

## “Way Back When”

Fred began Peace Corps training at **The Center for International Living** in Brattleboro, VT in October 1962. His group, Dominican #5 – Cooperative Development, was substantively trained there by the **Credit Union National Association**, in addition to Spanish language and area studies instruction. This was followed by an “**Outward Bound**” course (based on a British military orientation program designed to help trainees cope with unfamiliar physical challenges) in Puerto Rico during January 1963. Dominican #5 arrived in Santo Domingo in early February, in the still uncertain times less than two years after the fall of the Trujillo dictatorship, and just three weeks before the inauguration of **Juan Bosch**, the country’s first democratically elected president in many decades.

During an orientation week in Santo Domingo, the group discovered that the Dominican government agency responsible for the promotion of cooperatives had yet to be staffed, much less begun operations. Nevertheless, Dominican #5 members were dispersed to all parts of the country. Fred was posted to San Pedro de Macorís (SPM), then a town of some 30,000 inhabitants about 75 kilometers east of the capital, and essentially left to his own devices.

Making a survey of local conditions, he contacted local authorities, city elders and ordinary townspeople, during which he discovered a felt need for sporting facilities. Consequently, he set about organizing a youth group to undertake the construction of several basketball-volleyball courts with the invaluable assistance of the regional public works engineer. Supportive citizens led by Rotary Club members contributed to a non-profit foundation (*Patronato Deportivo de*

*SPM*) that a prominent local attorney helped Fred establish to collect funds for the project.

Another boon was having the use of a 4WD vehicle. Unlike now, PCVs were allowed to drive back then, and when a large shipment of “Peace Corps blue” Chevy pickups (reportedly destined for Brazil) was somehow diverted to the Dominican Republic, they became available to certain volunteers for their projects.

One of the sites chosen for court construction was at a rural teacher training school where Fred was eventually invited to reside and teach a course in cooperative development. Ultimately, five courts were constructed at various points around town; the main one was equipped with concrete stands and floodlights for night play. With the help of Peace Corps staff, a group of volunteers was brought to town in order to inaugurate the court with a night game against a local team.

During the 1964 Holy Week holiday when most students went home, Fred took those few unable to leave school on a day-long orientation tour of the eastern part of the island, a lush region devoted mainly to the cultivation of sugar cane and cattle ranching. Taking a break halfway through the journey, Fred pulled off onto a grassy area so the students, accompanied by their principal, could stretch their legs. As the drive was about to resume, a loud clatter emanated from the front of the pickup after which the check engine light appeared. Upon inspection it was discovered that the right front wheel had accidentally stopped atop one end of a curved palm frond stem (*penca*) whose opposite end had risen behind the grill and, upon engine ignition, had deflected the fan blades into the radiator. This caused a surface tear from which coolant had begun to leak.

So there they were, literally in the middle of nowhere, with an apparently disabled vehicle! But the rural surroundings were hardly unfamiliar to the resourceful students. While some removed the palm frond from under the vehicle and bent the fan blades back into place, another picked a plantain from a nearby tree and, peeling same, applied a glob of fruit to the damaged radiator whose heat immediately caused the fruit to sizzle into a seal of the leak. Luckily, the makeshift repair held and, after topping off the radiator with bottled water that had been brought along, the drive was completed without further incident.

### **Third Goal Takeaways:**

- The success of the sports facilities' construction project was mainly due to the goodwill and sweat equity of local youths who contributed endless hours of manual labor (as did Fred himself). Also crucial to its success was the monetary and physical support by municipal and public works authorities, as well as by leading townspeople. They bought into the project despite its conception and leadership by a young American volunteer with only rudimentary Spanish.
- Ironically, the *Patronato Deportivo* established to raise funds for the project was chartered under a law introduced by American military authorities during the country's occupation from 1916 to 1924. But the Marines also introduced the game of baseball and the rest, as they say, is history. Fred recalls a headline in the country's national dailies in mid-1963 announcing that President **Juan Bosch** had sent a telegram of congratulations to San Francisco Giants' (and eventual Hall of Fame) hurler, **Juan Marichal**, for having pitched a no-hitter, terming it a great feat (*una gran hazaña*). More than one hundred Dominicans now play for major league baseball teams.

- Although **Juan Bosch** was removed from office only seven months after his inauguration in a bloodless *golpe de estado*, volunteers continued their activities unfazed and without interruption. But the experience gave them a deeper appreciation for the long tradition of regular, peaceful government transitions in the USA.
- The somewhat comical (in retrospect) damaged pick-up truck incident demonstrated that local know-how, no matter how rudimentary, is an invaluable asset to any undertaking.