But Three's Allowed...

Peace Corps policy rarely goes against nature. Volunteer married couples are allowed to have babies! In fact, at least one “Peace Corps baby” has been born in almost every one of the 53 countries the Peace Corps serves.

Still, having a baby in a developing nation while on the job as a Peace Corps Volunteer does strike many couples as ill-advised, and the majority prefer to wait until they are back on American soil to start a family.

In any case, as of mid-1966, some 114 Peace Corps couples have had their first child overseas. Two of the most lyrical sets of Volunteer parents are the Robert Slattery (now serving in Ethiopia) and the Herbert Eagles (recently returned from two years in India).

The Slatterys met in high school and waited six years, until finishing college, to get married—three days before Peace Corps training at UCLA. Susan Slattery claims that she was “the agitator for joining the Peace Corps, although my mother still believes that Bob carried me off to Africa against my will. Really, we both joined because we felt an obligation to do something to help.”

Bob majored in engineering science at Notre Dame, Susan in math at Albertus Magnus College in New Haven, Conn. Both teach their majors in Asmara, Ethiopia, a city of some 90,000 people. Christopher Michael Slattery was born on April 15, 1965, in a U.S. Army hospital in Asmara, where Susan got “great medical care.” She adds that “Dr. Spock was in our Peace Corps book locker and we were most thankful for it.” Their house has been “quite suitable, easy to keep clean, and the baby has his own room.”

“We have an Ethiopian woman to care for Chris while we’re in school,” continues Susan, “and the working day here allows one a lot of daytime hours so that I can go home for feedings. I don’t even feel guilty about being a working mother, though I think I would in the States where you’re gone all day.”

“Ethiopian babies are usually carried on the back until they are two or three years old and thus get little freedom to move around and explore. Because of this, they walk late. So the Ethiopian mothers are amazed at Chris, who is bigger than their babies and walked at nine months. Some have been so impressed by the results of the American method of baby care that they have come to value Dr. Spock even more than we do.”

The Eagles’ story is somewhat less conventional. They met and married while serving in India. Retired in Indian wedding dress, they said their vows “in a garden in the middle of tea fields in the foothills of the Himalayas,” says Barbara Eagle. “We even had a wedding cake baked and decorated by the Girls’ High School principal and town baker, and were accompanied by the Boys’ High School bugpipe band and about 500 of our friends and neighbors from the town (Palamur, Punjab).”

They transferred to India’s capital, New Delhi, when they found they were expecting a baby since the medical facilities in and around Palamur were inadequate: “The nearest hospital was a 24-hour bus ride and a half-hour hike uphill!”

“Our job in New Delhi was ideal: we both did educational extension work for the Department of Field Service, under the Ministry of Education. We had a three-room flat with running water, electricity most of the time, a kerosene stove and simple Indian furniture.”

All in all, the Eagles found that having a baby in India “didn’t present any great problems.” Barbara’s doctor, an Indian obstetrician, was “very competent and relaxed” and the hospital in Delhi “more than adequate. Everyone was wonderful.”

After the baby was born, the Eagles worked at home for two weeks, then set out on the outings again with the baby, Megan Jill, in a basket.

Pioneers or just relaxed Americans? Perhaps the Slatterys and the Eagles are a bit of both.