

Marilyn Carr wrote “I became one of the many people who had their entire life changed by and owed their UN career to this extraordinary woman.” I am another of those whose life changed because of Peg. Even more than my career, Peg shaped the way I learned to deal with the world: how not to be stopped by conventional limits, how to think outside of the box.



Peg and Nancy

Photo courtesy Comfort Lamptey, collection of Marilyn Carr

I came to Addis Ababa in 1975 with my Ethiopian husband Berhanu (after we had both finished our PhDs in Boston). Haile Selassie had been overthrown, and my husband had been one of the founders of the student movement in North America that was highly influential in that happening. After the Emperor was deposed, Berhanu wanted us to return to Ethiopia as soon as possible. But unfortunately the Dergue took power before we got there, and Berhanu didn't get to have a hand in his dream of building a democratic Ethiopia.

I had an offer to teach at Addis Ababa University, but shortly after we arrived the university was shut down after shooting incidents that killed both students and professors. While looking for some other employment, I heard of the newly established women's program (the first international program on women in development) at the headquarters of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. Shortly before moving to Ethiopia, Edna Bay and myself, edited a collection of articles published as *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change* (Stanford U. Press, 1975). I went to ECA and met Peg Snyder. After we talked for a while she said, “We can offer you a contract for \$300 to do an annotated bibliography on women and development in Africa.” Having no other offers, I took it! That contract turned into 25 years of employment in the United Nations – first, 11 years as head of research and publications at the African Training and Research Center for Women that Peg had founded at ECA, then heading the Program to Promote Information Technology in Africa (until my retirement in 2000).

Peg was always very encouraging of those she worked with, but she was also a firm taskmaster. In 1978 the Swedish funding of ATRCW (even though ATRCW became one of the most successful programs at ECA, it never had any funding from the UN budget until about 1985!) was under review. We needed to finish the publication of some 15 reports and studies that had been completed, but at the time there was no paper to be had at ECA or elsewhere in Addis Ababa at the time – it was the period of the “Red Terror” and the Eritrean uprising. I told Peg: “We can't do it. There's no paper at

ECA or elsewhere In Addis Ababa, and the ports are closed.” Peg said, “And you’re going to let that stop you?”

I managed to find a solution; I contacted the American Embassy and found that they had a surplus of A4 paper that they couldn’t use because it wasn’t US letterhead standard. I identified funds to buy the paper, and we printed all the studies that had been completed and got our funding renewed.



Peg at Nancy’s daughter’s wedding in Isla Mujeres
Photo collection of Ribka

When Peg was appointed Director of the newly-established Voluntary Fund for the Development of Women at United Nations, New York in 1978, necessitating relocation to New York. I continued to live and work in Addis Ababa, but stayed closely in touch with Peg, always visiting her when I went on home leave to the US. I remember especially visiting her when I was 8+ months pregnant with my daughter-to-be Ribka in 1979. Afterwards Peg often told people “Nancy almost had her baby on my couch.” She became Ribka’s unofficial godmother, and at age 79 flew to Isla Mujeres in Mexico to attend my daughter’s wedding.

Peg was the most selfless person I have ever known. The stories of her kindness are legion. They stand out immensely for me. Most importantly, though, she was unwavering in her dedication to improving the situation of women in Africa. Her passing is a great loss to humanity.