

Geni Eng: Woman with a Trajectory

The US Peace Corps: Geni "discovered" her career commitment to public health and her lifelong partner in Togo, West Africa. From 1970-1974, Geni served as a Peace Corps Volunteer with the Health Education Program in Togo. During her first two years, she was given a Yamaha 80 motorcycle and a kerosene refrigerator, and was assigned to live in the village of Agou Gare, where she taught health for kids in 8 elementary schools and for pregnant women in 3 clinics. The Peace Corps program's volunteers developed a book of prenatal care lessons with accompanying visual aids for nurse midwives, and a school health curriculum guide with an accompanying resource manual for elementary school teachers. To pretest the curriculum guide in 100 pilot schools throughout Togo, Geni extended her service for two more years and moved to live in Atakpame, where the National Pedagogical Institute was located... and also where Dan lived as a Peace Corps Volunteer with the water wells construction program. With representatives from the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education, this three-person team observed and collected data from teachers in the pilot schools, provided technical assistance to teachers, reviewed the findings with a national committee of school superintendents and revised the curriculum. USAID covered the costs for printing and distributing the guide and resource manual to every elementary school teacher in Togo. The Ministry of Education added a health education question to the national primary school end-of-year exam.

Graduate School: In 1976, Geni and Dan pursued graduate studies at UNC-Chapel Hill; he with the Masters of Public Administration and she with the Masters of Public Health (MPH) and Doctor of Public Health (DrPH) programs in Health Education. 12 students were in her MPH cohort and 3 in her doctoral cohort. Guy Steuart was the Department Chair. Allan Steckler was Geni's academic advisor. Barbara Israel and Nancy Dean Hodges were on the same field team with Geni, assigned to complete an Action-Oriented Community Diagnosis in Alamance County. John Hatch advised her Masters Paper, which surveyed Black public health professionals on their preparation for and experiences with the dilemma of being caught in the middle between communities of color and health agencies. In Dr. Hatch's Rural Health course, Geni met Cherry Beasley, a public health nursing student and member of the Lumbee Tribe, and Victoria Motley Washington, a Black public health nursing student and President of the Black Student Caucus. Together, they advocated for expanding the Caucus to include all students of color. In 1977, they served on the Minority Student Caucus planning committee for the first annual Minority Health Conference that was held in a Rosenau Hall classroom. Upon completing the MPH degree, Geni and Barbara Israel entered the DrPH program; with Barbara mentored by Dr. Steuart and Geni by Dr. Hatch. Geni was hired as the Research Assistant for Dr. Hatch's Practical Training in Health Education Project in Cameroon, in conjunction with Ray Isely from the Research Triangle Institute and funded by the US Agency for International Development. She also worked closely with Drs. Steuart, Hatch, and Tony Whitehead in offering: (1) an annual intensive short course, called

Community Health and Development, for mid-level public health professionals from French and English-speaking countries in Africa and the Caribbean, and (2) technical assistance workshops, in conjunction with faculty from the University of Ibadan's College of Medicine, for African staff affiliated with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Combating Childhood Communicable Disease Project. In 1983, Geni defended her dissertation which examined the concept of "natural helping," possible dimensions for measurement, and piloting items for a multidimensional scale of natural helping with church-based lay health advisors.

Action-Oriented Community Diagnosis (AOCD) was brought to the department of Health Education at UNC by Dr. Guy Steuart as an approach to work with communities to identify and address issues they identified as priorities. AOCD incorporated the "insider's view" along with identification of strengths to improve upon traditional needs assessments. AOCD became the cornerstone of the department's MPH training for more than 35 years as student teams immersed themselves in North Carolina communities. Students worked for an academic year getting to know the community, conducting in-depth interviews with community leaders and members as well as service providers. They produced reports bringing together all the information and held community forums to discuss findings and identify future action. More than 1000 MPH students worked in almost 300 communities, learning the value of partnering with communities and building on assets in addressing public health issues.

Partners for Improved Nutrition and Health (PINAH)

was implemented in 1988 as a 5-year collaborative effort by Freedom from Hunger, the Mississippi State Department of Health and the Mississippi Cooperative Extension Agency. The project took place in 3 small towns in Humphreys County, Mississippi and focused on the African-American neighborhoods there. The project focused on three units of practice in the county (individuals, agencies and communities), using a community organizing approach focused on recruiting and training natural helpers as lay health advisors. Geni was the evaluator for the project and used a participatory action research approach to evaluate changes in the communities, including the "community competence" of the communities. Many of Geni's students were involved throughout the project as research assistants. In addition, a team of 6 students traveled to Mississippi in the summer of 1992 to collect data for the project and Michelle Bressler, a 1991 graduate of HBHE, went on to become full time staff with the project in Greenwood, Mississippi.

Community-Based Public Health Initiative: In 1991, the WK Kellogg foundation funded 7 coalitions nationally to strengthen linkages between public health education and public health practice by forming formal partnerships with people in communities. Here in North Carolina, community-based organizations in four counties, their county health departments, and faculty from the UNC School of Public Health worked together as a consortium to define and address the issues important to the residents of these counties. The consortium goals were to improve minority health in four African American communities, make public health

services and education programs more responsive to the needs of these communities and ensure a key role for community-based organization partners in shaping public health services and working with health professionals in their communities. The four counties were Lee, Chatham, Orange and Wake counties. Geni was the co-lead for UNC alongside Dr. Jan Dodds.

Kellogg Community Health Scholars Program: From 1998-2012, Geni directed the WK Kellogg Foundation's post-doctoral Community Health Scholars Program at UNC that trained newly minted PHDs in community-based participatory research. With Geni's leadership, the program established a framework driven by core CBPR values that instituted equitable and authentic partnerships between scholars and communities to address health issues important to the community. Unique to the Community Health Scholars Program was the community mentor. Well-versed in the community's culture and perspective on health issues, the community mentor served on equal footing with the faculty mentor in guiding scholars in their research and understanding of CBPR. Many would argue community mentors had more to say in the design and direction of the scholars' work during their time at Carolina than anyone else. In fact, even during the selection process, community partners played a pivotal role in deciding which applicants were accepted into the program. Once selected, Kellogg Health Scholars were expected to design and conduct a research project collaboratively with a community that was responsive to community strengths and needs and directed toward action and social change. At the start, scholars visited communities to learn firsthand about the health-related issues

community members found most pressing and their insights on how to address these challenges. Community partners in turn interviewed scholars to learn about the scholar's research interests and the ways in which a scholar might be able to work with them. Scholars soon recognized the central focus of needing to marry their interests and skills to issues and actions important to the community. In the end, scholars and communities became wedded through mutual agreement and a common understanding of how the strengths of both could work together to generate knowledge to improve the health of the community. In addition to their efforts within the community, Kellogg scholars also served on the teaching team of the Action-Oriented Community Diagnosis course (AOCD) and mentored MPH students on implementing the ACOD approach in communities throughout North Carolina.

Photovoice: I'll never forget the first time I thumbed through *Visual Voices: 100 Photographs of Village China by the Women of Yunnan Province* (1995). The bright blue, paperback book was gifted to Geni by the author, Caroline Wang—who codified Photovoice, and whose name was (prominently) missing from the book's cover. Over the years, Photovoice has become not only a well-used research method, but also an ethical viewpoint about knowledge and the power it represents. Photovoice affords community members the space and context to visually and verbally record, discuss, and relate to others the realities of their lives. Through their insightful images and words of embedded meaning, community members share the power of informing the what, the why, and the how of positive change. At a time when qualitative "non-traditional" research

methods were viewed as being non-scientific, subjective, and at best, subpar, Geni embraced the promise of Photovoice. This was no surprise as Geni's life work has been to amplify the voices of underserved communities that have typically been silenced and either neglected or condemned. In 2000, Geni applied for a Ueltshci Service-learning Course Development grant to create and offer the seminar, *Community Capacity, Competence and Power (CCCP)*. For nearly 25 years, CCCP students have engaged in critical thinking about the philosophical values that underlie "traditional" and "non-traditional" ways of knowing in public health research and practice. The enduring cornerstone of CCCP is the opportunity students are given to conduct their own Photovoice projects towards applying the concepts and strategies covered in class within a real-world setting. Through CCCP, Geni and an array of co-instructors have explored the history, innovations, and power of Photovoice with 100s of students who have partnered with countless Photovoice community partners! From its start in China's Yunnan Province to all corners of the world, the impacts of Photovoice, and of Geni's efforts are immeasurable!

The Cancer Health Disparities Training Program (CHDP) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill offers postdoctoral training on cross-cutting health disparity issues across the cancer continuum, from etiology and primary prevention to survivorship. A pivotal component to success in addressing these disparities is the availability of well-trained and energetic scientists to foster new, innovative research on both the causes of cancer disparities and methods to translate biologic and epidemiologic findings into

effective prevention and control programs for use by government and community organizations. Capitalizing on the highly collaborative, productive, and multidisciplinary faculty at UNC-CH, fellows are assigned mentors in more than one discipline to gain training experience in interdisciplinary research focused on cancer health disparities, learn research communication and grant writing skills, create tailored career development plans, and learn how to transition from training to productive career paths. The CHDP has mentored over 20 postdocs who are now making an impact on cancer health disparities research at academic institutions and research institutes across the country. We are pleased to be joined by several of Geni's former postdocs tonight.

Dr. Geni Eng is a founding member of the **Greensboro Health Disparities Collaborative (GHDC)**, which began in 2003. Nettie Coad (1936-2012), an anti-racist community organizer in one of Greensboro's oldest African American neighborhoods, invited Geni to join the GHDC. Geni Eng brought the idea of using "Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR)." Together, Geni Eng and Nettie Coad were the Co-Principal Investigators on the very first study managed by the GHDC and funded by NIH, 2006-2009: "Cancer Care and Racial Equity Study (CCARES)." CCARES uncovered subtle differences by race that breast cancer survivors experienced when interacting *within* the healthcare institution due to institutional racism, which was published in scientific journals and presented nationally. As an excellent grant writer, Geni became the Co-Principal Investigator, along with Dr. Sam

Cykert, for the next GHDC research project, "Accountability for Cancer Care through Undoing Racism and Equity (ACCURE)." This project accomplished the ambitious goal of eliminating a racial disparity in the completion of treatment for breast and lung cancer patients at two cancer centers through healthcare systems-changes! The results of this study have been published or presented in scientific journals, healthcare magazines, international conferences, corporate anti-racism trainings, and locally back to the communities most impacted by these results. Through the partnership with the GHDC, Geni mentored numerous undergraduate, graduate, and postdoctoral scholars from multiple universities, and research staff members. Many of these scholars and staff members have become professors, anti-racism trainers, and/or NIH Grant Officers. Embodying cultural humility, she shifted power dynamics within UNC-CH to focus attention away from herself, and to her community partners' leadership. She remains an active member of the GHDC coming to monthly meetings sharing opportunities, encouragement, and hope.

Geni is one of the foremost leaders, scholars and practitioners of **Community-based participatory research (CBPR)**, an approach to research that emphasizes power sharing, co-learning, equity, mutual benefit and social change, bringing together community, health systems, and academic partners. She embraced this approach early in her career—while still a student under the mentorship of John Hatch and Guy Steuart... long before it had the label "CBPR". Geni has conducted numerous CBPR studies that have

contributed to both our understanding of critical public health issues, and to addressing needed changes to reduce inequities. One of her most influential CBPR projects is the long-standing Greensboro Health Disparities Collaborative, initially funded in 2012 by the National Cancer Institute, which has been at the cutting edge of using CBPR to enhance racial equity and improve cancer care and outcomes through incorporating an undoing racism approach. The powerful results of this effort have been published extensively in highly regarded journals and book chapters, as have her other CBPR studies. For example, she played a major role in the publication of the early seminal work on "Evidence Base for CBPR", funded by the Agency for Health Care Research and Quality; she was one of the lead editors of the book Methods for CBPR for Health, now in its 2nd edition; and she has written extensively about the use of different methods within the context of CBPR (e.g., in-depth interviews, focus groups, Charette Model, and photovoice). Geni is a highly sought-after speaker and consultant on CBPR at local, national and international levels—and an excellent role model in co-presenting with her community partners. For over a decade, Geni has taught a fully subscribed course entitled "Community Capacity, Competence and Power: CBPR and Photovoice Methodology". In addition to the use of lectures, small group discussions, and experiential learning activities, students work in teams with local community groups to conduct a photovoice project: using photography to document strengths and needs in a given community and identify strategies for change. Approximately 30 publications to date have resulted from photovoice projects by former students, post-docs and community

partners that Geni has fostered. Throughout her career, Geni has received a number of awards in recognition of her accomplishments. For example, in 2008 she received the prestigious Tom Bruce Award from the Community-Based Public Health Caucus of the American Public Health Association for her outstanding contributions to CBPR and community-based public health. Clearly, Geni has had a major impact on the scholarship and practice of CBPR and has been instrumental in enhancing understanding and addressing racial and health inequities in the communities with which she has worked.

Geni is a co-founder of the **Graduate Certificate in Participatory Research (G CPR)**, a two-year interdisciplinary certificate program for graduate and professional students at UNC-Chapel Hill. The program trains students in the theoretical bases, rationale, methodologies, challenges, and motivations for carrying out research in equitable partnership *with* communities, instead of *on* communities. The G CPR program provides a community of support through a sustained network of community partners, faculty advisors, and students committed to collaborative research to advance equity. Since its founding in 2013, the program has awarded twenty certificates and supported hundreds of students participating in its core courses, workshops, seed grant funding, and direct training with community experts.

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