

Pauline Birky-Kreutzer, Volunteer Extraordinaire

Her legacy: Faith in the strength and resilience of women and families to improve their lives despite material and cultural obstacles

Peace Corps pioneer Pauline Birky-Kreutzer devoted her life to the welfare of all people, especially women and girls. After spending two years in Iran working with women and families, she became a research associate at Colorado State University under the direction of Dr. Maurice Albertson. When Albertson won a government contract to study the feasibility of a “youth corps” to go overseas and help build societies, he and Pauline put together a report for Congress. The proposal passed in 1961, and the Peace Corps, which had initially been proposed by candidate John F. Kennedy during his presidential campaign, was born.

Pauline went to several different countries to train volunteers, including Afghanistan, and during her travels experienced adventure and some danger. She persisted in her goal of improving the lives of women and families in poor countries throughout her time with the Peace Corps. After retirement she wrote a book, *Peace Corps Pioneer, or The Perils of Pauline*, about her experiences.

After the death of her first husband, Carl Birky, who was a professor at the university, Pauline married William Kreutzer, the first American forest ranger.

Her daughter, Ann Savageau, said of her mother: “She worked at a time when women were rare in the workforce, and as such she was a role model for subsequent generations of women. Pauline managed to balance her roles as wife, mother, friend and career professional with humor, diplomacy and grace. She was greatly beloved of the Peace Corps volunteers whom she had trained and with whom she worked while she was in West Pakistan in 1962-63. Up until her death she continued to attend former Pakistan Peace Corps mini-reunions.”

Throughout her career Pauline Birky-Kreutzer shared her knowledge and experience to the benefit of others, especially families, for whom the woman is the heart.

Written by Barbara Fleming, Author, Coloradoan Columnist and Living Her Legacy Wordsmith