CorpsAfrica gives Africans the opportunity to serve their country along the lines of the Peace Corps model. They will move to high-poverty communities and implement projects that the communities identify. From 1970 to 72, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke served as Country Director for the Peace Corps in Morocco – in fact, he said it was the best job he’d ever had. CorpsAfrica’s Holbrooke Campaign pays tribute to his love for Morocco, his belief in young people, and his vision for a peaceful and prosperous world. We had the pleasure of sitting down with Kati Marton, Richard’s wife of 15 years and Co-Chair of CorpsAfrica’s Holbrooke Campaign.

CorpsAfrica: What questions do people ask you about Richard?

Kati Marton: I like questions that deal with his motivation – because that’s the key to Richard. He was motivated by a deep sense of patriotism – but not of the flag-waving sort. Born of the fact that he was a child of refugees – he had a deep sense of America’s role in the world. For Richard, whose parents fled the two worst experiments in governance – his mother from Germany and father from Russia – he had an almost idealistic view of what America stood for in the world and that was as a place where people could restart their lives.

CorpsAfrica: My favorite line from your introduction in The Unquiet American was, “Yes, he was unquiet – but unquiet on behalf of those who otherwise would not have been heard…” It’s such a noble quality – where did it come from?

Kati Marton: He was genuinely a self-made man – he lost his father at a very early age. If anyone has ever raised himself it was Richard Holbrooke. He was always looking for mentors because his mother was not remotely interested in public service. The first one was his best friend in high school’s father – and that was Secretary of State Dean Rusk. It was Rusk who first suggested that Richard take the Foreign Service exam. Richard had majored in physics in college – his father had been a doctor and had wanted Richard to be a scientist – but Richard had an innate curiosity about the world, which had manifested itself in many ways by then. For example, he brought Malcolm X to Brown University as a speaker even though the administration was very opposed to the idea. He hitchhiked around the world during college – even through Afghanistan and the Balkans. He wanted a life that was both interesting and meaningful and he really stuck to that and never wasted time. It was almost as if he had a sense of how short his life would be. He really tried not to sweat the small stuff and he was very tolerant of people’s quirks. If he saw a gleam of promise he really stuck to you. And he never let a job description define the job. For example, when he was made Ambassador to Germany in 1993 – he saw that it was a critical time. It was the end of the cold war and the US military was retreating from Germany – so he invented the American Academy in Berlin as a kind of long-term American presence that would not be military – and it’s turned into something enormously successful.

CorpsAfrica: What did Richard say about his experience as Peace Corps Director of Morocco in the early 1970s?

Kati Marton: He loved the Peace Corps and every inch of Morocco was dear to him. When he took my children and me to Morocco in the 1990s – it was like going home for him. There were people in the souk that still remembered him. There was an almost proprietary pride in the way he showed off Marrakech and Casablanca and the Atlas Mountains and Ouarzazate. We would stop in villages and he was so happy and so in his element. I think that was a very important part of his development. He was in charge for the first time and he discovered he had good executive and administrative skills – but he was a realist most of all. He combined realpolitique of the Kissingerian variety with Wilsonian human rights and human values-based diplomacy. He was a very pragmatic person. To him
there was no point in a policy that didn’t factor in human values and wasn’t ultimately based on human rights.

He’s stayed in touch with many people from Morocco and many of the PCVs too. The Peace Corps was a very important milestone for Richard. He learned so much about himself.

**CorpsAfrica: What kind of mentor was he?**

**Kati Marton:** Well, he loved being a mentor. He was extremely generous with his time. Partly as payback for all the mentors he’d had. Not only Dean Rusk but Clark Clifford, Averell Harriman, Nicholas Katzenbach, Cyrus Vance – all these giants in foreign policy that saw the promise of Richard as a young man. Richard was always on the lookout for bright young people who needed encouragement and mentoring. He had hundreds of mentees and protégés. And he would be very forceful in his advice. When they came to career or life choices – including love choices – Richard would weigh in with very definite opinions. He lived such a full, rich life in every respect – and he wanted to share that. He was one of the most generous people I’ve ever met in sharing whatever he knew. Not everyone wanted that – but they’d get it anyway.

**CorpsAfrica: What do you think his advice would be to CorpsAfrica as we work to select our first group of Fellows in Morocco?**

**Kati Marton:** Look for people with great curiosity about the world who are determined, not easily discouraged, who have big, generous outlooks – not 100 percent convinced that they are right all the time, willing to be proven wrong. Look for people with high energy who are interested in more than just their own career tracks – while still being ambitious.

**CorpsAfrica: As you know, our Fellows are young Moroccans – mostly recent college graduates, who, like PCVs, are about to serve their country and embark on a transformative adventure. What advice do you think Richard would give them?**

**Kati Marton:** He would first tell them how lucky they are to be starting this journey. And to take maximum advantage of this incredible opportunity – to have fun – change the world, and not to take no for an answer. And to parlay this experience into the next experience – so always build on every experience. The people who are chosen for this are people of promise and from whom we expect a great deal.

**CorpsAfrica: Would your advice be any different?**

**Kati Marton:** I would give a lot of that – but as a woman, in addition to wanting to do my little part to improve the world, I would also want to have balance as well. I think that becoming a mother and raising good children is very important. And therefore I’ve always tried to combine an external life with a domestic one.

**CorpsAfrica: Thank you so much, Kati. Is there anything you’d like to add?**

**Kati Marton:** I think CorpsAfrica is a wonderful project, Liz. I’m so happy that you’re doing it and I’m glad to do whatever I can to help.

_Liz Fanning is Founder of CorpsAfrica, a project that brings the Peace Corps opportunity to Africans. Learn more at www.corpsafrica.org._