

Derek Staughton Singer obituary

Derek Staughton Singer, 95, a retired USAID Foreign Service officer, died on Dec. 24, 2024, near Washington, D.C. Born on Staten Island, N.Y., in 1929, Mr. Singer was a second-generation American.

Long interested in international affairs, he attended graduate school at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, where he met his wife, Ruth.

Mr. Singer joined USAID in 1954, serving as CARE country director in Bolivia. He was then assigned to the Mutual Security Mission to China in Taiwan, and from there to Japan. In 1958 he was transferred to Costa Rica.

He was then asked to help open the USAID mission in the Congo. This assignment lasted only five months and, as Singer noted in his oral history with the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, “was largely spent ducking bullets, because of the civil war in that country.”

Upon return from the ex-Belgian Congo in 1961, Mr. Singer left USAID to work with the fledgling Peace Corps. After exploring and negotiating the first Peace Corps programs in South America, he was named country director in Bolivia, where he had earlier served with CARE, and then to Indonesia for a short stint before the looming civil war there forced the program to close.

After training in Washington, Mr. Singer became Peace Corps country director in Tunisia until 1966, when he resigned from the Peace Corps (and the government).

He went on to work in the private sector for the next 15 years, including a long stint in the Chicago area with PBS station WTTW.

In 1980 Mr. Singer rejoined USAID. He was first assigned to Zaire, where he served for four years, and subsequently served in Kenya, Ecuador, and Cameroon. He retired from the Foreign Service in 1994.

The Singers raised their children around the world: Their daughter, Vicky, was born in Bolivia; son Alex in Taiwan; and their last boys, Ted and Jason, in the U.S. in between postings.

Along the way, Mr. Singer learned to speak Spanish and French, and he even took up studying Russian after receiving his PhD in political science.

Together with Ms. Singer, he acted in community theater productions overseas and enjoyed spontaneous and often belabored puns and wordplay. He developed a pleasure in birdwatching and continued his enjoyment of classical music and world affairs until late in life.

Friends and family remember Mr. Singer as a quiet man who often didn't express his emotions in words. Yet, as they recall, his actions spoke volumes as he supported the world's underclass and his children's and grandchildren's pursuits.

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