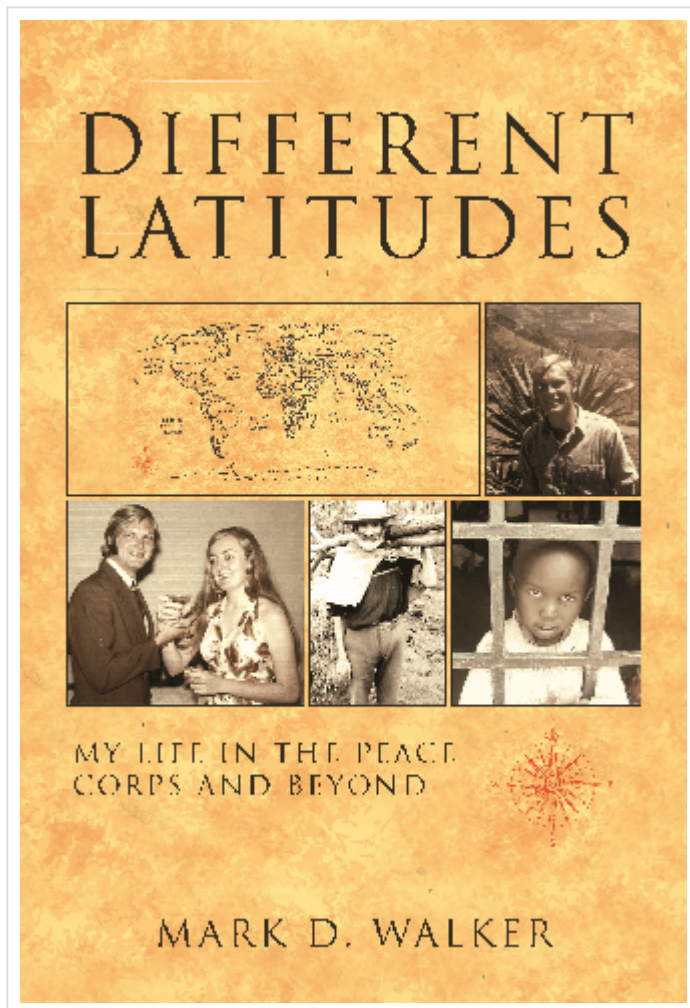


Latin American Studies Alumnus Chronicles Peace Corps Journey in 'Different Latitudes'

Posted on **May 4, 2017** by **Jessica Sinn**



As graduation looms right around the corner, many soon-to-be UT alums will be traveling far and wide on missions to change the world. From the Peace Corps to Teach for America, our jet-setting Longhorns will be making an impact in high-need regions of the world. In a book titled "**Different Latitudes: My Life in the Peace Corps and Beyond**" (Peace Corps Writers, April 2017), Latin American Institute alumnus Mark D. Walker chronicles his Peace Corps journey in various countries beset by poverty and political corruption.

Synopsis (from the publisher): Summer, 1971. A naive young man must decide his path upon graduation from a small university in Colorado. Amidst the turmoil of the counterculture years and the looming possibility of being sent to Vietnam, he concludes that he wants to travel, serve, and, if possible, save the world. As a Peace Corps volunteer Mark embarks on a vigorous cross-cultural experience in a Caribbean and two Central American countries, with a final stop in one of the more isolated areas of the highlands of Guatemala.

Though beset with a fear of the unknown and feelings of profound isolation due to being the only volunteer in a remote village, he eventually gets to know and appreciate the people of the rural communities he is privileged to live among. After a near-death experience takes him to another part of Guatemala and eventually to a horse town, Mark meets the love of his life, Ligia, who will bear him three children and be part of a lifelong commitment to and appreciation of this beautiful and unique country. Much of the courtship process will take place on a coffee plantation owned by Ligia's family, where Mark experiences a different side of Guatemalan society.

While Ligia selflessly abandons her own career to focus on establishing a stable bi-cultural home for their three children during the violent Guatemalan Civil War, Mark's "wanderlust" takes him on a four month solo trek through Latin America and then a country change based on threats from a guerrilla group. Mark's 13-year career promoting rural development through various international NGOs begins when he sets up a local development agency in Guatemala to help the poorest of the poor, whose plight is at least partially due to the policies of his own government.

Eventually family circumstances force a radical career change and a return to the United States to begin a 30-year calling. Inspired by the "extreme do-gooders" he'd met along his journey, he takes some of the wealthiest American families in the world to meet some of the world's poorest in some of the most isolated, unstable countries. This leads to many adventures, with both wealthy and poor growing from their shared experiences.

Mark's career comes to a sudden and unexpected turn after he is let go as the CEO of one of these international NGOs, and this frees him up to focus on his three children and six grandchildren. This twist in the road also provides a new opportunity to reflect on what he has accomplished, where he's failed, and where the international NGO community has come up short. *Different Latitudes* is more than a travel memoir. It is a tale of physical and spiritual self-discovery through Latin American, African, European, and Asian topography, cuisine, politics and history.

Visit the [author's website](#) to learn more about his good work in publishing and human rights advocacy.

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