

Michael Ford Oral History Interview
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Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Michael Ford served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Kenya from 1964 to 1966 as a land settlement officer (Kenya I).

Access

Open.

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Oral History Interview

with

Michael Ford

November 6, 2008
Northampton, MA

By Robert Klein

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

KLEIN: [00:00:02] Today is November 6, 2008. This is Bob Klein. I am interviewing Michael Ford, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Kenya, in fact, Kenya I in 1964 to '66. And the project was rural, rural community action. So let's go back about, oh, a year before you joined.

FORD: [00:00:24] Okay.

KLEIN: [00:00:24] And talk about what was going on.

FORD: [00:00:26] Okay. A year before I joined, I was in my, beginning my senior year of college.

KLEIN: [00:00:34] And where were you going to college?

FORD: [00:00:36] I was going to college in Galesburg, Illinois, at Knox College, a small liberal arts college, about a couple hundred miles from Chicago.

KLEIN: [00:00:44] Right.

FORD: [00:00:46] I was a political science major, but I had had a long-held interest in Africa and in fact, in a way, pulled together a kind of minor in African studies during college.

KLEIN: [00:01:00] Mm hmm.

FORD: [00:01:01] So.

KLEIN: [00:01:02] Well, let's go back a little bit.

FORD: [00:01:04] Sure.

KLEIN: [00:01:04] Where had you grown up?

FORD: [00:01:06] I grew up in the South Side of Chicago.

KLEIN: [00:01:08] Okay.

FORD: [00:01:10] In the sort of heart of the Black neighborhood often called Bronzeville.

KLEIN: [00:01:16] Yeah. Siblings?

FORD: [00:01:18] I had three sisters and one brother.

KLEIN: [00:01:23] Were you the youngest?

FORD: [00:01:24] I was the second. I have an older sister and I was second in birth order.

KLEIN: [00:01:28] And let's jump ahead to. And growing up, high school?

FORD: [00:01:34] I went to high school on the South Side. It was one of the best known of the high schools, DuSable High School, traditional Black high

school. I think maybe the second or third Black high school built in Chicago.

KLEIN: [00:01:52] Was it by law or by tradition that it was a Black high school?

FORD: [00:01:57] By tradition and geography.

KLEIN: [00:02:01] Oh, okay. And high school, during your four years in high school, did you get to do any volunteer work? What did you do during the summers?

FORD: [00:02:12] Usually I had to work.

KLEIN: [00:02:14] Yeah.

FORD: [00:02:14] I didn't do volunteer work, although there were times when there were high school projects that I was involved in or other kinds of things.

KLEIN: [00:02:27] Right, right.

FORD: [00:02:29] You'd be involved with meeting other people. The only other sort of projects were choral concerts we often did during the summer too, the high school choir.

KLEIN: [00:02:43] And you were in the choir?

FORD: [00:02:44] I was in the choir.

KLEIN: [00:02:45] So you got to do some travel?

FORD: [00:02:48] Around Chicago, yes.

KLEIN: [00:02:49] And did the family ever travel anywhere? Did you ever go on vacations?

FORD: [00:02:54] Not really. Once or twice there were treks to Mississippi, which was sort of the homeland.

KLEIN: [00:03:01] Okay. Yeah.

FORD: [00:03:03] But not the kind of travel that other families did, you know, vacations.

KLEIN: [00:03:09] Yeah. Yeah.

FORD: [00:03:11] We didn't do that.

KLEIN: [00:03:12] Okay. Um. Any other extracurricular activities at high school?

FORD: [00:03:21] Um. Mostly it was choir or some of the, often I was doing summer courses, accelerated courses, that kind of thing.

KLEIN: [00:03:32] Right.

FORD: [00:03:32] That wasn't extracurricular though.

KLEIN: [00:03:35] But in going through high school, your expectation was that you were going to go on to college?

FORD: [00:03:41] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:03:42] And your family's expectation also?

FORD: [00:03:45] Yeah. They were pleased to think that. I mean, I was going to be to the first or second to do so.

KLEIN: [00:03:52] Right. Right.

FORD: [00:03:54] But they certainly had those aspirations.

KLEIN: [00:03:57] Yeah. Yeah. So you graduated high school and had applied to several schools?

FORD: [00:04:03] Mm hmm. I went to Knox essentially because it became the most affordable. I got into the University of Chicago, but since I lived in the neighborhood, I really wanted to get out of town. I applied to a couple of other places outside of Illinois, but I had two fellowships. One was a Pullman Fellowship, which I'll tell you about in a minute.

KLEIN: [00:04:28] Okay.

FORD: [00:04:28] The other was an Illinois state one, which gave you money if you went to an institution within the state.

KLEIN: [00:04:34] Where is Knox College?

FORD: [00:04:35] Knox is in Galesburg, which is southwest of Chicago.

KLEIN: [00:04:39] Okay. But it's a private.

FORD: [00:04:41] It's a private school.

KLEIN: [00:04:42] And it's a four year?

FORD: [00:04:44] Four year liberal arts school, about 1,600 students or so.

KLEIN: [00:04:48] Yeah. And so you had the state money and Pullman money.

FORD: [00:04:54] Pullman. There's a Pullman Foundation, which actually got formed using the money from the Pullman fortune.

KLEIN: [00:05:05] Right.

FORD: [00:05:06] Pullman had a company town way south in Chicago, and it was essentially all white, and Pullman was pretty much a segregationist. You could be a porter in his company, but nothing else.

KLEIN: [00:05:20] Right.

FORD: [00:05:21] So in his desire to sort of organize social services and supports for the people who worked for him and lived in the company town, he created this foundation.

KLEIN: [00:05:31] Yeah.

FORD: [00:05:32] And the stipulation was that the money went first to the children of Pullman employees, people who lived in Pullman, and then people on the South Side.

KLEIN: [00:05:44] As long as you were poor.

FORD: [00:05:45] As long as you were poor. Little did he know that the South Side would become just about totally black.

KLEIN: [00:05:50] Oh, okay.

FORD: [00:05:53] So a lot of the Pullman money was available for potential Black college students.

KLEIN: [00:06:00] Right.

FORD: [00:06:00] So using the Pullman money and the state money, Knox was virtually cost free.

KLEIN: [00:06:09] Oh, okay. Yeah.

FORD: [00:06:10] \$1,002, I think. And I earned that working during the school year.

KLEIN: [00:06:15] So. Okay. So you got into Knox?

FORD: [00:06:18] Mm hmm. [to other person] Mary.

KLEIN: [00:06:21] How early did you choose a major? Was it by your second or third year?

FORD: [00:06:27] I pretty much was interested in politics from the beginning, politics or history.

KLEIN: [00:06:32] And the African interest?

FORD: [00:06:34] That was true even in high school.

KLEIN: [00:06:36] Oh, okay.

FORD: [00:06:37] And I'm not exactly sure where it came from. There were a variety of sort of local institutions in and around the South Side.

KLEIN: [00:06:48] Yeah.

FORD: [00:06:49] People interested in Africa. There was also an enormous Liberian population, and we knew some of them.

KLEIN: [00:06:54] Oh, okay.

FORD: [00:06:56] But even in high school, as I said, I began to develop this interest, reading.

KLEIN: [00:07:01] Marcus Garvey was long gone by then?

FORD: [00:07:05] Garvey was long gone, but there were still remnants. And I did have teachers who focused on Africa, for whom it was a serious interest. So by the time I got to college, the interest was embedded.

KLEIN: [00:07:22] Yeah. Okay. And you said during, while you were in college, you worked.

FORD: [00:07:28] Mm hmm. I did mail delivery for the school. I was a mailman.

KLEIN: [00:07:33] Yeah. All right. And what about your summers then?

FORD: [00:07:38] Summers I found whatever jobs I could.

KLEIN: [00:07:41] Come back up to Chicago?

FORD: [00:07:42] I'd come back to Chicago. And once I worked for a design company which did offset printing, and I was the packer and loader of their products. And so I had a variety of jobs of that kind. You know, anything you could get during the summer.

KLEIN: [00:08:01] And during the four years, any opportunities for travel?

FORD: [00:08:06] Not really, I'm trying to think.

KLEIN: [00:08:08] So now your whole life up to the end of college is pretty much in Chicago.

FORD: [00:08:11] Pretty much in Illinois. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:08:15] Okay.

[WOMAN]: [00:08:16] Did you ever go to Michigan?

FORD: [00:08:18] Ah, ah, please, please.

KLEIN: [00:08:23] So, okay, we're talking about travel during your four years. What was your involvement in school life at Knox?

FORD: [00:08:39] Um, let's see. I was in a fraternity, which was interesting. It sort of organized your social life on campus. It was a local fraternity because in those days, almost all the national fraternities had discriminatory clauses. Hardly any of them would allow Blacks in, and a great many had anti-Jewish clauses.

KLEIN: [00:09:01] Yeah. Yeah. So the fraternity you were involved with, it was integrated?

FORD: [00:09:06] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:09:06] Okay.

FORD: [00:09:07] And by local, I mean it had no national, it existed only on this campus.

KLEIN: [00:09:12] Yeah.

FORD: [00:09:14] I was involved in things political on campus, you know, student peace union and those kinds of activities.

KLEIN: [00:09:26] Yeah. It was during those years, of course, the Peace Corps first began, just about the time you started college.

FORD: [00:09:33] Right.

KLEIN: [00:09:34] Do you recall when you first heard of Peace Corps?

FORD: [00:09:36] At the very beginning.

KLEIN: [00:09:38] Okay. And how you heard about it?

FORD: [00:09:41] I'm not sure exactly how, probably media, but clearly my abiding interest in Africa was key because of Ghana I, you know. I'd had an interest in West Africa, Liberia, Ghana.

KLEIN: [00:10:03] Yeah.

FORD: [00:10:04] And actually knew one or two Ghanaians sort of from Chicago, the University of Chicago area.

KLEIN: [00:10:11] Oh, okay.

FORD: [00:10:12] So the announcement of the formation of Peace Corps and then the formation of Ghana I was something I, this was very much a.

KLEIN: [00:10:22] So you were aware of it?

FORD: [00:10:23] Yeah, very much.

KLEIN: [00:10:25] But setting Peace Corps aside, what was, what was your intended goal once you finished Knox?

FORD: [00:10:35] I assumed I'd go on to graduate school. I also thought fairly seriously about doing African studies at the graduate level. And one of the things I came to be aware of was those handful really of very good African studies programs that existed at the graduate level.

KLEIN: [00:10:59] That was, yeah, early on.

FORD: [00:11:00] Yeah. One of which was Northwestern.

KLEIN: [00:11:02] Right, right.

FORD: [00:11:04] And because I lived in Chicago and it was sort of close at hand, I actually made a trek or two up to their library while I was an undergraduate.

KLEIN: [00:11:17] Yeah.

FORD: [00:11:17] I remember, I think my senior paper was on African liberation struggles.

KLEIN: [00:11:24] Oh, okay. And were there any, were there any African study courses at Knox or?

FORD: [00:11:32] Not really.

KLEIN: [00:11:33] Oh, okay. And were there any Africans at Knox?

FORD: [00:11:37] There was one young man. This is a funny story.

KLEIN: [00:11:40] Yeah.

FORD: [00:11:41] Sukhdev Bassi, who came from Kenya. He was Asian.

KLEIN: [00:11:46] Yeah.

FORD: [00:11:47] And he was in my class and he graduated in the same year. This is skipping ahead. But Sukhdev was a bright and really engaging young man. This is the weirdest but absolutely true story. I was in the Peace Corps. I was assigned to Thomsons Falls.

KLEIN: [00:12:04] Yeah.

FORD: [00:12:05] You know, it's a good distance outside of Nairobi. And although there had been a colonial presence there, it wasn't a place that attracted lots of tourists.

KLEIN: [00:12:13] Right.

FORD: [00:12:14] So I was there maybe a week or two and went into the town to do shopping. And all of the shops were owned by Asians.

KLEIN: [00:12:23] Yeah.

FORD: [00:12:24] And this one man behind the counter who was one of the owners of the store in T Falls, really intrigued by this strange person coming, and he told me that he had a relative who'd gone on to the States and he said, do you know Sukhdev? That's an absolutely true story. This was Sukhdev's uncle.

KLEIN: [00:12:51] Well, it's not that coincidental, he had come from Kenya. But that's like, are you from New York City? Do you know?

FORD: [00:12:59] That's right. That's right. So we became fast friends. G. K. Unia was the guy's name.

KLEIN: [00:13:05] Yeah.

FORD: [00:13:06] And I got all kinds of special treatment because I knew Sukhdev.

KLEIN: [00:13:09] Yeah.

FORD: [00:13:10] But there weren't any Black Africans at Knox.

KLEIN: [00:13:14] Right. Okay. Let's jump back now. You're approaching graduation. Had you applied to graduate school?

FORD: [00:13:24] No, I had decided I really wanted to do Peace Corps.

KLEIN: [00:13:28] Do you recall applying, the application process?

FORD: [00:13:32] Vaguely.

KLEIN: [00:13:33] Okay. One of the things in the application usually is you give an indication of your preference for assignment.

FORD: [00:13:42] Right. I do recall that.

KLEIN: [00:13:44] And what was your preference?

FORD: [00:13:46] West Africa.

KLEIN: [00:13:47] Oh, okay. And also they may ask if you had a language preference, if you had a second language that you felt comfortable in. Had you studied any foreign language?

FORD: [00:13:58] German. So none of the ones, none of the places I'm interested in.

KLEIN: [00:14:04] Okay. So you applied. I don't know if they were still giving the entrance exam then.

FORD: [00:14:10] I don't remember.

KLEIN: [00:14:11] Did you apply before you graduated?

FORD: [00:14:12] I did.

KLEIN: [00:14:13] Okay, so then let's take the story from there. You sent the application in, but it wasn't a done deal. So you must have been exploring other options.

FORD: [00:14:24] Yeah. I graduated and took a job in Chicago.

KLEIN: [00:14:30] Oh, okay.

FORD: [00:14:31] Actually, in a management training program for AT&T, Illinois Bell.

KLEIN: [00:14:35] Yeah. Okay.

FORD: [00:14:36] And I expected that I'd hear from Peace Corps, and I told them that I'd applied, but they said, fine, you know, if it comes up, it comes up. But if not, we're happy to have you. They were trying to expand their management ranks.

KLEIN: [00:14:51] Right.

FORD: [00:14:53] Really diversity effort.

KLEIN: [00:14:54] Right. Yeah.

FORD: [00:14:55] So during the summer, I worked for Illinois Bell and waited to hear. And I guess I heard from Peace Corps probably July of '64, telling me that there was a Kenya program, the first one.

KLEIN: [00:15:17] Right.

FORD: [00:15:17] That training would begin in September and I had to let them know I was interested.

KLEIN: [00:15:23] Did it indicate that it was going to be rural community action?

FORD: [00:15:27] Yeah. I'm pretty sure it did.

KLEIN: [00:15:29] And did you think, what in the world is that?

FORD: [00:15:33] I did. And I, you know, I had second and third thoughts, but since I wasn't sure how or when the ideal operation would come up, I decided that this one is there now. And I was also intrigued, I remember, that it was Kenya I. It was early on, '64, so I thought it would be fun to be in, you know, the first group.

KLEIN: [00:16:01] Up to that point, had you known anyone who'd been in the Peace Corps?

FORD: [00:16:05] No. I think I'd met a Peace Corps recruiter.

KLEIN: [00:16:10] Yeah.

FORD: [00:16:11] But no.

KLEIN: [00:16:13] So it was kind of a leap of faith.

FORD: [00:16:14] It was.

KLEIN: [00:16:15] And when you got the invitation to training, the reaction of your friends, your family?

FORD: [00:16:27] Um. Friends didn't quite get it because, you know, in '64, African Americans didn't feel strongly identified with Africa.

KLEIN: [00:16:38] Right.

FORD: [00:16:38] Africa was more an epithet than anything else.

KLEIN: [00:16:42] Yes. Yes.

FORD: [00:16:44] So they didn't quite get it. And there was always joking, you know, about you're going to be over there with Tarzan. Or, you know, other jokes. My family was supportive of me.

KLEIN: [00:16:56] Right.

FORD: [00:16:57] But they had real hesitation because, you know, it's going to the other side of the world.

KLEIN: [00:17:02] Right, right.

FORD: [00:17:03] Like the dark side of the moon.

KLEIN: [00:17:05] Yeah.

FORD: [00:17:05] They know nothing about it.

KLEIN: [00:17:06] Yeah.

FORD: [00:17:07] So their trepidation was about the distance and the disconnection.

KLEIN: [00:17:13] Yeah. But you, you had no hesitation when the invitation came?

FORD: [00:17:19] No, I had no hesitation.

KLEIN: [00:17:19] That was it. And Illinois Bell would have to make it without you. They were supportive too I assume?

FORD: [00:17:28] They were. They were.

KLEIN: [00:17:29] Because it was the Peace Corps.

FORD: [00:17:30] Right. And they made clear that, you know, look, when you're done, you can come on back.

KLEIN: [00:17:36] Oh, okay. Okay, good. Uh. So now you finally get to travel outside of Illinois.

FORD: [00:17:45] I'm in Milwaukee.

KLEIN: [00:17:47] Are you reported directly to Milwaukee?

FORD: [00:17:50] Report directly to Milwaukee. I'm 90 miles away.

KLEIN: [00:17:51] Very exciting.

FORD: [00:17:52] It was.

KLEIN: [00:17:53] So you didn't fly?

FORD: [00:17:54] No, actually, I took the train.

KLEIN: [00:17:56] Oh.

FORD: [00:17:56] Took the train from Chicago to Milwaukee.

KLEIN: [00:17:58] What a disappointment.

FORD: [00:18:00] And made my way to the YMCA where we were housed.

KLEIN: [00:18:05] Okay.

FORD: [00:18:06] Downtown Milwaukee.

KLEIN: [00:18:07] Now, it's kind of an interesting moment for a lot of people. You're suddenly in a room with 30 or 40 other people, all of whom have joined the Peace Corps. And I think inevitably you say, well, how do I match up to this crowd and why are they all looking at me or whatever? Do you remember your?

FORD: [00:18:30] I do. I do. I remember, um, feeling sometimes in a way like I used to in college. I mean, it was an overwhelmingly white group.

KLEIN: [00:18:41] Right, right.

FORD: [00:18:42] See, my life was kind of strange by vocation. College was almost all white. I think there were three or four Black students.

KLEIN: [00:18:50] Right.

FORD: [00:18:51] But home was all Black. Utopia, you know.

KLEIN: [00:18:54] Yeah.

FORD: [00:18:55] You could go weeks without seeing a white face unless you went to the A&P or something.

KLEIN: [00:19:01] Yeah.

FORD: [00:19:02] So it was a strange kind of juxtaposition coming from college back home and then from home, say, to the Peace Corps group.

KLEIN: [00:19:11] Right.

FORD: [00:19:12] It was kind of like being back at Knox because they all seemed like the kind of people I'd gone to college with, you know, all the roughly the same age.

KLEIN: [00:19:20] About how many in the group, do you recall?

FORD: [00:19:22] 36. And three of you were African American.

KLEIN: [00:19:28] Okay. Okay.

FORD: [00:19:30] There was me, there was Rowan. Nettie Kane. I think I'm leaving out somebody, but if not there, there were at least the three of us I can think of.

KLEIN: [00:19:39] Had it been made clear that it was, it was training and selection that you were going into?

FORD: [00:19:44] Absolutely.

KLEIN: [00:19:45] Okay. Okay. So now you meet, you see the group and you settle into the why.

FORD: [00:19:51] Right.

KLEIN: [00:19:52] There are several married couples among?

FORD: [00:19:55] Right.

KLEIN: [00:19:55] Okay. And let's talk about how training began. We'll go through its components in a minute. So what happened after you reported to the Y?

FORD: [00:20:09] My memory is that there was a quick initial meeting, and several people sort of addressed us and welcomed us and began to pass out reams of instructions and paper telling us what was going to happen over the next several weeks.

KLEIN: [00:20:26] Yeah.

FORD: [00:20:29] We got to meet the staff. Most, actually it was two staffs, the training staff and some Peace Corps staffers were out as well.

KLEIN: [00:20:41] Okay.

FORD: [00:20:43] The people we actually got to know best at that stage where the training staff, many of whom had connections to the University of Wisconsin.

KLEIN: [00:20:51] Okay. And who was head of the program, do you remember?

FORD: [00:20:54] I can remember his face. And if I worked hard at it, his name would come. Joe.

KLEIN: [00:21:00] Okay, that's alright. But at the same time, there was a Peace Corps staff. They were there for the whole training, too?

FORD: [00:21:09] No. They were not. They were there to greet us. They stayed only a couple, three days.

KLEIN: [00:21:15] Okay. And during that time, when you made aware that you were a pioneering group, that you would be the first into Kenya? That kind of thing was being talked about by.

FORD: [00:21:28] That was.

KLEIN: [00:21:29] I assume more by the Peace Corps staff than by.

FORD: [00:21:32] Exactly.

KLEIN: [00:21:33] Okay.

FORD: [00:21:34] So they talked a lot about that, about the Peace Corps mission. My memory is they also talked a bit about selection so that we were made aware that there would be a couple of periods where the staff would come in and there'd be this process and selection would occur and not everybody would make it.

KLEIN: [00:21:57] Okay, let's, let's leave that for a moment.

FORD: [00:22:00] So that was sort of the orientation.

KLEIN: [00:22:03] So initial training took place at, in Milwaukee.

FORD: [00:22:07] Right.

KLEIN: [00:22:08] And it must have, you must have started language training?

FORD: [00:22:13] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:22:13] Let's describe the structure of that and how that works.

FORD: [00:22:16] Language training was phenomenal. It was what we'd spent most of our time on. It was several hours a day. We had two sessions, morning and afternoon.

KLEIN: [00:22:28] Right.

FORD: [00:22:29] And even on Saturday there was a, one session of language. I want to say, it's my recollection, it was five or six hours.

KLEIN: [00:22:41] Could be, yeah. Small group or?

FORD: [00:22:44] Small groups. I think there were three groups of 12 or 13.

KLEIN: [00:22:48] Yeah. Yeah.

FORD: [00:22:50] Each one, each group had two native speakers. One was sort of the lead person. The other was more support.

KLEIN: [00:22:59] And did they tend to be African Kenyans or white Kenyans?

FORD: [00:23:04] All African Kenyans.

KLEIN: [00:23:04] Okay.

FORD: [00:23:04] All African Kenyans.

KLEIN: [00:23:07] Graduate students in the U.S.?

FORD: [00:23:09] Mostly. In fact, perhaps all either recent graduates, B.A. graduates, or currently graduate students.

KLEIN: [00:23:17] Yeah. And did anyone indicate that your ability to learn the language would affect whether you became a volunteer or not?

FORD: [00:23:28] I don't remember whether they put it that starkly. It was made clear that this was important, that we were going to be out in the field, out of Nairobi.

KLEIN: [00:23:36] Right.

FORD: [00:23:37] I don't know whether they said, you know, there's a specific level you have to attain to make it. But it was very clear that you had to do well enough to be in the field using it.

KLEIN: [00:23:49] So the Milwaukee phase, then, there was intensive language.

FORD: [00:23:54] Very intensive.

KLEIN: [00:23:55] Did you also do some area studies, learning about Kenya?

FORD: [00:23:58] Absolutely.

KLEIN: [00:23:59] Do you remember who headed that up?

FORD: [00:24:01] There were a number of people. One of the guys who actually became part of the permanent training staff was a fellow named Roger Simmons. Roger, interesting fellow. He, I think, graduated from Tufts and had an interest in Africa and ended up in Kenya, actually worked in settlement.

KLEIN: [00:24:25] Okay.

FORD: [00:24:25] So somehow or another they found him or he found Peace Corps and they enlisted him as part of the staff.

KLEIN: [00:24:32] He was an American?

FORD: [00:24:33] He was an American.

KLEIN: [00:24:34] Okay.

FORD: [00:24:34] And he wasn't part of the Peace Corps staff before that. I think somehow or another they hooked up with him and he became part of our training staff.

KLEIN: [00:24:42] Right.

FORD: [00:24:43] So he was there and sort of organized and directed the area studies part.

KLEIN: [00:24:48] Okay.

FORD: [00:24:50] And there were a number of people who came through that were really memorable. And Carl Rosberg, who was a famous Kenyan scholar, came in for a short residency of a couple, of three days.

KLEIN: [00:25:02] Yeah.

FORD: [00:25:03] Maybe the most memorable one was St. Clair Drake.

KLEIN: [00:25:05] Oh, okay.

FORD: [00:25:06] Who was a phenomenal presence.

KLEIN: [00:25:08] Right. His main area of expertise is West Africa.

FORD: [00:25:13] That's right. And in fact, I remember one evening after class, we all went to some club in Milwaukee and St. Clair Drake taught us the highlife.

KLEIN: [00:25:26] Yes.

FORD: [00:25:28] Smoking all along.

KLEIN: [00:25:29] Yes. Yeah.

FORD: [00:25:30] So there was a fair amount of area studies done by a range of people, some of whom talked about politics. There were anthropologists. A couple of linguists.

KLEIN: [00:25:43] Was some of it familiar to you because you had done some African studies?

FORD: [00:25:47] Yeah, certainly the politics was. Rosberg was someone whose work I knew. And St. Clair Drake's work I knew.

KLEIN: [00:25:53] Right.

FORD: [00:25:54] So some of it was familiar to me.

KLEIN: [00:25:55] Yeah. And was there also a component called American studies?

FORD: [00:26:02] There was, I want to say there are some weird thing like ASWAC or something.

KLEIN: [00:26:08] Yeah. Okay. American studies, world affairs, and communism.

FORD: [00:26:11] Yes. It's funny. It's coming back. Yeah. Some of that was okay. Some of it was strange. Some of it was almost like USIS propaganda.

KLEIN: [00:26:24] Right.

FORD: [00:26:24] Like the communist stuff. Yeah. But yeah, there was ASWAC. The American studies was interesting and sort of parallel to the African studies, you know, history, politics. The world affairs, I don't remember it specifically. But I remember the communism stuff was a little heavy handed.

KLEIN: [00:26:45] Yeah. This is all still in the Milwaukee phase?

FORD: [00:26:49] All in Milwaukee.

KLEIN: [00:26:49] And it's like, it's an academic thing?

FORD: [00:26:52] Right.

KLEIN: [00:26:55] Uh, did, um, well, let's continue. Another component of training is kind of a medical training, health education sort of. Was that there too?

FORD: [00:27:10] That was there. Everything was in Milwaukee with one exemption.

KLEIN: [00:27:14] Okay.

FORD: [00:27:14] We spent a week to ten days in Madison, where the agricultural animal husbandry component was conducted.

KLEIN: [00:27:25] Right.

FORD: [00:27:25] Making use of, I'm pretty sure they're all different people, folks who are connected to the university there in Madison.

KLEIN: [00:27:33] At what point in training did that come?

FORD: [00:27:36] I'm guessing maybe midway or a little bit past midway? It wasn't super early.

KLEIN: [00:27:43] Okay. Let's stick with Milwaukee first.

FORD: [00:27:46] Sure.

KLEIN: [00:27:47] Two questions. Did the group tend to break down into subgroups, cliques? What did you do? Did you have any free time? And if so, without saying anything embarrassing, what did you do?

FORD: [00:28:04] Friendship groups did develop. Mostly, I think, out of the language groups because they were the small groups in met continually together.

KLEIN: [00:28:15] Yeah.

FORD: [00:28:16] And there might have been friendships across those, you know, people who had something in common. The people I was closest, the two, three, or four people, were people out of the language group.

KLEIN: [00:28:27] Right.

FORD: [00:28:27] Because you were with them 6 hours a day.

KLEIN: [00:28:29] Yeah.

FORD: [00:28:31] And they weren't cliquish in that you didn't have any time to go off and be a clique. You know, your entire day was structured up through about half of Saturday.

KLEIN: [00:28:49] Yeah.

FORD: [00:28:50] Saturday, I think we trained till noon, we had lunch, then at 2:00 you were off. But for some of us, and I was one of these, some of my Saturday time was given over to dentistry. I mean, they sent us this thing saying, you got to get all your dental work done before you come. Oh, but I couldn't afford it. And neither could apparently a lot of people so they had contracts with one or two dentists and every Saturday we were hieing off to the damn dentist.

KLEIN: [00:29:22] Did you lose all your wisdom teeth?

FORD: [00:29:24] I lost wisdom teeth. I had fillings. None of that stuff I'd ever been exposed to, you know. So I had several fillings and extractions. And so Sunday was pretty much the only day off.

KLEIN: [00:29:38] Yeah.

FORD: [00:29:39] You know, and Milwaukee being Milwaukee, it wasn't a town that was open to a lot of stuff on Sunday. So you could hang out a little bit, maybe go to a movie.

KLEIN: [00:29:49] Right.

FORD: [00:29:50] More often than not, a lot of us ended up spending a chunk of Sunday trying to catch up because they gave us a bunch of reading, you know. And sometimes you'd try to practice the language and there wasn't, you didn't have cars, so your reach was limited.

KLEIN: [00:30:11] Was there any phys ed component?

FORD: [00:30:12] There was. There was a, there's a component that was regular. I don't remember how often, but we had swimming training. We had regular soccer and other phys ed kinds of things.

KLEIN: [00:30:26] Right. None of it was a problem for you?

FORD: [00:30:29] No.

KLEIN: [00:30:30] Okay, let's, well, let's talk about the Madison phase and then we'll talk about selection. So somewhere near the midpoint of the program, the entire group. Had anyone been deselected by the time you went to Madison?

FORD: [00:30:47] I don't remember.

KLEIN: [00:30:49] Okay.

FORD: [00:30:52] I remember the first deselection was a guy in my language group.

KLEIN: [00:30:55] Right.

FORD: [00:30:56] Bill Phillip. I don't remember whether it was before or after Madison. I suspect it might have been before.

KLEIN: [00:31:05] Okay.

FORD: [00:31:07] And that was a strange thing. I don't know if you want me to talk about it?

KLEIN: [00:31:11] Yeah. Yeah. Talk about it.

FORD: [00:31:15] We were each interviewed by a couple of. [tape break] With these people and they had all kinds of questions. I discovered that they lacked a sense of humor. You know, I'd try to, as I typically did, joke around and they'd look at you very strangely.

KLEIN: [00:31:37] Up to that point, you had not been given a psychological interview or anything?

FORD: [00:31:43] No.

KLEIN: [00:31:43] So it was all new.

FORD: [00:31:44] No. It was very new. So all of us went through this. And my recollection is that the deselection was carefully scheduled so that. I remember we used to, used to have us do soccer on Saturday after the classes, maybe just before or just after lunch. And we'd be at soccer and somebody was missing. The first time that happened was Phil.

KLEIN: [00:32:20] Yeah.

FORD: [00:32:20] By the time we got back, he was gone. And, you know, somebody announced that he was deselected afterwards. It was all a mystery. Nobody ever told you why. He just was gone when you got back.

KLEIN: [00:32:33] A little creepy.

FORD: [00:32:34] Yeah. Very creepy. And the problem, well, there are probably an infinite number of problems with that. But one of the things that it did was it increased anxiety to a level that you could cut with a knife.

KLEIN: [00:32:47] Yeah. Yeah.

FORD: [00:32:48] From that point on, you know, because it was mysterious. Nobody knew why. And the guy seemed normal to us.

KLEIN: [00:32:55] Right, right. Yeah.

FORD: [00:32:57] You wondered maybe it was something in his background, but you didn't know that. So if it could happen to him, why not me?

KLEIN: [00:33:03] Yeah. Did it tend to bring the group together?

FORD: [00:33:07] It did. So the anxiety on an individual level was, you know, kind of unsettling. But it did sort of bring us together in a weird way, like a group under attack almost.

KLEIN: [00:33:21] Yeah, yeah.

FORD: [00:33:24] Um, I think there was one other deselection while we were in Milwaukee.

KLEIN: [00:33:34] Mm hmm.

FORD: [00:33:35] A couple of people sent home from Kenya, but the other deselection was a very quiet, almost effete young man, and we sort of wondered if there was anything in his mannerism or his sort of projected sexuality, whereas Phil seemed like one of us, you know, was involved in sports and so forth. So I remember two being deselected. And the second young man was clearly after the.

KLEIN: [00:34:11] Madison.

FORD: [00:34:12] Madison sojourn. I think maybe there were only the two.

KLEIN: [00:34:17] So let's now talk. The training now shifts over to Madison. And where do you stay at Madison?

FORD: [00:34:26] I'm pretty sure we stayed in some sort of dorm thing. We were on campus at the University of Wisconsin.

KLEIN: [00:34:33] And language training continued?

FORD: [00:34:35] Language training continued. Yeah, absolutely.

KLEIN: [00:34:37] Was there, about the midpoint, was there language testing? Were you given an indication of your progress?

FORD: [00:34:44] We did have a couple of tests, maybe about midpoint or maybe a little bit before. Yeah, we had a couple of tests and they told us where we ranked, you know, we were sort of graded.

KLEIN: [00:34:55] And you?

FORD: [00:34:56] I, the first one I was an S-3, which was the highest, and I ended up in S-4 which was native speaker.

KLEIN: [00:35:06] Yeah. And you were, that makes you an exception in your group, doesn't it?

FORD: [00:35:11] Yeah, I, I was the highest in the group.

KLEIN: [00:35:15] Yeah.

FORD: [00:35:16] There were a couple of others, I remember Mike Davidson, who were quite good, but nobody else had native fluency.

KLEIN: [00:35:22] Yeah. Why you, I mean?

FORD: [00:35:25] I, um, I took to the training because it was fun and fascinating, and I discovered quite by accident a way of doing the language. Mostly because I liked the teachers, one of whom I actually was in love with.

KLEIN: [00:35:43] All right.

FORD: [00:35:44] And I like palling around with them and talking to them.

KLEIN: [00:35:48] Yeah.

FORD: [00:35:49] And what I started to learn was how to create phrases rather than string words together. And I learned that early so I could think and talk in phrases.

KLEIN: [00:36:05] Right.

FORD: [00:36:05] And that sort of gave me a real jump.

KLEIN: [00:36:11] So you were having social contact with the instructors?

FORD: [00:36:13] Yeah, limited, I mean, you know, but yeah.

KLEIN: [00:36:17] But it was in Swahili?

FORD: [00:36:18] It was in Swahili.

KLEIN: [00:36:19] Okay.

FORD: [00:36:19] Yeah. And I would, I would learn how to say a phrase and I'd practice and get it correct. And I learned more and more and more.

KLEIN: [00:36:28] Right.

FORD: [00:36:29] Whereas most language study, the way they were doing it, you know, it was typical language study. You learn words and then they try to get you to pull it together. And but rather than learning, oh, *jambo* and then trying to think the next thing is *habare*, I learned *habare jaco*, you know, I learned a whole phrase.

KLEIN: [00:36:55] Okay.

FORD: [00:36:57] And that, that seemed to work.

KLEIN: [00:36:59] Yeah. You, I gather you were highly motivated in training because you really want, now you really want to get to Kenya?

FORD: [00:37:08] Right.

KLEIN: [00:37:09] Okay. Let's talk about the other, the other part of Madison was technical training.

FORD: [00:37:14] Right.

KLEIN: [00:37:16] And what was that?

FORD: [00:37:17] It was a blast because it was so foreign to everything in my background and makeup.

KLEIN: [00:37:24] Were you aware it was any, were there any in the group who had agricultural farm experience?

FORD: [00:37:30] Yeah, several.

KLEIN: [00:37:30] Oh, okay. Had actually seen a cow face to face?

FORD: [00:37:35] Uh huh. And I remember one or two actually, John Greer, who was sent home early.

KLEIN: [00:37:41] Yeah.

FORD: [00:37:42] He had grown up on a farm. There were a couple of others. Not, most of us had not, but a handful had.

KLEIN: [00:37:50] Yeah. So what did they take you through?

FORD: [00:37:53] Oh, well, there was all kinds of things about crops and corn and, which was called maize.

KLEIN: [00:38:01] Yes.

FORD: [00:38:02] I remember the animal husbandry more specifically because a lot of us were going to be in areas in the central highlands where everybody was going to have a cow and there were going to be sheep. So we had to learn some very basic things about the husbandry of cattle,

sheep. There was also, again, a focus on grain production. I remember we saw pictures in a lecture about pyrethrum, which I had never heard of.

KLEIN: [00:38:34] Right, right.

FORD: [00:38:37] And actually I think it was at that point a couple of former colonial types, farm owners, were there to talk to us.

KLEIN: [00:38:48] From Kenya?

FORD: [00:38:49] From Kenya. Yeah, mostly it was, um, I'm pretty sure they were all faculty.

KLEIN: [00:38:55] Right, right. But they were trying to say, well, this is the way it works over there in Kenya.

FORD: [00:39:01] That's right, yeah. And, you know, talk about special aspects of animal husbandry and the problem with the native cows and how you had to keep them from breeding with the European cows and that kind of thing.

KLEIN: [00:39:18] But didn't you feel like a fraud? I mean, you think.

FORD: [00:39:20] I did. I thought it was the craziest thing in the world. You know, in a week now, I'm going to go over and be the expert.

KLEIN: [00:39:28] But you didn't point this out to anyone else?

FORD: [00:39:30] No, I kept quiet about it. You know, there was a feeling that we got that was communicated, if not directly, it was clearly communicated indirectly that, look, you guys are bright, you got BAs. And even though you've only got a week, you're going to be years ahead of the Africans you're working with so you will know more than they do. Turned out that was a complete falsehood too.

KLEIN: [00:39:58] Of course. Yeah.

FORD: [00:39:59] But there was this presumption, and I think this was true in all the early Peace Corps times, that if you've got a BA and, you know, you have a good record, we can train you to do anything.

KLEIN: [00:40:12] Right, right. There were several lawyers in the group, weren't there?

FORD: [00:40:15] Yeah, there were at least two or three. No, three. Mohan, Davidson, and Baker. Yeah, there were three.

KLEIN: [00:40:25] Right.

FORD: [00:40:28] And all of them had joined, I guess, immediately after finishing law school. So they had more education. There might even have been one or two people with masters. I'm not 100 percent sure, but most of us were newly minted BAs.

KLEIN: [00:40:44] And was there any kind of test on the ag portion at the end?

FORD: [00:40:50] Yeah, there were tests, you know, written kinds. We didn't have to perform anything.

KLEIN: [00:40:57] Right.

FORD: [00:40:58] We did have to in groups sort of actually touch these animals and things from time to time, you know.

KLEIN: [00:41:07] I would have lost it right there.

FORD: [00:41:10] They actually showed us how to inseminate a cow.

KLEIN: [00:41:13] Okay. And did you or?

FORD: [00:41:16] I did not then. But I did do it once in Kenya.

KLEIN: [00:41:19] Okay.

FORD: [00:41:22] They showed us how the hooves of the sheep had to be trimmed to prevent foot rot. And you'd put this purple stuff on it, you know, all kinds of things.

KLEIN: [00:41:35] Now were there, there was two married couples at the beginning?

FORD: [00:41:40] Let's see. Dakin.

KLEIN: [00:41:42] Three.

FORD: [00:41:43] Three. Mohan, Dakin, and Janet and her husband.

KLEIN: [00:41:48] Benson.

FORD: [00:41:48] Benson.

KLEIN: [00:41:49] Okay. Did the women take part in the training alongside?

FORD: [00:41:54] They did.

KLEIN: [00:41:54] So there was no distinction.

FORD: [00:41:56] Right alongside.

KLEIN: [00:41:56] So the assumption was they were as much volunteers.

FORD: [00:41:59] Exactly.

KLEIN: [00:42:00] Okay. It's not always the case.

FORD: [00:42:02] The only time that it became obvious that there were real gender differences, I remember was when we had our motorcycle training in Kenya. And the women, a couple of them were small, Mohan was, and the women got special treatment on the motorcycle training, but otherwise they went through it just the way we did, everything.

KLEIN: [00:42:24] So Madison wraps up and you're back in Milwaukee with about how many weeks left for training?

FORD: [00:42:30] Maybe three.

KLEIN: [00:42:31] Okay. The tension is still very high?

FORD: [00:42:34] Very high, because there's at least one selection, deselection coming.

KLEIN: [00:42:38] Okay. And were you still being pulled out for psychological interviews all through?

FORD: [00:42:45] I think so. I think so. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:42:48] And were some people interviewed more than others?

FORD: [00:42:51] That you don't know because they kept it secret.

KLEIN: [00:42:53] Okay.

FORD: [00:42:54] Really very closely guarded.

KLEIN: [00:42:56] Another, sometimes when groups begin to coalesce in training, there's a problem because often another technique they use for selection is peer ratings. I don't know, do you?

FORD: [00:43:08] I don't recall anything like that.

KLEIN: [00:43:10] You didn't, uh, you'd like to be assigned with X, but not Y?

FORD: [00:43:15] I don't remember that.

KLEIN: [00:43:16] Okay. It may not have been used.

FORD: [00:43:19] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:43:20] Anything else about training?

FORD: [00:43:23] No. I just remember it as being utterly exhausting because we were on the go all the time without hardly any break.

KLEIN: [00:43:33] At any point in the training, was there discussion of the role you as Peace Corps might play going into a newly independent African country?

FORD: [00:43:44] A lot of points.

KLEIN: [00:43:45] That there'd be suspicion of you and so forth?

FORD: [00:43:47] Absolutely.

KLEIN: [00:43:48] Do you recall the flavor of that?

FORD: [00:43:51] I thought that was done relatively well. I do remember people saying that a country, they won't have a clue about who you are because they won't have had contact, but many people will be suspicious and think you're CIA and other kinds of things. And they talked about the role and how we should handle things. And I was impressed that somebody, I'm not sure who, whether it was the director of the training, made it clear that not only were we not connected to things like the CIA, but should we ever be approached, we should make it clear to them that we were Peace Corps and would not countenance any kind of extra involvement of that sort.

KLEIN: [00:44:42] And was there any discussion about particular, specifically about Africa, an African American going into the African setting of Kenya?

FORD: [00:44:56] Not one word.

KLEIN: [00:44:57] Okay.

FORD: [00:44:58] Interestingly.

KLEIN: [00:44:59] And we'll speak about that a little later but. And the other African Americans, there was nothing special about the training in relation to them? They were just part of the group?

FORD: [00:45:11] Right. The only one who had any sort of real difference was Roland Johnson, because Roland had been on Peace Corps staff before he became a volunteer.

KLEIN: [00:45:22] Ah, okay. I didn't know that.

FORD: [00:45:24] Yeah, or came straight to. And I recall that Roland, and maybe one or two of the other people, took pains to make it clear that he wasn't an undercover person because he actually talked. I remember him saying during, during training that there were a couple of people in the group with whom he'd spoken as a member of the staff, whether recruiting or whatever.

KLEIN: [00:45:55] Right.

FORD: [00:45:55] Answering questions. So he tried to make it clear that he had decided to volunteer and he wasn't, you know, a special agent of Peace Corps.

KLEIN: [00:46:03] Right.

FORD: [00:46:04] And he got accepted pretty quickly. So he was the only one for whom there was anything special.

KLEIN: [00:46:10] Okay.

FORD: [00:46:11] Lenny and I, you know, we were just there, as was Roland.

KLEIN: [00:46:14] Yeah. Training finally comes to an end, and the final selection is announced. Do you recall how that was done?

FORD: [00:46:24] Not with great specificity. I mean, this last young man was deselected and again hied off before anybody could see him.

KLEIN: [00:46:36] Mm hmm.

FORD: [00:46:37] And I remember that a lot of us were really pissed at that mode of selection. But at that point, we were also relieved it was done and we were going and it was now time to pack up and go to Kenya, that we didn't have as much time or energy to be pissed as relieved that training was over. But again, it was this very mysterious process. And you didn't have any chance to take leave of the person and find out what they'd been told because they were gone.

KLEIN: [00:47:10] Yeah. So once training is over, what month was it then? Was it December?

FORD: [00:47:18] December.

KLEIN: [00:47:19] Did you get any time at home?

FORD: [00:47:20] We did. My memory is it was maybe nearly a week.

KLEIN: [00:47:25] Okay. And you then are buying enough underwear to last you two years?

FORD: [00:47:31] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:47:31] And handkerchiefs.

FORD: [00:47:32] Exactly. Saying goodbye to everybody, you know.

KLEIN: [00:47:36] What was the reaction of your folks and friends now that you're on your way?

FORD: [00:47:42] Um, I think there still was the trepidation about the distance, because communication was not impossible, but extraordinarily difficult so. And mail took forever and you could barely make a phone call, you know. So there still was the concern about the distance and not being able to get their hands on you immediately if anything was wrong. But by the

time the training was over, certainly my family knew that this was something I was going to do, and they knew I was a pretty strong character. So they didn't worry that it wasn't anything I could handle.

KLEIN: [00:48:23] You didn't have any second thoughts?

FORD: [00:48:26] No, absolutely committed.

KLEIN: [00:48:28] Okay. So you pack it up and then report where?

FORD: [00:48:34] New York, where I think we must have met at the airport. There wasn't a meeting before that, and we were introduced to the other half of Kenya I, whom we had never met, the education group.

KLEIN: [00:48:48] And that was about 50 teachers?

FORD: [00:48:50] Yeah, about 50 teachers.

KLEIN: [00:48:52] And how many were then in your group, 30 something?

FORD: [00:48:55] Yeah, 33, 34. Somewhere like that. And so we met them and I don't know whether or not there was a meal at the airport, but we got the powder on a little bit because I remember when we all filed on to the plane, it was a TWA plane, and there was a little bit of mixing. Not much, just a little bit. You know, people met one or two people who either were from the same town or had gone to the same school, had something in common. But mostly you hung with the people you knew.

KLEIN: [00:49:28] Yeah.

FORD: [00:49:31] And as I say, they were an interesting group. I remember one or two people I met on the plane. And we flew to Madrid. And I want to say we were there nearly overnight. Then we flew. Strange, we made two stops. I think we might have stopped in Athens, but that was short. Whatever the second stop, Madrid was a long stop. Then we went somewhere else and then straight on to Nairobi.

KLEIN: [00:50:10] Mm hmm. I'll ask you, do you recall your reception when you got to Kenya?

FORD: [00:50:17] I do.

KLEIN: [00:50:18] Tell me about it.

FORD: [00:50:19] We arrived at the airport, which was a provincial seeming thing then. I mean, the new Jomo Kenyatta Airport is quite big and imposing. But this was a smallish airport.

KLEIN: [00:50:33] This was just a year after independence.

FORD: [00:50:35] A year after independence.

KLEIN: [00:50:36] Okay, so.

FORD: [00:50:37] So it's December and it's really warm.

KLEIN: [00:50:41] Right.

FORD: [00:50:41] And I remember many of us getting off in our overcoats because, you know, we got on the plane in New York, it was colder there. And this extraordinarily bright tropical scene unfolds in front of you.

KLEIN: [00:50:55] Yeah.

FORD: [00:50:55] And there's a whole coterie of Kenyans lined up to greet us as we're getting off the plane.

KLEIN: [00:51:03] Right.

FORD: [00:51:03] Among them is Jomo Kenyatta.

KLEIN: [00:51:05] Yeah. Yeah.

FORD: [00:51:07] And there were talks and speeches, not long lasting, but very impressive. While we tried to figure out how do we get rid of these damn overcoats because we're sweating bullets.

KLEIN: [00:51:18] Was anyone in your group chosen as a spokesman?

FORD: [00:51:22] Philip Schafer.

KLEIN: [00:51:23] Okay.

FORD: [00:51:24] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:51:24] And did he give remarks in Swahili?

FORD: [00:51:28] He gave a few. And I doubt that I.

KLEIN: [00:51:32] Woke up the crowd?

FORD: [00:51:34] I don't think I can do this before you leave, but I'll look. I recently discovered a tape of that and I'll see if I can't find it.

KLEIN: [00:51:43] Yeah.

FORD: [00:51:43] Quickly. But, you know, it's in all the packing up stuff. If it's handy, I'll, I'll actually give it to you and you can make a copy.

KLEIN: [00:51:51] Okay. Okay.

FORD: [00:51:53] I'll find it eventually.

KLEIN: [00:51:54] Yeah, yeah.

FORD: [00:51:56] So, the greeting.

KLEIN: [00:51:57] Was the American ambassador? Who was the American ambassador?

FORD: [00:52:00] Attwood.

KLEIN: [00:52:01] And he was there, I'm sure.

FORD: [00:52:02] He was there.

KLEIN: [00:52:03] And your friendly Peace Corps staff?

FORD: [00:52:05] Yes. Dotty Chambers and Tom Quimby.

KLEIN: [00:52:09] Tom was the?

FORD: [00:52:09] Tom was there. He was the director.

KLEIN: [00:52:11] Okay.

FORD: [00:52:13] I'm trying to think who, if anybody, was the associate. It had to have been somebody for the teachers. I just, I don't remember. I don't think. Well, you weren't there yet. Were you?

KLEIN: [00:52:25] Yeah.

FORD: [00:52:26] Were you there?

KLEIN: [00:52:27] Yeah. I may have been off checking on everything. I was. Yeah. So big reception.

FORD: [00:52:39] Big reception.

KLEIN: [00:52:41] How did it feel to be in Kenya?

FORD: [00:52:43] It was really extraordinary. I mean, we were all a little sick, many of us, because we'd had 50,000 inoculations before leaving. And, you know, you're tired because it was a long trip. But simultaneously.

KLEIN: [00:52:58] Was it a charter flight?

FORD: [00:53:00] No.

KLEIN: [00:53:00] No, it was commercial.

FORD: [00:53:01] It was commercial.

KLEIN: [00:53:02] Okay.

FORD: [00:53:04] And we were elated finally to be here, you know, to see Kenya and Africans and.

KLEIN: [00:53:13] Was there any publicity in the Chicago papers when you left or by then the Peace Corps was routine?

FORD: [00:53:19] I think Peace Corps was routine.

KLEIN: [00:53:20] Yeah.

FORD: [00:53:21] Enough that it didn't mention.

KLEIN: [00:53:23] Yeah.

FORD: [00:53:28] And there was a kind of gala reception at the airport and then later there was a big party somewhere in Kenya. We stayed again at a Y for a week or two maybe.

KLEIN: [00:53:44] Both groups?

FORD: [00:53:45] Both groups. There was in-country training with local people for the most part doing, doing the training.

KLEIN: [00:53:55] Right.

FORD: [00:53:55] There was some language.

KLEIN: [00:53:57] Yeah.

FORD: [00:53:58] It's funny. It brings back memories. Ayeesh Genovie was our language teacher expert and there were other people in too.

KLEIN: [00:54:12] Are the two groups together during this time, or were the teachers being peeled off and sent out to schools?

FORD: [00:54:18] I think we were together, at least initially. And then they may have been peeled off.

KLEIN: [00:54:25] Okay, let's concentrate on your experience. Do you recall at what point you? At what point in the whole process did you get any kind of definition of what the job is that you were going to be assigned to?

FORD: [00:54:42] During that two week period, the training included a number of visits by people from Settlement.

KLEIN: [00:54:51] So that's, that's the ministry. It's an agency within the Kenya government that concentrates on these.

FORD: [00:54:58] The resettlement projects.

KLEIN: [00:54:59] Land resettlement areas.

FORD: [00:55:01] It was actually a ministry.

KLEIN: [00:55:02] It was a ministry, okay.

FORD: [00:55:05] And the minister came.

KLEIN: [00:55:08] Yeah.

FORD: [00:55:09] A couple of assistant associate ministers.

KLEIN: [00:55:12] Right.

FORD: [00:55:13] And then the Department of Lands and Settlement, the actual organization, the director, the associate director, and then real people from the field. There were visits.

KLEIN: [00:55:28] At that point, weren't there still a significant number of white Kenyans as well as?

FORD: [00:55:33] Yes.

KLEIN: [00:55:34] African Kenyans in the ministries?

FORD: [00:55:36] Absolutely. The minister was African, but almost all of the department heads were European.

KLEIN: [00:55:45] Okay.

FORD: [00:55:46] Almost all.

KLEIN: [00:55:47] Now, this is 1964. Just.

FORD: [00:55:50] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:55:50] Do you remember when you had your first coherent discussion or talk in Swahili?

FORD: [00:56:02] Yeah, actually, it was during that sort of Nairobi phase. I remember now we were first at this Y. Really we got sent to the Kenya Institute, KIA, of Administration. That's where we are for this two week period. And there were service people and other people, like we got introduced to some of the kinds of people who were going to be staff out in the field, that assistance.

KLEIN: [00:56:35] Right.

FORD: [00:56:35] And I remember having a conversation in Swahili with one of the agricultural assistants.

KLEIN: [00:56:43] Right.

FORD: [00:56:43] Had little English. Most of these folk had technical training and spoke a teeny bit of English, perhaps, but Swahili was their lingua franca.

KLEIN: [00:56:54] But many, many of them also would have a first language like Kikuyu.

FORD: [00:56:58] Oh, yeah. All of them.

KLEIN: [00:56:59] So Swahili was an added on and then English would be on top of that.

FORD: [00:57:03] Exactly.

KLEIN: [00:57:04] Yeah.

FORD: [00:57:05] I remember my first conversation there. I was surprised. While we were training, some of the teachers talked to us about this phrase *Kiswahili cha jikoni*, meaning Kiswahili in the kitchen.

KLEIN: [00:57:24] Right.

FORD: [00:57:25] Which is, you know, broken Swahili that real Swahili speakers don't use. I remember learning, the Swahili that we learned was the correct Swahili. And it's, it's a beautiful language full of concordances and so forth. Nobody used it. It's like, um, kitchen Swahili reminds you of the English equivalent in the movies where people are talking to Native Americans. How, me speak to? You know, that kind of Swahili. I no go.

KLEIN: [00:57:58] Yeah. Yeah.

FORD: [00:58:00] And it threw me off a little. I mean, I could understand it, but I expected people to speak the way we'd been taught, but almost nobody did.

KLEIN: [00:58:09] Okay, um, but you were able to jump into Swahili conversation without hesitation, even though there was some surprises there.

FORD: [00:58:22] Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:58:22] At what point during the two, at any point during the two weeks were you asked any, anything about assignment preference? You'd rather be alone or with or in this area or that?

FORD: [00:58:32] There were discussions of that kind.

KLEIN: [00:58:34] Yeah.

FORD: [00:58:35] And I don't know whether that got all the weight in the world. I think there were clearly personal considerations that determined where people were sent. Preferences may have had something to do with, but.

KLEIN: [00:58:50] Right.

FORD: [00:58:50] And I learned that I got sent to one of the most forlorn places because it was presumed that I could handle it. And I was good at language and I had the kind of personality. So it was that rather than my preference. I don't think I would have chosen my spot.

KLEIN: [00:59:07] Okay. Initially you were assigned alone?

FORD: [00:59:10] No. Well, certainly there weren't other Peace Corps people, but initially all of us, without exception, were assigned as assistant settlement officers. So we worked with the settlement officer at some place, and there was a period of training, mentorship. As many settlement officers were European then as African.

KLEIN: [00:59:34] Oh.

FORD: [00:59:36] Mine was African. He was from [inaudible].

KLEIN: [00:59:40] And where were you assigned?

FORD: [00:59:42] Thomsons Falls.

KLEIN: [00:59:43] Can you give a quick description of where it is?

FORD: [00:59:45] It's 160 or 70 miles from Nairobi north and east. It was an area of some European settlement. Lots of sheep, pyrethrum. [phone rings] The center of European settlement was the Thomsons Falls Country Club, which I visited once or twice, and you know, there were Europeans still around and there was horse racing and genteel drinking and.

KLEIN: [01:00:29] There was a, there were a fair number of white Kenyans who stayed on after independence and were considered Kenyan citizens.

FORD: [01:00:38] Right.

KLEIN: [01:00:39] Citizens?

FORD: [01:00:39] Right.

KLEIN: [01:00:40] Okay. What was the traditional area you were in? Was it Kikuyu?

FORD: [01:00:46] Kikuyu. Totally Kikuyu. Most of the Europeans with whom we worked, I think, hadn't planned on remaining permanently in Kenya. It was a sort of transitional period until they made arrangements for the next stage of life.

KLEIN: [01:01:05] Did many of them go on to Rhodesia and South Africa?

FORD: [01:01:08] Most did. Some went to Britain, but many went to South Africa.

KLEIN: [01:01:13] Yeah. So well, we'll get that when we get into the job situation. So now the group, after two weeks, is finally breaking up and going out to assignments. Was that a wrench? I mean, you'd been together.

FORD: [01:01:27] It was.

KLEIN: [01:01:27] And there's an intensity.

FORD: [01:01:29] There was, and I remember it vividly. Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:01:31] Talk about it.

FORD: [01:01:33] We were at KIA, and all of a sudden these trucks and Land Rovers show up to pick us up. And they'd been sent from the particular place where we were going to all be going. And we had by then been given motorcycle training and assigned motorcycles.

KLEIN: [01:01:56] Oh, okay.

FORD: [01:01:56] So we all had motorcycles and helmets and three years worth of underwear and, you know, toilet tissue, because we knew we weren't ever going to get real toilet tissue. So we're all packed up in these, these bundles and a Land Rover came to get me from the settlement scheme where I was going.

KLEIN: [01:02:15] Yeah.

FORD: [01:02:16] And you had a time getting the damn motorcycle in there.

KLEIN: [01:02:19] Of course.

FORD: [01:02:19] In position.

KLEIN: [01:02:20] Yeah.

FORD: [01:02:22] The driver was Akamba who spoke no English whatsoever. And one of the clerks from the office there came. And he had decent English.

KLEIN: [01:02:36] Yeah.

FORD: [01:02:36] The settlement officer didn't come. [tape break]

KLEIN: [01:02:39] So they picked you up. Finally figured out how to get the motorcycle. Did Peace Corps supply the motorcycle?

FORD: [01:02:47] Actually the government of Kenya issued it.

KLEIN: [01:02:49] So it was, what kind of cycle was it?

FORD: [01:02:52] A Triumph.

KLEIN: [01:02:54] So it was British made. Okay.

FORD: [01:02:58] And everybody got one. And they all had government licenses. Mine was GK3040.

KLEIN: [01:03:07] Did, did everyone took? Not everyone had ridden motorcycles before.

FORD: [01:03:12] No, I hadn't.

KLEIN: [01:03:13] So all of a sudden. Were there any serious mishaps?

FORD: [01:03:19] Not serious, but there were spills. You know, they trained us at the Kenya Institute of Administration.

KLEIN: [01:03:26] Yeah.

FORD: [01:03:27] And, you know, once they did it, I remember this guy, Buckminster, who came out and trained us. We had two or three sessions. Once they did it, they assumed, all right, you're ready. You know, that's it. Now, the good thing about it was this is '64, '65.

KLEIN: [01:03:45] Yeah.

FORD: [01:03:46] In Kenya, there were only a handful of cars up country.

KLEIN: [01:03:52] Yes.

FORD: [01:03:54] Nairobi is a little car but nothing.

KLEIN: [01:03:56] Yeah. The growth came later.

FORD: [01:03:58] Yeah, much later.

KLEIN: [01:04:00] Yeah.

FORD: [01:04:01] So I'm sure there would have been many more mishaps and even fatalities if the road had been more crowded because, um, we just were far from expert.

KLEIN: [01:04:14] Do you recall if Peace Corps put any restrictions on your use of the cycle?

FORD: [01:04:19] Peace Corps didn't, but the government did. We had to follow government regulations, which was no personal use.

KLEIN: [01:04:24] Okay.

FORD: [01:04:25] I mean, you can use it to go into town to get groceries.

KLEIN: [01:04:28] Right.

FORD: [01:04:28] But you couldn't take it on holiday.

KLEIN: [01:04:31] Into the city. Right. Right. And of course, no one ever did.

FORD: [01:04:35] Nobody ever did.

KLEIN: [01:04:36] Okay, we'll get there. So now you go off into the wild blue yonder in the truck with a Swahili speaking truck driver.

FORD: [01:04:47] Uh huh.

KLEIN: [01:04:50] And mostly it's a relatively short trip.

FORD: [01:04:52] Actually, um, probably. I mean, you couldn't do a lot of fast driving. I want to say it was 4 hours anyway. More than that maybe. Four or 5 hours. Because, I mean, the roads were rutted, and, you know, you couldn't do 60.

KLEIN: [01:05:12] Were you at all apprehensive? I mean, you're really going into the unknown at this point.

FORD: [01:05:17] I was, because I didn't know the place or really anybody where I was going, and it had been made clear to me that I was on an escarpment. The settlement scheme was called Shamata. The Thomsons Falls was this town, but really where I was going was Shamata. And you'd go from Thomsons Falls up on the escarpment, up 9,000 some odd feet in altitude. And there was nothing up there except, you know, the Aberdares.

KLEIN: [01:05:54] Yeah. The mountains.

FORD: [01:05:56] And nothing was nearby. So you could come back to T Falls, which I want to say was 20 miles or so, you know, rough miles.

KLEIN: [01:06:09] From the scheme?

FORD: [01:06:10] From the scheme.

KLEIN: [01:06:10] Where you ended up.

FORD: [01:06:11] Yeah. So.

KLEIN: [01:06:13] Yeah, go ahead.

FORD: [01:06:13] I was a little apprehensive about being in a place so distant, you know?

KLEIN: [01:06:21] In sending you out, had Peace Corps set up any kind of emergency communication system? I mean, if you were to double over with some disease, you would jump on your cycle and drive 6 hours.

FORD: [01:06:39] Not to my knowledge.

KLEIN: [01:06:41] Okay.

FORD: [01:06:41] Not to my knowledge. What they did was they gave us a medical kit and said you're on your own.

KLEIN: [01:06:46] Okay.

FORD: [01:06:47] It's a pretty well supplied medical kit, but.

KLEIN: [01:06:50] Yeah. Yeah. And was there any, I guess it may have come later, any talk of if there's political trouble, this is what you should do? Or if we need to get in touch with you in a crisis?

FORD: [01:07:08] I don't remember that, at least initially. I do remember vaguely some sense that if there was trouble, there were gathering spots where.

KLEIN: [01:07:19] Oh, okay.

FORD: [01:07:21] But, you know, where I was the only way to get in touch with me was to ride up there.

KLEIN: [01:07:26] No, well, okay, on the scheme?

FORD: [01:07:29] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:07:30] No phones.

FORD: [01:07:31] No phones.

KLEIN: [01:07:32] Okay.

FORD: [01:07:33] There were some phones in T Falls.

KLEIN: [01:07:36] Yeah.

FORD: [01:07:38] But not on the scheme.

KLEIN: [01:07:39] So you arrive in Thomsons Falls and?

FORD: [01:07:43] I'm in the town. I meet the settlement officer, Ephraim Nifalma. Wonderful man of some real reputation, which I'll tell you about in a minute.

KLEIN: [01:07:55] Yeah.

FORD: [01:07:55] And just a very cheery, outgoing, quite bright man with pretty good English too. So he greets me, and he has a sense of humor. Kind of raucous, straightforward sense of humor. And we ride up together, and he drops me off at the house where I'm supposed to be. And, you know, we get sort of unpacked. And then my trepidation and anxiety really come to the fore. No lights. No working toilet. You know, a minimum of furniture.

KLEIN: [01:08:37] Yes.

FORD: [01:08:37] And it was, I want to say, a couple, three miles from his place.

KLEIN: [01:08:41] Yeah.

FORD: [01:08:44] And, you know, I was going to be, I didn't have any factotum. Nobody hired. I'm there. So I spent the first night in this house by myself. And next morning, got on the bike, drove to the scheme office, met him, and told him I wasn't staying there. He thought that was funny. He said, alright, you come stay in my house, which was quite generous. But it turns out, one it was an enormous house and we could actually divide it in half and have two separate parts. He wasn't there much. Ephraim, okay, a little bit about Ephraim. Ephraim had been in the Home Guard. These were the Kenyans who really were part of a quasi-military arm of the colonialist government.

KLEIN: [01:09:39] Right.

FORD: [01:09:40] Whose job was to keep order and to really be one of the first lines of defense against the Mau Mau.

KLEIN: [01:09:48] Right. Right.

FORD: [01:09:49] And as you can imagine, in Kikuyu areas, they were despised. Ephraim was really bright and quite competent.

KLEIN: [01:10:02] Was he Kikuyu?

FORD: [01:10:03] He was Kikuyu, yeah. He, in fact, was head of the Home Guard unit that captured Dedan Kimathi, the Mau Mau hero of all time.

KLEIN: [01:10:13] Right.

FORD: [01:10:14] So he was known, um, and had a reputation. I remember some of the Africans saying, yes, we had this dog and the dog's name, you know, everything was ferocious. And so part of the after effects of that was Ephraim was not a happy person in an all Kikuyu sort of setting. And when government took over and, you know, largely African, Ephraim was in Settlement, so they stuck him up there. In a way, it's kind of punishment because Shamata, my settlement scheme, was a settlement scheme that was made available to former Mau Mau. So he wasn't, I mean, nobody beat him, but his life was not easy.

KLEIN: [01:11:11] Yeah.

FORD: [01:11:12] So he didn't spend much time on the scheme.

KLEIN: [01:11:14] Okay.

FORD: [01:11:15] He would go Friday. He lived in Njebi. He would, he had his own vehicle. He'd drive into T Falls, leave the government vehicle, take his vehicle and go to Njebi. And he'd come back maybe Tuesday, as we had our settlement meetings on Tuesday.

KLEIN: [01:11:34] Right.

FORD: [01:11:35] And he drive with me back to the scheme. He'd be there Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and then he's off.

KLEIN: [01:11:41] Right.

FORD: [01:11:41] So for the most part.

KLEIN: [01:11:43] Did he have a family in Njebi?

FORD: [01:11:45] Yeah, big family in the Njebi.

KLEIN: [01:11:46] Okay.

FORD: [01:11:48] So, you know, half the week or more, he wasn't there. So I was pretty much on my own.

KLEIN: [01:11:53] Yeah.

FORD: [01:11:54] And it was easy to share the house because he was on his own there and wasn't there most of the time.

KLEIN: [01:12:01] Right.

FORD: [01:12:01] And we got along fine. You know, he was a boon companion, but he was really not happy where he was.

KLEIN: [01:12:10] Well, okay, let's think about the first weeks.

FORD: [01:12:13] Sure.

KLEIN: [01:12:14] You're way out at the end of nowhere, with Ephraim not being a hands on, right there settlement officer. First, second, third day. What did you do?

FORD: [01:12:30] Well, the settlement operation was reasonably well organized in most places to the extent that there was an office, there was a staff, and

there were ongoing operations. You know, the veterinary assistants and agriculturalists all had jobs to do. And they were out instructing people and so forth.

KLEIN: [01:12:56] So who did they take their orders from?

FORD: [01:13:00] There's two-fold, in a sense, in that they came from separate departments, extension departments.

KLEIN: [01:13:08] Yeah.

FORD: [01:13:08] But essentially they were under the control of the settlement officer. They were seconded, is the British phrase, to the settlement scheme. And the settlement officer ran everything.

KLEIN: [01:13:19] Yeah.

FORD: [01:13:20] So I worked with them and they were happy to have me be there because Ephraim wasn't around a lot, you know. So they, they taught me and they came to me with questions and.

KLEIN: [01:13:31] But the first week, what the hell did you know?

FORD: [01:13:34] I didn't know much. But, you know, it's funny, that business about having a BA and being able to do some stuff. I knew, for example, how to create a ledger.

KLEIN: [01:13:44] Okay.

FORD: [01:13:45] And so we made a real ledger because you had to keep track of the loan accounts and all of the disbursements for each farmer. So you know, went in, got these big books, and it was all by hand but we made real ledgers and columns headed with, you know, what did I know? But it was common sense. So it was stuff like that that needed to be done. People hadn't been there that long. So, you know, things were, the operation was in its infancy.

KLEIN: [01:14:16] Yeah. Well, so was independence.

FORD: [01:14:18] Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. In fact, there was still people coming in.

KLEIN: [01:14:22] Yeah.

FORD: [01:14:22] So there were regulations and procedures. Each person was to get so much of X and Y, and when you had the distribution, you had to record and they had to sign.

KLEIN: [01:14:37] Right.

FORD: [01:14:38] So I did things like create the ledger and help them construct records. And they would take me out often, you know, they'd be on the back of the motorcycle and we'd go around and look at this issue and this issue.

KLEIN: [01:14:55] That would be you and one of the other settlements officers?

FORD: [01:14:58] One of the settlement staff, yeah. Sometimes, you know, Ephraim would be there. Um. Oftentimes the office would fill people with questions and issues and problems and requests. So you'd spend a lot of time in the office trying to figure out what they wanted and what you could do to help.

KLEIN: [01:15:15] And were you the point of first contact or?

FORD: [01:15:18] Pretty much, when Ephraim wasn't there.

KLEIN: [01:15:21] Right, right. Well, let me, let me ask you a question. Well, two questions. Why did Peace Corps have to do this? Why weren't there Kenyans to fill?

FORD: [01:15:37] Because they weren't trained yet. They, in fact, this is another really good thing about Peace Corps. They made it clear to us, particularly when we got to the country and being trained, if you're really successful, if

you do your job, when you leave, there'll be a Kenyan to replace you. So you should be working yourself out of a job.

KLEIN: [01:15:59] So that was explicit?

FORD: [01:16:01] Absolutely.

KLEIN: [01:16:01] Oh, okay.

FORD: [01:16:02] That's completely explicit.

KLEIN: [01:16:04] It doesn't always happen. Yeah. The other thing is, what was, those Kenyans you were working with immediately, the staff and then the farmers, what was their perception of who you were?

FORD: [01:16:17] They didn't have a clue who I was.

KLEIN: [01:16:19] Okay.

FORD: [01:16:19] On a couple levels.

KLEIN: [01:16:23] Yeah.

FORD: [01:16:23] The white volunteers, I suspect, had a different experience and I, you would know better than I. It was clear that I was a little different. I looked different.

KLEIN: [01:16:38] Yeah.

FORD: [01:16:39] They didn't know what to make of me because I didn't fit one of the easy categories. And the categories were of overriding importance in Kenya, you know. You're European. You're African. You're Asian. You might be some weird, like mixed. And, you know, *jokata* was a, uh, it was closer to half breed than mixed race. It wasn't a compliment to be *jokata*.

KLEIN: [01:17:05] Right.

FORD: [01:17:06] And I wasn't sort of any of those. Mostly initially I was European because I looked different, I dressed different. And you know, I came from this place that was kind of European.

KLEIN: [01:17:22] Right.

FORD: [01:17:22] But they knew that wasn't right.

KLEIN: [01:17:24] Yeah.

FORD: [01:17:24] So as people asked me and I would explain my history, and this is the difference in Ghana and in the history wasn't part of who they were, you know.

KLEIN: [01:17:37] Yeah.

FORD: [01:17:38] They knew about slavery, but slaves from there had gone to Arabia.

KLEIN: [01:17:42] Yeah.

FORD: [01:17:43] You know, the French had been involved in. But America?

KLEIN: [01:17:47] Yeah.

FORD: [01:17:47] So they, what they, a lot of them ended up doing was giving me this separate category. The Swahili way to indicate something is an animal, a human, is to put an M in front of the noun.

KLEIN: [01:18:03] Right.

FORD: [01:18:03] So I became Mnegro.

KLEIN: [01:18:09] Mnegro?

FORD: [01:18:11] You know, that was the term I used there, not Black. They'd say, well who are? You know, I'm an American Negro. So when people

would want to know, well, he's Mnegro. I don't know what exactly they thought it was. They knew it was weird.

KLEIN: [01:18:25] Yeah.

FORD: [01:18:26] And they knew I wasn't quite European, but they weren't quite sure what it was.

KLEIN: [01:18:32] Yeah.

FORD: [01:18:33] So it was exotic.

KLEIN: [01:18:34] Were you ever mistaken for Asian?

FORD: [01:18:36] I was. Not so much in Thomsons Falls, but in Nairobi often, because I looked Swahili and my Swahili was correct.

KLEIN: [01:18:49] Right.

FORD: [01:18:50] So often I was mistaken for Swahili. Not the subcontinent of India Asia, no.

KLEIN: [01:18:55] Okay.

FORD: [01:18:56] But Swahili a lot.

KLEIN: [01:18:58] From the coast.

FORD: [01:18:58] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:18:59] Yeah. So let's, uh, a couple of things. For the first three, four months, at the end of that, there seems to be a clear pattern of work that emerged. And did you feel any confidence in what you were doing or any confidence?

FORD: [01:19:28] Yeah, because I had a great staff. I really had people who knew what they were doing. My clerk, Kihara, spoke good English, was bright as

a whip, was enormously useful and supportive. The agriculturalist and the vet, young people, had been well trained. And they had a terrific extension service. They were really very good. So I was well served by them, and a lot of what I attended to were the administrative issues like locating cattle to purchase and arranging their transport to the scheme and finding a place to get fencing material. And settling boundary disputes.

KLEIN: [01:20:18] And that was the kind of thing you could do?

FORD: [01:20:20] That's the kind of thing I could do.

KLEIN: [01:20:20] Yeah. So I'm gathering that the staff felt you had a role to play, that you weren't some annoying level of administration that had been imposed?

FORD: [01:20:32] Exactly.

KLEIN: [01:20:36] Um, two things. You didn't spend 24 hours in the office.

FORD: [01:20:44] No.

KLEIN: [01:20:44] So now, in the thick with the first six months or so, how often did you leave the scheme? Or while you were on the scheme, what did you do when you weren't working?

FORD: [01:20:58] Um, I was working. When you said you weren't in the office 24 hours, I wasn't, but I was in the house maybe 8 hours a day. The rest of the time I was on the scheme. I was either in the office or out in the field. I made it my business to visit every farmer in rotation, and I'd take notes on where they were, what their issues were, what they needed.

KLEIN: [01:21:26] How many farmers approximately?

FORD: [01:21:29] In Shamata, there were a couple of hundred, maybe 250.

KLEIN: [01:21:34] Yeah.

FORD: [01:21:35] And I just spent my time going around, you know.

KLEIN: [01:21:38] And in this case, in that case, the conversations were in Swahili?

FORD: [01:21:42] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:21:43] Okay.

FORD: [01:21:46] And, you know, this one would be having trouble with that, or this one. It wasn't all trouble either, you know? Something about who was especially good at something.

KLEIN: [01:21:56] Right.

FORD: [01:21:58] And they were pleased because people didn't go around and visit them, you know what I mean?

KLEIN: [01:22:03] Oh, okay. Yeah.

FORD: [01:22:04] Kind of unusual and weird, but they were wonderfully hospitable and happy to see me.

KLEIN: [01:22:09] Yeah.

FORD: [01:22:10] Many of them hadn't yet finished their houses or anything, but they'd always run off and get a kettle of hot water and make some tea. Yeah, we'd sit around and drink tea. And you know, they'd talk about stuff. I did a lot of that.

KLEIN: [01:22:29] Did you, did you begin to get some sense of the traditional life of the people?

FORD: [01:22:34] Absolutely. Absolutely.

KLEIN: [01:22:36] Births, deaths, celebrations?

FORD: [01:22:38] Absolutely. And it didn't take that long to do that.

KLEIN: [01:22:43] Yeah. But in a way, you had the advantage. Well, there were other Europeans in, on the scheme or not?

FORD: [01:22:52] Not on the scheme.

KLEIN: [01:22:53] So to deal with Europeans, you had to go into?

FORD: [01:22:57] T Falls.

KLEIN: [01:22:58] Okay. So in a way, you were, you were in an environment where if you were going to do anything, you were involving yourself with the Kikuyu people who lived there?

FORD: [01:23:08] Absolutely. Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:23:09] Did, well, did you find yourself going into T Falls much, you know, just to break away and get the?

FORD: [01:23:16] I'd go maybe once every two weeks.

KLEIN: [01:23:22] Oh, okay.

FORD: [01:23:24] You know, I'd go. We were. The Kenya workweek included a half day Saturday and I followed that. You know, that was what you're supposed to do.

KLEIN: [01:23:34] Yeah.

FORD: [01:23:34] So sometimes Saturday I'd go into T Falls, and, you know, I didn't. I knew the shopkeepers and some people around and people in the settlement office there. But I'd shop. I might grab a lunch someplace. Meet somebody. There were a couple of volunteers who were in the area sometimes, we'd meet. Then I'd go back.

KLEIN: [01:24:03] Yeah. Did the European community and people try to recruit you as part of their circle?

FORD: [01:24:12] They, they certainly tried to recruit.

KLEIN: [01:24:15] Not recruitment, but.

FORD: [01:24:16] No, no, it's a good term. Yeah, I would use it. I think they clearly tried to recruit the other volunteers. I was exotic to them too. And while I don't feel I was recruited, there were no barriers to, I mean, they were open to me.

KLEIN: [01:24:37] Right.

FORD: [01:24:38] They went out of their way to invite volunteers to the country club, which was their gathering place.

KLEIN: [01:24:45] Yeah.

FORD: [01:24:47] And, you know, I'm not giving them much credit. I remember there were local families that had me and other people over. And, you know, they were interestingly sometimes kind of lonesome for European or Western company too.

KLEIN: [01:25:05] Okay. Yeah.

FORD: [01:25:06] So there were people in the area, not tons, but there were people. The district headquarters for settlement in T Falls was largely staffed, the upper level staff was all European.

KLEIN: [01:25:20] Yeah.

FORD: [01:25:21] And, you know, they, they went out of their way to be nice and open to us, sometimes invite us for dinner. And there were contractors whom we met, you know, who lived locally.

KLEIN: [01:25:33] Did, um, so how long before you made a trip back to Nairobi?

FORD: [01:25:41] Probably three months.

KLEIN: [01:25:44] And was it required to get together with the group?

FORD: [01:25:48] I think it was a required meeting, yeah, because I didn't have much occasion to go before then. I think it was probably.

KLEIN: [01:26:00] Do you remember when the group first got back together?

FORD: [01:26:04] It was in Nairobi. There was a meeting. We'd had meetings of people in our area in Nakuru, and that involved, you know, the people within central, not the people in the west or wherever.

KLEIN: [01:26:21] And that was just Peace Corps?

FORD: [01:26:22] It was just Peace Corps.

KLEIN: [01:26:23] And it was just the settlement people?

FORD: [01:26:25] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:26:26] And was it, did someone come out from the Nairobi office?

FORD: [01:26:31] Yeah. Yeah. And, you know.

KLEIN: [01:26:35] By then, was there a staff person in charge of the settlement? I think there was.

FORD: [01:26:38] There was. George somebody?

KLEIN: [01:26:40] Yes. Yeah. Okay. Yeah.

FORD: [01:26:43] And, so we'd try to see what was on our plates, what issues we had, what we needed, if anything, what observations we had. You know, they were going to pretty quickly put together another group, so they were

interested in figuring out what they needed to know to better train the next group and that kind of thing.

KLEIN: [01:27:10] And how did your experience compare to when you're first getting together with the group again? How was the experience others were having?

FORD: [01:27:19] A lot of similarities. The main difference I think between and amongst us was some of us went into situations where we had more responsibility more quickly than others. Others went to places where often, you know, there was a European settlement officer and he was really in charge. And that was a major variation, you know. Also, resources. In central, we had more resources available more quickly. Some places it was more difficult to get stuff done.

KLEIN: [01:28:00] Was that tribal maybe?

FORD: [01:28:02] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:28:03] So being in a Kikuyu area in a way had some advantages.

FORD: [01:28:07] Real advantages.

KLEIN: [01:28:09] Yeah.

FORD: [01:28:09] Very real advantages.

KLEIN: [01:28:11] Okay.

FORD: [01:28:12] So I was there for three or four months in Thomsons Falls.

KLEIN: [01:28:15] Right.

FORD: [01:28:17] At the end of which time, this was roughly true for most of us, this was part of the plan. Then they found spots for us to be settlement officers.

KLEIN: [01:28:29] Oh, okay. Was that part of the program design or did it evolve?

FORD: [01:28:37] Um, that I can't say. I know that it seemed like part of the design, that it had happened to so many of us.

KLEIN: [01:28:43] Right. Now, who, who was, who was in a position to make a judgment that you were ready to become a full time settlement officer?

FORD: [01:28:53] The district settlement officer. The guy in charge of the district.

KLEIN: [01:28:55] Oh, okay.

FORD: [01:28:56] He assigns you.

KLEIN: [01:28:58] Yeah.

FORD: [01:28:58] With Peace Corps support. But it was their decision, it was strictly Settlement.

KLEIN: [01:29:02] Well, how did the district office get a reading on how competent you were?

FORD: [01:29:07] Well, we had meetings once a week. We had to do paperwork. They talked to us every now and then. They'd come out and visit.

KLEIN: [01:29:15] Yeah.

FORD: [01:29:16] But again, we had to go in every week to the meeting.

KLEIN: [01:29:19] Oh, okay.

FORD: [01:29:20] They got some sense of where you were. You had to do reports.

KLEIN: [01:29:24] Yeah.

FORD: [01:29:25] They got some sense of how well you knew the place. And, you know.

KLEIN: [01:29:29] Now, so after three, four months, you're being reassigned?

FORD: [01:29:32] Mm hmm.

KLEIN: [01:29:34] That couldn't have been across the board for the whole group?

FORD: [01:29:37] No, but it happened a lot.

KLEIN: [01:29:37] There must have been some who were judged not ready?

FORD: [01:29:39] Right. Right.

KLEIN: [01:29:41] You were judged ready?

FORD: [01:29:42] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:29:43] And it came as no surprise?

FORD: [01:29:46] No, I wasn't surprised.

KLEIN: [01:29:48] So where'd they send you?

FORD: [01:29:50] OI Kalou, which was still in the same region.

KLEIN: [01:29:55] Yeah.

FORD: [01:29:56] But different direction.

KLEIN: [01:29:57] Okay. [tape break]

FORD: [01:30:02] OI Kalou was closer to Thomsons Falls, much easier to get to. It's on the main road from Thomsons Falls that goes to Nairobi essentially.

KLEIN: [01:30:14] Now, had there been a settlement officer there?

FORD: [01:30:16] There had been.

KLEIN: [01:30:17] And what had happened to him?

FORD: [01:30:18] He was reassigned.

KLEIN: [01:30:21] Because he was incompetent?

FORD: [01:30:22] No, he was a youngish guy. He was moved to a more responsible position.

KLEIN: [01:30:29] Oh, okay.

FORD: [01:30:29] And there was that kind of shifting going on, particularly as many of the Europeans were beginning to leave. So some of the officers in places like Ol Kalou, I've forgotten where he went. I think he went to the west because he wasn't Kikuyu and sometimes I think people preferred to be in their own area. But he was reassigned.

KLEIN: [01:30:51] But you were still within the same district?

FORD: [01:30:53] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:30:54] So it's still the district settlement officer?

FORD: [01:30:57] Yeah. Yeah, same district settlement officer.

KLEIN: [01:30:59] Okay. Is there a house waiting for you?

FORD: [01:31:04] There's a house. Really nice house, you know, compared to where I'd been in the first place.

KLEIN: [01:31:09] Right.

FORD: [01:31:09] Very nice house.

KLEIN: [01:31:12] At any point did you have a steward or someone to help you?

FORD: [01:31:15] I did, actually. I did. Samatta. Because Ephraim had hired a guy. Joseph. He was a really sweet guy. You know, he was sort of a cook and everything else. And when I got transferred, Joseph said, Mr. Michael, I want to go with you. So I said, fine. So he came with me to Ol Kalou.

KLEIN: [01:31:40] Oh, okay.

FORD: [01:31:41] And stayed in service working with me as the cook person.

KLEIN: [01:31:48] Right.

FORD: [01:31:50] And we were responsible for their salaries, you know, out of our Peace Corps stipend. But, hell, the average salary was so low. And even though I paid at the high end of the scale, it wasn't the problem.

KLEIN: [01:32:01] Right, right. So Peace Corps was paying you?

FORD: [01:32:03] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:32:04] Okay.

FORD: [01:32:05] Yeah. We got, I think it was eight or 900 shillings a month.

KLEIN: [01:32:09] So it was an easy, by now you're familiar with the work and you're moving into a new environment.

FORD: [01:32:17] Yeah. But the same district settlement office, the same sort of cast of characters.

KLEIN: [01:32:22] And the new office that you're now in charge of?

FORD: [01:32:25] Yeah. The folks weren't quite as, they were okay.

KLEIN: [01:32:30] Yeah.

FORD: [01:32:31] They weren't quite of the caliber. So, you know, I had a little more work to do to get them trained and so forth, but they were perfectly fine. And it was a bigger scheme, it was 400 families.

KLEIN: [01:32:41] And you could do most of the training?

FORD: [01:32:43] Yeah. I did.

KLEIN: [01:32:45] Did you continue the practice of trying to visit all 400?

FORD: [01:32:49] I did.

KLEIN: [01:32:50] That wasn't common, I mean.

FORD: [01:32:54] No. That was pretty uncommon. But, you know, one, it's fun and I'm gregarious and love to get out and joke with people. It was just, it was a delight to get out and meet folk, you know. And they were really thrilled and often surprised. Then, you know, once you start doing it, they sort of come to expect it, not in an untoward way, but initially was a real surprise because the only time anybody visited them was if there was a problem.

KLEIN: [01:33:24] So now when you're running the office, do you encounter problems you can't solve, I mean, or questions you can't answer? I mean, you're not an expert by any means.

FORD: [01:33:36] Yeah, I do encounter some tough problems. You know, there are guys who've got local bulls and I'm supposed to make them castrate them because you don't want the local bulls inseminating the European stock. And that's difficult, you know, to. And you're supposed to, if necessary, really use force. [tape break] But there's human with tractors drawing lines. And so these were hard.

KLEIN: [01:34:07] Yeah.

FORD: [01:34:08] You do the best you could. But, you know, often everybody wasn't satisfied. So there were local problems of that level.

KLEIN: [01:34:16] Did people have any appeal over your head if they wanted?

FORD: [01:34:19] Oh, they could go to the senior settlement officer.

KLEIN: [01:34:21] In the district?

FORD: [01:34:22] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:34:23] Did it, did it happen?

FORD: [01:34:25] No, not really. You know, because mostly I worked to try to come up with a reasonable and fair solution.

KLEIN: [01:34:36] Where people working mostly as subsistence farmers or?

FORD: [01:34:40] Pretty much. Well, beyond that there was subsistence farming, but almost all of them had something to sell, whether it was milk to the Kenya Cooperative Creamery. Some had some pyrethrum. Some had sheep.

KLEIN: [01:35:02] Okay.

FORD: [01:35:04] If you grew a field of pyrethrum, let's say you had an acre to. You would cultivate it, let it grow, then you collect it. And the settlement scheme, or two or three settlement schemes, would pool the resources to buy a drying device. You'd dry the stuff and you'd take it in to Pyrethrum Board where it would be weighed and you'd get credit and ultimately some money for it. So there was that kind of thing that most farmers were engaged in. There was wool to be sold if you had some sheep.

KLEIN: [01:35:43] And did you tend to coordinate that kind of activity?

FORD: [01:35:48] Yes.

KLEIN: [01:35:48] Was there any ever any sense of combining plots to do large scale pyrethrum growing on a basis of efficiency?

FORD: [01:35:59] No. Sadly.

KLEIN: [01:36:02] And was OI Kalou a scheme where the issue of inheritance became a problem? In other words, a farmer's three sons would expect to each get a piece of his land. Or how did that work?

FORD: [01:36:20] It was so new then, Bob, that inheritance wasn't an issue that I got faced with, but it certainly, almost certainly would have occurred down the road when the farmer died.

KLEIN: [01:36:35] Yeah.

FORD: [01:36:35] But again, by then, when I got OI Kalou, it was maybe three years old.

KLEIN: [01:36:41] Okay, we'll leave it. Um. So, okay, let's bring it toward the end of the first year. During the first year, did you take any vacation at all?

FORD: [01:36:55] I might have, uh. I might have gone to Nairobi.

KLEIN: [01:37:04] You're not going to tell the story about going to Malindi?

FORD: [01:37:08] No. No. Actually, my best vacation, longest vacation, I'm not sure, it was probably after I was on OI Kalou a little bit. And maybe it was by the end of the first year, you know, first 14 months. I had become friends with some of the teachers, especially Rose Levinson.

KLEIN: [01:37:30] Levine.

FORD: [01:37:32] Levine. And, um, Lance and Joy Sobel and some of their friends.

KLEIN: [01:37:41] And they were all in Nairobi?

FORD: [01:37:42] They were all in Nairobi, right. And at one point there was a teachers vacation. Sometimes these were fairly long periods in between their sessions. So I invited them all up to OI Kalou.

KLEIN: [01:37:57] Oh, okay.

FORD: [01:37:58] And we had a good time. And then we all got together, rented a vehicle, and went on this long trek to the coast and to Tanzania.

KLEIN: [01:38:10] Okay.

FORD: [01:38:10] We drove to Mombasa and from Mombasa to Tonga and on. It was quite a trek.

KLEIN: [01:38:17] Right.

FORD: [01:38:17] That was the sort of major vacation I took. You know, on the weekends when I was at OI Kalou, we could run into Nakuru and maybe stay overnight. So there was time for fun. The major vacation was that one. That was just a blast.

KLEIN: [01:38:35] And you didn't, you did the game parks? You must have at some point.

FORD: [01:38:38] Yeah, we did game parks. And even on that trip, we did. In fact, there was a huge adventure. You bring all this to mind. We, uh, during this trek, we were in Uganda. We must have gone on two different vacations. We went to Uganda and we went to Murchison Falls Park.

KLEIN: [01:39:04] Yes, yes.

FORD: [01:39:06] On the way to Murchison Falls, we were staying at a place outside Murchison Falls because there were no lodgings within.

KLEIN: [01:39:15] Right.

FORD: [01:39:16] And we were driving from this place to the falls. And Lance Sobell was driving. I was in the car with Jadish and Rose. Lance and Joyce and a couple of other people were in this Peugeot, and we're kind of behind them. Lance drove a little fast. At one point, we got up to a spot. We see the ass end of the Peugeot sticking out over a body of water. And what had happened was Lance was going a little too fast and didn't make a curve. And it was kind of a land bridge like thing.

KLEIN: [01:39:55] Yeah.

FORD: [01:39:57] And it went into the drink and everybody got out and everybody was safe, and we came upon them. So, um.

KLEIN: [01:40:08] Wow.

FORD: [01:40:09] I think Rose and I and a couple of other people got out so they could ferry the ones from the car who needed to be ferried to the place where we were going to stay.

KLEIN: [01:40:18] Yeah.

FORD: [01:40:18] And then they came back and got us. It ended up that Joyce and Lance and whoever else, there was somebody else that was in the car, they didn't actually get into Murchison. They had to wait for the car to be dealt with.

KLEIN: [01:40:37] Right.

FORD: [01:40:39] Jadish and Rose and I, at least the three of us, I'm trying to think if there was a fourth in the VW, did get on to Murchison and you had a good time, but felt awful that our colleagues were stuck.

KLEIN: [01:40:53] Right.

FORD: [01:40:54] So that had to be a second vacation because we wouldn't have done Uganda.

KLEIN: [01:40:59] By then there was also a Peace Corps in Uganda I think. You may have made contact with some of them or.

FORD: [01:41:06] I think we did. I know we did in Tanzania.

KLEIN: [01:41:09] Yeah. Okay.

FORD: [01:41:10] In fact, I remember a couple of the volunteers in Tanzania. But so, yeah, we, we did a couple of vacations, you know, and the vacations that I did really were with Joyce, Lance, Rose.

KLEIN: [01:41:24] With the teachers, yeah.

FORD: [01:41:26] Yeah. They became close buddies from the times I would go to Nairobi and we hooked up. And we just had a lot in common and liked each other a lot.

KLEIN: [01:41:36] End of the first year was there a group gathering?

FORD: [01:41:39] There was.

KLEIN: [01:41:40] Of your group?

FORD: [01:41:41] Yep.

KLEIN: [01:41:42] And had, was there a second group of settlement officers in the works or?

FORD: [01:41:48] I think they were maybe on the ground. I don't think we were there more than a year before they. If, if it was more than a year, it wasn't more than a year and a couple of months.

KLEIN: [01:41:58] Were any of you invited to help train them?

FORD: [01:42:00] Not in the States, but we were brought, a couple of us were brought into Nairobi when they came in.

KLEIN: [01:42:09] During the two week orientation?

FORD: [01:42:12] Yeah. And we met some of them. And some of them were going to be, you know, in the same area where we were. So.

KLEIN: [01:42:18] Right, right, right.

FORD: [01:42:19] And they were going to kind of start off the way we did.

KLEIN: [01:42:23] Yeah.

FORD: [01:42:24] So we got to meet them and, you know, help acquaint them and situate them.

KLEIN: [01:42:29] Do, do you remember? I just, sorry. Do you remember any of your Thanksgivings or Christmases as being particularly lonely times? I mean, it's one of the few times maybe when some people are inclined to get homesick.

FORD: [01:42:47] I remember one Christmas. Well, the first Christmas in '64, we were still in the States.

KLEIN: [01:42:59] Yes.

FORD: [01:43:00] '65 was the only Christmas in Kenya.

KLEIN: [01:43:03] Okay.

FORD: [01:43:04] Because we left before Christmas in '66. So Christmas in '65, went into Nairobi. And Christmas is kind of a major holiday there. Oh, it's weird because it's, you know, hot and gorgeous.

KLEIN: [01:43:19] Yeah.

FORD: [01:43:20] And I remember all the celebratory stuff and there was Boxing Day and this. It was kind of nice but different, you know.

KLEIN: [01:43:28] Right, right.

FORD: [01:43:31] So that Christmas, I think I hung out with Rose and the Nairobi crew. I don't think we did anything for Thanksgiving.

KLEIN: [01:43:41] Okay. Had you been communicating back home to friends and or family?

FORD: [01:43:48] Regularly.

KLEIN: [01:43:51] Generally upbeat letters? You didn't tell them when you were?

FORD: [01:43:55] Always, you know, because I, I didn't have any period where I was depressed or, you know, I just, I didn't. Everything was so new. And even when things were challenging. I had a couple of rough spots.

KLEIN: [01:44:15] Right.

FORD: [01:44:15] Real rough spots. Not, I don't think of my doing, but they were problems to be dealt with. They weren't things that made me depressed and they weren't loneliness. For example, the guy who was the area settlement controller who was over at several districts.

KLEIN: [01:44:30] Right.

FORD: [01:44:31] And I had kind of relationship you did with Franklin Williams.

KLEIN: [01:44:36] Okay.

FORD: [01:44:36] And his name was Doug E. Kirkwood.

KLEIN: [01:44:39] British?

FORD: [01:44:40] British. South African.

KLEIN: [01:44:41] Okay.

FORD: [01:44:43] And he came to the scheme one day visiting around and wanted to go out his Land Rover and see a farm and he did. And I drove up with my clerk on the back of the vehicle and it bothered him, you know. And I had the kind of easy relationship, um, and it was obvious that I palled around with folks, you know?

KLEIN: [01:45:11] Right.

FORD: [01:45:11] Not in an appropriate way, but as human beings. And he didn't like that. And that set him off against me from the beginning.

KLEIN: [01:45:20] Right.

FORD: [01:45:21] So what happened was he was kind of critical of me. And there was one day when a guy was supposed to come and do a kind of workshop about sheep husbandry on the settlement scheme. And it was a day when a report was due into the district office, and I had written the report. I had both my clerk, and there was a guy called the head man in the scheme, organize everybody and get them there. I was going to ride in and come back. So I did that and when I got back they said, well, the guy showed up and said he was sick and wasn't going to do it. And he left. But the guy said, I got there and the PC wasn't there, so I left. Now, both those things were true, but it was a baseless lie.

KLEIN: [01:46:21] Right.

FORD: [01:46:22] So Kirkwood got on that. And what I did was demonstrated conclusively that I was not only there, I was ready. I had delivered an official report which was due. The senior settlement officer backed that up. And everybody else said they had gathered, they were there, and they were ready. And see, this guy made it seem like he showed up, came to the office, I wasn't there, and nothing was ready.

KLEIN: [01:46:54] Yeah.

FORD: [01:46:55] Everybody was gathered. I had had them gather. So Kirkwood got under that and was really a bastard about it. And he had said, he was,

he was a rugby player. And there was another volunteer, you may remember. C. Brian McDonnell.

KLEIN: [01:47:14] Yes.

FORD: [01:47:14] Brian and he were friends. Brian's a nice guy. By the way, Brian is a judge in this county, a Superior Court judge.

KLEIN: [01:47:23] Yes.

FORD: [01:47:24] He's often holding court in Northampton.

KLEIN: [01:47:27] Yeah.

FORD: [01:47:28] Anyway, and Brian was a nice guy, but he and Kirkwood played rugby.

KLEIN: [01:47:33] Yeah.

FORD: [01:47:33] And Brian had been stuck as an assistant in a settlement scheme the whole while.

KLEIN: [01:47:40] Right.

FORD: [01:47:40] So Kirkwood said, well, I'm going to switch you with him. I said, no, you're not. You know, the best you can do is you may send me home, but you're not switching me because this is a lie.

KLEIN: [01:47:52] Yeah.

FORD: [01:47:53] And Peace Corps was not terribly supportive. They didn't want to make waves. They didn't say we wouldn't back you, but they didn't move in to back me.

KLEIN: [01:48:06] This is, after the first year is this happening or?

FORD: [01:48:09] Yeah, it's after the first year. I'm on OI Kalou.

KLEIN: [01:48:11] So the program's already been in place for a year.

FORD: [01:48:14] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:48:15] Okay. And the second group has come?

FORD: [01:48:17] Second group has come. Yeah. And Brian didn't push him to do that. And Brian's a good guy.

KLEIN: [01:48:25] Yeah.

FORD: [01:48:27] But, you know, he wanted to do Brian a favor, and he was pissed at me.

KLEIN: [01:48:31] Right.

FORD: [01:48:31] So I actually got, proved that this guy, the sheep guy. One, that there was a guy, that the guy had actually left saying he was sick and going to get, you know, I got all that out. But Kirkwood didn't want to relent because that wasn't the real reason. He just wanted to help out Brian. So I said I wasn't doing it. And I talked to a Peace Corps person and they said, you know, you've got to sort of figure out if there's a way. In the meantime, my settlement scheme, it turned out. You may remember this really well-known guy, Josiah Mwangi Kariuki, who was assassinated.

KLEIN: [01:49:17] Mm hmm.

FORD: [01:49:17] It was a big cause celeb. He was a major figure in Kenyan politics. And his wife had a plot on my scheme. And she and other people really liked me because I went out of my way to do a good job and be a good person. People on the settlement scheme rose up in anger, called a meeting, and made it clear to the settlement people that this guy was lying, that they had been there. Josiah's wife, this is before he was assassinated. He was a major power. He had a big youth movement and so forth. Josiah's wife called Josiah Mwangi. She looked into it and sent word. If you send him home, you're going to have trouble. And all of a

sudden the trouble disappeared. Kirkwood got sent away. And Peace Corps was.

KLEIN: [01:50:20] Didn't know what to do.

FORD: [01:50:21] Didn't know what to do. You know, they really didn't know what to do. In a way I guess they were kind of happy I hadn't been maltreated, but in a way they weren't pleased with the notoriety of it all.

KLEIN: [01:50:31] Yes. Yes.

FORD: [01:50:33] But, you know, he got sent away and everything was fine.

KLEIN: [01:50:35] Yeah. Yeah.

FORD: [01:50:36] But that was the only trouble. And it wasn't the kind of thing I would have written home about. I wasn't worried about it. I was going to stand my ground, you know, you know.

KLEIN: [01:50:46] Now going sometimes, you know, going into the second year, you know that within ten months or so you're going to, your tour is over.

FORD: [01:50:55] Yeah.

KLEIN: [01:50:56] And sometimes people say, well, before I leave, you know, I'd like to at least to accomplish X, Y, Z, or have gotten this far. Don't let me put words in your mouth. But was that an element?

FORD: [01:51:11] Absolutely. Yeah, I had an agenda. There were certain issues and problems that needed to be dealt with, that I thought were important. For example, we didn't have a cattle dip and I broke my butt trying to get it organized, to get it done. Ultimately, we did get it dug and put up.

KLEIN: [01:51:33] Now, you have to deal with other ministries to do that.

FORD: [01:51:37] Absolutely. And get the money and get the.

KLEIN: [01:51:39] Now where would you get money from?

FORD: [01:51:42] From Lands and Settlement.

KLEIN: [01:51:43] Okay. Okay.

FORD: [01:51:45] They were supposed to do it, you know, but some places got favored and, you know, it just took forever to get anything done.

KLEIN: [01:51:51] Yeah.

FORD: [01:51:52] So I got a cattle dip. I got a couple of other major projects done. And one of the most fun things I did, actually, Marie Gadsden came to. I did this big, um.

KLEIN: [01:52:07] Marie was a Peace Corps staff member in charge of education.

FORD: [01:52:10] Yeah. She was in the area, and I invited her to what was an agricultural fair for the scheme. You know, it was an idea I stole from lots of places. We didn't do this shit in Chicago.

KLEIN: [01:52:28] Yeah.

FORD: [01:52:28] But what I did was I announced we're going to have a competition and it's going to be a big celebration with prizes. The best pumpkin, the best dish, you know, the Judas cow. So we had all these categories, and, you know, we had a good time. We, uh, we had food, and then everybody showed up.

KLEIN: [01:52:51] On the scheme?

FORD: [01:52:52] On the scheme, right. And Marie was there. I had solicited from the Asian *duka* owners, you know, pawn goods and other prizes. And they were happy to give them, you know, they weren't expensive gifts. I don't remember what the most expensive thing was, but they were all on that level. They're mostly implements that'd be useful on the scheme. So we had this thing and we invited all the settlement people and some people

from nearby schemes and, you know, there was food, they had slaughtered a cow, and there were speeches. The senior settlement officer was there and it was just a blast. And Marie just went back and extolled it, you know.

KLEIN: [01:53:38] Yeah. Okay.

FORD: [01:53:38] And I, I did something that she, she overrated. But it was kind of fun. I mean, I lived amongst the Kikuyu for a while. I didn't do a serious study of their language, but I knew phrases, so I addressed them in Kikuyu.

KLEIN: [01:53:53] Uh huh.

FORD: [01:53:54] She was just blown away.

KLEIN: [01:53:56] Yeah.

FORD: [01:53:56] So those were some of the things that I wanted to get done.

KLEIN: [01:54:01] Yeah.

FORD: [01:54:03] The fair, one, because it was a community building fun thing, but also to sort of highlight people who really were successful.

KLEIN: [01:54:11] Right, right.

FORD: [01:54:13] The cattle dip was another.

KLEIN: [01:54:15] What about the the goal that was supposedly part of the program of identifying or finding a replacement? Were you able to do anything for that?

FORD: [01:54:29] Absolutely. I saw to the continued training of my staff and the man who was clerk, Erastus Kihara, I pushed really hard and got him first to be sort of assistant to me. Brought him from Shamata to OI Kalou.

KLEIN: [01:54:51] Yeah.

FORD: [01:54:52] Got him to be assistant. And when I left, he became a settlement officer.

KLEIN: [01:54:56] Oh, okay. Was there, was there any exam or was it strictly?

FORD: [01:55:01] It was training. I don't know. There might have been exams during the training.

KLEIN: [01:55:06] Right. And the training was done by the Settlement ministry itself?

FORD: [01:55:10] Yes. Exactly.

KLEIN: [01:55:10] So you encouraged him to take whatever courses that were being offered?

FORD: [01:55:16] Absolutely.

KLEIN: [01:55:16] And was he aware that you would tapped him to?

FORD: [01:55:19] Oh, yeah. You know, he was ambitious and wanted it.

KLEIN: [01:55:23] Yeah, yeah.

FORD: [01:55:25] And was quite pleased.

KLEIN: [01:55:27] Yeah.

FORD: [01:55:28] Um, it was a delight to be able to do it. He was. There are a lot of competent people, you know. He was a standout, but the system was really very, very good.

KLEIN: [01:55:39] Yeah.

FORD: [01:55:41] It wasn't a spot I could put him in because their ministry was separate in a sense, or their department was, but within Settlement. And I don't think I was the only one who did that. I know that it happened in a couple of instances where people had been identified.

KLEIN: [01:55:58] As you come to the end of the second year, did you at all consider the idea of extending your tour to, because you never quite finished with the things you're trying?

FORD: [01:56:10] Yeah, I gave it a little thought, I did, but I decided to come on back and go to graduate school because I wanted to do African studies and I'd gotten into Northwestern, which was my dream.

KLEIN: [01:56:28] So you had applied while you were in Kenya?

FORD: [01:56:30] I had applied while I was in Kenya. And was accepted into Northwestern.

KLEIN: [01:56:33] Oh, okay.

FORD: [01:56:35] And this was sheer luck. One of the people who came during our training in Milwaukee was a linguist who talked to us about Swahili and, um, I'm slipping on her name right now, but she ended up in the linguistics department at Northwestern and really pushed me to come. And I got a really good fellowship so.

KLEIN: [01:56:59] Yeah.

FORD: [01:56:59] I decided to come on in. I knew that even though I was leaving this particular venture, that doing what I was about to do was going to bring me back.

KLEIN: [01:57:13] Yeah, uh, let's stick with the Peace Corps experience.

FORD: [01:57:19] Sure.

KLEIN: [01:57:19] Without your being overly modest, I assume you were probably considered one of the better volunteers in the group.

FORD: [01:57:26] I suspect so.

KLEIN: [01:57:27] And often, well, certainly even by '66, the Peace Corps was recruiting very aggressively among returned, the stars of returned volunteers. Were you approached at all?

FORD: [01:57:43] I was, uh, by local staff people wanted me to consider it. But, you know, I was pretty clear by then that I was going to go on to graduate school. So it didn't. It came up. But since I was clear about what I was doing, there was no pressure.

KLEIN: [01:58:07] You've been accepted at Northwestern. Okay. And it's for a master's degree or just?

FORD: [01:58:14] PhD program.

KLEIN: [01:58:15] In African studies?

FORD: [01:58:16] African studies. Political science, but the African Studies Program.

KLEIN: [01:58:19] Okay. So did Peace Corps invited you to stay on or they wanted you to?

FORD: [01:58:28] I had a discussion with the staff. Jim Black, I think, was the guy's name.

KLEIN: [01:58:37] Mm hmm.

FORD: [01:58:38] And he clearly encouraged me to stay because he and I got along really well.

KLEIN: [01:58:44] Right.

FORD: [01:58:45] And, uh, but again, you know, I was thrilled with my Peace Corps service, but I wanted to really go do the African studies. So I was pretty clear and I'd been accepted and had a fellowship. So, um, that, that was fine with me.

KLEIN: [01:59:05] Was there a termination conference? Often at the end of service, the group would get.

FORD: [01:59:11] There was.

KLEIN: [01:59:12] Want to talk about that?

FORD: [01:59:14] Yeah. We got together for a couple of days in Nairobi and there were a lot of discussion and I have this bizarre memory. I think it's right. But there were one or two volunteers who had had a really sour experience and they were down on the Peace Corps. The Bensons, at least Michael, maybe Janet a little bit, but at least Michael really had been unhappy. And, you know, we had to do questionnaires.

KLEIN: [01:59:46] Yeah.

FORD: [01:59:46] And you'd fill them out and they'd announce that 87 percent of you had a fabulous time and one of you hated it.

KLEIN: [01:59:52] Yeah.

FORD: [01:59:53] And I have this peculiar kind of ethic. I've noticed at least one other occasion when I'm making a major transition, I get unusually quiet and reflexive. And I'm thinking about where have I been, what has it been like. I said, uncharacteristically, almost nothing. And some of the young people who were my friends thought I was one of the ones who had hated it.

KLEIN: [02:00:26] Oh, oh.

FORD: [02:00:27] It was the furthest thing from the truth. It's just that I was thinking about all that I learned, all the people I knew, and a little bit about,

all right, what does the next step mean? And I just, I was ruminating rather than anything else. And, you know, a couple of times there were a couple of, three answers that were negative and Benson was obvious and nobody knew who the others were. But because, as I say, I wasn't saying anything, some people thought it was me.

KLEIN: [02:00:58] Yeah.

FORD: [02:01:00] I had a fabulous time and.

KLEIN: [02:01:02] And generally did most of the group have a sense that they had achieved something?

FORD: [02:01:11] Absolutely. Strongly positive feelings. As I say, it was striking that a couple of people would have such negative feelings.

KLEIN: [02:01:18] Yeah. Well, sometimes the negative feelings may be in relation to Peace Corps staff, and that's totally separate in many ways from the job that you're doing.

FORD: [02:01:27] Yeah.

KLEIN: [02:01:30] If you're successful as a volunteer, you've probably integrated more toward the job you're doing than what Peace Corps is expecting of you.

FORD: [02:01:38] Right. I don't remember the particular complaints. I kind of think, at least with the Bensons, my memory is they were in a position that didn't work.

KLEIN: [02:01:51] Right.

FORD: [02:01:52] For a variety of reasons, it wasn't the staff. My recollection is that for the most part, the staff were fairly highly regarded, you know, I mean.

KLEIN: [02:02:04] And your own, your own assessment is they were supportive?

FORD: [02:02:08] Absolutely, without question. I thought George was limited.

KLEIN: [02:02:14] Mm hmm.

FORD: [02:02:15] Not unsupportive, just limited, almost naive. Whereas Black was fabulous. Just a terrific person.

KLEIN: [02:02:22] And he was, he was in charge of the settlement part of the program?

FORD: [02:02:28] Yeah.

KLEIN: [02:02:30] So obviously, you've already given your assessment of what you feel of the two years. And on a broader sense, what do you think was the impact of having been in the Peace Corps on you?

FORD: [02:02:47] It was life shaping.

KLEIN: [02:02:49] Um, and can you flesh that out?

FORD: [02:02:51] Sure. Sure. I, I don't think it made me a person fundamentally different from the person who went in. It just gave new dimensions to, um. I had a perspective shaped by working with the people with whom I worked. It was internationalist, but it was also a deep appreciation for the humanity of even the poorest folk.

KLEIN: [02:03:24] Yeah. And you were spending time with the ordinary farmers on all schemes.

FORD: [02:03:29] Yeah. And what was amazing, you know, is with these people who are about as poor as you get, subsistence farmers.

KLEIN: [02:03:38] Right.

FORD: [02:03:38] But their love of family, their sense of humor, their generosity was always on display. And you couldn't come away with this feeling that

these are the poorest of the poor and, oh my God, we've got to help them and bring them up.

KLEIN: [02:03:59] There's a life there.

FORD: [02:04:00] There's a life there. An amazing life there. I think that's stayed with me. I reject the sort of analyzes of the underclass where, you know, these poor, benighted people. Lord knows we've got to pull them up out of their misery.

KLEIN: [02:04:20] Yeah.

FORD: [02:04:21] There really are lives there.

KLEIN: [02:04:23] You must have a good sense of self confidence because you stood up to a senior settlement officer. I gather you did that without hesitation. I mean, that's pretty nervy.

FORD: [02:04:33] Yeah. I think I was raised with that. You know, I was raised by two of the strongest people I've ever known.

KLEIN: [02:04:41] Oh, okay.

FORD: [02:04:41] In an environment where you were not going to be as happy if you weren't forward and so confident as if you were. So I was that way from the beginning.

KLEIN: [02:04:57] But you proved that in an international setting.

FORD: [02:05:00] Yeah. You know, I've done that throughout my life, battling, you know, even in high school. But, you know, I knew, I'm. [tape break]

KLEIN: [02:05:19] So, uh, you're now, you're leaving Kenya.

FORD: [02:05:25] Mm hmm.

KLEIN: [02:05:26] We'll jump ahead. One of the questions I ask is, uh, in the years that followed, have you been able to have any contact with the people you worked with in Kenya? Not the volunteers, but the Kenyans. Have you maintained any ongoing contact? And I know there's a lot. Answer that in, you know, in the narrow sense, and we'll broaden it later.

FORD: [02:05:56] I have, not as directly with the farmers. But I've been back to Kenya maybe a dozen more times since.

KLEIN: [02:06:08] Have you been back to OI Kalou?

FORD: [02:06:09] I went to OI Kalou. I actually looked up my old clerk who had.

KLEIN: [02:06:16] How many years later is this?

FORD: [02:06:18] I went back in '87.

KLEIN: [02:06:19] Okay. Okay.

FORD: [02:06:20] So it was many years later.

KLEIN: [02:06:24] Although you had been back to Kenya in the intervening years.

FORD: [02:06:26] Yeah, I'd gone back to do dissertation research in '70.

KLEIN: [02:06:31] Okay, well, let's just take the OI Kalou visit.

FORD: [02:06:36] It was phenomenal, absolutely phenomenal. People still knew me and remembered me and.

KLEIN: [02:06:44] Were you still Mnegro?

FORD: [02:06:45] Yeah. Yeah. Although they knew a little bit more, you know, there were TV programs and you could actually make a direct call to Kenya as opposed to booking it through London.

KLEIN: [02:06:54] Oh, yeah.

FORD: [02:06:55] So. Most of them remembered me. And I looked up Kihara. He'd been a successful settlement officer, moved on, and actually gotten involved in politics. And I looked up several of the farmers on OI Kalou. I tried to find Ephraim but couldn't. He might well have been alive and well, and yet I couldn't find him while I was there. So that was a delight when I did get to visit and see. The changes were astounding.

KLEIN: [02:07:39] The whole settlement program has changed considerably over the 20 years.

FORD: [02:07:43] Absolutely. The European overlay that had been there.

KLEIN: [02:07:51] Right.

FORD: [02:07:51] You know, the old houses, the old social club. All that, everything's gone. Things were much more dense.

KLEIN: [02:07:59] Yeah.

FORD: [02:08:02] People were in reasonable shape, you know, I mean, they weren't well-to-do. But they grew food. They had some cash crops and some of them were doing pretty well. You know, the houses have been rebuilt and were better and had tin roofs.

KLEIN: [02:08:21] Yeah.

FORD: [02:08:22] Some of the first houses, I mean, you had to build them pretty quickly. Some of the first houses were mud, mud and water, you know. But many of them had been replaced by wood structures that kind of. So it was a delight to see that. Nairobi was bigger, more congested, more smog ridden than you could imagine. The population growth has just exploded.

KLEIN: [02:08:50] Yeah.

FORD: [02:08:51] I can remember that, I think. I'll ask you if this is right. I think I remember being in Nairobi on a Saturday and crossing the middle of the street. Hardly a car around, '64, '65.

KLEIN: [02:09:05] Yes.

FORD: [02:09:06] '87. Not even to think about it.

KLEIN: [02:09:08] Yeah. Yeah.

FORD: [02:09:10] Just a sea change.

KLEIN: [02:09:12] Right.

FORD: [02:09:13] The other thing that was different, and people on the scheme talked about this. When I was there, the civil service was effective, honest. If you needed something, generally you could get it. I mean, it wasn't the computer age, things were slower. But if I needed a map, I went to the Geological Survey. They looked it up and I'd get it. I went back in '87. Corruption was unbounded and you couldn't get anything done. It reminded me of the descriptions of the need for the dash in West Africa.

KLEIN: [02:09:54] Right.

FORD: [02:09:54] It was palpable.

KLEIN: [02:09:56] Which you hadn't been aware of when you were there as a volunteer.

FORD: [02:09:59] No. The civil service had a kind of a spree, and it was just a complete change.

KLEIN: [02:10:08] Yeah.

FORD: [02:10:09] It was a little disheartening, you know, in order to get anything done, you had to use a bribe. And I ran into that as soon as we got into the airport, you had to bribe people to go through customs, you know?

Just it was amazing. So there are all kinds of contradictory things. I was pleased to see that many people are doing well. Some of the kids have gone on to school.

KLEIN: [02:10:37] Had you been involved with sponsoring or helping any Kenyans to come over?

FORD: [02:10:42] Not at that point. Since then.

KLEIN: [02:10:45] Okay. Up to '87, yeah. And on that trip back you had through the years been back to Kenya enough that you kept your Swahili?

FORD: [02:10:58] My Swahili was still quite good. I'd often taught it too, both at the college level and as a co-curricular thing.

KLEIN: [02:11:06] Oh, okay. I didn't know. We'll talk about that.

FORD: [02:11:09] Yeah.

KLEIN: [02:11:10] So, in going back to Ol Kalou, you're still, you're. You could converse in Swahili and?

FORD: [02:11:17] Pretty easily.

KLEIN: [02:11:18] Yeah. Okay, let's, let's zero back now to a little bit of a narrative. You went to Northwestern and working toward a degree in political science and African studies.

FORD: [02:11:38] Right.

KLEIN: [02:11:38] And, oh, sort of talk about your own continuing relationship with Kenya, where you served as a volunteer.

FORD: [02:11:47] Mm hmm. Um. While I was in Northwestern, the program of African studies, which was a renowned and fabulous program.

KLEIN: [02:11:59] Was Herskovits still alive?

FORD: [02:12:01] He wasn't still alive. But as you know he was the founder. Gwen Carter was running it then.

KLEIN: [02:12:06] Okay.

FORD: [02:12:06] And she was a force of nature too.

KLEIN: [02:12:09] Yeah.

FORD: [02:12:10] And there were all kinds of people in and out of the program as guest lecturers. And Gwen made it her business to invite the next generation of leaders to come and get to do. [inaudible] had been there. And I mean, everybody was there. A fair number of Kenyans were part of the program, some as graduate students, you know, some as guests. So through the program, I kept abreast of what was happening.

FORD: [02:12:49] Towards the end of the program when I had to design a research project, I clearly designed it to take me back to Kenya. So in '69 to '70, I went back for a year, stayed on the coast, but even in '69 and '70, I'd make trips to Nairobi and once or twice to see people up country. So the time at Northwestern deepened my interest in certain academic knowledge on Africa.

KLEIN: [02:13:27] Right.

FORD: [02:13:29] And just cemented what had been, not a lifelong, but damn near a lifelong fascination and connection to that world.

KLEIN: [02:13:40] So you were, you got to know a fair number of the political leaders?

FORD: [02:13:47] Right.

KLEIN: [02:13:48] Was that intentional or just the circle you moved in?

FORD: [02:13:51] Both.

KLEIN: [02:13:52] Okay. This is not a trick question. As you became thoroughly knowledgeable about Kenya, at any point were you ever approached by the CIA?

FORD: [02:14:08] Uh uh.

KLEIN: [02:14:09] Okay.

FORD: [02:14:10] No. Never, to my surprise.

KLEIN: [02:14:13] Or anyone from State?

FORD: [02:14:16] I was by State because they wanted me to enter. They had a kind of program, almost like AT&T's program, to identify reasonably young people, bring them in, train them, and set them on a career path.

KLEIN: [02:14:33] In the Foreign Service?

FORD: [02:14:34] Yes. And in fact.

KLEIN: [02:14:36] You were still a minority at that point.

FORD: [02:14:39] Yeah, yeah. I had a fairly serious interest in them and Mary and I talked about it.

KLEIN: [02:14:44] Right.

FORD: [02:14:46] But the academic world is seductive, even if you're not incredibly happy at any point. There aren't many push factors pushing you out, you know.

KLEIN: [02:14:57] Right.

FORD: [02:14:58] So I thought about the State Department really seriously, talked to people and, uh, but ultimately decided that I'd stay. You know, once I

had kids, there should not have been a case, but I think I tended to think more of staying put.

KLEIN: [02:15:15] Right. And you ended up at Hampshire College.

FORD: [02:15:20] Uh huh.

KLEIN: [02:15:20] And both as dean and professor on and off through the years.

FORD: [02:15:26] Yes.

KLEIN: [02:15:26] And you continued to go back to Kenya on a fairly regular basis?

FORD: [02:15:30] Mm hmm.

KLEIN: [02:15:31] Did you consciously think, you took students on trips?

FORD: [02:15:34] Sometimes. Yes.

KLEIN: [02:15:36] Well, it was part of your mission then to broaden some Americans' understanding of Kenya?

FORD: [02:15:43] Absolutely.

KLEIN: [02:15:43] Because, you know, that's one of the third purposes, or the second purpose of the Peace Corps, that to. And you were very, you were in a very specific place where you could do that. I mean, far more than many other people.

FORD: [02:15:56] Right. I did it in two or three ways. One, there were occasions to take students, but I continued to teach about Africa with a special focus on Kenya.

KLEIN: [02:16:07] Mm hmm.

FORD: [02:16:08] I did sort of local presentations, and I remember doing them for the Lions Club, the World Affairs Council in Springfield. I've done that kind of thing a great many times. Um, at one point I thought of taking an adult group, but couldn't pull it off.

KLEIN: [02:16:26] Yeah. Adults are difficult.

FORD: [02:16:30] They are. And, you know, if you have an infrastructure, if there's an organization that handles that stuff, you can plug in as the leader, but doing it on your own.

KLEIN: [02:16:41] Right. Right.

FORD: [02:16:43] I thought it would be fun to do, but I didn't find a group that wanted to.

KLEIN: [02:16:51] Did any of your children ever express an interest in joining the Peace Corps?

FORD: [02:16:57] No, not really. Not Peace Corps.

KLEIN: [02:16:58] Okay. Okay.

FORD: [02:17:00] They were interested in going to Africa.

KLEIN: [02:17:02] And did any, have any of them going?

FORD: [02:17:05] Beth did.

KLEIN: [02:17:05] Your oldest daughter, your daughter?

FORD: [02:17:07] Yeah. Yeah.

KLEIN: [02:17:09] On her own or?

FORD: [02:17:10] She went with me.

KLEIN: [02:17:11] Oh, okay. To Kenya?

FORD: [02:17:14] To Kenya.

KLEIN: [02:17:15] Yeah. Had she studied Swahili prior to the trip?

FORD: [02:17:18] No.

KLEIN: [02:17:19] Okay. How old was she then?

FORD: [02:17:24] She was mid-twenties.

KLEIN: [02:17:26] Oh, so she was in college?

FORD: [02:17:28] Yeah. Yeah. And I'm trying to think exactly. Maybe 18, you know.

KLEIN: [02:17:34] Well, okay. Yeah. And it was just father daughter?

FORD: [02:17:39] Well, what happened. I have this colleague by the name of Frank who is also a Kenya specialist. And we would frequently go during the summers to study, to you know keep abreast of what's happening in Kenya. Contact old friends. And our routine was we usually go end of June because fares would pump and change July 1. We'd stay a month doing work and then we'd come home. So what I arranged, uh, that particular year. Also this friend wrote this book [inaudible].

KLEIN: [02:18:23] Yes.

FORD: [02:18:24] He had a real interest in seeing Africa. So I arranged that he and Beth would meet me toward the end of the study period. [phone rings, tape break]

KLEIN: [02:18:35] I had to ask if any of your children, and you indicated that you took Beth on one of your trips.

FORD: [02:18:42] Nate is quite interested in going.

KLEIN: [02:18:44] Yeah.

FORD: [02:18:45] He actually has framed a video project, which, you know, it needs some funding, but he's interested in looking at the connections between the street gangs in Chicago and Cape Town, South Africa.

KLEIN: [02:19:04] Yeah.

FORD: [02:19:04] And there are real connections. I mean, he'd go to Kenya with me, too, but this interest is more in line with his work.

KLEIN: [02:19:11] Now, that's not Peace Corps?

FORD: [02:19:12] No. No.

KLEIN: [02:19:16] So you continue to, your involvement with Kenya and kept your Swahili up?

FORD: [02:19:24] Mm hmm.

KLEIN: [02:19:26] One of the interesting things you did, I think it's probably worth throwing on the tape, uh, when. I don't know if the system is still in place where the Congress had required elections in a country be monitored.

FORD: [02:19:40] Right. Right.

KLEIN: [02:19:41] Let's talk about that.

FORD: [02:19:42] I've uh, since the first multiparty election in Kenya, monitored nearly a dozen elections in East Africa. Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda. Zanzibar, which is part of Tanzania. But the elections are separate.

KLEIN: [02:19:58] And this is a State Department program?

FORD: [02:20:01] It's, actually it's encouraged by State and the funding initially was through AID. Now it's more private. The same institutions are

involved. There were four or five. There was the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute, the Africa-American Institute, the National Foundation for Electoral Systems, and the Carter Center.

KLEIN: [02:20:32] And their interest is what?

FORD: [02:20:34] They each have a strong international focus. And some of them specifically are focused on Africa, like the Africa-American Institute. But others have Africa as one of the areas that are of major interest. And in each case, one of the things that really is at the center of their interest is notions of governance. And they all have governance programs of one kind or another. And elections clearly are part of the sort of structure of governance and in Africa, really beginning in the early '90s, finally having succession, you know, sort of independence leaders were passing on.

FORD: [02:21:25] And the question becomes, you know, how is that succession going to be organized? And in many cases, it's not through a democratic process. But the election observation is designed together with probably the U.N. and other places to foster that kind of peaceful and democratic succession process. So I've done election monitoring in presidential elections, parliamentary, local government. The most recent which was Zanzibar in 2005.

KLEIN: [02:22:04] And you were, you were picked because you are knowledgeable about East Africa?

FORD: [02:22:11] Yes. Yes. And probably knowing Swahili doesn't hurt, although many other people don't and they're also selected. But just knowing about Kenya.

KLEIN: [02:22:20] Has it led you into any embarrassing exchanges where people don't know you know Swahili?

FORD: [02:22:28] Yes. Although it wasn't embarrassing for me. No. On a number of occasions. And, you know, sometimes, I must confess, sometimes I've used that, you know. I was at the coast in Kenya monitoring Mombasa election places, and guys at the site were openly discussing the fact that

they were going to bribe people. And I was standing around looking like a goofy American, like all the others, you know. And I knew exactly what they were saying.

FORD: [02:22:59] And in fact, I was on BBC because they interviewed me. I turned in a report, which you're supposed to, not supposed to interfere but you can observe and go to court. And I reported this one guy who was openly bribing people. He would give them the party symbol that he wanted them to vote for, and they had to go in and do that. And then when they came back out, I've forgotten how they demonstrated that they've done it but, and he paid them. And I heard him doing it. I saw him doing it in the line.

KLEIN: [02:23:38] Yeah.

FORD: [02:23:39] And I reported it, you know. And BBC did a sort of cute tongue in cheek thing where Ford K was one of the parties, and there were two Ford parties. And at the end of it, the reporter said, your name is Michael Ford. And I said yes. And he said, is that Ford K or Ford A?

KLEIN: [02:24:06] Yeah.

FORD: [02:24:07] But, yeah, there have been a couple of occasions where people didn't know I spoke Swahili and assumed, oh, American. I made it useful.

KLEIN: [02:24:21] One last question that now in 2008, it's an issue that's boiled up some and there is the possibility that Peace Corps may expand under a new government. Some people question, you know, what's the value of Peace Corps? And not thinking in 1960s terms when our perceptions may have been different, but what's your feeling now? I mean, what is?

FORD: [02:24:54] I think it's even more valuable to citizens of this country to have an organization like Peace Corps. You know, over the years, because of, I think, stupid, shortsighted, mal-intentioned foreign policy, it's just really true that a hell of a lot of people don't think a lot of this country.

KLEIN: [02:25:20] Yes.

FORD: [02:25:21] And I think, in my experience, good, sincere, thoughtful Peace Corps people can and have made a difference even in a context where there is suspicion about the country.

KLEIN: [02:25:36] Right. Right. Right.

FORD: [02:25:38] I don't think there's been a period in my life when we've been less well-regarded, even when there was talk about the Ugly Americans.

KLEIN: [02:25:46] Right.

FORD: [02:25:46] And I think a rejuvenated, expanded Peace Corps could make a significant difference.

KLEIN: [02:25:53] Do you think it would be possible to create a genuine international Peace Corps that was not American dominated?

FORD: [02:26:02] I think you could certainly make a start. I mean, I remember when I was in Kenya, Cuso, the Canadian volunteers.

KLEIN: [02:26:08] Canadian, yeah.

FORD: [02:26:09] And there were English volunteers, and occasionally we'd get together and talk and, uh, had many of the same values. I don't mean that those are the only ones. They're just examples I think of institutions that had the same mission. And we could talk and we could agree and we'd learn from each other. So, yeah, I think it's possible. What would be really fun is if there were non-Western groups like India that became a part of it.

KLEIN: [02:26:43] Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

FORD: [02:26:45] Yeah, I think that the possibilities are significant. I really do. And I'll say, unless you have a last question in closing.

KLEIN: [02:26:53] Yeah.

FORD: [02:26:55] I came to retirement and, you know, I've been trying to figure out what's next. I actually decided to apply to be a country director.

KLEIN: [02:27:04] Oh.

FORD: [02:27:06] They've put the applications on hold.

KLEIN: [02:27:10] Of course.

FORD: [02:27:12] They tell me that they'll probably reopen them in the spring.

KLEIN: [02:27:15] Right.

FORD: [02:27:16] But, you know, the good Lord willing and the creek don't mind, if my health will allow, I intend to apply and I really would want to do it in Africa.

KLEIN: [02:27:25] But anywhere you can make it, if you don't, you know, they have to accommodate to you.

FORD: [02:27:33] Yeah. So I would, you know, I'm not interested in a bureaucratic position in D.C.

KLEIN: [02:27:38] Right.

FORD: [02:27:39] I wouldn't want to be the regional director for act, but a country director would be.

KLEIN: [02:27:44] Yeah. Well, that's consistent with your experience through the years.

FORD: [02:27:48] And, you know, if it's possible, that's precisely what I would do. Mary's at the point where she's retired. The kids are grown.

KLEIN: [02:27:56] Yeah.

FORD: [02:27:57] And I'd love to do it. I think I have the energy and the vision and commitment so.

[END OF INTERVIEW]