studied in the States to become an evangelical missionary and they were going to Madras to open up a dispensary in the slums and do outreach work. They shared their home-cooked meals with me and invited me to visit them in Madras which I did every time I went through there. After I had changed trains to head eastward to Orissa state, I was in a compartment with some men playing cards. One of them told me he read palms, and after telling me the month I was born in (determined from the slant of my fingers) I was impressed. He then pointed out a line that said I would marry and die in a foreign land and have three children. I was skeptical, but so far two of the three predictions have been correct.

Ethelwyn had given me the address of a missionary in the capital of Orissa for overnight accommodation, the name of the bus line and the name of the village nearest to the work camp, and telegraphed my arrival day so I thought I was all set. The first wrinkle came when I found that the missionary was out of town, but the gatekeeper, seeing my white face, said I could sleep on the veranda. I was surprised by the arrival of another missionary the next morning – even without telephones the grapevine

worked fine. She took me out to breakfast and to the bus station, instructing the driver where I was to be let down. The further we got from the capital, the more sparse the towns became and finally the landscape became what they called 'jungle'. My own concept of jungle was of the Amazon, with lots of impenetrable greenery.

This was nearing the end of the dry season and it seemed rather barren countryside to me, but I knew the workcamp was with adavasi (aboriginals) to whom land had been given through Vinoba Bhove's gramdan movement. When the bus driver motioned for me to get down, it was in the middle of nowhere and the driver eloquently shrugged his shoulders. Seeing some thatched huts in a distance I followed the path and said the name of my destination, "Deopottangi", to some women who had the courage to greet me. When they gestured a path in the opposite direction, I wondered, but thought there was no alternative. That path led me to a small creek that was fordable, so off came my shoes, and I took the path up on the other side. Just as I was despairing of finding any human, I dead ended at a wider path and saw a man coming on a bicycle. I gestured for him to stop and repeated "Deopottangi" and he replied in English, "Are you looking for the workcamp?" It was the workcamp leader, Parashiva Murthy, and he was going to fetch the mail, amongst which would be the telegram announcing my arrival.

Workcamp in Deopottangi, Orissa, 1957

Arriving at the workcamp, a few campers were lingering over their lunch, including Henriette, a welcome sight, and two rather vocal Englishmen and a Dutch guy who had come overland to India and planned on going east. These world travelers on a shoestring budget were quite common at that time. One of them, Ian, asked me to tell them of the latest plays in London, so I could catch them up on *Look Back in Anger*. There was a handsome oriental face, whom I deduced to be Sato – the third team member. His English was very minimal and everyone told me his nickname was 'the sleeping Buddha' because he slept through most meetings. He smiled and attempted no conversation.

They oriented me to the work project which was under of supervision of a Bhoodan worker, a recent college graduate in literature, as I recall. As the adavasis were basically hunter-gatherers, the donated land was to be for a communal garden and fields. Since the terrain was hilly, the first order of business was to construct contour bunds, using pick axes. (A pick and shovel work camp!) Contrary to usual SCI principles stating that work campers should not compete with paid labor, Bhoodan was paying men from the area to work with us. But the day I had arrived was the start of

some feast period, and all the men had gone out hunting. That night they roasted a wild boar on a spit, and had a kind of palm wine (toddy), and a dance. Men formed an outer circle and women an inner circle going in opposite directions, then with a shout everything was reversed. Worn out from all my travel, I disappeared early and was surprised to hear the festivities still going when I woke up the next morning. Needless to say, the workers did not show up for several days.

Parashiva and the LTV team were to be in the workcamp for six weeks, with fresh teams coming in every two weeks. To Henriette and my great relief, three Indian girls from the Bombay area joined the second batch and we had someone in the kitchen who knew what they were doing. Just to get a wood fire going to boil water was an immense chore, but having to make chappatis was even more frustrating. We would just finish preparing one meal, when we would have to start all over again. We enlisted men to help and were pleasantly surprised by their skill, even though heretofore they had only watched their mothers cook. With more kitchen help we were able to rotate out of the kitchen and out to the project which seemed like a vacation – at least without responsibility to prepare something to please diverse tastes.

During one of the periods, A.S. Seshan who had replied to my initial query about volunteering, had taken a leave from his job at the British Council and came to the workcamp. He showed up with a packet of ground coffee, a rare treat for us all, and that cemented our life-long friendship. Here was someone whose wit I could really appreciate and he was a breath of sophistication from the city.

Henriette, trained as a veterinarian, and carrying a first-aid supply, became the outreach worker. She diagnosed numerous children with scabies, and soon mothers were bringing their children to be treated. That seemed to me to be one of most concrete, though unplanned, benefits of the project. Growing up around agriculture, I could see that the bunds were not going to last through one season of heavy rains because they were at the wrong angle, and the virgin soil had been leached by run-offs and would need fertilizers that were not available. Furthermore, the rhythm of the men's lives was not suited to tending plants, and the women did not appear experienced either. However, since I felt that the workcamp leader and Bhoodan worker had planned the project, it was my place to participate and keep my doubts to myself. As often happened in workcamps, intangible benefits prevailed. Participants, who had never lifted a pick ax before or carried water or scrubbed pots, were being exposed to the dignity of manual labor – an ever present phrase of Indian SCI in those days. They were sharing meals with rice-eaters from the south, chapatti eaters from the north and mixing with foreigners. Who knows what affect it had on us

all? One of the participants was from Calcutta, Sushil Bhattacharjee, who later served a stint as Indian Secretary.

One of the unusual omens from that workcamp was a hike planned for our rest day. More than a dozen workcampers set out to climb the nearest mountain (really a large hill). Henriette decided to stay back, but another American girl, Edie, who had recently arrived, joined in. At some point it started to rain, and one by one people started turning back. In the end, 4 people reached the original objective – Edie, Satish Saberwal from Calcutta, Sato and myself. Thoroughly drenched we practically slid our way back down from bush to bush. Little did we know then but within 18 months both couples would marry. At the time there was no inkling – just 4 stubborn people facing a challenge.

The year sped by

Thus began for me a memorable and life-changing year. It also allowed me to be present at the formation of the Indian Branch. When there were no workcamps, Ethelwyn arranged for our early program – escaping the heat of the plains to stay and help the Bakers who were running a hospital in the hills of the Almora District, and then sending us to Karachi, by rail, to help in a work camp. On our return, Parashiva Murthy had taken over as Indian Secretary, and the British Branch had officially relinquished responsibility. The offices moved to Quonset huts in Faridabad – a short bus ride from Delhi, or we could hop on one of the many trains passing through. Previously SCI had helped the refugees from the partition of India after independence and Faridabad had been one of the sites, so they let SCI have 3 Quonset huts.

The last workcamp for our team was in Shrimadapur, Rajasthan, sponsored by the Sharmas who had been in one of the batches at the Orissa workcamp. Our replacements, Joop Konig (Dutch), Jean Seuer (Swiss), and Henri Majewski (French) had arrived and were overlapping with us. Also coming to that camp was Valli Chari, the sister of a committee member, Chari. Sometimes first meetings can be striking and lead to unexpected connections. When Valli became Assistant Asian Secretary she came to Japan, prior to her marriage with Seshan. Our many long talks in Japan formed a deep tie that has intertwined our families. The special and lasting friendships spawned often in first workcamps remain for me the crème of the SCI experience, and remain long after the project has disintegrated. I am not sure that Pierre Cérésole intended this, but this has had the biggest impact on me.

Another special occurrence in my final workcamp in India, was the visit of Dorothy Abbot. Not only did Dorothy make her first contact with Valli, encouraging her to remain active and bring women into SCI India, subsequently inviting her to Europe, she also had serious talks with Sato. She was very keen that workcamps begin in Japan. A number of Japanese LTVs had left their mark in India and Europe, but as yet none of them had organized a workcamp in Japan. She was very persuasive, and within my hearing I heard Sato reply to her that 'I will devote my life to SCI'. Afterwards I teased him about using the wrong verb, thinking that he did not intend such a wholesale commitment. He proved me wrong and within six months of returning to Japan he organized the first workcamp in Nijima, site of a tense standoff dividing the island regarding the placement of a missile site by the Self-Defense Force of Japan.

Final thoughts on my Indian sojourn

My time in India seemed to fly by, and we were one of the last teams of so called 'all-rounders', a euphemism for unskilled volunteers who attended workcamps wherever they were held, visited local SCI groups, stayed in workcampers' homes and spent down time in the office or ashrams. Later LTVs would go to projects as an agricultural specialist, physical therapist, nurse and so on. I particularly felt like my major role was a grassroots ambassador – making friends, exchanging hopes and fears, and experiencing our basic humanness. In retrospect I now feel so lucky to have known India during this period. At the time it seemed to me teeming with people, in comparison with the wide open spaces of the States, but the total population was less than 500,000,000 people. On my last visit, four years ago, it was already over a billion and the congestion in the big cities made me long for the more leisurely, more somnolent state (a mid-day shut down during the heat of the day) and being able to easily share the road with bullock carts, tongas and meandering cows. I feel blessed to have known the slower paced life even though a lot of modern conveniences were not available. I had come after the ravages of the Partition had receded and during the growing confidence of managing their own affairs, and implementation of Five Year Plans. Nehru was still a leader in the non-aligned states grouping, and Gandhian/Bhoodan ideals were given much more than lip-service. SCI was one means of bringing people together, without governmental involvement, and there was an eagerness for such mixing.

SCI experience from a 2000 perspective

As SCI introduced me to my life-long partner, SCI has had an enormous effect on my life. Again, I know that this was not an objective of SCI, but in addition to life-long friendships, this has been a practical by-product of SCI work camps. I cannot point to a practical effect that our work left, but the mere fact that a handful of people shared their lives for a 2-3 week period may have had an immeasurable effect. The power of an idea or vision striking at the right moment may have changed thinking or superseded old prejudices.

With the internet and the speed of global news, today's youth have a much wider exposure to cultures other than their own. Certainly there is a lot more superficial knowledge or virtual knowledge available. Unfortunately that does not impart the essence of struggling together, under often difficult conditions, to accomplish something and to make a direct connection with strangers that happens in workcamps. It is an invaluable to experience the person behind labels/caricatures that our sound-bite culture doles out. Having to solve together such basic tasks as agreeing on a cooking rota, work schedules, or dealing with slackers means that we can form the basis for negotiating even thornier issues.

Even in our technological societies of the 21st century, there seem to be numerous opportunities for the personal touch in bringing Muslims, Jews, Christians, Hindus together, or helping in crises playing out of sight of our headlines like in the Sudan. The passion and the innovation has to come from today's activists, however the importance of making direct connections is age-old. SCI has something to offer.

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Valli (Chari) Seshan, 1957; LVT in Europe 1958-1959; Asian Secretary 1960-1965; International Secretary 1986-1990

Valli Seshan's first workcamp was in India in 1957, followed by LTV service in Europe in 1958-1959 and work in the Asian Secretariat, 1960-1965. She and her husband, A.S. Seshan, were part of a 4-person International Secretariat, based in Bangalore, from 1986-1990. They always maintained an "open house" for SCI volunteers. Seshan died at the time of annual SCI

meetings in Bangalore in 1989. Their daughter lives in Kerala and Valli settled in Bangalore.

Early influences

Looking back at childhood, one has to say that mine was a very ordinary one - a traditional family in south India - somehow still very open and accepting. Though I have no precise details to offer, even we children knew about Gandhi, the preindependence struggles and the climate in the country. It touched individual members of the extended family in small ways. World War II was happening elsewhere in the world but it also had some impact on me. Being evacuated from the city of Madras for fears of being bombed by the 'enemy 'submarine' (Japanese) and Germany destroying other nations were terrifying for young children - though not very comprehensible. However, even as a child of 10 or 11 one knew that one took sides with Indian freedom fighters who were being bullied by the British administration, and that nations were being oppressed by more powerful war-mongering ones and so on.

Being part of Independence Day celebrations as a young teenager was an exhilarating experience. News of Gandhi being shot soon after, (I remember feeling a sense of loss and the world becoming still; all of a sudden-empty streets and mournful prayer songs left a deep sense), stories of large scale killings in the North (South was not a witness to the horrors of Partition), and one's own country being divided affected one in some strange ways. On the surface though, it seemed as if nothing really changed in one's life. Life went on - completing school, the sudden death of my father, necessitating the family being distributed and so on.

The decade of the 50s seemed to have been important personally and for a post independent India with a great spirit of moving forward. The concept of community development, spoken of by the government, was very appealing to a young person. It was the time for promoting some reason for engaging oneself. The ideal of 'doing something useful for society' got nurtured. I had finished university and then taught for two years living in the capital city of Delhi.

First contact with SCI

Attending an international workcamp organized by the young Indian Branch of SCI during November 1957 to dig a foundation for a village school was a happy accident. It was at the instance of Seshan, an active SCI member, and family friend whom I married some years later. However,

this ‘happy accident’ became a truly lifetime opportunity in many vital ways. Credit is owed to many – including myself for recognizing the experience as a ‘significant’ one showing the ‘direction’ for me in life.

The international workcamp in a remote Rajasthan village had in it the making of the essence of SCI in every sense. It was able to communicate SCI’s mission statement of ‘breaking down prejudices between peoples’, promoting understanding, voluntarily committing to the discipline of hard work and building a healthy human group based on mutual respect. This all could be beautifully experienced without needing articulation. The small international group consisted of local villagers, Indian volunteers from different states, longterm overseas volunteers like Phyllis and Sato –many of whom became lifetime associates in SCI or other groups, the visiting International Secretary, Dorothy Abbot (Guiborat). Discussions within the camp brought in various dimensions of SCI and its operations. As an Indian, I was unfamiliar with the idea of compulsory military service as it existed in other countries. What impressed me most was the conviction of those who opposed it and the price they were willing to pay in opposing it. The camp was an example for demonstrating the extraordinary potential for a creative action involving a small group of people in a meaningful context; and paving the way for change. It is something that remained with me throughout my work in SCI and carried over to my work with other development organizations.

After this camp Dorothy Abbot (Guiborat) very quickly was able to draw me totally into the movement. She initially provided me with valuable opportunities for being exposed intensely and then nurtured and motivated me for long innings in SCI. Dorothy’s own work in SCI prior to our meetings in Europe and India was a great inspiration and as well her organizing capacities that I saw. Over the coming years, I was similarly helped by a large number of individuals with whom I had interacted and worked over a number of years. Names are fresh in my mind but they will make too long a list!

LTV to Europe, 1958-1959

My experiences in India and Europe were greatly inspiring and enriching ones. Living and working in a totally different culture for the first time raised many questions for myself and others; and about life as a whole. There was a sense of being evaluated and judged in harmless and serious ways. For example the questions: “How can you work in a sari?”; “No meat, no alcohol, no dancing – what do you have in life?!” Some of them were looking at me as if I had to be pitied and needed some sympathy. But in fact it was rather the other way around: I was not at all

envious and I felt sympathetic towards these people. They also had questions about how I had been raised: many amusing questions such as about the custom of sleeping together in the same room with others instead of off in separate bedrooms; or about the power of one's elders being able to tell even their adult children what is right/wrong or (good /bad). Being a young woman in usual situations like in SCI camps (not being a student nor part of an establishment of any kind) was a rarity in the 1950s. I was treated with respect and as well paternalistically at times. Was it due to some surprise that despite being a woman and from an 'underdeveloped 'nation, I could function 'normally' in that environment? An amusing question that sometime I asked others.

My time at the International Secretariat in Clichy was eye-opening. The facilities were very limited and there were bugs, and in fact it was below the standard with which I was used to in India. I had to adjust and SCI friends helped me in this respect.

Looking at and becoming seriously aware of stereotyping oneself and others was a great learning to begin with. Simultaneously one saw how similar human beings were, whether it was in distant Norway, a mountain village of Switzerland or in the great city of Paris. It was reassuring then, yet in later years I have recognized that what contributes to 'similarities' may also be the basis for deep seated prejudices: from simple likes to dislikes, animosity, hatred on a large scale?

What I found as an overwhelming effect from the volunteering in Europe was the number of encounters with very inspiring individuals, the striking of deep friendships, and acquiring insights into past history of SCI. I also gained some organizing skills and most of all, became able to function in totally different environments and cultures.

People often ask about the purpose of going to workcamps, and whether the work we did was useful. I think it is not so much the kind of work you do, but it is the breaking down of prejudices. That is always valuable whether it is in 1934, or 1919, or 2000. There is an openness. There are people coming from completely different backgrounds, but who are willing to put themselves in that situation because they care about what is happening to far away people. They do not primarily come with the idea of changing others or of being a big help, but it is more as being together with people with a sense of solidarity. In addition to the feeling of solidarity it is an opportunity to change oneself, break down one's own prejudices and perhaps help other people to take a look at their own prejudices. Volunteers usually say that they learned a lot about themselves.

An anecdote of my first introduction outside India and Europe

My first workcamp was to be an East-West camp in Moldavia. The world was divided at that time: communist or non-communist. Being an Indian I found I was acceptable on both sides. It was a great opportunity for me, in the 60s, but I did not completely know what was happening or what was expected of me. Devinder told me: “Look, you just go”, so I just went. Because of foreign reserve restrictions, I had just the 75 rupees we were allowed to leave India with and a plane ticket. I landed in Tashkent, with no money and no addresses or phone numbers. Devinder had told me “Somebody will meet you there”. When I landed, nobody was there, so I was wondering what I should do. But a half hour later a man and a woman came, one speaking English and the other only Russian. They welcomed me and said, “Hello Miss Chari”, taking my suitcase and leaving the airport. Such leaps of faith!

I was the only one traveling to Moldavia via Moscow from India to join the SCI group which should already be there. The others were traveling by train from Paris (see Max Hildesheim). I thought I would be given a ticket and taken care of and subsequently, in fact, I was. However, because of communication problems, things were never clear and I never knew what to expect next. I had to float. Devinder had the same kind of experience. After arrival they took me sight seeing and bought me ice creams. Then in the evening they brought me back to the airport and gave me a ticket to Moscow. There was a queue, but none of us spoke any language in common. So I left for Moscow with them telling me they did not know what would happen, but it will be OK. I landed in Moscow and a chap welcomed me in Hindi, then he took me to some kind of a youth hostel. He told me my room number and that tomorrow we will have breakfast together and then I was to fly to Moldavia. When I arrived in Moldavia the group had already been there for 2-3 days picking cherries.

You could see the amazing difference between communists and non-communists and amongst the communists between Russians and the other East Europeans in their approach to things. The project had been organized in a secretive way, or at least not publicly, yet the results were exactly what we would do for a group. Schedules/programmes were not shared in advance. In the evening without advance notification, suddenly we were all distributed among families. It was a nice thing but there was no explanation that would happen. Suddenly you are in a Russian family, eating some bread and very happy and I thought I had been specially brought there. But upon returning back to the camp I would discover that all had had the same experience, but nobody knew in advance. It was very funny and interesting, but somewhat odd. Some were asking “Why don’t

you open yourself more to the outer world? Some would answer “When you are in a nice glass house, why do you want the dirt to come in?”

Generally people were very warm and hospitable. At the end we were taken to Lenin’s mausoleum and there was a long queue. We joined it, but after a few minutes we were taken to the front since we were a special delegation. Then some East European standing in front of me turned around and said “I wouldn’t be surprised if when some of those people enter they cross themselves”. The queue was so solemn that it seemed a kind of a religious celebration.

Return to India

After returning from Europe on my ‘induction’ to SCI-International, I joined Devinder Chopra, the first Asian Secretary, in the Asian Secretariat from 60-65 in New Delhi. This assignment followed many stints over the years as National Chair Person of SCI India, two terms as the international vice president, member of the International Secretariat team in India during 1986-90. (This was a result of the International Committee’s decision to move the International Secretariat to Bangalore, India)). Between stints and even concurrently I remained active in the development sectors both within and outside India. I must mention that my years in SCI, with Seshan, were significant both personally and for the organization. Myself and many others who had joined the development sectors, have seen that the SCI values, aims and vision greatly influenced what we did/how we did and how we were able to help others in doing the same. Promoting peace based on mutual understanding and respect, justice and well-being of all has to begin where one is - recognizing the prejudices of one’s own and others; and at every level in society and having the willingness to fight to overcome them. Had we been more conscious of the possible impact of SCI actions on the individuals who took part in them and what contributed to the same, we could have been more effective perhaps.

Asian Secretariat, 1960-1965

Being part of the stage of establishing a firm base in Asia - strengthening the work of on-going branches in India, Japan and Pakistan; starting work in new countries like Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Thailand; working with Tibetan refugees in India together with Devinder Das Chopra, the first Asian Secretary, was an exciting and satisfying experience. Devinder’s previous experience in SCI, his dynamism, strategizing abilities and personal skills went a long way. Interestingly, for all this new venture available resources were rather meager. However, identifying and involving

like-minded voluntary organizations, interested individuals and bringing them together in SCI activities was useful to help establish the base for the future. Longterm volunteers (LTVs) played a valuable part towards this growth.

1968 Onward

The student revolution in Paris and strong emergence of left politics in many countries in Europe had its impact on SCI. There was polarization between branches and within committees leaving many of the older generation members in a crisis of confidence. Persons like myself and Hiroatsu Sato were dubbed 'reactionaries' from a distance. Initially, this term as applied to myself made little sense. How inevitable these turmoils - why and how they impacted the movement, both in positive and negative terms- were not clear to me and many others. The question of crisis of confidence in times of pressure to follow general 'trends' of change and the various ways it affects the work of groups or organizations have remained very real with me since then. At that time it seemed that a large number of members stopped seeing SCI as a radical movement. Workcamps as a methodology, longterm volunteering overseas and working towards peace and reconciliation all were seen to be lacking in depth. No 'moral force' strong enough emerged to reassure the membership.

1970s

The `70s saw rejuvenation in Asia in many ways beginning with celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the movement. The Indian branch provided strong impetus to work in other countries. Imaginative ways were found of working through longterm projects, nurturing longterm Indian and overseas volunteers - many of whom stayed on for many years within the fold of the organization and shared responsibilities with great conviction. Because of my own experience as a volunteer being nurtured, supported and encouraged by those responsible, I learned the value of doing the same. This had been reinforced, particularly by those who had been able to make positive contributions under demanding and difficult conditions. This decade was even referred to as a 'golden period' by some in SCI! Ironically the 'decline and fall' was also a familiar feature within the movement. Various factors contributed to it. A Swiss volunteer once remarked: 'the trouble with SCI is that it never dies completely'. A few 'pockets' come alive, here and there'!

International Secretariat, 1986-1990

Interestingly, my own history in SCI had been associated with many revival efforts. One example was when the International Committee decided that the International Secretariat should be based in India for the first time – after having functioned from Europe for 70 years. Some of us old timers, like Seshan, myself, Chandru (LTV in India/Europe/Secretary of Indian Branch with vast experience in the development sector), Krpa (LTV in India/development worker/activist) formed the IS team from 1986-90. New programmes relevant to the context of Asia and for its revival were initiated: Youth Induction Programme, Women's pogramme, increased number of workcamps with development agencies across Asia. The Asian structure was enlarged by inclusion of Asian Field Coordinators working along with national secretaries. The IS had a separate wing to support field activities, help in fund-raising etc and continued to service European Branches and the International Committee. There was a great deal of momentum and new confidence in SCI aims and methods. Somehow, the same could not be sustained and reasons could be many.

Final reflections

India was a colony of Britain in the `30s when Pierre Cérésole came with a spirit of service and of integration into the local environment. It was striking that, although he was the boss and person who had brought the resources, he himself worked like anyone else. This idea of service and of breaking down the prejudices between people has always impressed me. SCI people have a sensitivity and a respect for others that you hardly find elsewhere. During my time, we had a vision of the world.

I had mentioned earlier that SCIers brought with them something different to their involvement elsewhere. It remained an integral part of people's growth. Their own experience and knowledge gained from the international structure and operation were very valuable. A vast number of international agencies did not manage to function truly internationally. Ideas of local groups, national branches, election of delegates to International Committee, working groups for themes across the globe, giving people the opportunity to work together on common concerns are very original. In the late `70s, some development groups in South India organized a 'plunge-in-experience' for young people which fell far short of what SCI workcamps did for bringing about a change in attitudes.

Today, I continue to be involved in small ways in the voluntary sector. People, process and relationships remain the focus. I am labeled as many things - social scientist, facilitator, trainer, advisor for human-resources and

organizational development etc. Whatever may be the truth of these terms, I have no doubt my SCI experience contributed in ways that cannot be measured. And, as such, I hope 'SCI' lives on.

Looking back at my own exposure and experiences, something of the following caught my attention about the second generation: the fact that almost 50 years ago SCI could think of women volunteers from India working in Europe; volunteers from France participating in actions in Algeria during liberation; east-west work and study camps; continued efforts to support conscientious objectors; negotiating for working in India and Pakistan simultaneously after Partition; exchanging volunteers between India and Pakistan; being forerunners and example to many overseas volunteer programmes is significant. Radical in its time! SCI workcamps in the `50s also enunciated modern day principles of personal growth, team work, leadership, facilitation, conflict-resolution, process-orientation, empowerment without labeling them as such or theorizing. The principles could be successfully brought into action. 'Deeds, not words' - not concrete results (number of houses etc.) but the way of working together may be the underlying message.

If at times SCIers feel that the movement has not done well, we may have to look critically at what we have done/not done and not conclude that the origin/aims and even method are not relevant. Certainly modifications according to present 'times' will be useful to 'make sense' for evolving situations. Have we come across anything more fundamental than a statement that human beings need to breakdown their prejudices?? And act on it!!

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Alhaj M.A. Salam, life member of SCI Bangladesh, writes of a period between 1959 to 1965.

(The following is an extract from a booklet containing memorial tributes to Mohammed Ataur Rahman, self published by Roger Gwynn following Ataur's death in 2003. Parts relevant to the development of SCI in Bangladesh are included in order to give a first-person snapshot view of early work there. It is illustrative of the cooperation with groups such as the Pakistan Workcamp Association or the Friends Centre, that led eventually to the formation of an SCI branch, receiving long-term volunteers.)

In 1959 I participated as a volunteer in the 4th South-East Asia Training Workcamp which was held at Dolairpar High School in Dhaka. Volunteers representing twelve different countries attended that camp, which was led by the Secretary General of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Mr. Alec Dickson. One day, while this workcamp was in progress, the General Officer commanding of what was then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), Major General Umrao Khan, came to work alongside us. I would like to mention that our dear departed brother Anowar Hussain (founding member of the Branch) attended the training workcamp together with me. The volunteers from India, Japan and Sri Lanka were members of Service Civil International (SCI). It was from them that Anowar Bhai and I heard about SCI and came to know that it was an international volunteer organization whose Asian Secretariat was situated in New Delhi. That training camp, like all previous workcamps held in our country up to then, had been organized by the Pakistan Workcamp Association.

In 1960 Anowar Bhai himself went to Delhi and made arrangements for the opening of a branch of SCI in Dhaka. We adopted an SCI coat-pin or badge bearing the word PAX (peace). At that point, Ataur Rahman, myself, and other SCI volunteers started to hold weekend workcamps in the Lalbagh and Azimpur areas of Dhaka city. Our temporary office was at the Friends Centre in Murfatah Lane (south-east of the Daily Azad office).

Towards the end of 1960 the East Pakistan Red Cross Society organized a Red Cross Training camp at the Muslim High School, Dhaka, which I attended. Soon after that a devastating cyclone and tidal wave of unprecedented severity hit the coastal belt of our country. The Pakistan Workcamp Association sent a team of thirteen volunteers, under my leadership, to work in Ramgati, Bibirhat and Char Alexander. It should be noted that by order of the then Governor of East Pakistan, Azam Khan, only the Army , East Pakistan Rifles, police and government officials were allowed to work in the affected areas, while non-government organizations were banned from entering those areas or performing voluntary work there. In his capacity as Secretary to the Relief and Rehabilitation Ministry, Mr. Kafil Uddin, Chairman of the Pakistan Workcamp Association, granted our team special permission to proceed.

Towards the end of 1961 the Asian Secretariat of SCI invited four members of the Dhaka SCI group to attend the 7th Orient-Occident Training Camp in Ceylon (nowadays Sri Lanka). Mashudul Haque and I went to Ceylon on this occasion. After the Orient-Occident camp was over I participated in another twelve workcamps, returning to East Pakistan three months later.

In 1964 SCI East Pakistan organized an international workcamp on the island of Sandwip. Ataur and I took part, along with others. The British volunteer, Roger Gwynn, who had recently arrived in East Pakistan for the first time, was another participant. Also attending was the Asian Secretary of SCI, Hiroatsu Sato. He had to return to Delhi while the camp was still going on so I was given the responsibility of escorting him from Sandwip to Dhaka by train.

In 1965 once again a severe cyclone and tidal wave hit the south of the country, affecting Galachipa, Bhola and Barguna in particular, At the same time, a devastating tornado scoured several thanas of Madaripur Subdivision in Faridpur District. Many homes were destroyed and people lost their lives. So Ataur and I along with other volunteers went to Madaripur taking used clothing and medicines provided by the Red Cross.

Refer to Chapter 2, for Thedy von Fellenberg 1961-1962 in India.

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Shigeo Kobayashi, 1960; LTV in India 1964-1965; National Secretary 1965-1969; Kimpu Project 1969-1978

Shigeo Kobayashi attended one of the earliest workcamps in Japan, then was an LTV in India in 1964 and the National Secretary of the Japanese Branch on his return in 1965. After his marriage to Ann Smith, SCI LTV to Thailand, in 1968, they settled in the long-term project of Kimpu and raised four sons there until 1978. They then moved to England and were active in the peace movement.

SCI Japan, 1960-1964

When at Chuo University studying Law, a friend introduced me to SCI workcamp activities. I had no idea how this encounter would change my future life completely.

In the early 1960's, all universities in Japan were heavily involved in a Mass Movement against the Japan-US Security Treaty. In Tokyo

especially, demonstrations were organised by Student Unions almost everyday outside the Parliament Building.

I was interested to find out if I could do anything more meaningful than joining the marches on the streets. I started to doubt if we could make any difference by just demonstrating. Was any revolution or reform achieved in this way?

Studying at Chuo University began to look rather empty and unrealistic.

Then I had my first chance to attend an SCI work camp which was held in Niijima Island in Tokyo Bay. This experience did give me a deep impression as an experiment in human understanding on a small scale. This was it I thought, - I should be seeking more.

After that I did not look back. Nothing could stop me from attending all workcamp activities, short term and weekends. Going to workcamps became my priority rather than attending lectures! During this time, I had opportunities to travel extensively in Japan and also South Korea for its International Summer Work Camp held near the border with North Korea.

I also started to organize workcamps under the guidance of Sato-san and Phyllis-san. Both of them were living examples of how international understanding could be achieved through SCI movement. They did give encouragement and leadership whenever necessary.

SCI India, 1964-1965 for 10 months.

I took a French Cargo/Passenger boat - MM Line from Yokohama to Bombay - which took 3 weeks stopping at major ports such as Hong Kong, Saigon, Manila, Bangkok, Singapore, Colombo. At that time this was the cheapest method for volunteers to travel to Asia and Europe. Very slow but also an interesting way of travelling through the Pacific and into the Indian Ocean.

From Bombay to New Delhi I took a long train journey. I could see vast spaces and the people of the Indian Sub-Continent and this was such a good introduction to this fascinating country with so much history, many languages, races and religions.

My first assignment in India was Kasauli, Punjab where the SCI Asian Secretariat along with SCI Indian Branch had a long term project for Tibetan refugee children. This Nursery had been going for several years already and was well settled into the community of Kasauli. While I was working there, SCI India organised a Leadership Training Camp at a

nearby village and I was pleased to attend and meet other SCI India senior members and American and European long term volunteers.

The next long term project I was sent to was Hatibari Leprosy Colony located in the deep jungle in Orissa. Here I shared living and working with a Canadian agriculturist and a British nurse. This project was sometimes rather controversial as volunteers were left alone in this remote location working for leprosy patients without much support from the outside world and SCI India members. Still it had a certain character and meaningfulness just by sharing work and living with patients. Their daily lives were not at all different from the non-leprosy general population. Their happiness and sadness I did understand during my stay there.

From Hatibari to West Bengal was my next assignment. In a small village away from Calcutta SCI organised a short term workcamp to build a Community Centre. Several volunteers from Europe and the USA were there with me. It was so humid and hot and difficult to sleep as my bed was infested with bed bugs. In desperation I somehow drank unboiled water which, a few weeks later, caused complete hospitalization for 2 weeks in Ranchi, Bihar where I had moved to attend the next workcamp organised by Belgian Brothers and SCI group in Ranchi. This was a very big camp and I was keen to stay but had to be taken back to Ranchi University Hospital where the Belgian Brothers were based. My sickness was diagnosed as typhoid which meant I had to stay in bed resting completely until I recovered. My great relief was that I was not suffering from malaria which would have had a long term effect for life. While I was lying in bed, I dreamt of dying so many times. When I came through the worst time I felt I had become quite a different person. I thought I was now nearer to India, its people and their whole living.

My last workcamp was held by SCI Bombay group in Maharashtra. We were staying in the Sarvodaya Ashram in the village and building/improving the minor road into this village from the main road. This was very much a whole village affair and everyday there was a very big crowd of people along with SCI volunteers who initiated daily work.

National Secretary of SCI Japan, 1965-1969

As I came back from India after serving as an all round Long-Term Volunteer, I was just in time to attend the Annual General Meeting of SCI Japan. I was appointed to be National Secretary at this meeting and my busy life as the only full-timer started.

Straight back from India, I was very enthusiastic to organise all sorts of activities for SCI in Japan. As I started to live in the office as well, I was

spending all my time organising weekend/short term/long term workcamps/projects as well as volunteer exchange programs. Some other members also started to live with me and consequently SCI Office became a communal living space not only for Japanese members but also foreign volunteers and visitors. Many people came and went but always our focus was to continue SCI activities along with local groups and international contact with IS, AS, ES and National Branches and like-minded organisations. International exchange of volunteers was also kept up with increasing numbers.

During these years the Asian Secretariat held by Sato-san and Phyllis-san was also very active and Asian Secretaries Meetings were held twice a year either in India, Sri Lanka or Malaysia. On the way back from one of these Asian Meetings when I dropped in to the Asian Secretariat in Singapore, I had a chance to see Ann Smith who had just completed her long term service (15 months) as an English Teacher in Bangkok and was on the way back to England via Japan and USSR. We did get on the same MM boat sailing to Japan. She did go back to England after staying for three months attending workcamps in Japan and South Korea and also helping in Shinsei Gakuen in Hiroshima (a Children's Home which had a very close relationship with SCI Japan Hiroshima Group). She came back to Japan in December 1968 to marry me.

Kimpu Long term Project (Asian Regional Training Centre) 1969-1978

As SCI Japan had started this long -term project in 1965 with the first residential organizers Hiroshi and Tazuko Kashima, SCI's relationship with Kimpu Community was well established and regular activities at Kimpu Farm had been on-going and getting to the next level development stage. As a newly married couple, we took this challenge and moved into SCI House in May 1969.

As this project was based in a cooperative dairy farm, I had to get involved in daily working on the farm. This meant that I had to join in the farm work representing our family as well as running the SCI Training Centre for volunteers coming in to work on the farm at any time and supporting volunteers going to be sent out to other countries as MTVs or LTVs.

Although the location of the Centre was very remote high up in the mountains (at 1500m above sea level, Kimpu was the highest farm in Japan), and the nearest village was about 8km away, we had a continuous flow of people coming and going all the time. Spring to autumn (April to

October), were very comfortable with clean air and spring water but winter was very severely cold as the temperature in mid-winter sometimes dropped down to – 20 degree C.

As we were living in such a simple old farm house, there was no difference in the temperature inside and outside of the house. But we came to love this lifestyle and we managed to have 4 sons during 9 years of living at this place.

Our life there was very basic and primitive but our spirit was held high with the support of the 4 Kimpu families and all SCI members in Japan. During the course of 9 years of activities, we managed to receive over 5,000 people with more than 35 nationalities. We organised workcamps, seminars,training for Japanese and non-Japanese volunteers as well as keeping in touch with the Kimpu Community, Makioka Town and Yamanashi Prefectural Government representatives. We hoped that at least one other SCI family would join us on a long-term basis but did not succeed in this plan.

There was a branch primary school in the community which had 1 teacher and a few children attending. When our eldest son reached 6 years old, he started to go to this smallest school in Japan and his only classmate was a 9 years old girl from another family.

As a family with 4 young children under 10, we had to face the reality of our future life. The children, like the others in the community, would have had to leave Kimpu to be boarded out in order to attend senior school but unlike the 4 other Kimpu families we had no relatives living in that region. Apart from not wishing to send our children far away we had no personal funds to maintain them. Each Kimpu family received the same allowance for one man's work in the dairy farm but while the other two- generational families had some private income from vegetables and rural bed and breakfast business we were fully occupied at home with the SCI project. We also had to think about Ann's father who was getting old and living alone in England. Another reason for leaving this dearly cherished project was that we heard that the Prefectural Government had decided to build a dam whose waters would eventually cover the lower half of the valley including the SCI House and the Community Centre which we used for volunteer accommodation.

When we decided to leave this project in 1978 after 9 years, we worried that it was possible that SCI Japan might lose a significant part of its activities. Fortunately, Kitahara-san who had been a frequent volunteer with us for many years, decided to move to the project on a full-time basis. In May 1978 we moved to Wickford, Essex, England after travelling overland through the USSR, Poland and Germany.

Our long journey with SCI on a full-time basis had just finished but another interesting chapter of life was beginning to appear. I was 39, Ann 38, Tsutomu 8½, Sean 6½, Saburo 5½, and Hitoshi 4 years. We welcomed the arrival of our 5th son Simon in May 1979.

Apart from maintaining our links with SCI Japan, we have been active in the peace movement especially the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, since coming to England.

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Elizabeth 'Didi' Crook, 1962 in India; 1964-1965 in Japan

Elizabeth 'Didi' Crook, from Britain, first did a workcamp with the United Nations Association (UNA) in Austria in 1961. Having been trained as a nurse she was accepted by IVS, the British Branch of SCI, for long term voluntary service first in India in 1962 and later in Japan, returning home in 1965.

First contact with workcamps and SCI

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, East European refugees from the Second World War were being offered nationality in various countries. I came into contact with the settlement of refugees in Austria who had been living – some as long as 18 years – in the huts of Refugee Camps in and around Linz. Land had been given them but they had to build their own houses – but although each family were assisting each other, they had not got enough labour. So the United Nations Association set-up a work camp in the area, requesting (mainly students) to work alongside these families to build them houses. I was not a student, but I had heard about this because I was a member of the Cambridge University United Nations Group and so I spent my yearly holiday at the U.N. camp in 1961. I learned how to be a Builder's Mate!

While there I saw posters about U.N. nurse volunteers working in various parts of the world – in areas where there was poverty and suffering – much of which was caused by conflict. Although I had trained as a nurse, doing a 4 year training, I had left and had been working as a Secretary in Cambridge University. Then I wished I had the confidence and ability to do what those U.N. volunteers were doing. I felt their work was also such a

good contribution to world peace, and this would help different races to experience each other. However, I felt it was beyond my confidence and capabilities.

I kept talking about it however, and one day a student told me I should go and talk to a woman he had heard at a lecture, who had been doing such work in India and who would be in Cambridge for the next few days. Somehow I felt duty-bound to go and see her, even if just to prove this was something I really could NOT do! (Her name was Cara Schofield). I had a very interesting meeting with her, in which I learned she worked as a volunteer for S.C.I. This resulted in me visiting London headquarters for SCI in England – subsequently to an interview, and subsequently being accepted as a volunteer! I felt then that I had to put my actions where my mouth was, and actually dare to go and do it!

Before I could go – as I was not known to S.C.I., I was told to attend a short-term work camp in Belfast, North Ireland – working manually again – creating a sports field for a mental hospital. Here, I learned to wield a pick-axe!

Motivations

I joined S.C.I. because of this strong unaccountable urge within me to do something towards creating more Peace in the world. This may be because, having been a child in the War, I had heard much talk about the horror and sadness of war, and had seen the photos which came out of Belsen. This probably led to a period of depression in my teen-age years, when the Korean War broke out. I always had felt that I could have been born anywhere in the world and felt I was so lucky it was England, where we experienced less directly the atrocities of war and hatred. As a child, I had also noticed that the 'enemy' I witnessed as Italian prisoners of war, were in fact, lovely, singing people who liked children! So, then, my child-mind asked "What really is an enemy?"

My expectation of SCI was that by working together with different nationalities, with awareness of working towards a peaceful world, would help to that end. It only fitted into my life at that time because my boyfriend was a Hungarian Refugee and I belonged to the Cambridge University UN Group and their Overseas Club, and Buddhist Society – all of which could be said to touch on this subject. I also worked for the Adviser to overseas students in Cambridge and went to social gatherings of British Council students from abroad.

My experience with SCI

Dharamsala

Apart from the short-term work camp in Belfast (2 weeks) before I left, my experience of SCI was going straight out to India as a LTV (Long Term Volunteer) for just over 2 years. I left in 1962 and returned in 1965. In India at first I worked in Dharamsala with Tibetan Refugees. The Dalai Lama had only come to India in 1959, and his elder sister, Mrs. Tsering Dolma, was only just in the process of setting up the Children's Nursery for Orphans, and the children of Tibetans working in very rough conditions high up in the Himalayan roads. My work was to do as much as I could to look after the health of the children and adults. There was a Swiss Red Cross Doctor, but she was some ways down the mountain, where the very youngest children lived. The conditions in the one house were then very poor – 200 boys slept in one room, seven to a mattress on bunk beds or on the floor. Woe betide the one who fell out backwards from the top bunk! In fact it was a miracle that this never happened. To ensure all children in that room received 'worm' treatment, I had to treat all 200 on the same night, because they never slept in the same place each night – so it was difficult to keep track of who had had the medicine the night before! To check for scabies had to be done on Bath Day. This was done at the (only) tap outside in the big yard. They received a change of clothing then, so while they were naked for the washing I could check and treat anyone with scabies! Sometimes I had to ask permission to check all the childrens' eye and ear health during Buddhist 'prayers' – it was the only time I could be sure I'd seen all the boys and girls! In all there were about 250-300 children. It was impossible to prevent the spread of infection under such extreme circumstances, and sometimes children died as a result of diseases like measles – unknown in Tibet. These children and adults had little natural immunization against most diseases because Tibet is such a cold plateau that there are few diseases there. I used to work together with the Tibetan Herbalist Doctor – we would discuss 'cases' and if we disagreed about a potential treatment, we would refer to Mrs. Tsering Dolma as the final arbitrator! We had a good relationship. This was vital, because I learned that because of an incident with a Red Cross Doctor who would not allow the monks to carry out a ritual for the sick, the Tibetans began to 'hide' sick children, rather than go to the Doctor. This taught me how important it is to understand the meaning of cultural practices and to deeply respect them and have open discussion. There are so many stories I can't tell all of them!

In time, more help came to Dharamsala, notably by Save the Children Fund, who sent out a salaried nurse, backed by resources. So then SCI felt

I was more needed where there was no nurse – and so I went to Hatibari Leper Colony in Orissa state. There had been one nurse for SCI there before me (Valerie Hagger) but she had now left to return home. (She had also been before me with the Tibetan Refugees in Kasauli). Again, in Hatibari, I had no funding or resources available – though good people from home sent money out towards my projects.

Hatibari

Before I arrived at Hatibari, I spent two weeks at an Indian short-term work camp in Kalikapur village, in Bengal, near Calcutta – mainly agricultural work and evenings listening to classical Indian music! This was a wonderful experience of integration!

My work and life at Hatibari was another total cultural change. Most of the lepers (250) were Adavasi (tribal) people who normally would live in the scrub jungle areas, but there were also many Hindus including the highest caste of Brahmin.

Here my work was similar – to do my best to look after the health of the lepers. There had been a severe problem of corruption by a doctor, who had been appointed there, and India SCI had revealed this, and he had left and no other doctor was yet appointed to visit. There were only a couple of cow-shed like buildings and one square room available, other than the mud-huts which were scattered around the area, which were occupied by individual/shared lepers and two for our small SCI team. The leader was an Indian from Calcutta (Maulik). There was a veterinarian Indian volunteer, Felix, and a Frenchman, a Canadian American and Finnish girl came and went during my time there. All the others worked to develop agriculture – rice, vegetables and, by grace of Oxfam, a fish tank to provide food. Most of the lepers had been beggars until they arrived here, when the Orissa State government and SCI funded basic food. Rice and dhal daily gets a bit boring, hence the drive to get better vegetable, etc.

The cow sheds were filled with a number of Indian rope-beds and became the male and female 'hospital' wards respectively! The square room was used for treatments – medicine giving and treatment of leprosy ulcers. At this stage there was no possibility of a scientific check as to which leper was an infectious case or not. This was badly needed to ascertain correct dosages of leprosy medicines available. At that stage the effects of leprosy could be reduced but there was no cure. Nowadays there is a cure found.

Gradually I noticed that in the evenings people came who were not really ill – they just wished to be together. So with some money sent from England, we bought local Indian board games and set them up in the room.

So this, the Square Room, became also the Community Centre! Shortly after, the Brahmin wished to discuss the setting up of a small temple – which was duly built and then he would lead the lepers in the various Hindu ceremonies. People gradually became happier, although were the poorest people I knew.

I shall never forget the wandering Guru, who got leprosy and ended up in our community. I brought him into the 'hospital' – so that he would rest and not wander about, enlarging his ulcer. It was cold at night and while he was there we managed to purchase some blankets for each bed. When I did my 'night-round' of 'the hospital', all the others were giggling with glee and using their blankets – all except the Guru. One leper – Nisakaru – had given himself the role of interpreter for me. When I asked him why the Guru was not using his blanket and he asked him why, the reply was "It is such a beautiful thing to be given a blanket that, before I can use it, I must say thank you to God. I cannot do this however until sunrise tomorrow, at special prayers. I will take it with me to say thank you and then I can use it." Sure enough, he was using it the following night. Here was a man who had nothing – and waited to say "Thank you", rather than grab it and be warm. A most humbling experience for me coming from our materialistic western world.

Another day I had to tell a beggar who arrived wanting treatment for the worst foot ulcer I'd seen (half a foot only left) that I could treat him but there was no more food allowance available (we were full to capacity). On hearing that, one man whose family sent a very little money every so often, stepped forward and said quickly to me, "You can take him in. I will share my food with him". This was incredibly moving for me. I'm glad to say that this man who looked like a skeleton when he arrived grew to be quite 'chubby' 3 months later, and his terrible foot healed up at least. Maybe the maggots in the deep wound assisted the healing in fact!

The lepers were quite challenging. Whenever a new person came to Hatibari, instead of the normal Indian greeting of "Nameste" with palms of the hands together, they would do this gesture, but enclose the visitor's hands between their palms. If the visitor flinched, knowing they had leprosy, the lepers took an instant dislike. A bit naughty, perhaps, but understandable. They quickly gauged whether your humanity was real towards them or not.

Not long before I left, a new Doctor was appointed to visit. He really did not want to be there – it was not helpful to his career to be sent to a Leper Colony. This trick was tried on him and he failed the test. He also made a great show of washing his hands. That night I found Nisakaru charging about the land, with blood-shot eyes, and carrying a stick. When asked

what was wrong, he raged about the Doctor, saying he would overturn his car when he next came and set it alight. Nisakaru had been 'smoking' Gunja (marijuana) grown everywhere by the lepers at Hatibari – and I had quite a task to quieten him down.

Nisakaru loved to be with me in the Treatment Room - he would hang his long arms over the cupboard door, and sing softly. When patients would come in, he would translate, "Didi, this man has Head-defect (headache)", or "Didi, this woman has Water-defect (cystitis)!"

I loved my time also here at Hatibari as much as with Tibetans. The worst moment was when the new Doctor on a visit called me "a Bloody White"! Racism on the other foot for a change!

Japan

Finally SCI wanted a volunteer to go to Japan – from England – and as I was already half way there, they decided I should go. This was much more organized! I worked in a Christian Charity Out-patient Clinic in the slums of Osaka, called Kamagaseki. Here there was a doctor always present, and 2 regular nurses. I was not left to my own devices here! Language was a severe problem, but the nurses were welcoming, if somewhat bemused, and the Doctor tried to communicate in German! As all the medicines were labeled in Japanese characters the Doctor spent time adding labels in Romaji (Roman writing) in Latin! – so I could recognize the medicines he asked me to get! He was wonderful. The people who were patients were either Korean itinerant labourers or Japanese 'Buraku' people. In those days the Buraku were treated as a class apart (rather like 'untouchables' in India) and were very much despised. Access to jobs was severely restricted if their origins were known. A small girl of seven years who visited the Clinic 'taught' me some Japanese. I tried to make some sentences. I decided to try this out at a smart party organized by a Dental Professor. Imagine the horror, when his smart guests heard this 'foreign' woman speaking to them in the Buraku style!! The professor received complaints! He found it amusing, but decided to let me learn 'better' Japanese and I taught his dental students some English!

Japan was a much more severe culture shock than the Tibetans or Indians. Partly because I sort of expected the Japanese to be more like the English, because they lived in a modern urban setting and wore suits! I expected Indians in loin-cloths to be different. However, I found an easy rapport in the main with both Tibetan and Indians, whereas I always felt uncertain in Japan – in spite of the fact that while I was there I had a wonderful Japanese boyfriend of whom I was very fond. I gradually learned that Japanese have strong feelings too, but, culturally, it is a failure if you

demonstrate them. Slowly I learned a special sort of silent intuition into how another was feeling – and had to work out how, and if, I indicated that I understood. This was a very controlled world, and difficult for me while in Japan. I spent two shorter sessions – one working in an earthquake area (Niigata) doing emergency work like digging latrines, and guarding a school at night against looting (people who had lost their homes were temporarily housed there). The second was a wonderful time haymaking in Hokkaido!

Final thoughts

My work was mainly as a LTV, long-term volunteer, to oversee and treat the health situations wherever I was as best I could – usually with no octor on site, and little resources, except my knowledge gained during training and from books which had to be severely adapted to the non-sterile conditions and lack of any building built for the purpose (except in Japan) and any medicines. Bandages, cotton wool etc. were bought with money sent out from good people at home in England who wanted help. I took out my own stethoscope, syringes, needles etc., (again, this was not required in Japan).

My expectations were met, in that in some way the interactions with people within SCI, and those for and with whom I worked – did bring an awareness of how to strive for peace. This came even deeper when things were the most difficult – not the least that I had to learn that I personally had to keep eternal vigilance on my inner world and reactions, if I was truly to work for peace and overcome the differences that caused the troubles. It often required a lot of heart-searching, and letting-go of some of my own strong ideas, in order to reach out to understand the opposition, and to find a possible common ground on which to continue working together. The desire to find common ground and good will has to be much stronger than the desire to be the one whose view-point is RIGHT!

I'm sure I was realizing this both at the time, and also on looking back.

In the 1990s I did some training for 'volunteers' going abroad with VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas). I found it lacking compared to SCI (in 1980s) in that it was England (with government aid) sending 'aid' to other countries (doing a good job), but lacking the equality for potential exchange of volunteers, i.e. in SCI we are all in the same organization offering mutual help.

It seemed that many 'volunteers' did not go with a sense of 'greater purpose' – often because the work would add to their C.V. (curriculum vitae) or for travel interest or in lieu of employment in England, when getting work here was difficult. Having said that, many VSO volunteers

came back having had such a strong experience that they continue to work hard to keep the world becoming more equal or more understanding. One VSO 'volunteer' said to me: "In the 1960s you were idealistic, we (in 1990s) are more realistic". Is she right? I hope we were both idealistic and realistic.

Looking back on SCI

My appreciation of SCI's aims remains deep within me and have been my personal aims and values throughout my life. They remain fundamental in the desire for world peace and harmony. I only wish that aid-giving organizations affirmed similar beliefs today and that more governments held these values at the core of their ideologies and practices.

Was SCI efficient? In some ways I think it could be criticized for not being as efficient as it could have been – certainly there was a feeling of trusting to the wind and hoping for the best! VSO in England today could be described as extremely efficient, but bound up by interviews, regulations and much training prior to leaving, and constant monitoring of the 'volunteers' and of their living conditions. We were mainly left to our own devices, and lived exactly as the people we were assisting. Of course, the set-up of VSO is entirely different. The organization is government assisted, and the 'volunteers' receive a salary equivalent to that of an indigenous person of the country to which they are sent. VSO is much more organized with a tight safety-net. S.C.I. volunteers in the 1950/1960s were really 'thrown in at the deep end' with very little preparation and no training for the country and often lived at a great distance from the SCI H.Q. in the countries to which they went. There were probably no other British volunteers present in that country; though I believe there were some small 'teams' in some parts of the world. There was no management system of any real sort.

The impact of SCI on others may be difficult to assess. In India I was in such poverty stricken situations one could say one was only "holding peoples' heads just above the water" – therefore not drowning. Certainly Tibetan children mostly did grow up fairly healthily, and knew some happiness, and some beggar lepers lived rather than died, and became part of a community, with a 'temple' built by themselves, observing known religious rituals which both empowered them and gave a framework to their lives – much better than wandering the streets begging, getting more ill, and dying alone.

In Japan, a British volunteer working in the slums did have a huge impact for peace – so much so that I had to appear on television! So I was well placed to say why I was doing such work. All the more so, because I

was working amongst the Buraku people – a group of Japanese who at that time were very despised by the Japanese themselves and access to employment was severely restricted.

The benefits to me personally were enormous. The work and whole experience helped me to feel more authentic as a person, because I knew I was now living in such a way that my values coincided with action – whereas before, I may have had the values, but did not know how to try to be effective in living them. Therefore, I felt more empowered. I learned personally also that I did not have to prove myself to other people – but also I did not have to prove myself to myself! I became my own judge, needing less to defer to others. This was a key growing point. From a very dependent person, I grew in independence of character.

The experience certainly led to a complete career change, although, on return, I was very lost for a while. After some career guidance it was made clear to me that I was much more interested in social problems than I was in medical problems, so I changed career into social work, taking further training, of course, to do so. On return I had felt that I could not be effective unless I returned to India or a similar country – now I was able to understand that oppression and poverty are relative to which country you are in, and I was able to work according to my values in England.

Any lasting impact? Apart from a major career change, it possibly affected my attitude to politics, as I was not in any way political before I went. Now I received each party's manifestos carefully to see whom I should vote for. I still remain a floating voter, and have never joined a party – but increasingly (especially as I am now retired) I join 'pressure groups' and assist various campaigns in order to influence politics and 'the public' in this way. (Main organizations such as Amnesty International, the Medical Foundation Caring for Victims of Torture, Survival International (Tribal Groups), The Refugee Council, Oxfam, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, Compassion in World Farming, Peoples' Trust for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, etc., etc.!) I also became an anti-racist trainer. I have always traveled a lot – I'm curious to know more about how other people live, and the conditions of the environment they live in. Increasingly I realize we are all a small part of a large whole. At present I grieve that large corporations influence governments so much and greed and desire for power seem to be dominating forces today. If only the overwhelming force in the world was for a more caring, compassionate, and harmonized world.

I have not had much to do with SCI in England in recent years. It seems it has reduced considerably and has very few long term volunteers, mainly in Africa. I do understand there are quite a lot of short-term work camps.

Whether those young people attending work camps today have the same zeal for peace as I knew I don't know – but certainly they have good-will.

SCI – the future?

It may be necessary – while keeping the original aims and values – to reflect on how to reach the darker spirit of these present times, in order to create more respect for difference, true Human Rights and the Responsibilities required to ensure them, and a more peaceful approach to solving antagonisms.

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Roger Gwynn, 1964 in East Pakistan; 1971-1974 in Bangladesh

Roger Gwynn first encountered workcamps in Europe in the early 1960s while a university student and after graduation applied to IVS-UK (SCI Branch) for long-term voluntary service. His first stint was in East Pakistan (10/64-10/65), his second was with Aid for Destitute Children and, after Independence in 1971, he volunteered with SCI-Bangladesh for three years. His knowledge of Bengali and love of the country kept him involved with the Bangladeshi community in Britain on his return. Upon retirement he moved to central England.

'CONFESSIONS OF A COMPULSIVE WORKCAMPER'

Why?

It's easy to edit one's past to make it more flattering: "As I had useful skills to share, I decided to devote a couple of years of my life to serving as a volunteer in the third world. My social conscience prompted me to do my bit in the battle against injustice and poverty. I was glad to be able to contribute something to the community where I was posted."

But I shall try to be honest.

To explain satisfactorily how and why I became a volunteer I need to start at the beginning. I was born in 1941 in London. At that time bombs were falling, food was rationed, and our neighbourhood was full of refugees from the Nazi regime; yet my family was hardly affected by these circumstances, and my childhood was a remarkably sheltered one.

I attended a succession of private schools. Being teachable and obedient, rather than academic, I did well in class. In due course I secured a place at university.

But I was not ready for college, or, indeed, for life outside the cosy circle of home and school. I knew nothing whatever about society or politics, had no views about wealth and poverty, privilege and exploitation, was clueless about how other people lived. On top of that I had no ambition and no spirit of enterprise - I was so used to being told what to do, then doing it and receiving a pat on the head, that I could imagine no other way of carrying on.

So I was ill at ease amid the wild unfettered ferment of college life. But I did yearn to travel and see the world. As a student with limited resources, I looked around for cheap ways of exploring Europe in the vacations, and discovered two useful money-saving tools: hitchhiking and workcamping. Hitchhiking to move around, workcamping to stay in a place, see the area, meet people.

First workcamps

My first workcamp was in a village in the Taunus region of Germany. It was run by a small local organization called Aufbauwerk der Jugend - roughly speaking, 'Young People for Reconstruction'. There were volunteers from Germany, France, Denmark, Sweden, Algeria and England. The work was unambitious - cleaning up the public areas in the village - but the camp was a great success; the volunteers bonded into a very happy team, and the village people made every effort to work with us and make us feel at home. The second World War had ended only fifteen years earlier, so reconciliation and the need for mutual understanding between nations were live issues; in this way the camp may have resembled some of the earliest SCI workcamps, which had been held, not far away, a mere 40 years before.

Subsequently I joined a forestry camp in Austria held by the Steiermarkischer Waldschutzverband (Styrian League for Forest Protection); a camp preparing relief goods in Sweden under the aegis of a tiny organization with big ideals called Agni (from the Sanskrit word for Fire); a camp in Spain run by the Delegacion Nacional de Juventudes

(National Youth Organization), where the aim was to improve the civic amenities in a coastal tourist town. Each of these camps had its own distinct character; all involved volunteers from at least three countries, but none recaptured the spirit of international brotherhood and reconciliation which had so impressed me in my very first workcamp.

Post-University and first contact with SCI

Somehow - only just - I survived my three years at university. I came away with a third class degree, and still no notion of what I was going to do with my life.

By now I had heard about 'long term' voluntary work. It sounded like a good idea - go abroad, enjoy the kind of workcamp situation I was already familiar with, see the world, put off the day of decision about careers. Thus it was that, shortly after leaving university, in the summer of 1963, I headed for St Girons in the French Pyrenees to join an SCI orientation programme which was being held there for prospective long term volunteers. The programme involved study sessions, with lectures by Jean-Pierre Petit, Etienne Reclus and others, plus short workcamps in Ariege villages.

Immediately after the orientation programme, I got an opportunity to see long term voluntary service at first hand. I hitch-hiked with another volunteer through Spain and Morocco to Tlemcen in Algeria. In a makeshift encampment on a rocky hillside I worked for a few days with French SCI volunteers who were carrying out a health and education programme with Algerian war refugees. A derelict hut, used by goats as a shelter, was to be restored and converted into a bedroom. My job was to clean it out, plaster the rough walls and make a new wooden door. The highlight of this brief placement was being invited by one of the refugees to share a meal of couscous in her tiny shack.

Back in England I discovered IVS (the UK branch of SCI) and its network of local groups. I joined the London group and became a 'regular' at its weekend workcamp programme - which mostly involved painting and decorating in the homes of disadvantaged people in run-down areas of the city: the aged, the disabled, the mentally ill. The participants in these camps were mainly middle-class and English; but on some occasions we were joined by inmates of Wormwood Scrubs prison, who were allowed out on day release for the purpose. For me it was a revelation to see the dismal and often sordid conditions in which less fortunate Londoners lived.

On one occasion we were sent out with collecting tins, to raise money for SCI's emergency work in Algeria. This was my first experience of going from house to house or flat to flat, knocking on the doors of strangers,

trying to explain SCI's aims and activities in a few words, then asking tactfully for a donation. A small minority of the people we approached took a real interest in what we were saying about refugees, poverty and voluntary service. I remember in particular the enthusiastic reactions of some Indian students, and the moving response from a Jordanian doctor who was so pleased to hear we were collecting for relief work in an Arab country that he ushered my two companions and me into his tiny flat and entertained us with sweet cardamom-flavoured coffee.

Becoming an SCI LTV (Long Term Volunteer) for East Pakistan

But I still had to decide what to do with myself. Wisely or not, my parents put no pressure on me to take up a career. "Go into teaching," said an aunt. She knew I had been an exemplary schoolboy, and sensed that I wasn't cut out for commerce or industry ... or law or accountancy ... or indeed anything much else. Someone came up with a suggestion which intrigued me - go to Makerere College in Uganda, where you can train to be a teacher at the same time as helping Ugandan children and seeing East Africa. After much deliberation I applied through the appropriate channel, the UK Department of Technical Cooperation (forerunner of the Overseas Development Agency).

However, I also applied to IVS for a place as a long term volunteer. The fact that I had no skills to offer hardly entered my head; yet it must certainly have crossed the minds of the people who interviewed me. "He seems harmless enough, but what use could he possibly be?" was what they asked themselves.

Indeed, it took the best part of a year for a suitable unskilled vacancy to materialise. At different stages IVS sought placements for me in South America (with the United Nations Association); Thailand; Africa; and India. Each of these plans fell through. Meanwhile I worked for some months as a bricklayer's mate, then travelled in France, Switzerland and Yugoslavia. I was accepted as a postgraduate student at Makerere College, but by then I was so set on becoming an LTV that I turned down the offer. At last it was decided - I was to go to Pakistan to help liaise between the separate SCI groups in West and East Pakistan and encourage their development.

In those days IVS volunteers were still being sent to Asia by boat. There were six of us in a little batch of new LTVs setting off from Victoria Station, London, on 5th October 1964. The other five were girls. Nina Atkins, a nurse, and Anne Harland, a teacher, were to work with Tibetan refugees in Kasauli in northern India; Margaret Sargeant, a social anthropologist, would be posted in Kanya Kumari in Madras State, south

India; occupational therapists Judy Wallis and Jackie Horner were heading for Chieng Mai in northern Thailand. We travelled by train to Marseilles and boarded the SS Vietnam, a cargo cum passenger ship operated by the French company Messageries Maritimes. It took us almost a week to reach Bombay via the Suez Canal, another day to get from Bombay to Delhi by train. Before scattering to our various destinations we attended our first Asian workcamp in a village in Haryana - a congenial introduction to rural India.

I then visited West Pakistan to meet the SCI groups in Lahore and Multan; returned to Delhi and went by train to Calcutta, then on to Dhaka in East Pakistan. From that moment, although I didn't realise it at the time, my fate was sealed, the course of my life determined.

I worked with the SCI East Pakistan Group for a year, living all the time with local volunteers and visiting various parts of the country. I was in very good hands - thanks to the friendliness, generosity and optimism of my hosts I felt completely at home, and quickly fell in love with the country and its culture. My original brief, of liaison between the West and East Pakistan SCI groups, was somehow forgotten when the volunteers of East Pakistan Group, with the most warm-hearted enthusiasm, adopted me as their own.

I got involved in numerous kinds of activity. It started with an international workcamp on Sandwip, a beautiful cyclone-ravaged island, where a new primary school building was being erected. Then, back in Dhaka, there were weekend working parties attended by local students, doing such things as cleaning ponds and levelling playgrounds. I spent a lot of time in the SCI office (a cramped space in an outbuilding), communicating with prospective volunteers and producing a monthly newsletter with the aid of a borrowed portable typewriter and a messy Gestetner duplicating machine.

After a while I was sent away to a northern district called Rajshahi, where I was to join in the activities of the local SCI group and encourage its development. To fill in time between work programmes I stayed at a nearby Catholic mission and taught English at the mission school.

Then another cyclone hit the southern part of the country; I was recalled to Dhaka, and joined a team of SCI volunteers who were put at the disposal of the East Pakistan Red Cross and helped distribute relief goods in Barisal district. After that I was allowed to accompany an official SCI survey team which toured the cyclone affected area of Patuakhali to identify a suitable location for a long term development project. The island of Moudubi was eventually selected as the site. Then I was back in Rajshahi for a while; returned to Dhaka to resume production of the SCI

newsletter; took part in further non-residential work programmes in the city, including a construction project at an orphanage.

Meanwhile there was trouble in Kashmir, and diplomatic relations between Pakistan and India were reaching a nadir. There was a brief war between the two states, and although East Pakistan was scarcely affected by the hostilities, endless discussions went on among SCI members about the political and military implications of the conflict.

There was some talk of SCI holding an international workcamp to bring together volunteers from India and Pakistan; however the tense political situation and closure of borders made this impracticable. Instead a residential work and study camp was held in the grounds of a mission school in Dhaka, which was centred on tree-planting.

Subsequent returns to Bangladesh and its impact

And then my time was up. But even before I left for England, after one year with SCI East Pakistan, I had made plans for my return. My second period of voluntary service lasted about eighteen months; I was photographer and administrative assistant for an international child sponsorship scheme run by Aid for Destitute Children. Then I went back to England, trained as a teacher, and started work in a primary school in Birmingham. Simultaneously I developed links with the local Bengali-speaking community. Then, in 1971, civil war broke out in Pakistan, and its East wing became the independent state of Bangladesh. That prompted me to do a third stint of voluntary service there. IVS was willing to sponsor me, and I was attached to SCI Bangladesh so that I could participate in its ongoing SCI workcamp programme (mainly concerned with post-war rehabilitation), but for some of the time I was loaned to the Ganashasthya Kendra, a pioneering rural health project. I stayed for a total of three years.

But the story doesn't even end there, as I have continued to make return visits to Bangladesh and to remain deeply involved, as a volunteer, in the Bangladeshi community in Britain.

Final thoughts

What does it all prove? Well, I suppose it shows that even a cosseted dilettante who drifts into voluntary service with mixed and dubious motives is not beyond redemption. By any objective measurement I was a pretty useless LTV; yet I think some positive good resulted from the periods of unfocussed messing-about in far-off lands which I was lucky enough to get

away with. Certainly it changed me; gradually, over the years, my SCI experiences forced me to think more seriously about major international and communal issues - economic disparity, exploitation, racism - and my own role in it all. I found some purpose in life. These were huge gains for me; though of course, whether or not anybody else benefited is open to doubt.

As far as I'm concerned, my time with SCI brought three specific benefits. Firstly, the habits of patience and frugality which workcamping inculcated in me have taught me to enjoy life more fully, and probably also helped me to be a more responsible citizen of this crowded world than I would otherwise have been. Second, the knowledge and experience which I gathered, quite capriciously, during my years abroad eventually became useful tools in my work. But third and most important, I gained lifelong friends. It is for blessing me with these special, long-lasting friendships that I'm most grateful to SCI.

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Marie Catherine Petit, 1964 in Morocco; LTV in India 1972-1973

Born in Brittany and trained as a nurse, she joined SCI in 1964, went to Morocco for a summer workcamp and was a long-term volunteer in India in 1972-1973. She and her husband, Jean-Pierre Petit, remained actively involved with SCI in Paris.

Joining SCI

There were ten children in my family. I lived in Rennes (Brittany) and I was studying to be a nurse. In 1964, I heard about workcamps from some of my friends. I joined the SCI group in Rennes, where we had weekend camps to renovate the flats of old people. I liked this work. It was an opportunity to meet other young people in a friendly atmosphere.

This is how I met SCI volunteers with whom we drove to Morocco for a workcamp in the mountains. Jean-Pierre Petit was in charge of the volunteers going abroad, but there was no specific training before the workcamp. (Earlier, from 1957 to 1960, Jean-Pierre, together with a leader

of the British branch, used to organize 3 week sessions for long-term volunteers, thanks to a grant from the British branch.) My memories of this period concern mostly the travel. We had two cars and we were travelling with two French girls with whom we had long discussions; our views were rather opposite to each other. We visited one of the volunteers who was Basque; at his home, women were serving the men and remained standing, just as in Morocco.

In that country, there were several workcamps organized by a Moroccan association. Ours lasted for three weeks, but the project was going on for five years altogether. We built a swimming pool for the village. There only few European volunteers, the majority came from Morocco, but they were all men. It was a pick and shovel camp, where girls were doing the same work as boys. It was hot, but the camp was in a mountainous area, so that I don't remember suffering from the heat. As foreign volunteers, we were invited several times by the villagers. We had lots of discussions with the Moroccan volunteers on the camp, but they were not organized discussions and they concerned practical questions rather than ideological issues.

In these days, my awareness of these issues was not really developed and I don't feel that this experience had a big impact on me, although I was coming from a traditional environment, where I was rather 'cocooned'. I went there because I wanted to know a different environment (I had been a girl scout and a guide) and to meet people who had different views, in a non governmental and non religious context. During this workcamp, I met people from various backgrounds, but it was not really a shock, even with the Moroccans. To-day, in such circumstances, it would mean more challenge for me.

When I came back from Morocco, I participated in other weekend camps but I was less in touch with SCI. In 1967, I moved to work in the Paris area, where I was very busy with my job and I lived mostly with my colleagues from the hospital, with limited openings on the outside world. In 1971, I wanted to leave this rather closed environment and I started thinking that a different life was possible.

At that time, SCI was looking for volunteers, but this did not materialize for me. For India, they had to speak English and since I did not I first said no. But later on, I felt that I definitely needed a change. I got in touch with SCI and I signed a contract for India. But it took a long time until I could get a visa and in the meantime I went to England for workcamping. I spent two months in Newcastle to build a wall in a hospital for handicapped people – and ultimately the wall collapsed. It was not very beneficial for my English, since the local volunteers wanted to learn French. Therefore, the workcamp

was not very efficient and it was rather tough. I had to work as a nurse for mentally handicapped people and in those days, the living conditions for them were hardly human. (It has changed a lot afterwards).

India

In January 1972, I finally left for India. At that time, with the low cost airways companies, 20 hours of flight were required to get to India. When I reached Delhi at 5 AM, nobody was waiting for me at the airport. They had been expecting me for a long time, but on the day of my arrival nobody was there. I left with my little suitcase, with all my belongings for one year. It was not an easy situation and I was very innocent. I talked to some men who said that they could give me a lift. They were five of them and they took me to Valli Seshan's home. But nobody was there! I waited on the steps of the house and I saw the ward's watchman who was taking his watch patrol, beating his big stick: I did not know what it was. At 8 'o' clock, a volunteer came and called Bhuppy, then Secretary of the Indian branch, to tell him that the French volunteer had arrived. And Bhuppy came at last.

Despite the long journey and a sleepless night, I decided that day to follow the volunteers in the march organized by SCI (Walk For Peace) to collect money. There I saw a man spitting red, then another one, and, finally, an SCI volunteer. I thought that they had tuberculosis, but they were simply chewing betel. Since my English was still poor, I dared not ask questions, but I was looking around a lot. For my first meal, I wanted to take Indian food, but it was quite tough, especially after this sleepless journey.

I stayed for some time with Valli, then I went to Nangloi, a colony which was actually a slum, supposedly temporary, but in fact permanent. This was the major SCI project in India, which lasted for several years. It was a dispensary, where they were giving vaccinations, and also doing some gardening and sewing. I stayed there for two or three months, then I went to another project near Madras, then to a slum in Bombay for three or four months. I was replacing the nurses who were long-term volunteers but who were taking a leave. Finally, I went to Bangladesh for an international workcamp.

Foreign (notably English and Dutch) long-term volunteers were participating in these workcamps, together with Indian volunteers, boys and girls. The workcamps also included workshops, which employed some paid workers, for instance in carpentry and sewing.

My first year in India went on in this way. I was supposed to stay for one year, but I stayed for another year, in the state of Bihar and in the

Patna area, south of Calcutta. To reach that place, one had to walk for an hour in the jungle. It was with a tribe, in a village, where I was the only Westerner. There was an Indian volunteer who stayed and others who came for brief periods. This period was rather tough, although I was well integrated in the village – which required some time since the villagers were tired of seeing volunteers coming and leaving. But when one was staying for a longer period, he/she was well accepted. So much so that, as a volunteer, I could not do anything alone. For instance, if I wanted to walk on the road for a while because I was looking for a quiet moment, a number of villagers would come and ask me what was wrong with an Indian volunteer which would explain why I was going away. It was an interesting experience, but I am not sure that I could stand it to day, after being so independent.

There was a special house for the volunteers. It was made of mud and every month it was necessary to lay some cow dung on the floor. In the village, living conditions were far less difficult than in the slum. It was simple, but very clean. We could have a shower every day and, inside the house we were independent. For the people it was cleaner than in the slum. The children were mostly suffering from tuberculosis and from scabies. But in 1972 the village had never seen a doctor; one had to go to the nearest town in order to be cured; in some instances, we had to go there with a sick child. When the people were coming to the dispensary, it was because the local medicine had failed.

I don't think that there was so much that we could teach the local people concerning health, at least with regard to medical care. There was more work to do from the point of view of food hygiene. We could teach them by doing with them, for instance with a little vegetable garden, in order to improve the diet of the children. The quality of water also had to be improved; we used to put disinfectant in it. Anyway – and doctors were very surprised - I have never been sick, even without taking drugs against malaria. Once, I participated in a big festivity where I was the only European and I drank some turbid water, but nothing happened to me.

At the beginning, I was with a Swiss volunteer, who was a horticulturist and we had several Indian volunteers. Bhuppy, then in charge of the Indian branch came to the workcamp and I also went to Delhi, where I was living with Valli.

Conclusion

I came back to France in 1974. I had been on leave without pay. On my return, I took back my job as a nurse immediately, but I was completely out

of touch in relation to my friends. I felt closer to my SCI friends, rather than to those that I had left. I was living between two separate worlds: my professional environment, with which I did not share much and the SCI people, where many friends were sharing the same ideas. I liked my work, but I did not have much in common with my colleagues. It was mostly in terms of the way of life. When you have lived for one year in a tribe, where you are entirely left by yourself, with very few people around, when you buy almost nothing and have to walk for one hour to take a train, it is really a natural life. When I came back, I did not have any good clothes, nor any money (I could not save any during the period when I was a volunteer) and I had to ask SCI for some money, but I could not spend anything, therefore I could not go to a shop. My friends told me: “Either you go again, or you adjust to another way of life, but you cannot go on like this”. Even in the hospital, I kept my habits of saving money in an extreme manner.

I worked again as a nurse, but I came often to the SCI Secretariat, where I was helping with the office work. I participated in the training sessions on Asia, which were taking place for five days before the departure of long-term volunteers. I told them about my experience and gave them some practical information on life there.

Once, I thought of going again to India as a volunteer, but Valli told me: “You will never be Indian. Since you have enough income to pay for a travel to India, it is better for you to work in your country and to come to India from time to time to visit us if you like”. In any case, I was not convinced enough to drop my life in France altogether. I went back several times to India, taking a leave without pay from my job, in order to visit my friends and to do some work in a workcamp, but I was never really a volunteer again.

When I went to India for the first time, the impression was very strong: it was such a different environment. SCI made only one mistake while I was in India: to leave me alone with an Indian volunteer, which was not a good idea in such an isolated environment. When you go to India for the first time as a volunteer, you strongly believe in your role and you think that if you leave, the project would stop and it would be a problem for many people with whom you stay. To-day I would have a different view and I would look at things with more distance. I don’t think that one has to accept anything. I had very high ideals, but I never believed that I would change the world; I only had the idea of living together and to learn how to know each other. I still believe in this. In any case, this experience had a very big impact on me. I began to look at the world in a different way, to have a new awareness of the world

Concerning the efficiency of SCI action, I believe that from the medical point of view it was limited. There were only a few instances when it was fortunate that we were there to take urgently some sick people to the hospital. And there were the campaigns against smallpox. But I believe much more in the efficiency of human relationships, on both sides. On the Indian side, I could see when I came back that something had happened. But I think that we learn more from our stay there, than the people there from our visit. It is a one way process. I also learnt a lot about myself: an opening on the world, which made me more tolerant; an awareness of a number of issues, including on politics; the acceptance of being different. For me, there was life before and after India. For instance, if the events of May 1968 had taken place after my stay in India, the impact on me would have been different. I am much more open to the outside world, while I used to be focussed on my little job. I also learnt a different way of life: refusal of the consumption society, which looks ridiculous for the younger generation.

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Faruque Alamgir, 1965; life member of SCI-Bangladesh; MTV in Europe 1979

Faruque joined SCI in 1965 and took part in many work camps and long term projects in Bangladesh and went to Europe in 1979 as a Medium Term Volunteer. He has been a pillar of his home branch and also served on regional and international SCI committees.

First introduction

In early 1965 I was walking by a lane near my house with my friends. It was a stroll by youngsters then just to pass time. Suddenly we saw a handwritten poster on a small door of a garage: «VOLUNTEERS WANTED». I remember that we used to see some young foreigner coming and going from the same place. Being attracted, we peeped in and saw a man deeply engaged in typing something. As we went in he gazed and looked at us. Oh, it was Roman Bhai, alias Ataur Bhai, who was my big brother's friend. With his evergreen smile he welcomed us and, on enquiry, he said it was the office of an international voluntary social service organization named 'SCI'. The name sounded like 'CIA'. Oh no, don't join

that for god's sake!! But Ataur Bhai explained in detail about what SCI is and voluntarism locally, nationally and internationally.

My joining SCI had no exact aim or philosophy since I was in my youth with virtually no sense of direction and had not had any exposure to such an arena. I enrolled so as to see what voluntarism means. Is it unpaid labour or do you get something in return? At that time our social situation was not that open to do free services. Such services were not very popular in the society as well. Moreover, to be connected with a foreign organization in then Pakistani society was not viewed with respect.

Voluntarism stuck in my mind and I wished to give it a try to be a volunteer. But fear was there whether I would get the consent of my parents since the traditional family structure mandated that at that time, plus the membership application form also contained such a clause. It took me quite a while to get the consent, assuring my parents that my voluntarism would not affect my studies.

Early days

After becoming a member of SCI I observed that it was not only work based but also had a philosophy that it carried with it: the great philosophy of creating friendship and amity between people of divergent background, thus creating an opinion against the ills of war. PEACE was the main focus of SCI through voluntarism with people of different nationalities, caste, creed and colour. To erase the curse of WAR from the face of the earth the founder, Pierre Cérésole, dreamt to establish an army of volunteers to replace the man-killing army.

I have attended, led, and organized several work camps at home and abroad. My first work camp was a weekend camp in Dhaka to clean and sweep sewrage drains and the school premises at Hazaribagh. Though I was not accustomed to this type of work, it felt great when being appreciated by the elders of the locality. There were a few local participants and we had good discussions on SCI ideology. Our work drew the attention of the school committee who requested SCI to help them do masonry work on some rooms of the school. That project had participants from students of California University who were on a visit under the 'Project Pakistan' programme. This was my first interaction with foreign volunteers. During work and discussion most of the young volunteers were stammering talking English. I am sure conversation was not in pure English, rather it was 'Banglish' (mixture of Bangla and English!!)

As I continued with the movement of SCI, I found myself more and more attracted to provide service to people especially after natural

calamities. As our country is prone to disasters like cyclones/tornados/floods, the people's suffering is enormous and beyond imagination. SCI, though a small voluntary organization, always responded immediately after such natural calamities in cooperation with Red Cross/Church Council, etc.

Moudubi – long term project

After taking part in such relief distribution work in the southern most part of Bangladesh, SCI identified a remote small islet called Moudubi, which is almost in the sea bed. Sato-san of SCI-Japan, then Asian Secretary, termed Moudubi as the remotest corner in the world. The reason is that you can see both the sun rise and sun set from the island. In 1966, in cooperation with OXFAM and local villagers, SCI constructed a single story brick building which would act as School-cum-Cyclone shelter as there was no pucca (solid) building within a 30 mile radius.

In my opinion the Moudubi project is unique in character in respect to its distance, physical situation and the whole-hearted local participation as well as attracting a flood of foreign volunteers from about 15 countries, joining hand in hand and singing the famous song *We Shall Overcome*. It is unbelievable that masons Jabbar Mia and Matin who worked there were brought from Dhaka and influenced by ideals of voluntarism. If I remember correctly they did not take full wages as a gesture of their participation in this holy endeavour.

After almost forty years the memories of Moudubi are still very fresh and vibrant in me and I feel that it was yesterday that we were there. I am convinced that had I not joined the greatest long-term project of SCI, my joining SCI would not have been that memorable. Thank you Moudubi for allowing me to have sweet reminiscences which still give me inspiration.

At one point SCI, especially in Asia, started taking up long-term projects because of the work opportunities and availability of committed volunteers in the region. Many of the long-term projects ran smoothly and successfully when committed volunteers remained or the branch could raise funds and remain involved or the locality did not find any alternative to SCI.

The efficacy of long-term projects was put into question as to whether it is in line with the motto of SCI, i.e. to move, to grow, to expand beyond borders, to imbibe people with the spirit of internationalism and amity locally, nationally, regionally and globally. Whether it was making SCI stuck in one particularly society, in a particular area and failing to view the horizon elsewhere? These LT projects also made SCI heavily dependent on funds from different funding agencies whose aims and objectives are

not necessarily similar to SCI's. As my involvement grew more and more I came face-to-face with these burning questions.

Anecdotes

During the four decades of my involvement I have had the opportunity to attend various types of work camps like weekend, short-term and long-term camps both within Bangladesh and outside. Almost all of the camps were memorable and mixed with experience

In 1969 it was a ten day residential work camp with volunteers from the then West Germany, under the AIG programme, to construct a park for the locality. There was zero participation from the locals. The funniest part was that the camp subscribed to two newspapers. Surprisingly, one day we looked for the papers but they were not found. But, finally, some remnants were found in the toilet, used as toilet paper by the German volunteers !!!!

One day in the morning I was looking for my tooth brush but surprisingly found that it was being used by one camper. On query he answered that he thought that the brush was for common use!!

Also in 1969 there was a serious outbreak of pox in and around Dhaka city. SCI volunteers and the municipal health inspector took charge of a crowded market adjacent to New Market and started vaccinating residents with a pumping system. Suddenly some people came running and snatched away the machine complaining that people were forcefully injecting permanent Family Planning Medication. We were forced to withdraw.

The tragic one took place in Glebe House camp in Belfast, Northern Ireland in 1979. This was an international work camp. One evening after group discussion we were engaged in fun games but all of a sudden a white volunteer from SCI Leicester came downstairs and slapped the only African volunteer from Senegal without saying anything. There were about 10 -12 volunteers in the room. This was the most shocking experience I had in European work camps.

Asia-Europe Exchange Programme

I had the opportunity to be part of international work camping as organized by SCI-Europe in 1979. This was under the Asia-Europe Exchange programme. My journey started with a mishap, i.e. my luggage did not wish to accompany me to Europe!!

I deeply marked that the structure, membership, attitude and mainly the modus operandi of SCI-Europe is quite different from that of Asia.

Membership is different as Asian volunteers remain in touch on a regular basis for a long, long period.

The volunteer exchange programme is the key to SCI ideology. But method of recruitment does not help the morale of the exchange. From the European end they recruited first-timers who had no exposure to SCI ideology or previous work camp experience, who consequently often found it diffcult to follow the work camp schedule. As I was a member of the Asian Executive Committee/Seed Executive Committee and attended very many big forum meetings, I tried to impress on our western colleagues that a volunteer who had no previous SCI exposure should not be recruited or else this would turn SCI into a professional tourist club.

Final reflections

SCI is not as vibrant as it was there during the `50s till `90s. The morale has been deviated from creating an army of volunteers to replace militarism and instead turned into a project oriented and bureaucratic organization, rather than remain a voluntary organization.

There is a big distance between the European branches and Asian branches. To make SCI vibrant and an international family again more and more volunteers need to be inducted and people-oriented programmes be adopted, fostering closer contacts and the IEC/IS (International Executive Committee/International Secretary) be more mobile. Attempts must be given to revive and establish new contacts in the countries where SCI once existed. Since SCI is membership based, branches should focus on increasing membership, meaning that being a torch bearer of Peace can be further expanded.

I personally feel that because of the growing tension, deadly conficts and unhealthy competition between the rich nations, plus making the august United Nations a clique of the big five that now the world is shaking like a volcano. Pierre Cérésole dreamt that the spilling of human blood would lessen and end soon by the help of peace sentinels through SCI. But the spill has turned in greater volume as the flood of blood throughout the globe and again the Western powers are behind such unholy blood bath.

If someone asked me what is my appreciation about SCI, I will not hesitate to say that SCI has given me the opportunity to widen my thinking and adopt a philosophy of life to become a sentinel of Peace. SCI is the gateway for free thinkers and those who are ready to make friends and be part of the global peace effort. But individual attitudes vary from place to place and people to people but all with the only single goal – Solidarity,

Friendship and Peace and that is the essence and beauty of SCI. SCI glorifies itself by having Unity in Diversity.

SCI's efficacy is still there but maybe the modus operandi has to be modified or changed. However, the main ornament of SCI, work camps, must continue to give the feeling of oneness with the situation, people and issues. SCI has changed me to be a life long volunteer and I enjoy being in the company of friends attained during my long association with SCI.

SCI is my way of life and I proudly belong to the global SCI family.

Due to my continuous involvement with global SCI I am fortunate to have come across, as well as work closely with, some of the best campers of SCI. I received the loving affection, encouragement and moral support and they are my idols in SCI: Ralph Hegnauer, Nigel Watt, Ethelwyn Best, Michilene Six, Helen Honeyman, Roger Gwynn, Navam Appadurai, Devinder Das Chopra, Sato-san, Asta Mangal, Anwar Hussain (founder of SCI-Bangladesh), Ataur Rahman, Valli Seshan, Bhuppy Kishore. These are the erudite, selfless committed stars or core of the movement who are an inseparable entity with SCI. I feel myself very lucky to have had the great opportunity in working with these Peace Giants and feel myself as an able (?) disciple.

SCI is distinctively different from other normal NGOs. The essence of SCI is that it is purely a voluntary, non-profit social welfare membership based organization. The members are its weapon to turn out sentinels of Peace.

SCI and its impact on people is very diffcult to draw. As, after a work camp, SCI (other than long-term projects) leaves and mostly never goes back to find out whether there are any sweet memories left in the peoples' mind that it worked with. To me, SCI should revisit some camps to reinvigorate the lost memory.

As for me SCI had a great impact on my life. Because of my commitment to voluntarism and belief in SCI ideology I did not join any other organization so that I could contribute whole heartedly to SCI. I believed that if engaged in many works, I could do justice to none. SCI, since 1965, has become not only part of my life but is my second global family.

Finally, I wish to say that the efficacy of SCI seems to be fading due to the onslaught of well funded NGOs with clandestine motives. But, as conflict has intensified, diversified on a daily basis and globalized by the war mongers, it is now around the corner of everybody's home so the ONUS is greater than before.

The Man Pierre

Once upon a time
a man named Pierre
urged the humanity
to forget bestiality,
join immediate past foes
for reconciliation and friendship;
mend the shattered human values
and free the world from the curse
of WAR

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Ann Kobayashi, LTV in Thailand 1965; 1968-1978 in Japan

Ann (Smith) Kobayashi was sent to Thailand through IVS (International Voluntary Service – SCI British Branch) in 1965. In addition to her teaching duties, she and fellow LTVs in Thailand helped lay the groundwork for the formation of the Thai Group/Branch. She met her future husband, Shigeo Kobayashi, on her return to England via Japan in 1967. After their marriage they managed the long-term project of Kimpu in Japan until 1978, then lived outside London in Wickford.

First contacts with SCI

In 1965 I had been in my first full-time job as a social worker in England for 18 months when I heard about the IVS (British branch of SCI) LTV programme from my flat-mate who had met the IVS secretary at a party! At the time of applying to be an LTV the idea of voluntary work in a developing country seemed more challenging than statutory social work with the marginalised and in many cases desperately poor, people in a London

Borough. In retrospect of course, I realise it was change and adventure I was seeking.

As I subsequently discovered, IVS unlike most other SCI branches and especially those in Asia, did not require LTV applicants to be members of a local IVS group or to have had any previous work-camp experience. During the LTV orientation programme I cannot recall learning anything significant about SCI's history or structure. I was, however, sent to my first work-camp - a Rudolf Steiner community near Ulm, Germany - where I white-washed cow-houses, gathered hay and talked about world peace, conscientious objection and was introduced to a vegetarian menu. It was a wonderful break from 12-hour days spent in Juvenile Courts, police stations, Children's 'Homes' and endless report writing.

Accepted as LTV - 1965

Initially IVS assigned me to a Fishermen's Cooperative in an Indian village where the major project was to improve the fishing nets. Even I realised that my fervent, uninformed, wish to do good would not outweigh my complete ignorance of any type of fishing and net-making. Fortunately for the Cooperative I could not leave my job in time to join the project; happily for me I went to Bangkok where I joined Morag Beaton, a Scots LTV, and worked as an English teacher.

Our principal task in Bangkok was to run a British Council English Course for Thai teachers of English in cooperation with the Dept. of Secondary Education. We were also assigned to teach in several secondary schools. It was a busy, daily schedule and every evening teachers and students came to visit our room in the Teachers' hostel to practise their English or take us to meet their families. With Tony Kidd, the other Bangkok-based LTV, we began to build a group interested in SCI and on Saturdays went to a large psychiatric hospital to talk and dance with the patients. Later we also did some work in a school for visually impaired children. Tony was the main mover and largely through his efforts, an international work-camp was organised at a Health Centre in the rural, impoverished and therefore politically unstable, North-East. By then, through correspondence with Sato-san, SCI Asian Secretary, we had begun to realise that he did not view our teaching project as an ideal SCI placement. We and others had gone to Thailand as IVS volunteers understanding that our main contact point was IVS National Office which expected, although didn't always get, regular progress reports; only gradually did some of us become part of SCI. Support from Claire and Olivier Bertrand, SCI representatives in Bangkok, and a visit from Phyllis Sato also encouraged us to see the larger SCI context but not to feel overly

defensive about the project; at one stage we had begun to feel caught between the conflicting expectations of IVS and the Asian Secretariat. So it is always interesting when searching questions begin to puncture assumptions that you are doing the right thing!

When Morag finished her year, I moved out to live with a Chinese-Thai family which included two young women university students. They became enthusiastic about SCI and voluntary work. The SCI group began meeting at the house; with Tony's continuing support after I had left, it eventually became a fully fledged national branch. For most of the Thai students SCI was their first encounter with the concept of volunteering to work alongside people from different economic/social backgrounds in rural areas; the presence of foreign volunteers was probably less challenging and certainly we were made to feel very welcome. Few of my many non-student Thai friends had the luxury of choosing to attend a project or work-camp because of family financial commitments but their great kindness, warm hospitality and patience with an often clumsy foreigner, made all the difference to my stay.

Return home via Japan - 1967

I travelled to Singapore where I stayed with the Sato family while waiting for the MM boat to Yokohama. Shigeo Kobayashi, then SCI Japan Secretary, arrived on that MM boat from an SCI National Secretaries' meeting in Sri Lanka so we met in May 1967. I had intended to stay in Japan only for as long as it took to buy boat and train tickets for the USSR but it somehow seemed to make economic sense to wait until autumn when the Trans-Siberian ticket would be cheaper! Staying with Mieko-san in her little room beside the SCI office which was always crowded with Japanese members and foreign volunteers, cooking, writing, discussing camps together, I met people who are still good friends. I also did two camps in Kimpu, an international camp organised by SCI Korea near the border with North Korea, and worked at an orphanage in Hiroshima.]

[Note: See Shigeo Kobayashi's piece for the description of their marriage and many years in Kimpu.]

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Cathy (Hambridge) Peel, 1965 in India, 1967-1968 in Japan

Cathy (Hambridge) Peel did two consecutive tours as an LTV – first to India in 1965 and next to Japan (1967-1968). After further study in England she later returned to Japan to teach and remained in contact with SCI friends. She and her husband live near Chester, England.

Motivation and first SCI contacts

I attended a Quaker School and I was well used to hearing about overseas voluntary projects, which certainly influenced my thinking.

After school I trained as a Nursery Nurse in 1962/3 and then worked in Great Ormond Street Hospital.

In 1965 I was accepted to become a Long Term Volunteer (LTV) with IVS, and spent a week in Ariege, France with other potential volunteers. Due to the outbreak of hostilities between India and Pakistan in the autumn I experienced 3 workcamps in London whilst waiting to be sent out to India. This was actually good as I gained some experience of IVS/workcamping. Comments made at Ariege by French volunteers were that UK volunteers had no experience of SCI, and its history

1965–1966 with SCI India

One year working at Hathibari Leprosy Colony, near Sambalpur, Orissa. I was supposed to be sent to Dharamsala project (with Tibetan refugee children) but due to the political unrest it was considered unwise and so I was sent as a replacement for the physiotherapist at this project, and was to oversee the weaving of bandage cloth and teach English in the local school. I lived with other long term volunteers, one English agriculturalist and one Japanese nurse. Other medium term volunteers were assigned to us from time to time. We had a house similar to the better ones at Hathibari, thatched roof, no electricity or running water, no news: radio or newspaper. I assumed the role of 'housekeeper-shopper' as well as this meant a day trip into town and I could be more flexible than the other volunteers. A frustrating year as I could not work using my experience and at 21 years old, I had not much of that anyway! We were also too cut off from Indian society to have much effect from an SCI point of view.

For my vacation I spent some time in Bombay (Mumbai) and then joined a workcamp building a school on the sea shore in Mahabalipuram, South India. This was very enjoyable.

1966-1967 Malaysia

After the year in India I was able to continue in Asia, spending 3 months living with the Satos' at their home and supposedly working in the SCI regional office, Kuala Lumpur. This was a break between projects and countries. I gained cultural and practical knowledge before travelling on to Japan to spend a further year as an LTV there. Being with the Satos was great for me; gave me a good background to SCI in Japan, as well as helping me to make the essential change from very rural India to the modernising Japan.

1967-1968 with SCI Japan

I attended several workcamps in Kimpu project (SCI-Japan's long-term project with a farmers' cooperative) and a few others. I worked 3 months as a nursery nurse in a children's home in Hiroshima (Shinsei Gakuen), and the last 6 months in a Tokyo institution for mentally and physically handicapped children alongside a nurse who was to go to India (Hathibari) as a volunteer.

Shinsei Gakuen was a positive placement for me and I felt my time there was too short. The Principal and his wife were wonderful people to work under, and were immensely kind to me. I liked my co-workers and wanted to do more. I would happily have spent my whole year there. Working with children was what I had wanted and what I had been trained to do. This was also the place that gave me a strong grounding in Japanese language. Total immersion! Negatively, a hazard of the job, I also suffered an attack of measles which rather drained my energy.

Consequences

Some of the particularly valuable experiences that have influenced my later career and activities:

An association with agriculture both in Hatibari and more particularly in Kimpu resulted in an interest in agriculture and the environment. I studied 'Rural Studies' for teaching purposes, but have also married a one time agriculturalist and lecturer. Until a few years ago we were working an

agricultural small holding, keeping goats, producing milk, cheese and yoghurt, most of which was used for people with asthma and eczema. Not a grand profitable venture, but we were able to help in the raising of standards of produce in this corner of the industry.

As a result of travel and SCI experiences I could see the value and importance of education. So, after the year in Japan, I trained as a primary school teacher in the UK and then went back to Japan, where I spent 4 years teaching at the American School Kindergarten (Tokyo). I continued contact and activities with SCI Japan and friends made through SCI Japan; I escaped the city frequently to return to Kimpu, sometimes joining in with workcamps and to enjoy again the wonderful environment, discussions and philosophies of both SCI and the Kimpu farmers.

Additionally, here at home, where I now live in Cheshire, UK, as our smallholding work reduced I was able to train as a Blue Badge Tourist Guide for Chester, my local city and a tourist 'hot-spot'. I have been guiding for some 18 years, largely for Japanese groups, thereby using and developing the Japanese language that I initially picked up as a volunteer and being able to meet Japanese people again. I have revisited Japan for work and pleasure on several occasions in the last 15 years. Chester has civic connections to Japan, and on a number of occasions I have been able to advise the Mayor and Lord Mayors about Japan prior to visiting Japan.

Sometimes I give talks on life in Japan, and have recently been involved in a local school project on Japan, and it is likely this will be on going as the school is currently linking up with a Japanese School. I am also a committee member of the Japan Society North West, which is involved in being an intercultural link between the Japanese living in the north west of England and our English members.

Most importantly of all, it has been the people I have met, their thoughts, their friendships and their cultures, which has been the precious 'product' of voluntary service. Have I achieved what I set out to do all those years ago when embarking on this journey? Probably not. It is essential that we should change through our experiences. In the main, the projects with which I was involved did not have a specific 'role' for me to take, so it was not a matter of achievement.

Whilst I do not work with SCI/ IVS now, I do still volunteer to work for issues that I value, and as the above shows, my experiences of and in Japan in particular have had a long lasting effect on most of my life.

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Bhupendra (Bhuppy) Kishore, 1966; LTV in Europe 1967; National Secretary of SCI India, 1968-1974; Asian Secretary 1975

Bhuppy Kishore first encountered SCI workcamps in New Delhi in the early 60s, then in 1966 was asked to be the Indian liaison in the long-term project at the Hatibari Leprosy Colony in Orissa. Next he was selected as an LTV to Europe in 1967. After returning home he volunteered in the SCI-India office and then was appointed as the National Secretary. In 1974 he moved to the Asian Secretariat. The following is from an interview conducted in Paris by Olivier Bertrand with Jean-Pierre and Marie Catherine Petit also present.

Childhood

"I was eleven years old when the partition of India took place in 1947 and we had lots of refugees. My two elder brothers had worked with Gandhi and they were in charge of refugees coming from Pakistan. So I had the opportunity to go with them. One of my brothers also went to Kashmir to look after refugees as the government needed volunteers at that time. My elder brother with his wife (who was English) were in touch with Quakers and had also worked with SCI."

Beginning of SCI in India

"Ralph Hegnauer had come to India and there was also an SCI project for refugees in Faridabad, which lasted for about a year. Before that, Pierre Cérésole had already gone to India in the thirties. Ethelwyn Best was there for some time and helped in the establishment of an Indian branch. She was probably more than 60 as she had worked with Pierre Cérésole and Pierre Oppliger, a Swiss volunteer and first SCI Represenative to India, who had taught French to young Indira Gandhi, who later became a Prime Minister. In the beginning, SCI had some high level contacts in the government, and good connections with colleges and some professors.

"Nehru himself had asked Ralph to suggest a way to organize this kind of voluntary work. He had come to the project in Faridabad along with the first President of India and also been in touch with Pierre Cérésole in the 30s. All these people were involved. So Nehru set up an organization called Bharat Sevat Samaj (BSS). BSS was a very big organization, funded

by the Government, with branches all over India. We worked a lot with them and with some other organizations like the Quakers. Gandhian organizations had members in almost every big village, so we used to cooperate with them because of their good connections in the villages. BSS came only after Nehru had seen the good work of SCI and wanted to do something similar".

When the Indian branch of SCI was started after the partition, the chairman was a professor and chancellor of Jamiah university and Nehru's sister, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, was also a president of SCI for some time. They were involving lots of college students. According to Bhuppy, castes were always mixed among the volunteers and it was not an issue. But Marie Catherine remembers that when she was a volunteer, most of the SCI people belonged to the Brahmin or other high castes and there were hardly any Harijans (Untouchables). This might be explained by their lower level of education, but Bhuppy remembers that there were people from all castes, including Christians, who came from the lower castes. This was consistent with the Gandhian tradition, which used to mix castes without any prejudice, even though a number of the followers of Gandhi were Brahmins themselves.

"The Delhi group used to organise week-end and short-term camps in the slums, just to do the cleaning work. The idea was to involve the students and to expose them to the village and slums conditions. There was also the international exchange programme. The idea was to expose people to each other's country. There were also programmes organized by UNESCO, the American and German Peace Corps. SCI was the first one and is not a Government programme like the others".

Joining SCI and going to Europe

Bhuppy, who was an art teacher, participated in weekend and short-term camps in Delhi: cleaning the slums, talking to people. In short-term camps, volunteers worked on roads for the villagers and helped them to have a kind of playground for children and so on. "The idea was to go the villages and take youth from the cities. Otherwise they never go. I liked it very much, as even before finishing my art studies, I always thought that to pursue art was a luxury in the conditions of India, when we saw so much misery and poverty".

While thinking of going to Egypt, Bhuppy was told that SCI needed an Indian volunteer for a short time. Having an Indian on the team was the condition for getting subsidies from donor agencies. In 1966 he joined a leprosy colony, Hatibari, in the State of Orissa. There were three or four

other volunteers there (teacher, agriculture specialist, nurse). It was a Government colony, run privately, which was short of staff. They needed someone who could speak the local language to coordinate the work of these volunteers with the neighbouring villagers. It was also an education for the people, otherwise they were just neglected. Nobody would go there.

"When I was in this leprosy project, I was sent in 1967 to Switzerland and Italy (Reggio-Emiliana, Florence, Siena) as a long-term volunteer. The volunteers on this programme stayed three, six or nine months. I stayed for nine months. There were very big programmes organized by the SCI branches in Europe and the volunteers were going to three or four different places and workcamps. Usually 3 or 4 were in the team, and I left by ship from Bombay with someone from Bangladesh. We first had an orientation session in Paris with Dorothy Abbott and then went to Switzerland."

"In Switzerland, near the Austrian border, the Government used to give some money to the villagers and the rest was their responsibility, with the help of volunteers. We were repairing a road, or digging a trench, to lay a pipe, which was known as the 'milk pipeline', because these people were taking their cows to the upper mountain and sent down the milk through the pipe. We also had to clean a village after a rock-slide. I stayed two or three months and then went to Italy". According to Marie Catherine, after Bhuppy left, everybody in the village was talking about "the Indian" who had impressed the villagers.

"Some questioned the idea of Indian volunteers going to rich and advanced countries, but the idea was to have international gatherings, where people meet and get to know each other. But when we saw the conditions of the farmers, it seemed they struggled. The funds available in the different camps were very limited and it was clear they needed assistance from volunteers. It was a very good experience. Being spring, the weather was very cold for the volunteers from Bangladesh who were not used to it. We had a good relationship with the farmers. The idea was to go with them and talk to them. The programme included work in the day, visit to the farmers and discussion of some issues, like environment, human rights, and so on. There was always a German-speaking volunteer to translate.

"Of course, Italy was much poorer, but the work was similar. After the camps, I went to England where my brother was teaching. I was surprised to see areas which were almost like a slum and conditions in parts of London which were like hundreds of years ago, with no repair, in contrast with Switzerland. I was stuck in London for some time, because the French liner that I was supposed to take to go back was on strike. This gave me an opportunity to do some work with SCI in England. We joined groups who

were doing fund raising by singing from pub to pub. It was a different experience".

Back to India

"Before going to Europe, I had occasionally helped the Delhi group, which used to organize weekend and short-term camps. When I was in England, Valli who had become chairperson of the Indian branch, asked me to work in the SCI Secretariat. I told her that I had no experience of administration and that I was not a man of office. But she said no, you should come; there are also other kinds of work. And it was true."

"We had about five SCI groups in India: Calcutta, Madras, Bombay, Delhi, etc., but there was nobody working full-time in the Secretariat. The office work represented only about 20% of the total. Anyway, I never typed and was always assisted for this type of work. The main part of my work was to help organize workcamps, and to lead them. We were also placing long-term volunteers in other projects. We helped to develop local groups. We organized leadership programmes for members of local groups on how to run a camp. We also had long-term projects, like the leprosy colony and in a slum near Madras (Cherian Nagar). SCI worked with a Swedish organization and handed over the programme to them because they were better organized and had more money. And at that time SCI never believed in running its own long-term programme."

"We were giving orientation courses for the long-term volunteers going to Europe and also for those coming from Europe. It lasted for three days, on India, its climate, its culture, the possible difficulties. The long-term volunteers were expected to have already taken part in camps in their own country. But later on (in the eighties), the European branches were sending people who wanted to do voluntary work, but who had nothing to do with SCI and its ideals. For us, it was very difficult for some time and we had to tell these branches that we did not want such volunteers. Asian branches were very strict on this point; for us, it was most important to have a dialogue and to participate in the discussions".

There was also a long-term project in Bihar, in a remote area where people were short of water, affected by a drought. It was a tribal area. There, SCI also organized night schools for the children who were working during the day for their family and who could sleep there. We were running four schools like that. We were using television with educational films, using batteries because there was no electricity in the villages. SCI collected money for buying tiles for the roofs, while the villagers were building the rest with local materials. The children were very enthusiastic,

but the money lenders, who were exploiting the villagers, were not happy. They used to cut trees to sell, paying the villagers to do it with just a bottle of something. We used to stop them cutting trees. They threatened the volunteers and sometimes beat them. This area was particularly affected by malaria and many volunteers suffered from it.

When the Delhi government had a slum clearance programme, people had been transferred outside the city to a place where there were no facilities, no drinking water, etc. SCI set up a dispensary for medical help and also had education programmes and hobby classes for the children (painting, dancing, etc.). SCI was also organizing training programmes for young people who had no education, in order to prepare them for a job. When it became too big and too expensive for SCI, the government took over the responsibility for the programme and built its own dispensary.

There was a project in a border area, where the Government would not allow any organization to go, but SCI was allowed. SCI had a good reputation, because it has been continuously working since independence.

“When Devinder was the Asian Secretary, along with Valli, they began a project with Tibetan refugees. Their office was in a garage at that time. Volunteers used to sleep on the same table during the night. It was fun going the hard way”.

“The villagers were surprised to see these white people working with them, digging with them. They could not imagine that they were volunteers. It was a big surprise, especially for the elder generation. (And Jean-Pierre remembers that, in Ariège, when he was supervising a large group of volunteers, an old lady was angry with him because she thought that he was the guardian of a group of prisoners). On the other hand in India, sometimes the villagers thought that they could do the work faster than the volunteers, who were tired and suffering from the heat. Bhuppy also saw this in Switzerland, where the local people used to work very hard and thought that the volunteers were not doing enough – often, they were soft persons, coming from the university and not trained for hard manual work, for instance to carry cement bags. Some volunteers also used to bring their instruments and play music.”

“For some time, I did this work as a volunteer as only full-time worker in the office. Later on, I was appointed national secretary, with a salary. SCI also did relief work after an emergency (floods, earthquake) that lasted three or four months. At the beginning, in the sixties, SCI was very much involved with these situations and in programmes for refugees.

The Asian Secretariat

“Altogether, I spent about thirty years with SCI. In 1974, I became Asian Secretary. I went to Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Korea, Japan. I helped the local groups to organize the camps; we were visiting schools and colleges with the local groups, speaking about SCI. There were short-term and weekend camps and exchange of long-term volunteers within Asia, sometimes in remote areas, such as Chiengmaï in Thaïland. Some groups were working with other organizations. At that time, we had some grants for the Asian Secretariat, for this kind of work. Volunteers from Europe were supported by their own Government, which paid for their travel and their allowances. That helped SCI, which had lots of programmes in Asia.”

“Some of the problems we met were related to the political situation, for instance in Indonesia, where we could not work, or in India, where Sato was asked to leave during the Emergency period: they were given a one month notice. After that, India also refused to give visas for long-term volunteers from organizations like the Peace Corps, which were suspected of doing some spying work or something like that. They did not do it to SCI, which had a long record and was staffed by Indians, but getting visas took months, instead of a few days. So we started a new programme, with volunteers coming for two or three months as tourists taking part in educational and cultural activities.

“The role of the Asian Secretariat was to coordinate this work, to decide who should go where. For volunteers going to Europe, fifty per cent of the cost was paid by Europe and the rest by the volunteers. There were also big programmes, for instance on environment, or peace education. A peace education programme was organized in 1970 on a very big way, because at that time in Europe, priority was given to the fight against nuclear proliferation, while we used to say that for us we had nothing to do with the war and the bomb. For us, poverty, diseases and exploitation were the peace issues. We had programmes in schools and colleges, encouraging students to write essays, make posters and to participate in peace walks. We also raised funds and had a lot of publicity for that programme. There were lots of schools in Delhi where the principals and teachers were looking for an organization that would help them to organize activities. So the peace programme became a very important activity of SCI, also in Nepal and Sri Lanka. In India, we had a few volunteers who had an experience and who would help branches in other countries to organize a peace walk.

Issues and changes in SCI

"At the international level, there was some impact of the leftist movement, especially in Sri Lanka, where some people were a bit leftist and very dynamic. There was a conflict between them and the other branches in Asia. The Italian and the Belgium branches were very leftist and there used to be heated discussions at the international level on the kind of issues that SCI should focus on. But this did not affect the other Asian branches. At some time, there was a Commission called "Solidarity for Exchange and Voluntary Action" (SEED). They almost became a special group of SCI because the International Secretariat was understaffed. There were discussions, for instance, on the freedom of Namibia".

As the International and Asian Secretariats were considered too costly to run, the idea of 'issue oriented programmes' arose and we dissolved the Asian Secretariat and had only an Asian coordinator, without any more Committee meetings, which meant lots of expenditure. This took place at the end of the `70s, or beginning of the `80s. Consequently the International Committee is a smaller body and does not meet so often. So most of the work was given to the special groups like SEED; but after some time even this group was dissolved, because money was not coming. It all depends on how much money you can get for each activity."

"So now, before any international meeting a seminar is organized on some issues and there are organizations to give money for seminars. This can be used also for the participation of international committee members. In other words, SCI was doing very well until the end of the seventies, when there was enough money; then some organizations were giving money only for special programmes. But slowly they (OXFAM, Action Aid, etc.) said, not for work-camps, except when there was an emergency, earthquake for instance. Now, there is money only for training programmes and seminars. Therefore, SCI work suffers a lot, because the donors do not believe in long-term projects, except in case of emergency, or in slum areas."

"There has been a tendency for SCI in the `80s (and even now for the British branch) to work like other organizations, doing publicity with glossy brochures and so on. They spent all their money on that. The democratic tradition of accepting anyone in SCI is dangerous. All kinds of people are coming who don't even believe in SCI aims; they are just interested in participating in meetings, going to Europe and all kinds of things. It is a fashion to be a member of an international organization. And they don't talk much about SCI in these places. It depends much on the availability of money coming from volunteers. They are doing it much on a commercial

basis, because they do not have enough money to run their branches if they do not have enough members."

In this connection, Jean-Pierre remarks that when he receives volunteers to prepare them for long-term projects abroad, they say that they want to do humanitarian work. But SCI is not exactly doing humanitarian work, therefore we often need to clarify this issue. However, it is also clear that these volunteers have selected SCI on the basis of values that are specific to SCI. It appears that the young people find it difficult to relate the workcamp which they are going to join with the ideals of the organization. During the evaluation period, they say that they have been prepared before, but that nothing happened afterwards; so they do not continue with SCI. We have been trying for many years to get people committed for a longer period, but they do not, says Jean-Pierre. And this is an illustration of a wider phenomenon with the youth to-day.

What worries Bhuppy today is also that there is very little orientation on SCI. "And these volunteers who come also are not interested. We used to send a programme beforehand, saying that in the camps there will be this kind of discussion: we were also writing to the branches before sending the volunteers, asking them to give some information about SCI. So it depends on how the branches see their programmes: do they want to see it as an SCI programme, or just as another type of social work? Most of the workcamps, the way they are planned, are just on a mass scale."

"Ethelwyn Best was for a long time in India, even after 80, and she insisted on going with the bus. She and Ralph were the two people who would read everything we would send to them from India and send their comments. She would always come to the international meetings and she was really mad about the way the new volunteers were behaving and the new ways of thinking: she thought these people were not serious. She was especially critical of the way the British branch was changing; they tried to be professional in the same way as the other organizations. They used to have 10 or 15 people in the office; if you wanted to meet the Secretary, you had to ask the reception fellow, who would ring the Secretary. We should never work like that, but we had always two or three people in the Secretariat. (Later on, things were a bit different in UK). SCI had become very institutional."

"People today do not always understand the spirit of SCI. They are trying to be more professional and taking up more issues such as women, human rights, environment, etc. At one time, we said, "Look: SCI is not a social organization. We work for understanding and so on, so we work with workcamps." Long-term projects were accepted only in special circumstances, when there was an emergency and no other organization

was available, because it is too much of a responsibility, including raising funds. After Marie Catherine came, we did not want more long-term volunteers, because it was too much work, even if you stay for a long time For instance, work in a slum requires a very long time and a variety of activities. The National Indian Committee would always try to hand over this type of project to another organization; they would say: "We are a workcamp organization." Ideology was always discussed; for instance about raising funds, there was a suggestion to organize a lottery, and we said "No, lottery is gambling" (while in UK this kind of thing was always popular; in France, it was essentially a subsidy, because today there are almost no grants)."

The interview concluded with Bhuppy's observation that now there is an anti-Muslim feeling everywhere and something has to be done about it, otherwise it will burst. It is a critical issue for today.

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Linda (Rogers) Whitaker, 1969 in East Pakistan; 1972-1974 in Bangladesh

Linda (Rogers) Whitaker first came into contact in 1968 with SCI/IVS in London, and was sent to East Pakistan as a physiotherapist in 1969. Her stay was dramatically cut short by the war of independence resulting in newly independent Bangladesh. She went back a second time between 1972 and 1974. After retirement she remained involved in volunteer activities in central England.

Influences

I grew up in England in the 1950s and `60s when it was still the norm to attend church and Sunday school. The influence of this, with that of parents, school and movements such as the Scouts and Guides encouraged love for and service to others. It was a time of great freedom and opportunity for many young people from all levels of society following the war. There was opportunity for education and for travel. As a teenager I was very interested in geography and travel and partly due, I think, to my Christian upbringing I developed a desire to live and work in other countries and also the hope that I could be of some help to others.

I liked sport and wanted to work with people so I decided to study Physiotherapy which seemed to combine the two. The course I chose involved two years training in orthopaedic nursing first. This meant that I could start my training at the age of seventeen and didn't need to stay on at school. I couldn't wait to get started! The nursing skills and experience turned out to be extremely valuable when working overseas in isolation from other medical professionals.

My first job on qualifying five years later was at the University College Hospital in London. Whilst there I met another physiotherapist who was a member of IVS and who had worked in India as an SCI long-term volunteer. Through her I got in touch with IVS and joined a local group in London. We worked on various community projects, particularly helping the elderly with visits, shopping, gardening etc. I also worked as a volunteer at an International Hostel, near where I lived in Earls Court. I enjoyed the interaction with young people from different backgrounds and cultures.

Although I only had one year's professional experience I applied to go as a Long Term Volunteer with IVS and was accepted. (It was only later that I realised how much more I would have had to offer if I had gained more experience first – but as usual I couldn't wait to do what I had always wanted to do).

LTV to East Pakistan, 1969 - the first project

Following work camp experience, in France (building gabions to stop the erosion of a river bank in Ariege) – a great learning experience - and orientation at the SCI centre at Oust I flew to what was then East Pakistan via Karachi in September 1969. I was met by SCI friends including 'Minto Bhai' Chowdhury, then Secretary of the local SCI branch. I stayed with his family for the first few weeks, his younger brother and sister patiently teaching me Bangla while I came to terms with living in what felt like a Turkish steam room full of mosquitoes. Once acclimatised I loved the climate and the people and the mosquitoes ceased to bother me. I was working in a Day Centre for children with disabilities which was run by a charity and in which the local SCI group had some involvement. My experience in this field was quite limited but I worked alongside a local physiotherapist and did my best to treat the children who attended and to pass on some skills to the assistants employed at the centre.

I soon began to realise that I was learning far more than I was able to teach or give to anyone there. Being a member of the local SCI group was tremendous. It gave me instant friends in an alien environment. Friends who, although from a different culture and religious background, saw things

in a similar way to myself, wanted the same things, such as peace and understanding between peoples, and wanted to give service to others. To them it was important that I was there, not for what I could do in a brief 2 year period, but just to be there as a fellow member of the group and working alongside them on work camps etc. My presence also made the work camps feel 'international'. The work camps I attended in this period were some of the best times we had. I remember weekend work at the Children's Centre, decorating and making a garden, and also weekends away in other parts of the country – river banks again! I am a practical person, not given to expressing my feelings at length in public so I found the discussion meetings which were always part of the weekend and longer camps a little alien to me, but very interesting especially as they seemed to bring us all closer together in thought as human beings. I have a strong memory of one occasion when Bhuppy visited the group and inspired us all. I also remember times when committee members fell out with each other as committee members do all over the world!

The country had a strong Muslim culture and it wasn't always easy for people to know what to do with me when visiting their homes because although I was a foreign volunteer I was also female and females didn't tend to sit and discuss things with the men in Bangladesh, they served the tea and stayed in the back rooms. Frequently I ended up in a bedroom with the women of the family, (this could be just as interesting but sometimes frustrating), or sitting in the front room with men who felt unable to converse as they normally would do. However, I have to say there were several women in the SCI group and we were generally included in meetings and discussions. I think this made the organisation fairly unique in Bangladesh at that time.

Later in 1970 I was joined by another IVS volunteer, Carol Barnshaw, who was attached to a school for the blind.

In November 1970 a devastating cyclone hit the southern part of Bangladesh, the Ganges Delta. Carol and I were seconded to assist the Red Cross, with which the local SCI group had links, providing volunteers etc. We worked mainly in Dhaka at the HQ and warehouse (outside our project duty times). I made one trip to the affected area with supplies and later Carol went to the SCI project at Moudubi, set up to help the local people on this island make a raised area with defences to protect animals and people from floods and cyclones.

In March 1971 came the war of Independence for Bangladesh. Carol and I were living in a student hostel near the university. All the students had gone to their homes as the tension was mounting, so we were alone apart from the hostel cook/caretaker and his family. We had been registered with

the British High Commission due to the situation. We found ourselves under fire for 2 nights and a day and then were told to leave the hostel. We joined a stream of hundreds of refugees fleeing the area. We just went with what we had on and a few personal things. Suddenly we saw a familiar tall figure pushing his way towards us against the flow of the crowd. It was, of course, Minto Bhai who was coming, at great risk to himself, to find us and make sure we were alright. He took us to the house of a British couple who were our High Commission contacts. I shall never forget that selfless act of care and friendship. Carol and I were evacuated to Singapore by the RAF where we struggled with the sudden shift into an expensive western hotel. The food was too rich and too much and we couldn't work the showers! We met up with Navam who was then Asian Secretary and living in Singapore with his family.

We felt terrible leaving all our friends in such dire trouble but in that situation, if we had stayed, we would have been a liability and extra mouths to feed.

Interval

We arrived home in April 1971 and I worked for a year as a physiotherapist in Bristol. This was fairly near to my family as they had had a worrying time before they knew I was safe. Carol was in London and I frequently went there at weekends. We attended marches and demonstrations – some about Bangladesh and others about other injustices around the world. I was very unsettled and desperate to know what was going on in Bangladesh (I wish we'd had the internet then!). I did an overland trip to India, spending a short time there but eventually managed to get myself posted to the Orthopaedic Hospital set up in Dhaka after the war, again through IVS.

The second project, 1972-1974

This was a very different experience. I travelled with a Belgian SCI volunteer (Micheline) who was a physiotherapist also and was to replace me at the Children's Centre. This time the flight was via Delhi and we stayed a night or two at K5.

We were met in Dhaka by several old SCI friends who by now were getting very used to meeting overseas volunteers. There were many more international agencies than there had been before in the country and as a result much more begging and crying. I missed the self confidence and pride the Bangladeshis had in their own culture, that I remembered from

before, and resented the foreign agencies who were creating a culture of dependency, though much aid was needed. Was I one of them?

The aim of the project at the Orthopaedic Hospital was to provide treatment for those injured in the war and also for the local population. Many of the trainees being taught to make artificial limbs and appliances were freedom fighters who had lost limbs themselves. The physiotherapy team, of which I was a member, set up a training course for physiotherapists. There was a major problem with getting recognition for the course and consequently a proper remuneration for the graduates. I was working with volunteers from Australia, Canada, Europe and India as well as 2 other IVS volunteers (Maureen Thompson and Helen Preston) and we lived together in a hostel near the hospital. Although this was a more international group of volunteers it was not at all the same as my previous experience - it was too easy to slip into western ways with so many westerners together. There was less interaction with the local population and although we had contact and went on some weekend work camps we weren't as close to the SCI-B group as before. We were also at that time involved as volunteers for WHO on the final campaign to eradicate smallpox, vaccinating the population surrounding some cases of smallpox in one of the refugee camps in Dhaka.

Although I was glad I had been able to go back once Bangladesh became independent and especially to see for myself that old friends were alright, it was not as good or as life changing as my first experience had been..

Consequences

After my return to England in January 1974 I decided to live in London and do further training in physiotherapy for children. Having worked with children in Bangladesh I knew there was a lot more I needed to learn. I shared a flat with Carol and made contact with a local IVS group in South London. Again we did community work and some weekend work camps. There were a number of returned volunteers in the group as well as local people and a lot of enthusiasm and dedication. It was also great fun and gave me much the same feeling of togetherness as we had had on the SCI – Bangladesh local activities.

During this period I visited Ireland - visiting VSI in Dublin and joining (for a weekend) an international work camp at Glebe House in Northern Ireland. I also started assisting IVS with weekends held for the selection of long-term volunteers to work in Asia and southern Africa.

Then, in 1977 it was off to Central America for me with another voluntary agency this time (CIIR). The organisation had asked me to help with the selection of a volunteer physiotherapist for a school for children with disabilities in Honduras. I liked the sound of it so much I decided to apply!

On my return in 1979 I worked in Doncaster, South Yorkshire developing a new community physiotherapy service for children sponsored by the Spastics Society (now SCOPE). My experience overseas was invaluable for this job. I remained in contact with IVS through the Leeds office where Martin and Juliet (Pierce) were then working, and also continued working with IVS national office, on selection weekends.

Since then I have stayed in Britain working in the NHS as a paediatric physiotherapist, eventually becoming a clinical manager. I retired in 2002, but worked part time as a clinical paediatric physiotherapist till November 2005.

The effects of the SCI experience on my life

How have my experiences affected my life? I guess they have shown me firstly what true friendship is and how human beings can meet on common ground in spite of different cultures and religious backgrounds. I have always tried to remember this in my working, social and political life.

The project at the Children's Centre in Dhaka gave me the desire to learn more about working with children and I have worked in the field of paediatrics ever since. I am thankful for this as I feel I was good at my job, I enjoyed it and I feel I helped a lot of families. My rusty Bangla was useful in breaking the ice with my clients when I worked in an area of Manchester with a large Bangladeshi population for the last 16 years of my career. I hope my past experience gave me some insight into the situation of Asian families living in Britain.

In writing this, having to look up old papers and photographs, speaking to former colleagues and friends, it is only now I realise how much my early SCI experiences have influenced my life. I had also forgotten that I was actually involved in SCI/IVS for nearly 20 years from 1968 to the mid to late 80s.

Since my retirement I have joined the local Volunteer Centre and am back doing voluntary work again. The Centre initiates a lot of group and individual work towards self help and social inclusion and there is very little boundary between clients and volunteers – we are all part of the same

community. I am involved in shopping for the housebound and fundraising but no river bank work this time!

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Juliet (Hill) Pierce, 1970 in India; again 1975-1977

Juliet (Hill) Pierce went to India as an LTV in 1970, working as a physiotherapist in a leprosy colony, and a brief time in the newly independent Bangladesh. After returning home in 1972 she enrolled in a degree course at the School of Oriental and African studies. She married Martin Pierce, who had been an LTV in India and they returned together to India, 1975-77. Returning to England they were active in IVS, then moved to Birmingham, England where they work as international development consultants.

Influences

Born in 1946 I was the granddaughter of a Methodist minister, brought up in a household strongly influenced by Christian values rather than religious belief. My father's motto was "Fair shares for all". He strongly encouraged my brother and I to do our boy scout's good deed everyday! Although my family had middle class aspirations, we lived on a modest family income with a strong philosophy of self reliance and resourcefulness, expressed as "make do and mend".

At an all girls school we were inspired by a headmistress who was a strong supporter of the ideals of the UN. She went out to serve the cause of education with UNICEF in the Sudan and expected us to do similar things. Ideas of service and what we needed to do to recompense the world for our privilege were strongly instilled in us.

I was also a 'baby boomer' brought up in a world of post-war reconstruction, new building on the bombsites of London and a feeling of making things better after the destruction and austerity of the war years. By the time I was entering the workforce Britain was prosperous enjoying the 'swinging `60s'. With near full employment there was no fear of being unemployed after spending some years as a volunteer.

First contacts with SCI/IVS

Although pushed to follow an academic route I rebelled against my teachers to do something more practical and studied to become a physiotherapist. It was at this period that I spotted an IVS poster on a railway station of people decorating for old people and I jotted down the contact number. When I eventually rang the number I talked to John Hitchins who invited me to meet up for a decorating weekend with Sutton IVS.

After qualifying as a physio I attended my first international camp building a children's playground in Germany. Then I got my first job in Southampton, and having thought all that decorating was behind me, I found myself living in a flat above the local IVS group Chairman! At this point I began to learn more about the ideals of SCI and its roots as a peace movement. Besides decorating we worked closely with the local Social Services Department to run a youth club for travellers' children and a club for disabled youngsters. I found myself addressing a huge public meeting in Southampton Town Hall to explain what SCI and volunteering were all about.

At this point I received a letter from John Hitchins, by now a volunteer with the SCI India Office. He explained that a physiotherapist volunteer was needed for a leprosy project in Delhi and I decided to go through the IVS selection process.

The first project – Shahdara Leprosy Settlement 1970-1972

I was eventually selected and attended an IVS orientation course and a day for medical volunteers run by the British Volunteer Programme. Eventually I arrived in India in November 1970 to work in Shahdara Leprosy Settlement, but before going to Shahdara I was allowed a very useful period of orientation. This involved spending time with John and Bhuppy and Valli and Seshan (and Subi aged 4) in Delhi.

Valli also took me to Janpath to learn to eat masala dosa and to buy some Indian clothes suitable for going on my first Indian workcamp. This camp was at Baba Amte's newest settlement for leprosy patients (Anand Gram). Our task was to clear stones and build the bundhs around the rice fields. It was hot and hard physical work and I struggled to eat enough and to drink water from the communal jug by pouring it without my lips touching the jug.

In the evenings Baba Amte lectured us on various issues. Some of the post-`60s, European volunteers were not used to listening to older people's

ideas without challenging them. I remember Baba Amte did not take kindly to this kind of challenge and we had many interesting arguments about authority and rights, and the right approach to respecting cultural differences.

The high point of the camp for me was getting to know Shashi Rajagopalan and Monique (now Michels), listening to their interpretation of SCI ideals and enjoying their laughter, especially as we listened to Dinesh Jesrani earnestly trying to master *We shall overcome* on his guitar, again and again!

My assignment as a physiotherapist was supposed to enable the rehabilitation of leprosy patients after reconstructive surgery. I had learnt what I could about this from specialists in the UK but was recommended to visit an eminent Bombay plastic surgeon to tap into his knowledge of reconstructive surgery for leprosy patients. After the camp with Baba Amte I therefore travelled to Bombay to stay with Dinesh. The interview with the surgeon was an experience in itself, since the only way he had time to talk to me was by gowning up and standing next to him in the operating theatre while he gave a face lift to one of the Bombay elite.

The final step in my orientation was to attend the SCI India National Meeting in Jabalpur at the end of December 1970. I was able to meet SCI India members from all over India. There were also a few other foreign LTVs present and one lunchtime I found myself sitting next to a young and idealistic Englishman dressed in khadi. His name was Martin Pierce!

Having received this orientation to India, SCI and leprosy I was now considered ready to be sent to Shahdara. Much to my delight, instead of going there on my own, it was decided that Shashi and I would form a small SCI team and go to live in Shahdara together. Although coping with a naïve foreign LTV may have been a burden for Shashi, it was an ideal situation for me. I felt able to ask for clarification about everything I did not understand and I had the benefit of Shashi translating what the patients were saying and what I wanted to say to them (the patients spoke Hindi, Tamil and Bengali and luckily Shashi could speak all three). This must have been very frustrating for Shashi after a while, especially as I proved hopeless at learning enough of the relevant languages. As a team of two, living and working together day after day, and talking by the lightlamp every evening I don't think there was any subject we did not talk about. After a short time we became very close friends. At weekends we often went to stay with Valli, Seshan and Subi or travelled over to a weekend workcamp helping to build the dispensary and school building in Nangloi, with Delhi Group volunteers.

After all the preparation for using my physiotherapy skills in post-surgical rehabilitation, no reconstructive surgery was performed during my entire stay in Shahdara. Instead, Shashi and I spent our time trying to train the patients to look after themselves to prevent more serious injuries due to lack of sensation. We had to battle against the fatalism of people believing that they were cursed and that there was nothing that could be done to preserve the functions of their limbs or to reduce the injuries.

We also concentrated on trying to breakdown the social prejudices about leprosy that led to people being locked away in Shahdara rather than treated in the community. We enjoyed holding camps at the colony to get as many people as possible accustomed to relating to the leprosy patients as people. We also enjoyed getting the patients out from behind the barbed wire to participate in SCI fundraising activities like the first all India sponsored cycle rally run by SCI India around the Delhi ring road.

Towards the end of 1971 Shashi and I participated in a camp in Bihar, working with the villagers to build a dam. We worked with a big group of workcamp volunteers and LTVs Monique and Oswald Michels and Hans Kammerer who were based in Titmoh Village.

After that the drama of the war between India and Pakistan, the break-up of East and West Pakistan resulted in a flow of Hindu refugees into West Bengal. Shashi went to work with the SCI team supporting the massive refugee camp near Dum Dum Airport.

I was alone in Shahdara for a while which proved one of the loneliest and most difficult periods at first, but one that I soon got used to. Having considered myself a gregarious kind of person I found myself almost afraid to be in groups of volunteers, preferring to rush back to the solitude of Shahdara and the familiarity of the patients with whom I could only communicate in sign language.

Bangladesh

Then it was my turn to leave the settlement as someone needed to be sent by SCI to make contact with the newly formed Bangladesh SCI. This was an exciting time. I travelled up the West Bengal border and crossed into Bangladesh making contact with the Indian army. I found myself being asked to mediate between the local Mukti Bahini leader and the Indian Commander as the young Bengali liberator felt he was being upstaged by the Indian army and it was he who should be hosting me as the first international visitor to cross into that part of the new Bangladesh. I managed to feel I was upholding the spirit of SCI and reconciliation by persuading the Indian commander to at least shed his uniform and to wear

civilian clothes to the evening film entertainment being provided for the local community, so that he would look less like an occupying force!

Finally, the Indian Army leant me a vehicle and an officer to drive me to Dacca across all the temporary bridges constructed besides those so recently blown up by the retreating Pakistan army. I was going to Dacca to make contact with the Bangladesh SCI Branch and to see how SCI India could join in the reconstruction efforts. Colleagues in SCI Bangladesh greeted me warmly. They showed me the tragedy of what had befallen Bangladesh and we had a weekend camp at a home for the girls who had been raped by members of the Pakistan army. As a physiotherapist I was also concerned to do something to provide care for all the amputees, mostly children, whose limbs had been blown off by anti-personnel devices designed like toys. At that time all the training facilities for physiotherapists were in West Pakistan. Later it was to be the SCI volunteer physiotherapists who did a wonderful job in getting the Bangladeshi training facilities started.

Interval

In 1972 I returned very reluctantly to the UK having learnt so much from the SCI experience. Shashi had taught me to question the woolly ideas of compassion I had arrived with. She showed me how laced they were with ideas of cultural superiority. Valli showed me what open mindedness and internationalism really meant. Seshan kept challenging my half baked ideas of development. Bhuppy showed me the richness of Indian culture and how humour could transform situations of tension and allow people's humanity to shine forth. So many others taught me so much about what it is like to live and grow up in another part of the world and to look out on our planet with fundamentally different but equally valid perceptions. The exposure to the effects of war had a profound effect on me, what a waste! And how come so many innocent people have to suffer from the manoeuvring of big power politics? I left India reeling, feeling hopelessly disorientated and returning to a UK that was both familiar and alien.

It took me three years of studying for a degree at the School of Oriental and African Studies to recover my bearings. By the end of that period I had met up with Martin and we had decided that the best cure for our mutual disorientation was to marry and return as volunteers to India!

Second project as a volunteer with the Asian Regional Training Centre 1975-1977

Martin and I arrived in Visionville avoiding any official processes by paying for ourselves as volunteers and taking on the role of managing the Asian Regional Training Centre which was intended to support the SCI India office with the orientation of volunteers coming to and leaving from India. It was also a chance to act as a base for organising and running workcamps in Karnataka. I am not sure how the idea arose but it proved a wonderful opportunity for us to live and work with the Sato family. I did not really have a role other than to help out, whilst Martin threw himself into organising workcamps. This was just as well as I spent the first few months being ill and then the last few months being pregnant! The last month of being in Visionville was particularly tough as the Sato family was forced to leave the country and Martin and I with our young son Richard tried to ensure an orderly transfer of the work of maintaining Visionville to its new occupants. It was clear that it was time for us to return to the UK.

Consequences

After such an intense experience of India, Martin got a job as a solicitor in Leeds so that he could use his Hindi and work with migrants coming from the Indian subcontinent. I became a member of the IVS National Committee eventually becoming the Vice Chairperson, giving this up when I became pregnant with our daughter and focussing on working locally. Meanwhile Martin returned to workcamp organising by becoming an IVS local field officer. Slowly my paid work commitments grew and my involvement with SCI reduced to occasional IVS weekends and hosting SCI visitors. Slowly I became involved in community work in a multiracial inner city area, and then became more involved in education and education policy. In the 1990s I returned to work in international development as a consultant, eventually specialising in strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation of mostly DFID funded programmes.

The effects of the SCI experience on my life

Like most SCI volunteers, the experience radically altered the direction of my life. That first decorating weekend led to going to India. The experience of meeting so many extraordinary people in SCI India and being exposed to poverty and the aftermath of war completely woke me up politically. Before India I was a fairly politically naïve medical person, after India I wanted to be involved in changing the world! However, what I learnt was not how to be engaged in politics as such, but the importance of continually trying to understand different points of view, the urgent need for communication across cultures and the need to use everyone's insights,

not just those who are articulate or powerful, to build a better world. When I meet SCI people I realise that is what we have in common and that I think that is the quiet influence we are having.

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Solvig Starborg, LTV in India, 1971

Solvig Starborg had had experience with another workcamp organistion in the early 60s, and knew IAL (the Swedish Branch of SCI), but went to India on her own, armed with some addresses. Finally, she connected with SCI-India and used her nursing experience in the long-term project at Nangoli. After her return home she took her degree as a Health Visitor in London, and continues to work there.

Influences

Born in 1945 in southern Sweden, I was an only child of working class parents.

Both my parents came from poor families and neither had a higher education. However they had embraced the ideals of the Social Democratic Party which came into government in the 1930s. My father was a self taught mathematician and taught, as a volunteer, in evening classes, run by the local workers union. Those were the early days of adult education! We lived in a small village and my parents helped out as volunteers in a library which was started in an old school. I have memories of sitting on the back of my father's bike in the cold of the winter and arriving at the library which had a large iron stove with a roaring fire. It gave me a love of books from an early age.

In our rural life we were far from shops and most other amenities so we had not only the milkman, the butcher and the fishmonger coming to our door but also a variety of other door-to-door salesmen. Once when I was about thirteen a bookseller came and he had a book about Buddhism. We had talked about Buddhism at school and I found it very interesting, so I bought the book. I read it several times because it wasn't easy to understand. I think it was then that I first decided that I wanted to travel and in particular I wanted to go to India.

My education was very different from my parents and I went on to do matriculation, or the equivalent of A-levels.

The 1950s and `60s was a time when the horrors of the Second World War were still fresh in people's memory. It was also a time of improved media and news reporting and therefore an increased awareness about the plight of people in other countries, where there was war and famine.

My first 'international experience' was in the early 60s when I went with a school friend to a work camp in Norfolk in England during the school holiday. It was organised by the National Union of Students and turned out to be both educating and enjoyable. The summer after I had finished my A-levels I went to Israel to work in a kibbutz. Again I met people from other parts of the world but also learnt about life in Israel, both from Jews and Muslims. The kibbutz was along the Jordan River and the work was agricultural. It was my first experience of a war zone. Every now and again, when there was an exchange of fire across the river, we had to go and sit in bunkers. The noise of machineguns was excruciating and I remember wondering how people could survive, not only the war but also the noise of it.

When I came back from Israel I worked the autumn term as an unqualified teacher in a small fishing village. In my class I had thirteen 9 year old pupils. Feeling the need to promote international exchange I had my class draw pictures and write a story about themselves which we then sent to the school on the kibbutz. It was with great excitement they received a reply with what they thought very exotic drawings of among other things orange-trees!

I finished my nursing training in the spring of 1969 and my first job was at The Serafimer Hospital in central Stockholm.

Travelling to India

I had not been long in Stockholm when I started to try and find out about working in India. Eventually, through the Indian Embassy, I got in touch with Bharat Sevak Samaj and Major Ramachandra who offered to find me voluntary work. I also had some contact with IAL, the Swedish branch of SCI but they were a rather small organisation with limited resources. However, one member, Jan Simon, had travelled to India and not only put me in contact with another member, Lena, who wanted to go to India, but also gave me Valli Seshan's address. Little did I know then how valuable that last piece of information was going to be!

We tried in vain with the help of Major Ramachandra to obtain visas to go to India and work as volunteers for a year. It wasn't really possible because we didn't have a specific job to go to. In the end we decided to travel on tourist visas which would last for three months and could be

extended another three months. Lena had friends in Delhi, a young Sikh couple, Gurmel and Harnek Dhillon, who had offered us initial hospitality on arrival.

We arrived in New Delhi in September 1970. The day after our arrival we went to meet Major Ramachandra who had a small office behind the public toilets in Connaught Place in Delhi. He welcomed us to India and told us about Mahatma Gandhi. During my time in India I got to know Major Ramachandra quite well. Initially Lena and I were two restless Europeans who were trying to acclimatise ourselves to life in India and his advice was: "Be happy and keep smiling; there are many lives to come". It has followed me through life!

We were soon introduced to Mr Kaul who was in charge of the SOS children's village outside Delhi. They needed a nurse for a month to run the dispensary and we were happy to have our first task as volunteers in India. We would work for food and lodging. The village consisted of a group of houses and in each of them lived 6 - 8 orphaned children with a 'mother'. These women were either widows, divorced or had refused to marry. There were also a number of 'aunties', who went to the different houses and helped the mothers if they needed help or time off.

Lena became a temporary auntie and I was working in the dispensary with Surya, who was a lab assistant from Bombay. Surya was happy and easy going and taught me a lot. I had my first Hindi lessons from her and she also lent me books on tropical diseases, in particular on intestinal worms which were quite common among the children. She also introduced me to, what she called 'Indian thinking'! She was a Christian but said God is one. Sometimes we went to puja (a ceremony) in one of the houses and then Surya would add a picture of Jesus to the Hindu gods and we gave sweets and then sang hymns as well. I remember thinking it was very generous to just include everyone!

We also met Mrs Pohl who was an Austrian lady who had helped set up the village and who was going to Nepal to start another SOS village. The work in the dispensary was mainly cleaning up little injuries, putting on plasters and giving worm treatments. Sometimes we had to take children to hospital in Delhi for more serious complaints.

In the evenings people from a nearby village would come to collect rations of milk powder and also for medical help and we tried to help as best we could. Our month was quickly up and we were sad to leave 'our' village. What we found so amazing was that we had been accepted straight away. We were two foreigners and people trusted us and included us in their lives just like that. We felt we were leaving old friends behind when we left!

Mrs Pohl had invited us to come and visit her in Kathmandu. Since our time (visas!) was limited and there seemed to be no other voluntary jobs available in the immediate future, we decided to do some travelling and see India before we were forced to leave. While waiting for visa to go to Nepal, I visited The Delhi College of Nursing, all through Major Ramachandra's good contacts! I was introduced to a nursing tutor, Miss Haque, who invited me to a couple of lectures and I was then asked to talk about nursing training in Sweden. It produced some interesting discussions! Besides everyone wanted to know about the snow!

We travelled via Benaras to Kathmandu where we stayed for a few days with Mrs Pohl. Then with a list of people and places to visit, supplied by Major Ramachandra, we travelled by train, third class, to south India. We went to visit a school in Tambaram and a Leprosy colony in Warda. In Seva Gram, Gandhi's ashram in Warda, we tried our hands on the spinning wheel. We stayed a few days in Madras and then continued to Bombay from where Lena, who had had a lot of ill health, decided to leave. She caught a flight from Bombay to London.

I wanted to go back to Delhi to say goodbye to all the friends that we had made. I also had a doll with a Swedish costume to give to Valli Seshan's daughter Subi from Jan Simon in Stockholm.

22nd February 1971 - first meeting with Valli Seshan

By the second cup of coffee it felt as if I had known Valli all my life! We seemed to have a lot to talk about! Valli told me about Nangloi Jhuggi Jopri Colony and how SCI needed a nurse there. It sounded very interesting but I only had one month left on my already extended tourist visa! I went to visit Nangloi the next day and met Rik and Liz Rottger with their son Inder. Rik was building the second floor of the dispensary; Liz was helping to run the nursery school. SCI also wanted to start a child health programme with baby-clinic, childhood vaccinations etc. That would be my field. Liz and I also dreamt about starting sewing and batik classes for the women in the colony. It was all very exciting!

There was one big problem of course, - my visa. Everybody tried; Valli and Major Ramachandra wrote letters and UNICEF was approached to assist but to no avail! The Foreigners' Registration Office gave a blank "No"! I was advised to leave and apply for a visa outside India. However, by this time I had very little money left and it wasn't really within my reach. During these uncertain days I spent a lot of time in Nangloi, participating in week-end work camps and getting to know people. Then Bhuppy called me to the office to fill in yet another form which he took to someone in a

government office. Suddenly I had permission to stay on, no questions asked! Bhuppy maintained, of course, that it might send us both to prison but he would make sure that we could share a cell! That was fine by me!

I moved out to Nangloi to join the team. The first task was to set up the baby-clinic. My last job in Stockholm had been in an intensive care unit for myocardial infarctions with, at the time, the latest of technology. Not much use in Nangloi, however, I had done paediatrics in my training. It was decided that I should visit baby-clinics in hospitals and see how they were run and organised. I went both to Irwing hospital and Kalawati hospital. I also visited UNICEF, Catholic Relief Service and The Family Planning Centre to ask for supplies that we needed to start off with. We were advised to apply to Oxfam for funds and were eventually given a grant for 35,000 rupees for equipment, vitamin drops, printed weight charts and teaching aid for teaching ie nutrition and family planning.

It was a busy time and there were also work camps both in Nangloi and Shahdara. In the good spirit of SCI it was a time to try one's hand on jobs one hadn't tried before and also to socialise, exchange ideas and discuss a variety of issues.

The break up of East and West Pakistan meant that the Indian army was mobilizing troops to the borders and we watched army vehicles coming past Nangloi travelling east. It was both frightening and depressing. We often talked about it in the evenings, how to stop the madness of war! Then there were the good times, like when Chandru came from Delhi with his guitar and we would all sit on the roof in the evenings after work and sing Joan Baez or Bob Dylan songs, not to mention, *We shall overcome*! It wasn't just the singing but the feeling of friendship which is still with me today.

Prior to starting the Baby-clinic I went out with different Indian volunteers on home visits in the colony. We talked to the women about vaccinations and how these were important. For a lot of these women it was a difficult concept to understand. Why give an injection to a baby who is well? An injection is something you have when you are ill, to make you better! They were so poor and they would rather have food, money or a job. Eventually the baby-clinic started in the beginning of May with the help of the doctor who was already working in the dispensary. Arya had also joined the Nangloi project as a mid-term volunteer and was by that time my regular interpreter and co-worker. In our first clinic we had 25 babies but could only vaccinate three because all the others were ill and their mothers wanted treatment. We struggled on. Then came Radha to help out, during her holiday from university. She was wonderfully artistic and creative and knew exactly how to communicate with the mothers! She made up her own

story of how the injection created a little army in the body so that when the horrible disease came along the army could fight it and the baby wouldn't get ill! Of course this made much more sense and a lot more mothers brought along their babies when they were well! Radha also helped with our school. One day we made colourful paper birds with the children. The birds were attached to strings so that they fluttered in the wind when they hung from the string. The children loved it and it was so good to see them laughing and enjoying themselves. I always felt they had so little childhood and had to grow up so fast.

Returning to Sweden

I went back to Sweden in December 1971. It was a difficult decision to make and I would have liked to stay longer in India. I was torn between my desire to stay and my parents who wanted me to come back. It was a cold, dark and miserable winter and it seemed worse than any other I had known. I got a job in Stockholm and connected up with old friends but felt very depressed. Everyone seemed so materialistic and I found that I looked at my own society with different eyes. It was more difficult than the culture shock of arriving in India. I expected India to be different but Sweden to be the same, which it was. It was I who was different!

In the summer there was some relief when I went and did a textile course on the island of Öland in the Baltic. It was somehow very healing to be engrossed in lovely colours and absorbed with weaving them together. However I was determined to travel more and in 1973 I was accepted on a course in tropical medicine at The Hospital of Tropical Diseases in London.

London

The six month course in tropical medicine went very quickly and I didn't feel ready to leave London. I was again involved with SCI, attending meetings and trying to be supportive to Indian LTVs. It was also good to meet up with the English ex-volunteers who, like me, found it hard to readjust in western society.

In 1975 I went with Oxfam to The Ogaden desert in Ethiopia during the drought and famine. It was a short term emergency relief programme for nomadic Somali people.

It was yet another war zone and another lot of human tragedy.

Working in areas of poverty and other environmental hazards to health made me feel the need to educate myself further. My specialty was really

acute medicine so I applied to do the Health Visitor training, which included more on nutrition, psychology and sociology.

I qualified as a Health Visitor in 1979.

The effect of the SCI experience on my life

My introduction to SCI was really via Bharat Sevak Samaj and Major Ramachandra and the spirit of Gandhi's teaching. I hadn't been selected and briefed like the other LTVs but I felt a kinship with the SCI people straight away. It was as if I had found my 'international family' and I belonged there. We all wanted to make the world better! It also taught me a lot about cultural understanding, not least looking at my own culture with different eyes.

I still work as a Health Visitor in inner London and in our case load we have about twenty different ethnic groups. My colleagues are also of a rich ethnic mix. I may visit a Pakistani family, a Polish family and a Somali family all in a morning's work. I spend my time communicating with people from different cultures and I think the skills I have developed were first initiated in those early days with SCI. Maybe that is why I have ended up living in London, you can stay here and meet the world!

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Fiona (Fo Williams, Chaudhary) Ferguson, LTV to India, 1971-1974

Fiona (Fo) had her first contact with IVS in England in 1968, and decided to be an LTV in 1971. She worked in SCI-India's office in New Delhi, was a fundraiser and put out the newsletter, PAX-India. She currently works with the Quakers in England, does life coaching and has two children from her marriage to Jagwant Chaudhary.

Why did I join?

There were several reasons why I became a volunteer for SCI India. At the time I applied to volunteer, I was working in London for a hotel chain as an interior design assistant. At weekends I was an IVS volunteer decorating

homes for unmarried mothers, taking out elderly people on day trips to the seaside, helping at a club for disabled people. I lived with my boyfriend and he wanted to get married. One day I realised I didn't want to get married yet, that I really didn't care whether the blue in the hotel carpet was an exact match for the one in the painting I was buying, and that there was more to life.

I rang up IVS and said I wanted to volunteer, preferably in Bolivia please. When I told them what I did for a living, there was a snigger at the other end of the phone. "Do you really think there is a demand for interior designers for people living in huts?" Undeterred, I applied and eventually was assigned to become a volunteer with SCI India, helping in the Delhi office. In vain did I protest that I wanted to go to Bolivia and it was only a telegram from Bhuppy saying, "Do not send woman, send man," that got me to India because I was so annoyed!

I was relatively politically unaware, very immature and extremely stubborn. A summer job as a 'mother's help' when I was 17 had given me an understanding of what it was to be exploited and a simplistic dislike of wealthy people. I felt compassion for the people I worked with as an IVS volunteer at weekends but had no grasp of, or interest in, the deeper issues.

My experience with SCI

My flight to India was the first time I had been on a plane and I was very scared. To boost my morale I had designed a special outfit that I thought would be both fashionable and practical – a red and white checked gingham trouser suit. Juliet Pierce and Hans Kammerer kindly met me at Delhi airport and later told me that they thought it was strange that I had travelled in my pyjamas! When I opened my suitcase at customs, the officer was outraged to discover that I had brought enough toothpaste, soap and diarrhoea medicine for 2 years and lots of packets of biscuits. "Don't you think we are a civilised country? We have all these things here!"

I was so ignorant that I was surprised to see blocks of flats and tarmac roads outside the airport. I had travelled with another IVS volunteer, Ruth, and we were whisked off to Shahdara leprosy camp for lunch. I was in an advanced state of shock as my food was served by a man with no nose and stubs for fingers. Friends, I had no idea what I had let myself in for. I was a deeply superficial person with a taste for expensive lingerie.

Volunteers would come and stay in K5 (SCI's office in Delhi where I was based) for a break and envy the occasional electricity and the water that sometimes came out of the taps in the flat. Bhuppy (National

Secretary) and I, both being artistic souls and also mindful that we were illegally running an office in a residential area, created a working space that centred round a low table surrounded by attractive floor cushions with a beautiful wall hanging on the wall behind it. We also had a couple of old desks - which I felt rather spoiled the effect! I painted some round figures on the front door and they stayed for many years, making it easy to identify the office. I envied the volunteers who visited because I felt they were involved in real work not sitting at a typewriter writing reports like me. Bhuppy and I had frequent philosophical discussions and he introduced me to Indian art, architecture and music. I watched bemused as various females pursued him with flowers or herbal remedies as tokens of their affection. We revived the SCI India newspaper, Pax India, and got very worked up about its editorial content.

Eventually I was let loose on India and I travelled to Titmoh (in Bihar), Vedanthangal (in Tamil Nadu) and Visionville (outside of Bangalore). I helped organise the Peace Walks in Delhi and Madras. After the creation of Bangladesh, I went on a workcamp there and had my first contact with Quakers and the late lamented Ataur Rahman. I had a particularly romantic workcamp on a passion fruit plantation in Sri Lanka, the experience only marred by the tremendous snoring each night of our esteemed workcamp leader. While organising a Peace Walk, I got pneumonia and ended up being treated with Sato's magic wheel, as we called it, in Visionville. A treatment that miraculously worked! I helped organise a food for work programme outside Udaipur, Rajasthan, experiencing the difficult living conditions endured each day by the community we were working with. These were all very powerful experiences for me which had a huge impact.

One of my colleagues in the SCI office was Jagwant, who first volunteered when he was still working for a newspaper but who then joined the staff. We disliked each other intensely but, as is the way of the world, this changed one day and we ended up getting married when I finished my SCI service.

What did I think of the work that I did?

I never thought of what I did as work. I discovered I loved writing and even Bhuppy's lengthy reports gave me pleasure as I edited them ruthlessly and each issue of Pax India gave me an opportunity to practise my newly discovered skills. I mostly enjoyed having people descend on me expecting to be looked after and I suppose providing that hospitality was part of my role. I learnt about what funding agencies were looking for and how to create a winning bid, organised workcamps, well-digging programmes and committee meetings, answered the phone and dealt with

visitors but none of this seemed like work. I thought that was what everyone else was doing who was out in the long-term projects. Nowadays, I appreciate the tolerance and patience of the rural and urban host communities who mostly welcomed these young foreigners and Indians into their lives.

Looking back on my experience with SCI, what is my appreciation today?

I hadn't been to university in England and I felt that India was my university, giving me so many more opportunities to learn than if I had gone down a traditional academic route. It is a tribute to the patience, love and understanding of Valli and Seshan, Bhuppy, Chari, Shashi, Chandru, Juliet, Ruth, Sheila, Solvig, Martin, Andrew, Myra, Pat and the numerous other Indian and foreign friends that I made in my 3 years of SCI service in India, that I eventually began to learn about injustice, political systems, non-violence, Indian history, colonialism, the caste system, things spiritual, healing, Indian family life and so much more. C8 South Extension, Valli, Seshan and Subi's home, became a home for me too. I came to feel one of the family and I will always be grateful for the extraordinary warmth and generosity which Valli and Seshan extended to me.

I learnt about myself, what I was capable of, my fears, my prejudices, my gifts. What other organisation would have trusted a group of young, inexperienced people, foreign and Indian, with setting up and running the sort of community projects that we did? The only limits were those we imposed on ourselves or the permit restrictions that prevented foreigners from working in vulnerable areas. Fortunately we were guided by the wisdom and experience of SCI India staff and committed SCI committee members.

Thanks to the international meetings that sometimes took place in India, I had the privilege to meet the most amazing people who were involved in all sorts of challenging and interesting projects, from northern Ireland to Japan. My eyes were opened to a world that I knew nothing of before I joined SCI.

Is there a lasting impact of what I experienced in SCI?

Since India, I have spent most of my working life in the voluntary and public sectors – no more interior designing! I did a degree in education, and a Masters in complementary therapies. I discovered I loved teaching adults and I have had numerous opportunities to use my writing talent. I became a

Quaker and now divide my time between looking after an historic Quaker meeting house on the outskirts of Bristol and life coaching. Although Jagwant and I eventually divorced, our children Supriya and Alex are a living testimony to a period of my life that changed me profoundly. A few months after arriving in India, I remember having my feet read in Delhi (therein lies another story!) and the woman looked up and said to me, "You may not believe it now, but you will become a completely different person in the next few years. You are shallow now but you will become deep, interested in a spiritual life." At the time I dismissed what she said but I had a good laugh years later when I came across an old journal recording her prediction.

I am still in touch with friends I made in India and, in some cases, these connections have passed on down to our children. I feel part of an extended family that has given me love, support and friendship over the years and helped me through difficult times in my life. I was very moved to be at the gathering of SCI India wallahs that was held at Martin and Juliet's in the summer of 2006.

The Quakers have a small book called *Advices & Queries*. Advice no. 27 says, "Live adventurously. When choices arise, do you take the way that offers the fullest opportunity for the use of your gifts in the service of God and the community? Let your life speak…".Without realising it, the day I picked up the phone to IVS to volunteer my services, I began living my life in this way and, thanks to my experiences in India, I have the courage to continue to do so.

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Martin Pierce, 1972-1974 in India; again 1975-1977

Martin Pierce came in contact with SCI-India in 1970 while teaching in the Punjab as a VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas) volunteer. He returned to India as a LTV in Nangloi in 1972-1974, and again returned with Juliet in 1975-1977, volunteering at Visionville, leaving after the birth of their son. Subsequently he served with IVS (International Voluntary Service), as a Field Officer and as its Chairperson. He has used his experiences working as an independent development consultant, mostly in Nigeria or Sierra Leone.

Joining SCI

In summer 1970 a friend told me he was going to a workcamp in Dharamsala in North India. Knowing nothing about workcamps or SCI, I decided this would be fun and went along with him, without applying through SCI India. We walked in one day late. Fortunately for me (not for him!), the camp leader, John Hitchins, was in hospital with hepatitis and nobody objected to my presence.

The Dharamsala workcamp was a significant 'peak experience'. So many different strands of what I was looking for came together and I felt that I had arrived 'home'. On reflection this can be explained by:

- I had trained to be a lawyer, but I had no interest in law as a career and was searching for a more fulfilling alternative
- I had been brought up in 'privileged' India as a child, had received a privileged education, and had been working as a volunteer teacher in an elite school in Punjab, India – the simplicity of the basic living conditions of the workcamp was a soothing contrast
- I felt accepted and stimulated by a friendly, inclusive group of people
- the manual labour was a very welcome antidote to my customary, more cerebral world
- the history and philosophy of the organisation, with its pacifist, non-violent roots and principles, were ones that I fully identified with.

My expectations arising from the workcamp were essentially that I had found an organisation that had provided me, and could continue to provide me, with an experience of feeling complete.

My experience with SCI - dates and positions held:

1970–1971	Attended workcamps in India, including relief work in refugee camp near Calcutta for Bangladeshi refugees (during holidays whilst teaching with Voluntary Service Overseas in Punjab)
1972–1974	Long-term volunteer with SCI India – mostly spent working as Co-ordinator of Nangloi project in Delhi

1975–1977	SCI volunteer, with wife Juliet, at Regional Training Centre in Visionville; attended and led several workcamps during this time
1980–1984	IVS staff member – Field Officer for North of England
1985–1987	Chairperson, IVS National Committee

Enjoyable aspects

- *Friendships*: SCI provided an opportunity to join a welcoming group of lively, thoughtful individuals from a wide range of cultures and backgrounds

- *Meaningful work*: SCI activities offered easy access to a committed and rewarding engagement with groups of people and their worlds who otherwise would have been beyond contact

- *SCI ideology*: SCI's history, reflected particularly in its first generation members and their stories, was an inspiration. It served as a healing response to some of my deeper questions and fears: the threat of war, especially nuclear war; the prevalence of violence and conflict, within families, communities and states; the discrepancy between the so-called 'rich' and 'poor'; the divisions that seemed to dominate relationships between people, their beliefs and customs.

- *Simplicity of a shared lifestyle*: maybe being a twin helps, but I found the interdependent, communal, unadorned culture of workcamps and long-term projects to be congenial at a deeply satisfying level. It was restorative after a dislocated, privileged and somewhat alienating life up to that point.

The following were particularly pleasant experiences:

- First workcamp – a life-changing experience!! And numerous other workcamps, too.

- Being accepted, and having a sense of belonging, at the heart of the organisation in India, with the Seshans as the principal instigators

- Meeting Juliet and, 5 years later, deciding to get married

- Time in Visionville with the Sato family – extraordinarily rich and stimulating times

- Organising or participating in more political workcamps with overt 'peace' and 'non-violence' themes, for example: at Torness nuclear power station; Molesworth nuclear air base; Milton Keynes Peace Pagoda; New Relationship camp, Wakefield (with adults with learning difficulties).

Some less happy experiences

- Being caught up in occasional serious and destructive conflicts, for example: between local groups and national office in India; between an Indian volunteer and myself in Nangloi project; within the local group in Bangalore; within the teenage programme in Leeds

- Unproductive meetings, usually at a national branch level

- Being present when Nangloi and other SCI India projects were criticised by international committee members, mostly from some branches in Europe

- Contributing to polarised arguments about what SCI should be doing – often characterised as being between the 'idealists' and the 'pragmatists'. I identified with the 'idealists'!!

An anecdote

One day on my first workcamp in Dharamsala it was raining hard and the workcamp team decided that it would be a rest day. However, I was so exhilarated by my new found purpose in life that I set off on my own, with crowbar in hand, up the rather steep hill to the work site. There I happily spent the day trying to break up the rock-face so that foundations for an orphanage could be laid. My enthusiasm was impressive but largely ineffective, particularly in contrast with the six Tibetan women besides me who were rhythmically and collaboratively splitting the rocks with far less effort and singing all the while. One wonderful aspect of SCI has always been that, for the most part, its volunteers may not 'have a clue' or be highly productive but their aspiration and commitment is what makes a difference.

My thoughts on the work

In my experience the short-term workcamps were mostly highly successful and had a significant impact on the majority of those that took part. In my view they are a very effective means of breaking down barriers between people, through the combined impact of socially productive work tasks, shared communal living, and the explicit ideology and objectives of the organisation.

The long term projects were, in my experience, less satisfying, being more complex and requiring a degree of management skills and life experience that were generally undeveloped in most of the volunteers. However, the experience and learning resulting from being given responsibility beyond what was merited were themselves highly valuable.

I never expected that SCI would contribute significantly to world peace and the abolition of discrimination and poverty. What mattered more was the opportunity to find out the power of what collaboration and working together can achieve and the importance of symbolic action.

As I look back

What I miss about my years in SCI are the ‘camraderie’, the sense of purpose, the internationalism, the innocent idealism and the sense of finding a ‘home’ outside in the world of work. I have no regrets about leaving and moving on and exploring other possibilities, but I have a deep and lasting affection for the organisation and the people in it. This is reinforced strongly when meeting up with SCI friends, and, particularly, at the recent get-together of the `70’s vintage of SCI in Birmingham.

Of the many organisations that I have been involved with subsequently, none has been as rewarding in such a complete way. Other organisations have been more effective, or better managed, or less conflicted, but none has taught me so much about what works well, what inspires and what heals. I think this is primarily because SCI more completely involves a person’s belief system, their working life and the way they relate socially to their fellows, whether on the basis of friendship or merely shared space.

My appreciation today of SCI aims

As I interpret these aims, they seem more relevant than ever and timeless. I would characterise them as:

- Primarily using manual work as a practical means of giving people the experience of solidarity and of connectedness, beyond divisions of ideas, attitudes, customs and privilege
- Demonstrating that we all have more in common than whatever serves to divide us
- An explicit ethos of sharing, equality and co-operation, both in work and in our domestic and social living, which provides an experience that is integrative, rewarding and humanising
- Targeting situations that stimulate division and conflict and bringing a healing and humanising dynamic which leads to change in the situation and within individuals (hosts and visitors)
- Particularly in short-term workcamps, to offer the opportunity for groups of people to take responsibility to make a heaven or a hell of their time together.

Of its efficiency

I wouldn't want to pretend that SCI is any more efficient than other organisations – however, as mentioned above, I would claim that workcamps as a methodology are highly efficient in achieving the aims of the organisation

I consider that SCI has been less efficient in its organisational management and development, especially in the following respects:

- Its pacifist ideology was and is highly relevant and contributive when compulsory military service exists; however, with its abolition in many countries, the objective of providing alternative military service was reduced in importance and I don't think SCI has found a successful replacement for this focus; its role as a pacifist or peace organisation has diminished over the years
- In many countries the explicit 'peace' or 'non-violence' objectives have been seen to be too exclusive, and there has been a tendency to try to attract as many, mostly young, people as possible by underplaying the traditional ideologies and maximising its 'convenience' for student priorities; this, to my mind, has largely deprived the organisation of its power and impact to play a part in healing complex and deeply rooted conflicts

- I don't think there is a sufficiently strong belief in the 'workcamp' methodology to apply it to situations that have the ability to be 'transformative' – I was always more excited when there was a political or social change dynamic to the work activities; during the end of my time with IVS I felt the more challenging aspects of the organisation were being replaced by 'safer', less inspirational aspirations.

Personal benefits

- Lifelong friends and a partner – and, consequently, two children!
- Some great memories
- The opportunity to grow up and develop in a stimulating and affectionate environment
- An outlet for cherished beliefs and idealism
- An escape from a professional career in law
- The chance to reconcile some of the conflicts of growing up in 'air-conditioned' India
- Years spent learning first-hand about development

SCI's impact on others

From continued contact with very many of my colleagues from working in India, and, less so, from my days in IVS, it seems that, to a greater or lesser extent, the experience of working with SCI has been mostly positive and rewarding

As frequently mentioned above, I think workcamps generally have a significant impact on the lives of most of the participants. Because many of SCI's work projects took international teams to places and to people that would, otherwise, not be exposed to international and idealistic groups of people, I imagine there has been a beneficial impact, too, on our hosts.

Relevance to the requirements and spirit of the times

Not much has changed that would make SCI less relevant. Divisions and conflicts at a personal, communal, and international level require just as imaginative and transformative commitments from individuals. Whilst alternatives to military service may no longer be as much required, given the voluntary nature of most armed services, the visible demonstration of the power of individuals, whatever their superficial differences, to transform divisions and conflicts in the world remains as essential as ever.

Lasting impact - on politics or career

My politics were largely taking shape before joining SCI and were a reason for joining it. They have not changed much.

After SCI I worked in peace education, mediation and conflict management, and international development. What I bring to these areas of work was incalculably shaped by the experiences of working in SCI India and IVS.

On travel

Not sure how much the urge to travel was planted by an early childhood spent in India, or how much by working in India as an adult. Both have ensured that I now spend more time outside my home in the UK and more time in countries in West Africa.

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John Neligan, 1973-1975 LTV in India

John Neligan joined IVS, the British Branch of SCI, and was selected as an LTV to India in 1973. Upon his return in 1975 he joined the Camphill movement in England and made his home in a number of Camphill communities, where he met his wife and raised his two children.

First Contact with SCI

I was 21 years old when I first encountered an S.C.I. work-camp. It brought together for me the possibilities of living the ideas and ideals I had had at 16, which my 5 year training had said was ‘unrealistic and

impossible', and to see there were other ways for people to live and work together outside the 'conventions' of our society.

LTV in India, 1973-1975, then Camphill

Increasingly as I worked with S.C.I. in India, I and other volunteers talked constantly about "how do we live and work in ways we believe in, with a long term commitment?" It is a longish story, but, I believe for the last 30 years I have worked in Camphill (a Rudolf Steiner community with people with mental disabilities), mainly as a farmer, working with all sorts of people from all sorts of backgrounds and tackling difficult social questions. I hope I have done my little bit to the 'long term commitment'.

Ways of living together

In the Communities I have lived in, and our society at large, I feel the aims of 'Truth and Reconciliation' are so important, and the work of 'Non Violent Communication' (ahimsa) and 'living and working together', are tremendously valuable.

It is quite clear to me that we need support, books and guidance to work systematically through problems and conflicts; with skilled people to be called on at certain points. In the past this has sometimes been through religion, I believe that we must always find ways suitable to 'the group concerned' to enable misunderstandings, conflicts, assumptions, joys, enthusiasms and ideals to be worked on, taken further and hopefully built into a better world.

Final thoughts

As I write this it is the last day of a 2-week holiday that my wife and I have had on Crete. All around is the history of violent conflict, especially the Civil War and the 'Battle of Crete' in 1941 and the 'German Occupation'. 65 years later, there are quite a lot of British tourists in Crete, but what is evident is that membership of the E.U. has brought tremendous material development to Crete. However, when you look at the cars, consumer goods etc., it is quite clear that Japanese, Korean, German, Italian and Spanish, i.e. the 'Vanquished' Axis powers, dominate vehicle and consumer goods sales, and it is European currency in the tills! You can well wonder what was the battle of Crete about?

I feel tremendously grateful for the time I spent on work-camps and S.C.I. related activities, I do not believe we have had major impacts in the world but I do believe we have been able to make major impacts on peoples' lives and have enabled people to feel empowered to change things around themselves and in their circles of influence. I have been able

to see the reality that violent and negative thoughts are just as harmful as actually hitting someone in the face! What we do, strive for and think is important.

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Chapter 4
SCI IN NORTH AFRICA

Morocco and Tunisia were French protectorates, and got their independence in 1956. Algeria was in a different position as it was administratively, legally part of France at that time. The gaining of independence for Algeria was a much longer and more painful process than for its neighbours. Independence was finally obtained only in 1962, at the end of a brutal war which had been initiated by an uprising in 1954. This bloody war of independence had wreaked large-scale death and destruction on the country, and 280,000 Algerians had fled the country taking refuge over the borders in Morocco and Tunisia.

Although the Algerian branch of SCI was only small, and didn't last very long, Algeria has been important for SCI as a whole and for the French branch in particular. The relationship was close and there were many immigrant workers from Algeria and Morocco living in France. The War of Independence soon became a burning issue and the brutal suppression was opposed by many French people, especially by a number of conscientious objectors, members of SCI. Their fight for recognition played an important role in the adoption of a statute for conscientious objectors at the end of the Algerian War of Independence. SCI organized a long-term workcamp in a large shantytown in Nanterre, near Paris. Most of the inhabitants were Algerian and Moroccan workers and their families. Life there was affected by the tense social climate. Above all, in Algeria itself, several volunteers were persecuted by the French authorities, and some were even assassinated by one side or the other.

Pierre Martin (1912-1998) economist, sociologist and life-long militant pacifist, was jailed in 1939, at the beginning of World War II, because he was a conscientious objector. In 1947, he was leader of one of the very first workcamps to take place in Algeria. Later the same year, he went to Palestine on a UNESCO mission to help educate Palestinian refugees. In 1948, Pierre set off from France for India on his bike (!) with the intention of trying to meet the Mahatma Gandhi. Shortly after arriving in North Africa he learned of Gandhi's assassination, and therefore decided to stay on in Algeria where he developed workcamps, and created the Algerian branch

of SCI. In the 1950's, he carried out a number of workcamp promotion missions for the Co-ordination Committee of SCI, and he became an expert in basic education and development in Senegal.

Throughout his life he remained a militant for peace and for nuclear disarmament.

(Hommage à Pierre Martin, by Malik M'Baye. Internet M'Baye-Martin and SCI, 50 ans).

The Algerian group, created in 1948, and established as an independent branch in 1952, included both European and Algerian ('Muslim') volunteers. At that time in Algeria, according to the French branch, "Fear prevails among both the Europeans and the indigenous population. There is on the one hand colonialism, implying inequality and lack of justice, and on the other an increasingly radical nationalism. This shows how difficult it is to work in Algeria and how our spirit of understanding, tolerance, and complete racial equality is sorely needed."[25]

After a very short but active period the work of SCI in pre-Independence Algeria came to a tragic end, as will be seen from the following story by Nelly (second part). An entirely new situation was created after March 1962. In the aftermath of the War of Independence there was a dire need for relief and construction work."[26]

So, a very big workcamp was organized by SCI near Tlemcen in Western Algeria; it is described by Jean-Pierre, then R.L and, more in detail, by David, who had experience of other workcamps in Europe and in Iran.

The story of Paulette refers to a similar workcamp with Algerian refugees on the other side of the border, in Tunisia. Jean-Pierre, who was later in charge of SCI activities in North Africa, gives an overview of the developments in the three North African countries. Strong nationalistic feelings which prevailed after independence have been a major obstacle to creating or maintaining national and local branches in North Africa.

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[25] Bulletin de la Branche francaise du SCI, ete 1948.*50 ans au service de la paix*, SCI 1980

[26] In 2007 Mohamed Sahnoun published a novel entitled: "La mémoire blessée" ('The Wounded Memory) – Algerie 1957' (Presses de la renaissance). A largely autobiographical work, it recounts how the hero, Salem, is arrested, tortured and convicted in 'The Trial of the Progressive Christians'. He evokes SCI, its work and his French friends, amongst whom one can recognize some of the people mentioned in this anthology.

Nevertheless, since then SCI has continued cooperating with local organizations, including exchanging volunteers.

4.1 *Algeria before Independence*

Mohamed Sahnoun, 1952-53; leader of Algerian Branch

Originally from Orléansville (nowadays known as El Asnam) he got to know SCI in Algeria in 1952-53, and took part in several workcamps before being put in charge of the Algerian branch for a while. After Algerian Independence he held high office in the Diplomatic Corps and in international organizations, whilst constantly endeavouring to achieve Peace and Reconciliation[2].

It was through one of my teachers, and some friends – particularly Paul Lafon who was one of the leaders of the Algerian branch – that I first came into contact with SCI when I was a student in Algiers. I had read Pierre Cérésole's book; I was interested in the values and objectives of the association, and I immediately saw its message of Reconciliation; an example of which had been the first workcamp in Verdun. I thought one ought to draw inspiration from it, in order to be able to work together. At that time the work going on in Algeria particularly interested the International Secretariat in Switzerland (whose Secretary was Willy Begert), as well as the French branch (whose Secretary was Etienne Reclus).

In the beginning our activities took place mainly in Algiers, and we often got together with members of the association. Then I did three workcamps, and rapidly found myself in charge of the Algerian branch; but to be truthful, Nelly Forget, Paul Lafon and I were together so much of the time that I find it hard to remember precisely *who* was in charge and *when*. At one time I represented the Algerian branch at an International Committee meeting which took place in Basel (beginning 1954?).

My first workcamp was in Kabylie, in a village called Tiki Ouache, just above the town of Delly. The village was very remote and in distress. The camp consisted in building a road to open up the village, and also to lay on a supply of drinking water. When I arrived there were already volunteers from France and other countries there. In fact I did not stay very long in that camp.

The second one was at Elkseur, near Bougie (Bejaia). Our work was putting in a water supply system. The village was less isolated than Tiki

Ouache, and was more open to the outside world. The villagers were concerned about a lot of things, and we had interesting discussions with them. Even though it was before the War of Independence we could feel a certain degree of tension in the atmosphere. I only stayed there a fortnight or so.

In those days after doing our manual work we would discuss what we had experienced during the day; our relationship with the local people, and with the Authorities. We analysed it all, and it fuelled our arguments for getting over our message, which was one of Reconciliation and -in a way- being charitable. At that time amongst us workcampers there was a commonness of understanding about the political situation, which, marked as it was by Colonization, was unbearable, and put into question by everyone of us. Even though we all agreed on the need for reform in the country, some people wanted to go further; whereas others considered that it was not their job, and that if there were other prospects it was up to the Algerians- whether of French or native origin- to discuss them and find their own solution. There was no common will in the camp to reach consensus on the issue; we respected one another's opinions. We discussed the causes for the tension and the problems we observed, from an agricultural, economic and social point of view.

My third camp took place in Orléansville, my home town, after the earthquake of September 1954. At that time I was waiting for a grant to go and study at the Sorbonne. It was perhaps the camp that had the greatest impact on me, as I was on my home ground. I was naturally more aware of the problems and stayed there longer than in the other two camps, working non-stop. It was a very big camp involving other organizations, but SCI was by far the biggest. That is where I really became friends with a number of SCI leaders. Already in my previous camps the French Authorities had regarded us with suspicion, wondering who 'those foreigners' were. Even more so in September 1954 when tensions were higher, even in SCI office in Algiers.

According to Emile Tanner's report, the earthquake had killed 1300 people and the town of 44,000 had been almost completely destroyed. Several villages had been razed to the ground.

The first group of volunteers, sent to one of the villages that had suffered most, managed to overcome their initial difficulties encountered in recruiting Muslim volunteers (including women) which enabled them to gain

the trust of the local people. People initially feared that they would have to pay for help, that they might thus be disqualified from receiving official

compensation, and that the volunteers might not be skilled enough for the work.

Working together with the inhabitants the volunteers did not acquire the skill or the speed of local men.

Not long after starting the work, SCI had to cater for forty more volunteers from three other organizations, working on other reconstruction projects and providing medical care.

All the volunteers suffered from extremely gruelling living conditions; but, relations between them and local people quickly improved.

After the uprising of November 1954, the French Authorities – who (according to our reminiscences) had initially welcomed SCI in a friendly manner – for some reason, suddenly decided to close down the workcamps.

This shocked people and it was a very big disappointment, for the volunteers as well as for the local people with whom they had become friendly. Emile Tanner concludes by saying that the organization of emergency workcamps requires a well-prepared branch and 'emergency volunteers'.

Reminiscences of the French branch of SCI (op.cit)

In 1956 I had to stop studying at the Sorbonne because we Algerian students went on strike; I went back to Algeria and started working in the Social Centres team. In fact I had already got to know Nelly Forget (see Nelly Forget) well before then. Nearly all SCI people were there. As an organization the Algerian branch of SCI could no longer function; its premises had been closed down. I was a middle-ranking manager in the Social Centres when I was arrested and put in prison along with other members of these services, including Nelly Forget. Thus it was that in 1957, I was one of those convicted in the trial that became known as 'The Trial of the Progressive Christians' which had a big impact on public opinion. Among the defendants the Algerians were considered '*plotters*' and the French were considered friends or '*accomplices'*.

When I was released I first went to France where I had regular contact with friends at SCI office in Clichy. I next went to Lausanne where I likewise

met up with SCI members. I was unable to go back to Algeria before Independence.

This experience with SCI left its mark on a certain number of young people and colleagues with whom, later on I found myself involved in the political campaigns I lead, and also in my international work. Professionally, from early on, I tried to establish a dialogue between the different communities: at the World Youth Assembly with regards to the issue of the Congo; as one of the leaders of the Organization for African Unity after Independence when African countries were confronted with the problem of borders inherited from colonization, and finally, in the different posts I have held at the United Nations.

Today I still hark back to the importance that SCI has had for me, in my way of perceiving problems, in understanding the various sources of conflict, and in treating the wounds to people's memory, resulting from these conflicts. It has been a particularly rich experience, in all sorts of ways: getting to know one another, gaining better psychological and cultural understanding, discussing important topics such as confronting one another in War (we did not yet talk very much about 'security'), and Ghandi's ideas. In fact, at that time Romain Rolland's work on Ghandi was virtually my bedside book. It opened up our eyes, because it showed us that the world was not made of *enemies*, that there were not only *friends* either; but, there were also possibilities for human beings who do not know one another, to work together and discuss matters. At the time we were emerging from adolescence, our SCI experience was a sort of answer, a school, - a fabulous school. The discussions taught me a lot; for example with the Norwegian volunteer who explained why he was a conscientious objector (like many SCI volunteers at that time). It was also the first 'international school' we got to know, though we were still only students. In workcamps we really encountered the world, and we could only be influenced by it. It more or less determined what I went to do in my life afterwards. It taught us how to avoid conflicts, to overcome them, and learn how to live together.

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Kader Mekki, 1948

Got to know SCI in Algiers in 1948, and did a very large number of camps in Algeria, France, and several other countries. Married to a Norwegian volunteer, his professional life was largely devoted to carrying out humanitarian aid programmes, in particular reconstruction and development work.

I first heard about SCI from a friend in 1948 when I was a student at a Professional Trades School in Algiers. I was motivated by the idea of being able to have contact with others, that is not just the French, but foreigners like Swiss, Dutch, Germans. I wanted to get to know a bit more about life and things like that. In work camps the atmosphere was so calm; people were very friendly and sincere. Pierre Martin wasn't there just then. I took part in weekend camps, especially in Béradi in the Algiers suburbs (see Nelly) where I did some painting work. We would unblock drains, and repair huts. The girls taught sewing and knitting.

I also did some camps in Kabylie during the holidays in 1949 and `50. In `49 I did a camp near Oued Aïcha not far from Tizi Ouzou, building a road through to the village. There were two German and two Swiss volunteers. I was the only Algerian. I had my head shaved, and several other volunteers followed suit. As we worked for nothing, and we had very frugal food, a lot of people took us for convicts who had been sent by the French to spy on the village! At that time it was difficult to explain to people who we were, and what we were doing.

In 1950 I was in charge of a camp at Rhba Routh (?). I was a bricklayer and a frame maker, and we made a catchment for a fountain. It was the first time I had done that kind of thing. We were helped by a British missionary who lived there, and he supplied us with all the necessary materials. We piped the water supply to just above the village, so that the womenfolk could easily fetch their water, rather than having to walk 4 or 5 kilometres for it. There were no village people available to work with us, as all the men had gone to France or elsewhere to find work, leaving only the women and children. Still, we had very good contact with the local people. In the autumn we went back to repair and redecorate the village school. Simone Chaumet was there, a marvellous girl, and a certain 'Emile' – they were always together. He was best man at our wedding, and we went to visit her on our honeymoon.

A little anecdote: one day it rained very heavily, and the next morning we picked loads of mushrooms which one of the volunteers cooked for us. Anyway, as our food was usually rather frugal we threw ourselves on them and thoroughly enjoyed them. Afterwards, everyone was as sick as dogs, all night long.

The Algerian branch tended to function in fits and starts. The secretaries only came for a limited period of time. Nelly for about a month, Willy Begert for a few months – Pierre Martin himself wasn't there all the time. The others (Paul Lafon) used to come to give a hand, but their main jobs were elsewhere. On top of that, we were very much lacking in resources. Emile Tanner was only just able to make ends meet. I, myself, didn't have enough experience to make a good secretary, and we didn't have the wherewithal for me to live on.

After Independence, it wasn't only SCI that was prevented from starting up again. Any organization outside the FLN wasn't at all welcome. There was only the camp in Tlemcen which I visited in 1963, where they did a good job; but apart from that, the Algerian Authorities even regarded SCI with suspicion. Later, after Boumediene, it became even more difficult. I only once had contact with Touiza in the 80s, but they didn't have sufficient resources either.

At the end of 1950 I became a long-term volunteer with SCI; first of all in Clichy with Etienne Reclus. I was in Nanterre with the Abbé Pierre in the first Emmaüs camp. We built a small shack for a family. We also constructed the first prefabricated house for the Castors. At Pigalle, where the Abbé Pierre was trying to rehabilitate prostitutes, we repaired apartments. It was most interesting.

Then I went on to Calabria in Southern Italy, for two and a half months. The camp, where we built a road to a village, was organized by the Italian branch. For me, it was a very unexpected experience - it was as if I was at home in Kabylie. The people were dark-skinned and wore a costume similar to a burnous, and they would bring their goods and produce to market, just like in Kabylie. We had problems with the local Catholic Church, which owned all the land around. From what I was told the Church preferred to let the fields lie fallow, and refused to help the common people who only had small plots of land.

Afterwards I went to Saint Pol de Léon in Britanny for three months where we worked with a building cooperative. Next, SCI sent me to England near Coventry where there was a centre for handicapped people; there we helped dig a swimming pool. From there I went to Norway near Oslo. We worked in the forest, planting trees for a big forestry company. I stayed there three months. The company paid us for our work, and whatever we were able to save we sent to SCI to finance a camp in India.

I went back to Algeria at the end of 1952, and I stood in as SCI secretary for a while, as no one else was available at the time. I stayed until Willy Begert arrived. I then took up a bricklaying job in order to earn my living, and make ends meet. I got married to a Norwegian volunteer,

despite the opposition of the French authorities who told my wife "You are crazy, these people aren't at all like us!" It was only after some string-pulling by someone connected with Concordia, that the Prefect gave us his permission to get married.

We went on holiday to Norway in 1954, but there was a terrible earthquake in Orléansville (Algeria), and SCI organized an emergency relief camp there. I left my job in Norway, and went to give a hand for a couple of weeks. There were several organizations involved. Where I was, there were only a dozen or so international volunteers, and some Algerians like Mohammed Sahnoun. It was a matter of clearing up but, above all, to encourage the local people. In fact we weren't able to do very much else for them, even more so as the French Authorities didn't want any interference from "*those SCI snoopers"*. In fact, we were barely tolerated by them, and they did everything possible to prevent us from doing anything that might help the people.

The Algerian national uprising started on 1st November 1954, and the French Authorities started waging war on anyone who could in any way be considered an activist. I was living with friends when the police came looking for me. My brother was already in prison. I left for Norway. I worked there, and studied engineering, but I continued to do camps during my holidays – I was often put in charge of them. I went on to work for firms in various countries.

Then I was employed by the Norwegian government: helping resistance movements in Southern Africa, with development projects in Yemen and Vietnam, and then for the French government in Angola and Mozambique. I have also worked for the UN High Commission for Refugees, with Norwegian aid for Palestinian refugees after the Arab – Israeli war of `67 and in the `80s for the World Council of Churches in Algeria.

With regards to the question of the effectiveness of SCI, one must first and foremost emphasize its general lack of resources. We could have done much more had we had adequate means to carry out our job. In due course, I was put in charge of projects involving millions of dollars, whereas with SCI we only counted in thousands. Moreover, the work of SCI was too fragmented: the work camps were only for short periods. Even when I was a long-term volunteer, now and then, I had to take a paid job for two or three months at a time, in order to earn enough pocket money so that I could do three months more voluntary service which hindered continuity. But having said that,-despite our limited resources, we did achieve a great deal.

The organizational problems that occurred were due to a lack of continuity. We were the pioneers of long-term voluntary service, even

paying our own travel expenses; only our board and lodging were covered by the association.

Feelings of solidarity grew between us. We accepted each other as we were, bringing about deep friendships without reservations, which are still as strong today, fifty years later.

My experience with SCI has taught me how to listen to people and it has opened up new horizons to me.

. . . . .

Nelly Forget, 1948; LTV in England, Europe 1949; in Algeria 1951-1952, again 1955

Nelly Forget was born in Paris, belongs to a generation whose childhood and adolescence has been strongly affected by WWII. She took part in several workcamps in Europe, worked in the International Secretariat, and had significant experience in Algeria. Subsequently she has spent most of her professional life as an advisor on development in various African countries.

I started high school in 1939, and passed the first part of matriculation in 1945. More than half of my schoolmates had been Jews. They had all been rounded up by the French authorities and sent to concentration camps. It goes without saying, that my generation was already familiar with situations of injustice and violence.

Being an only child and rather isolated, I sorely wanted to meet other young people. One year after matriculation just after the War, my parents offered me a trip to England, which at that time was a rather unique opportunity. Nevertheless, I refused, preferring to visit my grandmother (who died soon afterward), but I promised to go to England the following year.

Even before discovering SCI, I had had experience of workcamps in Central Europe. In 1948, through the Student Travel Agency, I went to Czechoslovakia with a group of about one hundred French people, all members of the Communist Party. This was shortly after the communists took control of Czechoslovakia. It was just after the start of the struggle with

Tito, and the coming down of the iron curtain. My parents did not receive any news from me for weeks and no one knew whether I would be able to come back. It was a very difficult time, but I was in a real vantage point for observing what was going on. This experience radically cured any leanings I might have had towards communism. But, at the same time, I had discovered the value of work camps. It was one incredibly big camp involving about 1 000 volunteers. We were organized in national teams or '*brigades*' for the work. Our job was to rebuild a railway, the work was quite gruelling. We were encouraged to work as 'shock'- workers, and medals were distributed at the end. I received the silver medal of '*oudarnyka'.* The brigades were separated from one another, and not supposed to mix. Opportunities for meeting people from different brigades were limited to mealtimes and during free time after work when we would sometimes dance. Dancing anything different from folk dances was considered a form of political opposition. But secretly (we had to be careful) we managed to do other forms of dancing, as the regime deemed it decadent or even degenerate Young Czechs would explain that, if they were sons of the bourgeoisie, they would not have any chance of entering university. I remember attending the political examination which applicants had to sit and pass before being admitted to university, which took place under huge pictures of Marx, Lenin and Stalin. I was also able to see how the French communist brigade functioned, and discovered its bureaucratic language. One day, Yugoslavia was a 'socialist paradise ', and the next Tito was described as 'a venomous toad' (common language among communists at that time). The young militants justified the changes, at the same time claiming "You cannot tell everyone everything", and so on. For me, it was an exciting experience, very negative with regards to communism, but very positive from the point of view of discovering what 'working together' meant.

A year later, thanks to a cousin I became acquainted with SCI and went on one of its camps in the South-East of France, at a place called Vercheny. It is in the part of the Alps called the Vercors, where the Resistance had been very active during WWII. Following the derailment of a train organized by the Resistance, all the men of the village had been rounded up by the Germans and sent to a concentration camp. Only a few of them had come back.

The workcamp was organized to help a Paris-based association, which worked with street children in a Paris suburb. The oldest and highest part of the village, which had been almost entirely destroyed during the war, had been donated to the association, and SCI had been asked to assist in its reconstruction and conversion into a holiday home for the street children. The village had agreed to host some German volunteers in the group. Despite its dramatic story; it was the first time that any German people had

come to the village, since the War. At the end of the camp all the volunteers, irrespective of nationality, were invited by the villagers into their homes. A fine gesture of reconciliation .The work camp only lasted two weeks. I was very enthusiastic. The volunteers (among them two Germans) were really friendly. The team leader was a charismatic personality, who had a long experience of dealing with people living on the margins of society, which had encouraged him to take care of children. Boys did the construction work, and girls had to work in the washhouse, as huge quantities of children's clothes had been donated by the Canadian Embassy. I also did some digging. Half of the volunteers stayed on after the camp, in order to train the permanent staff. I do not remember any organized discussions, but the atmosphere was very different from that of my previous camp in Czechoslovakia. In Vercheny there was a real feeling of freedom, which was such a big contrast. Genuine relationships were established and real friendships were created among the volunteers. Some of them are still in touch with one another today.

I enjoyed the experience so much that I decided to give up my university studies (I had done two years studying English and one of law) and go and work as a long-term volunteer. Against my parents' advice, I went to England (Lincolnshire) where I worked for six months with SCI. Part of the time I worked in a camp organized by the Quakers, and the rest of the time in another organized by the British branch of SCI (IVS). There were about 20 volunteers (British, Germans, Scandinavians and Italians – I was the only French person). We worked for farmers who were conscientious objectors. Most of the money we earned was used to finance SCI projects in India. We got along very well with the farmers, who received the volunteers into their homes, where sometimes they would read poetry or plays. We lived in tents, or in barrack huts which had been used for German prisoners of war and for displaced persons.

The work was hard, especially potato picking. We were so tired in the evenings that we were unable to have formal discussions, but nevertheless we were able to get to know each other. We had a deep feeling that we were building peace in our daily work. I am very grateful to SCI for this.

After three months of farming work, I was assigned to a kind of youth hostel in London, managed by the British branch of SCI (IVSP). It was a sort of clearinghouse, which would dispatch volunteers to the various workcamps. There I met some of the early companions of Pierre Cérésole - the founder of the movement. There were also paying guests in the hostel, just like in a boarding house. We were on friendly terms with them. There was, of course, household work to do, mainly cooking, but I also had the opportunity of meeting lots of other volunteers. Afterwards, I was sent back to France, where I was employed by SCI International Secretariat, which

was at that time in Paris (rue Guy de la Brosse). The Secretary at that time was Willy Begert assisted by his wife Dora. I was full of admiration and affection for them, even though they were much older than me. We worked with one another on an equal-footing, and I learned a lot from them.

I worked with them for a year. I did secretarial work. I had to deal with all sorts of activities and I met many people. From time to time, I had to organize workcamps, for example for a new handicapped people's association. Among other things, I remember the arrival of American volunteers and how amazing it was for me to discover how their concerns were so different from those of us Europeans. Their lifestyle seemed to belong to another world. They had apparently been very well trained for this situation, and appeared exceedingly cautious, which sometimes made relationships rather difficult. There was a black man among them. Everyone went out dancing with him. At that time it was an extraordinary experience for a black man from '*the South'*, to be able to live with white people. It was during this same period that the first Algerian volunteers came over to France.

At that time, the International Secretariat had an on-going relationship with the Youth Division of UNESCO. Willy Begert was very competent, and he often had to chair the coordination meetings with other organizations. He was highly considered, and he went to work for the UNESCO later on. From the point of view of practical organization the International Secretariat was very modest. Apart from generally lacking in equipment and having only extremely limited resources, it was very rich from the human point of view.

My voluntary work experience was then further extended in a displaced persons camp in Donaueschingen, South-West Germany, where there was a very long-term camp. It was very interesting and it gave me the opportunity of seeing another aspect of an enormous European problem of the time. The camp housed refugees from Sudetenland - the German-speaking part of Czechoslovakia - and from other Central European countries expelled from their homelands after 1945. Their total number in Europe was then around 10 million. It was a terrible situation, which is not well-known to-day. These people did not even understand the variety of German that was spoken by the other Germans around them. They had been first received in Schleswig-Holstein, and then some of them had been sent down to the camp of Donaueschingen. The whole camp was made of barrack huts; we Service Civil people lived in one of them .The refugees were paid to build their own houses. They only received help from SCI. This decision had been made by the chief administrator, who wanted to open the minds of the refugees to something more positive beyond camp life. I did not speak German, but I had learned some basic vocabulary for

shopping and for construction work. With the bitter cold weather people would remain indoors, and so we only had limited contact with the families, except for one who frequently invited the volunteers in. We also had contact with the French soldiers, since this was part of the French occupation zone. As I was '*head-sister'* in the camp and the only French person, I was delegated to liaise with the Army. I remember once visiting the local commanding officer to ask for permission for the soldiers to visit the camp. He appeared to suspect the camp of being a brothel! A few soldiers came during their free time for a change. Once an armed French military-policeman told me "You must be a saint working for the Germans".

We were long-term volunteers. The work was very hard, especially since the winter was cold. The water in the rooms froze overnight. There were few women volunteers. Women did the construction work, but also looked after the cooking and did the house work. Every week, they had to hand wash dozens of sheets in freezing water. There was always a man who would help them, and he would say that it was harder than construction work. Women also had to carry big cooking-pots full of food to the men on the construction site. It was in this camp that I received a letter from Pierre Martin asking me to be in charge of the Algerian branch. At first I refused. I had already been a volunteer for two years and at that moment I was more interested in Scandinavian countries. A Finnish volunteer I had met at the camp in England, had found me a job as a teacher of French in Finland. I really liked the idea and was shortly expected to start working there.

I remember very well how I came to change my mind, realizing that it was a vital decision. Since then, Algeria has left an indelible mark on my whole life. In those days I used to receive 'Le Monde' newspaper, and one day I read an article about a general strike in Spain. It was the first one since the beginning of the Franco regime. By then, I had already turned down Pierre's offer, because I could not see what I could possibly do in such a colonial set up as there was in Algeria at that time. Then, suddenly, while reading the article about that strike, it occurred to me that things might possibly change, that some events could actually bring about a new situation; even under a totalitarian regime like Franco's. I was, in a way, shaken by this act of liberation. "I am going to Algeria" I said; and that is how, thanks to that strike, I left for Algeria shortly after.

Fifty years later, Algeria still stands out as a decisive time in my life –a strong point, something that is always with me. I left Metropolitan France in May 1951. Arriving in Algiers I was met on the quayside by an Algerian volunteer, Kader (who is still a very good friend today). The welcome I received was typical of the friendly group with whom I was going to work. I was taken to SCI headquarters: a small flat in a narrow alley, where

meetings took place on the ground floor, whilst a mezzanine was used as a bedroom above. But I did not live there for any length of time, since I managed to move in with SCI friends (In fact I moved about twenty times in a year and a half.)

Pierre Martin was working in the south, and we only met briefly now and then to liaise with one another. The Algerian branch included several regional groups, with which I had only a limited administrative relationship. In the Algiers group, the most important one in the whole country there were, in fact, only a small number of active members. However, there were French people from France and Algeria, particularly men in their 30s 40s, mostly middle management types, who had taken part in WWII. Initially there were no students and no young people among the membership, but they did come later when we started the new work in the slums.

Then, the Algerian members (they were called 'French-Muslims'), were almost all students, and there were even some secondary school pupils. Amongst them there were also a few Algerian girls. The young Algerians did not hide their passionate nationalism, and openly denounced the evils of colonialism (the massacres of 1945, electoral fraud, non implementation of the 1947 statute etc.). At the same time, they were attracted by the international character of SCI, happy to have contact with like-minded people, and more than willing to discuss issues. Mixing French and Algerians, boys and girls, working together on common projects was unique- a challenge; but, on the other hand, for many people around us, it was scandalous. Only a very small minority of Europeans and Algerians used to meet in a friendly manner on an even footing. Every European family used to have their own 'Fatma' (servant) or a native gardener, but fraternal relationships did not exist between them.

Very soon, I had to make a choice. Through other connections, I had come into contact with French people who had told me, in no uncertain terms, that one should not fraternize with the 'bicots' ('niggers' or 'wogs'). I had to choose, and I said: "I have chosen". We used to go out together and to meet with SCI people. Social life was very rich from that point of view. I remember once, when Willy Begert was in Algiers, we went out with an Algerian friend. We were coming back home on foot, when a police patrol arrested us, truncheons raised. The men were searched with their hands up. The policemen asked us for our identity cards. They wanted to know what we were doing, and added: "A French girl does not go out with "bicots". In the Kabylie region, when the villagers saw European volunteers working hard on a SCI workcamp with native Algerians, they could not believe that they were volunteers; they thought they were convicts.

Upon my arrival, I went to a workcamp that had been set up by Pierre Martin. It was an international workcamp, a very tough one. In the middle of nowhere, it was a three-hour walk to the nearest bus-stop, and it was nearly impossible to find food supplies in that area. The objective was to set up a mains water supply for a dispensary belonging to a Protestant mission. Later on, SCI stopped cooperating with those missionaries, as they had decided only to admit local people to the dispensary on condition that they first received a Christian religious education. Obviously it was not the best way of being accepted in Algerian society.

Before then, the work of SCI had been limited to the Kabylie region, but, Pierre Martin recommended that new activities should be developed in urban areas throughout the country, as there was an urgent need and our work would be more visible there. One evening, at '*La Robertsau'*, the restaurant for Muslim students (where I later went regularly), I dined with a priest and two friars. We did not establish a close relationship that evening, but they suggested that I should meet Marie-Renée Chéné, who was working alone in a slum at Berardi-Boubsila, an eastern suburb of Algiers. One of the friars told me "That woman is a bit crazy, but she certainly does a lot of work". That was how it all started.

So I went to see her. To give an idea of SCI working conditions at that time; Beradi was approximately 17 kilometres from the centre of Algiers, and I didn't even have the money to pay for a return ticket by bus. It was summertime, so I went on foot thinking that I would be tired by the time I got back. That's how it was for a SCI secretary in those days. In Berardi, I found the rather squalid dispensary, where Marie-Renée worked in two small rooms.

She was a social worker. A very religious-minded person, she was nevertheless secular in her ways. She worked for the Parish of Hussein Dey (an Algiers suburb) for virtually no salary at all. Her only material support was the municipal health centre, whose van would take her there so that she could take care of the people. She was an extraordinary person. I have never met anybody who had such compassion for people. She really suffered for them. She was not really an organizer, and she did not like institutions, and *red tape.* She was fully committed to her work, and she drove others through her example. I was rather taken aback by her welcome. "What are you doing here? I don't need anybody! I don't need people who come and gawp, or talk about '*the poor'.* "Precisely", I retorted, "our motto is *Deeds, not Words*." Clearly, she appreciated my attitude, and we started working together right away.

I began going to the slum regularly. Initially, my duty was to stand against the door to prevent people from invading the treatment room. Later

on, although I am anything but a good dressmaker, I gave sewing lessons to the little girls. Then, a volunteer who was in charge of the laboratory at the hospital came. Others followed. Consequently, it was decided to organize a workcamp for girls to include developing care activities and sewing courses. In September 1951, the first international volunteers arrived: first from Norway, but unfortunately after only two weeks they had to be sent back home for health reasons. Then an American and a British volunteer were also sent back home after a month for the same reasons. They were falling like flies, because the slum was so dirty, so squalid and so full of all sorts of diseases. Clearly the French volunteers were more immune to such ills. Then two Swiss nurses arrived: Rachel Jacquet and Gabrielle Uzzieli. They had just been working in a mining area in Belgium where the conditions were really tough. With them the turnover of volunteers decreased. But tragically, shortly after returning home to Switzerland, Rachel Jacquet died. She had been exhausted by the work, and this had been compounded by the fact that she had refused to eat more than the little children she took care of.

While female volunteers were developing educational work and making it a permanent activity (Rachel had opened a girls' school), SCI boys were building barrack-type school buildings. First of all, one for the girls, and then another for the boys. Simone Chaumet taught there later on. They improved the road, dug gutters and drains, and stairs along the steep streets. Then, extraordinarily (for those times), around the workcamp in Berardi, different organizations started cooperating with us .Students from Muslim and Catholic centres came, as well as a few girls. The Confederation of Education showed films, and the Organization for the Promotion of Active Teaching Methods sent along instructors.

SCI workcamp with Marie-Renée became a centre which attracted young people who wanted to give a helping hand, and almost all our activities expanded. After the girls' school, a boys' school, literacy courses, a social secretariat (in the shell of an old ambulance), a dispensary with more medical staff, a People's Committee. A comprehensive survey of living conditions was carried out, and the road system improved. An association of Algerian Youth for Social Action was established in 1952, and was involved in the work carried out at Berardi. In other words, there were important spin-offs (most of which did not, unfortunately, survive the War of Independence). For the first time, not only individuals, but organizations bringing together French and Algerian youth were working side by side, and all of it because of projects initiated by SCI. This boom in activities, aimed at improving conditions in the community, was not only proof that there were real expectations (even from a small number of people), and a possible response to be found from these young people of

different origins; it was also the start up of Community Centres created in 1955 on Germaine Tillion's initiative[5]

After being sent on an official mission to Algeria, - for which she was eminently competent in view of her earlier work as an ethnologist - in 1955 Germaine Tillion joined the staff of the Governor-General Jacques Soustelle. Her appointment was made with a view to implementing social and educational policies, which, in turn, would lead to the creation of Community Centres. After seven years experience in the Aurès (a mountainous area South-East of Algiers) she had thought a lot about ways of helping people struggle "against the evils of nature and the wickedness of traders and bureaucracy". But, as an ethnologist, she insisted on visiting people in the field, and among those she visited, was Marie-Renée Chené [6].

What had been done in Berardi-Boubsila was, to a large extent, the prototype of the urban 'Community Centre', and it became a training centre for the staff of the new organization, which recruited several people from amongst SCI volunteers. There is so much continuity between the two experiences that I find it sometimes difficult to differentiate between them. The former rural teachers and trainers in basic education had probably the same impression: each one found in the 'Community Centre' the best elements of their previous experience. Apart from that, the work of SCI has left another legacy: *'l'entraide populaire familiale'* (an association promoting self-help between working-class families), created in 1950 to assist the social work of Marie-Renée on legal matters. It is still in operation in 2006, and receives trainers working with mentally handicapped people.

Soon after my arrival in Algeria, I realized that being the Secretary of the Algerian branch was not a job for me. In the context of this period, this function should have been filled by an Algerian. I wrote to Hélène Monastier, one of the earlier volunteers, and the then President of the International Committee, to tell her that this was a very interesting job, but that it should be done by an Algerian, not a European. So I put forward the name of Mohammed Sahnoun, then a student and an active member of the Algerian branch. She agreed with me

After thus finding a successor, I stayed on another year in Algeria, still involved with SCI, and at the same time, teaching at the university to make a living. I carried on going to Berardi. Marie-Renée, who had become a very good friend, told me that I had a gift for social work, and that I should not remain just an amateur volunteer, but should get a vocational degree. So I went back to France and undertook studies in social work. Three years later, with my degree under my arm, I came back to Algeria and became fully involved in the adventure of the Community Centres, together with

friends from SCI; but I was much too busy to be able to go back to actually taking up employment with SCI.

By then, Emil Tanner had replaced Mohamed Sahnoun as Secretary of the Algerian branch. The War of Independence had already started, and from the beginning SCI was kept under surveillance, and had to limit its activities. But solidarity and personal relationships between people remained. When members of SCI were put in jail, others took care of them and their families at their own risk. People would cross the country to visit the camps to find those who had disappeared, and they carried parcels to the prisoners. During this period, the Algerian branch was efficiently supported by the International Secretary (especially Dorothy Abbott). Consequently money was collected to help SCI members who had been incarcerated, so that they could obtain a lawyer.

This story would not be complete without mentioning the tragic events, related to the War of Independence which are now history, but which have had a long-lasting effect on SCI.

Simone Chaumet, after working at Berardi, had lived for two years in Kabylie teaching. Then, she settled down in an Algiers suburb, with Emil Tanner, who had been Secretary of SCI and was training apprentices. Their neighbours would come to ask for help in writing letters, and for caring for people; the house was open to everybody, and their car was used as an improvised ambulance. On the 25th of May 1962, the two of them were kidnapped, and were never to be found again. Along with Rachel Jacquet, three losses were thus directly brought about by the work of SCI (Madeleine Allinne, op.cit).

The fate of the Community Centres has been referred to elsewhere. First of all, they had to bear the persecution of the French authorities. In 1957, several of its members, including Nelly, were arrested and subjected to torture, and again in 1959.

The fact that SCI had mixed groups, working in harmony, having positive relationships with the local people, without the protection of the army; all this, at a time when people were shooting at each other, was , to say the least, highly suspicious. It meant that we were necessarily involved in a ‘guilty relationship’. We were doing what other people were not doing, thus demonstrating that it was possible to bring about change, and consequently for the status quo to be brought into question. This could evidently not be tolerated by many people. All the projects for reform had failed because there was, in fact, no willingness for change. The criticisms made of the Community Centres had probably already been addressed to SCI, but the Community Centres were working on a much larger scale and they were ,after all part of a government department.

In March 1962, a few days before the ceasefire, six heads of Community Centres were killed during a meeting by an anti-independence commando group, supporters of French Algeria (l'Algérie Française). The most eminent among the victims was the writer Mouloud Feraoun, who had supported SCI since 1948 when one of the very first SCI workcamps in Algeria had taken place in a nearby village to where he was teaching. Albert Camus was also a supporter of SCI.

I came back to France and worked with a group of sociologists and in so doing – rather ironically – I joined Germaine Tillion at the Ministry of Education. Later on, I worked as an adviser in several African countries. In post-independence Senegal I really worked like a militant, which was rather unusual for that kind of mission. Again the idea was to promote change by giving more responsibility to ordinary people. But, again, as always, I was faced with resistance to change, and to the ideals which underpinned my experience with SCI; to which I have always been faithful.

Today, most of my friends are those with whom I worked with in Algeria; an experience which has had a deep influence on all of us. Despite the passing years, and whatever direction our individual paths have taken, we are united by a sort of closeness. There is no divergence between us, and none of our paths have deviated.

Some years ago I received a letter from an Algerian friend who after his workcamp experience with SCI had gone on to a prestigious career. 30 years had gone by, and he wanted to meet Marie-Renee again, but he was unable to. He wrote:

"I would simply like to tell her how important her example has been to me. Despite a quarter of a century of constant and disorderly changes, a period of confused and violent excitement, she has represented something which has determined my way of building my life, and my attempts at making it useful. Her memory has been a constant benchmark for me, something bright and warm".

4.2 *North Africa after Independence*

Jean-Pierre Petit. 1955; Delegate to Algeria 1962; North African Delegate 1963-1996

My first experience with SCI was just after WWII. My father, a high official in the district administration, had come close to being shot by the Germans when I was 14. This naturally had an impact on me; moreover, our home had been destroyed by bombing. Consequently I hated the Germans. A few years later, conscious of this, I decided to be brave and go and have a look at the reality of post-war Germany. So, I got in touch with the German/French Office for Youth and I went to Offenburg, where they organized kinds of workcamps with young French people and Germans who had just been expelled from part of Eastern Germany which had just been annexed to Poland. The refugees lived in barracks near the airport. The camp took place in 1955 in the port area where the dockers lived. I used to meet them and I was impressed by the fact that they still spoke well of Hitler. It was surprising, because they were good guys, who were hospitable and invited us to eat with them. But on the other hand we gained a better understanding of the influence Hitler had had on nice people like them.

This first workcamp had proved too short for me, and I wanted to do more. I met Etienne Reclus, the French branch secretary, and he sent me to another camp in Germany. It wasn't that I was so keen on the basic aims of SCI; I just wanted to go to Germany for personal reasons. The camp was in Mannheim, and it lasted for three weeks, with a majority of German volunteers. It consisted of building a kindergarten for the children of Volkswagen workers. It was not very hard work. .We were very well received, and were invited out several times. It gave me the opportunity of looking at Germany from a different angle. I remember having seen the memorial to those who had been killed during WWII and having been impressed by the very large number of names on it. It occurred to me that we had the same war memorials in France, and it brought home to me the absurdity of war. I also discovered some of the reasons why people had been attracted to Hitler: they had simply been pleased to get a job and a home, and for them it was all thanks to him. Nevertheless, they probably knew a lot about the crimes that the Nazis had committed. This was food for thought for me, and we had many discussions.

Then, between 1955 and 1959, there was a gap, for a while as I started working with the *CIMADE* (an organization working with refugees) for Algerians, some of them members of the FLN, (the National Liberation Front) the banned Algerian nationalist party, which was struggling for independence. These Algerians had been convicted and were obliged to remain outside Paris. I was asked to go and replace a priest for a year in an industrial area (Le Creusot). The priest, who helped the Algerians, introduced me to an Algerian trade-union leader, and (as I realized later) he was also leader of the FLN for that area. I thus became involved with the

nationalist party. With them, we looked after those of them who were banned from living in Paris, and we used to find them jobs, - as well as for former miners - with the main industrial company around there, Schneider.

That Schneider Company was the only firm still in operation in the region. People, and particularly the Algerians, were very poor and we used to distribute food from the parish to them. They were practically starving. At the same time I was working for SCI, and I had to keep an eye on the work of Monique Hervo, a volunteer who was working with a small group in the North African shantytown of Nanterre, near Paris. It was in 1958-59 (in the middle of the Algerian war of Independence); I visited Monique every month and we both had the same type of links with the FLN. We were free to do it as individuals but not *in the name* of SCI. There was some reluctance within the French branch itself, but in fact, behind the scenes Henri Roser, the SCI president, discreetly supported us.

Independent Algeria

It was then that my work with SCI really started. Ralph Hegnauer, the International Secretary, was aware of the situation. When Independence came, and a delegate was needed on the spot in the Tlemcen region of western Algeria, SCI asked me to accept the position. I arrived there at the end of August 1962. I had got to know a number of Algerian people in France, but they were very different from those living in Algeria. In France, the Algerian people I had met were much more reserved towards the FLN.

The Algerian Prefect who was in charge of the Tlemcen region was faced with a very difficult situation. During the war more than 20,000 people from that area had been expelled from their homes by the French army. Their villages had immediately been destroyed in order to create a *no-go zone* along the Moroccan border, aimed at stopping the movement of insurgents, and arms getting into the country via Morocco. Everything had been destroyed, and the people had to choose between: either being expelled into Morocco or being forcibly put into 'resettlement camps' where people from the different tribes were systematically mixed together. This had no doubt been done on purpose; it was common knowledge that tribal feelings were very strong, and living together would, at least, be very difficult for many of them. After Independence, those that had gone over into Morocco were living in refugee camps near the border, and a large number of them were taken care of by SCI, providing tents, lodging, food, medical care and so on. But the volunteers who had carried out that job were exhausted, and they had to be replaced by a new team. Under the administrative responsibility of the Prefect of Tlemcen, we had to help the

refugees get back over into Algeria and find some sort of accommodation for them.

First of all, we had to find tents for 20,000 people, feed their children, give them shoes (most of them were barefoot), but also supply them with seeds and sheep so that they could resume their traditional agricultural way of life, and so on. The region was divided into three areas: the North was assigned to an American organization, SCI was in charge of a large area around Sebdou, and down to the Sahara desert, and a third association was in charge of the rest. Our work, in what was officially known as the 'Tlemcen Project', was centred on the 'commune 'of El Khemis. In the first nine or ten months of the project more than 150 SCI volunteers were involved, working a few months each. They included teachers, doctors, midwives, nurses (we were fully in charge of health care provision for a large area) and some 40 or so other volunteers who did the masonry and carpentry work on the construction of a new village which became known as 'El Fass'. This replaced the former village of Beni-Hamou nearby which had been destroyed by the French army. A paid Algerian driver would come once a week with a lorry, and the villagers who were to benefit from the construction would send some men every day to work with the international volunteers. Many more came occasionally to lend a helping hand. It took over two years to finish the construction work.

Among the tasks Ralph Hegnauer gave me to carry out, was to get in touch with Mohammed Sahnoun, the first native Algerian to have been in charge of the Algerian branch of SCI. He had previously been jailed by the French authorities. I met him shortly before he left for New York, where he was to look after preparations for the arrival of the Algerian delegation to the United Nations. He told me that given the political climate in the country at that time, starting up the Algerian branch of SCI again was out of the question. I should remember that Algeria had just become independent; nationalist sentiments were very high; and people were not ready to accept an international organization establishing itself in the country, as it would be seen as foreign interference. But new workcamps *could* be organized, as long as it was done by SCI, that is, by a foreign branch of SCI, and not by an *Algerian* branch. This was embarrassing for me, as we were aware that there were actually a number of Algerian former volunteers who were, willing to re-start a branch. I tried to find a compromise by asking an Algerian friend to share the responsibility for projects with me, and give him a chance to start up the branch again with the old group, but unfortunately he pulled out.

In El Khemis the 50-odd volunteers lived in a former military fort. I did not live there, but I used to visit them three times a week with a Land Rover, to deliver food supplies. The rest of the time, I visited the other

places where teachers and nurses were working. I lived in the flat SCI rented for our office in Tlemcen along with a British volunteer, I slept on the terrace. It was cold in the winter and too hot in the summer, but very nice nevertheless. The camp in the abandoned fort in El Khemis was at an altitude of 1.500 meters. In winter, it was very cold, and snowfalls were common. Living conditions were very difficult: all the bridges had been destroyed, we had to cross the rivers, and there was no phone since all the lines had been destroyed (sabotaged amongst other amenities, by the French army as they pulled out). There were hardly any 'mod cons': only wood stoves, and no running water – so, we had to wash in a bucket (today, this would not be acceptable). In the early days, at El Khemis we did not have enough mattresses to go round and some volunteers had to sleep in twos, top-to-tail on the same mattress - Ralph Hegnauer, who was used to it, showed us how to do it. There was only one (SCI) doctor covering a very large area with tens of thousands of people. It was very hard for the volunteers. Nevertheless, apart from hepatitis, typhus and a car accident, they managed. After I had finished my term of service, and gone back to France, tragically, one of them was accidentally killed whilst working.

All in all, the project lasted five years. It went on long after I had left. If we attempt to make a final assessment of the workcamp, on our arrival the situation in the region was so disastrous that we could say that SCI saved many lives, through our efforts combating a number of basic problems: shortage of food (this involved organizing milk and vitamin distributions), inoculating large numbers of people against tuberculosis, and helping to provide a minimum nursing service at the hospital in Tlemcen. Volunteers also reopened and manned a number of schools and developed community projects. The relationship with the local population was excellent. After my departure, the management of the project passed through a variety of other peoples' hands, including several Swiss people and Roger Briottet. They finished the construction of the village, and in due course, all the health care and teaching jobs carried out by SCI people were officially taken over by Algerian personnel under ministerial control and financing.

In 1967, we tried to find an Algerian partner organization with whom we could work together, as we had already done in Morocco. We did manage to find a new organization which agreed to work with us on joint projects.

Morocco and Tunisia

As I indicated above, in Morocco, the initial phase of our work with Algerian refugees had been carried out before Algerian independence. Following a request by the Moroccan authorities, SCI had set up a

delegation in the eastern region of Oujda, close to the Algerian border to take care of the refugees. I was not involved at that stage, but as indicated, this naturally led on to, our taking care of the same refugees upon their return to Algeria.

When I became SCI delegate for North Africa, in 1963 I immediately went to Morocco. My task was just to get in touch with newly established workcamp organizations there, with whom we were not acquainted, in order to see whether we would be able to cooperate with them and undertake international workcamps together. A meeting was held between the Coordination Committee of workcamps in France (Co-travaux) and some Moroccan associations. I had lots of individual contacts with them, organizing exchanges of volunteers – possibly long-term volunteers etc. These associations had sprung up after a first Moroccan national workcamp, led by Mehdi Ben Barka 2, which lasted for a whole year (1957-58) and which involved 13,000 volunteers. Thus the volunteer spirit in Morocco was related to decolonization, and independence. These associations were very nationalistic on the whole, but the newer ones were more open to an international approach.

For more than 20 years, I spent at least four months a year in North Africa. In winter to prepare volunteer exchanges, in summer to visit workcamps, and often back again in the autumn to assess what had been achieved. In 1974, there was a Moroccan national project for the development of the Rif area. Others lasted for several years, building school canteens, with financial aid from the Belgian branch of SCI. Nurses were also sent out to work in the slums in Rabat, until Moroccan nurses were trained, and could take over the work. For a number of years, SCI also sent volunteers to help take care of mentally handicapped children.

All these projects received international volunteers, including female volunteers. In particular, over a period of three years, Morocco and India exchanged volunteers There were a few girls from North Africa who took part in Moroccan camps, and also surprisingly, in India, but none took part in camps in France. Some exchanges of volunteers have also taken place with Algeria, but the relationship between Algeria and Morocco often made things difficult. So workcamps have been organized in France to receive participants from the two countries. In many cases, they had never met anyone from the other countries involved, but everything went well.

They used to say that an association loses in quality and ideology what it gains in size and structure. This is not the case today as far as the French branch goes. It is not a big association – on the contrary – but excessive importance is attached to structural problems. Even at an

international level, institutional issues have become far too important, while the movement itself is very weak.

I was employed by SCI from 1963 to 1996; first by the International Secretariat, then from 1978 by the French branch. I would often go to the French national Secretariat in Clichy, but I never actually lived there. Conditions there were very frugal, but we had a lot of fun. Today, I still work as a volunteer making my contribution to induction courses for long-term volunteers.

I received a request from Tunisia to develop activities for young handicapped people. Therefore work camps were organized to train volunteers how to produce recycled paper in the traditional way, so that they could instruct handicapped people in the technique. It is not economically profitable, but it is a useful activity for the mental development of handicapped people. It is similar to earlier projects initiated by Ralph and Idy Hegnauer. Volunteers worked together as in any other workcamp.

Despite its modest size, SCI really works for peace. I still believe in it. I try to share this with the young people who come on our training courses. They understand this sort of language; maybe not exactly in the same way as in the old days. But, when work – as far as possible *manual work* - is undertaken for the good of the people, in SCI spirit , that is, bringing together people with different convictions, from different ethnic groups, with acceptance and toleration, it is an act of peace which is strictly in line with how Pierre Cérésole envisaged things. It is first and foremost an encounter, from which friendships develop between people of different backgrounds, for instance between French and North African people. Should there ever be a serious conflict between our countries, I cannot imagine these people fighting against us.

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David Palmer, 1961; LTV in Algeria 1962-1963; earthquake relief work in Iran 1963

David Palmer was born in rural North West England, and started out in life as a railway worker. For a period of about ten years (the sixties) he worked in long-term and short-term workcamps, mainly with SCI in various countries, including Germany, Algeria, Iran and Norway. His subsequent

professional life has been shared between teaching and social work, in Britain and in France.

When I was about eleven, my father, foreman of a local building company, suddenly became concerned with my education. He wanted me to go to grammar school which I identified with children from families much wealthier than ours Just before leaving school at 15, my father sent me to the railway station where they had a vacancy for a junior porter. Thanks to the railway's in-service training system I moved on to becoming a clerk Even though I gained some satisfaction from my job, and despite the fact that if I continued with my in-service training I would clearly continue to get promotion, a higher salary and status, I got more and more the feeling that simply earning my living in this way was not really *worthwhile*. To my eyes, there was so much poverty and injustice in the world, and only trying to put this state of affairs to rights was ultimately really worthwhile, all the rest was egocentric materialism. Also, I dearly wanted to travel abroad.

One of my close colleagues showed me an article in a national newspaper about voluntary work organizations. There were one or two, which appeared to be simply interested in obtaining cheap labour. These I rejected as too materialistic. I wanted to do something *worthwhile,* help people in need, without expecting anything in return; which I felt was morally better. The only organization that appeared to me to be morally respectable was the International Voluntary Service. Apart from describing the organization, the article high-lighted particular relief- work projects they were involved in at the time. This was the first time I had ever heard about voluntary work camps.

Thus, at the age of 17, I became a contributing member of IVS, making a modest yearly donation. There was no 'local branch' nearby, so my only contact was through the IVS newsletter. In the summer of 1961 I did my first camp. Apart from it being an opportunity to 'do something really useful' (at last!), it was also especially significant for me in that it was the first time in my life that I went on holiday alone.

At that time the general rule was that volunteers had to do their first camp in their country of origin before being allowed to go on SCI camps abroad, *but* I wanted to go to other countries and meet different people. In fact, IVS waived the rule and sent me to a poor village in Switzerland (!) where, for nearly a month, I helped with the building of a small road for agricultural purposes.

Switzerland

Andiast in those days really was a *poor* remote mountain village with, only one car, and very little modern agricultural machinery. Hay mowing was still done by hand. The only water supply was by rudimentary fountains. We did heavy manual work, moving rocks and digging and making a road out along the mountainside.

For the first time in my life I found myself in a real international group of about 10 different nationalities .The work was hard but I enjoyed it. The camp's purpose was simple and easy to grasp, and our life there was well organized, and we pulled together. Our specific tasks, whether on the site or chores in the camp (cleaning and cooking), were decided upon collectively by discussion at meal times, and in 'Camp meetings' once or twice a week in the evening. Not having been able to learn any foreign language at school, I had only the slightest smattering of German and even less French, but I enjoyed getting to know people irrespective of language. To my pleasure we often sang songs particularly at special 'goodbye' gatherings. .On such occasions, after a few words from the leader, we sang *'L'amitié'* - a song on the theme of friendship. I found these moments moving. The camp leader was a seasoned workcamper, who had recently returned from a year's 'long-term service' in India. He immediately impressed me with his calm charisma, and stories of his service in India. Before leaving Andiast I had made up my mind, I too was going to do 'long term service'.

Back home, I didn't try to hide my enthusiasm for work-camping I had tasted of something 'really worthwhile', which fitted my idealistic bent; and I started to prepare my next move. Already, at that time, long-term projects tended to be 'development' type projects requiring volunteers who were qualified in a particular trade or profession – none of which I had to offer. But, now and then, there were 'disaster relief' projects, and that's where I would stand the best chance , having already proved myself as it were, in the heavy manual work I had just done in Andiast.

Germany

I had already planned on doing a camp with the IVS during my summer holidays. It was just a few weeks before my 20th birthday when I told my parents that I was resigning from my job, going on my planned workcamp in Germany, and en route I intended to go to the IVS head office in London to apply for long-term service. It was naturally a very emotional moment. My mother was reluctant to see me go, but thought I should do what I wanted to do. My father took the news badly, and predicted that I would soon be coming back home, penniless and jobless. Upon which I showed

him the money I had saved. He was visibly impressed, and became less radical in his tone, telling me that I would always be welcome at home.

As planned, I called in at the IVS office in London, and confirmed my request for a long-term camp in India. They said that, at that time, the only long-term work they could possibly offer me would be in Algeria, on reconstruction work for people who'd lost their homes during the recently terminated War of Independence. They insisted on the fact that the project would involve hard manual work in difficult living conditions, and that I should take time to consider it. I said I was not afraid of manual work, and I was so excited I told them that I was in fact prepared to leave for El Khemis right away, immediately volunteering for a minimum of six months. However, it appeared that, conditions in Algeria would not allow them to send over any more volunteers just then; so they asked me to go to the camp in Germany as planned, until such time as they could send me to Algeria.

Neuenkirchen, where I eventually stayed for over two months, was a surprise in more ways than one. It had been a prisoner-of-war camp, not a concentration camp; but still, the same sort of buildings. We were ten or twelve volunteers simply, but comfortably housed in one of these buildings. Compared with Andiast, where conditions were somewhat primitive, - we had slept on straw mattresses, and did our ablutions in the fountain - here we had proper beds and showers with hot water, and even a record player with a few classical albums - luxury!

Due to chronic understaffing, our job there was to help in the wards, - or sometimes with the potato harvest in the adjacent fields which also belonged to the hospital. Volunteers worked alone most of the time as auxiliaries to the small nursing staff. Only occasionally did I find myself momentarily working with another volunteer. Most of our work was dirty, and in some way or other, hard on one's nervous system. Though officially called a 'hospital' it was much more like a 'hospice'. There was no emergency service, no operating block.

Apparently there were no permanent doctors on the staff. For several weeks I worked with predominantly geriatric male patients, feeding them, washing them and carrying bedpans. Every day brought me a series of a real shocks, and my near- inexistent command of the language complicated things at times; whether between myself and the patients or with the nursing staff.

The camp leader didn't live in the same quarters as us. He didn't participate in the work, didn't socialize with us and was consequently perceived as a rather distant person. On the 8th November 1962, in his usual formal manner, he informed me that the International Secretariat of

SCI had sent the necessary funding for my journey to Tlemcen, and that I should leave as soon as possible.

Algeria

My rail trip from Bremen to El Khemis took five days. I arrived early on 11th November 1962. The camp at El Khemis was about 50 kilometres southwest of Tlemcen in mountainous terrain, at about 1000 meters above sea level, some 20 kms from the Moroccan border. It was housed in an abandoned Foreign Legion fort on a rocky hilltop overlooking the valley of the Oued Khemis. In fact the whole area was dry and rocky, with profuse outgrowths of formidably prickly cactus.

In *The Fort* the various dormitories, former stores and munitions bunkers were spartan in their comfort, to say the least, only a few had rough concrete floors , the rest were of mere trodden earth. A matter of weeks before the arrival of the first volunteers, - counter to strict orders from regional French military command -, the departing legionnaires had made a pretty thorough job of sabotaging all basic amenities (drainage, water and electricity supply), and generally wrecking the place. The first SCI volunteers to arrive had had to spend a lot of precious time making *The Fort* modestly habitable.

Though, in the country as a whole people were still celebrating, disorganization was widespread and building supplies of any kind were very hard to obtain, - first of all for the tens of thousands of displaced and homeless, particularly in this border area. In *The Fort*, smashed doors had been patched up with any old piece of salvaged wood, and most windows were a collage of broken panes and cardboard. Most of us slept on mattresses on the floor. I managed to find a grubby old piece of thin hardboard to put my mattress on.

About a hundred meters away were twenty or thirty bedraggled heaps of coarse hay and branches, draped with motley pieces of rag and ripped tarpaulin. Here and there were a few floppy tents in various stages of collapse. Strung around this primitive huddle were remnants of a coiled barbed-wire fence. On closer scrutiny, one realized that people actually lived there! This was what was left of a '*camp de regroupement*' – a resettlement camp, from where its inhabitants no longer had anywhere to go back to.

They lived in pitiful squalor, sharing their meagre shelters with a few chickens. Their sheep and goats and the occasional donkey huddled in at night for protection from the jackals. Most women and children went barefoot. Despite the large boulders strewn across the hillside, the ground under the hovels ('gourbis') had often been hollowed out to afford more space and headroom. In the face of severe poverty, sickness and malnutrition, the inhabitants were always very hospitable, ever-ready to

welcome one in for a glass of mint tea; they were to be the main beneficiaries of the reconstruction effort of the 'Tlemcen Project'.

The SCI 'appellation' for the hillside where they lived was 'Diar or Dar Mansourah', and the original village, most of its inhabitants came from, was called 'Beni Hamou' .Like many other hamlets and villages in these borderland parts, it had been destroyed by the French army, and its inhabitants had been herded together, and surrounded by barbed-wire for the duration .There were no remains of houses to be seen on the spot, moreover there had been so much devastation (an estimated 90 % of the villages had been destroyed), ruined houses and villages were such a common sight that I never learned where the original site of Beni Hamou was. Anyway, it was part of the administrative area of El Khemis, all the same.

Thirty seven houses plus a school and a mosque were planned on a site about three kilometres away; other amenities were being considered. When I arrived, there were about forty foreign volunteers based at *The Fort* – a lot of people, - and the figure rose to around fifty by the beginning of 1963. In fact the Algerian authorities had conferred the overall coordination of the emergency work on SCI for the whole of the Wilaya, involving an estimated population of between 60 and 80,000

In addition to the reconstruction work there were several small teams of SCI volunteers involved in peripatetic medical care, milk distribution, catering for basic educational needs, and in a few places, modest trade training . A few French volunteers had moved out into the surrounding area, in ones and twos, to reopen village schools, start milk distribution centres and dispensaries, or teach trade skills. To our relief they were well received in the villages. There were also a few other SCI volunteers further afield in urban areas working on their own; nurses and teachers, in Tlemcen, Maghnia and even in Oran up on the coast .In early '63, working from *The Fort*, a four-man mobile repair team was set up to re-establish essential services in the surrounding area which had been sabotaged; water pumps and electric generators in particular. R.L was a member of the repair team.

Five or six weeks after arriving I went to Algiers with 5 other volunteers from El Khemis to help in a short-term camp aimed at helping re-launch the local Algiers branch of SCI. It involved renovating what had been an A.L.N clandestine medical centre during the hostilities – the Clinique Verneau in the district of Climat de France. We were very warmly received, and along with a few local volunteers finished the work in two and a half weeks.

In El Khemis itself, given the number of satellite projects that sprang from the work going on, in fact, as few as only a third or a even a quarter of

the total number of volunteers on the 'Tlemcen Project' actually worked on the building of El Fass at any one time. That is, during my 5 months on the building site, no more than about 8 or10 volunteers actually worked on the building itself, -and sometimes as few as 4 or 5, along with a variable number of local men from Dar Mansourah – usually between 4 and 8. They were cheerful, hard-working colleagues; used to hardship, their philosophical - "Inshallah" was forever on their lips. Only a few volunteers – whether local Algerian or foreign - had any building trade skills at all, this was also a factor affecting progress on the site.

The number of menfolk in the country had been seriously depleted during the 6-year war of independence. Survivors in the area, had in many cases spent several years in the wilds with the A.L.N fighting the French .They were now hard-pushed to get crops growing on land that had been left untilled for several years. Food was scarce. The children from Dar Mansourah queued in *The Fort* courtyard everyday for milk, bread and vitamin distribution. Their fathers who worked with us shared bread and coffee with us mid-morning, and usually had lunch with us back at *The Fort* (except of course during Ramadan). It was important that people doing such heavy manual work should eat enough.

The slowness in building the new village was particularly due to the irregular supply of essential building materials - most crucially cement - , and a basic lack of modern equipment: our first concrete mixer arrived towards the end of January, more than three months after the first foundations had been made. Transport for the site was a constant problem, to the extent of work being brought to a standstill at times for a few hours or even a day. Given the multiple needs of supplying *The Fort*, and the volunteers in outlying villages, as well as those of the various healthcare and repair teams, heavy, and at times conflicting, demands were made on any vehicles available.

Once a week the Algerian authorities would lend us a tiny lorry and its driver for the day, - which was insufficient compared with our needs. It often arrived with a load of cement, for which we were, of course, dependent on regional suppliers in Tlemcen who could not keep up with demand. I once rode 5 or 6 kms to and from *The Fort* on a borrowed donkey to get a bag of cement so that a particular piece of work could be finished properly .Over a period of several months, various vehicles were donated to us from Europe; but they did not last long, either giving up the ghost or proving to be in over-frequent need of repair. For whatever make of vehicle certain spare-parts were impossible to obtain in Algeria.

Two or three times a week we had to go two kms and dig sand from the riverside. New cement blocks were nearly impossible to find; at one stage

plans were made for us to make our own, but it never materialized and we continued to use what was most easily available. Boulders from the slopes around the site of the new village were used as basic building material. We manhandled them down to the site, broke them into workable pieces with hammers before they could be masoned into place. A hard, laborious process. A few kilometres away, along the border, were a series of small abandoned forts where- whenever we could- small teams of volunteers would go to demolish the cement and concrete structures, in order to salvage cement blocks and incorporate them into the masonry of the houses. Such pacifistic recycling of military infrastructures was most satisfying for everyone concerned.

Running beside these fortified outposts were multiple minefields: the French army had strung the entire length of the Moroccan border in order to prevent cross-border movement of arms and A.L.N (Algerian Liberation Army) combatants. This several-hundred-kilometre-long structure now formed a lethal legacy. Amongst frequent emergency calls, our medical teams were often called out to administer to the consequences of such casual, blind savagery. Frequently the victim was hard to locate in a life-endangering situation, and morphine had to be administered. Inevitably a rushed evacuation by Land Rover down to the hospital in Tlemcen ensued, ending - more often than not - in an amputation, sometimes in death.

At that altitude, in stony semi-desert terrain, not far from the Sahara, the climate is extreme in its harshness: scorching sunshine, bitter winds, occasionally laden with sand from the desert. Sometimes we would get a mixture of these in rapid succession in the course of just one day. Often, on rainy, blustery days at the worksite, we would huddle together like miserable wet cattle trying to shelter behind half-finished walls, waiting for the bad weather to abate; using pieces of cement bags as raincoats or umbrellas. Now and then, at night, temperatures went down to as little as minus ten centigrade, and we had several heavy falls of snow. Whenever work was held up on the site we would work in *The Fort*; adapting existing constructions to needs. For example we made a classroom for the children of Dar Mansourah, and their parents. People were very eager to learn, it was most heart-warming to see. Very soon demand was so great we actually had to refuse some children and send them down to El Khemis village school (which worked 2 shifts a day). The parents came to learn how to read and write French in the evenings. The school was run by volunteers. A few Arabic and French lessons were organized in the evenings for the volunteers. I appreciated these a lot.

When I arrived in the camp the atmosphere appeared to be relaxed and convivial, but as time passed the leadership arrangements became vaguer and vaguer, sometimes a little confusing. The campleader- who was on the

whole well-liked- was absent for long periods and usually someone or other was co-opted to stand in for him. After the workleader left around New Year, various people were at one time or another in charge of the building site. Sometimes there was nobody, and for the best part of two months there was a tense co-work leadership situation where it very quickly transpired that those two valuable, skilled volunteers could not get along with one another, much to our discomfort.

There were a dozen or so nationalities represented. Most English and French-speaking volunteers were very limited in their ability to communicate in each others' language. At times this state of linguistic inadequacy tended to exacerbate a fairly palpable undercurrent of Franco-British discomfort or malaise; which had, of course, deep historical and cultural roots.

That certain volunteers didn't bother to attend meetings shocked me initially; moreover, I quickly observed that most 'Work' and 'Camp' meetings at El Khemis tended to be the scene of a lot of recriminations, and the general airing of frustrations . One rarely left a meeting with the feeling that issues had really been satisfactorily sorted out (= a *symptom*, not a cause). To my mind this clearly indicated that the camp organization was malfunctioning to a certain extent.

A large proportion of the volunteers – me included – had no particular skills. Those that did, one way or another, managed to find themselves a specialist/specialized role = a niche. Usually getting involved in one or other of the several mini or 'satellite' projects –when not actually creating one themselves. This involved them moving out, permanently or temporarily from *The Fort* to an out-lying community. This accentuated the state of flux the camp was frequently in .The building of El Fass was very much the focal point of what was going on in El Khemis, and we were constantly short of skilled volunteers for the worksite, despite frequently reiterated requests to national branches via the International secretariat to recruit volunteers with building skills.

As if there were not sufficient problems to deal with, we were constantly at the mercy of serious health problems; the most discretely debilitating of these was known as '*la jaunisse* 'or yellow jaundice. This would nowadays be called *'hepatitis'*. Ironically, in fact, at one stage, more than half the nurses and the only doctor were out of action and in the sickbay with this illness. A number of volunteers had to leave the project and were sent home because of the epidemic, contributing in no uncertain way to the high turnover of volunteers. This was surely compounded by the fact that a rather large proportion of volunteers only came for two months service.

The French volunteers were older than most of us, more skilled and included a few seasoned conscientious objectors. Some of them would probably be put in prison for refusing to do military service on returning to France They tended, not surprisingly, to be much more committed to what they were doing than most of the other volunteers. Clearly they had difficulty suffering us younger, more hedonistically-inclined volunteers who were constantly on the look-out for fun and adventure – of which we managed to find plenty.

On Saturdays we would frequently go into Tlemçen by Land Rover, eager to visit the souk and do our shopping. Ablution facilities were very primitive in *The Fort,* and several of us discovered the hammam - a wonderful luxury! I went virtually every week. Parties were quite a common feature at weekends. On Sundays, some of us occasionally enjoyed hiking and potholing, or swimming in the oued.

Even though most local people were clearly very poor, they were extremely hospitable - forever inviting us into their homes. Especially to attend the numerous wedding celebrations that took place during those months. Many young men had been unable to get married at the usual age, because at that time they had been fighting in the *maquis*; so there was a lot of catching up to do, and it was traditional to invite everyone to the celebrations. Sometimes we were invited to as many as 2 or 3 weddings a week .We partook of simple couscous, mint tea, and, beneath clear frosty skies, joined in exciting dances around fires, accompanied by itinerant musicians, till late in the night.

Work on the new village had begun at the beginning of September 1962. On my arrival, there were 3 or 4 partially built houses. By the time I left (20th April 1963) about a dozen had roofs on. The construction of El Fass was finally finished, and officially moved into by 37 families on 10th Oct.1964.

I spent over five, exciting, but difficult, months in El Khemis, and left there rather disappointed with our performance on the building side. It left me with mixed feelings, and beginning to doubt about work-camping. My main misgivings concerned what I saw as a rather amateurish approach, and a crucial lack of focus (hadn't we-SCI -taken on too many different jobs?). It left me quite bewildered. Having said that, I have come to realize that as a result of the organizational difficulties we experienced, the camp and its satellites often ran itself, creating an opportunity for us, collectively and individually, to learn how to manage ourselves (rather than just being told what to do); from this viewpoint it was a really valuable learning experience.

It has taken me more than forty years of thought, conversation and research to gain, what to me is, an adequate understanding of what was, at one and the same time, exciting and complex.

Iran

As it happened, SCI recruited myself and 4 other 'experienced volunteers' from El Khemis to take part in a reconstruction project following an earthquake in Iran the previous year; to be known as the 'Dousadj Project'. This was the first international workcamp ever to take place in Iran and was to be organized by a new organization called the European Working Group (EWG) founded in June 1962 [27] It turned out to be such a contrast for myself and the other ex-El Khemis volunteers that we inevitably, frequently compared it (then and later) with what we had just experienced in Algeria. Incidentally, SCI was one of several voluntary aid and development organizations which contributed to the Dousadj Project. Amongst other things it collaborated in organizing our 10-day preparatory at Villepreux near Paris. The work, of painting and decorating a sort of social holiday centre, was not difficult and above all it provided us with a rendezvous point. The preparation we received there involved an impressive series of lectures and briefings about all aspects of Iran and Iranian society including the political situation at that time, - and most importantly, the project. The EWG clearly benefited from close contacts with the Iranian authorities, and people from the Iranian Embassy in Paris visited us and gave us simple presents. Various experts flew especially to Paris to talk to us, and the project manager came over from Teheran.

Dousadj, was one of over 300 villages that had been wholly or partially destroyed by the earthquake that shook a large area of the Kharagan district in Western Iran on 1st September 1962 .The quake had killed 13,000 people and left 150,000 homeless. An estimated 110 of some 120 houses in this particular village had been totally or partially destroyed

30 volunteers (5 females and 25 males) were recruited for a minimum of 6 months, which was the estimated time needed for the whole building phase of the completely new village, which had to be finished before winter set in. All the volunteers were flown from Paris to Teheran and back free of charge by the Dutch Air force. I was in the first group sent out to Teheran on 4th May '63. Once in Dousadj our initial task was to prepare a tent and brick building campsite, about a kilometre from the ruined village, in time for the arrival of the main group of volunteers three weeks later.

[27] The European Working Group disbanded itself in 1969

Manpower and skills were not lacking. 20 to 30 villagers a day worked with us, as well as small groups of between five and ten student volunteers from the University and the Polytechnic in Teheran. They were predominantly anti-Shah, and were constantly on their guard in case they were infiltrated by the SAVAK, (the Iranian secret police); generally they came for two weeks at a time. The house and village plans were based on surveys carried out in the village by a team from the Teheran Institute of Social Studies & Research prior to our arrival. The EWG project manager and a professor of sociology consulted the villagers at every stage in the planning process. The villagers were 'required' not only to work on the project in order to qualify for a house but also the EWG paid them a small amount daily to enable them to stay in the village for the summer months rather than seeking seasonal work in Teheran. This gave them a proprietorial feeling that what they were doing was building their own village and accordingly they were very conscious of maintaining a good standard in their work, as well as that of everyone else involved in the project.

I was astonished to learn that the EWG had hired an Iranian building contractor who would provide skilled tradesmen, transport and modern building equipment (i.e. a cement-block-making production line was set up on the building site).We even had the luxury of a lorry and chauffeur, provided by the Iranian Red Crescent, to take us the two kilometres to and from the worksite. Funding did not appear to be an obstacle. After the volunteers had spent the first 3 weeks digging foundations, they were astonished to see a team of professional diggers (a subcontractor) arrive and replace them. They were then invited to find themselves other work on the building site (!). This started me thinking that, perhaps, after all, volunteers were not absolutely indispensable on that project. Later on, I had a strong impression that some of the less experienced volunteers' morale was affected by this feeling.

For most of the camp I worked in a 6–man team - including Azziz the village blacksmith-making the reinforcing steel rods which were then fixed into the foundations, walls and roofs. At 2300 meters altitude the climate was extreme and during our time there, temperatures went up into the upper forties, with mini tornados and dust storms quite common. The Project Manager was a very capable organizer, a 'hands on' sort of person, who had Kibbutz experience, and had studied community development work in third world countries. He was generally respected both in the EWG hierarchy, and in the field. He was, in fact, only present in the camp about a quarter of the time, so mostly the camp had to run itself. Rather aloof, and somewhat authoritarian in his manner, he made an effort to keep the volunteers informed about developments through camp meetings. A number of volunteers were on their very first workcamp, and some had

never even worked before. On the Project Manager's decision the camp had no leader, just a work leader/coordinator who liaised with the Contractor. Two work leaders left because of 'personality clashes' with the Project Manager, and then R.L was appointed to this position for the rest of the camp. Volunteers went on strike on more than one occasion, and malingering was unfortunately relatively common, creating ill-feeling in the camp.

Contrasting with this we found many pleasant ways of spending our leisure time. I often went hiking on free days and in the evenings we would sing around a campfire until late in the night under the wonderful, dark blue, starry sky. A number of volunteers were crazy about animals. At one time the camp pets included two or three cats, the same number of dogs, an injured eagle and a stray young camel, and a likeable Frenchman collected scorpions.

21.11.63 we flew back to Paris. Despite a lot of difficulties, we had met our deadline: Using earthquake-proof techniques, 116 houses, complete with outhouses, a school and a hammam, had been built, and a new water supply network for the village, had been completed on time. Clearly an important factor in the success of the reconstruction project had been *focus*.

Shortly after, in collaboration with FAO, the EWG started an extensive agricultural and community development programme for Dousadj; it was expected to last at least 7 or 8 years.

Unlike SCI, the EWG had no membership of ordinary volunteers, that is no subscribing members, with or without voting rights, just a small network of people who were connected with youth work .They were predominantly upper-class young men and women, representing 5 or 6 European countries who were interested in creating a 'European voluntary work organization' to help developing countries. The headquarters were in Amsterdam where the 'Board' – of a dozen or so dignitaries-, met under the presidency of a crown princess. There were 3 or 4 salaried members of staff in the office, and a salaried International Secretary who became the Project Manager for Dousadj. Volunteers were only part of the EWG for the duration of their contract. The principles and aims of the organization were:

- To encourage young people to take an active part in the more important human issues of their time and do this on a European scale.

- To give them the opportunity of sharing the responsibilities of helping people who are less fortunate than themselves. ;

It also described itself as “non-Governmental, non-denominational and non-political”.

With regards to its finances, the EWG was entirely dependent on grants from a variety of organizations, as well as donations from international trusts and philanthropic bodies.

Two or three months before volunteers were recruited for Dousadj, the EWG organized a dynamic ‘Youth’ campaign throughout The Netherlands which attracted a lot of attention, involving large numbers of young people. This included street demonstrations a variety of events and extensive media coverage. Young people appeared on national T.V to advertise the events they were organizing to raise money for the project. The original estimated cost of building the new village, and the community development programme was about £100,000. The first £10,000 was given by Oxfam.

The EWG was run as if it was a small company with a ‘hands on’ manager, that is, the Project Manager, who in fact wielded more power than the General Secretary of the organization.

Of course, to try and compare SCI and the EWG on the grounds of my own limited experience as described in the above accounts of El Khemis and Dousadj, would be unfair; despite the fact that both were ‘reconstruction’ projects with a lot of aspects in common, their specific contexts were quite different and not really comparable. SCI and the EWG were fundamentally different types of aid organization, and even though the latter did have a significantly substantial fund-raising capacity, the main difference between them was in terms of project planning and organization.

Conclusion

My experience with SCI and the EWG has been important-even-fundamental, in a general way, to my becoming who I am today. The S.C.I ideals of pacifism, non-violence and human rights- to which I still adhere- were very much part of the ‘*zeitgeist*’ of the sixties. I enjoyed a feeling of being outside ‘the system. The frequent confrontation of ideas with workcamp mates, measuring oneself intellectually, was – to say the least - stimulating. For example, I remember taking part in a lively informal discussion in El Khemis about the newly invented American Peace Corps, which other countries were beginning to copy. Despite its aim of promoting peace, we were mostly strongly ‘anti Peace Corps’ because of - to our eyes- the risk of such organizations being used to serve national, if not imperialist, interests. Later, despite admiring the dynamic efficiency of the E.W.G, the predominance of Dutch people on its Board and their position in the Dutch ‘Establishment’ had made me feel uneasy. At that time in the

Dousadj camp it occurred to some of us that the project could be serving Dutch commercial interests and, of course, Western geopolitical strategy. This brought home to me the importance of having supranational non-governmental organizations like the S.C.I.

After El Khemis and Dousadj I went on to lead a 4-month summer camp, May to September ’64, for the E.W.G in Ibestad, Northern Norway; then did two S.C.I summer camps: Guingamp ’67 and as co-leader with my wife in Belfast (Purdysburn) ’69. Then, professional and family priorities took over completely. Working in workcamps helped me - to a certain extent - sort myself out, finding my way towards a career, and, in a way, to a better understanding of the world. It helped me learn a lot about participating in a group effort with shared aims, the importance of cohesion in a group, and of organization. I suppose it gave me something of a basic political consciousness. Not surprisingly, after workcamping I went on to work in fields in which, ‘*team spirit*’ is of fundamental importance: social work and teaching.

Looking back, workcamping was for me a unique opportunity which enabled me to gain a wealth of experience. It was in many ways a very formative experience for me. Some of the friendships, that took root during those camps, are still alive today.

Of particular significance - well beyond the scenic beauty of the places, and the richness of their cultural contexts – the villages of El Khemis and Dousadj are in countries where Islam is, at least pre-eminent, if not *all important*. As such, both camps provided me with firsthand experience of Muslim values through my everyday contacts on the worksite and in the village. The warmth and simplicity of straightforward hospitality, and fraternal relations was striking. It has remained a glowing reference, contrasting sharply with the colder, more self-centred values of our western society. This is the basis of my continuing interest in the Muslim faith and its culture in general, my constant endeavouring to understand, and striving to keep a balanced view of events, and relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in the world.

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R.L., 1962 in Algeria; earthquake relief in Iran, 1963

After leaving university R.L decided to go travelling, and came into contact with the S.C.I quite by accident. He worked in Algeria for several months until SCI eventually recruited him for an EWG reconstruction project in Iran, where he became work leader/coordinator. Consequently he went on study administration in developing countries which later led to him becoming EWG coordinator in Iran for a year. He has since held administrative positions with a Youth Hostel organization and a large university.

First contact with SCI

In November 1962 at the age of 23, I found myself in Gibraltar and wondering where to go from there. I had originally set out from the UK a month or so previously from St Peter Port in Guernsey in the Channel Islands where I had worked the summer behind the bar of a couple of holiday hotels. I had previously studied at University in the UK, had a Bachelor of Arts degree and had taught Secondary School for half a year but was not happy and had decided to take to the road for a year or so to sort out my life.

In the only cheap hostel accommodation to be found in Gibraltar, we were all talking about where to go next and how we would do it, not many of us had enough money to really do anything exciting and I had nearly put my name down to teach for a year and thus make Gibraltar my home for quite a while. This plan was ended by the arrival of two young Englishmen who had just come from Algeria where they had been working at a voluntary work camp near the Moroccan border. They talked in such glowing terms about it all and how vital the work was which was being undertaken that I became enthused along with a couple of English lads who had an old Fiat so we decided to go straight there and see for ourselves.

The next day we left on the ferry to Morocco and on arrival headed east along the main road to Algeria. The car was not in good condition but we finally made the border at Oujda. The next day we crossed into Algeria without any incident and proceeded to Tlemcen where we reported to the address of the organization we had been given, namely the ‘Service Civil International’. After a few days there they told me that I was to leave for Khemis that day but the two lads had already decided it was not for them and had headed off for Cairo, never to be heard from again as far as I was

concerned. While in Tlemcen I effectively became a member of SCI by agreeing to work for six months after signing along the dotted line.

Algeria

I enjoyed the trip out to the project and was thrilled to see the old Foreign Legion Fort in which we were staying. I agreed to help out on the 'chantier' for a while until suitable work was found for me but, after only a few days, I accidentally crushed the tip of a finger and had to give up working on the site. I found myself confined to the camp doing all manner of work which came to include cooking for everyone for a few weeks and because I was one of the few with a driving license, I got called on to drive all the vehicles from time to time, including the large truck. I also had to help out with tending the volunteers who had succumbed to illness, which all too often was Hepatitis, or *Yellow Jaundice* as it was more commonly called then. They would usually be sent back to Europe after getting over the worst of the symptoms. There was milk and vitamin distribution to the local children as well as still helping to make the fort more habitable as we had inherited it in a vandalized state from the bitter departing troops. I also seemed to spend much of my time in trying to keep the water pump in the village below the camp in working order and when this was not possible we would have to get our water in 200 litre drums from the source in the valley using the truck or even the Land Rover if the truck was not available.

After the three weeks I spent cooking for everyone in the fort I was sent (or was requested to go) to the town of Maghnia to relieve a teacher in a Lycée who had to take five weeks off for an operation. This involved teaching English in French and it was something I felt I managed well enough mainly because I spoke reasonably fluent French at the time, having spent three months in Lyon when I was fifteen and had further formally studied the language in more detail.

Maghnia was full of many nationalities including a Russian team of mine experts who were undertaking a massive mine-clearing programme along with few hundred Algerian soldiers. There was also a Revolutionary School there whose aim was I think, to foster struggles for independence in other countries similar to the one the Algerians had just achieved for themselves. In the town cinema in the evening one heard many languages, often English and some of that was from native Africans from existing European colonies south of the Sahara. It was an interesting few weeks, and then it was back to the fort. My next task for a while was to drive one of our nurses on her rounds of the clinics stretching into the northern Sahara where I saw some terrible examples of the effects war and mines have on unsuspecting civilians. More often it was children who were getting hurt by

the mines. There was also much evidence of malnutrition of the general population but particularly among the women and children. I also got to help out with a new team of our volunteers working on repairing local infrastructure such as water pumps and engines for pumping water etc. It was an interesting time and in between this kind of work I would be called on to drive to Tlemcen for supplies or take donated clothing to local towns and villages which left little time for me to get involved again with the actual building of the new village. I suppose the closest I would get to it was when I would take the lorry with a team of volunteers and villagers to gather sand or gravel from the river bank a few kilometres away.

I had initially undertaken to stay for six months, and close to the time this was due to end we received a request from a new organization for some experienced volunteers for their first project which was to be in Iran and due to start almost immediately. A few of us decided this would be a very complementary addition to our Algerian experience and coupled with the fact that the fare to the initial camp in Paris was paid for by them we decided to apply.

I had not been very happy with the management of the Algerian project where work leaders seemed to come and go with seemingly very little intelligent or forceful direction from Europe. Maybe because of this lack of direction, I had been lucky to have drifted from one interesting job to another and had experienced a great time; I also felt that I had, in my little way, been able to help the situation in this war-torn area, with its suffering from malnutrition and official neglect. I had stumbled into this work, but it suited me and I really looked forward to a new challenge in a totally different country and climate.

The original reason for the Khemis Camp I was told was to build a new village to replace one destroyed by the French early in the seven year war whose people had been living in tents and shanties all the time since. When I left there was not much to show for the progress on the ‘chantier’ so I was pleased to hear later that it had been completed successfully. Some of the reasons for the slow work on the ‘chantier’ had been the poor health of so many volunteers and the constant branching out into different fields of work as the need arose. An example of these was my teaching spell of five weeks and the later work on the mobile repair team.

Which should have been given priority? There is no easy answer for this but our work seemed very much to be based on “fighting the fire”, in other words, priorities seemed to be given to problems which rose from time to time and not based on firm directives from Paris. As mentioned earlier there was very little sign of cohesive leadership or forward thinking on the part of SCI and the frequent changes of camp leader and work

leader was not helping in any way with the morale of the volunteers, who very much did what we were asked to do and made the most of the wonderful surroundings in which we had found ourselves. The social life of the camp was generally very good but I have heard some people later criticized the excessive amount of alcohol consumed by some of the volunteers.

On the return of the other nurse I was soon asked to go on yet another adventure and was detailed to tow back our second Land Rover from several hundred kms away on the road to what was then Colombe Bechar. Our SCI Doctor had made a tour, I am not sure of the reasons now but, enough to say that the Land Rover had broken down and it needed retrieving. The most economical way of doing it was for ourselves to fetch it. Harry, at the age of 50, our oldest volunteer, accompanied me on this trip. I briefly mentioned him earlier as a member of the mobile repair team. He had been a British Army Sergeant Major who had served as a Quartermaster in WW2 and had found himself at the Battle of El Alamein amongst others and was a very pleasant person though it could be said his mind was like an open sewer and he had the language to match. He had galvanised us all at Christmas into cooking something special by creating a camp oven made with a 200 litre oil drum and lots of earth. It worked well and it was not just because of this oven of his that he was well liked by all, he was a very positive man and his positive attitude to the local situation was infectious.

The road we took was well sealed with one of the major minefields running parallel to us for much of the way. It was looking a little cloudy and well into our trip it began to rain, then to pour and finally it became a desert storm accompanied by copious lightening and thunder. The rain was falling in such intensity that Harry later likened it to travelling behind a truck carrying a fire hydrant aimed at us, as it was hitting our windscreen so heavily. We finally deemed it too dangerous to go on, it was getting dark and we did not want to hit a seriously flooding *wadi*, (a normally dry riverbed), which in these conditions can become raging torrents. So I gingerly drove off the road, still wary of mines and waited for the storm to subside. We waited a long time; hours in fact as even when it had stopped we felt it was still too dangerous to proceed in the dark on account of flooding. Harry helped pass the time by reminiscing about El Alamein, likening the effect of the lightening we had experienced to that of the lights created by the barrage of guns when the battle opened up. He said however, that the noise we experienced of the severe thunderstorm was nothing like the battle, it was only the lighting up of the night sky that really brought it all back to him.

While waiting for the storm to subside he also told me more stories about the battle but the one that sticks in my mind is his one about the ants. As a Quartermaster he was not in the fighting and found himself at one point in the middle of the battle, using one of the camp toilets. He sat there in the din and mayhem which was the battle but felt very calm when he noticed on the sand under his feet ants going about their work of food gathering. He suddenly realised that ghastly as it all was for him and all around him, he could not help but realise that these ants were oblivious to the history being made at the time and helped him cope with it all.

In the first light of day we set off again after an uncomfortable night in the car only to find how right we were to have done what we did. We shortly arrived at the town of Ain Sefra but the Land Rover we had come to rescue was still beyond this town on the Bechar road, and the water that was flowing through this little town had become a raging river, and with no bridge over it, all through traffic was barred from proceeding. This even included the large land trains which would have been swept away like matchsticks had they attempted a crossing. We were advised to take a hotel room, which we found without any trouble. The town had been quite busy when the French were there and these people were very much the middle class of the city, the shop owners, professional people like teachers, doctors, nurses etc and now they had all gone in the previous months. There was still a group of Foreign Legion soldiers in the town who were confined to barracks and waiting their turn to evacuate the country. Their Caserne was very close to the hotel and when we went for a walk in the evening we could hear what sounded like a drunken free-for-all going on inside; bottles being thrown and smashing on the stone floors, the men shouting in several languages and we were rather glad these people were no longer being let loose on the town.

We had to wait two, or maybe three nights before we could gingerly set off to cross the still very considerable flow of water in the wadi in order to continue with our rescue mission. The water that was still raging rose above the bottom of the doors of our Land Rover and I was concerned about continuing but nevertheless followed the example of other drivers who were more experienced than me. A couple of hours after the successful crossing we came across the broken down Land Rover, attached a towrope and set off on our return trip. Being towed is not the most interesting means of travel but when the road is absolutely straight and there is nothing much to look at in the way of scenery, it gets very boring. Harry and I decided to go 50 kms as the tower and then swap for the next 50. We finally made it successfully home and then the realisation that this had been no ordinary trip gradually sunk in.

There is no doubt in my mind that the experience of those six months was a pivotal time in my life and I found working as a volunteer satisfactory and the pocket money we were paid each week was enough for our needs, even if some, or most of it was spent on alcohol by some of us. Friendships made at the time have lasted to the present day despite many years of non-contact in some cases. The experience I gained from this time served me well and helped to shape the next decade of my life which saw me involved in a couple more camps, one in Iran and the other in India.

Iran

I moved from Algeria to Iran to join a project planned by The European Working Group (EWG) where I ended up work leader and which involved building a village of 116 houses with outhouses as well as a school, bath and an adequate water supply. I am convinced I would not have been made work leader without having the benefit of the Algerian experience which had obviously been an important factor in my being selected for the position.

One very valuable aspect of my time spent in both countries was the need to work with the locals themselves who were generally of the Moslem faith. We never had a problem with this and given the hysteria in the world at present on this subject we can only look back on those times with pleasant memories and respect for the people we met and worked with. It is a pity that this kind of experience is not available to more people; we all certainly had our thinking broadened by these cultural contacts.

Comparing the work camps in Algeria and Iran is like comparing chalk and cheese as the latter was very much controlled by the European main office and we remained focused on the task in hand. The Algerian SCI experience seemed a very amateurish affair in comparison though perhaps it is not fair to be too damning because the two projects were very different in nature and the needs of the local population with which we were working were very different. Maybe methods used in Iran would not have worked in Algeria and vice versa.

Because of the year or more that I had been working as a volunteer I decided to go back to University on my eventual return to the UK and attained a Post Graduate Diploma in Social Administration at the London School of Economics. This course was aimed at the problems of working in the “Developing World” and with this Diploma I was able to get work as the Co-coordinator of the EWG’s new focus for voluntary work in Iran by using only skilled volunteers, often working singly as part of an Iranian establishment such as in nursing, agriculture and building.

Conclusion

When this organization closed down due to political pressure in Holland I left and pursued a different type of employment and lifestyle but the experience gained served me well in much of my work in the years to come.

My experiences helped me change my direction in life and the return to University on a course which would allow me to work in an administrative position in relief work. I also mentioned the benefit of having worked closely with Muslims both in Algeria and Iran.

I certainly became more tolerant of diversity in the world but I also travelled for three months in India, Pakistan and Ceylon after leaving Iran which completed in many ways the experiences gained in Algeria and Iran.

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Paulette Rabier, 1958, Orient-Occident camp in Tunisia; 1962-1965, again 1967-1969, in Algeria

Paulette Rabier studied nursing and social work in Mulhouse (Alsace). She was a volunteer in Tunisia working with Algerian refugees during the War of Independence.

During my studies (1952-1955) I came into contact with an association which brought together young volunteers helping old people (renovating flats, cutting wood, etc.). That is where I first heard of SCI. In the next few years, I went on to do social work with Algerian families. This is why I wanted to get to know more about their country, but going to Algeria at that time was out of the question because of the war. I got in touch with SCI and in 1958 I went to Tunisia on an '*Orient-Occident'* workcamp (a project developed by Dorothy Abbott). Among the volunteers were several North Africans, and young people from several other countries in the camp. Our task was to repaint a hospital – no small job! There were lots of lively, idealistic discussions. A particular Libyan volunteer was very enthusiastic about the idea of creating a 'Greater United Maghreb' - a union of the 5 countries of the Maghreb (Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya.), that is, North Africa.

Although it wasn't actually planned to happen we quarrelled a lot with the Libyan, Egyptian, (and to a lesser extent) Algerian and Tunisian male volunteers, with regards to their attitude towards women, and their role in society. They tended to be very '*macho*', and backward. But, having said that, I did not really realize the situation when female volunteers were limited to the role of 'sisters' My main contacts there were with Algerian and Tunisian volunteers, some of whom took us to see the refugee camp at Sakhiet[28], which had just been bombed by the French air force.

In 1959, I participated in another 'Orient-Occident' camp near Lausanne, to train teams of female volunteers to work with women and teach them hygiene, healthcare and sewing. That is where I met Nelly Forget and Lise Cérésole.

During these camps, I noticed that with regard to the issue of the on-going war in Algeria, the Swiss volunteers were much less inhibited and more straightforward than the French volunteers were. The French were scared of getting involved and of the possible repercussions from the French authorities in general. As far as I was concerned, on the contrary, given my personal experience of war, the very idea of taking part in another one was completely unacceptable to me.

After that workcamp, as I still very much wanted to do something for Algeria - but I could not go there -, I decided that I would be more useful in Tunisia than in France. I went back there to take part in another workcamp, but, unfortunately it did not take place. So I obtained a contract for a job with the Tunisian authorities, in the first place, to work with Algerian refugees in the west of the country near the Algerian border. But soon it became clear that they did not really want French people there and they asked me where I would like to go and work. I suggested Kairouan, where there was a team of the French Catholic Mission, which had just been expelled from the Algerian side of the border. I worked there a year as a social worker, under contract to the local authorities. Later on I worked in a home for Algerian children, run by the Red Crescent and a trade union. This time I was a volunteer with SCI (on a small allowance). I stayed there three years doing social work. In addition I trained social workers as well as providing information to potential donors. From 1962 to 1965, I worked in Algeria, and again from 1967 to 1969. Afterwards, I taught in a French high school.

[28] This raid shocked public opinion everywhere. The bombing of a refugee camp in a friendly, independent country, causing a large number of casualties amongst the Algerian refugees was widely criticized in the international media.

Chapter 5
SCI IN WEST AFRICA

The following historical notes have been provided by Arthur Gillette and Franco Perna - both their contributions are in Chapter 2

A British Quaker civilist, Gordon Green, served as a conscientious objector during the Second World War when he acquired a taste for unskilled manual labour at nominal rates by picking spuds at 4d. an hour. Then, after a series of post-war camps on the Continent, he took part in Quaker projects in America. “Meeting Negroes for the first time there got me interested in the colour problem” he remembers and in going to Africa. In 1954, Gordon went to teach at fashionable Mfantsipim School in the Gold Coast (Ghana). To give students an opportunity to experience – and combat - underdevelopment first-hand, he helped organize occasional workcamps. As Independence approached, however, he saw the need to hold camps on a regular basis. With like-minded African and European friends, Gordon founded in 1956 the Voluntary Workcamps Association of the Gold Coast (VWAGC - 'G C' being changed to 'G' for 'Ghana' in 1957).

In 1962 the Co-ordinating Committee organized its second West African Workcamp Leader Training Project in Ghana and Togo. It was significant that the regional project could take place in both countries simultaneously for although they were neighbours their official relations were far from cordial. Friendship and co-operation among workcampers in the two countries had ignored government quarrels since the first regional training project had been held in Ghana in 1958. A single Togolese, Gerson Konu, a teacher from Palimé, took part in that project and carried the workcamp idea home with him to found *Les Volontaires au Travail* (LVT - Volunteers at Work), a workcamp association patterned on VWAG. Largely on the strength of his organization's success Gerson was elected to the Togolese Parliament. The independence and work of VWAG and LVT were so widely appreciated that both organizations survived the increasingly volatile political situations which culminated in *coups d'état* in Ghana and Togo. It is only in 1957-58 that IVS (UK branch of SCI) sent the first volunteers to West Africa, Ghana and Togo, where some sort of voluntary

service bodies were being set up, partly as a result of volunteers' work and a camp leaders' training course. Gradually, during the `60s, in response to specific requests from local communities and governments and making use of substantial financial support obtained through the British Volunteer Programme, IVS placed quite a number of long-term volunteers in various African countries south of the Sahara. However, it was only in North and West Africa that SCI became known and appreciated as an international movement, thanks to deeply rooted links of cooperation and friendship with local partners.

The first two contributions, from Nicole Lehmann and Max Hildesheim, refer mostly to the same period – the late `50s / early `60s, - and the same country - Togo, where they both did long-term service. Both have done many other camps in various countries. By the time Nicole Paraire became involved with SCI in the `70s only short-term volunteer exchanges with West African countries were being made. Nicole has done workcamps in third-world countries, and has been actively involved with developing SCI's Africa policies. Each of these three contributors had a close relationship with the late Gerson Konu who was an important figure in aid and development work in Africa.

Gerson Konu, whose real name was Kwadzo Gaglo Gù-Konu (1932 – 2006), was the originator of voluntary workcamps in his homeland, Togo. Workcamps which are still run by the ASTOVOCT - The Togolese Association of Christian Volunteers at Work. In 1957, when a young primary school teacher, Gerson discovered international voluntary workcamps in Ghana, and thus heard about SCI for the first time. On returning home he founded an association called 'LVT' - Volunteers At Work.

Togo which had recently become independent (1960) was at that time under the the presidency of Sylvanus Olympio, and Gerson was elected Member of Parliament for the region of Kpalimé. The LVT workcamps were a response to the needs the new state whereby local people were encouraged to take in hand their own development. Villagers, secondary school pupils and foreign volunteers – African as well as European – worked shoulder to shoulder. In parallel with these workcamps, Gerson organized literacy tuition programmes in the local vernacular. These initiatives were very successful as they corresponded to people's aspirations, all the more so as they fitted in with the indigenous custom of working together.

After the coup d'état of 1963, and the assassination of President Olympio, Gerson was arrested and tortured. He was freed four years later

thanks to petitioning by Amnesty International and the IVS, the British branch of SCI. He then fled to France where he found work in SCI Paris office, and became a permanent member of staff. From 1970 to '78 he was SCI International Secretary for West Africa, alongside Jean-Pierre Petit, International Secretary for North Africa. He developed links between SCI and partner associations in Africa. He founded the UACVAO, that is, the Union of West African Workcamp Associations in order to strengthen these associations, and also started long-term projects with local communities. In France he set up a certain number of aid groups which pursue long-term exchanges with African partners, including 'The Women and Development Group' which works with village women in Africa; the 'Vendée – Africa Group' which carries out exchanges with African farmers and craftsmen.

In 1978 he resigned from his position with SCI and went to work for the International Secretariat of Amnesty International in London. He was in charge of the development and support of A.I. branches in Africa.

Throughout his exile he was threatened by the régime in Togo, and was not even able to visit his homeland. He became very ill, and on retiring shared his time between London and Ho, a small village in Ghana not far from the Togolese border. He continued to launch development projects based on trust in local initiative, and to support human rights associations in Africa.

All those who have known Gerson have been impressed by his passionate desire to bring about a democratic Africa – independent, developed and open to the rest of the world – and by his perseverance in furthering these aims in every possible way.

From a homage to Gerson Konu, by Nigel Watt.

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Nicole Lehmann, 1958; to Togo in 1961; workcamps in Algeria, Morocco, Tanzania

Nicole Lehmann, born in Alsace, France. After studying social work she soon got involved in SCI activities. She took part in various workcamps in Europe and was a long-term volunteer in Africa between1959-`62. In 1962, she went to the workcamp at El Khemis in Algeria (see chapter 4) and went on to do camps in Morocco and Tanzania. She lives in Paris.

I lived with my parents. There were very few people around, just the locksmith, the road mender's and the coal man's daughters, and a couple of farms where nobody could speak French. I did not see any children outside school and I did not meet my schoolmates very often. My father had just come back from the war, and he used to say that he did not trust anybody. He would meet very few people socially, and my mother did not like Alsace. I was very isolated, I spent my time reading. After middle school, my friends had gone to work as apprentices. At the age of 17, I went to Paris to live with my grandmother.

My parents were well-educated and had a wide range of interests, when I went to university I expected to have exciting contacts and discussions with the other students, but it was not so. Fortunately, I heard about SCI through the press and I joined the association on my 18th birthday. There were floods in the Paris suburbs, and I participated in week-end camps around Paris and in the North African shantytown of Nanterre. I also did some work giving literacy tuition to immigrants as well as going on two summer camps, in the North of France and in the Alps.

In 1958, I went on a workcamp in Poland, in the mountains near the Czech border. The project was building a road, and the Polish Army was also involved in the work. The girls did the same work as the boys (whereas in the North of France they spent part of the time cooking) and the volunteers ate in a canteen. In the Alps, they were in charge of cooking. In Poland, we ate in the workers' canteen.

Poland was my first experience of a camp abroad. It was not very easy. There were volunteers from Germany, Bulgaria, France and Poland (some of them could speak French). I was stunned to see that Warsaw had been completely destroyed. From Alsace, I had already seen the ruins of Sarrebruck in nearby Germany and the damage caused by the fighting in my village (including our own house); there were still mines there and children were not allowed to play away from the footpaths. From Warsaw, I had taken a train where I had met an old man who had been a soldier in France during WW1. He was so happy to meet a French person.

I do not remember any of the discussions that were organized during the camp. I did not feel that there was so much difference between the

Polish (most of them spoke French) and the Bulgarian volunteers. I kept in touch with some of them. A French volunteer, Georges Douart, who had just got back from a camp in the Soviet Union, based his book 'Operation Friendship' on his experiences in workcamps I personally did not find the work in that camp too hard. I was young and strong and enjoyed physical work. It is then that I had the opportunity of visiting the Auschwitz concentration camp.

A year after starting work (1959), I participated in a workcamp in Italy, near the French border, after a flood. Amongst the Italian volunteers there was a girl who worked with me, and we both did manual work and the cooking. Nevertheless the boys did the hardest work; there were also German and Irish volunteers. In the evenings, there were organized discussions, mostly on religious subjects: I enjoyed that camp very much.

Looking back over that whole period, what was most worthwhile for me were the week-end camps and the literacy courses in the Paris area (where I worked with North African people). Coming from an isolated background as I did, this work afforded me the opportunity of meeting people I would never otherwise have met, including (during the week-ends) extremely poor old people. Then there were our interesting team leaders, some of whom had participated in the Korean War. It was also life in other countries, the wooden houses and the muddy roads in Poland, or that old man, the only survivor from WWI I had ever met. I also met young people of different social origins. I liked the pick and shovel work. I did not feel that foreign volunteers were so different. I was not influenced by the fact that they were foreigners. Maybe because our cultures and social origins were not so different.

Contrary to Nelly's memories of the Czechs, that she had met a few years earlier, I remember that the Poles were not communists, and they tended rather to speak out against the régime. Volunteers from Bulgaria did not talk with people enough to express a political point of view.

I did not go to any work-camp for three years. I was a social worker in the Eastern part of France, dealing particularly with North African families. There were lots of discussions about the war in Algeria. Therefore, I had met Algerian people and this had an impact in my choosing a job. I had friends who had to do their military service in Algeria; some of them went there, others managed to escape. After completing my three year work contract in Eastern France, I wanted to work with SCI again, this time as a long-term volunteer. I was offered the possibility of going to India or Africa. I did not know much about India; I had just read a few things and of course heard about Gandhi, and seen pictures of him in very large crowds. Finally, I chose Africa and left in 1961.

Togo

At that time, one had to travel there by boat and it took me two weeks to reach Togo. On the boat - thanks to the book 'Operation Friendship' that he was reading at that moment- I met an African with whom I am still in touch. On arriving in Togo, I was attached to a local association, 'Volontaires au travail' whose leader was Gerson Konu. He had received some training in Ghana, one of the first independent countries in Africa. His association cooperated closely with SCI. I was part of an exchange of volunteers which included Max, a Belgian volunteer, who had arrived six months prior to me; we did not get many opportunities of working together. The workcamp was located a kilometre from the sea, near the Ghanaian border, and we worked in isolated villages or near roads used only by local taxis going to and from the market. In the village, there was no electricity and we used to have to fetch water from the little river nearby.

I was with Togolese volunteers and we were supposed to open up a trail in the forest to link different villages and build schools and dispensaries. We dug foundations, made earthen bricks or used concrete blocks bought by the farmers (with some help from the Government). I worked with high school children and the villagers themselves. Most of the work was done by local carpenters and masons. The African women, who made bricks, carried the materials and did the cooking. Every day, people from a different village would come to work with us; we did not *work for* the villagers, but *with them*.

I was the only European volunteer, except during the holidays, when other volunteers would join us. I had very limited contacts with the local Europeans, who lived in the small town nearby and who had a completely different way of life. There was a nun, an education inspector and a protestant nun, whom I met once. There was also a Togolese doctor and his wife, who would only travel by car (I never met her). The Africans could see that the missionaries were competing with each other and that they said bad things about one another.

At the end of my stay, I visited the school supervisor in order to try and borrow some particular books; he told me that everyone thought I was a communist. I routinely wore a loincloth. I walked and went cycling, which was all very unusual for a European. Some Africans told me that I was losing prestige because I walked instead of driving. Like Max I became very well integrated. Amongst other things, I never objected to the local food. For instance, we ate beans with palm oil for breakfast; I found them delicious compared to my memories of eating beans during the war. The spicy food was a bit more difficult. In our camp, we used to drink filtered water, but outside, I drank the same water as everyone else. I had tablets

to put into the water, but since, in a group, it was usual to drink out of the same cup, I felt that I could not put pills in the cup when it was my turn. I was lucky as I never got sick, and only took anti-malaria pills. Most of the time I slept with a family in the village, but not when there was work to be done in the fields; then I lived for several months with a Togolese teacher and his family.

People were nice. I liked the way of life, and living out of doors was not a problem for me. The village was made of traditional mud huts. The teacher had a house made of concrete in an agricultural school, but his wife cooked outside and we only went indoors to sleep. In other words, I lived and dressed like an African woman, except for when I was on the campsite itself, I wore trousers then. We slept on the ground on mats. Every morning the women swept the floor and everyone did their washing. It was a picnic the whole year round.

We foreign volunteers and local camp leaders could speak French or English, but not the villagers so I picked up a bit of Ewe, the local language (which is now the official language). That was enough to manage on and to go to the market and exchange a few jokes with people.

For some time, I replaced a local teacher of French who had to go away on a training course. The pupils were happy to have a white teacher. I also went to a village in the hills to do some dispensary work (my first year of training had included some nursing). But I did not see how my social work skills, gained in France, could be of any use in Togo. Apart from how to deal with problems of feeding infants, I soon realized that I did not have much to teach them. Boiling water was almost impossible, in view of the wood shortage. I had some tablets for the water, but people did not see the use for them. They did not really have so many problems, except maybe in perinatal matters. I tried to persuade them to use palm alcohol as an anti-septic before cutting the umbilical cord with a bamboo knife, or to wean their babies more progressively, before only feeding them on manioc, as there were no cows in that region. I doubt whether I succeeded.

I tried to do some sewing with the young girls and to make loin cloths for the babies in winter. I always tried to use local resources, since the farmers had very little money. Everyone was poor but nobody was really miserable. They grew coffee and cocoa on small pieces of land and living on corn, manioc and yam. These little parcels of land belonged to the community and their distribution was renewed periodically.

I was impressed by the freedom of African women compared with North African women. In Togo, when women rowed with their husband, they simply stopped preparing food for him, and that was that. I also noticed there were a large number of single mothers, hence father-less children.

Gerson Konu also organized literacy courses, which were very successful. It was not long after Independence and so everyone was enthusiastic, eager to learn and do things. During that period, there were a lot of discussions on politics. I also participated in work-camps in Ghana; they appeared to be more advanced and more active than the ones in Togo. I was offered a job as interpreter (from English into French) at a meeting in Accra, but I discovered that that country was more developed and had its own interpreters.

Before coming back home, I thought that I should see a little more of Africa. I had very little money and I was so used to being independent that I decided to hitch-hike back via Abidjan (Ivory Coast) which was very daring. I was picked up by various trucks, and got busses (when they were available). Hotels were too expensive for me, so I slept with SCI friends, missionaries - and once with French people who had a typical colonial mentality. Once, I camped on a camping ground for travellers. I was alone. There were tom-toms playing, and people were singing. I could see them dancing in the bright moonlight. I was a bit frightened. After this experience, I preferred sleeping like the other travellers, on the ground under the bus.

Today, it would no longer be possible to travel in that way because soldiers stop cars and busses and ransom the passengers, even when people are going to market (I saw this sort of thing happen when I went back in 1972 and 1991).

I finally took the ship in Abidjan and arrived in France in January 1962, it was freezing cold, I only had on a summer dress and sandals.

North Africa

In France, I went back to studying sociology. I kept in touch with Gerson Konu (who died in 2006), and am still in contact with the Togolese teacher and with the families of some of the villagers who live in France. Some of the villagers also came over here; one of them as a political refugee. I don't participate in the 'Women and development Group', but I fully agree with what they do; I always insisted that priority should be given to the use of local resources.

I thought of going back to work in Africa again, but with my degree in social work, I would have had to teach Government officials' wives how to use powdered milk. I was not at all interested. I also thought of doing community development work in Niger, but it did not materialize, and was offered a job in Togo as assistant director of a school training for social workers, but I was afraid of having difficulties with the European community

there. I remember once that a friend had problems when he was working there with UNESCO for having socialized with African people!

Waiting for a decision on that job in Togo, just after Algerian Independence I went to Algeria to join the workcamp in El Khemis, near Tlemcen (see Jean-Pierre, David and R.L in chapter 4). I went down by car with two SCI volunteers. I remember that we stopped in a coffee shop where there were only men. As we were leaving, we were told that the coffee had already been paid for, and one of the customers told us in French "And tell them that we are not savages".

I was a member of a team of three volunteers doing tuberculosis control. There was also a doctor and a dentist with us. We toured the villages, doing skin-tests and inoculations. There were queues of men and women (veiled, but I noticed they were not when they were out in the fields). To start with, we were not in the main camp at El Khemis, and we slept in Tlemcen, the main town, but that required a lot of driving and we got very tired. So, in the teeth of opposition from the doctor, the team decided to sleep out on rooftops in the villages. He said we were crazy and would get sick. Sometimes the villagers invited us in for a couscous. On Saturday evenings, we would go into Tlemcen, for a shower (we had to wash in buckets the rest of the time) and an ice-cream. On Sundays we would go to the beach up on the coast.

We were very well received by people. Only once when we were doing our rounds, were stones thrown at us and landed on the roof of the car. It turned out they were being thrown from another village and the people stopped when the Algerians who were with us talked to them. I felt that even if the Algerian people are very violent sometimes, they don't have any resentment against the French, whereas some of French people are still angry with the Algerians, even today. They are also very hospitable. I used to work with Algerians in France during the War of Independence. Some of them were called up, sometimes they deserted. I made housing applications for them, and the civil-servants would respond by saying, "So, you are looking for accommodation for your niggers are you?"

In Tlemcen sometimes we heard cries during the night. We were told not to be afraid as "it's only a woman whose family has just been murdered, and she's gone mad".

In 1964 or `65, I went on a camp in Morocco and again in the `70s and a little later to a kibbutz in Israel (but not with SCI). In the `70s, I went to Tanzania again with SCI, to a 'Work and Study Camp' where we worked with farmers picking tea, and planting corn. I am not sure it was a very useful job; we did not have the know-how. Exchanges with the local people were limited, because they only spoke a little English. I was pleased to see

a lot of mud houses, because I am very much against the houses concrete with corrugated iron roofs which were beginning to appear everywhere like in Togo. They are expensive and badly insulated. Houses made of mud and palm branches don't cost anything and are much more comfortable.

I did not get any training before going on these workcamps. Prior to going to Africa, I had only read a few books about Africa and seen Jean Rouch's anthropological films .On the other hand, I didn't feel that I really needed any training, maybe because I can easily adapt to any kind of situation and environment.

Conclusion

I have learnt a lot from these experiences and that is why when I retired I agreed to take up SCI again. I am a one-day-week volunteer in the Paris office nowadays. For the rest of my career, I did child welfare work in the Paris suburbs. I have done exciting work and had altogether an exciting life. Thanks to these experiences, I have had the opportunity of getting to know all kinds of people from various social backgrounds that I would otherwise never have been able to meet. My first workcamps had an influence on my choice of career, since I took up my first job with immigrants. I have visited various countries. I had the possibility of seeing, in a concrete way, what one otherwise only heard about through the press or the radio; this helped me get a better understanding of the way other peoples react.

I realized that one can live with very few resources, while in Western societies you are almost obliged to own a lot of things, if you don't want to appear different from other people. But I can live very well without a TV set or other things that I have nowadays.

What is special about SCI? Initially, there was the idea that more knowledge of other people allows one to understand and to accept things, which could help us achieve a little more for peace, in our jobs and in our lives. But: what about today?

I used to be very much in favour of manual work, but now I sometimes feel that workcamps – maybe not so much in Africa – are now more simply an opportunity for young people to meet one another; a way of keeping them occupied. I feel that hard work brings you more than just doing odd jobs. Maybe workcamps, in the Balkans for example, can be enriching. Or in Africa, getting a better understanding of the lives of African peasants?

Maybe after all, I need to update my experience in order to appreciate what is really happening. Perhaps my impressions are misguided.

Concerning camp discussions, a few decades ago, we had lively discussions on issues like communism or the Algerian war. And there were more emergency relief workcamps after disasters, because unlike today, there was very little government provision and organization. In my time, this work was done together with the people in a spirit of solidarity. I am not sure whether this is still the case today.

During the workcamp I did in Italy, there was this Palestinian volunteer, a very nice guy. I kept his address and when I went to the kibbutz, I visited him and I used to spend all the week-ends with them. It was not so easy. It was striking for me to see that it was the few Arabs in the kibbutz who were building the shelters. There were also a few Druses; I was looked down on because I was friendly with them. I had lots of ideas about social work in Africa and I got in touch with UNESCO. Their reaction was "Another girl who wants to take advantage of the high salaries of UN organizations!" So I walked away, slamming the door loudly behind me.

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Max Hildesheim, 1960; LTV in Togo; Moldavia in 1962

Born in Brussels of Dutch parents, Max Hildesheim was in Indonesia during the war. While still a student in architecture, he worked for SCI from 1960 in Morocco and Moldavia and was a long-term volunteer in Togo.

My family was Dutch, of Jewish origin, we lived in Brussels. During the war, in order for us to escape the Nazis, the Dutch government sent us to Java (Indonesia) where, ironically, we spent three years in a Japanese concentration camp. Men and women were separate, I was with my mother and I did not know my father for three years. In 1945, when I was nine years old, we came back to Belgium and I had to go to a French-speaking school, a change which later facilitated my learning of English. At the age of 20, my parents offered me a trip to Israël, hoping that I would become a Zionist, like they were themselves. My sister had been to a kibbutz, but she had not liked it, because she did not like the community life; it reminded her too much of '*The camps*'. On the contrary, I loved the manual work in the kibbutz, as I have done ever since.

The following year, while I was studying architecture, I realized that instead of spending my holidays at the beach, I could go and do a workcamp. So I went to one in France, in the Alps, with '*Jeunesse et Reconstruction'* (Youth and Reconstruction). I often stood in and helped interpreting, and I eventually I had to replace the camp leader, which I also liked very much. In 1960, after getting my degree in architecture, I wanted to go abroad and I got in touch with SCI. Normally, I should have started with a camp in France, but with my former experience, I was sent to Greece for a month. Actually, I stayed there for three months, again replacing a camp leader. I had the opportunity to meet conscientious objectors and I became aware of the more ideological aspect of SCI. I also discovered that there were *'long-term volunteers'*.

Morocco

I went to spend a few weeks with Ralph and Idy Hegnauer in Zurich and, at the end of 1960, I was sent to Morocco which had recently gained its independence. I worked in an orphanage at Aïn Sebaa, near Casablanca. There were some Western volunteers, but what I liked most was the opportunity of working with the Algerians. In fact they were not really SCI volunteers, as even though they worked in the orphanage they were members of the FTA (the Algerian Workers Federation), and the FLN. Although I was not very much interested in politics, it seemed interesting to have a closer look at the situation. I could see in Morocco very structured organizations related to Algerian nationalists. Idy Hegnauer was the team leader. There were eight volunteers, five from Algeria and three from Switzerland. A man dressed in a formal way who was also a leader of an Algerian trade union was monitoring the project. I was a jack-of-all-trades, as I was not expected to draw plans as an architect, but to do various kinds of odd jobs. This was the first time when my work was related to my occupational area, construction. I was working with a professional mason, Ahmed. We had to build a small wall and he showed me how to use a trowel (whilst I had just graduated from my architecture studies!).

It was at that time that I became aware of a number of cultural issues, and I learnt to change some of my ways. Accepting Sunday work, which was a problem for protestant volunteers, and, above all being careful in our relationship with female Algerians, especially those who were not volunteers; we had to be very cautious with regards to them. Relationships amongst volunteers in general were not always easy. As a whole, we Europeans were welcome to come and work with the Moroccans, but as soon as there was problem, they tended to have a reflex reaction behaving like colonized people facing their colonizers, or by interpreting things

exclusively in terms of race or of ethnic group. There were also clear differences between Algerians and Moroccans as there were also between Arabs and Kabyles.

We were also concerned, of course, with more basic issues, such as the usefulness of our work, our individual responsibilities, and the way money was spent. The war in Algeria was also very near. The Algerians told me what they had personally suffered or seen; how the French were treating those who were fighting against them, including civilians, and non-combatants. Another problem was that we did not have enough orphans for the orphanage, because as soon as a child lost his/her parents, he was taken in by other members of the family.

During that period, there was a terrible earthquake in Agadir, but the Moroccan authorities did not ask for any outside help, especially from SCI, although it was organizing many emergency workcamps in various places. In January, I was asked to go to another children's home for sick children, located in Ifrane, a former resort for the French colonists in a mountainous area. There were various arrangements required in the house, and my architect's skills could be useful, but I only stayed there for a short period of time because, once again, we had too few orphans.

The workcamp in Morocco was only a temporary assignment for me as I was waiting for a one year contract. Finally, Ralph suggested that I go and help a young local association for voluntary work in Togo, in order to prepare their summer workcamps with LTV (Volunteers at Work).

Togo

There was no real harbour in Togo and I took a ship which dropped me in Cotonou (then Dahomey, now Benin). I had to get my destination by my own means; one way I did this was by hitch hiking. The first car that passed stopped immediately. They had never seen a white man hitch hiking before. The next vehicle was a truck going to Lomé. The driver came from the village of Palimé, where I was going, and he knew Gerson Konu, the leader of the association, very well. In the evening, as I had no place to sleep, the driver took me home with him. Then, I took the train for the rest of the journey.

When I reached the village market place, a lot of children appeared and clustered around me, singing a little song: *Yovo, yovo,bonsoir, ça va bien, merci*. '*Yovo'* means '*whiteman*', and I was to hear that little song very often throughout my stay in Togo. I did not need to ask which way to go as, there he was: Gerson had come to meet me. A handsome smiling young man, with delicate features, he took me to his home. All the buildings in the

village looked the same, one storey, with rough-cast walls, white or clay-coloured, unglazed windows with shutters, and the roofs were made of corrugated iron. There were also some wooden shops with straw roofs where a blacksmith, a carpenter or a dressmaker was working. Gerson's house was a little bigger than the others with several rooms around a covered gallery. Nearby was a small building with a sign 'Les Volontaires au Travail'.

Gerson had just been elected a member of parliament, within the party of President Sylvanus Olympio, who had a large majority. In a way, Gerson was not so happy, because this would give him a lot of work to do, and so he would have less time to devote to L.V.T. But they had already a good team and had run several workcamps: constructing a reservoir, a school that the villagers themselves finished afterwards, making roads, etc. They had also created an education centre for the people, where they were able to recruit their volunteers and their leaders.

Gerson, who was 28 at that time, had been invited to Europe the previous year, to participate in various SCI workcamps in France and England. That is how he had come to think of inviting European volunteers. I was the first, and the second one (Nicole Lehmann) was to arrive in a few months time.

To begin with, I was mainly expected to advise LVT on preparing their summer workcamps, and to draw up plans for a primary school with three classrooms. We were expecting foreign volunteers from SCI and the Quakers. As a member of parliament, Gerson had to go to Lome, so he invited me to stay in his house. I got on with the people around me very easily, and they immediately took to me. Once, in the restaurant, an old '*Père Blanc'* missionary with a white cassock, a sun-helmet and a white beard came and sat next to me. His ideas were as old as he was. It was very difficult for us to get along together, but it was interesting to see the conception some people had of Africa.

Among the first points on which decisions had to be made was the camp time-table: the volunteers would get up at 6 o clock at sunrise, work from 7 to 11 and again from 1 pm to 5pm, so that they would be able to go and have a bath down at the river before nightfall (around 6 p.m. all the year round). Then we had to organize the teams for the various tasks: digging the foundations with a hoe (the only tool available), going to get sand down at the river, digging for pieces of rock and breaking them up, and helping the carpenter and the blacksmith. Volunteers also had to cut down very big trees with a longsaw to make beams.

The American volunteers were a bit surprised to see the pace of work which was sometimes very slow. But they very soon adapted, since the

conditions were very hard, the work heavy, the tools primitive and the sun very hot. So, from time to time, they would stop working in turn and sometimes pick up a guitar and sing. But the pace really accelerated when the villagers came to help to fetch the sand, shouting their '*yovos'* while they worked, thus emphasizing the fact that they were participating. In the second week, I was glad that my friends had included me among the volunteers, and my role as a technical leader was strengthened. I really felt like an architect, but with dirty hands and clothes. I was asked to advise on any simple problem that occurred and to make decisions. When necessary I asked the African engineer in Palimé for a second opinion.

I also participated in other workcamps in Togo. Whenever there was not a camp immediately available for me to go to, I would go surveying, in order to draw up plans for the straightening of roads etc in several nearby villages.

I was also involved in a training workcamp for leaders. Nicole Lehmann, who was not usually in the same workcamps as me, also participated in the training of female volunteers. So, we were then promoted to being trainers. Our trainees were really enthusiastic and full of goodwill to listen to our experiences and, as usual, to talk about Europe. As they were not at all reluctant to work, the conditions were really very good. We also organized weekend camps where there were many volunteers. The atmosphere was really exciting when there were a lot of people involved.

Of course, at the end of my stay in Togo, it was a bit difficult for me to leave all those new friends. They had really adopted me. Whenever a foreigner asked the villagers where I was from, they would say "He is from the village". Furthermore, they often called me by a nickname in their language. (In fact; as was customary, they used to give volunteers a sort of *second* 'first name' as they did amongst themselves). It was Koffi.

A wonderful farewell party was organized for my departure and also for the general assembly of '*Les volontaires au travail'.* The festivities and the ever-present tom-toms have remained vivid in my memory. For example, when some American volunteers arrived, during some celebration or other, the newcomers looked surprised - to say the least - to find themselves suddenly right in the middle of a crowd singing and dancing, with tom-toms throbbing. In all this apparent disorder, half-naked girls were dancing - doing more-than-suggestive contortions; people were running everywhere. What a scene !

Today, I think that my plans for the school and the African village roads were inappropriate. They reflected my training, which had been very abstract. For instance, we should have used traditional materials more

often; instead of using sophisticated – and of course - expensive modern materials.

Just before leaving for home, there was an international conference on workcamps organized by UNESCO in Nigeria. I was sent there by SCI as a delegate, but also as an interpreter. I often sat beside the Soviet delegate, who spoke perfect French, but no English; I frequently translated for him in small group discussions. Later he tipped me off about a camp that was going to take place in Moldavia.

To get back to Europe, I had to go by ship, but I thought that it would be a pity to go straight back like that, since I had seen very little of the rest of Africa. So, I hitch-hiked to the river Niger, bought a dugout canoe, and went down the river all by myself, - a very exciting experience.

Moldavia

After resting a few weeks in Brussels, in summer 1962, I went to a workcamp in Moldavia, which was then still part of the Soviet Union. At that time, we tended to confuse 'Russia' and the 'Soviet Union', but the people insisted on their national identity, as well as belonging to the USSR. The camp was in Terespol, a *kolkhoz* (a collective farm) not far from Kichinev, the main city. It was organized by the *komsomol* (the Communist League of Youth), together with the World Federation of Democratic Youth. There were three types of volunteers there: those from the komsomol, from SCI, and those from other organizations, such as the Quakers, who had volunteers from the Third World. We travelled by train from Paris with SCI volunteers. I had to help the Indian volunteers *(among them Valli – chapter 3)* who had no transit visa to cross Belgium at night (!) even though we did not even have to get off the train. Georges Douart was with us, and he gave us an account of his previous experiences in workcamps. In the USSR, he recalled the discipline, the propaganda, the flag-waving, and sending telegrams of support or protest in connexion with certain events.

At the kolkhoz there was a big house for us, where only a few of us were boarded in each room, and every day we had a huge breakfast. I had never had such a reception in a workcamp. The president of the kolkhoz, a big and jolly fellow, briefly explained our work to us: helping in the fields or in the building of a new hospital. In the evenings, we were invited to see Moldavian dances by the kolkhoz company. Everyone gathered there to greet us in an informal way.

At the start, I chose to work in the beautiful orchard to collect cherries. It reminded me of my first manual work in Israel. Working together, we soon managed to mix the different groups and the members of the kolkhoz so as

to create really multinational teams. So, during the breaks and even afterwards we talked a lot; in the beginning about simple subjects such as the family, studying, our work and so on.

The next day, the work (collecting green peas) was much harder, but we stopped early in order for us to greet the newly arrived volunteers from Eastern Europe, the US, Japan and Africa. As the group was now complete, there was an official reception with banners, speeches and more dances. Everything took place in a pleasant atmosphere. The most welcome volunteer was Cuban, not because of his personality, but because Castro enjoyed a lot of prestige in Eastern European countries, and in third world countries. All the volunteers – and not just the Africans - were very interested to hear about my experience in Togo.

Personal discussions often turned to religion. As often happened in workcamps, I scored a great degree of success when I revealed that I was of Jewish origin, I was from the '*ancient religion*'. But it was particularly difficult to explain to people - above all the Africans – that I was an *unbeliever*. Whereas, with the Soviets, it was hard to convince them that I did not agree with Israeli policies – a very sensitive subject as it was only just after the *Suez affair.* Here we came to realize that Western opinions,- though often very different from one another-, were, at that time, faced with a much more uniform point of view in the Communist countries, although it was much less rigid than we had expected. The Eastern Block volunteers could argue in a more rational way than we could, and could refer to more precise facts with regards to the influence of religion on politics, on peace and disarmament, on the various conflicts in the world. There were organized discussions; the first ones were mainly concerned with workcamps, but little by little we came to discuss about our régimes, our political systems and so on, in a very free manner.

Georges Douart, - who had a lot to say about workcamps - was able to compare the situation in the USSR at that time with that of the `50s. Broad changes had taken place, there was far less rigidity and more openness in various matters. Our Soviet partners very often used to say, "In the last four years", but they could not explain precisely what the changes were they were referring to.

As usual, living together contributed to gaining mutual understanding, not only during work-time but also when we were invited in small groups, particularly by the inhabitants, with the habitual bottle of vodka and a large number of toasts. We discovered the life of these people, much more than we expected to. They looked healthy and joked a lot, making fun of their leaders whenever the opportunity arose. We used to drink a lot of vodka on such occasions, and after the red wine, it was very effective indeed. I still

remember this dinner, when the leader of the Soviet team made a great speech on *'the evils of alcoholism'* when he was himself half-drunk and could hardly stand! Then there was a lot of singing, and the Soviets were far better at that than we were.

When the leaders found out that I was an architect, they wanted me to join the worksite. But it was a big one, and they were only at the foundation stage; on top of that they were using heavy equipment. So I preferred carrying concrete in a wheelbarrow.

We often went swimming in the river nearby. We were also taken on excursions. Once, we went to Odessa by bus and it was moving to see the famous stairs which were featured in the film *'The Battleship Potemkin'*. In this way, days passed very quickly, in a very pleasant atmosphere, and then the day came when we had to catch the train back Moscow. The workcamp in the Soviet Union was a real eye-opener. It changed my way of seeing things in many ways and influenced my political views.

With regards to SCI, my most important memories concern human relations. An important contribution of workcamping to my life has been in learning how to live with people about whom one knows absolutely nothing.

I worked as a professional architect from the time I returned from the USSR till 1978, when I gave it up, because the type of work I had to do was too much in contradiction with my political convictions, and my wife and I wanted to devote more time to ourselves and our family.

We came to live in the countryside in the Ardèche (South-East France), where we have become fully integrated in the local community; living a life which is rather similar to that of a workcamp, although much more comfortable and not so collectivist. My pacifist ideas and SCI experience, including the vision of the U.S.S.R acquired whilst workcamping, have had a lot of bearing on the subsequent choices I have made, and my way of life in general.

. . . . .

Nicole Paraire, 1970, workcamp in Tunisia 1973, in India 1974, in Peru

Nicole Paraire was born in Paris. From a modest background, she had to apply for a grant in order to enter teacher training college. In fact she

managed to carry on studying and obtain a degree from the prestigious 'Ecole Normale Supérieur', and become a researcher in physics. Her career had already begun when she had her first contact with SCI in 1970. Ever since then she has continued to participate in workcamps abroad, training activities and the organization of exchanges with West Africa.

When I started working, I thought that I should have other activities. I gave literacy courses. I felt that immigrants were oppressed and that it was quite normal to help them. I started doing this in 1970, when large numbers of immigrants came to France. Living under very bad conditions, among them were Portuguese people who did not want to be sent to Angola to fight against the Independence movement there. It was a bloody colonial war.

While doing this literacy work, I felt that the best way to understand the people, with whom I was working, was to meet them in their own environment. A girl belonging to the literacy group said that she was going to North Africa on an SCI work-camp, I was interested. I did not have to choose between organizations: this was just an opportunity. I had once heard about SCI from a friend who talked about conscientious objection. At that time, I had never thought about it before.

Normally, for new SCI volunteers, there was at that time (1973), - unlike nowadays - an SCI training course under the responsibility of the Africa, Asia and Latin America Commission (CAAAL). It lasted a full week, plus a weekend, which volunteers went on just before leaving for the camps. Jean-Pierre Petit was in charge of it; he interviewed each volunteer before giving the 'go-ahead'. Now, in view of financial constraints, the training course is limited to three days. I was a member of this Commission for a long period, and I disagree with this reduction.

At that time, the training course included geography, history, sociology and economics (international relations).I feel that such training is essential, even for short-term camps. With this sort of training, and with discussion evenings, people are obliged to put their ideas into question. We discuss themes such as: "What is a work-camp? What is it for?". We also explain that we are not just going to dig a well, and that there is little chance that they will actually do what they expect to do. Too many people go in for humanitarian work, and imagine that they will change the world by digging a well. On a week's course, they have enough time to look at things in a different way, and they may even give up. I feel that this is important. There are also people who go to the training session without having made up their mind. In a week, you can also see whether certain people may have difficulties adapting to living in a collective situation. Living is sometimes

difficult in work-camp conditions, especially in Third World countries. Sometimes, we have to tell people that it would be better if they did not go at all. Others realize that the country they want to go to does not necessarily correspond to their expectations.

The point is, to explain what *development* is, what a *Third World country* is, and to stimulate thinking about the reasons why some countries are developed and others are not. SCI should aim, first of all, at developing awareness among volunteers themselves. The volunteer training course, as it used to be, was very demanding, with a week plus a week end and an assessment session after the camp. It meant that those who actually went on camps after the training course were really committed, and they were likely to stay with SCI. Nowadays, the training session only lasts three days, less than half of the volunteers come for the assessment after their camp, and no more than 2% carry on working with SCI. This reduction in training time took place a few years ago, in response to the competition with other organizations which are less demanding. When they saw that the number of participants in SCI training sessions was decreasing seriously, the Commission wanted to do something.

My work-camp in Tunisia (1973) lasted for three weeks. It took up all of my vacation time. It was in a village, and we were altogether about 15 volunteers, North African and foreigners. Most of us were girls, whereas there was not a single North African girl in the group. We had to dig canals. What for, and for whom? I did not know, and actually I did not care. The camp was a hard experience in many respects, first of all, because inter-cultural relations are always difficult, especially in North African countries, and the majority of us were European girls.

It was also very hard from a physical point of view. I cannot stand the heat, and it was awful in Southern Tunisia. We had to be vaccinated against cholera, since there was an epidemic at that time, in order to be able to drink the water. We dug irrigation trenches in the blazing sun, while a number of the North African boys would go and sit in the shade and sing little songs. But they were always first at dinner table. Still, the food was so spicy that I could not eat it anyway. As soon as we spoke to a North African boy, the others became jealous and got upset. Radios played all night, every night. In other words, it was exhausting.

In the evening, we had to go through a process of self criticism, probably because the team leader did not have much experience and was lacking in self-confidence. He did not want to have any problems, so if, for example, I had spoken to a boy in the group and not to the others, I had to apologize, and so on. Apart from that, there were no organized discussions as far as I can remember. Anyway, it was already difficult enough to face

our everyday problems. As it was the camp was organized by a local institution which was under the responsibility of '*The Party'*, therefore discussions were not really welcome anyway. Exchanges were rather limited to music and dancing in the evenings - which was compulsory – local folk-dancing of course.

In any case, gender relations in North Africa are always a bit complicated. Especially for young boys who have never met foreign women before, nor any other women for that matter. However, the girls did not have to prepare the meals. We had a local cook, but even the Tunisians from the North could hardly eat his very spicy food. Another positive aspect of that camp was that, at the end, we had the opportunity of being invited by the families of the local volunteers .Thus we were able to discover certain aspects of local life and culture. When I came back to France and went back to work, I saw the North African people I was dealing with, in a different light. I was able to talk with them about small, everyday things, and even exchange jokes. A number of things now had a name for me.

Despite the fact that, altogether, it had been a very difficult experience for me, I was not discouraged. What was very good with SCI was the week-end after the camp, and the assessment that took place then. One could hear other people's reactions and I concluded that, it had not been so bad after all. There had been some value in what we had done, and I kept in touch with a friend met at that camp, because, after all that collective life, in hard conditions, personal relationships had been stimulated, without any consideration for social origin, education and so on. One is faced with such a completely new situation that it creates a real relationship. I think that this is very good. At this final meeting I felt that by assessing its activities SCI was a real organization, doing a serious job of work. It involved an aspect of continuity which I considered to be very important.

Thus I got involved with a work-camp organization. In addition one was offered to do something afterwards within the framework of the CAAAL (the Africa, Asia and Latin America Commission of the French branch of SCI), which was fully independent (its leaders were Gerson Konu and J.P. Petit). We were asked to think about a particular topic. It was in 1973, when the first oil crisis took place, and I was lucky enough to work on the oil problem. This is how I learnt about the price of oil and things like that. This is essential, and that is why I stayed with SCI: one not only has to do manual work, one has to think as well. Over a period of years, I continued to work on other issues: each volunteer did his or her part of the work, and we met from time to time.

The following year (1974), I went to India to do another work-camp. It was the first time that short-term volunteers were sent to India as a group.

There was a long period of preparation before our departure. Everyone had to do a lot of reading, and there was a weekend camp to make one another's acquaintance. Volunteers had to commit themselves to the camp for a minimum period of seven weeks, which was a long time for working people like me. In India, there was a week of information in Delhi with long presentations by SCI. Then there was a workcamp in Madras, to build the foundations of a dispensary. We, short-term volunteers, were mostly French and we were supervised by Indian and international long-term English-speaking volunteers. We were able to travel a little. Later on, I stayed about two weeks in a dispensary in a slum near Delhi. Volunteers did not really work there, since they were not adequately qualified for the work.

This experience was completely different from my work-camp in Tunisia. In the first place we had been invited by the Indian branch of SCI, which considered it important to explain how the Indian branch worked, and what life India was like. It was equally important, in a country where the caste system is so predominant, for the public to realize that people from different countries could actually work together. This is the point I remember. One difference though was the large number of women participating in the camp. I have seen more of India than of Tunisia and was more impressed by the poverty there, but I was also impressed by beautiful things. Before going there, I had expected India to be inaccessible; which I discovered was not true. Likewise I had imagined it as a magical place, which I quickly realized it certainly was not. It was really hard seeing all that poverty! Another thing that I discovered was Indian dancing, which I loved. Religion did not seem to have the same influence on daily life as in North Africa, though we did see some religious ceremonies. No doubt there was talk of non-violence, but my main memory is of a football match at the end of which people threw stones at each other.

During that period, I became a member of SCI volunteer-training team, since I have an intellectual job, and that is why I liked SCI: it was a place where one could speak. It was not activism for the sake of activism. This is probably why I carried on. This is compatible with manual work, but I would not have stayed if it was *only* manual work. It is not so much the camps that interested me, but rather the experience that I could gain through them .It was the best period for me – unfortunately it is no longer the same.

At the end of the `70s I also participated in an SCI camp in Peru. Someone in SCI was trying to develop an on-going relationship with Latin America, but it was very difficult. Over there, if you are not a Latino, you are considered a *'gringo'*. There would be a lot of work for SCI to do in Latin America, promoting mutual understanding and non-violence. However, it is

very difficult to do, given the rather radical politicized attitudes that tend to oppose South American people towards one another. It is extremely difficult for people to believe someone who claims to be non-violent if they perceive that person as belonging to the opposing side.

During that period, there were differences of approach in international activities between national branches, and different views as to what was the specific character of SCI. The British branch was very pragmatic, the Germans had a bad conscience because of the war and they simply wanted to give money. On the other hand we (the French branch) thought that it was impossible to undertake development work only by donating money – and this does not apply only to Latin America. I found that cooperation between European branches was difficult in view of these differences.

Later on, I belonged to two SCI groups: *'Women and development'* and '*Vendée*'. The latter,-which is now called *'Vendée/Afrique'* - initially brought together farmers and craftsmen of the Western part of France, who wanted to do something to help developing countries and who did not know SCI. They met Gerson Konu, who was then in charge of SCI activities in West Africa, and he told them "If you want to help developing countries, the first thing you have to do is to get to know them." He suggested that they should receive people from the Third World into their homes. He went a long way, and he persuaded them to receive a Senegalese farmer and a carpenter from Benin for a whole year. It proved to be very difficult. It was in a remote area where they had never met black people. I was involved in it, and even though it was a first experience, it did not turn out to be a failure since it is still going on today, and the group is still active. We had to do a lot of assessment work in order to see the positive side of the experience.

I did not personally initiate that project. Looking back at it, I feel that it was too heavy; it went on too long – especially for the African participants who tended to make a nuisance of themselves, to the extent of becoming unbearable, which is not unnatural. For those who met them, it is less difficult as the group is large enough, so that its members receive the Africans in their families in turn. Also there was follow up, involving several assessments. Later on it was suggested that the French group themselves should go to Africa. So now, every other year they go to Africa for two weeks, and the Africans come here the following year.

This was really revolutionary, first of all because the Europeans get to understand the African way of life. In the beginning, the Europeans believed that the project would stimulate the development process in Africa. They believed that it would work, just like that. But, what has been really interesting, have been the exchanges between farmers, which have been

highly beneficial. The result is stimulating in that they realize that they are skilled which makes things a lot easier when participants do a similar job. The project is not financed by SCI. We organize money-raising activities, such as collecting waste paper, and now by organizing paying meals. We also organize training and information evenings. When we receive African people, we provide information on life and living conditions in Africa, and we organize discussions on exchanges between Europe and developing countries. Consequently, today many members of the group are more knowledgeable on these issues than a lot of so-called experts.

I still participate in these activities, but to a lesser extent now, because the meetings take place in the evenings, and the local people have taken over full responsibility for the project. Nevertheless, I am not sure that it will last much longer, because I doubt very much if such a varied group of people can pull in the same direction without someone to coordinate them.

The project called *'Women and development'* was launched by SCI in connection with International Women's Year *(see Dorothy in chapter 2)*. Two Swiss long-term volunteers participated in a work-camp in West Africa, where they met African women's groups. The volunteers told them that they did not have any money to offer them, but asked the groups in which way they could cooperate with one another. This became the strong point of the '*Women and development'* project: the idea that we do not have any money. Therefore, exchanges were established without us donating any money. This changes the whole thing. The Swiss volunteers came back saying: "Over there, women say that they tend to feel discouraged, because they are isolated, they don't have any exchanges with the outside world, and no help is forthcoming locally".

Such a situation was not surprising, since - at least at that time - exchanges between West African countries always had to go through Paris. We then thought that we should attempt to establish a support link between groups of women in Africa, to prevent them from becoming discouraged. As usual, an outside contribution may be useful: it helps raise questions, it provides food for thought, helps in enabling people to see things in a more objective way. This is how we were useful, by saying: "Okay, you do things this way; other people do it another way".

In 1976, in Benin, Gerson Konu organized an international conference of women's groups from French-speaking West African countries. The previous year, the country, until then called Dahomey, became the new state of Benin, under a Marxist-Leninist government. This change of regime led to four of us finding ourselves in an extremely difficult situation; I could write a novel about it! There were all kinds of difficulties. I was one of the four foreigners who took part, and we had arrived earlier in order to prepare

the conference. Unfortunately, the Government had taken over the event and selected its own participants. There was always a representative of '*The Party'* present, policing the situation, especially during discussion meetings. It was horrible and meaningless. We had to be very careful about what we said, never sure of what would happen to us after the meeting. A relationship was nevertheless established between the participants, but there had been no '*free discussion'* at all.

Prior to this conference, at the CAAAL in Paris, we had envisaged a charter to define the type of relationship that should be maintained with sub-Saharan countries, and the conditions required to allow for proper exchanges. It stated that exchanges would be completely impossible if on the one side there are those '*who have'* and '*who know*', and on the other those '*who have not*' and '*who do not know*'. In that case, all the others can do is say 'thank you', but that it is not *an exchange*. For us, this is basic. Money can destroy a relationship. If another branch comes along after us and offers financial aid, the partner will naturally prefer the organization which is prepared to give them money, rather than the one who just says: "let's discuss your problems". It is even worse with organizations like UNESCO. We had an example of a meeting when the participants were asked for their '*per diem' (*= daily expenses or allowance); people did not even know what it meant. We then realized that UNESCO's way of dealing with things was jeopardizing our way of working. There was another meeting when representatives of the local '*establishment'* were the only ones who spoke, which made us understand that we had to go through *'the establishment'* in order to get to the people with whom we wanted to talk.

In the '*Women and development'* project, every one pays for his or her own travel expenses and there are money-raising activities, such as making fruit juice and selling it. We try to organize exchanges between women who do not live too far from one another, in order to reduce travel costs. From time to time, some of us go to Africa to see what is going on (paying our own fare). Another activity is producing our newsletter, where women recount their experiences and exchange views.

At the beginning, our meetings were called *seminars*, but now they are called *working meetings*. Also usually, we organize some manual work to do together (such as planting trees). In this way, we only get participants who know that they will come to work and live in very simple conditions, without any financial benefit. This goes against the dominant trend. The objective is to exchange views on improving the functioning of women's groups. Once, we asked the participants to talk about a specific skill they possess, which gave them (including the non French-speaking participants) responsibility for passing on a piece of know-how to the other participants.

Recently, a further step has been made: small meetings occasionally now take place without any French participation. Normally, two participants are invited from each group. The African women come to France for three months. If they stay for a shorter period, it is just tourism, they just admire what they have seen, and conclude *"If only we were white, we would not have any problems*". If they stay for three months, they first go to a rural area, which is nearer to their way of life; then to the Paris area. There, they are confronted with some of the more negative sides of western life (especially for immigrants), and they are left to their own resources, to travel home and so on. Then, they usually find it quite difficult, and are eager to get back home, which is exactly what we want. Their conclusion is that everyone has a burden to carry–and we have to do it at our own pace. We have thought a lot about the selection of participants, and about those who actually do the selecting. It is quite possible that those women who come back are not well received by the others, since she realized that life in France was not what they imagined.

We are working for the long term, attempting to change mentalities, here and there. An isolated work-camp is meaningless to me, if it is not part of an on-going activity. In any case, what is important is not whether the job has been done efficiently or not; but, the relationship that has been established through it. The trust gained allows us to reflect on things together. If the camp is organized by another institution, this must be its approach. If the idea is just to meet people, it is useless. It is important to include the long-term aspect in what we do. When people go on a camp, we tell them that they should go back again, preferably to the same place, so that the people whom they meet again know that they are not simply tourists, but more like friends. I am not a volunteer for a tourist agency. Even though it is usually true that a work-camp is an opportunity of opening up people's minds, but only so if the participants are properly prepared.

The *'Women and development'* project was not really supported by the CAAL. However, it is a typical SCI activity, and I have been a member of its board. For some time, I was employed as a part-time worker in SCI Paris office; but then there were disagreements about what it means to be an employee, as compared with being a volunteer. In 2004, I participated in a work-camp in Algeria, with volunteers from among my colleagues (details not given here) in the Paris area.

To conclude - 'What is SCI for me?' First of all, it means building Peace through concrete action. For a long time we struggled, together with conscientious objectors to try and explain: "When there is injustice in the World, this is the origin of War; struggling against injustice means building Peace."

Chapter 6
LOOKING BACK - A BROAD VIEW

This document was primarily a collection of individual stories. They do not follow any other logic than the continuity of the life of the former volunteers. In some instances their pathways cross each other or are related to each other. The stories may be redundant but most of them include a few comments on a variety of themes and the authors draw some conclusions from their own individual experience.

For these reasons, it is worthwhile to undertake a cross reading of the stories to look at them in a more systematic way and to draw a few more general conclusions. In order to limit the length of this final chapter and to avoid repetitions, it will only include references to the contributors' memories, so that the reader may need to refer back to some of the individual stories.

Following this approach, three themes are discussed in this chapter:

- First, we take a broad view of the origins and motivations of the volunteers and of their memories of their life in workcamps.
- In the next section, the comments made by the volunteers about SCI as an organization are brought together. With a few additional remarks, this leads to a discussion of some of the issues that were raised in the first chapter.
- The last section is a brief synthesis of the conclusions drawn by the contributors from their own individual experiences.

6.1 *A broad view of individual pathways*

a) Origin, motivation and attitudes of the volunteers

The founders of SCI were European, usually explicitly Christian, often conscientious objectors, and they were primarily working towards peace, reconciliation and mutual understanding, hoping to substitute civil service for compulsory military service where it existed. During the period covered

by these memories (1945-75) – and even more so afterwards – this context has changed completely. SCI has become truly international, developing outside Europe in countries with different cultures; Christianity has lost much of its influence; and the way wars are waged has drastically changed; military conscription has been abolished in many countries and has never existed in others. Keeping in mind this change of context, it is interesting to look at the volunteers of the second generation, from the point of view of their background, their motivations and their perception of their life in workcamps.

This raises three interrelated questions:

- To what extent were the contributors to this work particularly prepared for a commitment to civil service by their background, their culture or their beliefs?
- Were they convinced beforehand, or conversely, did their concrete experience in workcamps develop their convictions?
- Looking back on their experience decades later, what is their assessment of it, and to what extent did it correspond to their expectations (a point which will be dealt with in the conclusion)?

Firstly, there is a wide diversity in the contributors' countries of origin, their cultures and of their social origins. This raises the question of universal values, concerning the objectives of SCI. Do they determine commitment to the organization? As for the diversity of the contributors' social origins, it would appear that a lasting commitment to, or frequent participation in, voluntary service was possible for young people from lower or higher classes of society; however those volunteers with more financial resources in general are freer to volunteer. Thedy von Fellenberg sheds interesting light on this point and suggests that, at least in the West, the latter might have been perceived as a handicap.

This is probably less true for people from Southern Asia, where this could hardly have been possible for the poorest and least educated categories of the population, who did not have the resources and access to the information required in order to get involved.

Secondly, all the contributors to this work started doing voluntary work while they were youths, but many of them have continued or resumed their activity as adults and sometimes even as seniors. Let us recall in this connection that there seem to have been a good proportion of adult volunteers in the early days of SCI. Is it a specific feature of SCI? Has the

movement gotten younger as time has gone by, and what could be the implications?[29]

Thirdly, the older contributors grew up during the Second World War or the post-war decolonization period and, in one way or another, had been confronted with violence of some form or other: air-raid bombings for Dorothy Abbott-Guiborat and Roger Gwynn in London, also for Claire Bertrand near Paris and Hiroatsu Sato in Tokyo. There was also the brutal disappearance of Nelly Forget's Jewish schoolmates, and the partial destruction of Nicole Lehmann's home. In India, Valli Seshan was relocated from Madras because of perceived submarine threat, Devinder Das Chopra's family was among the refugees after Partition, while Bhuppy Kishore's family harboured refugees and Jean-Pierre Petit's father came close to being shot by the Nazis.

Younger British volunteers had been horrified by stories of war and deportation. Later on, French volunteers were particularly sensitive to the struggle for Independence in Algeria and started by working with migrant families (Nicole Paraire and Paulette Rabier). Conversely, Kader Mekki states that Algerian volunteers, who experienced a kind of apartheid in their homeland, longed for constructive relationships with Europeans. Nelly underlines the fact that Algerians badly needed to be recognized as equals and to find a friendly atmosphere that was otherwise unknown to them under the French colonial regime.

It is likely that this context of War, and the fact that the contributors to this work had been confronted with violence, had a big impact on their motivation to do something for Peace.[30] There are very few conscientious objectors (Arthur Gillette, Nigel Watt) in the sample. This is partly because the majority of the contributions are from women, and from Asian countries where military service was not compulsory. Anyway, seen from a worldwide viewpoint, there were not so many.

In the context of World War II, and the post-war era, travelling was almost impossible. This and the particular location where some of the new

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[29] 'Although voluntary service is not always undertaken by '*young people'*, on the basis of statistics one can state that it is basically a youth activity'. Ernesto Ottone : *Antécédents, potentialités et possibilités d'utilisation de volontaires par l'Unesco,* Unesco, 1982.

[30] Pierre Martin disagrees with the tendency to look for specific (religious, philosophical, political) motivations of the volunteers in Algeria in 1948. For him, "what is common between them is that they are men, and these men want to do something for peace"(In Kabylie). Nevertheless, for several contributors to this collection of reminiscences, the main idea was a broader concept of mutual understanding. The fight for conscientious objection was a marginal aspect of SCI goals.

volunteers came from may explain why a number of them mention their desire to get out of their isolation and to see the outside world after the war.

Round about the `60s, war looked more distant. The concern for development in poor countries became predominant and many young people wanted to do something about it. Ann Smith/Kobayashi is an example of this tendency of the period.

Religious beliefs do not appear to have been an explicit element in contributors' family backgrounds, or in their motivation to do civil service. Compared with the early years of SCI, this may be explained partly (as mentioned above) by the decreasing role of Christianity and by the fact that (at least in Europe) religious convictions were not expressed as overtly as during the time of Pierre Cérésole. However, even if these beliefs were discreet, they may well have been one of the factors governing an attitude of being considerate towards others in general, and of solidarity towards deprived people in particular. Although not clearly stated, a number of contributors do refer implicitly to their moral upbringing: "we are here not only to have a pleasant time, but also to use our privileges to help people who do not have them" (Thedy) or "fair shares for all" (Juliet Pierce).

Some contributors, either in relation to religion, or in their clearly non-religious attitude, express moral concern. Juliet refers to Christian values but also to the new ideals of the United Nations, rather than religious beliefs. Michèle Buijtenhuis wanted to be useful while keeping away from any religious ideal. Similarly, Thedy, marked by a Calvinist upbringing - but critical of his church - was looking for a form of solidarity unrelated to religion.

There was also sometimes a will to do something concrete, like Shigeo Kobayashi at the time of mass demonstrations by students in Tokyo; he felt that there should be something more meaningful to do.

Several former volunteers say that a normal job was not sufficient to meet their desire to be useful and to fight against injustice. This is said for example by David Palmer, who adds that he chose SCI rather than other organizations, in view of its moral goals. Martin Pierce was also looking for a more gratifying occupation than his job as a lawyer.

Finally, a few young people joined SCI just by chance, simply as another way of spending their vacations. However, there, they found a spirit and an ideal that fitted very well with their deeper convictions, even though these were not always explicit nor maybe not even conscious. This happened to RL in Gibraltar when, by chance, he met young people returning from an SCI camp in Algeria, to Claire, going to Norway with a

friend, to Martin, who thought that it would be fun to go on a workcamp in India with a friend, and once there, he felt 'at home'.

On this basis, it would be interesting to look at the historical development of attitudes towards voluntary work. However, this is a wide area of research, to which our sample of volunteers' memories only offers limited elements. We can only recall Dorothy's memories; according to her, in the United Kingdom after W.W.II, the volunteer spirit was widespread though in a context of poverty; she wonders whether this has lasted and if it still exists elsewhere.

On the other hand, Bhuppy Kishore referred to Ethelwyn Best, a pioneer, who, already in the `70s thought that the serious-mindedness of the volunteers was lost in India. Is this a question of generation - the typical reaction of a *senior*, or of the context? This is probably a universal and permanent debate. Elizabeth Crook also found that the volunteers that she met in the `90s were more concerned with practical and personal objectives than in her early days, but, there again it was with another association. One of these volunteers told her: "In the 1960s you were idealistic; we (in the 1990s) are more realistic". Similarly, the daughter of a former volunteer recently said, "Your generation hoped to change the world. Ours does not believe one can". Or perhaps the urgency for change in the aftermath of two catastrophic world wars gradually faded from peoples' memory.

b) Volunteers in the workcamps

Most of the contributors went abroad, often for a long period of time. Did SCI prepare them for it? At least two volunteers (David and Claire) observe that SCI had a rule requiring volunteers to have experience in their own country before being allowed to go on camps abroad, but that the rule was gradually relaxed. A number of other volunteers did not get any training before leaving, others do not mention it. Dorothy, among others, regrets that it was so. This situation seems to have persisted for a certain period of time, but we lack more specific information about it. On the other hand, Jean-Pierre and Nicole Paraire underline that they had participated (and still do) in SCI training programmes which they consider most important. The French Branch conducted formal orientation at Ariege in southern France and there was the Asian Regional Training Centre in India, continued by the Indian Secretariat under Bhuppy.

Particularly for the older volunteers (Dorothy, Nelly, Nicole Lehmann), the work was hard and the working hours were long. This may be partly explained by a shortage of resources and the poverty of the environment, and the example set by Pierre Cérésole was still fresh. Several volunteers (Dorothy, Nicole) state that they liked the hard manual work, or at least they

did not mind it. Anyway, it was in accordance with the original spirit of the movement. Dorothy adds that, at least during her time, it was specific to SCI that one had to pay the price with hard work and that it was positive, because it was the best way to create a feeling of solidarity and warm friendship, whilst abolishing differences. Phyllis pointed out that manual work transcended language barriers, enabling everyone to participate/communicate through work. Martin Pierce wrote that manual work was a practical means of giving people the experience of solidarity and of connectedness, beyond divisions of ideas, attitudes, customs and privilege. Others share this view, which seems to be important. Conversely, Emile Bernis remarks that the development of new non-manual activities does not facilitate the creation of group spirit. Linda Whitaker gives an example when she remembers that her work at the hospital in Bangladesh made her feel somewhat estranged from the rest of SCI team.

That nationals from countries which formerly considered themselves (or were seen as) superior, should do hard manual work has impressed many people, who sometimes could not believe that volunteers were working for free. It is amusing that, in Algeria as in India, people thought SCI volunteers were convicts. Similarly, when volunteers from very different social backgrounds did manual work together, it was particularly meaningful in countries where the social structure is very rigid and non-egalitarian. This is of course especially true in India, where it was probably only possible at that time because Gandhi had set an example. Incidentally, at that time, when the first volunteers arrived, shortly after Independence, his example was still very present. Today, it appears very far away indeed.

This being said, the memories illustrate the decreasing importance of manual work and of its duration. There are possible explanations for this change. The decreasing importance of manual work is probably partly related to the fact that nowadays there are more and more mechanical devices - particularly on emergency workcamps - and to the diversification of SCI's activities. Less arduous work is also likely to be related to rising expectations and standards of living, at least in Western countries. The duration of work for people in general tends to decrease in most countries, and attitudes towards work are evolving. In Asia a move from manual labor to community development work took place as a result of British government funds available to send qualified long term volunteers: for example, Ann to Thailand to teach English and Juliet to India as a physiotherapist.

Notwithstanding the emphasis on manual work and on the motto: 'Deeds, not words', already in the initial concept of workcamps, discussions used to be organized after work, in a rather systematic way. Themes were often related to SCI goals, such as non-violence. The memories vary on

this point, but a number of volunteers do not remember any organized discussions. Dorothy regrets it and would have preferred organized discussions to have been more systematically alternated with manual work. Phyllis recalls that a regular feature of all her workcamps in India were cultural exchange evenings, during which information on one's country's educational system, social customs, and marriage customs were exchanged in addition to national songs and dances. Spontaneous but meaningful discussions frequently accompanied the organized evenings.

The position of female volunteers in workcamps was theoretically related to the fact that the work was so hard physically. Initially, their specialization in housewives' tasks as "sisters" was supposed to spare them this hardship; but it is ironical, when Nelly observes that their work was sometimes even harder than that of the boys. Actually, it was mostly the predominant paternalistic culture of the time, which explained the particular status of female volunteers. The simple fact that they could actually participate in camps was seen as progress. Their emancipation can be seen in the stories, and Dorothy contributed to it. After Dorothy, a Westerner, the most extreme situation was that of Valli, who left India as a long-term volunteer at the end of the 50's and was later called to international responsibilities: but this is probably exceptional. With regards to SCI volunteers from Mediterranean countries, the under-representation of females as compared with males has remained a permanent factor. Likewise, it is interesting to observe that female volunteers from North Africa were more easily sent to India than to Europe (Jean-Pierre).

Several contributors remember that not only was the work physically hard, but living conditions in the workcamps were sometimes very rough. The lack of basic facilities was such that, thinking back to the Tlemcen project in 1962, Jean-Pierre believes that no volunteer would accept such conditions nowadays. On the other hand, Martin felt that the very simple living conditions in his camp were a welcome contrast with his previous experience where he had been treated like a 'privileged' person.

Overall, it is worth underlining that volunteers adapted very well to their environment, and to local standards of living, whether in Africa, Asia or North Africa. This greatly facilitated their integration into the community and the creation of personal relationships, on an egalitarian and friendly basis.

Workcamp life-style strongly contrasted with that of *settlers* or *Europeans* in the former colonial states (Dorothy, Nelly, Nicole), as did the attitude of the later 'foreigners' towards the indigenous people. The development of a constructive relationship between the colonizers and the colonized was usually difficult and often impossible. This was also due to different ideologies and attitudes. Clearly, the spirit of friendship and

equality of SCI was not compatible with the traditional colonial or post-colonial mentality. The most extreme example of this was in Algeria, during the period of tension experienced by Nelly. This ideological and cultural gap was also evident amongst traditional Christian missionaries in Algeria (Nelly), and elsewhere in Africa (Nicole Lehmann).

6.2 *SCI as seen by the contributors*

The memories collected here refer mostly to individual experiences, but they also refer, directly or indirectly, to SCI as a *movement* or an *organization*.

a) *Goals and orientations*

After reviewing the evolution of SCI in chapter 2 and the contributors' pathways, the following three points could be discussed. They are probably still valid today:

- The geographical context: the internationalization of SCI and its implications
- The time frame: changing goals and orientations in relation to the context and the continuity with the origins
- The specific character of SCI.

The issue of internationalization can be raised with regard to the movement's goals, and also concerning the attitudes and behaviour of the volunteers. As early as the late `50's, Dorothy, writing from India, raised some of the issues resulting from new developments within SCI outside Europe:

"Until 1948, SCI had only worked in one developing country: India. In the late 50's, it was active in four African and six Asian countries. It then became increasingly important to analyse the problems and the needs of these countries, and not to be satisfied - as was commonly the case formerly - to think that what is good for Europe is also good for the rest of the World. Fortunately, very few people still think in this way, but many have not yet undertaken the effort to find how to prepare ourselves carefully to be well prepared for the conditions prevailing in these countries, so that the work of SCI could bring a lasting and diversified assistance to the community."

Today, for Phyllis, the initial concept of SCI was to some extent 'Eurocentric'. On the one hand, the goals aiming at peace and international

understanding are universal and could easily be accepted, but differences in ways of working, of attitudes between Westerners and South Asians are still there. For her, it is thanks to the exceptional personality of some Asian SCI leaders that complete harmony and deep friendship with European volunteers developed.

In his biography, when referring to divergences between Europeans and Asians, Sato felt that the former tended to look at the world through their own particular *prism* and to keep a subtle form of paternalism and of feeling of superiority. On the same theme, but giving it a different assessment, Elizabeth remembers that SCI organized volunteer exchanges on an equal footing, whereas other organizations only offered their assistance. At least, we can say that SCI has been a pioneer, not only for developing activities in Asia, but also for giving high international responsibilities to Asians themselves, which was not usual at that time.

From a more political perspective, Franco Perna was in a position to perceive differences of view and attitudes between Asian and European volunteers. The latter were more inclined to get into politics and some of them were tempted to replace the motto: 'Deeds, not words' by 'Deeds and words', which would have been very different from Pierre Cérésole's initial concept. Nicole Paraire also observed differences of attitude between Europeans.

Arthur observed that, depending on their cultural environment, people are more or less predisposed to the idea of *civil service*. He refers to some African countries where education dispensed within the family implies learning about *rights*, but also *duties* towards the community. The idea that there should be a counterpart to rights (for example the right to go to school) is widespread. Therefore, people are more prepared to do civil service.

If we now look at the changes which have taken place over time concerning youth ideals and attitudes towards voluntary work, a reference may be made to E. Ottone who wrote in 1982: "Although international voluntary service work was initially inspired by a radical humanitarian pacifism, it later aimed at a great variety of ideals".

Earlier, back in the `60s, Arthur[31] felt that, compared with the development of many other workcamp organizations, the emphasis on high ideals and on Peace was specific to SCI. The most salient difference between SCI and other pre-war workcamp sponsors was the extent of SCI's commitment to overhauling society. 'Civilists' were not satisfied with

[31] *One million volunteers,* op. cit.

just improving social conditions; they sought to establish relations among men so new as to render useless, and replace, one of society's oldest institutions: the army. 'Civilism' was more extreme, and 'civilists' more *militant,* than the ideologies and supporters of most other organizations supporting workcamps. SCI was the only body in the idealistic stream to use workcamping for a well-defined political purpose. Civilists did not have to be pacifists, but volunteers in SCI camps agreed explicitly to demonstrate the feasibility of alternative service for conscientious objectors. As a result, over the years SCI has played an important – sometimes, decisive - part in obtaining the recognition of conscientious objection from the authorities, and implementing conscientious objector civilian service provision in Britain, West Germany, France and Italy.

Martin writes that pacifist ideology *was* and still *is* valid, where conscription still exists, but with the abolition of conscription in many countries, he does not believe that SCI has found another ideology to substitute for the older one. For him therefore, its role as a pacifist organization has decreased. Martin adds that in many countries the goals related to pacifism and non-violence have appeared too limited, so that SCI branches have tended to put less emphasis on the traditional ideology and to give more importance to practical objectives, which could attract young people. For him, this has deprived SCI of some of its power and impact.

For a number of former volunteers, building peace remained the main goal, in keeping with the origins of SCI, but with a broader interpretation, as indicated for instance by Nicole Paraire in her conclusion: 'SCI primarily means building peace through concrete action. Together with conscientious objectors, we have struggled to explain that when there is injustice in the world, of course this is the origin of War. If we fight against injustice, we are building peace'. Similarly, Jean-Pierre said that: "When something is happening in accordance with the spirit of SCI, with the participation of people of different origins, in a spirit of tolerance, in a concrete job of work - preferably manual -, rendering useful service to society, it is an act of Peace, strictly in accordance with Pierre Cérésole's views".

One may wonder whether excessive broadening of SCI goals does not risk diluting its efforts and calling into question its specific character. At least this seems to have been Bhuppy's concern, when he considers that SCI is not a social and humanitarian organization.

While the ideal of Peace has played a more important role for SCI than for others, we have seen that Christian convictions are less explicit than they used to be in the movement's early years. There does not seem to have been any problem of independence vis-à-vis the churches and religion. However, the orientation of SCI has been affected by other

ideological and political influences: from without by the national and international political context, and from within, through ideologies with political implications. Finally, with the spread of SCI to predominantly Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist countries, its non-sectarian nature was emphasized, and Christian language was not appropriate.

b) SCI and politics

The international political context has played an important role, firstly in the confrontation of East-West. Dorothy and Nelly were the first to go and work in Central European countries, where they encountered quite different attitudes from their Polish and Czech counterparts. Later on, exchanges were organized, as reported by Max Hildesheim, and by Arthur, who stresses the pioneering role played by SCI. It created some tension, on the one hand with communist organizations, who wished to further their cause by trying to enlist SCI, and on the other with those who were afraid such a commitment would violate a core SCI principle of working with all sides, as begun in Verdun. Arthur concludes that SCI was able to prove that systematic distrust between the two sides could be avoided. Max still has a very positive impression of the workcamp he went on in Moldavia. (It was during the *Khrushchev era and* not in *Russia*).

In France and in North Africa, the commitment to helping Algerians during the civil War which led to their Independence, played a very important role for SCI (particularly, of course, for the French branch) and raised difficult problems: how to fight for a subjected people's Independence against one's own government and face repression (particularly Nelly, but also Claire). There are also examples of the indirect influence of politics on SCI action. For instance, one volunteer regrets that her workcamp in North Africa was rather abruptly closed down, apparently because the institution, which financed the work, was shocked by the attitude of the volunteers from other Arab countries, who were volunteering for the war with Israel (1967).

In Asia there were also political disputes that impacted volunteers. Tension over Kashmir made exchanges of volunteers between India and Pakistan eventually impossible. The Indo-Pakistan War closed the Kasuali project with Tibetan refugee children, diverting volunteers to other projects. Linda Whitaker writes of being evacuated to Singapore during the civil war between East and West Pakistan. The Emergency in India affected the issuance of visas and the Satos were forced to leave. The subsequent difficulty in obtaining one year visas forced the Indian Branch to revise its exchange programme. In Sri Lanka, volunteer movement was restricted because of the Tamil Tiger clash with the government. Reading the

contributions makes one recall the historical context of the individual volunteers.

It is mostly the ideas and demonstrations of students during the late `60s and the early `70s which ushered in ideological differences inside SCI, as mentioned by a number of former leaders (Bhuppy, Franco, Jean-Pierre, Sato, Thedy, Valli). They refer to two types of differences that partly overlap: firstly, between those who wanted the movement to get more politically involved, and those who were against the idea on the grounds of traditional SCI ideals; secondly, between Europeans and Asians, the latter being far less concerned with these ideas and who had other priorities.

At a national level, several conflicts had implications affecting the organization of workcamps and for discussions between volunteers. Asian leaders succeeded to some extent in their attempts at overcoming hostility between Indian and Pakistani volunteers by mixing them in some camps. Devinder and Claire remember that it was very difficult for Arab volunteers to overcome their distrust of Israel.

c) Perceptions of SCI as a movement or an organization and its activities

Before discussing the few comments received on this issue, a preliminary question may be raised as to whether SCI is an organization. Franco gave a very interesting answer[32]: 'I have frequently used the term '*movement*', rather than '*service*', '*organization*' or – worse – '*agency*'; This has been intentional, for I have known SCI as a movement of people for whom the methods of doing things has generally been more important than what we are trying to do'. Valli says almost the same thing when she stresses that for SCI the important thing is *people* and not the *organization*, a rather specific feature as such, compared to other institutions, which she has known. Jean-Pierre, on the other hand, regrets that too much importance has sometimes been attached to problems of structure, while the organization itself was rather weak.

Franco adds a nice description of the way SCI operates when he says, "SCI has never offered ready-made ideas or blueprints, and your ideas had to be tested first". An outstanding example of this is Ralph Hegnauer, who always used to show great enthusiasm when someone came up with a proposal, but he would soon add, somewhat quietly and persuasively, "That's really a good idea, now go ahead and start to implement it". Naturally, many ideas that were put forward would not get much further

[32] 'Action', an article written in connection with the 70th anniversary of SCI, 1990.

than that, but a few would, and in the process, those concerned would get great satisfaction while contributing considerably to the movement.

Nevertheless, SCI has an International Secretariat, branches with their national secretariats and their staff, as well as committees and assemblies that make the main decisions. It is therefore difficult not to talk about a form of organization, even if it is rather specific. Like any other organization, SCI has been (and probably still is) faced with a dilemma: should priority be given to faithfulness to its origins and the specific character of the organization, at the risk of remaining small and marginal; or should the movement try to develop on a larger scale, at the risk of losing its soul? The latter orientation implies a more *professional* approach, at least with regards to management.

This dilemma (mentioned by Jean-Pierre) has, of course, implications with regard to financing. Here we may refer back to the UNESCO document from the `80s (see above), according to which the cost of volunteer work has become increasingly acute with the development of voluntary service. Undoubtedly, although there is little direct reference to the issue in the contributors' memories themselves, the operation and even the orientation of SCI has been seriously affected by a permanent shortage of resources. Bhuppy refers to the issue, but he seems to regret the initiative of some branches who tended to work in a more professional way (using publicity, increasing bureaucracy), thus to some extent losing the *voluntary* character of the movement.

Already back in the `50s, Dorothy, writing from India, expressed reservations with regard to a very large official organization like the Bharat Sewaj Samaj, as she feared that SCI might lose some of its independence. More recently, Nicole Paraire has underlined a permanent feature of SCI: its independence from any *institution* and its different relationship with money, as she feels that developing exchanges on an equal footing and maintaining a friendly relationship are not compatible with expensive bureaucracy and big money. However, minimum amounts of resources are required: where to find it without losing one's independence is a common problem: Nicole has found the solution by organizing voluntary money-raising activities

Another theme concerns decentralization. Paulette was concerned about the possibility that it would go too far, at the risk of losing the unity of the movement. Conversely, Sato appreciated that SCI was, at one and the same time, a national and an international movement: the autonomy accorded to the regions and to the national branches allowed them to adapt to their own specific culture.

The memories, whilst only briefly touching on traditional emergency, summer and weekend camps, provide an illustration of the diversification and internationalization of SCI's activities:

- workcamps for conscientious objectors (Emile);
- East-West exchanges with socialist countries (Arthur, Max, Devinder, Valli);
- long-term volunteers, particularly in the framework of Orient-Occident exchanges (a lot of stories);
- community development/long term projects (Nangoli, Vedantangal, Hatibari, Pahariya, Kimpu, etc.
- women and development work (Nicole Paraire);
- work with handicapped youth (Dorothy, Jean-Pierre).

The development and diversification of these activities are only some examples of a more general trend affecting voluntary service, but SCI has played a pioneering role. This is particularly true of East-West workcamps and of the concern for development[33]. Is this diversification faithful to the origins of the movement? There is a reference to this issue in Sato's biography. He thought that adaptation was necessary, whilst maintaining Pierre Cérésole's ideals. He believed that following the core principles would prevent SCI activities from becoming simply *social gatherings*. He was always ready to invent innovative actions, adapted to a variety of contexts, from India to the US.

Martin regrets that SCI has not always been confident enough in using the workcamp method in situations where political and social change is possible and that, during his time, preference had all too often been given to safe *'arrangements'* rather than to challenging projects. As already mentioned, Bhuppy recalls that SCI is basically a workcamp organization and he apparently regrets that this has sometimes been forgotten.

Dorothy and Nicole Paraire emphasize the need for more continuity, a point already brought up by Pierre Martin in the UNESCO Courier in 1948. He was afraid that, apart from doing concrete work, little would be left from the workcamp in Kabylie with regard to what they tried to teach the villagers. For Dorothy, SCI has not sufficiently built on what has been done: spending two months in a village may create a friendly atmosphere, but after the volunteers' departure, nothing is left. She feels that some follow-

[33] E. Ottone, and Arthur Gillette, op. cit.

up would be desirable. Similarly, Nicole Paraire insists on the time required to establish and maintain a friendly relationship. During volunteers' training period, they are told that the most important thing is to go back to the same place. On an individual basis, the memories give many examples of such lasting relationships.

d) Efficiency of the organization

According to the UNESCO document from 1982 (see above) every type of voluntary service has three aspects:

- The result or objective value, from a practical point of view, in terms of the work done - the contribution made to society, whether at a national or local level, economically, socially or culturally.
- The self-learning value for those who take part in this sort of activity.
- The pioneering aspect which heralds in another form of a more human and more noble relationship between man and work, and its potential for providing an experience of solidarity.

The stories collected here provide a good illustration of the relative meaning of the concept of *efficiency* in voluntary service. Referring to the above distinction, we can look at the stories from the point of view of the *concrete* short-term *results*, of the long-term *impact* on the environment, and of the *implications* for the volunteers themselves (end of the chapter). At the same time, we have to look at conflicting intangible goals. For example, in the immediate post-colonial era in the Indian sub-continent, there was an aim of demonstrating the dignity of manual labor (carried over from Cérésole's first work there) and breaking down barriers between the local people and former colonial masters. In order to give deference to the leadership of local organisers, many times LTVs found themselves abstaining from Western concepts of efficiency.

The former volunteers in our sample take a modest, objective, and sometimes critical view of the short-term concrete results of their work. However, we should recall that this limited sample is not representative of all SCI volunteers, particularly since there is little reference to large-scale emergency workcamps, which were expected to give more concrete results with more resources. One of the most positive assessments comes from Jean-Pierre, when referring to the work in the Tlemcen area in the early sixties, which allowed a number of lives to be saved and which contributed to the re-building and re-birth of several villages. Likewise in Algeria,

before-Independence, Nelly's memories show that SCI played a pioneering role in the beginning of the social centres, an historical development.

This overall positive assessment contrasts with a number of more critical impressions at the local level, which can be explained either by lack of adequate resources or by poor workcamp management. They primarily concern the traditional 'pick and shovel' workcamps, but even the long-term volunteers assigned to medical or social tasks have sometimes a modest idea of their contribution. For Elizabeth, its usefulness was limited by the shortage of resources. Marie Catherine and, even more so, Nicole Lehmann feel that African and Asian mothers did not have much to learn from them.

The efficiency of reconstruction projects is discussed in more detail by David, who compares his experiences in Algeria and in Iran, where the latter project was run by an organization with substantial financial resources. This discussion raises two issues:

- To what extent should the participation of SCI volunteers in workcamps abroad which are under the responsibility of other organizations, be subjected to guarantees? Guarantees concerning project objectives, the spirit in which they are carried out, and how they are managed?

- Is it desirable to resort to paid professionals, at the risk of neglecting the goals and the spirit of workcamping?

Talking of *professionalism*, Thédy has a straightforward, but particularly interesting conclusion, which is worth reproducing here. "After the end of my voluntary work, I was completely disillusioned: I thought that it was not serious. The *amateur* character of SCI and the fact that the voluntary work did not imply any obligation were discouraging for me. As an active man, I felt that I was wasting my time. But, strangely enough, among the number of organizations with which I have worked, no other had had such an impact on all my life. This is despite – or maybe precisely because of - the lack of professionalism, the weakness and, I would say, the naïve character of SCI. It is precisely this deeply moving simplicity which has been warming my heart, in spite of all my disappointments: a concrete service for those who are suffering, regardless of their colour, religion and culture, based on love and compassion"[34].

Similarly, Martin says that, "One wonderful aspect of SCI has always been that, for the most part, its volunteers may not 'have a clue' or be

[34] Ernesto Ottone, op. cit

highly productive, but their aspirations and their commitment are what makes the difference".

Already in the `50s in India, Dorothy raised the question of the practical value of the aid provided by volunteers. She underlined that the costs, apparently modest, were in fact high compared to local standards and that there was plenty of cheap labour available. Her conclusion was that the important thing was the human value of work which, until then had been associated with the lower classes. That these human relations are more important than concrete results for the majority of contributors, is illustrated by Thedy, when Valli was visiting his workcamp in India and he told her of his frustrations. She simply asked him, "Did you make any friends?" A similar conclusion is drawn by most contributors.

Likewise, after long international experience with a variety of organizations, Valli draws a very positive conclusion of the pioneering role of SCI. She writes that: "Almost 50 years ago SCI could envisage women volunteers from India working in Europe, volunteers from France participating in actions in Algeria during the war of Independence, East-West work- and-study camps whilst continuing efforts to support conscientious objectors. SCI was also active in negotiating with the Indian and Pakistani authorities for setting up workcamps simultaneously after partition, exchanging volunteers between both countries as well as being forerunners and a model to many overseas volunteer programmes". She concludes that SCI workcamps enunciated modern-day principles of personal growth, team work, leadership, conflict-resolution, process-orientation empowerment (without labeling them as such or theorizing) and that these principles have been successfully implemented.

Other volunteers (e.g. Juliet, Sato) draw similar conclusions from their experience and point to the specific character of SCI and its contribution to mutual understanding between different peoples.

6.3 *Personal benefits and impact*

It is on this theme that contributors have most to say and have very convergent views.

For instance, Elizabeth Crook emphasizes her continuing faithfulness to the goals and values of SCI. Juliet goes so far as to say that her experience has completely changed her life and her political views. Martin and Linda refer to personal transformation and a feeling of achievement.

Most former volunteers state that their experience with SCI has meant an opening up to the world and to people in general, which seems to be the

most important and the most common conclusion. According to Claire and David, their understanding of, and interest in, other cultures, especially the Arab world and Islam, has been a direct result of their relationship with SCI. RL says that he has become more tolerant. A number of stories refer to travels, periods of life abroad and international marriages. Sato felt he had become *a citizen of the world*.

Today, reading these memories and stories written about SCI from around the `50s and `60s, one gets the impression that their idealism and wonder is somewhat obsolete. What is striking is - in addition to the stories themselves - that, at that time, the discovery of such cultures as those of India, Africa, and even North Africa was something which was quite extraordinary. Today we are much more familiar with these different *worlds* through TV and tourism, in other words due to globalization. So the impact of a workcamp experience abroad might be less striking now, but other types of experience provided by the modern world are probably much less meaningful and enriching and more superficial than taking part in a workcamp with shared objectives for a particular period of time. Manual work together transcended language and cultural differences, and 'Deeds, not Words' became a common bond.

Another dimension of the opening up to the outside world is its impact on volunteers' political awareness and ideas. An earlier orientation was confirmed (Martin), new and different points of view were discovered (Claire, Max).

In addition, SCI often had an impact on volunteers' career orientation (Cathy and Juliet for instance). Some of them decided to give up promising and profitable carees to become, more or less, lifelong volunteers, either within SCI (Bhuppy, Jean-Pierre) or in different organizations with similar social or humanitarian goals (Martin, Thedy, Valli). Martin states that his current work, and what he brought personally to it, has been greatly influenced by his work with SCI. Even though they did not change their orientation, the way people with medical or social qualifications have since practiced their professions, or the extent to which they became involved in their fields of specialization, was modified through their SCI experience (Marie Catherine, Nicole Lehmann, Linda, Roger). The experience gained was useful to them, and although they later went on to work in a large organization Nelly, Arthur and Devinder attempted to overcome its rather bureaucratic style and to transfer into their work environment the values and the approach that they had used with SCI.

. . . . .

The contributors to this collection of stories were enthusiastic about their experience, and had the feeling that they had participated in an individual and collective adventure. In many ways, they were pioneers. After reading their memories, several questions come to the fore:

- To what extent were they representative of a movement, of a type of activity, of a period?

- If the period covered by these memories may be seen (as some of them say) as a *golden age* of SCI, *how* and *why* did it end? Was it the result of broad changes in the volunteer spirit or of more specific developments within SCI?

- Are SCI's goals and approach still relevant in today's world?

Such broad and ambitious questions go beyond the scope of this work. However, it would be appropriate to consider here a few words from Valli, Phyllis and Martin's conclusions.

Valli: "If at times SCIers feel that the movement has not done well, we may have to look critically at what we *have done* or *not done,* and not hastily conclude that the origins, the aims and even the method are irrelevant. Certainly modifications according to present 'times' will be useful to 'make sense' of evolving situations. Have we come across anything more fundamental a statement that human beings need to break down their prejudices? And act on it!"

Phyllis: "With the internet and the speed of global news, today's youth have a much wider exposure to cultures other than their own. Certainly, there is a lot more knowledge that is superficial or *virtual*. I think that does not impart the essence of struggling together, often under difficult conditions, to accomplish something and to make a direct connection with strangers. Even in our technological societies, there seem to be numerous opportunities for the personal touch in bringing Muslims, Jews, Christians, Hindus together, or helping in crises playing out of sight of our headlines like in the Sudan. The passion and the innovation have to come from today's activists; however the importance of making direct connections is age-old."

Martin: "Not much has changed that would make SCI less relevant. Divisions and conflicts at a personal, communal, and international level require just as imaginative and transformative commitments from individuals. Whilst alternatives to military service may no longer be as much required, given the voluntary nature of most armed services, the visible demonstration of the power of individuals, whatever their superficial

differences, to transform divisions and conflicts in the world remains as essential as ever.”

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