

A former U.S. President, Hollywood and Bollywood stars and more than 100 U.S. Navy sailors and other military personnel were among 2,000 volunteers who worked side by side with villagers in Maharashtra to build simple and affordable houses during a five-day construction effort in October.

On a port visit to Mumbai, the sailors from several U.S. ships in the Boxer Expeditionary Strike Group traveled to Malavli village near Lonavala, 110 kilometers southeast of Mumbai, to participate in the annual Jimmy Carter Work Project.

Each year, former President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn, give a week of their time, along with their construction skills, to build homes and raise awareness of the need

for affordable housing in different parts of the world. This is the first time Carter, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, has brought his 23-year-old house-building mission to India. The event was a showcase for efforts by Habitat for Humanity—a U.S.-based charity that provides home-building material and volunteers—to erect homes for 250,000 poor people in India by 2010.

Carter and his wife chipped in along with Hollywood actor Brad Pitt, Bollywood star John Abraham, Annerieke Owen, wife of Mumbai Consul-General Michael Owen, and other volunteers to construct the 33-square-meter duplex, semi-detached houses. The homeowners, who will buy the houses through non-profit loans, worked, too. Each home costs Habitat and its partners about \$2,840 to sponsor. Once completed, the families pay back the amount over eight years. The payments go into a revolving fund



Building Homes and Memories Together

By SUMEDHA RAIKAR-MHATRE and CHRISTINE DAL BELLO

which is used for building more houses.

Former President Carter's connection to the Navy—he is a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy and served as a naval officer for seven years—made this community service project particularly special to the sailors. The U.S. Navy has a long-standing commitment to assisting allies

with community service projects, but this was on an entirely different scale. "I didn't expect such a large project when I signed up. I thought we'd be building a house but instead we're creating a community," said Petty Officer First Class Duane Solomon.

One highlight for the sailors was the opportunity to meet fellow international volunteers. "My team includes Koreans, Cambodians, Indians and people from Hong Kong. We're making a difference working alongside the world. I'm leaving with a sense of pride and satisfaction," said Navy cook Maribel Challburg.

The only regret for many was that they could not stay longer: "We're going back too soon," Petty Officer First Class Edreal Evans said. "I'd rather do this than go on liberty," he said, referring to permission granted to sailors to go ashore for rest and relaxation when they dock at a port.

Actor Brad Pitt, in India to work on the film *A Mighty Heart*, cemented blocks to complete the exterior of Aziz and Sadhiya Sheikh's home. He re-

turned the next day to work on the house of Subhash and Shalini Sathe, helping volunteers put horizontal beams on the roof. Indian celebrities and regular folks also dropped in to reinforce the spirit of volunteerism. John Abraham helped build the gabled roof of the house for Manda Gyaneshwar Jadhav. History Channel presenter Diana Hayden and talk show host Pooja Bedi also chipped in.

The India trip also gave Carter a chance to catch up with friends and colleagues of his mother, Lillian Carter, who had served as a Peace Corps volunteer at the Godrej Colony in Vikhroli, a Mumbai suburb, from 1966 to 1967. "My mother could rise above the language handicap and make friends for a lifetime in this industrial complex. It was here that she learned so much about India and the Indian culture. And this was only because of her fellow colleagues who are special to me, too," Carter said at an informal gathering.

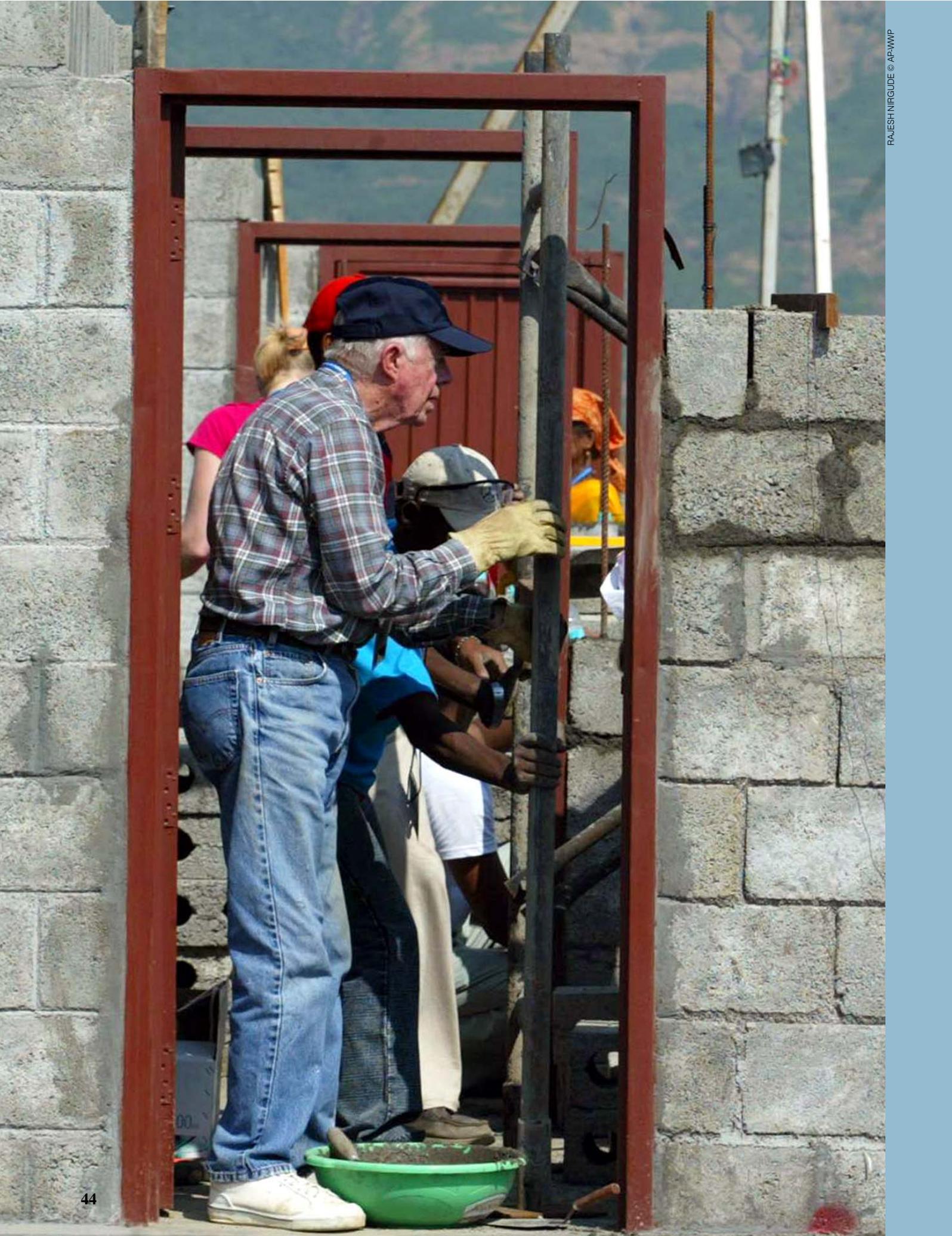
Lillian Carter's letters to her son, later compiled in the book *Away From Home*:

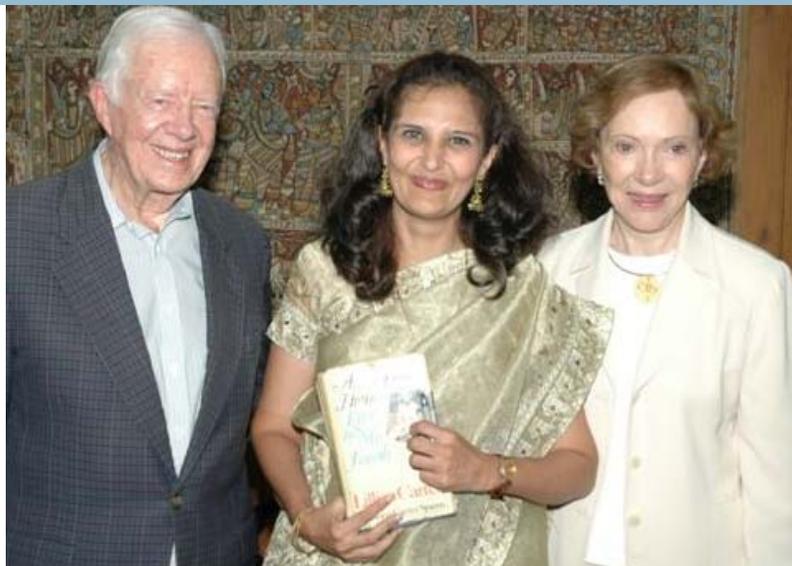
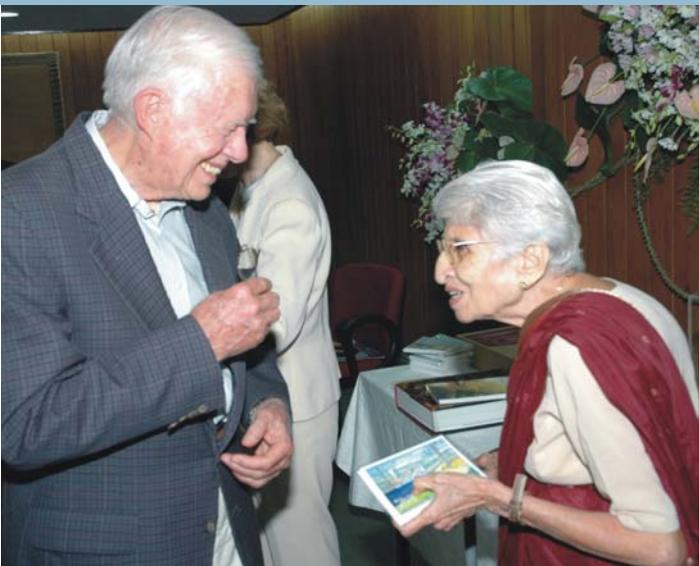
Left: Sergeant Patrick Finnerty, of the U.S. Army Reserve, took a break from university studies in Pennsylvania to build houses in India. Working alongside is U.S.-educated Bedar Islam, who was born in Bangladesh and works with Dow Chemical in India. Below: Vanessa Malagra, a sailor from California, serving aboard the USS Boxer, lays blocks for a house with Rahul Yadan, an Indian volunteer.



GREGG PACHKOWSKI/Habitat for Humanity International







Peace Corps

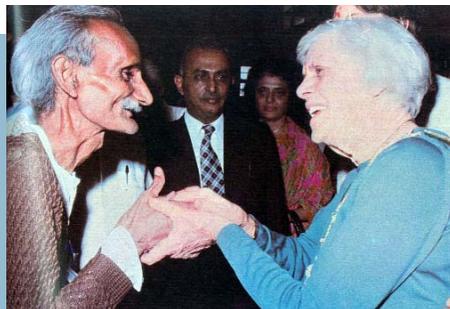
President John F. Kennedy established the Peace Corps on March 1, 1961, to promote world peace and friendship. Its primary mission is to help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women, as well as to promote mutual understanding

between Americans and the peoples in the countries served. Since its inception, more than 182,000 volunteers have been invited by 138 host countries to work on issues relating to education, health, business development, agriculture and the environment.

Above left: Former President Jimmy Carter with Aloo Kersy Moudawala. Above: Carter with Dr. Madhavi Pethe and Rosalynn Carter.

Letters to My Family, kept him updated about the happenings at the clinic and welfare center where she worked as a health volunteer. A special moment at the gathering came when the girl featured on the cover of the book stepped up to meet the former President. “My father was a gardener at the Godrej company. It was Lillian Carter’s love for flowers and children that brought our family closer to her. Once, while she was appreciating my father’s work in the garden, I was sitting next to her. My father clicked our photo. I never knew this photo would later become my claim to fame,” said Dr. Madhavi Pethe, who is now principal of the M.L. Dahanukar College of Commerce in Mumbai.

Dr. G.D. Bhatia showed some old family albums to the former President, who autographed the black and white photos. “When I first came to know that two Peace Corps volunteers, Lillian and Mabel, had expressed their wish to work at the factory dispensary, I never imagined



ID. BERTI

Lillian Carter meets an old acquaintance, Sitalaprasad Yadav, a Hindi teacher, on her 1977 return visit to Vikhroli, where she had worked as a Peace Corps volunteer.

or visualized women nearing their seventies. But both defied my notions of volunteerism,” Dr. Bhatia told SPAN. Bhatia recounted how female patients bonded very quickly with Mrs. Carter, who often gave money to needy patients. “I discour-

aged her sometimes. But she said she had enough and would want to give.”

Carter visited the staff residences, where his mother had lived. Aloo Kersy Moudawala, 78, who was Mrs. Carter’s next-door neighbor, recalled how she was always willing to do home visits, counseling semi-literate wives of the workers. “She also took workers’ children for immunization drives to nearby municipal schools,” said Moudawala.

Every person who had known Lillian Carter had their own anecdotes to share with the former President. G.L. Pirumal Raja, a senior nurse, recalled how he gave haircuts to Mrs. Carter as there were no beauty parlors in downtown Vikhroli. Public Health Supervisor Sudha Ambekar spoke of Mrs. Carter’s interest in almost every aspect of the people’s lives—from making a *phulka* to listening to spiritual leader Swami Chinmayanand to writing a skit on family planning. “She had tremendous energy, for which she is so much remembered. She still lives with us in our memories,” said Ambekar. 



GAUTAM SINGH © AP/WIDEWORLD

Left: Jimmy Carter works on a house in Malavli village in Maharashtra. Right: Actor Brad Pitt with house owner Subhash Sathe at the construction site. Pitt helped put up horizontal beams for Sathe’s house.