



Culture of Peace: Thoughts on refugees past and those to come

BY [BARB SETTLES](#) December 01, 2018

I'm grateful for David Wick and Irene Kai's invitation to share my thoughts for this column on the culture of peace. As we gathered near the World Peace Flame on Nov. 11, we returned Peace Corps volunteers (RPCV) who were dubbed "vets" and honored by the Veterans for Peace and the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission, the community, the Rogue Valley Peace Choir and the guest speakers were all part of the display of gratitude in the culture of peace. Gifts of World Peace Flame candles were given to each RPCV as we stated our names and our countries of service.

As I heard the list of countries where Peace Corps volunteers served, many of them which are no longer asking for service, and some which are still on the roster, my heart sank at the mention of some countries, especially Afghanistan, Yemen and Honduras. We as PCVs had access to lives in those countries when they were peaceful and promising. We worked in a permissiveness to support the needs in social welfare, education and health, which was valued by the host countries, especially in safeguarding the futures of their children.

In return for our service, they showed us the treasures of their cultures, gave us full range of travel through ancient landscapes, and a doorway to understanding their cultures through their family events, national parades, and pageants. What struck me when I heard the list of countries was that we as foreign PCVs had access to more beauty, peaceful times and richness of

culture, than those born now from Afghanistan, Yemen Haiti, or Honduras will ever know.

How many citizens of those countries are refugees in some pocket of the world, far from their homelands? It is heart breaking to talk to my few friends from those countries, now living in large cities in the world, those children will never know the peaceful times of their homelands. Those who were “forced out” have the bittersweet present. They have new lives for their families but, in conversations, it is clear that there is an ever-longing wish to return to their homelands. But there is no going back to war and terror, until peace takes over.

It happened quickly, they say, their loss, although historians, political scientists, economists and educators relay facts to the contrary. Such disruptions of government and culture grew in time. Had people worked together, educated themselves as they did, predictable disaster could have been averted.

As I see pictures of refugees of today, from all over the world, it strikes me that this pattern is set to repeat itself. How many refugees will be fleeing the chaos of harsh fires and coastal flooding from mega-cities? How many people have not stopped to heed the data, the signs and the paths to disaster which could cause another wave of refugees? Will millions of people reminisce on their recent past carefree lives, beautiful landscapes, and close communities, as they struggle to relocate? Will they ask, “What happened?”

In this season of gratitude, I am grateful that we are near the World Peace Flame to remind us that we can be mindful and participate in the culture of peace to protect the future of the world. We can heed the signs of threatening environmental issues; we can make choices and make it easier for others to make choices to stave off disasters. We can build in a clause in our individual peace plans that there will be no more refugees.

Barbara Settles has lived in Ashland since 2015. She is a member of the [Southern Oregon Returned Peace Corps Volunteers](#), of the [Citizens Climate Lobby](#), the [Rogue Valley Peace Choir](#), and of our Ashland community. Email comments and questions to ashlandcpc@gmail.com. The ACPC website is www.ashlandcpc.org; like the commission on Facebook at www.facebook.com/AshlandCultureofPeaceCommission; follow twitter.com/AshlandPeace on Twitter. All are welcome to join the

ACPC's Talking Circle at 11 a.m. each Tuesday and Community Meeting at 4 p.m. each Wednesday, both at the ACPC office, 33 First St., Suite 1, diagonally across Lithia Way from the Ashland Post Office.