

Marilyn Lashley Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

Creator: Marilyn Lashley

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Biographical Note

Marilyn Lashley served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Liberia from 1978 to 1980 as a teacher trainer.

Access

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Oral History Interview

with

Marilyn Lashley

October 10, 2010
Madison, Wisconsin

By Robert Klein

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

KLEIN: [00:00:06] You know, today is 10-10-10.

LASHLEY: [00:00:07] Yes, 10-10-10.

KLEIN: [00:00:10] This is Bob Klein. Today is October 10th, 2010. I'm interviewing Marilyn Lashley, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Liberia, 1978 to '80, in a teacher training program. And so let's begin by going back a little bit.

LASHLEY: [00:00:32] Okay. Well, I should say that I was married and had two children.

KLEIN: [00:00:38] Okay.

LASHLEY: [00:00:38] And, um, we're talking about the year before I was in Peace Corps?

KLEIN: [00:00:42] Right. Right.

LASHLEY: [00:00:43] And I'm a native Chicagoan, number one.

KLEIN: [00:00:46] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:00:47] And my husband and I had already spent time in, he worked for the UNDP [United Nations Development Programme]. And we, he did work on the island of Bonaire. So we had already been overseas for two years.

KLEIN: [00:01:02] Okay. Now, where is Bonaire?

LASHLEY: [00:01:03] In the Netherlands Antilles.

KLEIN: [00:01:05] Oh, okay. Okay.

LASHLEY: [00:01:06] So, um. And we were looking to go back overseas and we had a number of options.

KLEIN: [00:01:13] Right. What about your own background? You grew up in Chicago?

LASHLEY: [00:01:18] Grew up in Chicago, yeah.

KLEIN: [00:01:19] High school, college?

LASHLEY: [00:01:21] High school. College in central Illinois. And then came back to Chicago and did a master's degree at the University of Chicago.

KLEIN: [00:01:33] Oh. And in what subject?

LASHLEY: [00:01:37] It was in social psychology, actually.

KLEIN: [00:01:39] And at that point, did you begin a work career?

LASHLEY: [00:01:44] Yeah, I had been doing some pre-service teaching and in-service teacher training.

KLEIN: [00:01:49] Right?

LASHLEY: [00:01:50] Yeah, for one of the city colleges in Chicago.

KLEIN: [00:01:55] Okay.

LASHLEY: [00:01:56] And for Northeastern Illinois University as well.

KLEIN: [00:01:59] Right. And, but then you, you started the family.

LASHLEY: [00:02:06] Uh, let's see. I think I had the family before I actually. Yeah, I had the family right after I finished university.

KLEIN: [00:02:16] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:02:16] And then went on to do part time college level teaching.

KLEIN: [00:02:22] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:02:22] And then had actually, I was actually working at the University of Illinois Circle, now that I think about this, uh, in their student services area because I was working in education, doing some educational programs.

KLEIN: [00:02:38] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:02:39] And, um, but I always had an interest in being overseas.

KLEIN: [00:02:44] Okay.

LASHLEY: [00:02:44] And so wanted to go back overseas. So we were looking at options to get us back overseas.

KLEIN: [00:02:49] How long were you in Bonaire?

LASHLEY: [00:02:52] Two years.

KLEIN: [00:02:53] And while you were there, was it, did you have a professional role or was it just your husband?

LASHLEY: [00:02:59] It was just my husband that time.

KLEIN: [00:03:02] Okay.

LASHLEY: [00:03:02] And he was a, uh, he actually directed a couple of programs for them. He worked in the ILL and they had some vocational education programs. And so he is an artist by training, but he also is a sculptor and he's very skilled in woodworking. And so they had, and we both do leathercraft.

KLEIN: [00:03:35] Okay.

LASHLEY: [00:03:36] And they had hired him to set up a tannery and run a leather program and actually produce goods.

KLEIN: [00:03:44] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:03:45] So he did woodworking and leather.

KLEIN: [00:03:49] Did you get involved at all?

LASHLEY: [00:03:51] Only with some of the designs, because I, and they also had had people there before who had developed a series of designs because they had a tourist shop.

KLEIN: [00:04:01] Okay.

LASHLEY: [00:04:02] And so what they were trying to do is train young people in a set of skills whereby they could actually earn a living.

KLEIN: [00:04:08] Right. And so how old were your children when you were there?

LASHLEY: [00:04:11] My children, my youngest was three and my daughter was three, and my son was just about going on five.

KLEIN: [00:04:20] So you must have been busy.

LASHLEY: [00:04:21] Yeah, well, actually, no, they were a little younger. She was two and a half and he was more like four.

KLEIN: [00:04:26] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:04:26] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:04:27] So you came back and settled back into Chicago?

LASHLEY: [00:04:31] Yes. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:04:32] And then how did Peace Corps get into the mix?

LASHLEY: [00:04:36] Well, we had had some friends who had served in Peace Corps. And because we were a family and we had known a couple who had been in Peace Corps with the family, they had served in Kenya.

KLEIN: [00:04:48] Oh, okay.

LASHLEY: [00:04:49] But it was, as you said, Peace Corps had started this initiative whereby they were accepting families in scarce skills, is what they called it.

KLEIN: [00:04:57] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:04:58] And she told me that they were interested in teacher trainers. And we had actually had a couple of other options, but we decided to take Peace Corps because it was one, it was the only option that would actually employ both of us.

KLEIN: [00:05:19] Ah, yes.

LASHLEY: [00:05:19] Everything else was either me or him.

KLEIN: [00:05:21] Right, right.

LASHLEY: [00:05:22] So it was, that was why we decided on the Peace Corps. And that it would be a nice experience. We wanted to go to Africa, but the other two options were not Africa. One was Guyana and the other one was Cyprus.

KLEIN: [00:05:36] Mm hmm. Um, when did you first hear about the Peace Corps? Do you remember?

LASHLEY: [00:05:41] Oh, I had heard about it long, a long time, when I was in college. Even so, I was familiar with it. But I.

KLEIN: [00:05:49] And you did know a few people who had served.

LASHLEY: [00:05:51] Mm hmm.

KLEIN: [00:05:52] So then you make the decision that.

LASHLEY: [00:05:54] Yeah, that we would give it a try. Yeah. Because it's a two year commitment. So that's not a long time. And because you're actually employed by the government and you have a stipend and the rest, it's not like you're going to a country and having to fend for yourself, you know?

KLEIN: [00:06:10] Right, right.

LASHLEY: [00:06:11] You had support. So that that made sense to us.

KLEIN: [00:06:14] It'd be a consideration with young children.

LASHLEY: [00:06:16] Yes, absolutely.

KLEIN: [00:06:18] Do you recall the application process?

LASHLEY: [00:06:21] Yes. Um, it was kind of three stages. We applied from Chicago, and the recruiter who was working with us was a very, she was very good. She actually bent over backwards to get us in because she knew that she had to, uh, bringing in families was, even though they had the initiative on, they had to make sure, A, that you were stable. You know, there are a lot of Peace Corps volunteers who don't, shouldn't be going off to Peace Corps. And they really wanted to make sure they didn't make that mistake with the family.

KLEIN: [00:07:02] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:07:02] But also with the family, they needed to know that you could take care of your children because they didn't want, you know, the liability issues associated from, you know. Not to say that the State Department doesn't deal with them when they send families overseas all the time. But Peace Corps, as you know, is not resourced in the same way.

KLEIN: [00:07:23] Yeah. Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:07:24] So, uh.

KLEIN: [00:07:25] So the recruiter was working with you?

LASHLEY: [00:07:28] Yeah. And she was good. You know, recruiters are all different. And in those days, uh, it was a very competitive process. It wasn't so much about their numbers and them needing to recruit a quota as them needing to actually get really good volunteers that wouldn't wind up being a problem.

KLEIN: [00:07:49] Oh, okay. Okay.

LASHLEY: [00:07:50] And so.

KLEIN: [00:07:51] The Peace Corps was relatively small then overall?

LASHLEY: [00:07:55] No, at that point it wasn't. It was really pretty large because they had a regional recruiting office.

KLEIN: [00:08:03] Oh, in Chicago?

LASHLEY: [00:08:04] Yeah, well, they had regional offices all across the states.

KLEIN: [00:08:08] Oh, okay.

LASHLEY: [00:08:08] Yeah, they had, oh, my sense of it was at least 10 or 12 offices.

KLEIN: [00:08:14] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:08:15] Which made it easier for us.

KLEIN: [00:08:17] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:08:17] Because generally most of the families were recruited through Washington as opposed to being recruited at a, at a regional. And so she shepherded us through that process because we both had skills for programs that were desperate to have these skills, that they were having a hard time getting skilled people to do.

KLEIN: [00:08:38] Right. Your skill was defined as teacher training?

LASHLEY: [00:08:43] Yes. And my husband's skill was vocational education.

KLEIN: [00:08:47] Oh, okay.

LASHLEY: [00:08:48] Yeah. So he. And Liberia was such that they were pretty sophisticated in terms of the level of expertise they were looking for and they really needed people to, for Peace Corps, and this was also kind of problematic with Peace Corps, to actually be able to work with a related USAID project.

KLEIN: [00:09:12] Okay.

LASHLEY: [00:09:12] And not every Peace Corps volunteer was well suited to that. That was the kind of marriage that often didn't work very well. And it had other vulnerabilities, let's say.

KLEIN: [00:09:22] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:09:23] But in this case AID, well, in Liberia really needed us. So yeah.

KLEIN: [00:09:31] But at the same time, was there, did AID have any program where you might have gone to work directly for them?

LASHLEY: [00:09:38] Not really. I mean, yes and no. That comes later on.

KLEIN: [00:09:43] Okay.

LASHLEY: [00:09:43] Because actually, when you asked about the recruiting process, so basically her name was Pat. I'm trying to think of her surname. But anyway, so it was a straightforward process. I think from start to finish, it took about seven months.

KLEIN: [00:09:59] Yeah. Okay.

LASHLEY: [00:10:00] For the clearances and everything.

KLEIN: [00:10:02] From the get-go though, it was, you were being recruited for that project in Liberia?

LASHLEY: [00:10:08] Yes, because when she saw us, it was a dead marker because I already had experience. And my husband already.

KLEIN: [00:10:13] Yeah. Okay.

LASHLEY: [00:10:14] So and she knew that, you know, we, she was good. She knew all of the vacancies and all of the skill requirements. So she was, she was a good recruiter.

KLEIN: [00:10:25] What did your, at that point, what did your family and friends think of your going?

LASHLEY: [00:10:29] Well, they were worried of course, they don't like to see you take children overseas, especially to those, uh, backwards countries.

KLEIN: [00:10:37] Yeah, yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:10:38] You know, so our friends were only too happy, because that was a time when a lot of people were going to Africa, you know? So in that regard, it wasn't unusual.

KLEIN: [00:10:47] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:10:48] And among certain people, the Peace Corps, you know, was still an attractive option at that point, particularly among college graduates.

KLEIN: [00:10:59] Being African American, did you have any particular meaning, special meaning, in going to Liberia?

LASHLEY: [00:11:06] Oh, that wasn't our first choice. We really wanted to go to Tanzania, but of course, at that point Tanzania was closed.

KLEIN: [00:11:14] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:11:15] We didn't want to go to Kenya, and at that time Ethiopia was open. But, you know, you had to go to where the positions were.

KLEIN: [00:11:23] Right, right.

LASHLEY: [00:11:24] And so and again, in terms of family, no. In fact, Liberia was our last choice.

KLEIN: [00:11:31] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:11:32] Because we regarded that as too Anglicized.

KLEIN: [00:11:34] Yeah. And they wouldn't let you go to Ghana?

LASHLEY: [00:11:37] Well, it had to do with the jobs.

KLEIN: [00:11:39] Yeah, that's true.

LASHLEY: [00:11:40] You know, and there weren't really jobs there for families.

KLEIN: [00:11:44] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:11:45] You know, the jobs for families were in very, uh, they were scarce to begin with and they were pretty much in pivotal, associated with pivotal programs so.

KLEIN: [00:11:57] But at some point you were content with the idea that you were going to Liberia.

LASHLEY: [00:12:02] Yeah, I mean, Pat made a compelling case that, you know, she was clear about that.

KLEIN: [00:12:05] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:12:06] And then as African Americans, um, and it just so happened she was African American as well so, and she, she knew what the numbers looked like.

KLEIN: [00:12:15] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:12:15] And there tended to be a higher rejection rate among African American applicants than there was among whites. So when she saw us, she, you know, really pushed.

KLEIN: [00:12:26] You're very solid.

LASHLEY: [00:12:27] Yeah. So she knew. Yeah. So she knew what to do.

KLEIN: [00:12:30] So you, you then finally got a letter saying you're invited to Liberia.

LASHLEY: [00:12:36] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:12:38] You were ready for it to come, I mean, you had a sense of what the timing was?

LASHLEY: [00:12:42] Uh, we were busy doing other things. Like I said, I had to quit a full time job.

KLEIN: [00:12:47] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:12:49] So. And that wasn't received very well at all. It wasn't. The man looked at me like I was crazy. He said, what did you want to do that for? Do you want to be a gypsy all your life, he goes.

KLEIN: [00:13:02] Yeah. And if you ask.

LASHLEY: [00:13:04] People would kill for this job that you have and you're going to throw it away?

KLEIN: [00:13:08] Yeah. So you had to close up?

LASHLEY: [00:13:12] Yeah, we had this, we had an apartment. We put our things in storage. We sold a lot of things, sold our cars, and off we went. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:13:24] And the kids agreed?

LASHLEY: [00:13:25] Oh, the kids at that age, they don't complain.

KLEIN: [00:13:27] They're highly mobile at that point.

LASHLEY: [00:13:29] They're highly mobile and they had a good time. They spent a lot of time in, I mean, when you look at it, our daughter is two years old, two and a half years old, who spends two years in another country, she's been lived there as long as she's lived anywhere.

KLEIN: [00:13:44] Right. Right. Well, we'll get to that. So you had, you had the invitation and it was to report to X?

LASHLEY: [00:13:54] Yeah, it was training. We did our training in Washington part ways. But for this segment, it was really considered a in-country training.

KLEIN: [00:14:04] Okay. Let's talk about the Washington phase. You report to Washington.

LASHLEY: [00:14:09] Because we were a family, we actually did report. Did we report to Washington? I'm trying to think.

KLEIN: [00:14:17] There must be some point when you did shots and some advance passport stuff.

LASHLEY: [00:14:23] Well, see, we trained at Peabody College, what was then Peabody College, in Memphis, uh, in Nashville, Tennessee.

KLEIN: [00:14:32] Oh, but not overseas?

LASHLEY: [00:14:34] Uh, and we did some training overseas later as well. We had one of the longest trainings of any group that ever went to Peace Corps because we had approximately six weeks in the U.S. And then another 6 or 7 weeks in country. And they were still playing around with optimal models of training.

KLEIN: [00:14:55] Right. And the shift had occurred where most training was being done in country.

LASHLEY: [00:15:00] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:15:01] Although they still.

LASHLEY: [00:15:02] And they still. And but for this group, because it was mostly education people.

KLEIN: [00:15:07] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:15:08] Uh, and I'm trying to think. I don't think we were all going to Liberia or?

KLEIN: [00:15:13] It's possible.

LASHLEY: [00:15:14] I think we all were. Um. Yeah, we all were.

KLEIN: [00:15:20] Well, let's talk about reporting to Peabody.

LASHLEY: [00:15:23] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:15:24] Do you recall your initial reaction to? Now you're in the midst of a bunch of other people.

LASHLEY: [00:15:31] Yeah, well, it was wintertime, number one. My daughter got pneumonia, number two.

KLEIN: [00:15:38] Oh!

LASHLEY: [00:15:38] Yeah, it was weird. Well, we had different accommodation from the other volunteers. They had actually rented a house for us to live in within walking distance of Peabody.

KLEIN: [00:15:48] Okay, let's take a look at the training group then. Were there other married couples?

LASHLEY: [00:15:53] No.

KLEIN: [00:15:55] So the others?

LASHLEY: [00:15:57] We had probably 100. Was it 100 or? It was a large group. It was considered a large group. It's, um. Maybe it wasn't 100, but it was, it was like 40 something. But it was still a large group. We filled up whatever little housing accommodations that had been.

KLEIN: [00:16:17] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:16:17] And we had been divided into various groups. Some were teacher trainers. My teacher training group, for example, was 15 people.

KLEIN: [00:16:27] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:16:28] The voc ag contingent was probably 8 or 9.

KLEIN: [00:16:33] All right.

LASHLEY: [00:16:33] And then there were math science people, you know. So I'm sure there were a good 60 of us.

KLEIN: [00:16:41] Let's first talk about the domestic arrangements, then we'll get into the content of training.

LASHLEY: [00:16:47] Um, the domestic arrangements for us, because we were family, they put us, they rented a house for us.

KLEIN: [00:16:52] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:16:52] And so we were separate from all the others in that regard, for houses.

KLEIN: [00:16:56] You were spending a lot of time in class?

LASHLEY: [00:16:59] Yes. And what they had arranged for my son, he went to a, they both did. They went to a preschool right there at Peabody.

KLEIN: [00:17:08] Oh, okay. So they were close by.

LASHLEY: [00:17:10] They were close by. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:17:13] All right, let's talk about training, the six weeks at Peabody. Training generally has several components, one of which is language. And I don't know if, if you had a special language?

LASHLEY: [00:17:29] We did the language training in country.

KLEIN: [00:17:31] Okay.

LASHLEY: [00:17:32] The Peabody was strictly pedagogy.

KLEIN: [00:17:36] Okay.

LASHLEY: [00:17:39] And training about cross-cultural relative to the, to the country.

KLEIN: [00:17:45] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:17:45] And what to expect. But no language training.

KLEIN: [00:17:47] Right. And the pedagogy, much of it must have been familiar to you from your own background.

LASHLEY: [00:17:54] So it really consisted of Liberia specific, uh, instruction as it related to, uh. By that I mean teaching and teacher training in Liberia. What teachers were, what teachers' needs were.

KLEIN: [00:18:14] But did you also do Liberian history and culture?

LASHLEY: [00:18:17] Yeah, we did.

KLEIN: [00:18:19] But not the language?

LASHLEY: [00:18:20] Not the language, because Liberia is a place that has several languages.

KLEIN: [00:18:23] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:18:24] And so we were learning region specific, which was the other reason why they had gone to in-country language training, because, you know, the earlier groups found that they were taught one language and then went to a site and couldn't speak to anybody.

KLEIN: [00:18:38] It happens all the time.

LASHLEY: [00:18:38] And so to avoid that, they had gone with a model where all language training was done in a village where you were actually going to be placed.

KLEIN: [00:18:47] Well, during this phase of training, did anyone come out from Peace Corps Liberia, from either Peace Corps or AID? And was there, how precise was the definition of what you would be doing when you got there? Let's concentrate on your job.

LASHLEY: [00:19:05] For my job, and I can say safely for us, because I actually knew the people who were handling the voc education training.

KLEIN: [00:19:14] Okay.

LASHLEY: [00:19:14] And that person had been with USAID in one part of his life, had been an APCD, um, in rural development or something else, but something related to voc ed anyway. And so, so we really had experts available to us from the country, both host country nationals and former either, well, people who had worked in development in those countries for a long period of time. So we really had competent trainers.

KLEIN: [00:19:47] How did you feel about what you were learning? I mean, did it fit, did it seem a little off, or?

LASHLEY: [00:19:51] Yeah. It was, it fit very closely.

KLEIN: [00:19:55] Okay. I don't know if there was still doing it with this model. Often in training there is a selection component where you're screened further by either a psychologist or a psychiatrist. Do you recall that?

LASHLEY: [00:20:13] Uh. In this case they had dropped that psychologist screening. The, the model they were going with at the time is that the trainers involved were highly competent. They just weren't RPCVs. That is another level of training that takes place later. And the reason I can say

that is because I was also an APCD in Botswana much later on. And so I know that the training really, as Peace Corps started spending less money and with the Reagan cuts, there were lots of changes to, in the model.

KLEIN: [00:20:50] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:20:51] Um, but in those days they were still hiring, really what I wanted to say was highly trained, highly skilled, competent professionals who had worked overseas.

KLEIN: [00:21:01] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:21:02] And, and the, you know, the process by which they selected the training sites and the rest was closely associated with people who had real track records. Later there was this shift to go with a bidding process where people who came in with the right kind of a package. And Peabody certainly had to bid. But they had been successful in training education volunteers because ours essentially was an education group.

KLEIN: [00:21:34] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:21:35] Um.

KLEIN: [00:21:35] Were the others in your teacher ed group, generally speaking, younger than you?

LASHLEY: [00:21:42] Uh.

KLEIN: [00:21:43] I mean, you came with a fair amount of experience at whatever.

LASHLEY: [00:21:46] And the teacher trainers, there were only two people out of those 16 who were younger than I was.

KLEIN: [00:21:52] Oh, okay.

LASHLEY: [00:21:53] They were either my age.

KLEIN: [00:21:55] Okay.

LASHLEY: [00:21:55] And some were older. There were 5 or 6 former teachers in that group.

KLEIN: [00:21:59] Oh, okay.

LASHLEY: [00:22:00] Yeah. For teacher trainers, that's what you look for. You need experienced teachers.

KLEIN: [00:22:08] It's a radical change from what was going on in the 60s. You know, it's much more.

LASHLEY: [00:22:13] Yeah. And, well, it had to do with the host country and what they were demanding.

KLEIN: [00:22:17] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:22:17] In the Liberia case, they had a long history of working with Peace Corps. They had a sophisticated set of skills that they were seeking.

KLEIN: [00:22:26] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:22:27] And so they knew that they just didn't want freshly minted undergraduates.

KLEIN: [00:22:33] Yeah. So when you're in the six week training program, did you have any second thoughts about is this a smart thing to do or do I want to do this?

LASHLEY: [00:22:45] No, you know, because for us to sell up everything and make that kind of move, second thoughts are not an option.

KLEIN: [00:22:51] You're not going back.

LASHLEY: [00:22:52] No, no. Now, there were people who opted out at that point, and there were some people in country who should have opted out a lot earlier. And yeah, what we discover later is people have all sorts of motives for going overseas.

KLEIN: [00:23:06] Yes. Yes. And but the training that you were doing at Peabody wasn't particularly probing that aspect, you know, pushing you on motivation?

LASHLEY: [00:23:15] It tried to ferret that out. You know, but under those circumstances, it was very difficult.

KLEIN: [00:23:21] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:23:22] And so, and as I said, at that point, they weren't using a psychologist to do it.

KLEIN: [00:23:28] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:23:28] They tried to really identify people on the front end, at the point at which they're initially recruited.

KLEIN: [00:23:35] Got it.

LASHLEY: [00:23:35] You know, and so there they're running your past.

KLEIN: [00:23:38] So there was no, there was no tension within the training about who's going to go and who isn't?

LASHLEY: [00:23:45] Right. No. And I know what you're talking about.

KLEIN: [00:23:48] And that appeared later, or earlier much.

LASHLEY: [00:23:51] It appears earlier. But also, um, there was that component. I mean, it was clear that we were being evaluated and it was clear that

there would be a few people who wouldn't measure up given how they were behaving anyway. You could see that.

KLEIN: [00:24:08] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:24:08] Uh, but it wasn't intimidating. Whereas we had heard of, we had also known prior volunteers that had the other experience where they were put through sensitivity training and all of these other things to. No, they had abandoned that because that was.

KLEIN: [00:24:27] Was the Vietnam War over by then?

LASHLEY: [00:24:29] Oh, yeah.

KLEIN: [00:24:30] Yeah, that's right. Yeah. Okay.

LASHLEY: [00:24:31] So they weren't doing that.

KLEIN: [00:24:33] The draft wasn't an issue.

LASHLEY: [00:24:34] No.

KLEIN: [00:24:35] Were you asked to do peer ratings during that time?

LASHLEY: [00:24:39] Uh, let me think. We might have been. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:24:42] And did the group?

LASHLEY: [00:24:45] But based on products we were asked to, that we were assigned to do, you know, because with teacher training and with teaching, you have to make units and you have to make presentations. And so in that sense, you did some peer ratings, but that was it.

KLEIN: [00:25:02] Oh, okay. Okay. Some places they ask, well, the on, on the face of it, is well who would you like to be assigned with? But then they use it for, to find isolates and so forth.

LASHLEY: [00:25:16] Yeah, they had. They had abandoned, they didn't use that with our group, for that at that level. And I'm thinking back because I have to. I also did two Peace Corps trainings after that as a RPCV. And so again, depending on who you're contracting with determines what kinds of things you're doing.

KLEIN: [00:25:43] We'll stick with your Liberia experience. So the six weeks comes to an end. At that point?

LASHLEY: [00:25:53] We go straight from Nashville. That was where we went to Washington I guess.

KLEIN: [00:26:02] It could be.

LASHLEY: [00:26:03] Yeah. We disembarked from Washington for Liberia. That's what it was.

KLEIN: [00:26:08] Was there a swearing in ceremony?

LASHLEY: [00:26:09] The swearing in, I believe, was in Washington. Yeah, that's, I think that's what happened because we didn't go back home before going.

KLEIN: [00:26:17] You don't remember who was Peace Corps director at that time? Was it Blatchford?

LASHLEY: [00:26:22] Oh, no. I'm smiling because we know Blatchford.

KLEIN: [00:26:27] Oh, okay.

LASHLEY: [00:26:28] From another, his son went to school with my son. Okay. So we know the Blatchfords very well.

KLEIN: [00:26:33] Yeah. He may have been earlier. And then there were others.

LASHLEY: [00:26:37] He was, he was. Cy Griven was the Peace Corps director in Liberia. And the Peace Corps, I want to say, was it Payton?

KLEIN: [00:26:46] Could be.

LASHLEY: [00:26:47] It was Payton.

KLEIN: [00:26:48] Okay. And how were the kids taking all this?

LASHLEY: [00:26:54] Oh, it was fun for them. They pretty much. I said the only problematic incident was with my daughter getting ill.

KLEIN: [00:27:04] You mentioned that. Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:27:05] And that was because the house, it was. Winter in Nashville is different from winter in Chicago because it's rainy and damp.

KLEIN: [00:27:14] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:27:14] And, um, we were. Where she was in preschool was really very drafty and damp and I didn't know that. And so she wound up with this cold. And, you know, my children generally don't get sick. So when she showed the signs of an infection, you know, runny nose and stuff, I took her to the doctor right away.

KLEIN: [00:27:40] Was she hospitalized?

LASHLEY: [00:27:42] No, no, no. They just gave her an, an injection and medication and we were able to treat her at home. And so within a week, she was fine.

KLEIN: [00:27:55] So now you're leaving from Washington, flying to?

LASHLEY: [00:28:02] Liberia.

KLEIN: [00:28:02] Liberia. Robertsfield?

LASHLEY: [00:28:03] Yep.

KLEIN: [00:28:04] And this is your first time then going to Africa?

LASHLEY: [00:28:10] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:28:10] Yeah. Do you recall your initial reaction?

LASHLEY: [00:28:15] Being in the airport, getting off that plane and the dead of winter and coming into the, with the heat convection things coming off the ground? Absolutely. And getting through the airport, through customs.

KLEIN: [00:28:29] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:28:30] It was easy for us because we had children. So everything for us was expedited. Not at Peace Corps' end, but when you, when you travel, you know this.

KLEIN: [00:28:39] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:28:39] When you're going through customs with or without U.S. endorsement, you basically are breezed through because they know that young infants, young children have had enough stress and so they try to expedite it. So we were, we got out of there pretty expeditiously.

KLEIN: [00:28:58] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:28:59] Peace Corps Liberia was really good at handling those kinds of things and so.

KLEIN: [00:29:05] But before you came, they had, there had been a couple of years when married couples with children were coming into Liberia? You weren't the first.

LASHLEY: [00:29:16] I may not have been, I don't know.

KLEIN: [00:29:17] Yeah, okay. And not a large number, but the program had been in place for a couple of years.

LASHLEY: [00:29:24] Yeah, but I don't know if any or many had come to Liberia.

KLEIN: [00:29:28] Yeah, I don't know that.

LASHLEY: [00:29:29] My understanding is that we were the first and probably the last. The married couples that we knew were other places.

KLEIN: [00:29:37] Okay. Yeah. Yeah, I know they, someone sat down and calculated the cost.

LASHLEY: [00:29:43] Yeah. And, um, and it had, before they could do that, they really had to make sure that the infrastructure was in place. And in a lot of countries, it really wasn't. But Liberia was considered to be a fairly good country.

KLEIN: [00:29:56] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:29:57] Easy country.

KLEIN: [00:29:57] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:29:58] And so they had school places. They went to the American school like everybody else.

KLEIN: [00:30:04] When you were, when you got there, do you have any idea how many Peace Corps volunteers were in Liberia? Was it a big program?

LASHLEY: [00:30:14] Oh yeah, it was a big program.

KLEIN: [00:30:16] Because in the early days, it was. It was one of the largest.

LASHLEY: [00:30:20] I want to say there were probably close to 200 volunteers maybe, but there were a lot. We weren't tripping all over one another because Liberia is a very diverse country.

KLEIN: [00:30:30] Talk about your settling in the first week.

LASHLEY: [00:30:34] Uh, well, the first week was more training. We went up to, I can't remember the name of the county, but we. The problem was, let me think. Okay. Yeah. Um, it's interesting because we actually did part of our training in [Grand] Cape Mount County is what it was called. And my husband was being, we were trained in two languages, Vai and Kpelle. That's what it was. Uh, which, now that I think about it, was kind of. I don't know. I think everybody was trained first in Vai. And then, and we spent two weeks being trained in Cape Mount, living in a village. That's what it was. We were doing village living. That's what it was.

KLEIN: [00:31:36] Okay.

LASHLEY: [00:31:36] And so as part of village living, we had to do Vai because we were in a Vai village. And then we'd break up into groups doing your own specific language for where you would be going. So we did. [tape break]. As well.

KLEIN: [00:31:52] Okay.

LASHLEY: [00:31:52] We did there. And then we also, hmm. And we also did some training in Bonga, which is where our first placement.

KLEIN: [00:32:08] Once you, once you're in the country for the two week village stay, at that point do you know what your final assignment is going to be?

LASHLEY: [00:32:16] Mm hmm.

KLEIN: [00:32:17] So, okay.

LASHLEY: [00:32:18] We knew.

KLEIN: [00:32:18] You knew coming into the country. And why didn't they give you a village experience there?

LASHLEY: [00:32:27] Because the villages were far flung and that would have stretched Peace Corps' resources. But they were doing village based

training as well as in-country training. So there were two weeks of village training, being with the family, becoming a member of that family.

KLEIN: [00:32:51] Now, that, that's a big step now, it's not just a single volunteer. It's a couple with two children.

LASHLEY: [00:32:58] Right.

KLEIN: [00:32:59] So with whom did you stay?

LASHLEY: [00:33:01] Oh, I can't even remember the family's name.

KLEIN: [00:33:03] But what was their family structure like?

LASHLEY: [00:33:06] Well, it's a village. And so it's a compound.

KLEIN: [00:33:11] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:33:11] And it's a kind of village where people are closely related to one another. I guess it would be like a village in the British countryside somewhere where people know one another, related to one another as cousins, second and third cousins.

KLEIN: [00:33:30] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:33:30] And so they kind of share the responsibility for hosting.

KLEIN: [00:33:36] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:33:36] Now with the singles they were placed in, with one family.

KLEIN: [00:33:41] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:33:41] For us, we were still with one family, but, um, there was, the family setting was large enough to accommodate another family right in that, that housing unit itself.

KLEIN: [00:33:59] Do you recall the kids? I mean, this is pretty far out there.

LASHLEY: [00:34:03] They were doing well because they were just running around playing with the other Liberian children that lived in the village and picking up the language much faster than we did.

KLEIN: [00:34:10] Of course. And I assume they were readily accepted.

LASHLEY: [00:34:14] Oh, they were.

KLEIN: [00:34:15] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:34:15] You know, yeah. So. And they became very Liberian the whole while they were there.

KLEIN: [00:34:21] Yeah. And the health wasn't a problem?

LASHLEY: [00:34:24] No.

KLEIN: [00:34:24] Good. Yeah. Um, so you have two weeks in the village stay. And then after that?

LASHLEY: [00:34:35] Then we go to our sites. So we went to Gbarnga.

KLEIN: [00:34:39] Gbarnga.

LASHLEY: [00:34:40] Gbarnga, yeah.

KLEIN: [00:34:40] Okay. How far is that from Monrovia?

LASHLEY: [00:34:43] From Monrovia, um, is it three hours by car? Um, but in distance, you know how the roads work in Africa. In real distance it was probably 150 miles. If that.

KLEIN: [00:35:04] Okay. Yeah. So when you get to Gbarnga.

LASHLEY: [00:35:08] I'm trying to think. Oh, yeah. Yeah. Okay. I remember. For the first few weeks, we stayed on the campus of BWI. Oh, what was BWI? Uh.

KLEIN: [00:35:28] British West Indies?

LASHLEY: [00:35:30] No, it was whoever the man was. Booker Washington Institute, sorry.

KLEIN: [00:35:39] Okay. Okay.

LASHLEY: [00:35:41] You know, Baltimore Washington International Airport. Booker Washington Institute was the name of the school. I was teaching at Kakata Rural Teacher Training Institute. They share a campus. BWI is here. Kakata is there.

KLEIN: [00:35:57] Now, what's the level?

LASHLEY: [00:35:59] It is a high school.

KLEIN: [00:36:01] But they're preparing to become teachers?

LASHLEY: [00:36:06] Uh, the Kakata Teacher Training Institute is the equivalent of junior college, first couple of years of college. Post-secondary.

KLEIN: [00:36:17] Okay. Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:36:19] BWI Institute was secondary.

KLEIN: [00:36:21] Yeah. Okay.

LASHLEY: [00:36:22] And so we actually lived in the principal of BWI Institute's house for the first few months because housing was supposed to be provided at Kakata, KRTTI, it was called. And it took several months for them to come through with it.

KLEIN: [00:36:41] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:36:41] So that became a problem, you know, living in somebody else's space, you know, for months after you joined the Peace Corps, got to be a little. But it was good in one way because I didn't have to cook and had some of the best Liberian food I'll probably ever eat because it was furnished right there.

KLEIN: [00:37:00] Yeah. Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:37:01] But it was, it was a real inconvenience.

KLEIN: [00:37:03] Yeah. Now, when you're, when you're at Gbarnga, you're now doing intensive language training or just?

LASHLEY: [00:37:20] Uh, we were still doing. What are we doing? Oh, I know what happened. Okay. Sorry.

KLEIN: [00:37:29] That's all right.

LASHLEY: [00:37:30] What happened with the language training is that at some point after two weeks, some of us got shipped to Gbarnga to do language training in Gbarnga and training associated with practicum teaching. They had found a school, a high school, and Bong County High School is what it was. And we were doing some pre-service training right there, whereas other people were taken somewhere else. So that's the first time we're separated. So the children and my husband stayed in Cape Mount. That's what happened.

KLEIN: [00:38:19] Okay.

LASHLEY: [00:38:19] And, uh, so they were still with the family and kids. And I, along with a lot of other education and teacher training volunteers, we went to Gbarnga. And so we were, we stayed on the Methodist mission for like two weeks.

KLEIN: [00:38:40] Was there any expectation that you were going to be working in a second language?

LASHLEY: [00:38:47] Mm hmm.

KLEIN: [00:38:47] So the language of instruction was?

LASHLEY: [00:38:49] Oh, no, there was never that expectation.

KLEIN: [00:38:51] Okay. And you knew that?

LASHLEY: [00:38:53] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:38:53] So that language is an incidental benefit, but it's not essential to the job?

LASHLEY: [00:38:59] Right. No, it was not essential. For the high school educators and for some of the others, it would be more essential to the job because technically Liberia is English speaking.

KLEIN: [00:39:07] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:39:08] As well as, and for Liberians, English is the lingua franca because everybody else speaks, you know, a panoply of languages.

KLEIN: [00:39:19] So, and is Liberian English is also.

LASHLEY: [00:39:25] Different.

KLEIN: [00:39:26] Different than American English and Ghanaian. So there was the adjustment.

LASHLEY: [00:39:30] It was a patois, yes.

KLEIN: [00:39:30] Tuning into that language as well.

LASHLEY: [00:39:32] Yeah. But that happened um, in, in Tennessee, it happened in Nashville. We were training, we were, part of our training consisted of.

KLEIN: [00:39:43] Then there were Liberians there and just interacting you began to?

LASHLEY: [00:39:47] They were there expressly to, as host country nationals, to teach us Liberian English and various other cross-cultural aspects.

KLEIN: [00:39:58] Right, right. So now training has to come to an end someday.

LASHLEY: [00:40:05] Well, it finally did. And then we went upon our work. And, uh, so, yeah.

KLEIN: [00:40:11] Now did the family then came together in Gbarnga?

LASHLEY: [00:40:17] In Gbarnga, yeah. And, uh, we were. I guess we were sworn in again. We were actually sworn in. Well, we guess we were sworn in in-country. That's really what it was. There was a big swearing in and that's where it took place. And some people left after all of the training. They didn't get sworn in. They went home. They were about 4 or 5 who were deselected at that point.

KLEIN: [00:40:42] Were deselected, not self selected?

LASHLEY: [00:40:45] Some of both.

KLEIN: [00:40:45] Yeah. Was that a surprise to you?

LASHLEY: [00:40:48] No. A couple. There was one person who really just was using it as a vehicle to hook up with this boyfriend she had to get. So she had, well actually, there were two of them who did something like that. There was another guy who had come on board who, he was Arab. And so he was using it as a vehicle to get back to make some contacts with a construction company that actually worked in Liberia that he knew about. And so he deselected and went to work for them.

KLEIN: [00:41:23] Okay. Okay. Had the group developed much of a group spirit and?

LASHLEY: [00:41:31] Mm hmm.

KLEIN: [00:41:31] But you were assigned throughout the country.

LASHLEY: [00:41:34] Yes. And so we kept in touch. We often would visit.

KLEIN: [00:41:37] Well, sometimes it's a wrench when training is finally over. And then the group that's become congenial, all of a sudden you're.

LASHLEY: [00:41:45] Far flung. But we would support one another by visiting.

KLEIN: [00:41:49] Okay.

LASHLEY: [00:41:50] We'd take the money bus or whatever it was and go to visit them, or they'd come to visit us. I had people passing through my house all the time.

KLEIN: [00:41:58] Yeah. So, okay now, let's again, you settled in the town. Let's talk about two things. One would be how the domestic arrangements worked out, including relation to the children. And then we'll talk about your initial settling into the job. So let's talk about the house you had, the way you were living.

LASHLEY: [00:42:22] So after we left the principal's house, we finally had a house on BWI's compound. It was okay. It was allegedly furnished and we had to get some things made. Fortunately, my husband was a carpenter and worked in the shop and he and the head of the shop made some of the extra furniture that we needed. And I could sew. So, you know, I just sewed curtains and made bedspreads and lots of other things. You know, that, that wasn't anything new to me so.

KLEIN: [00:42:52] Was it considered acceptable or to have someone working for you to help with the cooking and the cleaning or the childcare?

LASHLEY: [00:43:02] I didn't have anyone. Okay. Um, initially, uh, we, I did all my own cooking and cleaning. And then when we were told that we were expected to have, quote unquote, a houseboy.

KLEIN: [00:43:21] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:43:22] Um, we hired a couple of them, and that became problematic because, um, sometimes they said they could, they could actually do things they couldn't do, you know, and or sometimes they stole things.

KLEIN: [00:43:39] Yeah. Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:43:41] Uh, so managing them could be a bit of a problem. I think we had two.

KLEIN: [00:43:46] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:43:46] Ultimately. Um. And the first one didn't work out. After about two weeks, it was clear that we didn't want to do that. There was somebody else we had who I think was at BWI and he was someone my husband had met and that kind of worked out for a while. But in terms of the children, um, that was a bit of a problem because sometimes they weren't as reliable as we would have liked. And so my children were actually school aged.

KLEIN: [00:44:27] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:44:28] Um, I mean, there was a preschool available, so. Oh, I should also say that we lived in Gbarnga and we also lived ultimately in Monrovia. Um, so.

KLEIN: [00:44:44] Let's stay with Gbarnga initially.

LASHLEY: [00:44:47] Right. And so in Gbarnga, what, where were they in school? They weren't in school in Gbarnga.

KLEIN: [00:44:53] Yeah. Okay.

LASHLEY: [00:44:55] Um, I'm sorry. We were in Kakata, Gbarnga, and then Monrovia.

KLEIN: [00:45:01] Okay, that's fine.

LASHLEY: [00:45:02] We actually go, I go back to Gbarnga, but that's, that's coming.

KLEIN: [00:45:08] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:45:09] Uh, in Kakata, they were not in school, but we had a neighbor who was the wife of the, uh, hmm, of the person who worked in the shop with my husband. And so she looked after our kids during the day.

KLEIN: [00:45:26] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:45:27] And she had children, too, so they were doing things. And I think my son actually went to some little school with her son or something. But it was, it was right in that compound. So it wasn't like they were going anywhere. It was a little school down there and they did some preschool activities.

KLEIN: [00:45:44] And the kids were?

LASHLEY: [00:45:45] Oh, they were adaptive. At that age, they're, you know, my kids are.

KLEIN: [00:45:49] There are a lot of changes, you know.

LASHLEY: [00:45:51] Well.

KLEIN: [00:45:53] But mommy and daddy are around so.

LASHLEY: [00:45:54] Yeah, we're around. You know, we haven't gone anywhere.

KLEIN: [00:45:57] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:45:57] And they see us in our work.

KLEIN: [00:46:00] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:46:00] You know, so, you know, because. Yeah. So, yeah. They, they were around. And it was exciting for them because there was lots of stuff going on all the time.

KLEIN: [00:46:12] Yeah, yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:46:14] It, BWI, because it was a high school, they would do something called culture shows with each tribe would have a day when they would do their thing.

KLEIN: [00:46:24] Right, right.

LASHLEY: [00:46:25] And so they got accustomed to culture shows all the time where people would be playing music and dancing and, you know, showing off their culture.

KLEIN: [00:46:34] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:46:34] And so they could even tell you which culture they identified with and which ones they liked. And there was just plenty to do. You're out in nature. You're, you know, and at what, three, four and five, you are chasing things.

KLEIN: [00:46:50] Did their language shift over to Liberian accented English?

LASHLEY: [00:46:54] Yes. But when we were in the Netherlands Antilles they could speak Dutch too.

KLEIN: [00:47:02] At only five.

LASHLEY: [00:47:04] So they're in a Dutch school for one. Got to meet Queen Bea, Princess Beatrix at that point. But yeah.

KLEIN: [00:47:12] All right. Let's talk about your initial professional work. What's the job you had?

LASHLEY: [00:47:20] Um, I was actually doing pre-service teacher training, which that meant was I was actually teaching students who were going out to be teachers.

KLEIN: [00:47:30] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:47:31] And so I was teaching a methodology class and, um, an psych course in educational psychology.

KLEIN: [00:47:40] Now they would be going out to teach at the elementary level, wouldn't they?

LASHLEY: [00:47:43] No.

KLEIN: [00:47:45] Secondary?

LASHLEY: [00:47:45] I was teaching ones who were going out to secondary.

KLEIN: [00:47:47] Oh, okay. Okay. And your language of instruction was English.

LASHLEY: [00:47:53] It was English, yeah. And what was interesting to me is that there were more men enrolled in my classes than there were women. Because, you know, our expectation is that women go out to be teachers. In West Africa at that time, mostly men were going out to be teachers.

KLEIN: [00:48:09] Ghana was that way, too.

LASHLEY: [00:48:11] Yeah. So.

KLEIN: [00:48:14] Describe a classroom setting.

LASHLEY: [00:48:15] Well, a classroom setting was very much like any college classroom setting anywhere, except the students were older. Had generally had a little bit of experience as a teacher already, but were coming there to get a credential, or a teaching certificate. Um.

KLEIN: [00:48:34] Concrete block buildings?

LASHLEY: [00:48:36] Concrete block buildings.

KLEIN: [00:48:38] Simple desks?

LASHLEY: [00:48:39] Uh, no, this was kind of more like a college setting.

KLEIN: [00:48:43] Oh, okay.

LASHLEY: [00:48:43] I mean, but in a country where you have natural air conditioning. So you had the jealousy windows, the concrete block, and nice clothes and.

KLEIN: [00:48:52] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:48:54] Um, like schools, colleges you see in Mexico and other places. Yeah. Um, well supplied, except we had mimeograph machines in those days and not computers. Computers were just making their way into Liberia, but they certainly weren't in, at the teacher training institutes. They were at the University of Liberia.

KLEIN: [00:49:17] How large were the classes?

LASHLEY: [00:49:20] I had a class. They were actually large. One of my classes was, uh, probably about 35 to 40 students. And I had another class that was larger than that, about 50 to 60.

KLEIN: [00:49:36] Do you recall how the students addressed you?

LASHLEY: [00:49:40] Uh. Madam. Sir. Prof. Professor.

KLEIN: [00:49:47] And how did you address the students?

LASHLEY: [00:49:49] Uh. By their last name and Ms. or Mr. So-and-so.

KLEIN: [00:49:57] Yeah. It must have taken some time to learn.

LASHLEY: [00:50:00] It took a little, you know, and Americans do the first name basis. But again, in our pre, our training in the U.S., we were already instructed on those basics. Because you're a teacher, so you have to get it right the day you walk in the door.

KLEIN: [00:50:15] Right. And of course, you're walking in with a lot of experience anyway.

LASHLEY: [00:50:19] Right. And so for me to walk in a female, one, and at that time I looked much younger than I actually was because I've spent most of my life looking 10 or 15 years younger than I really was. They didn't believe that I was, uh, what? A, they didn't believe I had the credentials to be there. And they just thought, you know. So my first day of class, my students questioned the validity of me being there in the first place.

KLEIN: [00:50:53] Did they confront you directly or?

LASHLEY: [00:50:55] It was in class.

KLEIN: [00:50:56] Uh huh.

LASHLEY: [00:50:57] You know, they weren't belligerent or bellicose or anything, but, uh, they wanted to make sure that I had the right credentials to be there.

KLEIN: [00:51:07] Were you surprised by that?

LASHLEY: [00:51:08] I was, absolutely. You know, it's the first time I've ever walked into a classroom where people asked me what were, what was my experience.

KLEIN: [00:51:19] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:51:19] You know, that's not something that happens. Generally when you, if you get a job to do something, they know that you, you should be there. But for them, A, I was a woman. Two, I looked.

KLEIN: [00:51:31] Which is not common, I gather?

LASHLEY: [00:51:33] Which is not common. They had never had a female teacher before and certainly not a black female.

KLEIN: [00:51:38] Right. Was that.

LASHLEY: [00:51:40] The one female person that they had had was an older white woman.

KLEIN: [00:51:45] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:51:45] And no, just that I was female and looked very young.

KLEIN: [00:51:50] Yeah. Had, had Peace Corps been at that school before?

LASHLEY: [00:51:55] Oh, yeah.

KLEIN: [00:51:56] So you were not the first Peace Corps volunteer?

LASHLEY: [00:51:58] No. No.

KLEIN: [00:52:00] But the first married couple with children or?

LASHLEY: [00:52:03] Yeah. There was a woman who had been there. She's white. Was she, did she teach there? I'm trying to think. Uh, yeah, but she had married a Liberian guy, so. No, she wasn't there. She was at another teacher trainer institute, but she had been there before me. And so she told me a bit of this. She had been challenged in the same way.

KLEIN: [00:52:28] Yeah. In the town, were there are lots of Peace Corps people?

LASHLEY: [00:52:32] No. They had had, they knew Peace Corps people.

KLEIN: [00:52:37] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:52:37] You know, generally in Liberia, if you reach the point where at you're at a post-secondary, you would have had an experience with a, you would have had a Peace Corps teacher at some point, by that time.

KLEIN: [00:52:52] So to the students, did the fact that you came in and said, well, I'm a Peace Corps teacher, or did you?

LASHLEY: [00:52:57] I didn't say that. I was introduced to them, formally introduced by the principal of the school.

KLEIN: [00:53:02] Right. Without reference to the Peace Corps?

LASHLEY: [00:53:07] Without reference to Peace Corps, although they knew I was that Peace Corps woman.

KLEIN: [00:53:12] Okay. Okay.

LASHLEY: [00:53:13] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:53:14] Um, but I gather that was just an initial?

LASHLEY: [00:53:20] Um.

KLEIN: [00:53:20] Or did that continue through your teaching?

LASHLEY: [00:53:22] Oh, no, I put that to rest right then and there. No, I was skilled. I knew what to do. And when I, when I spoke back with the headmaster of the school or whatever he was called, I can't remember, um, you know, he thought they were insolent. So he was prepared to go and give them what for the next day. I said, no, don't do that. I said, they, I can understand why they wanted to know. And I didn't take it as an affront, you know. And I handled it in such a way that they, A, they knew that they should never ask that kind of question to me again. But, you know, I was totally, I respect their need to need to know. But basically, you know, like a lot of people do, A, they're going to test you. B, you're a woman and it's a very misogynist environment.

KLEIN: [00:54:07] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:54:08] In the first place. And so, uh, so I handled it. And after that I had no problem with anybody in that class. None. Not cheating, not anything.

KLEIN: [00:54:21] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:54:21] The other group, you know, I had experience with people cheating. There were more females.

KLEIN: [00:54:27] At the same school?

LASHLEY: [00:54:28] At the same school. There were more women in that class. And, um, you know, that was my first experience with people just cheating wholesale, you know, bringing in a cheat sheet and then denying it when they were confronted. What? You know.

KLEIN: [00:54:47] For those students, this was a desired career track, I mean, it represented solid employment?

LASHLEY: [00:54:56] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:54:56] Okay. Did you have much opportunity, again with the Gbarnga, for informal contact with the students, or was the pattern just you taught and you'd come back to the house?

LASHLEY: [00:55:13] In this case, what I knew was you didn't want informal contact with students. Uh, one of the problems for Liberia, but it's true in West Africa generally, is the sexual piece. And so, uh, after school contact becomes very problematic because the, it's not just sexual, it's the familiarity.

KLEIN: [00:55:42] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:55:42] You know, and then you lose control.

KLEIN: [00:55:44] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:55:46] So one of the things that was very clear. We lived in a compound with teachers who taught at BWI were, and students didn't come into that compound unless they were invited to come into that compound. That would have, that would have been a profound mistake.

KLEIN: [00:56:02] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:56:02] Because then the lines of authority are blurred and those lines of authority are very critical to Liberians.

KLEIN: [00:56:10] One of the classic problems that American teachers have going overseas to teach is the style of learning, the rote learning versus what we might consider a somewhat more challenging, unstructured question answer. Did you encounter that?

LASHLEY: [00:56:30] Well, we were prepared for that, again, in our training stateside. That was, Peabody was an excellent place for us to train.

KLEIN: [00:56:37] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:56:38] You know, because it was very, that was what we, we were learning as pedagogy. We didn't need content.

KLEIN: [00:56:44] Right, right.

LASHLEY: [00:56:45] We needed culture specific pedagogy. And that was what we did.

KLEIN: [00:56:50] And so you were ready to handle it?

LASHLEY: [00:56:52] We were ready to handle that.

KLEIN: [00:56:53] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:56:53] So that came as no surprise.

KLEIN: [00:56:55] Okay. And, uh, how did you evaluate the students?

LASHLEY: [00:57:01] The same way I do in the States, through testing. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:57:07] Did, uh, were they preparing to go out student teaching and did you observe them?

LASHLEY: [00:57:13] No, I didn't. Student teaching would happen in the content specific areas. What I was doing in the teacher training area, I was. Let me think. Like I said, I taught educational methods.

KLEIN: [00:57:30] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:57:31] And I thought it was a psych course. And so those don't require that level of supervision.

KLEIN: [00:57:39] Yeah. In the meantime, your husband is working.

LASHLEY: [00:57:44] At BWI just across the road, like.

KLEIN: [00:57:48] So that the family was close and your living conditions were comfortable.

LASHLEY: [00:57:53] Oh, yeah.

KLEIN: [00:57:55] Did anyone from Peace Corps come out to take a look, see how you're doing?

LASHLEY: [00:57:58] Oh, yeah. The places had been, uh, you know, Peace Corps logistics. For every housing accommodation, they had sent people out to actually identify housing.

KLEIN: [00:58:10] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:58:10] So they weren't putting you in sight unseen accommodations, by and large.

KLEIN: [00:58:15] Okay.

LASHLEY: [00:58:16] They knew of, whoever had, was responsible for your job, was responsible for the housing. So there were a few incidents out in the hinterland where some volunteers might decide that they didn't want that specific accommodation that had been Peace Corps provided.

KLEIN: [00:58:37] Right.

LASHLEY: [00:58:37] And they would find something else. You could do that, there was enough flexibility to do that. In the case where we were living when we were in Kakata, the housing was considered higher end. It was very nice accommodation by Liberian standards, so it was not an issue.

KLEIN: [00:58:59] Yeah. How were you being paid?

LASHLEY: [00:59:03] Uh, it was money deposited in bank account somewhere. Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Oh, I shouldn't ever forget having to do the bank thing. The Bank of Liberia. Yeah. In Monrovia. All deposits were there. And so basically once a month, because Liberia is heavily centralized, people had to make their way in town to get money.

KLEIN: [00:59:29] And you just get a stash of money?

LASHLEY: [00:59:30] You'd get a stash of money, or you'd live off your money in such a way that you didn't have to come in all the time.

KLEIN: [00:59:36] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [00:59:37] But people who lived closer in wanted to come in all the time because Monrovia is like a fry, you know?

KLEIN: [00:59:44] How did you, uh, how did you travel around in the country? Let's take the first 4 to 6 weeks there.

LASHLEY: [00:59:52] Well, we had a bit of privilege. Now, when I was a volunteer, volunteers were not allowed to have cars.

KLEIN: [01:00:00] Right.

LASHLEY: [01:00:01] Teacher trainers were actually given Suzuki dirt bikes. So I had a dirt bike and ultimately I really didn't use it. I gave it away.

KLEIN: [01:00:11] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [01:00:13] It was just too hot, you know, basically. And with teaching, you had to wear dresses all the time. And it was just, you know, it's not the image you see of dirt bikes on TV and ads and stuff. It's nothing glamorous about being on a dirt bike.

KLEIN: [01:00:27] But was the idea that you would possibly be going out to supervise?

LASHLEY: [01:00:29] Yeah, because you would do in-service and you'd be. And so some of us were pre-service teacher trainers, which is what I was.

KLEIN: [01:00:37] Right.

LASHLEY: [01:00:37] And we had some in-service teacher trainers. So I just gave my bike to some other Peace Corps volunteer who was doing rural development. It was no big deal.

KLEIN: [01:00:46] Weren't you tempted to buy a car?

LASHLEY: [01:00:49] It was forbidden.

KLEIN: [01:00:50] Well.

LASHLEY: [01:00:51] Well, if you're not in that close in, you might get away with it. And some people had tried it, but when I was in Peace Corps, people really didn't violate those kinds of expectations.

KLEIN: [01:01:03] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [01:01:03] Later on, when I was an APCD in Botswana, I was pretty horrified to see the Peace Corps, you know, because.

KLEIN: [01:01:10] Different countries and.

LASHLEY: [01:01:11] Well, not only that, the standard had really changed.

KLEIN: [01:01:14] Oh, okay.

LASHLEY: [01:01:15] You know, when I was there, most people really wanted to have the village based experience. They weren't going there to hob nob with the elites of Liberia.

KLEIN: [01:01:25] So then how, if you decided you wanted to go into Monrovia, how would you get there?

LASHLEY: [01:01:30] We'd take public transportation like everybody else. Now, if you had a little extra money, you can hire a taxi, which we did. But that was cheap. You know, when I was traveling with the children and we were coming into Monrovia.

KLEIN: [01:01:42] Sure.

LASHLEY: [01:01:43] I just, I pretty learned very rapidly that it was best to just hire a taxi.

KLEIN: [01:01:50] Right. And was there a Peace Corps hostel in Monrovia or?

LASHLEY: [01:01:54] There was, but I didn't use it. By that time, I had friends who lived in Monrovia, and so I always had really fairly nice places to stay.

KLEIN: [01:02:03] Okay. Now, so how long were you at Gbarnga?

LASHLEY: [01:02:10] Well, I was in Kakata at first. The Gbarnga thing was just a teacher training episode. I was in Kakata for about, hmm. Well, certainly a full term.

KLEIN: [01:02:27] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [01:02:27] And then it began to put stress on the marriage. Not for that reason, but my husband started spinning out of control a little bit. So I decided that it was time for us to split. And so I took a different position in Gbarnga on a different project. So I got a reassignment and the children came with me.

KLEIN: [01:02:50] And you negotiated that with the Peace Corps?

LASHLEY: [01:02:53] Mm hmm.

KLEIN: [01:02:53] Okay. And so now you're moving into a new job?

LASHLEY: [01:02:58] Yep.

KLEIN: [01:02:59] And what was the new job?

LASHLEY: [01:03:02] The new job was actually working on a curriculum materials development project. That was an AID sponsored project.

KLEIN: [01:03:10] Okay.

LASHLEY: [01:03:10] And they actually needed a teacher trainer to help liaise from the Liberian technical staff curriculum development specialists to the American specialists who had no clue about Liberia. They had brought in this team from Bloomington, Indiana.

KLEIN: [01:03:35] It sounds so much like AID.

LASHLEY: [01:03:37] Typical horror story. [tape break] Shifted from Kakata to Gbarnga. And I changed jobs.

KLEIN: [01:03:44] Right.

LASHLEY: [01:03:45] I moved. We moved onto the Methodist mission, which is a place I had come to know from my early training there. And as you're around, you develop relationships with people anyway. And the Methodist mission at that point was headed up by somebody from the U.S. whom I knew. He was with the United Methodists, I guess it was. And so it was a good place. And my children went to school at Cuttington University Hospital, and Cuttington College was the best university at that time in Liberia.

KLEIN: [01:04:23] Right.

LASHLEY: [01:04:23] Better than the University of Liberia.

KLEIN: [01:04:25] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [01:04:25] And so that worked out very well.

KLEIN: [01:04:29] Right. And, uh, you were, who was your immediate supervisor then?

LASHLEY: [01:04:38] The people, the head of the AID project.

KLEIN: [01:04:43] Okay.

LASHLEY: [01:04:44] It was, it was called the Improved Efficiency, IEL project. Improved Efficiency of Learning project.

KLEIN: [01:04:51] Yeah. So you were considered to be responsible to them more than to a Liberian entity or?

LASHLEY: [01:05:00] Right. My supervisor was, who was my supervisor? No, I was actually reporting to a Liberian. You're right. But that Liberian, while I reported to him, uh, in truth. What was his name? Dr. Thyagi. He was Indian. And so they were sent. Bloomington got the contract for a school of education. They appointed two, three people, a team headed up by a

Hindu with no Liberia experience. And he had, as his two head specialists, two Filipino women who worked on curriculum development.

KLEIN: [01:05:44] Right.

LASHLEY: [01:05:45] Or curriculum materials development. And then he hired a couple of other people from the U.S. who were recommended to the project from people he was associated with. And it turned out that one of those people was a friend of mine.

KLEIN: [01:06:02] Oh.

LASHLEY: [01:06:03] And so anyway, so it was like, you know, to see them walking down the road one day and you go, no, it can't be them. That's a mirage.

KLEIN: [01:06:12] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [01:06:13] And then later that evening there was a basketball game and I took my children to the basketball game because it's right on the mission. And sitting in the audience is this friend. It's like, what are you doing here? You know, so. So we're here working on this project. I said, it can't be. And so, yeah.

KLEIN: [01:06:34] So but, and they were all being paid AID type salaries.

LASHLEY: [01:06:39] They were. But I wasn't.

KLEIN: [01:06:40] And you were still.

LASHLEY: [01:06:41] Yeah. And what also made that possible is that by that time, given Liberian kind of how the social network works, I had become, or our family had become friends with some people who worked at AID.

KLEIN: [01:06:59] Okay.

LASHLEY: [01:07:00] And so they knew us.

KLEIN: [01:07:02] Right.

LASHLEY: [01:07:02] And so and one of them actually headed up, was responsible for educational programing. So I can't say that there was nothing that they did. But, you know, I don't know. But and from what I, as I understood it, AID had asked for a Peace Corps volunteer to work on that project all along. But they were reluctant to assign anyone because that could be a difficult.

KLEIN: [01:07:29] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [01:07:30] It gets to be tricky because generally what happens when the project goes wrong, the Peace Corps person becomes the fall guy. And in this case it was going wrong because there was the cross-cultural piece was absent. And so the curriculum materials, they were lagging behind, partly because the Liberians fell out with the Filipino women.

KLEIN: [01:07:56] Right.

LASHLEY: [01:07:56] And they just refused to do any more work for them.

KLEIN: [01:07:59] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [01:07:59] And so, because they didn't feel that they were competent, and they weren't at one level. They knew about materials development, but they knew nothing about Liberian culture or protocol.

KLEIN: [01:08:11] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [01:08:13] So it just turned into a mess. So at that point, AID and the Indiana people had to reformulate what they were going to do.

KLEIN: [01:08:25] Right.

LASHLEY: [01:08:25] The ministry was getting increasingly impatient with them. They felt that they were being paid for and weren't delivering a product. And then furthermore, what had also happened pretty much across the

board, the Ministry of Education was beginning to feel that they were being compelled to bring in programs and projects they really didn't want. And that was one of them.

KLEIN: [01:08:48] Yeah, yeah.

LASHLEY: [01:08:50] So at the point where the project is, is losing its way, then I was offered a transfer to Monrovia.

KLEIN: [01:09:01] But when you went into it initially, were you aware of much of that background or did it sort of unfold?

LASHLEY: [01:09:09] It unfolded as I was there. I was good. I was doing what I was asked to do, and I was actually doing more than I was asked to do because I was, I was effective. I was helping them bridge and get stuff done.

KLEIN: [01:09:21] At any point, did you say to yourself, why doesn't AID just hire me? Why do they?

LASHLEY: [01:09:26] Well, we had talked about that. And at one point I had kind of pursued that option.

KLEIN: [01:09:32] Right.

LASHLEY: [01:09:32] And, uh, there was a job offer ultimately, but I turned it down. And the reason why I did is because I wanted to come back to Chicago and do a PhD. I didn't want to stay in Liberia and work for AID.

KLEIN: [01:09:45] So now, uh.

LASHLEY: [01:09:48] But there was another reason, we're going to come to that in the chronology of things.

KLEIN: [01:09:52] So as you're now, the project's in trouble and you're aware of it, although it has some viable elements, that you then shift over to Monrovia.

LASHLEY: [01:10:03] Right. So I get a new house.

KLEIN: [01:10:07] Okay. You must be accustomed by now.

LASHLEY: [01:10:11] In area called, they called. Well, what was it called? It's right on the beach. Um, it's right over by the Swedish Embassy. What was that place called? Anyway, it's a little village that sat off the main road into town. Sinkor. Yeah. Sinkor. And it is, it's got the Swedish Embassy for my nearest neighbor. And on the other side, I've got the village of Sinkor right on the other side. And I've got the beach, which was fine.

KLEIN: [01:10:53] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [01:10:54] And it was a brand new house built by this doctor. And so it was fine.

KLEIN: [01:10:59] Yeah, yeah.

LASHLEY: [01:11:00] It was fine.

KLEIN: [01:11:00] And Peace Corps approved?

LASHLEY: [01:11:02] Yeah, Peace Corps found the house. I didn't mind.

KLEIN: [01:11:04] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [01:11:04] And so that worked. And I went to work for the Ministry of Education.

KLEIN: [01:11:11] Okay.

LASHLEY: [01:11:12] And the Deputy Minister for curriculum.

KLEIN: [01:11:14] Okay.

LASHLEY: [01:11:16] Right next to the World Bank person. And ultimately got asked to evaluate the very program I had worked on.

KLEIN: [01:11:26] So that's an interesting situation.

LASHLEY: [01:11:28] Yes, it was. So I just evaluated, well, the person I was working for was a nun, and she was really very nice. I mean, she was serious, but they were having problems with the program. And so I gave them the evaluation.

KLEIN: [01:11:42] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [01:11:42] Which were that there were some serious flaws.

KLEIN: [01:11:45] Yeah. This may be a personal question, but did Peace Corps try to mediate at all between you and your husband or?

LASHLEY: [01:11:53] No, no, no. No, no. They accepted.

KLEIN: [01:11:55] And so that wasn't an issue at all?

LASHLEY: [01:11:57] No.

KLEIN: [01:11:58] Okay.

LASHLEY: [01:11:58] No, it wasn't an issue.

KLEIN: [01:12:00] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [01:12:01] And it didn't cost them anything more.

KLEIN: [01:12:04] Right. Okay.

LASHLEY: [01:12:04] Other than maybe the rental of another house.

KLEIN: [01:12:07] Right, right.

LASHLEY: [01:12:07] But. And they would have had to have paid for separate volunteers if we'd been separate.

KLEIN: [01:12:14] Right.

LASHLEY: [01:12:14] So in that sense, it wasn't. Yeah. It didn't cost them anything.

KLEIN: [01:12:18] But the expectation was that you would end your tour of duty at the same time?

LASHLEY: [01:12:23] That was the expectation.

KLEIN: [01:12:25] Yeah. Okay.

LASHLEY: [01:12:26] But too changed due to circumstances well beyond our control.

KLEIN: [01:12:30] Okay. Now, so let's. Anything further about. You settled into Liberia, into Monrovia, with the job, with the ministry and curriculum development. You're evaluating the AID project. Did anyone from AID kind of try to pull you aside and say, give us a break, or anyone from the Bloomington?

LASHLEY: [01:12:56] Let me put it this way. There were other events that took.

KLEIN: [01:12:59] You were diplomatic.

LASHLEY: [01:13:00] No, there were just other events that made those issues irrelevant.

KLEIN: [01:13:04] Oh, okay. Okay.

LASHLEY: [01:13:05] The other events were the Easter riots, rice riots that took place not long after I had come to Monrovia, and the coup that took place.

KLEIN: [01:13:19] Ah, okay.

LASHLEY: [01:13:21] And so after, within about, what? Maybe four months of being there.

KLEIN: [01:13:27] Right.

LASHLEY: [01:13:27] It just didn't matter.

KLEIN: [01:13:29] Okay. Now, briefly describe the coup. It was?

LASHLEY: [01:13:34] Well, the coup in Liberia in 1978 [1980].

KLEIN: [01:13:36] Right.

LASHLEY: [01:13:39] Well, culminated in the execution of the former, the head of state.

KLEIN: [01:13:45] Right.

LASHLEY: [01:13:45] And 13 other people.

KLEIN: [01:13:47] Okay. Okay. And who was the leader of the coup?

LASHLEY: [01:13:52] Uh, who was the leader? Samuel K. Doe.

KLEIN: [01:13:55] Okay.

LASHLEY: [01:13:55] And he murdered then President Tolbert.

KLEIN: [01:13:59] Okay.

LASHLEY: [01:13:59] Yeah. And 12 of his ministers, including the Minister of Education. Oh, no, well, no, she went into hiding, but her brother was wound up in jail. Yes.

KLEIN: [01:14:13] Now, during this period, one, how did you hear about the coup? And two, what was?

LASHLEY: [01:14:21] Well, that didn't take much. We're right on the beach, right on the main drag. And we see the tanks rolling up the street.

KLEIN: [01:14:27] Ah, okay.

LASHLEY: [01:14:28] No, we were there. We were there. We had a front row seat to most of this.

KLEIN: [01:14:32] Now, what did Peace Corps do at that point?

LASHLEY: [01:14:34] Well, Peace Corps insisted that because we were a family, like all other American families, we were evacuated.

KLEIN: [01:14:45] Okay. Someone showed up at the door the next day?

LASHLEY: [01:14:49] No. Within a month.

KLEIN: [01:14:53] Okay. During that month.

LASHLEY: [01:14:55] Yeah. Or within a month. I can't say whether it's the whole month.

KLEIN: [01:14:58] Did you, did you feel at all at risk?

LASHLEY: [01:15:03] It was a dreadful time for my kids because they didn't understand the military convoys going up and down the street and all the shooting. I mean, we were indoors when the coup took place because it happened in the small hours of the night.

KLEIN: [01:15:16] Right.

LASHLEY: [01:15:16] And the presidential palace was far from where we lived, so we didn't have that kind of action. But the rioting and the looting and stuff they saw.

KLEIN: [01:15:26] Oh, they did?

LASHLEY: [01:15:27] Yeah. In the village where we were, there was far less of it. But people were frightened. And because we were right behind the Swedish embassy and not far from Peace Corps, we were relatively safe. And Americans were not targets, first and foremost.

KLEIN: [01:15:43] Okay.

LASHLEY: [01:15:45] Uh, what was pretty traumatic for my children was going to school with, because by this time they were at the American Cooperative School in Monrovia, but it was across the road from where we lived, not far.

KLEIN: [01:15:58] Right.

LASHLEY: [01:15:58] Another area. Um, and going to school with the son of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and they were classmates and they were good friends. I mean, he's five years old at this point and he'd been to their house and been invited to things and had met the minister because he had come to the school on occasion. And, you know, children meet dignitaries before their parents did.

KLEIN: [01:16:28] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [01:16:29] And so he just remembered the child, someone having to come to explain to all the other children what had happened to the man's father, who had been hung.

KLEIN: [01:16:40] Oh, yeah.

LASHLEY: [01:16:41] Yeah. And these guys had been basically placed on poles and shot.

KLEIN: [01:16:48] Yeah, yeah.

LASHLEY: [01:16:50] Yeah. And lined up all along the beach.

KLEIN: [01:16:51] So you were becoming aware of this as well?

LASHLEY: [01:16:54] Aware of?

KLEIN: [01:16:55] The execution?

LASHLEY: [01:16:56] Oh, it was public. It was public. It was played up in the American press. Those heads, those pictures went around the world.

KLEIN: [01:17:03] Were you still going to work during that month or?

LASHLEY: [01:17:06] Uh, there was a mandatory, there was martial law, so people weren't going anywhere.

KLEIN: [01:17:14] Yeah, alright.

LASHLEY: [01:17:14] Not far. There was a point on which we ventured to the Peace Corps office and places. We had, and one of the other things that happened to us is I had some friends at AID, as I said, the person who was over education, and she invited us to stay at her house.

KLEIN: [01:17:31] Oh, okay.

LASHLEY: [01:17:31] And so for part of that time, we actually stayed at her house.

KLEIN: [01:17:34] Okay.

LASHLEY: [01:17:35] And lots of times we would stay there when we were coming to Monrovia, even when we didn't live there so. And it had guards, military, U.S. guards and stuff.

KLEIN: [01:17:43] How did you become aware that Peace Corps was pulling out?

LASHLEY: [01:17:48] Oh, Peace Corps didn't pull out.

KLEIN: [01:17:50] Oh, okay.

LASHLEY: [01:17:51] Well, what happened was only the family of American personnel were forced to evacuate. Wives and children. And men stayed. My husband stayed, but we left in July of '70 [sic], of '80.

KLEIN: [01:18:08] You didn't protest?

LASHLEY: [01:18:10] There was no protesting.

KLEIN: [01:18:12] Okay. I mean, protest may be the wrong word.

LASHLEY: [01:18:15] No, you couldn't, you know. No, it was not an option.

KLEIN: [01:18:18] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [01:18:19] I mean, basically, no. I said we wanted to stay.

KLEIN: [01:18:22] Yeah, but you'd seen the impact on your children.

LASHLEY: [01:18:26] Yeah, because school was discontinued.

KLEIN: [01:18:28] Yeah. Yeah.

LASHLEY: [01:18:29] And, but, you know, services went on. But it was, it was a wise thing to do because things, as you know, in Liberia went to hell after that.

KLEIN: [01:18:37] Oh, yeah. Yeah. But, um.

LASHLEY: [01:18:41] But basically the people who served in my cohort were able to serve their terms.

KLEIN: [01:18:46] Oh, okay.

LASHLEY: [01:18:47] And there was no evacuation of Peace Corps at that point.

KLEIN: [01:18:49] Okay. But you and the kids. Were there any, any other, uh. I guess it was always wives and children.

LASHLEY: [01:19:01] So wives and children of.

KLEIN: [01:19:03] Were you the only Peace Corps?

LASHLEY: [01:19:04] No, we were the only Peace Corps.

KLEIN: [01:19:06] Okay.

LASHLEY: [01:19:06] That's what I'm saying. Because we were a spouse of American personnel overseas in a country that was at risk.

KLEIN: [01:19:14] What did they do with you? I mean, where?

LASHLEY: [01:19:16] They put us on a plane and sent us back to Washington and we debriefed.

KLEIN: [01:19:22] Where'd you debrief, I mean?

LASHLEY: [01:19:23] In Washington.

KLEIN: [01:19:24] At AID or?

LASHLEY: [01:19:25] Uh, no, at Peace Corps.

KLEIN: [01:19:28] But you were the only one.

LASHLEY: [01:19:29] I was the only one.

KLEIN: [01:19:30] Oh, okay. Okay. And did Peace Corps have any kind of emergency plans in place before?

LASHLEY: [01:19:42] Well, they were always prepared to do emergency evacuations. I mean, where Peace Corps is, they're prepared.

KLEIN: [01:19:49] By then.

LASHLEY: [01:19:50] Yeah. Well, they always, well, my sense is they always were. No?

KLEIN: [01:19:54] No.

LASHLEY: [01:19:54] Oh. By the time I was there, they had, oh yeah. No. There was nothing like. Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:20:00] And they, and they were prepared to handle it?

LASHLEY: [01:20:02] Oh yeah. And so that was why they had us leave.

KLEIN: [01:20:06] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [01:20:06] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:20:07] Okay.

LASHLEY: [01:20:07] So, no, it wasn't. Peace Corps volunteers were never at risk.

KLEIN: [01:20:11] Yeah, but it must have been really unsettling for you. Now you're back ahead of when you expected to return.

LASHLEY: [01:20:18] Yeah, no, it was okay because I had already been applying to graduate school, so it just made it possible to start when I needed to start. It was no biggie.

KLEIN: [01:20:26] And at that point with the kids, you went back to Chicago?

LASHLEY: [01:20:31] I came back to Chicago.

KLEIN: [01:20:33] All right.

LASHLEY: [01:20:33] And enrolled in a PhD program.

KLEIN: [01:20:37] I have to, uh. [tape break] Okay, let's, uh. So when, after you're back, you come back to Chicago, you're going back to school. Was it

much of a shock coming back to the U.S.? People talk about the reverse culture shock.

LASHLEY: [01:20:55] Well, there always is in the sense that you have to kind of adjust to the fact that you're not in the same place.

KLEIN: [01:21:04] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [01:21:05] You know, you're not going to walk to the beach. You're not going to go to the market. People are not going to say hello as being as open as they are.

KLEIN: [01:21:12] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [01:21:13] Um, so those kinds of changes, yeah, there's a little bit of discontinuity, but otherwise, no.

KLEIN: [01:21:19] And the kids, I mean by now they're?

LASHLEY: [01:21:21] No, that was difficult, coming back into, into the States, you know, because American children aren't interested in other places. So they could care less that they had lived abroad or anywhere else because the only thing that matters to them is, excuse me, the immediate and football and the other things. My son plunged right in. My daughter, she had a much more difficult time adjusting because then. You know, American society, its values with respect to beauty and other things are vastly different from. And also not just that among children, but even among adults and how adults deal with children.

KLEIN: [01:22:05] Yeah.

LASHLEY: [01:22:05] You know, so that required adjustment for them. And because they had the experience of shaking hands with the president of a country or the queen of a nation, you know.

KLEIN: [01:22:18] Right.

LASHLEY: [01:22:19] Those are experiences ordinary children don't have, you know. So, you know, they were much more sophisticated in some ways and much more down to earth in some other ways. So it was like. Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:22:32] Yeah, I can see where it'd be.

LASHLEY: [01:22:34] You know, so it's a little, you know, and I think most children who go abroad have that kind of an experience because most countries are small enough whereby, you know, people are accessible. It's like here. You live in Madison, right? You get to see your governor all the time. You know who people are. So, you know, or going to school with the people. I mean, living in the neighborhood where your teacher is your neighbor, you know.

KLEIN: [01:22:59] So your adjustment may have been difficult mostly through the kids.

LASHLEY: [01:23:02] Yeah. Yeah. So, you know, coming back to the U.S. and having to deal with the school stuff where things are just really different. Even though we live in a, in Hyde Park, which is a neighborhood that's, you know, quite different from most. It's not like your average, but still there were issues.

KLEIN: [01:23:20] Yeah. So now you, you had a continuing career with the Peace Corps and we'll talk about some of it. You said you at one point did some teacher training.

LASHLEY: [01:23:33] Yeah, I was called back to do some Peace Corps training as an RPCV. You know, the way they utilize returned volunteers to help them with their cross-cultural pieces and other pieces. And so I did that. And in fact, both of those trainings were right here in Washington. Well, right in Washington.

KLEIN: [01:23:52] And what were they for, Liberia or?

LASHLEY: [01:23:55] Uh, they were both for Liberia. Um. There was a contractor, a contractor in, based in Washington, who had set up, who had gotten the contract and had set up. And so I worked for them.

KLEIN: [01:24:11] Okay.

LASHLEY: [01:24:11] And one of my jobs was working with the education volunteers and doing the cross-cultural component.

KLEIN: [01:24:18] Yeah. Which and you were very comfortable with that.

LASHLEY: [01:24:21] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:24:22] Did, did you get, you didn't get a chance to go back to Liberia then to follow up?

LASHLEY: [01:24:27] No. No, I didn't do that. But at that point, when you asked about peer reviews and evaluations and deselecting, that's when I got involved in those kinds of activities.

KLEIN: [01:24:38] Yeah. And the selection, that change in it.

LASHLEY: [01:24:40] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:24:41] Have you had an opportunity to go back to Liberia?

LASHLEY: [01:24:44] I haven't.

KLEIN: [01:24:46] Yeah. It's a country that's.

LASHLEY: [01:24:48] Well, you know, it was. I wasn't. Well, let me think. We were doing trainings for Liberia.

KLEIN: [01:24:55] Well, I guess it could have been for other places.

LASHLEY: [01:24:58] It was probably other places too.

KLEIN: [01:25:00] Yeah. They would have a cluster and then they'd split them.

LASHLEY: [01:25:04] It was, it was, it was for others too.

KLEIN: [01:25:07] Right.

LASHLEY: [01:25:07] It wasn't for, one was for Liberia, but the other one was for other places.

KLEIN: [01:25:13] And then several years later you went back to Botswana and were on staff?

LASHLEY: [01:25:18] Yeah. Several years in '80, '80? Oh. Hmm. Yeah, it was '86.

KLEIN: [01:25:26] Okay. Were you an APCD then?

LASHLEY: [01:25:28] Yeah, for education and women in development.

KLEIN: [01:25:31] Oh, okay.

LASHLEY: [01:25:32] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:25:33] But that's a whole other story.

LASHLEY: [01:25:34] That's another story.

KLEIN: [01:25:35] We're going to have to defer that one.

LASHLEY: [01:25:36] We'll defer that one.

[END OF INTERVIEW]