

## John Miksic

- **Country of Service: Malaysia**
- **Assignment: First Term – Agricultural Extension Worker; Second Term – Elementary School Mathematics and Science training for teachers**
- **Service Tours: First – 1968-70; Second – 1970-72**
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### Service Description:

In my first term, I drew upon my experience growing up on a small farm in western New York State. We had four family farms in the same area. My grandfather and uncles had dairy cattle and sheep. My parents raised chickens for eggs.

In my second term, I taught teachers about new methods of teaching mathematics and science to children in grades 1-3.

### Life and Career Impact:

I studied archaeology at Dartmouth, including participating in a summer expedition to northeastern Canada to excavation Inuit sites. In Malaysia, I learned Malay, and during my first term I visited rural areas in the course of conducting surveys regarding current agricultural practices, and the attitudes of farmers regarding mechanization and the formation of cooperatives.

After leaving Malaysia in 1972, I entered a Master's Degree program at Syracuse University for social work managers, but almost immediately I realized that I wanted to go back to Southeast Asia and pursue archaeological research. I had seen fascinating archaeological sites during my visits to rural areas on my motorcycle, and realized that nobody was working on that topic. I received an MA from Ohio University in Southeast Asian Studies in 1974, and was accepted to do a PhD at Cornell. I obtained a Fulbright Hayes grant to join an Indonesian expedition to northeast Sumatra. Indonesian language is quite close to Malay, so I was able to discuss archaeological methodology with the Indonesian team. They eventually allowed me to take some samples from the site we excavated back to the US.

I finished my PHD in 1979, and was offered two jobs. One was in Wyoming teaching general archaeology; the other was a rural development consultancy in southwest Sumatra. I chose the latter. After two years in Bengkulu, Sumatra, I was offered a fellowship to move to Yogyakarta, central Java, to teach new archaeological methods at Gadjah Mada University. I stayed in Yogyakarta until 1987, during which time I conducted a short excavation in Singapore. I was offered a job teaching at the National University of Singapore. I have been here ever since.

In 2017 I retired as an Emeritus Professor of Southeast Asian Studies from NUS, and was offered a job as a Senior Research Fellow at Nanyang Technological University. My Singaporean wife, who is also an archaeologist, has obtained grants from the National Heritage Board of Singapore to analyze artifacts excavated here and in other parts of Southeast Asia.

### **Additional Observations:**

- Describe what motivated you to join the Peace Corps: A desire to find some way to help the poor rural dwellers of the world to improve their standard of living.
- Describe any differences you were aware of between being posted alone in a village and being with other Americans? I lived in a small town, where nobody spoke English, so my Malay language ability improved pretty fast. I also found it relatively easy to be accepted into the local society, since I was working with local people 24/7.
- What was the importance and difficulty of speaking local dialects? There was an appreciable difference between standard Malay and the dialect spoken in my area. It took me about 6 months to familiarize myself with northern Malay, but thereafter it helped me considerably to communicate with the villagers.
- What experiences stand out most? When I went to one village with my counterpart, we met some resistance from villagers who thought I was another imperialist who wanted to colonize them. My counterpart said that my skin was white, but my heart was black, which in this context meant I had a local perspective.
- What was the most challenging (perhaps least enjoyable?) aspect of your experience? Health problems, especially diarrhoea. Also, my motorcycle was stolen.
- What were the one or two of the most amusing or memorable experiences you had? Becoming accepted among the rural population and getting invited to many weddings, at which I was treated like a guest of honor.
- What was the coolest PC job in your assigned country? Mine, I assume.
- What are the most significant cultural, socio-economic, and/or political insights about your host country and the Peace Corps itself? The greatest impression the experience had on me was the feeling of being accepted by people very different from myself once I learned how to speak their language. I also felt that the Peace Corps approach was doing a lot more for the local people than governmental programs, but that the two-year time of service was too short to become really effective. About the time I really understood what was going on in the society, it was time to leave.
- How do think your host area/country benefitted from your Peace Corps service? By giving me a chance to describe America to the rural dwellers around campfires on long evenings without electricity.
- What did you miss out on at home during your Peace Corps service? Family and current news.
- Describe if you went “home” again or ended up “elsewhere”: I ended up in Southeast Asia and have no plans to return to the USA.
- Describe any situation in which you were “thanked” for your Peace Corps service? Mainly my local counterparts in the Agriculture Department were the ones who thanked me by participating in their rural development activities. Attracting many participants in our extension work due to their curiosity about the strange foreigner who was with them, and who could speak their language.
- Why should anyone here and now be interested in your experience, what relevance does it have on a personal or national level now? Not sure. Things are quite different now.
- Based upon your experience, what are your thoughts about national service and about immigration? I sympathize with immigrants. I am, after all, an immigrant to the country where I live now. I also believe everyone should do national service.