

## Teaching Science in Ghana: **Bill Miller**

Bill Miller, '73 BUS, taught science in Ghana, where the pace of life and the focus on what's really important engraved an important lesson upon him.

Bill Miller, pondered law school, but perhaps it was a law of physics that directed him to the Peace Corps. From 1974-76, he taught physics, statistics, and labs in the science department at the University of Cape Coast in Ghana, West Africa.

The day they called me we had a blizzard here," he recalls. "They asked me, 'How would you like to go to Ghana?'" He said he had to find Ghana on a map because he wasn't sure if they were talking about Ghana or Guyana, South America. He discovered Ghana had beaches and palm trees, and decided to go.

In Ghana, one of the first Peace Corps countries, the volunteers were used primarily to teach. Bill got a week of training before finding a position at the University of Cape Coast. "It took three to four months to get the paperwork through, so I took a motorcycle trip around West Africa for six weeks," he says.

The school provided housing and the Peace Corps paid him the equivalent of \$75 per month. "The average income in Ghana at the time was \$200 per year, so I was doing all right," he says.

Bill says that when he first arrived, Ghana was in decline economically. After gaining their independence from Great Britain in 1957, the Ghanaians had trouble competing in the world market, despite being rich in natural resources including gold, bauxite, cocoa, and hardwoods. "They hadn't managed their resources well and were being exploited for the raw materials," he says.

While Bill was there, the inflation rate went up 300 percent. "At the end, I was just buying food," he says. "I also got pretty good at bargaining. You had to bargain for everything there. In the stores, one week maybe there was just Earl Grey

tea, another time maybe just toilet paper. You learn to adjust. I miss that pace of life and focus on the things that are really important," he says.

Bill understood former President John F. Kennedy's reasoning behind establishing the Peace Corps. **"We fought the 'Ugly American' perception.**

they'd be building roads with bulldozers and other heavy equipment, not by hand," he says.

After his two-year stint, Bill came home via East Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. "Each step west was a challenge" because of culture shock, he says.

Getting sick once a month, iffy transportation, enduring



Matthew Dunn

**The program does present volunteers with an appreciation and understanding of other people and ideas, ways of doing things.** There, the light switch is up when the light is off. I thought it was wrong. Then I realized I was the one who saw it differently," he says.

His Peace Corps group had a 50 percent attrition rate, Bill says. "They lost a lot of the civil engineers because they thought

rabies shots that "felt like hot lead going in," sometimes living off peanut butter and bread, Bill says he has no reservations about recommending the Peace Corps to students. "Both sides win," he says.

*Now married with two children, Bill is a teaching lab assistant in the UNM physics and astronomy department.*

**Life's Lessons:** *Bill Miller gained new perspectives on life away from the West African university where he taught.*