

Peace Corps Iran Country Directors, Part 2

This article covers directors who served from 1971-76. See the September 2014 issue of *KhabarNameh* for directors who served from 1962-71. The number of Iranian and American staff who served with Peace Corps Iran is large. While many are mentioned in this article, I look forward to highlighting others in a future “Where Are They Now?”. As always, forgive errors in history, as it is a challenge to recreate the Peace Corps Iran world of so long ago; records are lost; people die; memories fail. Please volunteer to be included in a future “Where Are They Now?” by contacting me at genna@peacecorpsiran.org.

1971-74 – WARREN SAWYER

Paul Zimmerman left in May of 1971. A few months later **Warren Sawyer** arrived from India, having served as Peace Corps regional director in New Delhi from 1969-71. Director Sawyer’s wife Joan arrived with five children to raise—plus mothering the many volunteers who were always welcome in their home. A number of program, organizational, and staff changes occurred under Warren’s directorship: volunteer assignments were refocused to rural and smaller cities; language and medical staffing was now handled by Iranians. Among staff changes, his deputy, John Hansen, returned to Washington, D.C.; Lawrence Irvin, who had come to Iran as program officer to replace Roger Wangness, became country director in Tunisia; Quentin Fleming arrived as Lawrence Irvin’s replacement. Two departing staff members had served as volunteers: Mike Jerald in Turkey, and **Mike Hillmann** in Mashhad. Others who left included Arakel Baroyan, Farshid Banani, and Terry Salayer. In July 1974, after five years with the Peace Corps, it was time for director Sawyer and his family to return to the U.S. This had been an extremely rewarding time, he says, five of the best years of his life—so far.

Warren and Joan Sawyer live in Massachusetts and attended the Boston mini-reunion in 2013. They are active founding members of The Caleb Group which, since 1992, has provided housing and support services for the disadvantaged throughout the northeastern U.S., serving 30 cities and towns, with 2,000 apartments available for those displaced and homeless. The Sawyers’ children loved the years they spent with the Peace Corps. Their parents’ lives and their Peace Corps years influenced them to pursue service to others and social justice. All five work in fields helping others: Debra works for The Caleb Group, Sandy is a teacher, Heidi works with those who have Alzheimer’s, Douglas is a cardiologist, and Holly works with the homeless.

1974-75 – EDWARD H. THOMAS

Edward Thomas came to Iran well equipped for his role as country director—he spoke Farsi and had a deep knowledge of the country. He learned Farsi shortly after graduating from college in 1948, when he moved to Kabul, Afghanistan to teach math for two years. After joining the State Department, he was assigned as American vice consul in Tabriz from 1957-59, where he met and married his French/Iranian wife Lelah. From 1959-62, he served as consul in Mashhad, where their first daughter, Leslie, was born. Returning to Washington, D.C., he was sent to Princeton University for a year of Iranian studies and was then assigned to the Iran desk in Washington.

Among Director Thomas’ career highlights was being assigned as Farsi/English interpreter for Afghanistan’s last king, Zahir Shah, when he was invited by President John F. Kennedy to visit Washington in September of 1963. Sitting in as interpreter on discussions between the king and the president proved a lasting memory, as the president was assassinated a few months later.

In 1964, he volunteered for a new State Department program offering assignments as Peace Corps staff. This led to a number of Peace Corps positions over the next ten years. From 1964-66, he was programs, planning and field officer in Iran; from 1966-68 he set up and became

deputy director for a new program in Libya; this was followed by a tour in Morocco as deputy. He served as country director in Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) before receiving his last assignment, replacing Warren Sawyer as country director in Iran. Since she had family in Tabriz, Lelah Thomas was pleased each time their assignments took them back to Iran.

After retiring from the State Department, Ed and Lelah Thomas moved to Dallas, where their second daughter, Isobel, lives. After his wife's death in 1995, Ed Thomas served on the board of the Institute of Medieval and Post-Medieval Studies and taught continuing education courses at Southern Methodist University. In 2013, he moved to Washington, D.C. where at the age of 88 he lives in an assisted living facility near his daughter's home.

1975-76 – QUENTIN W. FLEMING

Quentin Fleming served as the last country director, concurrently directing the Peace Corps program in Bahrain. His career with the Peace Corps began in Washington, D.C. in 1971. Assigned as program officer in Iran, he, his wife Elaine, and their children moved to Tehran. He became Edward Thomas's deputy, and country director upon Thomas's departure. By the time he took over as director, the number of volunteers in Iran had declined to about 80. On June 30, 1976, after fourteen years, the Peace Corps left Iran, closing the doors at #65, Takht-e Jamshid Avenue.

Quentin Fleming and his wife both came from Detroit, but have called California home since they married in 1953. Their family includes twin sons and a daughter. With bachelor and master's degrees in management, he spent the majority of his career in project management. In 1991, after 30 years in the aerospace and defense industry, he started his own consulting firm. He has published management textbooks and developed college-level courses. Quentin Fleming lives in Tustin, California.