

**Zoe Bouvier Schroeder Oral History Interview**  
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Zoe Bouvier Schroeder  
**Interviewer:** Phyllis Noble  
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**Biographical Note**

Zoe B. Schroeder served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Lesotho from 2012 to 2014 as an English teacher.

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Oral History Interview

with

Zoe Bouvier Schroeder

June 5, 2016  
Madison, Wisconsin

By Phyllis Noble

Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection  
John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum

NOBLE: [00:00:06] This is Phyllis Noble. Today is June 5th, 2016. I am interviewing Zoe Bouvier Schroeder, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Lesotho from 2012 to 2014. And Zoe, what kind of program were you in?

SCHROEDER: [00:00:24] I was an education volunteer, so I taught English in primary school. Two schools.

NOBLE: [00:00:31] Okay, good. I look forward to getting the details about that pretty soon. Let's find out who you were before you joined the Peace Corps. Where were you born?

SCHROEDER: [00:00:42] I was born outside of Washington, D.C., and I grew up in Washington, D.C. I went to public school there.

NOBLE: [00:00:51] In D.C.?

SCHROEDER: [00:00:51] In Washington, D.C., yep. My mother is a French teacher and my father is an entrepreneur. And I grew up in a bilingual household. I spoke French and English. And I have dual citizenship. So really, language education was always a part of my upbringing.

NOBLE: [00:01:13] Yeah. And did you have siblings?

SCHROEDER: [00:01:16] I do. I have a younger sister and a younger brother. I'm the eldest.

NOBLE: [00:01:20] The eldest of three. And you all speak both English and French?

SCHROEDER: [00:01:24] Yes.

NOBLE: [00:01:24] Oh, how wonderful. And so you went to public schools and then you went to. Your parents were, um, they had both gone to college?

SCHROEDER: [00:01:35] Yes.

NOBLE: [00:01:36] Yeah. Okay. So what did you, did you do family vacations?

SCHROEDER: [00:01:41] Yes. My, since my mother was a teacher, she had the summers off. And it was always very important for her for us to have experiences in France with the culture and my family, because all of my family on her side lived over there. And still does.

NOBLE: [00:01:55] Your mother was born in France?

SCHROEDER: [00:01:56] She was. So as a child with my brother and sister, we would always go to France for the whole summer, which was just an exceptional childhood and experience.

NOBLE: [00:02:07] Fabulous. Where, where in France?

SCHROEDER: [00:02:10] The majority of my family lives in Lyon, which is a big city in the southern part of France. And I, uh, my grandmother moved out of Lyon quite some time ago and just lives in the south of France in a little village on her own land. I met my best friend there when I was five. And we're still very close best friends, so I have a lot of connections to that region still.

NOBLE: [00:02:35] Fabulous. I'm going to be going to Lyon next month so.

SCHROEDER: [00:02:39] Really?

NOBLE: [00:02:39] After the interview. We'll talk.

SCHROEDER: [00:02:41] That's exciting.

NOBLE: [00:02:42] Yeah. So you had this very, very deep international, bicultural, bilingual experience from the beginning.

SCHROEDER: [00:02:52] Yes.

NOBLE: [00:02:52] Fabulous. Then you went to high school?

SCHROEDER: [00:02:56] Yes.

NOBLE: [00:02:57] Also in D.C.?

SCHROEDER: [00:02:58] Yes.

NOBLE: [00:02:59] Public school?

SCHROEDER: [00:02:59] Yes. It was called, it is called School Without Walls. It's a, it's a public school, but it's also a magnet school in Washington, D.C., where it doesn't have a certain neighborhood. It's on the campus of a major university. And so it attracts high achieving students from all over the city. And you have to pass an interview and a test to be accepted. And it's, you know, it's a bit of a selective process so. But it

was a wonderful high school experience. I really loved my high school.

NOBLE: [00:03:35] Great. Did you study another language, well, did you have to take high school classes in French?

SCHROEDER: [00:03:41] I did not, because I already spoke French. Right. And so because I already spoke French, when I was first enrolling in school in kindergarten, my mother told me that I was going to be taking Spanish. So I started, I've been taking Spanish since kindergarten. Every year I would take Spanish and up until high school. And then in high school I surpassed the levels that they offered at my school. So I would take them at the universities around, around Washington, D.C. And then I continued Spanish language in college so.

NOBLE: [00:04:16] Yeah. Yeah. In high school, in addition to. Boy, that sounds like a very rich experience. Did you have other extracurricular things that you were involved in?

SCHROEDER: [00:04:27] Well, the language was a big part of my extracurriculars because it took place at universities. I mean, it was part of the curriculum, but I felt like it demanded more of me than regular high school classes.

NOBLE: [00:04:40] Yeah, sure.

SCHROEDER: [00:04:41] However, I also was in theater in high school. I really enjoy theater. My high school was very small, however, so our theater program, or any program at all really was not very large. So I think that the first two years in high school, I was, I participated in things and then I kind of petered off once we took AP language classes and we're applying to colleges and all of that. I don't really remember doing that much extracurricular because I was so engrossed.

NOBLE: [00:05:12] In summers, did you have, did you have summer jobs?

SCHROEDER: [00:05:15] Well, I continued.

NOBLE: [00:05:16] Oh no, but you went to France.

SCHROEDER: [00:05:17] I continued going to France, and I don't remember in high school. I think I still went to France and I took some classes in France to learn how to write in France.

NOBLE: [00:05:33] Well, yes.

SCHROEDER: [00:05:34] Because I was, I had learned how to speak. And I, I would write, but I would write phonetically. And anyone who has ever studied the French language knows that that is not how you write it.

NOBLE: [00:05:46] Right, right. So you studied that in France.

SCHROEDER: [00:05:48] So I studied that, yep, one year in France. And I, I did, I think babysitting jobs a few times over the summer. I really took care of kids for a while. Yeah. Nothing very formal.

NOBLE: [00:06:01] But in French?

SCHROEDER: [00:06:03] Yes.

NOBLE: [00:06:04] Wow. And then you went to college. Where did you go?

SCHROEDER: [00:06:07] I went to the University of Wisconsin Madison.

NOBLE: [00:06:10] Right here in Madison?

SCHROEDER: [00:06:11] Here in Madison.

NOBLE: [00:06:13] Wow. What brought you here?

SCHROEDER: [00:06:14] Well, being from Washington, D.C., which is not a state, we, uh. Basically as a resident, we were offered a scholarship. I think it was back in the nineties, I'm not quite sure. But anyways, there's a

scholarship for D.C. residents if they wish to go to a state university. Of course, outside of Washington, D.C., you will pay in-state tuition.

NOBLE: [00:06:40] Oh, terrific.

SCHROEDER: [00:06:40] So basically.

NOBLE: [00:06:41] Anywhere?

SCHROEDER: [00:06:41] Anywhere. There is a scholarship that you will pay in-state tuition at any state school because Washington, D.C., is not a state.

NOBLE: [00:06:49] Doesn't have a state school.

SCHROEDER: [00:06:50] Right. We don't have a state school. So already I was looking at state universities and Wisconsin Madison really offered the breadth of options that I was looking for. It had a good geography program, which I was looking into. And it just had really the, the lifestyle I was also looking for, in living in a city, but also having a major university life there. And so it really just was perfect for what I was looking for.

NOBLE: [00:07:22] Oh good. So you came here to Wisconsin, to Madison. You lived in a dorm?

SCHROEDER: [00:07:28] No, actually. Um. Although I was very excited to come to Wisconsin Madison, I was not offered housing the first year, so I found my own housing.

NOBLE: [00:07:38] Oh.

SCHROEDER: [00:07:38] Yep. And, um.

NOBLE: [00:07:40] Because you were not a Wisconsin resident?

SCHROEDER: [00:07:42] No, I think Wisconsin Madison, I don't know if they, if it's still the same thing nowadays, but they just didn't have enough room in the dorms for all of their incoming students.

NOBLE: [00:07:53] Oh.

SCHROEDER: [00:07:54] So there was a handful of them that were not guaranteed housing at all. And so that housing was already full by the time I had accepted. And so I didn't know anybody in Madison, much less Wisconsin, just anybody at all. And so my parents got me, helped me sign up for an apartment that was on campus or very close to campus. So that was the first year. I lived in this apartment and I still had a roommate and everything. And it was very affiliated to the school, but it was not a dorm experience. The second year I did live in a dorm.

NOBLE: [00:08:34] No kidding. It's just the reverse.

SCHROEDER: [00:08:36] Yes, I know.

NOBLE: [00:08:37] Of the experience of so many kids. And so what did you study here, geography?

SCHROEDER: [00:08:42] Geography and Spanish. With a minor in European studies.

NOBLE: [00:08:47] Wow. Yeah. And in, did you have to, did you have to do any work to afford your expenses?

SCHROEDER: [00:08:59] I worked. It was mostly for me to pay for my food and housing and all of that. My family helped me cover tuition. So I did have jobs. I worked at the language lab in the university language building for I think a year and a half. It was my sophomore year I worked there. And then my junior year I studied abroad and when I came back, I think I worked there for another semester. And then I also worked as a waiter, waitress, at one of the university restaurants for, that holds meetings and things like that for alumni.

NOBLE: [00:09:49] Oh, yeah.

SCHROEDER: [00:09:49] So I worked there for a year as well, so I had little jobs.

NOBLE: [00:09:53] You referred to study abroad. Where did you go?

SCHROEDER: [00:09:55] I went to Buenos Aires, Argentina.

NOBLE: [00:09:57] For a whole. year, a whole academic year?

SCHROEDER: [00:09:59] Yes.

NOBLE: [00:09:59] Oh, my goodness. How rich this is. So you really are now trilingual?

SCHROEDER: [00:10:04] I am trilingual.

NOBLE: [00:10:05] Yeah. Bueno.

SCHROEDER: [00:10:06] Si.

NOBLE: [00:10:10] What, and um. Oh, I'm just trying to grab this super international background. And then when you graduated here, from UW, did you immediately apply to the Peace Corps?

SCHROEDER: [00:10:25] Yes.

NOBLE: [00:10:26] You did.

SCHROEDER: [00:10:26] Well, I applied actually while I was still in school. I had always wanted to do the Peace Corps, and I just knew that that was the next thing that I wanted to do as soon as I had my degree. I wanted to join the Peace Corps. So I applied, you know, starting in October, I think, my senior year. And the whole process takes a long time.

NOBLE: [00:10:49] Yeah. And how long did it take you?

SCHROEDER: [00:10:50] I took, uh, it took several months. I think I got my letter, my acceptance letter, in July, so.

NOBLE: [00:10:56] Okay. So you'd just graduated a month and a half earlier?

SCHROEDER: [00:11:00] Yeah.

NOBLE: [00:11:01] And what did the acceptance letter say?

SCHROEDER: [00:11:04] It said, congratulations. You've been accepted to Peace Corps Lesotho.

NOBLE: [00:11:08] Uh huh.

SCHROEDER: [00:11:10] And me, freshly with my degree in geography, had to look up Lesotho on Google Maps.

NOBLE: [00:11:18] And did you know right away that it was pronounced Lesotho?

SCHROEDER: [00:11:21] I did not. I was saying Lesotho.

NOBLE: [00:11:24] Right.

SCHROEDER: [00:11:25] Where is Lesotho? I knew it was in Africa, but I did not, I wasn't entirely sure where it was. Like most people, I assume.

NOBLE: [00:11:33] Right.

SCHROEDER: [00:11:34] So I did my research.

NOBLE: [00:11:37] And you found out where it was. And at some point in there, found out how, how the name of the country is pronounced.

SCHROEDER: [00:11:42] I think I didn't find that out until I actually arrived. And you walking around saying Lesotho and people were looking at me like, what are you talking about? It's Lesotho.

NOBLE: [00:11:52] You couldn't have been the only one.

SCHROEDER: [00:11:53] No, not at all. I think we were all walking around saying that.

NOBLE: [00:11:55] Sure. Sure. Yeah. Yeah, of course. So where did you, um, before I talk about where, where you met your fellow trainees. How did your parents feel about this, your going off to Africa?

SCHROEDER: [00:12:14] My mother was nervous. My mother was born in a different country, in France. And there isn't the history of the Peace Corps in France, um, or really that much volunteering in general. And even though she definitely supported me volunteering, she just, it didn't have that familiar ring to it like it did for my father, for example, or other Americans who have heard of the Peace Corps probably.

NOBLE: [00:12:47] Right.

SCHROEDER: [00:12:47] You know, know about it. It really, it didn't for her. So she, uh, she was just a little nervous because she wasn't familiar with it. And I really took the time over Thanksgiving break and Christmas break and all of that to really sit down with her and talk with her about it. My father was not concerned about me. He knew very well that I could take care of myself. But my, my mother needed a little bit more coaxing.

NOBLE: [00:13:12] But she didn't ever say, don't go, please don't go?

SCHROEDER: [00:13:16] No. My parents have always been very, very trusting with me, even in my teenage years and everything, just understanding that as long as I have thought through my decision, you know, that I, they, I'm free to do what I want to do and I'm an adult.

NOBLE: [00:13:31] So it's just a matter of appeasing your mother's fears.

SCHROEDER: [00:13:35] Right, right. And she was she supported me once she really understood what the program was all about.

NOBLE: [00:13:40] Good. So was there a goodbye party or something? You remember saying goodbye?

SCHROEDER: [00:13:47] Yes. In Washington, D.C., there was a little get together with some family friends and my friends in Washington, D.C., and we had a little a little dinner and a little goodbye party. I didn't want it to be too dramatic because I felt like I'll be back, you know?

NOBLE: [00:14:06] And of course, you did come back.

SCHROEDER: [00:14:09] And I did come back so.

NOBLE: [00:14:12] Before you went off to training, did Peace Corps give you a list of things that you had to do? Did you have certain medical procedures to be done? Eyeglasses, wisdom teeth, vaccinations?

SCHROEDER: [00:14:29] Um, yes. I had to have a few vaccinations. I had most of the vaccinations already because I had done extensive traveling in South America.

NOBLE: [00:14:36] And that's right, going to Buenos Aires.

SCHROEDER: [00:14:38] Right. And then I traveled extensively around there. So I had a lot of the vaccines. So I really only a handful that I didn't have. You know, I had to have my physical and everything. But I.

NOBLE: [00:14:51] But you were on your own for that.

SCHROEDER: [00:14:53] Mm hmm.

NOBLE: [00:14:53] You had to find your own doctor and get all that?

SCHROEDER: [00:14:55] Yeah. But I was part of the university health care system, so I was a student, so I could just do that pretty easily on campus.

NOBLE: [00:15:03] Good. Good, good.

SCHROEDER: [00:15:04] Yeah. So it wasn't that difficult. It just takes a long time.

NOBLE: [00:15:08] Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Very different from in the 1960s.

SCHROEDER: [00:15:13] I can believe it.

NOBLE: [00:15:13] All that happened during training.

SCHROEDER: [00:15:15] Oh, my goodness.

NOBLE: [00:15:16] We didn't have to do that on our own. So off you go. And where did you first meet your fellow trainees, was it in Washington or did you all meet as a group? Where did you meet as a group for the first time?

SCHROEDER: [00:15:30] We met in Philadelphia for the first time. So I took my flight from Madison and I went to Philadelphia. We had a one day orientation there with a lady whose name escapes me now, but she was wonderful and she was also a returned Peace Corps volunteer from Lesotho. Worked with the Peace Corps staff and did this really wonderful orientation. And we met everyone and we did all of those awkward get to know you games.

NOBLE: [00:16:07] And how many people, how many trainees were there?

SCHROEDER: [00:16:10] We were about 30.

NOBLE: [00:16:11] Oh, that's a nice small group.

SCHROEDER: [00:16:13] Yes.

SCHROEDER: [00:16:14] In Lesotho, at any given time, there's between maybe 90 and 100 volunteers.

NOBLE: [00:16:20] In country?

SCHROEDER: [00:16:21] In country, at least that's when I was there.

NOBLE: [00:16:23] Yeah. In training, um, was there a mixture of men and women?

SCHROEDER: [00:16:30] Yes.

NOBLE: [00:16:31] Single people? Were there any married couples?

SCHROEDER: [00:16:33] Yes, there was one married couple who ended up being placed very close to me, actually. And they're wonderful people and became good friends.

NOBLE: [00:16:40] Oh, good, good, good, good. So one day. It sounds like you had a very positive experience that one day. I'm really glad that it was somebody who was a woman and who had been in Lesotho to welcome.

SCHROEDER: [00:16:53] Yes.

NOBLE: [00:16:53] To welcome you. That would have really eased a lot of anxiety.

SCHROEDER: [00:16:59] Yes. Until that we got on the bus to go to the airport and then she said, okay, we wish you all a great journey. And you could tell everyone kind of popped their heads up thinking, wait.

NOBLE: [00:17:09] What, you're not coming with us?

SCHROEDER: [00:17:12] Which is obvious. But at 2:00 in the morning, you don't really think those things through. But and it's just to say it was a great orientation because we really, I felt connected to her at the end.

NOBLE: [00:17:21] Sure, sure.

SCHROEDER: [00:17:21] And I felt like, oh, guide me, take me on the plane with you, please.

NOBLE: [00:17:25] Yeah, yeah. I really do think it's sort of remarkable that you're sent off without an escort all the way to Lesotho. So where, did you fly out of Philadelphia or New York?

SCHROEDER: [00:17:36] Uh, we flew. We took a bus to New York. Now I remember. We took a bus to New York and then flew out of JFK.

NOBLE: [00:17:43] Yeah, okay. Did you make stops along the way?

SCHROEDER: [00:17:46] No. There is a flight from JFK to Johannesburg.

NOBLE: [00:17:50] Oh.

SCHROEDER: [00:17:50] So I suppose we did. We stopped in Johannesburg.

NOBLE: [00:17:53] Johannesburg. But that's practically Lesotho.

SCHROEDER: [00:17:55] That's, I think, one of the longest flights that you can have.

NOBLE: [00:17:57] I bet it is.

SCHROEDER: [00:17:58] It's, it's a very long flight.

NOBLE: [00:18:00] How many hours, do you remember?

SCHROEDER: [00:18:01] I think it was 15 hours or 16. And then in Johannesburg, I mean, you have to stop. There's no direct flight to Maseru. Maseru's the capital of Lesotho. So we stopped in Johannesburg. Had a few hours before we got on a tiny little plane to Maseru.

NOBLE: [00:18:20] And you're exhausted already.

SCHROEDER: [00:18:22] Yes, absolutely.

NOBLE: [00:18:22] Because how can you sleep on a plane when you're so excited?

SCHROEDER: [00:18:25] I know.

NOBLE: [00:18:26] So a couple of hours then you get on a small plane, the 30 of you with no escort. So you've had to negotiate your way through the airport in Johannesburg.

SCHROEDER: [00:18:38] Mm hmm.

NOBLE: [00:18:39] What, what was that like in Johannesburg at the airport?

SCHROEDER: [00:18:42] It was really astounding because it really was just stereotypical Africa in your face when you arrive at the airport.

NOBLE: [00:18:55] Really, even in the airport?

SCHROEDER: [00:18:57] Yes. Well, you know, um, South Africa had the, I think it was 2010 World Cup there. And so as far as I know, to my knowledge, the airport had a makeover done to really cater to all of the people that were coming to see the World Cup. And so it really, um, is just, you know, trying to make you feel like you're, you're just stepping into the bush almost. Like the culture and.

NOBLE: [00:19:29] Oh, really?

SCHROEDER: [00:19:30] Oh, yeah. People in traditional outfits, you know, from South Africa are walking around. There's giant wooden giraffes. There's a beaded sculpture of Nelson Mandela standing there. I mean, all sorts of things which, you know, we don't see that at the airport in Washington, D.C.

NOBLE: [00:19:49] No, no. So they really wanted to impress you that you know right away you are in Africa.

SCHROEDER: [00:19:54] Right, yeah. That's how I felt, you know, at least. And of course we're all overwhelmed anyways, so it really was like, we're here.

NOBLE: [00:20:03] And then you pile on to the small little plane.

SCHROEDER: [00:20:05] Yes.

NOBLE: [00:20:05] And how many hours of a flight was that one from Johannesburg into Lesotho?

SCHROEDER: [00:20:10] It's very short, I want to say it's about an hour or maybe 40 minutes. Maybe even 30 minutes. It's a very short plane ride

NOBLE: [00:20:19] Maybe this is the time to talk about exactly where Lesotho is geographically.

SCHROEDER: [00:20:25] Okay.

NOBLE: [00:20:25] In case whoever is listening to this isn't quite sure.

SCHROEDER: [00:20:29] Lesotho is centered directly in the heart of South Africa. It's completely surrounded by South Africa. It's one of the few countries in the world that is completely surrounded by.

NOBLE: [00:20:42] Another country.

SCHROEDER: [00:20:43] Other country.

NOBLE: [00:20:44] Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [00:20:47] And it is not a part of South Africa. So the language in Lesotho is Sesotho. And there are parts of South Africa that speak Sesotho or Sotho. And they have definitely, you know, a history that

intermingles. However, the reason primarily that Lesotho has remained a sovereign nation is because it's located in the middle of the Drakensberg Mountains and the Maloti Mountains. So it is very high up. You know, it's one of the only countries in Africa where it snows on a continual, I mean, on a consistent basis annually.

NOBLE: [00:21:29] Oh.

SCHROEDER: [00:21:29] It has the four seasons. It has a very cold winter. I mean, it's the mountains. So there is snow, I mean, every year.

NOBLE: [00:21:37] So when you were packing, you had to pack for both summer and winter.

SCHROEDER: [00:21:44] Oh, yeah. You know, we definitely. And then also knowing that it's the mountains. So you really have, I mean, your hiking boots and all that and, yep, the four seasons.

NOBLE: [00:21:54] It's a lot to cram into, what did you get, 40 pounds or 50 pounds?

SCHROEDER: [00:21:57] Right. Right. Oh yeah. Yeah.

NOBLE: [00:22:02] So, so you fly into the capital city, which is Maseru. And how do you get off the plane? This is a small plane. Do you walk down a little ladder sort of onto the tarmac?

SCHROEDER: [00:22:17] Yes.

NOBLE: [00:22:17] Uh huh. Just like in the movies.

SCHROEDER: [00:22:19] And we just walked to the airport from there.

NOBLE: [00:22:22] From there, right. There's no big jetway.

SCHROEDER: [00:22:25] Yes. No.

NOBLE: [00:22:25] As soon as you open the door and step out, now unlike in Johannesburg, you are really in Africa. You're breathing African air. What was the temperature? What time of year was it?

SCHROEDER: [00:22:35] It was the spring when we arrived, because I arrived in October and the seasons are inverted there.

NOBLE: [00:22:43] Oh yes, because we're south of the Equator.

SCHROEDER: [00:22:45] Right. So it was just starting springtime there. Uh, I can't remember if it was particularly, I mean, I think it was just moderate temperature, you know. And then Maseru is also located in the lowlands. You know, there's half of the country is considered in the lowlands, although it's still quite high compared to sea level and all of that. It's, it's called the lowlands. And then the other half of the country is really, really high up in the mountains.

NOBLE: [00:23:16] Do you know what the elevation is?

SCHROEDER: [00:23:18] I have been told that Maseru is the elevation of Denver.

NOBLE: [00:23:24] Okay, so about 5,000. Uh huh.

SCHROEDER: [00:23:26] Uh huh.

NOBLE: [00:23:27] And everything else is higher than that.

SCHROEDER: [00:23:28] Everything else is higher than that. So that's the lowest point or one of the lowest points in the country. Lesotho is the size of Maryland. I can't remember how big that is, but it's very, it's very small. However, because it's so mountainous, it's still, it can take a very long time to go from one place to another place. I mean, that the size is no indication of how far it is.

NOBLE: [00:23:54] So I want to talk more about getting around in Lesotho in a minute. So you're not hit by a blast of tropical heat when you get off the airport, or get off the airplane?

SCHROEDER: [00:24:06] No. No, there were some staff members at the airport.

NOBLE: [00:24:10] They greeted you right there?

SCHROEDER: [00:24:12] Yes.

NOBLE: [00:24:12] Good.

SCHROEDER: [00:24:13] And a few Peace Corps volunteers who were there currently with little signs saying welcome to Lesotho and all of that.

NOBLE: [00:24:19] That would make you feel good.

SCHROEDER: [00:24:21] It did. It did. And then we piled into those white vans with the Peace Corps logo on it.

NOBLE: [00:24:29] You had to move through customs?

SCHROEDER: [00:24:32] Yes. Customs was not very intense.

NOBLE: [00:24:37] Okay, so it didn't take forever.

SCHROEDER: [00:24:39] No, Maseru is a very, very small airport. I think, I mean, there's maybe one or two flights a day, and I'm pretty sure they just go to Johannesburg. There's, there's nowhere else it goes I think.

NOBLE: [00:24:52] So you get into these little vans, all 30 of you? Or there were a couple of vans?

SCHROEDER: [00:24:55] There were a couple of vans.

NOBLE: [00:24:57] And off you go to where?

SCHROEDER: [00:24:59] We went directly to our training villages. We had three training villages and one of them was called Makola. It was a bigger village, and I think most volunteers were placed in Makola. And then

there were two other villages right outside of Makola that were smaller, and they had just a handful of volunteers each there.

NOBLE: [00:25:25] How did they split you up or were you all going to be doing the same kinds of jobs?

SCHROEDER: [00:25:30] Lesotho has, it had really at that point two types of jobs. There were, there was education and there was health. And so my group, we were all education.

NOBLE: [00:25:41] You were? Okay.

SCHROEDER: [00:25:42] And within education, you can do either primary English or high school math. So we were separated into those groups.

NOBLE: [00:25:51] Okay. So the math teachers would be in maybe a different training village from the English teachers.

SCHROEDER: [00:25:57] Yeah. It was high school science and math, now that I can remember. I mean, there was an emphasis on math because of standardized testing and all of that. But, you know, definitely there were science teachers there, of course, as well. And I believe most people there were science and math teachers.

NOBLE: [00:26:14] Oh, really? A smaller number of English teachers?

SCHROEDER: [00:26:16] Yeah, we were maybe six or seven.

NOBLE: [00:26:19] Yeah. Yeah. So then, so there you are. You're in a training village. Where are you living during training?

SCHROEDER: [00:26:29] I lived with the chief of Makola, who was a woman, and they were the Tumo family.

NOBLE: [00:26:38] The chief was a woman?

SCHROEDER: [00:26:40] Yes.

NOBLE: [00:26:41] Is this typical in Lesotho?

SCHROEDER: [00:26:43] No, it's not. Um. It. I asked her about this once I got to know the family very, pretty well, which I, I loved my host family. They were so good to me. And throughout my Peace Corps service, I came back and visited them and kept in touch with them because they really, really were just very, very good to me. Um. With her family, her, as far as I know, what she explained to me, was that her husband in his family, they were the family with the chiefs. And as is part of the culture in Lesotho, and really just the dire economic situation, a lot of the men leave Lesotho to go work in the diamond mines.

NOBLE: [00:27:39] In South Africa?

SCHROEDER: [00:27:40] In South Africa.

NOBLE: [00:27:42] So that leaves women to.

SCHROEDER: [00:27:43] Yes.

NOBLE: [00:27:44] Be the decision makers.

SCHROEDER: [00:27:45] Yes. So my host father had spent many, many, many years working in the diamond mines in South Africa to provide for his family. And I don't know if it was when he was going to leave or one of the times at the beginning when he had come back. But they had, he and his wife had a discussion about, well, who's going to run the village? And, you know, he said to her, you would be very good at this.

NOBLE: [00:28:12] Oh, wow.

SCHROEDER: [00:28:12] I think you should run it because of her temperament and all of that.

NOBLE: [00:28:15] What an extraordinary man.

SCHROEDER: [00:28:17] I know. And, uh. And she was, she is very good at it. She's still the chief, as far as I know. And yep, she was just a wonderful, really good, caring person. Good person to be chief.

NOBLE: [00:28:35] So you in her, you're living with her family?

SCHROEDER: [00:28:38] Yes.

NOBLE: [00:28:39] Did you have a room of your own?

SCHROEDER: [00:28:41] I did.

NOBLE: [00:28:42] During training?

SCHROEDER: [00:28:43] Yes. I had a little room that was separate from their house. It was just a separate little brick house on their compound.

NOBLE: [00:28:54] Okay. Were there other separate little houses on the compound?

SCHROEDER: [00:28:57] No, I think that was, that was it.

NOBLE: [00:28:59] Two buildings, the main one and your little house?

SCHROEDER: [00:29:02] Yes.

NOBLE: [00:29:03] Were there other people your age, were there children?

SCHROEDER: [00:29:07] In my host family?

NOBLE: [00:29:08] Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [00:29:08] Yes, there was, um. So there was my host mother who was pretty elderly at that point. I don't know how old she was exactly, but she was up there. And one of her daughters lived with her. Her

daughter had been married and then her husband passed away and she had moved back in with her family.

NOBLE: [00:29:32] Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [00:29:32] So she was living there. And then, I don't believe it's her daughter, but she called her her daughter. But it was from another, it was the granddaughter of my host mother. Lesotho families, just like in many countries I think, are pretty ambiguous.

NOBLE: [00:29:54] Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [00:29:55] You hear, you know, that this person.

NOBLE: [00:29:56] My cousin and my brother.

SCHROEDER: [00:29:57] Exactly. This is my daughter. This is my cousin. But you don't really know the bloodline.

NOBLE: [00:30:02] Yeah, yeah.

SCHROEDER: [00:30:02] But honestly, it doesn't really matter.

NOBLE: [00:30:03] Doesn't matter.

SCHROEDER: [00:30:03] So she was there, and then there was a grandson that was also there.

NOBLE: [00:30:09] And so how old were these?

SCHROEDER: [00:30:12] Right. The grandson was I think maybe seven. I forget his name now. But the granddaughter was 11. And the daughter who had moved back in with them was, I'm not sure, maybe in her thirties. She looked like she was in her thirties.

NOBLE: [00:30:36] And what was the language in that house?

SCHROEDER: [00:30:39] It was Sesotho and English.

NOBLE: [00:30:42] Now you had not, you went straight into this family.

SCHROEDER: [00:30:46] Mm hmm.

NOBLE: [00:30:47] You had had no training in Sesotho at all when you first got there.

SCHROEDER: [00:30:51] Mm hmm.

NOBLE: [00:30:51] Whew. But they did speak some English?

SCHROEDER: [00:30:53] They did. They were well educated, this family. My host mother, the chief, spoke English and her daughter also spoke English very well. So it was, was nice to arrive and be able to communicate with them.

NOBLE: [00:31:13] No kidding. Right. Right. So that and, um, your host mother did all the cooking for you, right? You ate with them?

SCHROEDER: [00:31:23] Yes, I would eat with them per Peace Corps rules. I think if I remember correctly, the first month they were supposed to provide you with all of the meals. And then the second month of training, you could start making your own meals and shopping for yourself.

NOBLE: [00:31:39] You had, in your tiny little house, you had a kitchen?

SCHROEDER: [00:31:41] Yes, well, I had, I had a little gas stove. Right. That I could start making my own meals.

NOBLE: [00:31:47] Yeah. Okay. I could see how that might be good training. But we'll talk about that later, about how, to what extent you had to take care of your own food. Um. And then during the day in training, you would gather with other Peace Corps volunteers.

SCHROEDER: [00:32:07] Yep.

NOBLE: [00:32:07] In Makola. The, what did you say, six or seven of you were in Makola together?

SCHROEDER: [00:32:13] Makola had the largest group. I think we were maybe 15 actually. And then the other villages were the smaller groups. So, yep. Every morning we would meet at the church in Makola.

NOBLE: [00:32:29] The church?

SCHROEDER: [00:32:30] Uh huh. They had a church building.

NOBLE: [00:32:33] What kind of church?

SCHROEDER: [00:32:34] Which was pretty large. Uh, I forget. It was a Christian, Christian church. I don't remember what sector of Christianity. I forget.

NOBLE: [00:32:47] It doesn't matter. Doesn't matter. It, was it like a meeting room, a big meeting room?

SCHROEDER: [00:32:52] It was just a big space with windows and everything, with chairs. So, uh, you know, the village let us have it. They, of course, used it on Sunday, but the rest of the time, we could go there and have our, our Peace Corps sessions.

NOBLE: [00:33:09] So let's talk about the sessions.

SCHROEDER: [00:33:11] Okay.

NOBLE: [00:33:11] What went on? What were they doing with you during training?

SCHROEDER: [00:33:15] Well, you know, it was a full day every day. We had language in the morning and we had wonderful language teachers who were just so funny.

NOBLE: [00:33:26] There were native speakers of Sesotho?

SCHROEDER: [00:33:27] Native speakers of Sesotho, primarily women who were also hosted in the villages like us. So these are ladies who lived, I believe most of them lived in villages around the capital. But when they sign on to be a Peace Corps instructor for language, they are also housed in the villages like us.

NOBLE: [00:33:52] So they might be leaving behind their own family.

SCHROEDER: [00:33:54] They are leaving behind their families. Yeah.

NOBLE: [00:33:57] And this went on, this was, the training session lasted how long? Two months?

SCHROEDER: [00:34:00] I think it was two or three months. Maybe two and a half months. Something like that.

NOBLE: [00:34:05] So what was that like, learning Sesotho? You'd already, you were already fluent in three languages. Sesotho now is language number four.

SCHROEDER: [00:34:13] It is.

NOBLE: [00:34:15] How did they teach it?

SCHROEDER: [00:34:17] Uh, they just. Well, you were randomly pretty much put in these little classes. They really focused on small class sizes.

NOBLE: [00:34:29] How small is small?

SCHROEDER: [00:34:30] Small is maybe four people.

NOBLE: [00:34:32] Good.

SCHROEDER: [00:34:33] Yes. So they would split us up into groups. And you were put into just a small group randomly with four other volunteers and

one instructor. And they would go through vocab and just try to talk to you about, okay, what did you have for breakfast? What is your house like? Family, you know, and then go through all the words. Really just starting with words, basic communication of how does that work. Then as you progressed, then they would really talk about, okay, grammar and sentence structure and how does that work, all of that. And as you increased your Sesotho capability, at whatever speed that was, they started to rearrange you into, okay, you know, you are learning this pretty quickly. We're going to move you into a class that is people that speak quickly, like with other.

NOBLE: [00:35:19] Move along a little faster.

SCHROEDER: [00:35:19] Right, people that move along a little bit faster.

NOBLE: [00:35:20] That sounds good.

SCHROEDER: [00:35:21] So we were rearranged a few times with that.

NOBLE: [00:35:24] I'm assuming you'd be in the fastest moving group.

SCHROEDER: [00:35:27] I was not in the fastest moving group, actually. I was in a moderate group. Sesotho, I felt like it was challenging, you know, because I had had a lot of language experience. However, it was languages that have a strong foundation in Romance languages, you know. Spanish for me was not very challenging because I knew French already.

NOBLE: [00:35:53] French, right, right.

SCHROEDER: [00:35:54] And why did I know French? Because I was.

NOBLE: [00:35:57] It's the language of your home.

SCHROEDER: [00:35:58] Yeah, it's the language of my house. So, um, in my language experiences, I always had that foundation and suddenly I did not have that foundation anymore at all.

NOBLE: [00:36:10] Yeah, yeah.

SCHROEDER: [00:36:10] So, I mean, I did all right in Sesotho. I was in an intermediate group.

NOBLE: [00:36:15] Were they teaching, does Sesotho have an orthography? Is it a written language?

SCHROEDER: [00:36:21] It's a written language. I think the base language is called Sotho. I mean, it's part of the Sotho people who lived in the area. And it's a, it's a vast area because I know that parts of South Africa also speak it. And in Botswana, Botswana speaks Setswana.

NOBLE: [00:36:45] Setswana, yes.

SCHROEDER: [00:36:46] Which is almost exactly like Sesotho. When I traveled, I went to Botswana and I suddenly was looking around saying, hey, I know what you're saying.

NOBLE: [00:36:56] Wow.

SCHROEDER: [00:36:57] Which I had no idea. But so the language is spoken in different parts too.

NOBLE: [00:37:02] So when they were teaching it, did they use written materials as well as oral?

SCHROEDER: [00:37:09] There was a manual that Peace Corps had put together and the language instructors had put together over the years. And they used that language manual. There was, they gave us little dictionaries. There were a few, a few things like that. And our Peace Corps instructors would give us, you know, like vocab lists and things like that. But it was limited, you know. I mean, Sesotho is a written language, but there aren't very many libraries in the country. So it was limited resources.

NOBLE: [00:37:41] So most of your training in the language was oral.

SCHROEDER: [00:37:45] Yes.

NOBLE: [00:37:46] Yeah. Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [00:37:47] And us taking our own notes from what the teacher was writing.

NOBLE: [00:37:51] Right, right. Right, right. Yeah. And, and did you find that that language training was adequate? Did you learn enough to be able to function?

SCHROEDER: [00:38:01] I did, yeah. Yep. You know, at the end of Peace Corps language sessions, and really at the end of your orientation, you have to take a test to see if you can actually be in the community on your own and you speak enough of the language that you can function by yourself.

NOBLE: [00:38:16] Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [00:38:17] So I did well enough. I passed. I think most people passed. And so, yeah, it was all right. Um. I mean, there were some of my friends that became very, very good in Sesotho.

NOBLE: [00:38:33] Is it a tonal language?

SCHROEDER: [00:38:36] Uh.

NOBLE: [00:38:37] Like, does the tone of it determine the?

SCHROEDER: [00:38:39] No.

NOBLE: [00:38:39] The meaning of the word?

SCHROEDER: [00:38:42] I don't, I don't think so, no.

NOBLE: [00:38:44] Uh huh. Okay. So it's possible.

SCHROEDER: [00:38:47] Yeah, it's possible. But as far as I know, I mean, I don't remember having any experiences like that where I was saying something differently because of my tone.

NOBLE: [00:38:57] Okay. Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [00:38:57] It was possible.

NOBLE: [00:38:58] West African languages are tonal and that's.

SCHROEDER: [00:39:02] Wow.

NOBLE: [00:39:04] Just one more layer of difficulty.

SCHROEDER: [00:39:05] I'm sure.

NOBLE: [00:39:06] And so training was heavily, had a heavy emphasis on language training, and what else?

SCHROEDER: [00:39:13] There were Peace Corps led sessions about safety. You know, that was a big, big part of it. Lesotho in 2010 had a volunteer that was killed.

NOBLE: [00:39:29] Oh.

SCHROEDER: [00:39:30] Yes. So that was very, um. Very, uh, I mean, horrible, of course, you know, and very challenging to the program because it was basically an accident. I mean, it was not an.

NOBLE: [00:39:52] It wasn't a deliberate murder?

SCHROEDER: [00:39:54] It was a murder, but it was not, um. You know, because you are Peace Corps or you are American or this, this person was not, I believe, pursuing this individual in particular. He was just happened to be at the wrong place. And, you know, I can't, I can't

speaking much else to the, to that because I wasn't there and I didn't know what happened. But what happened once that became known was that Peace Corps in Washington, I mean, really wanted to close the program.

NOBLE: [00:40:30] Oh.

SCHROEDER: [00:40:30] Because they felt like, well, this is unacceptable. You know, obviously it's not safe. And, you know, this volunteer was murdered and it was right near the Peace Corps office. So it just, just was bad all around. And so Peace Corps Lesotho made dramatic safety changes that were very strictly enforced to keep the program open. And, uh, we had resources that are available with the embassy. I mean, the embassy really helped us out, the U.S. embassy, to really put these safety measures in place.

NOBLE: [00:41:08] What kinds of safety measures?

SCHROEDER: [00:41:09] Well, we couldn't really go anywhere without telling Peace Corps where we were going at all times. I mean, you had to have direct communication with Peace Corps for everything. I know that before, uh, you could go to South Africa pretty easily and Peace Corps didn't have to know about it if you weren't spending the night there. And so considering that Lesotho is completely surrounded by South Africa, that was a very simple, it's a very simple thing to do. I mean, you just cross the border to go to the grocery store on the other side.

NOBLE: [00:41:42] Oh, okay.

SCHROEDER: [00:41:42] It's not a big deal. It's like crossing a state line, you know? But we could definitely no longer do that. You couldn't be in the capital city at night. You couldn't be in the capital city without telling anyone. A lot of the rules regarded the capital city really as, uh, as the area of most of the safety concerns. You had to be approved to be there at any time.

NOBLE: [00:42:08] How did you communicate with the Peace Corps office to let them know your whereabouts or to, if you were in trouble, to, to reach them for asking for help? Did you have a cell phone?

SCHROEDER: [00:42:21] Yes, we all had phones and it was expected that we would keep our phones charged and available so that if anything did happen, we were able to be reached.

NOBLE: [00:42:33] So they wanted to be able to reach you and you had a way of reaching them.

SCHROEDER: [00:42:37] Yes. Of course, if that didn't work either, there were, there were other ways. There was a radio signal that we had to learn for the radio, in case there was an emergency and we couldn't be reached.

NOBLE: [00:42:50] You had like a two-way radio?

SCHROEDER: [00:42:52] I didn't have a radio, but a lot of the families in, the, the host families and the Peace Corps did. So at least your host family, who, you know, many of the families had the radio on all the time, they could be reached and they could inform you about anything that's happening.

NOBLE: [00:43:11] Huh. Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [00:43:12] So anyways, that was really the tone when, when my group had arrived. You know, a lot of our sessions were about how important the safety is and, and following all of the rules, which I completely agree with and understand.

NOBLE: [00:43:32] Um, with women in Peace Corps today, I know there's a lot of concern about sexual assaults.

SCHROEDER: [00:43:40] Mm hmm.

NOBLE: [00:43:40] Was there an expectation for a particular dress code? Were you expected, were you told not to wear mini skirts or, I don't know, whatever for your own safety?

SCHROEDER: [00:43:51] Yes. There, I mean, it was recommended that we really try to be as respectful as we can to the culture and also that we are being seen as teachers really. So being role models and all of that to the community. We were supposed to wear long pants, long skirts, you know, try not to show.

NOBLE: [00:44:18] When you say long skirts, ankle length or just below the knee?

SCHROEDER: [00:44:22] Below the knee. Or even to the knee, that was all right. Nothing very tight. Just making sure that you're being professional at all times. Um. Yes. So no miniskirts.

NOBLE: [00:44:40] Right, right. And so there was a lot of emphasis on your own safety and communication. What else did training include? Was there a talk about the culture of the people in Lesotho, cultural norms?

SCHROEDER: [00:44:59] Yes, lots of culture sessions. Lots of, uh, you know, how to not make any faux pas about the, the community and the culture and all of that.

NOBLE: [00:45:13] That's easier said than done.

SCHROEDER: [00:45:14] It is. We would have these little sketches where, you know, we would misunderstand something and how easily something could be misunderstood. So that was always very interesting. I liked those sessions because it was very eye opening. We had a little bit of, oh, we had education about the status of HIV and AIDS in Lesotho. That is very, very important. So a lot of information sessions about that and sessions that provided us with resources for teaching about HIV and AIDS, which is a very big component of Peace Corps volunteers there.

SCHROEDER: [00:45:59] And then a session about, uh, resources for being teachers as well. We had people from the Education Department come and talk to us about, you know, how schools are in Lesotho, because that was my main concern. You know, how am I going to teach in Lesotho? I don't know what the school system is like at all

NOBLE: [00:46:23] And you had not had education courses?

SCHROEDER: [00:46:25] I had. I had had one education course before, but it wasn't at all about how to teach at all. It was like, you know, theory of education. So that doesn't help me at all in Lesotho. So that was very, very eye opening. And resources for teachers, really. How can we teach our subject? The more we went on through orientation, we got split up into groups to science and math teachers and resources for them. And what is the curriculum like? All of that, and the same thing for primary English teachers.

NOBLE: [00:46:58] Yeah. So I can see how you'd be in different groupings throughout the day. You'd be in one grouping for language instruction, but in a different one for talking about what your teaching life was going to be.

SCHROEDER: [00:47:11] Yeah. At the end of our orientation, we had a practicum where we worked, when we taught classes in a school.

NOBLE: [00:47:17] Right there in Makola?

SCHROEDER: [00:47:20] Yes, I think it was in one of the villages outside of Makola, Berea. But anyways, it was the end of the school year and we actually went and did little language classes, I mean, for English, we did little language classes in the primary school there.

NOBLE: [00:47:36] So what was that like? What, um, how, how, how many kids in a class?

SCHROEDER: [00:47:42] In that practicum?

NOBLE: [00:47:44] Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [00:47:45] There were maybe 30, or 20 to 30 in a class. It wasn't a very big village.

NOBLE: [00:47:52] And the kids were how old?

SCHROEDER: [00:47:54] In primary school we were teaching, I believe it was fourth grade and fifth grade and sixth grade.

NOBLE: [00:48:00] So they'd be about the same age as kids in those grades here?

SCHROEDER: [00:48:05] Mm hmm.

NOBLE: [00:48:05] Nine, ten, 11.

SCHROEDER: [00:48:05] Yep. Most of them. Some of them, of course, were older and had been kept back because they, they weren't able to master the subject.

NOBLE: [00:48:16] Or maybe hadn't had a chance to go to school.

SCHROEDER: [00:48:19] Right. You know, I didn't really get to know them that well because it was really only a few days.

NOBLE: [00:48:23] Oh, just a few days.

SCHROEDER: [00:48:24] Just a few days for practicum. Just to make sure that we could handle ourselves in the classroom.

NOBLE: [00:48:28] Was, was there another, another teacher there in the room with you while you were teaching English during your practicum?

SCHROEDER: [00:48:39] There were other PCVs that would observe you and give you feedback.

NOBLE: [00:48:48] Oh, that's nice.

SCHROEDER: [00:48:48] And then there was one Peace Corps staff member. It was very nice because in our education group, I'm also now remembering that we didn't just have math and science and English. We also had kind of like resource teachers. Some of them helped out in primary, like pre-K area, it was called ECCD. And so they worked with helping ECCD programs, which is like.

NOBLE: [00:49:17] ECCD?

SCHROEDER: [00:49:17] Yeah, that's like early childhood programs. It's like pre-K, you know, infants and all of that. And then others were retired teachers from the United States who joined Peace Corps and had a lot of experience, obviously. And so they were kind of put in as resource teachers for a school to help them with their program, teaching teachers basically, guiding the school and instruction and all of that. So that was really great because that was an extra resource within our PCV community. I mean, those people, I used their depth of knowledge all the time to my benefit.

NOBLE: [00:50:05] Oh, good. That's great. I'm glad they were there.

SCHROEDER: [00:50:07] They were, and they were able to help me, you know, plan my lessons and everything and be successful in my job.

NOBLE: [00:50:13] So eventually training comes to an end after two or three months. Was there a big swearing in ceremony or something?

SCHROEDER: [00:50:22] There was.

NOBLE: [00:50:23] Back in Maseru maybe?

SCHROEDER: [00:50:25] Nope, it was still in the village. Again, I think it was in the neighboring village, in Berea, for some reason. But there was a ceremony. The representative for the U.S. embassy came. There

was singing and dancing, which is just a big part of the culture in Lesotho. It was, it was just really nice. Lots of speeches. And then we were each read our names, you know, our names were read off and we would come and get our certificate saying that we had completed orientation. We are now officially Peace Corps volunteers. I think we had to take an oath.

NOBLE: [00:51:03] Uh huh.

SCHROEDER: [00:51:04] Yeah, it was a really good time. And then there was a feast, of course.

NOBLE: [00:51:08] Oh boy.

SCHROEDER: [00:51:08] Because there's no party without food.

NOBLE: [00:51:10] Yeah. What about alcohol? Um, is, is it a country in which people consume alcohol?

SCHROEDER: [00:51:19] It is, uh, primarily men however. It's not. Women are not, it's not respectable for a woman to drink alcohol.

NOBLE: [00:51:31] So even at this party, maybe it would have been dry.

SCHROEDER: [00:51:35] Yeah. There was no alcohol at the party. Lesotho is primarily Christian, a Christian country. I mean, a very high percentage is a Christian country. And so they have these, you know, traditional Christian values. So the clothing, the church, yeah, no alcohol. It's not necessarily a cultural thing. I don't know, actually, maybe not, but it's kind of these conservative values I believe that we find here too.

NOBLE: [00:52:08] So you've finished with training and now instead of living in Makola, you're going to be sent someplace else?

SCHROEDER: [00:52:18] Yes.

NOBLE: [00:52:19] Uh huh. Where to?

SCHROEDER: [00:52:20] I was sent to Tabola.

NOBLE: [00:52:22] Tabola.

SCHROEDER: [00:52:23] Tabola.

NOBLE: [00:52:24] Now, how do you get to Tabola from your training site? Did, did you have to get back into Maseru at any point during training?

SCHROEDER: [00:52:31] We did. We took a trip to Maseru with our Sesotho instructors as guides. That was just a fun field trip day to kind of explore the city with, with a guide and see the different, different parts. We also went into Maseru to buy a lot of the things that we needed for our house.

NOBLE: [00:52:53] Uh huh.

SCHROEDER: [00:52:54] So Peace Corps gives you a certain amount of money, you know, towards the end of your orientation to go and actually buy basic things for your house.

NOBLE: [00:53:04] Well, how did you know what you were going to need? Had you, had you been given a glimpse of your house, the house you were going to be living in for two years?

SCHROEDER: [00:53:11] Yes. Your, first of all, your community provides you with basic things, you know, a bed, a dresser, a stove, things like that.

NOBLE: [00:53:23] Did you have a table and chair?

SCHROEDER: [00:53:24] I had a table and chairs. Yep. Not everyone did though. So at the end of your orientation, you do, you. There are two things. You get to go and live with a volunteer who's, um, you know, doing something similar to what you're doing. So I went with an English

volunteer and you get to follow them around and see how their daily life is. And then you also got to go to your actual site.

NOBLE: [00:53:49] The place where you're going to.

SCHROEDER: [00:53:50] The place where you're going to be. And you go there for I think it was two days to meet your village, all of that, and see where you're going to live. And so for a lot of people, that was a glimpse of like, oh, you know, this is, this is. I need to buy this and this and this and.

NOBLE: [00:54:06] Oh, yeah. Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [00:54:07] What am I missing? Okay.

NOBLE: [00:54:09] And then you go to Maseru and do some shopping.

SCHROEDER: [00:54:11] And then you do some.

NOBLE: [00:54:12] And they gave you a special allowance for settling in?

SCHROEDER: [00:54:16] Yes, exactly. Settling in allowance.

NOBLE: [00:54:18] Yeah. Good, good, good, good. And then off you go to Tabola. How did you get to Tabola?

SCHROEDER: [00:54:26] I would take a taxi.

NOBLE: [00:54:29] The first time?

SCHROEDER: [00:54:30] A public taxi. Well, no, I'm sorry. I'm getting ahead of myself. What happened was that we were sent to different regions, depending if you were going. If your site was going to be in the north or in the south of Lesotho, you were sent to a conference during training. And this was a conference for you to meet your counterpart, which would be instrumental in your getting to know the community and all of that.

NOBLE: [00:55:02] So wait, your counterpart is a host country national, somebody. What do you call a person who lives in Lesotho?

SCHROEDER: [00:55:11] A Mosotho.

NOBLE: [00:55:12] Mosotho.

SCHROEDER: [00:55:13] That's like one person, yeah.

NOBLE: [00:55:16] So your counterpart would be a Mosotho?

SCHROEDER: [00:55:19] Yes.

NOBLE: [00:55:20] Okay. And that person would be a primary school teacher?

SCHROEDER: [00:55:27] Um, I think that was the idea. Yep. I don't know if everyone's was a teacher. Some of them were the principals of the school. Mine was a, yes, primary school teacher at one of my schools because I had two schools.

NOBLE: [00:55:40] So you had a chance to meet that person during that conference? Were you in the north or the south?

SCHROEDER: [00:55:45] I was in the north. My site was not very far from the capital or the training villages.

NOBLE: [00:55:51] Oh, okay. When you say not very far, how long would it take you to get from Maseru to Tabola?

SCHROEDER: [00:56:01] An hour.

NOBLE: [00:56:02] Oh, yeah. Oh, that's nice.

SCHROEDER: [00:56:04] Yeah. So I was not, not very far at all. So we were. We went from our orientation to these conferences where we met our

counterpart. And then the school was supposed to provide transport for you and your things to your village when you were moving.

NOBLE: [00:56:27] Oh, from Maseru?

SCHROEDER: [00:56:28] From your.

NOBLE: [00:56:30] From, from Makola?

SCHROEDER: [00:56:32] Not from Makola, but from where you, from our conferences. We had brought all of our things to the conferences. So from the conferences you were going to take all of that stuff. So my counterpart had, uh, one of the people on the parents committee, a father on the parents committee, who had a truck that came and took me and all of my things. And we went to my village.

NOBLE: [00:57:03] So you went to the village. What's the road like?

SCHROEDER: [00:57:07] My road was pretty good. I was right off of the main road. So there's one.

NOBLE: [00:57:11] Paved?

SCHROEDER: [00:57:12] It's a paved road. There's one main paved road that makes kind of a C around Lesotho.

NOBLE: [00:57:18] Okay.

SCHROEDER: [00:57:19] In the lowlands area.

NOBLE: [00:57:19] And is it one lane or two lanes?

SCHROEDER: [00:57:22] It's one lane.

NOBLE: [00:57:24] One lane for both. One lane in each direction?

SCHROEDER: [00:57:26] I mean, it's one lane in each direction, right.

NOBLE: [00:57:28] So it's a two, two lane highway.

SCHROEDER: [00:57:29] Sorry. Two lane. Yeah.

NOBLE: [00:57:30] Paved?

SCHROEDER: [00:57:32] Paved, yes.

NOBLE: [00:57:32] Wow, deluxe.

SCHROEDER: [00:57:32] I know. And I lived right off of that road. So that was really nice because I really didn't have the transportation struggles that many, many people did, who would be cruising along on this paved road and then would turn for maybe 4 hours or more on a dirt road.

NOBLE: [00:57:52] Yeah. Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [00:57:53] So mine, mine was not like that at all.

NOBLE: [00:57:55] Okay. So you get to Tabola and you're collected in a truck that the school provided to bring you and all your stuff over and. And they take you to where you're going to live for two years. Describe that place.

SCHROEDER: [00:58:15] So Tabola, um, is a village right off of the main road. It, I don't remember how many people lived there. It had an upper and a lower part. It was basically at the base of a little, I would say mountain, but it's not really a mountain. It's like a foothill. And it had a primary school and then it had other little villages very close to it that had another primary school and a high school. And so there were these little villages just around this main road that kind of connected to Tabola, that was this main area.

NOBLE: [00:58:58] And did it have a post office?

SCHROEDER: [00:59:00] No. It did not. There was a, kind of down the road, I mean, you know, 5 minutes in a taxi, there was a village called Peka, which was larger, and that was where the post office was. There were a few more shops there in Peka. I had my post office box there.

NOBLE: [00:59:23] Okay. So if you wanted to mail a letter to somebody or pick up mail coming into you.

SCHROEDER: [00:59:28] I went there.

NOBLE: [00:59:28] You'd go 5 minutes down the road to Peka and pick it up. Yeah, that's not too bad. And where you were in Tabola, was there electricity?

SCHROEDER: [00:59:37] I had electricity.

NOBLE: [00:59:40] Ho ha!

SCHROEDER: [00:59:40] Which I think I was one of, yeah, maybe one other person in my group had electricity. I mean, it is very rare in Lesotho to get electricity. And primarily why did I have electricity was I was replacing another volunteer. So there was a volunteer who was before me and she had extended, so she had been there for three years in Tabola, living with the host family that I lived with. And so I think when she moved there, there wasn't electricity. And my host family did have electricity. So she managed to have somebody come and take a line and send it to her little, little house, which was on their compound. And so in your little traditional house, you had electricity. So I did have electricity and I paid my host family for what I used.

NOBLE: [01:00:29] Oh, very nice.

SCHROEDER: [01:00:30] Every month.

NOBLE: [01:00:30] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

SCHROEDER: [01:00:31] It was amazing.

NOBLE: [01:00:33] And of course, Peace Corps gave you a living allowance.

SCHROEDER: [01:00:36] They did.

NOBLE: [01:00:37] That which was to cover things like your electricity. What else did you have to pay your? What else did you have to? What else did you need money to, to buy?

SCHROEDER: [01:00:49] I mean, you know, food and transport were major things. I did pay for my electricity, but most people didn't have electricity.

NOBLE: [01:00:56] Didn't have any.

SCHROEDER: [01:00:57] I paid for a data plan on my phone every month. I paid for, there was a really great plan that was unlimited data, which means that I could get Internet on my phone.

NOBLE: [01:01:14] Wow.

SCHROEDER: [01:01:14] Yeah, I had a BlackBerry that I had brought from the United States, which was my dad's BlackBerry, per the recommendation of a Peace Corps volunteer that was there who said, you know, Blackberries are kind of passé in the United States, but here they are really important.

NOBLE: [01:01:28] So you.

SCHROEDER: [01:01:29] And if you want, if you could bring one, that would be great.

NOBLE: [01:01:31] So you had contact.

SCHROEDER: [01:01:32] I did have contact.

NOBLE: [01:01:33] How did you swing that?

SCHROEDER: [01:01:35] I mean, my dad had a BlackBerry. And so.

NOBLE: [01:01:37] Yeah, but I mean, what I mean is how did you know? How did you have contact?

SCHROEDER: [01:01:41] Oh, I'm sorry.

NOBLE: [01:01:43] With a Lesotho PCV to tell you what would be useful?

SCHROEDER: [01:01:46] Well, we had, you know, once you figured out that you were going to Lesotho, I immediately started doing research of, like, who was going to be in my group. Can I find a list anywhere? They had sent in my package of, you know, my informational package of my country and all of that when I first was accepted, they had sent a letter of someone who was just writing to say what his daily life was like, what were the things that he recommended bringing. And I don't know. I don't think he had recommended bringing a phone, but I just remember speaking with people via, I think, social media that were currently in Lesotho and ask them, okay, what should I bring? You know. And I asked about the phone, should I wait to get into country to buy a phone or what? And they said, if you can, bring something in.

NOBLE: [01:02:37] What, how, how helpful.

SCHROEDER: [01:02:39] I'm sure.

NOBLE: [01:02:40] That's very.

SCHROEDER: [01:02:41] Very different than a lot of people's experiences in the past.

NOBLE: [01:02:44] Wonderful. That really smoothed the way for you. So I'd like to know more about the place you were. First of all, you were living with a family, another host family, a different host family now, not the one in training.

SCHROEDER: [01:02:59] Yes.

NOBLE: [01:02:59] Now you're in Tabola.

SCHROEDER: [01:03:01] Yes.

NOBLE: [01:03:02] What's your Tabola family like, your host family?

SCHROEDER: [01:03:07] They were wonderful.

SCHROEDER: [01:03:12] They were the Mognani family.

NOBLE: [01:03:14] Mognani.

SCHROEDER: [01:03:15] Yes. My host mother was the principal of the primary school in Tabola, and my host father was a preacher at the church that they had on their compound, which was just a little building separate from their house and right next to my house. I lived on their compound in what's considered a traditional house, which is a stone rondavel. It's a circle, like a circle hut.

NOBLE: [01:03:47] Your house was like that? A round rondavel?

SCHROEDER: [01:03:51] Rondavel, that's what they called them, with a thatched roof. And they lived.

NOBLE: [01:03:57] What kind of door?

SCHROEDER: [01:03:58] A wooden door.

NOBLE: [01:04:00] Huh. Windows?

SCHROEDER: [01:04:01] Yep. I had two windows. It was nice.

NOBLE: [01:04:05] And then an electric light bulb?

SCHROEDER: [01:04:07] I know. Yeah, I had a little, little light bulb. It was great.

NOBLE: [01:04:11] You have a refrigerator?

SCHROEDER: [01:04:12] I did buy a refrigerator.

NOBLE: [01:04:14] You did.

SCHROEDER: [01:04:15] A little one. It was such the posh life. It was. Peace Corps volunteers would visit me and just couldn't get over that I had a refrigerator because that just doesn't happen there.

NOBLE: [01:04:28] And your host family's house was also a rondavel?

SCHROEDER: [01:04:31] It wasn't. It was considered a more modern house. It was a brick house with a tin roof and in a square shaped. So primarily around the Lesotho, you would find these round stone with thatched roofed houses as the older traditional houses. And then people, when they were expanding their compound, when families were growing, kind of the more modern thing to do would be building these stone, uh, sorry, brick, square brick houses.

NOBLE: [01:05:03] Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [01:05:03] So, yep, they lived right close to me in this brick house. And they had a TV. They had electricity, they had a gas stove, and all of that.

NOBLE: [01:05:13] Mm hmm. Did they cook for you?

SCHROEDER: [01:05:17] No, I cooked for myself. I had a little gas stove, and I did all of my own shopping. I had a garden, which was very nice. They had a big area for their garden, and they gave me a little section of it so that I could do my own gardening.

NOBLE: [01:05:33] Oh, very nice. What did you grow?

SCHROEDER: [01:05:36] Oh, I grew lots of things. I grew Swiss chard, which was phenomenal. It was just very successful. I grew zucchinis, green beans, lettuce. I think there was spinach. Things like that.

NOBLE: [01:05:52] Are these things that your whole family also grew in their portion of the garden?

SCHROEDER: [01:05:57] No, they grew, um, well, they grew actually Swiss chard in their portion. They grew a lot of cabbage. That's kind of a staple in Lesotho. They grew spinach, a certain kind of spinach, and I think some beans as well.

NOBLE: [01:06:24] What's the food, what's the cuisine like in Lesotho?

SCHROEDER: [01:06:29] In Lesotho, the base, the core of the meal really is *papa*, which is a kind of a cornmeal mush. I think in the United States, it would be comparable to grits. But it's definitely very firm. So that was the staple food. And then people would eat *moroho* next to it. *Moroho* is really just any kind of cooked greens. So a lot of times it was cabbage just chopped up and cooked with some oil and salt. And you would eat that with the *papa*. It was very good.

NOBLE: [01:07:08] Onions, any onions or garlic?

SCHROEDER: [01:07:10] Sometimes they would put onions and garlic with beans or when they would make chicken or something. But not, not usually. Sometimes, yeah, they would make these kind of baked beans on the side. Meat was usually for special occasions or on Sunday.

NOBLE: [01:07:29] Fish?

SCHROEDER: [01:07:30] No, no fish. It's a mountain country. There were not a lot of, um, not a lot of fish there.

NOBLE: [01:07:38] And if there was.

SCHROEDER: [01:07:39] Chicken. Chicken was the big thing for meat.

NOBLE: [01:07:42] Uh huh. Did your host family ever invite you to come and sit with them and eat?

SCHROEDER: [01:07:49] Yes. Yes, they did. They were lovely people. And yeah, they would lots of times. Or if they thought that I was having a hard day or anything, they would just welcome me inside. Or if I was just there talking with my host mom, who was great, and we would talk all the time.

NOBLE: [01:08:02] So she was the, what did you say, she was the principal of the school?

SCHROEDER: [01:08:06] Yes.

NOBLE: [01:08:06] The principal of the school that you were working in. So she was also your counterpart?

SCHROEDER: [01:08:10] She was not my counterpart. I worked at two schools. So I worked at the primary school in Tabola. And she definitely was my main reference for that school. But I guess the main school that I was supposed to be really working with was another school called Lepholisa. So my school into Tabola was called Mopeli. My host mother was called Matabo Mognani and she was the principal of Mopeli Primary School. Then my, my other school was Lepholisa Primary School, and my counterpart was a teacher there.

NOBLE: [01:08:54] Ah.

SCHROEDER: [01:08:56] And my principal just was obviously a main resource for me at that school as well. And I think the reason I was put to work there as well and that was kind of my, um. The name of the school on the paper that I was assigned to was, because it was just less funded than the Mopeli that I worked. Mopeli was a government school. So they had all this, these resources from the government and the government provided the building, textbooks, things like that. Lepholisa, which was the village across the road, is a church school.

So they only had funding through the church. It's considered a private school, and they just didn't have as many resources and as much funding. And the school building was just not very large and students had to share classes and all of that.

NOBLE: [01:09:56] Mm hmm.

SCHROEDER: [01:09:57] So two very different schools. Mopeli had one classroom per grade. So it was, uh, yeah, better management of classes there.

NOBLE: [01:10:11] Uh huh. An easier environment in which to teach.

SCHROEDER: [01:10:13] Exactly. Yes.

NOBLE: [01:10:15] So let's, let's go to school.

SCHROEDER: [01:10:17] Okay.

NOBLE: [01:10:17] Let's, let's go to school at Mopeli first. What's that like?

SCHROEDER: [01:10:21] Well, Mopeli was really close to my house so I would just.

NOBLE: [01:10:25] Walk over.

SCHROEDER: [01:10:26] In the morning, I would walk over in my little teacher's shoes and my colleagues would also probably be walking over at that time.

NOBLE: [01:10:33] Well, wait a minute, your little teacher shoes?

SCHROEDER: [01:10:36] I know, well. Well, I strove to always be very professional. So I tried to make sure that I was dressed appropriately for school. And so I would have my, my Dansko shoes, which are a shoe brand here that a lot of teachers use. And I would, I would just go to school in my, my shoes. I know a lot of Peace Corps volunteers had to walk very far to get to their schools. And so they didn't always wear, they would wear, you know, like sandals or something like that to get to

school. But I always was saying, no, I'm going to wear my teacher shoes, even though it was kind of rocky at certain points.

NOBLE: [01:11:17] Oh boy.

SCHROEDER: [01:11:17] I would get there every day. And so I would go to Mopeli. At Mopeli, I taught English in the fifth, sixth, and seventh grade. In Lesotho in primary school, it goes up until seventh grade.

NOBLE: [01:11:36] Ah.

SCHROEDER: [01:11:38] English in Lesotho is very important. It's an official language. The two official languages are Sesotho and English.

NOBLE: [01:11:49] Okay.

SCHROEDER: [01:11:50] And the reason it was so important was because their final exams, students, when they reached 12th grade, their final exams were in English.

NOBLE: [01:11:59] Oh, boy.

SCHROEDER: [01:11:59] Yes. Even the math portion, everything. The only part that was in Sesotho was the Sesotho part. Everything else was in English, at least at that time.

NOBLE: [01:12:08] I suppose that would be true in South Africa as well.

SCHROEDER: [01:12:11] Yes. Also a lot of, I mean, there were a lot of job opportunities in South Africa and South Africa has a lot of languages. And so really English is kind of a primary connector between all the different communities there that speak different languages.

NOBLE: [01:12:25] So of course, your host mother, who's the principal of the government school, would, would be a good English speaker.

SCHROEDER: [01:12:32] Yes, she spoke English very well. Yes. And I, you know, I taught there and I had my own little office, which was the school library, which the volunteer before me had set up with the help of another volunteer. They worked on that, I think, together. So there were already books at this school and there was already a little library, and I suppose that's where she had her little office. And so that was my office, which was really nice. I inherited a nice little working space.

NOBLE: [01:13:12] Does that mean you were also the librarian?

SCHROEDER: [01:13:14] It did. Of course, the volunteer before me had tried to set up a system that made the students accountable for taking care of the library. So she had a system where students would elect their classmates to be librarians. And so that would mean that, you know, once a week or something, you would come into the library and you would clean it and you would spend time in there to reorganize the books and all of that. You were kind of held accountable to pursue the students who were not returning the library books.

NOBLE: [01:13:46] Oh, yes, yes.

SCHROEDER: [01:13:48] Very important. People like that. So and I, of course, tried to maintain that tradition, and it worked pretty well, actually.

NOBLE: [01:13:55] Did you ever meet that volunteer?

SCHROEDER: [01:13:57] I did.

NOBLE: [01:13:57] Oh, good, so you overlapped for a couple days or something?

SCHROEDER: [01:13:59] We overlapped. Mm hmm. And she was such a great resource to me. I mean, she had a wonderful reputation, of course, in my village. And she, you know, if anything really also gave me a lot of things in her home, which was just so nice to, to really have a have a kind of one foot through the door already and, right, the little working

space, all of these things that I just had inherited. It was just very easy to kind of step into that role.

NOBLE: [01:14:35] That's great.

SCHROEDER: [01:14:35] And she was one of these teacher, teacher resources, so she wasn't necessarily teaching English, but she was a retired teacher from the United States who had come in as a resource for the school. And the library was a really big resource for the school. I would say that working in the library, being there, was probably I had my happiest moments in the Peace Corps in that library.

NOBLE: [01:15:00] Ah. And did you, did you interact, when you were in the library you were working with students?

SCHROEDER: [01:15:05] Yes.

NOBLE: [01:15:05] Interacting with them?

SCHROEDER: [01:15:06] So that would be my office space for when I was planning my lessons and all of that. And I would basically just walk into the class. When it was time for English, I would walk into the class and do my little 40 minutes of English. I loved it so much. It was just so fun.

NOBLE: [01:15:23] And so a class was 40 minutes long?

SCHROEDER: [01:15:26] 40 minutes long. My school was small, so I had between. It was like around 20, 25 students per class.

NOBLE: [01:15:37] Fifth, sixth and seventh grade.

SCHROEDER: [01:15:39] Yep. Each class was around that size. So I would go into those classes at different points of the day, and I would help out with other things. Sometimes, you know, a teacher needed help with something. I was just also a resource for other things. And I, I maintained the library and all of that.

NOBLE: [01:15:59] So let's walk into a classroom.

SCHROEDER: [01:16:04] Okay.

NOBLE: [01:16:04] Fifth grade. You walk in. Do the students stand up to greet you?

SCHROEDER: [01:16:11] No.

NOBLE: [01:16:11] Do they? How do you begin the, the hour that, your 40 minutes?

SCHROEDER: [01:16:16] I think maybe at the beginning, when I was new, they would stand up to greet me and it would be like. I would say, you know, in Sesotho I would say, good morning.

NOBLE: [01:16:25] You would say it in Sesotho?

SCHROEDER: [01:16:26] Mm hmm.

NOBLE: [01:16:26] Oh, let's hear it.

SCHROEDER: [01:16:27] I would say *dumelang*, which is just hello. And they'd say, *dumelang*, madam. They would call me madam. Yes. And I would say, *le phela jwang*, which means, how are you? How are you all? And they would say, [speaks Sesotho], or we're good, you know, [speaks Sesotho]. How are you? And I would say, [speaks Sesotho]. I'm good. Because, of course, greetings were very important.

NOBLE: [01:16:52] Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [01:16:54] So or I would say it in English too, sometimes. But really at the beginning I did it in Sesotho. And I structured my classes so that I would have a warmup and we would go through the English curriculum that was already set up. So I would base my lessons on, on that information.

NOBLE: [01:17:13] Students had textbooks for this English class?

SCHROEDER: [01:17:17] Um, sometimes they would have a textbook. Uh, I very infrequently saw textbooks.

NOBLE: [01:17:26] So you had to make up you own.

SCHROEDER: [01:17:28] I made up my own materials for the most part. I had, there was a curriculum that all the teachers followed. For every grade there was a curriculum of the material that you had to cover. And the students had notebooks, paper, pens, things like that.

NOBLE: [01:17:43] So you were to write on the board and they would copy into the notebooks?

SCHROEDER: [01:17:46] Yeah, that's pretty much how it works.

NOBLE: [01:17:47] Did you, do you ever, were you able to make a worksheet, say, and run it off in the school office, make copies?

SCHROEDER: [01:17:55] No, we didn't have a copy machine. That would have been wonderful. But we did not have that. So a lot of times what I would do when we had a test or a quiz or something like that, anything, I would write it all out on the board.

NOBLE: [01:18:08] Wow.

SCHROEDER: [01:18:09] Yeah, it took a lot of time and they had these really big, wonderful chalkboards. I mean, for that reason, because of course everybody else did that. And every other subject, you would write the entire test out on the board.

NOBLE: [01:18:21] And students copied.

SCHROEDER: [01:18:22] The students copied everything down.

NOBLE: [01:18:25] Wow.

SCHROEDER: [01:18:26] Yeah.

NOBLE: [01:18:28] So. And you did, so you had three classes there in Mopeli?

SCHROEDER: [01:18:35] Yes.

NOBLE: [01:18:36] And then in that same day, you would stroll over to Lepholisa and teach some more?

SCHROEDER: [01:18:43] No.

NOBLE: [01:18:43] How did that work?

SCHROEDER: [01:18:44] I split up my week. I would spend Monday and Tuesday at Mopeli, Wednesday and Thursday at Lepholisa. And Fridays I did alternatively between the schools, you know, once a week. I mean, every other week I would go to the school.

NOBLE: [01:19:00] And Lepholisa, was it? They didn't have as many classrooms or they didn't have a separate classroom for each grade?

SCHROEDER: [01:19:11] Right.

SCHROEDER: [01:19:12] Lepholisa was in dire straits when I arrived. They, their building was a church building. And so there was a big main hall area, just a big room, that was the younger students. And then.

NOBLE: [01:19:34] Younger students meaning?

SCHROEDER: [01:19:36] Meaning kindergarten and first grade.

NOBLE: [01:19:38] Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [01:19:39] Then it had this extension built onto it, these two classrooms that had been built with stones, and that was part of the volunteer before me. She, she helped manage that with the community, building these extra classrooms. So that was kind of the main building. And then because that's three classrooms and there are seven grades.

NOBLE: [01:20:05] Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [01:20:05] So then the school had also repurposed a house that was a little bit down the road. It was, it was really one house that was split into two rooms. And then there was another little building next to it. And so three grades were kind of removed. They had a different campus that was up the hill. And so it was, I can't remember exactly, but it would be, for example, you know, third, fourth, and fifth grade is up there on the hill, doing their school up there in these little, these little classrooms. So these were houses that I think a family had moved out of. And they let, they told the school, you know, we're not going to be here right now.

NOBLE: [01:20:47] Ah.

SCHROEDER: [01:20:47] You can use these, these houses while we are not here.

NOBLE: [01:20:52] Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [01:20:53] So I would do my little classes down at the main building and then I would go up to the other classrooms and teach there. But the classes, the classrooms are very small. Not all of them had a concrete floor. Some of them had a dirt floor.

NOBLE: [01:21:08] Dirt floor.

SCHROEDER: [01:21:08] Yep. The chalkboards were just basically pieces of plywood that had been, I mean, very, very old.

NOBLE: [01:21:16] Painted black?

SCHROEDER: [01:21:16] That had been painted black with chalkboard paint a long time ago. They had holes in them. They were falling off. You would, you would lean them up against a chair to write anything. And it was, you know, maybe two feet by three feet. It was not very large at all.

NOBLE: [01:21:32] Oh, difficult.

SCHROEDER: [01:21:32] So, um, yeah, it was, it was definitely very different than the government school.

NOBLE: [01:21:39] How far away was Lepholisa from Mopeli?

SCHROEDER: [01:21:44] Not very far. It was the next village over. I could walk there and it would take 30 minutes, maybe.

NOBLE: [01:21:49] Could the kids from Lepholisa not have gone to school in Mopeli where the facilities were so much better?

SCHROEDER: [01:21:55] Well, um, no. There was the idea that if you were in Lepholisa, if you were born in the Lepholisa village, you would go to the Lepholisa school. The people in that village all went to that church. I mean, really, you know, the communities in Lesotho a lot of times when they are small like that, there are lots of extended family members are there. So they're all part of the same church.

NOBLE: [01:22:19] Mm hmm.

SCHROEDER: [01:22:19] And the expectation was that if you are part of this church, you will support us. You will come to this school.

NOBLE: [01:22:25] Okay. Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [01:22:26] We have excellent teachers and all of that, which they did. But the resources were just not as minimal, were definitely minimal so. So I split up my time between those, those two schools.

NOBLE: [01:22:45] Did you get any help from Peace Corps in, in terms of resources? Or did people from Peace Corps come up to visit you to see how you're doing and give you suggestions about classroom management or whatever?

SCHROEDER: [01:22:59] They came to visit, you know, the Peace Corps drivers. I was on the road. I mean, I was literally on the way to almost anywhere you were trying to go to in the north. And so a lot of times the drivers would just stop by and they were always really nice and drop off packages for me that happened to come to the Peace Corps office or for anybody else. And they would check in.

NOBLE: [01:23:21] Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [01:23:21] Or my, you know, my program director would come, who was a host country. He would come, right, and tour the school with me and talk about how we're doing, how I'm doing. I think that happened once a year. So we had two visits.

NOBLE: [01:23:40] Uh huh.

SCHROEDER: [01:23:40] Yeah, a few people would come by. But, I mean, the idea was really that you were supposed to work with your counterpart. Your counterpart was your number one person to stay in touch with. And, you know, people in the village and the community. I mean, not everybody had a counterpart that they could rely on.

NOBLE: [01:23:57] Uh huh.

SCHROEDER: [01:23:57] They were just kind of assigned to counterpart and they developed different relationships with people at the school. Maybe they found somebody else that they could work better with. I really, really relied a lot on my counterpart and she was wonderful. And she was probably my, my best friend from Lesotho.

NOBLE: [01:24:13] So when you were with your counterpart, who was a native of Lesotho, would you speak with her in Sesotho or in English?

SCHROEDER: [01:24:25] I spoke with her in English. Really a lot of people in the area that I lived in spoke English. I was very close to the border with South Africa, I mean, right on the border with South Africa. And the nearest big town that was close to me was a main gateway with South Africa, I mean, you know, transportation area. Peka, where I would get my mail, was also a border, so I was very close to South Africa, which meant a lot of people that would come back and forth between South Africa. A lot of people went to university in South Africa. They were just, a lot of English was spoken where I lived. So.

NOBLE: [01:25:09] So did you, did you really need to learn Sesotho?

SCHROEDER: [01:25:13] No.

NOBLE: [01:25:13] You could have functioned.

SCHROEDER: [01:25:15] I functioned a lot in English, which was just, um, disappointing I know in a lot of ways. But I had my conversation Sesotho. And of course, when I walked to my schools in the morning, I was always greeted by the villagers.

NOBLE: [01:25:31] That's right, in Sesotho.

SCHROEDER: [01:25:31] In Sesotho, and I would have, you know, the basic conversations in Sesotho and I really could get by understanding everything. And I did, you know, learn a lot, but I taught English and the, in schools you are also supposed to speak English. Starting in fourth grade, all of their language, I'm sorry, all of their subjects are in English. That's the idea.

NOBLE: [01:25:54] Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [01:25:55] So I just, my Sesotho wasn't, wasn't pristine.

NOBLE: [01:26:01] Yeah. Yeah. So you, you made friendships with people from Lesotho, your counterpart, um, your host mother. Yeah, that

sounds good. And was there another volunteer in your town, or were you the only American?

SCHROEDER: [01:26:22] I was the only American in my town. But I didn't live very far away from other Americans. There was the married couple I was telling you about. They lived down the dirt road that went behind my village, up to the mountain and beyond. So I could walk to their house in maybe an hour and a half, or something like that. They were probably the closest volunteers to me. And then as my service continued this kind of later on, maybe nine months in, there was a volunteer that was medically evacuated from another Peace Corps country. And he came to Lesotho and was placed in the high school that was the village over.

NOBLE: [01:27:11] Ah.

SCHROEDER: [01:27:11] So a lot of my students would go to that high school. It was like a middle school, high school area. So he came and so then he became kind of, that's a 30 minute walk away. He was the closest person. And then the second year, he finished his service and another young lady came and was placed there. So I was not very far away from volunteers.

NOBLE: [01:27:34] But you were actually quite alone in your own town.

SCHROEDER: [01:27:38] In my own town, there was no one else but me.

NOBLE: [01:27:40] Right. What did you do to relax, have fun?

SCHROEDER: [01:27:43] I read a lot. I really like to read.

NOBLE: [01:27:48] Did you bring your own books or did Peace Corps give you a book locker?

SCHROEDER: [01:27:52] I brought a few books. And the Peace Corps office in Maseru had so many books, and there was a constant flow of books circulating around. People who had brought their own books. And I

mean, I just. One of my greatest anxieties was, oh my gosh, am I going to be able to read all of these books before I leave? I can't bring these books back with me, but they're here and I want to read them. So I did a lot of reading.

SCHROEDER: [01:28:16] I did a lot of cooking. I really like to cook and I really liked experimenting with okay, you know, these are my resources. What can I make? You know, I would make my own bread. I made my own yogurt for a little bit because I had a little fridge. I was able to store some things that I wouldn't have been able to do otherwise.

NOBLE: [01:28:35] Oh, yeah. So you had milk?

SCHROEDER: [01:28:37] I had milk. Right. I could keep milk. I mean, a lot of volunteers kept milk anyways. It just, it would be in these little cartons and they would use it up, you know, depending on the season, in a day or two.

NOBLE: [01:28:49] Did you have running water in your house?

SCHROEDER: [01:28:51] No, I didn't have running water. I think most people didn't have running water either. The water situation was I had a pump that was a few feet from my house. It was not on my compound, but it was right on the main pathway in the village. So it was just very close to my house. And there were a few pumps around the village at different areas and a hand pump. So you would go. I had a 20, a few 20 liter buckets, and I would go and wait there for everybody to finish up and I would wait for my turn.

NOBLE: [01:29:25] Oh, well, that would be a good time for conversation.

SCHROEDER: [01:29:29] Exactly. You would talk with those people. Sometimes my students were there. They'd be playing music and, you know, with little radios and such.

NOBLE: [01:29:37] Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [01:29:37] We would just hang out there and then I would pump my own water and bring it back.

NOBLE: [01:29:43] And then did you have to boil it or filter it or?

SCHROEDER: [01:29:48] Yes, Peace Corps gave us a filter and they told us to boil our own water. So I had a really big kettle and I would boil my own water and then put it through the filter. But Lesotho has good water. It is a mount, you know, it's called the mountain kingdom. It's a kingdom. And because it snows every year, there's always the snow runoff. And water is one of its main resources, and fresh, clean water that comes down from the mountains. So I just, I of course boiled my water and wanted to be sure, but you know, water was very clean in general.

NOBLE: [01:30:34] Oh, very nice.

SCHROEDER: [01:30:36] Yeah. At least where I lived it was.

NOBLE: [01:30:38] And there was enough of it.

SCHROEDER: [01:30:40] Yes.

NOBLE: [01:30:40] Good. Did you ever get sick?

SCHROEDER: [01:30:44] No.

NOBLE: [01:30:45] Oh, wonderful.

SCHROEDER: [01:30:46] I had, one time I had ringworm, which is.

NOBLE: [01:30:51] That's a skin thing, right?

SCHROEDER: [01:30:52] It's a skin thing, right. I didn't, I didn't even know what it was. But, yeah, it was very easily treated, tiny little antibiotic cream, and that's it.

NOBLE: [01:31:01] Yeah. Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [01:31:02] But that, that was it. I never, yeah, never got sick. In fact, I was very healthy when I was there. I mean, I lost a lot of weight because I was just eating from my garden and all the walking, very fit from pumping my own water. I mean, I feel like I was in the prime of my life when I lived in Lesotho. Yeah, I ate very healthily.

NOBLE: [01:31:25] Yeah. Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [01:31:26] So it was, it was good. I did not get sick.

NOBLE: [01:31:33] Um, can you describe? What about the music, music and art and what? Talk about that.

SCHROEDER: [01:31:41] Okay. Well, um, Lesotho, its culture is a conservative one in that it's not a kind of a bright and in-your-face culture. For example, you know, when I heard that I was going to Lesotho, nothing, I could depict no images in my head of what that might look like at all. What the food might look like, what the traditional clothes were, anything. So and, you know, the culture is kind of one that is, um, just very minimalist in a way. So they have, um.

SCHROEDER: [01:32:30] So in terms of clothes, traditional outfits, they, they do have traditional outfits. They have a traditional fabric, which is kind of these bright colors, very small print designs, like little circles or little diamonds, something like that. And, you know, there's a lot of women generally in the village that know how to sew and would make dresses and skirts for the women. And the men would wear these shirts with this, these different fabrics.

NOBLE: [01:33:04] Fabrics were home spun, spun in Lesotho?

SCHROEDER: [01:33:06] Yes.

NOBLE: [01:33:07] Wow.

SCHROEDER: [01:33:08] Oh, I'm sorry. The fabric itself, no, actually, I don't think it was. I mean, of course.

NOBLE: [01:33:12] So like the market cloth.

SCHROEDER: [01:33:14] Right. You would buy it at the market. I don't know where it came from. Um, I don't know. But it was considered fabric, like Lesotho traditional fabric.

NOBLE: [01:33:28] Okay. Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [01:33:29] And so that's kind of the traditional clothes that people would wear generally for celebrations and things like that. Music was very important in Lesotho. Church is a big aspect of life for a lot of people. So lots of a cappella singing, a lot of church songs, things like that. Singing was so enormous. I mean, just a part of everyday life. And I loved it so much. I mean, every morning the students would sing, you know, the national anthem. They would sing little songs before they started off their school day.

NOBLE: [01:34:02] In Sesotho?

SCHROEDER: [01:34:03] Sometimes in English. Sesotho and in English. And it was such a lovely way to start the day when you have an assembly. And then they would, you know, maybe the eldest class would, like the seventh graders or something, would pick the song that they would sing and they would sing this little song and they'd march off to their classes singing the song. And it was just a great way to start the day. But anyways, so really just every day people were singing all the time together in harmony, which was always really nice.

NOBLE: [01:34:38] Wonderful.

SCHROEDER: [01:34:38] It really was. And then music in general was just very important. Radios were on all the time. There was, you know, kind of these pop songs that would come out of South Africa that became very popular, that would go around. House music was very popular,

which was kind of these low beats that people would listen to very loudly on transportation.

NOBLE: [01:35:03] The same thing that we, when we talk about house music here, the same kind of, kind of techno?

SCHROEDER: [01:35:09] Uh, yeah, kind of, kind of the same thing. I mean, it definitely would have its own, like South African house music I think was probably separate. It's the same genre, but it's definitely, it's got its own rhythm to it than elsewhere.

NOBLE: [01:35:21] Did you bring any of that home? Were you able to buy?

SCHROEDER: [01:35:25] Yes.

NOBLE: [01:35:25] Music on, what, cassette tapes? On CDs?

SCHROEDER: [01:35:28] Yeah, on CDs. I got a few MP3 clips from friends of that music. And then there was *famo* music, which is kind of.

NOBLE: [01:35:39] What, say it again?

SCHROEDER: [01:35:40] *Famo* music, which is kind of more traditionally for Lesotho. And it's these kind of, um, song stories that people would sing. Many times it was men, and a lot of times it had an accordion and a harmonica. And sometimes, and this beat, it would always, almost always start the same way. And it would be usually a man saying a story of something that happened to him. A lot of times it was pretty random and I didn't like it very much. It was a, I had never heard anything like it and it was not always what I wanted to hear, but my next door neighbor would blast it at all hours. So it was always a struggle with that kind of music.

NOBLE: [01:36:35] Yeah. So you were there for two years. Was the second year in any way different from the first?

SCHROEDER: [01:36:46] Yes, it was a lot easier the second year. You know, Peace Corps does two years mainly because the idea is that your first year is you are just getting to know where you are and people and build relationships. And you cannot do anything really in the first year and you're not supposed to. And then the second year is when, okay, you are part of the village, you are part of the community. You know people, people know you, and now you are one with the community. I mean, you really have those relationships grounded. So you have more flexibility, really. You're able to do more, more things, more activities. You know, have an idea if it's going to be successful or not.

NOBLE: [01:37:32] Mm hmm.

SCHROEDER: [01:37:33] So the second year, I, my big project was helping Lepholisa build classrooms.

NOBLE: [01:37:40] Ah.

SCHROEDER: [01:37:40] You know, when I asked Lepholisa, you know, what, okay, what should we do? You know, I'm here. I've got one more year. I could probably get funding from the United States. What, what is the most important thing that you think Lepholisa would need funding for? And immediately they said classrooms.

NOBLE: [01:38:01] Classrooms.

SCHROEDER: [01:38:01] So we really worked hard to get classrooms built.

NOBLE: [01:38:06] Did you get funding?

SCHROEDER: [01:38:07] We did.

NOBLE: [01:38:07] How did you do that?

SCHROEDER: [01:38:08] There is the PCPP. It's like Peace Corps Partnership Program.

NOBLE: [01:38:12] Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [01:38:13] And I applied and, you know, we basically were accepted to have Peace Corps' name put on this program, um, this, this, you know, offer basically. Or what we were asking for, to put Peace Corps' name onto it. So then my name got put onto the Peace Corps website of saying, okay, you know, here you can fund a Peace Corps volunteer's current project. And so that would be for people in the United States who maybe wanted to support me. I mean, I had, you know, family members, friends that, that wanted to just do something.

NOBLE: [01:38:55] Sure. Did the RPCV group here in Madison contribute to that?

SCHROEDER: [01:39:00] They helped me so much.

NOBLE: [01:39:02] Good, good.

SCHROEDER: [01:39:03] I wrote newsletters once a month via email that I sent out to a big listserv of my family and friends, and a few of them were returned Peace Corps volunteers from Madison, and they really supported me. They got to know the people that I would talk about on my newsletters, my host family, people like that, my village. And maybe I would talk about how, oh, you know, we didn't have enough markers so I couldn't finish this poster I was making, for example. I don't think that actually happened. But they would send me school supplies.

NOBLE: [01:39:34] Oh boy.

SCHROEDER: [01:39:34] They were just really, really instrumental. I had a very good friend who would also help me get some of my, my newsletters published via Peace Corps affiliated magazines and blogs and things like that. So I really had help from people that I didn't really know as well.

NOBLE: [01:39:53] That is true.

SCHROEDER: [01:39:54] It was really wonderful.

NOBLE: [01:39:55] That's good. So you succeeded in getting some classrooms built?

SCHROEDER: [01:39:58] I did. I did. We got two classrooms built, which was just really wonderful for that school. I mean, it was tricky getting all of that organized and how are we going to get bricks to this area. And we're many times going to the local hardware store, figuring out, okay, quotas, all of, all of these things. But we managed and it was just really nice to be able to do something for the school. Of course, not all the funding came from the United States. A big portion of it came from the community as well.

NOBLE: [01:40:39] Ah.

SCHROEDER: [01:40:40] Maybe not necessarily money, but okay, what can the community contribute? And maybe somebody would say, okay, I have a wheelbarrow, I can give the wheelbarrow, you know, lend the wheelbarrow. Somebody else would have electricity, that they would be able to run a line from their house to the school. And we could do, you know, use the drill, right?

NOBLE: [01:41:00] Yeah, yeah.

SCHROEDER: [01:41:00] Something like that. Somebody says, I have sand, I can contribute sand, you know, things like that so.

NOBLE: [01:41:07] And labor.

SCHROEDER: [01:41:09] And labor, labor was very big.

NOBLE: [01:41:11] Yeah. Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [01:41:12] And water. People going to get water from the pump basically, which was huge. So, uh, so that was really wonderful. And I did a few other projects too. Built some chalkboards for the class.

NOBLE: [01:41:28] Oh, yeah.

SCHROEDER: [01:41:29] Which was really important. Helped set up the library at Lepholisa, because they had books but they were in boxes. And so no one ever.

NOBLE: [01:41:37] Right.

SCHROEDER: [01:41:38] There wasn't a library system set up at all. Books were not on the shelf at all. So we built some bookshelves and put the books on the wall, things like that. So yeah, a lot happened in that second year.

NOBLE: [01:41:53] Sounds very gratifying.

SCHROEDER: [01:41:54] It was very busy.

NOBLE: [01:41:55] Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [01:41:57] It was wonderful.

NOBLE: [01:41:58] Did you take any vacations? Did you get time off?

SCHROEDER: [01:42:01] Yes.

NOBLE: [01:42:02] School holidays?

SCHROEDER: [01:42:03] Yes.

NOBLE: [01:42:03] What do you do? Where'd you go?

SCHROEDER: [01:42:05] Well, for Peace Corps, you would have to accrue vacation days. Every month you would get two days of vacation, and then you

would have to be pre-approved to go anywhere. You know, you would have to basically tell Peace Corps, okay, I would like to go here for my vacation and they would have to approve you and say that it was okay to go. So, you know, traveling kind of came after you accrued a few vacation days.

NOBLE: [01:42:32] Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [01:42:32] But I traveled a lot. I went to Swaziland, another small country in southern Africa. So it was very interesting to compare those countries. I went to South Africa a few times. I went to Botswana, I went to Zimbabwe and Zambia area. I went to Madagascar.

NOBLE: [01:42:54] Wow.

SCHROEDER: [01:42:54] That was really nice.

NOBLE: [01:42:55] Wow.

SCHROEDER: [01:42:55] Yeah.

NOBLE: [01:42:56] This is all during your two years?

SCHROEDER: [01:42:57] This was all during my two years.

NOBLE: [01:42:58] When you had holiday time?

SCHROEDER: [01:42:59] Yes. And then I took my close of service trip to Mozambique.

NOBLE: [01:43:03] To Mozambique.

SCHROEDER: [01:43:05] So I really traveled a lot.

NOBLE: [01:43:07] That was on your way home?

SCHROEDER: [01:43:08] It was on my way home, yeah. So it was nice.

NOBLE: [01:43:11] Yeah. Yeah. Is there anything else that you'd like to talk about, about things that happened when you were in Lesotho?

SCHROEDER: [01:43:24] Um. Transportation was always really interesting.

NOBLE: [01:43:28] Yeah. You mentioned taxis a couple of times.

SCHROEDER: [01:43:30] Yes.

NOBLE: [01:43:31] Describe that.

SCHROEDER: [01:43:31] Well.

NOBLE: [01:43:32] Is it like a taxi like when you call a union cab here or is it?

SCHROEDER: [01:43:36] No. They would have taxi ranks in these bigger cities or urban areas, so there would be a place to go get your taxi. Again, fortunately for me, I lived on the main road so my, I could almost always quickly catch a taxi because it was very well traveled in that area. It's not like I needed a special one for my village. I could just get off at my stop, basically. So that was lucky for me. I.

NOBLE: [01:44:06] And would you be all by yourself in a taxi or are these, like, collective little, sort of like minivans?

SCHROEDER: [01:44:14] They were like minivans. Mini, mini busses. Yeah, most of the time. And they, yeah, they would just wait until they were full and then they would move along.

NOBLE: [01:44:24] Right.

SCHROEDER: [01:44:25] Lots of time there was music playing, loud music. Something I always thought was really funny was people didn't like to open the windows. They would say that you would get *sufuba*, you'd get sick. *Sufuba's* like flu.

NOBLE: [01:44:40] Uh huh.

SCHROEDER: [01:44:40] And so that was always funny. I didn't, I didn't mind so much in the wintertime, of course, but in the summertime it would be very hot and I would open the window and some grandmother next to me would say, what are you doing? Close the windows. *Sufuba, sufuba*, you're going to get sick! And I'd be like, no, we're going to get sick sitting in here. You know, it's so hot, all the germs. It was always really funny. But yeah, transportation was always just very exhilarating because you never quite knew what was going to happen. And I was very fortunate in that my transportation, I had very, I mean, generally good experiences.

SCHROEDER: [01:45:18] But there's also a culture around transportation. Like you, you know, there's a lady that comes in with bags and you have to help this lady with her bags. Or someone that comes in with multiple babies. You have to, you know, she would just pass you a baby and you hold onto the baby for the ride. Or you'd hold onto someone's chickens or whatnot. And, you know, there was also, you would, if you put yourself in someone's taxi, you shouldn't get out and try to get on to a different taxi because that would offend the driver and all of that, even though that taxi might be leaving now and you don't know how long your taxi is going to be filled up. There was just all of these cultural, um, innuendo moments that.

NOBLE: [01:46:06] Yes.

SCHROEDER: [01:46:06] That revolved around transportation, which I feel like we don't have in the United States so much because we're very private in our transportation options.

NOBLE: [01:46:14] Yes, yes.

SCHROEDER: [01:46:15] So that was always very interesting. Um.

NOBLE: [01:46:26] What was, what was difficult? Was there anything difficult?

SCHROEDER: [01:46:31] Yes. I had, um. I had, I had definitely a few moments. Transportation sometimes was difficult. Even though I could get pretty reliable transportation, it was sometimes difficult because it wasn't people that knew me at all. Like maybe somebody else that would go always to their village and always take the same taxi, another Peace Corps volunteer I'm talking about. Then they would know the driver, you know, eventually they would know people in their village that would be in their taxi. And there's an element of security in that. And with me, many times I'd be on a taxi with people that did not know who I was at all. And, you know, I was already in the Peace Corps a year and a half in and, um.

SCHROEDER: [01:47:22] And it was, it was all right. I didn't mind it so much, but sometimes that was just difficult, you know, just frustrating to be like I've been here a long time and, you know, you. Like someone once tried to cheat me out of money.

NOBLE: [01:47:36] Oh.

SCHROEDER: [01:47:36] That was the only time.

NOBLE: [01:47:38] Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [01:47:38] The only time that ever happened to me. But I, it was very frustrating. Like I, I have been taking this taxi for two years, my friend. You know, I know how much it costs. And of course, it was a new, new driver.

NOBLE: [01:47:50] Uh huh.

SCHROEDER: [01:47:50] Who didn't know me, you know. So things like that. I had, I had a rat problem.

NOBLE: [01:47:58] Oh.

SCHROEDER: [01:47:59] Yes, vermin. So that was.

NOBLE: [01:48:03] How did they get in?

SCHROEDER: [01:48:04] That was almost traumatizing. Um. My house, although I loved it very much, was a very old house too. It was almost 100 years old.

NOBLE: [01:48:14] Oh. What kind of floor?

SCHROEDER: [01:48:17] It had a concrete floor. I think, though, that the volunteer before me was, had had that made. I don't think it was always a concrete floor.

NOBLE: [01:48:27] Uh huh.

SCHROEDER: [01:48:28] So by the time I arrived, I don't know, there was a very nice concrete floor and she had put tiles on it. So, um, like kind of these plastic tiles, but very firm. It was just, it was nice. They didn't come through the floor. I might, I think it was just one rat really. This rat would come through the wall. There were these, basically the stones on my house were put together and held with this mud paste basically. And over the years it's starting to crumble. And so it was very easy for it to kind of dig its hole in there. And so in my two years, I had two moments, both at the same time, in like the fall time, when a rat would come into my house at night. And, um, yeah.

NOBLE: [01:49:16] How did you become aware that it was there?

SCHROEDER: [01:49:18] Because I heard it, because my house is just one room.

NOBLE: [01:49:21] Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [01:49:21] And so.

NOBLE: [01:49:23] How big is this room, by the way?

SCHROEDER: [01:49:24] Not very big at all. It's a circle. It was just a circle. It was maybe ten feet in diameter, or 12 feet. Yeah.

NOBLE: [01:49:37] Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [01:49:38] So I definitely heard it. And I would wake up and turn on my light and there would be a rat looking at me, you know, from my table.

NOBLE: [01:49:50] Oh. So what did you do? How did you deal with that?

SCHROEDER: [01:49:53] Well, it was a process. I mean, I, uh, you know, and it was like psychological too, because every night it would come and destroy my house.

NOBLE: [01:50:05] Oh, oh.

SCHROEDER: [01:50:06] For like two weeks, you know, it would come.

NOBLE: [01:50:09] Oh my.

SCHROEDER: [01:50:09] Yeah. And I couldn't sleep at night. And of course I couldn't sleep, there's rats in here and so.

NOBLE: [01:50:16] It would destroy your house?

SCHROEDER: [01:50:18] Well, he would come and he would eat my fruit, you know, that I had out. And it would come and dig in my drawers and, uh, yeah, just like run around. Yeah. So. Yeah. Well, I tried a lot of things. I tried a lot of, I did a lot of research, you know, when I could get the internet and I would look at like, okay, peppermint repels rats. So I would get some peppermint tea and make peppermint tea. And then once it cooled down, put it around on the stones around my house. I tried filling in the cracks.

NOBLE: [01:50:50] Did it work?

SCHROEDER: [01:50:50] So I tried a lot of things. And the only thing that worked was I bought poison from basically a villager who I was complaining to, like I have this rat problem. I don't know what to do. And she said, oh, sister, I will get you the poison that you need. And she did.

NOBLE: [01:51:07] Your host, did you confide in your host mother?

SCHROEDER: [01:51:10] I did. And but she didn't really, I don't think it was her that helped me out. I think it was a friend at school, one of my colleagues that told me, oh, I will, I will get you the things that you need. You know, this little sachet of poison, basically, that helped me get rid of my rat problem. So, um. But that was, that was, I don't know. That was hard. And I'm not a very squeamish person. But this, this like rat that kept coming in my house, it just felt like that was my safe space and I was no longer safe because I had this, this, this intruder every night.

NOBLE: [01:51:46] Devastating.

SCHROEDER: [01:51:47] Yeah, yeah. Yeah. That was, that was hard.

NOBLE: [01:51:55] So when your two years were over, did that, did that coincide with the end of a school year, of the second school year?

SCHROEDER: [01:52:02] It did.

NOBLE: [01:52:03] Was there some celebration and some, some sort of party or acknowledgment that you had been there for two years and you were now leaving?

SCHROEDER: [01:52:15] Yes, there was, um, I had two celebrations because I had two schools. There was a big, um, yep, a big party at both schools. It was lovely. You know, I had gifts given to me from the schools. We had food. There was dancing, you know, traditional dancing from the women. It was very nice. Very, very lovely, lovely parties. I mean, yeah, it was, it was very overwhelming. Such, all the gratitude from everyone.

SCHROEDER: [01:52:49] I have thought of two things that I, um, that were. One thing that was hard that I wanted to mention that I'm now remembering. And then another story that's an embarrassing story. And I feel like.

NOBLE: [01:53:05] No fear at all.

SCHROEDER: [01:53:07] Okay, well, I'll start with the embarrassing story because I felt like this is something that, of course, would happen as I'm trying to get to know my community. So I had recently moved to my community. And, you know, the first months are very hard because you're suddenly in this village and, oh my gosh, what do I do? I'm just here. Okay, this is it, I'm Peace Corps. I'm here. Now what? What do I do? You know, and no one knows who I am, and I'm trying to make friendships and but everyone's a little bit suspicious, of course, you know. So I was really trying to make sure that everybody would have a good impression of me of course.

SCHROEDER: [01:53:46] So kind of at the beginning of the school year, schools, primary schools, would have these competitions between themselves, sports competitions, kind of like what we have in the United States. But a lot of times it was running. So they would have these different races and the best students would compete next like with the other village schools. And then the winners there would compete within the district. And then those, you know, you would continue on until you were at the championships and whatnot. And so they had been practicing this at my schools, and I was at Mopeli one day and it had been raining. And so I had worn the, I had been wearing these rain boots that I had bought for the rain.

SCHROEDER: [01:54:31] And I found out, of course, only that day. You're never know, you never know these things in advance. I found out that day that my other school, Lepholisa, was going to come over. They were, the whole school was going to walk over that afternoon so that the kids could race against each other and have these races. And so this was, I mean, my entire community. I mean, everyone, like the chiefs

were there, all of these really important people in my villages that were supposed to help me with things, they were all there. My colleagues, my students, everybody was there watching these races. And after all the kids race, the people, the teachers that were organizing the whole thing said, okay, so now the teachers are going to race.

NOBLE: [01:55:21] Oh, no.

SCHROEDER: [01:55:23] That's exactly what I said.

NOBLE: [01:55:23] And you've got rain boots.

SCHROEDER: [01:55:25] I said, I do not run. And they were saying, no, come on, everyone's going to do it. And, you know, teachers, they weren't wearing any other special shoes.

NOBLE: [01:55:38] Right.

SCHROEDER: [01:55:39] So I kept saying no.

SCHROEDER: [01:55:40] And then eventually I was thinking about it. And I said, no, I'm in the Peace Corps. I'm here. I need to make, you know, I need to be one with the community. If the other teachers are going to do it, I'm going to do it. So we got at the starting line. He said, one, two, three, go. And we were running and I hit a patch of grass with my rain boots and I just had this, this whole display of me falling and mud because it had been raining, rolling around in my professional clothes, moaning because I had gotten dirt in my mouth.

NOBLE: [01:56:17] Oh!

SCHROEDER: [01:56:18] And everyone was there and everyone had this collective gasp, just uhhh! Because you could see that they were thinking, oh my God, our Peace Corps volunteer, you know, she. You know, is she okay and everything? Because it was pretty dramatic. And of course, I'm lying there looking at the sky thinking, oh my gosh, I've

just embarrassed myself in front of everyone important. Oh, my gosh. What am I doing here? You know, all of these things.

SCHROEDER: [01:56:50] And then I heard what sounded like thunder, because it was all of the school kids that came running out into the field, who no one knew who even won. Because just when I fell, all of the kids had about a second where they just registered that I fell. And then all of the kids came running out into the field and they all picked me up and dusted me off. Madam, madam, are you okay? Are you okay? They were so nice. And I was carried off by the kids.

NOBLE: [01:57:16] How lovely.

SCHROEDER: [01:57:16] It was just so lovely. And then through the rest of my service, I would, uh, my students would sometimes in class, you know, we'd be talking grammar or whatever, and they would raise their hand. One in particular would raise her hand like she had a question. And I'd say, yes, what's your question? And she would say, madam, do you remember that time that you were running and you fell in front of everyone? And everyone would laugh. And I'd say, yes, I do remember that. Thank you for bringing this up in the middle of English class. I so appreciate it. And everyone would get a good laugh out of that and I would carry on.

SCHROEDER: [01:58:02] So these sports competitions that the kids had, usually on Moshoeshoe's Day. Moshoeshoe was the founder of Lesotho pretty much, kind of the most important man in establishing the country, and a very well respected leader from a long time ago who created Lesotho and established it really as such a peaceful country.

NOBLE: [01:58:29] Which was how long ago?

SCHROEDER: [01:58:31] I can't recall. A long time ago.

NOBLE: [01:58:34] Okay.

SCHROEDER: [01:58:36] So he, um. So they had Moshoeshoe's Day, which was kind of the national celebration for him and the founding of the country. And so on Moshoeshoe's Day, which was, well, that was a national holiday. And right before the national holiday, the schools would compete. And so we had sports day for Moshoeshoe's Day. And so your school with all of the schools really in the district would kind of meet up at this field somewhere. And an all-day event of kids just running, you know, racing and, and racing and practicing. And it was always very exciting to do that because a lot of times, you know, the kids, they were very excited. It was a field trip.

SCHROEDER: [01:59:22] They would, there would be special transportation, there would be a bus hired for the school and the kids would get on the bus and they would just be so excited to be doing something else. Of course, like kids are here, you know, to go on a field trip. And they would just go to the field. There would be music blasting in the bus. It would be totally, I mean, just overstocked with kids. Kids would be leaning out the window and yelling at people on the road. Like, we're going to the sports day! They were just so excited.

NOBLE: [01:59:56] Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [01:59:56] And we'd get there and they would spend their little money that they would bring on like chips and stuff like that. And fat, fat cakes, which is just fried dough, and all of these little treats and such. So anyways, it was just a grand old time for them. And you know, I also enjoyed going to them because it was really a bonding thing and you would go and support your school. Sometimes there were school t-shirts and you would go and cheer for your students. But sometimes it would also be very challenging because it would be an all-day affair. I mean, you would go there and you would not know when you were going to leave at all.

NOBLE: [02:00:33] Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [02:00:33] And you were reliant on the school's public transportation. I mean, sorry, the school's transportation.

NOBLE: [02:00:38] Right, right.

SCHROEDER: [02:00:39] And usually you would be there 9 hours.

NOBLE: [02:00:41] Oh, that's a big commitment.

SCHROEDER: [02:00:43] Big commitment. I know.

NOBLE: [02:00:44] On your day off.

SCHROEDER: [02:00:45] On your, right, it wasn't on your day off. It would be a school day. But still, it was just a very long day. And then you would be suddenly in this sea of people who didn't know who you were. And which is, I would be, you know, the only white person there at all.

NOBLE: [02:01:06] Sure, yeah.

SCHROEDER: [02:01:06] Which I don't mind so much. Of course I don't mind, you know. But everybody else would just make a big show of it. Not, not everyone, but a lot of people would. And there was a lot of like leering and a lot of comments and.

NOBLE: [02:01:18] That's uncomfortable.

SCHROEDER: [02:01:18] A lot of people get just, it's just very uncomfortable. Yeah. Which I could handle for maybe three hours, but 9 hours was just a very long time of, of handling this constant attention. So sometimes that was, that was hard. It was hard to deal with.

NOBLE: [02:01:37] It's reminding me of what you said in the very beginning, about in training, they put so much emphasis on safety.

SCHROEDER: [02:01:44] Yeah.

NOBLE: [02:01:44] Did you feel safe in these situations? Were you ever in a, in an unsafe situation?

SCHROEDER: [02:01:52] No. I would feel safe because I was with my community and, I mean, that was really the main message that they were trying to say, was that you are put in these communities and not, you're not put into the capital city because, of course, the communities need you rather than the capital city. But also because it is very safe in the community. And you might feel like you don't have the resources that you would have in the capital city, but you are much safer in these small villages than you are ever in the capital city. Because it's small, people get to know you.

NOBLE: [02:02:26] That's right.

SCHROEDER: [02:02:27] People look out for you, I mean. And it's true. I had students that would accompany me around the scary dog that I would have to pass by every day. There was a bar in my village that would get all of those people that would come through on the main road, again, who didn't know who I was, and I would pass the bar just to go to school. And I would have my students accompany me sometimes because that was also kind of dangerous.

NOBLE: [02:02:55] Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [02:02:56] But, no, but in general, I mean, I felt very safe in my own village because I knew who everybody was. And at these events, it's never that I felt unsafe. I did not feel unsafe. It was just uncomfortable. But I was always with my colleagues and they really respected me and they understood. So yeah, they were very good to me.

NOBLE: [02:03:16] Was there another one? I think you said there were two hard stories, about things being hard.

SCHROEDER: [02:03:23] Well, I had said, no. I said there was the embarrassing one. And that led into the hard.

NOBLE: [02:03:29] Right, right.

SCHROEDER: [02:03:30] That was always difficult, the sports days. The other Peace Corps volunteers would talk about that, too, like, oh, how was your sports day? Oh, my God. We were there 10 hours. Oh, my gosh. It was in the sun. It was just so long. Yeah, it's just, it's really great. I wanted to talk a little bit more about the library.

NOBLE: [02:03:51] Yes.

SCHROEDER: [02:03:52] At Mopeli. Because it was always so fun being in there. Again, one of my main roles at Mopeli was working in this library and I would kind of manage everything, but the kids really did a lot of it. So during the lunch break is when a flood of students would come in every day to check out books.

NOBLE: [02:04:15] Ah, good.

SCHROEDER: [02:04:15] And we had a little notebook that we would keep track of, okay, who took out what book, what day, all of that. And they would always come in. And it was just such a beautiful time of learning. You know, you can just imagine these kids, especially the little, little ones who maybe didn't have very many experiences beforehand, before coming into this library, who would check out, I don't know, Olivia, like the pig series of Olivia the Pig. So it's the story of a pig, and she dresses up in fancy tutus and whatnot and they just thought it was hilarious. They have never seen anything like it. These books are classic books, you know, which was always so interesting to me.

SCHROEDER: [02:05:00] The books that I felt like I liked as a kid, you know, Clifford the Big Red Dog, for example, and these book series, they ate it up, loved them. Arthur. They loved Arthur. These book series. Franklin the Turtle. Um, I mean, really. And they would come in and ask me, do you have more of this series? I've read all of these series. Do you have more? And I would say no. I mean, we just have what we have in the library. But I just loved it that they, they didn't, that wasn't an excuse. Like others exist, where are they? Why don't we have them? You know, and they would come up with these really wonderful

thoughts. You know, really creative thinking that would come out of the library.

SCHROEDER: [02:05:48] I had a big map on the wall that was from the previous volunteer. And we would talk a lot about, you know, I'm from this country, you know. And then I would have, um, maybe I had one year a calendar that my mother's friend from France had made for me. And so it had pictures on it of, you know, me and their family, and that just blew their mind with the kids. Like, what? You're on the calendar, oh my gosh! You know, and I would try to explain, well, you know, we can make these things.

NOBLE: [02:06:23] Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [02:06:23] You know, these, it's possible to make these things. The calendar was in French, so they learned like the French months just on their own, just looking at my calendar. And where is France and, okay, matching like the flags and all of the stuff. They were just very interested.

NOBLE: [02:06:38] It's a wonderful moment, really working with kids who are tuning in.

SCHROEDER: [02:06:40] Or just taking out a book and coming up to me and pointing at like jellyfish and being like, whoa, what is this?

NOBLE: [02:06:48] Ah. Uh huh.

SCHROEDER: [02:06:48] And I would explain, okay, a jellyfish lives in the ocean, which they've never seen before.

NOBLE: [02:06:52] Of course not.

SCHROEDER: [02:06:53] You know, or a kangaroo. They'd be like, whoa, what, oh, what is this weird animal? And I'd go, kangaroo, Australia. I'd point to the map. I would explain. It has a pouch, it puts its baby in there.

These things that they had never seen before, and they just loved it so much.

NOBLE: [02:07:10] Those are wonderful moments, being with a child who's filled with curiosity.

SCHROEDER: [02:07:14] Yes.

NOBLE: [02:07:14] And brings the question to you. And you talk about it together.

SCHROEDER: [02:07:17] Exactly. And we'd talk in English. It was just great informal learning. And these were things that they were interested in. You know, I had one student one time. I mean, this was just, this was when I really didn't know what to say. He came and he said, madam, what would happen if a shark and a bear got into a fight? Who would win? And I love that question because there are no bears in Lesotho. There are no sharks in Lesotho.

NOBLE: [02:07:51] No sharks.

SCHROEDER: [02:07:52] And he just had this question on his own, you know, from reading books and looking at pictures and all of that and decided, okay. Sharks are like the main predator in the ocean. Bears are the main predator on land. If they got into a fight, who would win? And this is a ten year old boy and this is the same question that a ten year old boy here would ask, you know? Maybe not a teacher, but his friend or whoever. And he was so serious. And I was kind of laughing like, well, I don't know. And he was, he was like, but who would win? You know, looking into the answer.

NOBLE: [02:08:21] There must be an answer.

SCHROEDER: [02:08:22] I eventually, I think I said, well, you know, I guess it depends on where they're fighting, you know, the ocean, maybe the bear, the shark would win. On land, it might be the bear, I don't know. But these are the kinds of questions that they would come up with on

their own that I loved. I would also see this, these kinds of questions I really saw the second year. I did, you know, a big part of Peace Corps Lesotho at least is HIV AIDS education, because it's very, very prevalent there.

NOBLE: [02:08:50] And do you discuss that in the primary schools?

SCHROEDER: [02:08:53] Yes.

NOBLE: [02:08:53] Ah.

SCHROEDER: [02:08:54] I was very fortunate that my schools gave me the okay to talk about these kinds of things. Of course, it's still elementary school so you want to, you know, kind of stick with the facts of course. I mean, I know I had friends who worked in the high school that would get all sorts of questions. But in primary school, of course, you just want to stick with like really the science of it all and all of that. But it's important. I mean, I was there saying, no, yeah, we have to talk about these things in elementary school. Some people I know, some staff members were saying, oh, it's, don't you think it's too early? And I would say, no, you have to. I mean, you really. It is very, one out of four people in the Lesotho has HIV so.

NOBLE: [02:09:38] One out of four?

SCHROEDER: [02:09:40] Yes.

NOBLE: [02:09:40] That's huge.

SCHROEDER: [02:09:41] It is. We, that, that's what the statistic was when I was there. So we need to talk about it all the time with everyone and make this not a taboo anymore.

NOBLE: [02:09:51] That's right.

SCHROEDER: [02:09:51] I mean, there was very much this taboo of silence around it.

NOBLE: [02:09:54] Right. And this idea that you may not, you may feel fine and not know that you're carrying it for ten years before you come down with any symptoms, that you can be spreading it.

SCHROEDER: [02:10:05] Right. And then when someone would pass away, no one ever said he would, they would pass away from AIDS. You know, it would be like, oh.

NOBLE: [02:10:14] There was a taboo to them?

SCHROEDER: [02:10:15] Absolutely. Oh, he passed away, you know, from his heart or his stomach. Like no one, it was never clear what, what happened.

NOBLE: [02:10:26] So that doesn't help with prevention.

SCHROEDER: [02:10:28] No, it doesn't. And but of course, you can't come in and say, well, we really need to, you know, that type of situation. You know, you cannot come in and actually try to say, well, what did he really die from? I mean, that's just not appropriate culturally. But in the schools where you're learning these things, you can, you can talk about it and the science and, you know, be a person that is talking about it. You know, if anybody wants to talk about this subject with me, I am willing at all times to talk. You can come to my house. We can talk about it any time. It doesn't have to be at school.

NOBLE: [02:11:02] That's good.

SCHROEDER: [02:11:02] Yeah. So the first year was just hard. Not not hard, but the kids always thought it was really funny and they didn't really, I don't think they took it seriously so much, but I don't know. You never know these things. But we would play a lot of games. It's just very important for Peace Corps volunteers in education to really, to talk about that. So I would also teach a life skills class every day. And life skills is like health, basic health type of thing, um, decision making, things like that. I mean, I had a life skills class probably in high school, things like that.

SCHROEDER: [02:11:43] And the second year I would have the same students again a lot of times in my classes, just the next grade up. And we would come to these subjects again. And the second year I saw that they were more serious about it. I mean, it was kind of done being funny. It was still funny at some points, but I had better questions the second year. And one time I had a student, Fito, who was always kind of a prankster in class, goes like joking, thinks he's really funny all the time. And we were talking about, right, the prevalence rate. And I was saying, I was asking them, what is the country with the highest prevalence rate of HIV? And it's Lesotho. At that point in time, it was.

NOBLE: [02:12:31] It was?

SCHROEDER: [02:12:33] Yes. And, you know, the kids, they think it's really funny to say all of these countries that they just know randomly, or these countries that they have rivalries with football or soccer and whatnot. And then I said, you know, eventually it came down to it and I said, oh, it's, it's Lesotho, you know, this country. And they kind of, most of the kids in class were kind of like, oh, that's crazy kind of attitude and just kind of, okay, well, whatever, we're continuing on. And Fito was glaring at me in the front of the classroom. And I was going to move on from that because they kind of had their reaction. Like, oh well, that's crazy. And I was going to move on into the statistics of it all and kind of talk about that and what does that mean and everything.

SCHROEDER: [02:13:21] And Fito very clearly, loudly said no. And I said yes. Like, what do you mean, no? This is true. It's that. And he said, no, that, that can't be right. That's not, no, that's not us. It can't be us. It can't be Lesotho. And I said, yes, it is. And he said, who told you that? Which here is, you know, this child, ten years old, asking me who told me that.

NOBLE: [02:13:49] What's your source?

SCHROEDER: [02:13:50] Exactly. What's your source? And that was a great question.

NOBLE: [02:13:54] No kidding. Who told you that?

SCHROEDER: [02:13:55] And I said, we can talk about this if you want after school. And we did. And, you know, I explained. Really it had been obviously a part of my Peace Corps orientation. In training we had a HIV AIDS coordinator, you know, who had all her resources from the World Health Organization and everything and all of that. So all of those resources. And I was able to talk with him and show him and explain that we have these organizations that measure these types of things, you know. And when you go to the clinic and you get tested, you get like part of this, you get placed on this, you know, percentage of people. Like I explained it to him who, and but the fact that he could understand what I was saying, and the gravity of what I was saying, was just a really. It was a, it was an important moment in my service.

NOBLE: [02:14:52] Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [02:14:53] I mean, you never know really when you're when you're up there and you're talking about these things and you think, well, I'm trying to make it fun, but it's obviously really important. But I don't know if they know if it's important. And this, this culture, there's a taboo around it in this culture. I don't, I don't know if people are going to take any of what I'm saying. You know, who am I? I look so different from all these people and I'm only here two years and they're dealing with this. They've been dealing with this for generations. And who am I to come in and say, well, this and this and this? You know, it's just, it's hard to tell what people take away. But that was, um, that's something I'll always remember, that he could understand what I was saying.

NOBLE: [02:15:40] That's a wonderful thing to be able to take home with you, that you made a difference there, that, you know, that somebody woke up and asked good questions and you were there to give the answers.

SCHROEDER: [02:15:52] Right. And someone who hopefully will grow up thinking, understanding and thinking about that and having, you know, really taking responsibility for that.

NOBLE: [02:16:05] Excellent. Um. I was struck in the very beginning when you talked about your languages. You're fluent in English, fluent in French, fluent in Spanish. Do you, did you ever have any regrets that you were not sent to a country where you could have used either your French or your Spanish?

SCHROEDER: [02:16:25] Yes. I was very confused when they told me I was going to Lesotho. Because in the interview process they ask you, what are your skills? And I said, well, I'm fresh out of college. My skills are languages.

NOBLE: [02:16:41] Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [02:16:41] I don't have much experience elsewhere.

SCHROEDER: [02:16:44] I have to say, it mystifies me that you were not sent to either a Spanish speaking country or a French francophone.

SCHROEDER: [02:16:51] Me too, me too. And I was, I for sure thought they were going to send me to French speaking Africa, because how many volunteers do you get that apply that speak French?

NOBLE: [02:16:59] Right.

SCHROEDER: [02:16:59] I felt like, well, of course I would have to learn the dialect.

NOBLE: [02:17:04] The local.

SCHROEDER: [02:17:05] Local language, of course. But at least if I could speak the official language or whatnot, maybe that would be helpful.

NOBLE: [02:17:14] No kidding.

SCHROEDER: [02:17:14] But then Lesotho? English and Sesotho? I mean.

NOBLE: [02:17:18] Did you have the option of saying, no thank you, I'll wait until an invitation comes up for a French speaking country?

SCHROEDER: [02:17:29] No. Uh, it was. Now it's different when you apply now. You actually get to select.

NOBLE: [02:17:39] Oh.

SCHROEDER: [02:17:40] Where you get to go, or you have a say in where you get to go. And that was not what it was like when I applied, which was.

NOBLE: [02:17:46] You either take it or you're, you're out.

SCHROEDER: [02:17:48] The past 50 years is kind of been this way of you, you allow someone else to choose for you based on your skills and what you have to offer and what you're willing to do, you know, in what sector you're going to work in, where you're going to go. And I just trusted. You know, I trusted the Peace Corps. I felt like I'd given everything in these interview sessions. I have told them everything about what I have to offer. And they're making a decision based on that information. And maybe, you know, I'm just going to go with it and I'm going to try. I mean, that's what anyone you can do.

NOBLE: [02:18:25] Now that you've, now that you've been in Lesotho as a volunteer for two years, do you regret having spent your time there?

SCHROEDER: [02:18:35] No, no. I think I have the rest of my life to go and travel to these countries that I do speak the language. And frankly, I don't think I would have ever made it to Lesotho on my own.

NOBLE: [02:18:48] That's right.

SCHROEDER: [02:18:49] I mean, it's really, it's really fortunate in that way. And not, not that I'm trying to make it to any every country or anything, but to have this, this experience that I would not have otherwise.

NOBLE: [02:19:01] That's right.

SCHROEDER: [02:19:03] And being kind of this international person, I think I, I have that drive to travel and I have these major spoken languages under my wings that I can go and communicate. And so there's nothing holding me back really from doing that if I want to. But going into Lesotho to on my own, what would I?

NOBLE: [02:19:31] No.

SCHROEDER: [02:19:31] How would I?

NOBLE: [02:19:31] No, you wouldn't.

SCHROEDER: [02:19:31] No, I wouldn't have done that on my own.

NOBLE: [02:19:34] You'd never, you'd never wind up there.

SCHROEDER: [02:19:35] The longer I was in Lesotho the more I was looking around my surroundings and thinking, thank goodness I was placed in this country. I mean, it was just things that after living there for a while I realized, you know, I really appreciate, you know, like that there's no malaria in this country, you know, which is not the reality for a lot of Peace Corps volunteers. Yeah, things like that. Or how kind my community is to me or to Americans. That was huge. And for me personally, I really, in my interview process I really stressed that I was concerned that I was going to go and teach English someplace. I did not want to be put as this person thrown into a country and just like, well, I'm here to do all English. And I was like, well, why? Well, because, you know, English is a very important language to know, to learn.

NOBLE: [02:20:38] But Lesotho needs English.

SCHROEDER: [02:20:40] Right, that might not have English as an official language or be any near any other country that needs to learn English.

NOBLE: [02:20:47] Yeah.

SCHROEDER: [02:20:47] I just felt like that was kind of an imperialist thing. And so I really stressed that, well, I want to feel like I have purpose when I go. I would like to teach English and I feel like I would really appreciate being placed somewhere where I feel useful. And I did.

NOBLE: [02:21:07] And you did.

SCHROEDER: [02:21:08] And I really did there in Lesotho. So it really was just a perfect place for me to go to.

NOBLE: [02:21:12] What's next? What are you doing now?

SCHROEDER: [02:21:15] Well, I'm back in Madison, Wisconsin. I work in a school now.

NOBLE: [02:21:22] You do? Which school?

SCHROEDER: [02:21:23] I work in a Montessori school as a teacher's assistant. And of course, that's been very eye opening. I mean, you know, working in a school in Lesotho, quite different than working in a school in the United States.

NOBLE: [02:21:37] Oh, sure, sure. And do you think you might go to graduate school?

SCHROEDER: [02:21:41] I do. I intend to apply next fall for graduate schools. And actually, I'm looking to teaching ESL.

NOBLE: [02:21:51] No kidding. How about that?

SCHROEDER: [02:21:53] Yes. Which was not my original plan. When I had come back from Peace Corps, I thought, okay, I'm moving on to other things. I knew I wanted to work in a school and I had now this time, about a year and a half, to kind of ground myself in the United States again. And I'm just coming back to my experiences in the Peace Corps.

NOBLE: [02:22:14] Yeah, yeah.

SCHROEDER: [02:22:14] And really what I was doing there. And I just, I like that a lot.

NOBLE: [02:22:19] Good.

SCHROEDER: [02:22:20] And so I'm going back to that, which is really funny.

NOBLE: [02:22:23] Excellent.

SCHROEDER: [02:22:25] So I, you know, I'm involved with the Return Peace Corps Volunteers of Madison, Wisconsin, Wisconsin, which is quite active and large. And it's, it's really lovely to be living here and to have that community group. They're kind of like family, because my family lives far away. So that's nice. Um. I've been working. Last October I did a TED Talk.

NOBLE: [02:22:51] Oh, yes.

SCHROEDER: [02:22:52] About my experiences in Lesotho and about the culture of community in particular that I witnessed in Lesotho, and how that, that it's very eye opening for someone that doesn't live in a culture that is so community driven all the time. So I did that. Yeah. And the next step is, is graduate school.

NOBLE: [02:23:23] Yeah, yeah.

SCHROEDER: [02:23:24] For education, which I'm very excited about the next chapter.

NOBLE: [02:23:27] I wish you well.

SCHROEDER: [02:23:28] Thank you.

NOBLE: [02:23:30] Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]