

Irwin Dubinsky Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

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Date of Interview: August 22, 2016
Location of Interview: Washington, D.C.
Length: 26 pages

Biographical Note

Irwin Dubinsky served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Colombia from 1963 to 1965 in a cooperatives program.

Access

Open.

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Suggested Citation

Irwin Dubinsky, recorded interview by Evelyn Ganzglass, August 22, 2016, page #, Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

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Oral History Interview

with

Irwin Dubinsky

August 22, 2016
Washington, D.C.

By Evelyn Ganzglass

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

GANZGLASS: [00:00:00] So I have to start. This is Evelyn Ganzglass. I am interviewing Irwin Dubinsky, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Colombia, from Colombia VI, from 1963 to 1965 and he worked on cooperatives. I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Somalia, Somalia IV, from 1966 to 1968. And with that introduction, Irv, Irwin, but we'll call you Irv.

DUBINSKY: [00:00:36] I appreciate that.

GANZGLASS: [00:00:36] Why did you go into the Peace Corps? What motivated you?

DUBINSKY: [00:00:40] What motivated me? Well, I was finishing my BA and I was faced with what do I do here with my life? And I was, uh, I didn't go to graduate school. I wasn't interested in that. There was the beginnings of a war in Vietnam and I had applied to Peace Corps after hearing John Kennedy's message. I was really thrilled with that. I thought that

would be a great adventure, doing something good, getting me out of New York. And because I felt I had no future in New York because it's either you know somebody or you don't. I didn't want to become a doctor, lawyer, or a dentist. And so I applied for the Peace Corps sometime in the fall of '62, I guess, and then never heard anything from them.

DUBINSKY: [00:01:53] And so I decided to go into the National Guard. So I had somebody who got me into a National Guard unit in Park Avenue, New York, at an armory. And in the middle of the winter, I think it was. It must have been December or January. I can't remember. It was freezing and I went to this armory and they said, strip down to your socks and so you stripped down to your socks. And it was freezing. There was no heat and you had to give them a urine sample and just walk around. And I surprisingly passed the physical because that was what I wanted to do. And I guess if you didn't want to pass the physical, you shouldn't have been there.

DUBINSKY: [00:02:42] So I passed the physical and they said, come back next week and swear in. So I came home and then I came home, and then my mother said, you know, you got a telegram from the Peace Corps. And it said you could become a surveyor in the British Cameroon and I didn't know where that was. We had Encyclopedia Britannica and we kind of looked it up and said wow. So the next day, I called up the reserve unit and I still remember the guy's name, Sergeant Nagelski. And I said, right now I'm going to go to the Peace Corps. And he said, we'll get you yet. So that was how that ended.

DUBINSKY: [00:03:34] And then about later the next week, Patrice Lumumba was assassinated. And then as it was, I got a day or two later, another telegram from the Peace Corps saying that project has been canceled, but we'll be in touch with you with something else. So something else came, I guess another week or two later, to become an economics professor in Peru or a teacher. Now I have a BA in economics and, well, I didn't know how well equipped for that.

GANZGLASS: [00:04:13] Seemed reasonable.

DUBINSKY: [00:04:14] But so later that, I guess it was in January, and they sent me tickets to go to UCLA, you know, and the training there for Peru, to be a professor of economics, not professor or whatever, teacher. So I took my first plane ride on a 707, something like that. And my father, who had never cried before, cried at seeing me going. So there I was. I flew out to Westwood, California, where UCLA is, and could not believe my eyes about California.

GANZGLASS: [00:05:01] Not like New York.

DUBINSKY: [00:05:02] Not like New York. No dirty streets, even though I grew up in the suburbs, in Queens. But you know, this was something else. You know, the beaches nearby and everything was clean and all the girls were attractive and whatever so.

DUBINSKY: [00:05:16] There was one hitch, though. As we got involved with the program, it became obvious they wanted somebody who would be able to speak fairly fluently in Spanish. Now, I almost didn't graduate Queens College with three Ds. My last three grades in Spanish and the fourth one before that was a C, so I didn't feel that competent. And I met three other guys who were in a similar boat, and so we spoke to some of the people because they were selecting out 50 percent of the people. I mean, that was, that's not what I wanted. So they told us they had another program that may suit us. And it turned out to be going to Colombia and going in cooperatives. So I stayed another week or two in California. They flew me back to New York to be with this new group going to Colombia.

GANZGLASS: [00:06:22] And you trained in New York City?

DUBINSKY: [00:06:24] Yeah, we trained in, well, no. We met in New York City. And the first thing, the next thing was we went to training was beginning, beginning in Puerto Rico. We did Outward Bound training for a month. It started off and that was great. And I was I was a star basketball player for Queens College. You know, not exactly big time ball, but I was captain of the team or co-captain. And I was in really good shape.

And to me, this was a chance I was not about to lose, so I was revved up. And they woke us up at 4:00 in the morning and we had to go run a mile or two. I don't remember how many miles in the morning. And what I remember was the trainer there was Jim Lowery. He was a big guy. And he sort of led the pack running and I started running with him, I was trying to beat him. And then he said something to me which stuck in my head. And he said, don't try too hard. You know, it was like I was overdoing it, so I took a little pace off. But I so still remember that comment and I did really well in the Outward Bound training. You know, it was, I was in shape. I was not afraid to do different things and then had a good time with it.

GANZGLASS: [00:08:08] Did you also have training to work on cooperatives or was it all sports?

DUBINSKY: [00:08:12] It was all Outward Bound, had nothing to do with cooperatives. You know, it was hiking, rappelling off a dam, and learning some Spanish and just stretching your physical balance and what you could do. And then we went to Milwaukee for three months. That was where we went for our country training and that was OK. We stayed in sort of a building that looked like sort of modeled after the U.N. and there was more classroom stuff and this was kind of boring at times.

GANZGLASS: [00:08:55] Did you learn Spanish?

DUBINSKY: [00:08:59] I picked up a little more of the Spanish. I was better than most because I had an exposure to Spanish, so I knew the basic rudiments of it and I could speak a little of it. But I wouldn't, you know, I mean, it wasn't until I got to Colombia I was able to speak Spanish and I can. Well, let me digress for a second. I got so, you know, you try to learn a language, you learn the grammar and then you learn little phrases here and there. And when I got to Colombia, I was still trying to learn stuff and I was in one site, Manizales. This other guy, Archie, was at another site down the road. And so Archie, when Archie spoke, he mumbled, and you could barely understand half of what he said in English.

GANZGLASS: [00:09:55] OK.

DUBINSKY: [00:09:57] And when he started to speak Spanish, people understood about half of what he said. And then it occurred to me, here I was, because at one point I remember talking to some peasant guy pulling a cart full of stuff in my best Spanish, and he seemed to not understand what I was saying. So then I thought, well, why don't I just speak faster and mumble a little? And maybe that'll be better. So that was what I did. I started speaking faster and not worrying about how it was coming out. And it was like I went to a different realm of Spanish and became much. By the time, you know, I became fairly fluent. And so I always benefited from Archie's counseling.

GANZGLASS: [00:10:53] Well, you were just using the language as opposed to studying.

DUBINSKY: [00:10:57] That's right.

GANZGLASS: [00:10:58] And is Colombian Spanish fast?

DUBINSKY: [00:11:01] No. Well, it depends on where you are in Colombia. And I was, when they sent me to Colombia, I was sent to the coffee country in Manizales and the Colombians think they speak Spanish like from Athens. They're the most sophisticated. And if you talk to anybody else in South America, they have some qualms about it. But in any case, in where I was, they spoke fairly clear Spanish. If you go to the southern part of Colombia, which I was at one point lived in Pasto, they speak a little more singsong. It was the northern part of the Inca empire, and the Spanish is a little higher tone, but not that appreciably different. But if you go to the coast and again, I was transferred to the coast, I had three different sites.

GANZGLASS: [00:12:05] We'll talk about that.

DUBINSKY: [00:12:07] Yeah. And Barranquilla, I was trying to save money because they made me a volunteer leader. So I lived with a family. And when I

got there, the mother started talking to me and here I was in the country a year and a half, and I had no idea what she said to me because coastal Spanish is very fast. They don't say the whole word. It's more like Caribbean Spanish, like Cuban Spanish. And so those are the three varieties.

GANZGLASS: [00:12:39] So going back, so you were in Milwaukee and was finished training, you weren't deselected.

DUBINSKY: [00:12:47] Well, let me just say what they did.

GANZGLASS: [00:12:50] OK, yeah.

DUBINSKY: [00:12:51] The selection process was, you know, it was a game being played because I had to see a psychiatrist, the psychologist. I took the MMPI and all these other things that you didn't want to, you know, did you kill your mother or whatever it was you were thinking about doing, and hoping you didn't say the wrong things. And they did a sociogram to see who you were friends with and all that stuff. And I seem to do fairly well or it wasn't. But they, what they did was they selected people out at intervals, and usually it would be a meeting and they'd be talking about somebody and somebody would tap you on the shoulder and then you would just disappear. It was like, you know, that was what was happening. And so I was deathly afraid of being tapped on the back and disappearing.

DUBINSKY: [00:13:43] And so the last day we're in Puerto Rico the last night, and we're supposed to take the flight to Bogota the next morning and then somebody taps me on the back. And I think, God, I can't believe it. I came this far and I can't believe they're selecting me out, you know, and I just was just fit to be tied. They talked to me in this room and I thought they would explain to me why they selected me out. And then they said, well, this landlord where I had lived in Manhattan was claiming that I had damaged some apartment that I had rented with a friend of mine on the West Side. And it was just a lie. But, you know, he was extorting some money, so I had to call my dad up and say, you've got to take care of this and pay this guy off. And so they it was

like \$600 you wanted anyways. So that seemed to calm the whole thing down they shipped me to. So I went down with the group to Bogota and then. And then what we did was we, you know, had an orientation.

GANZGLASS: [00:15:04] In Bogota?

DUBINSKY: [00:15:05] In Bogota. And then they wanted us to get sort of feel our feet into the country. And they had everybody go to a different site near Bogota with some other volunteers from another program. So I went to a town called Choachí with a guy named Bill. I can't remember Bill's last name, but he was in Group II, and at the time I didn't speak that much Spanish. And Bill was from Chicago raising chickens in the backyard, which was okay. And I remember going to the bar with him one night and somebody said that I looked familiar. Some Colombian, like I was a guy from the next village, which sort of blew my mind out, but it seemed like I had a familiar face. And then Bill started telling me how beautiful the mayor's daughters were. And he kept on talking about that. I stayed there for two weeks and, you know, I got sort of interested in what he was saying, and I had this vision about what they might look like and stuff. And then there was a, the mayors had some kind of a coming-out thing and his daughters were there and they were this plump two girls, missing teeth, and they were not very pretty. And then I looked at Bill and then I thought, God.

GANZGLASS: [00:16:45] You've been here too long.

DUBINSKY: [00:16:46] You've been here too long. Is this going to happen to me? I can't believe it. You know, I'm in danger of this, of this, you know, whatever, being acculturated this way. Anyway, so

GANZGLASS: [00:17:02] But were they nice? Did you ever meet them?

DUBINSKY: [00:17:05] No, I never really met them. I just saw them from a not that afar, and I just got frightened about how enthralled he was with the mayor's daughters. And I thought, I don't know, you know, what's going to happen to me? So, but in the long run, I met very Colombian women

are really beautiful. So I don't know what happened in Choachí. They certainly were not.

GANZGLASS: [00:17:31] So after the two weeks in Choachí then?

DUBINSKY: [00:17:35] Then they sent me back to Bogota. We got back and then they sent me to Manizales. And Manizales is a beautiful town sitting on the ridge of the coffee country. Now, they told me I just needed jeans and work clothes. OK. Now I was dealing with this farm, the coffee growers cooperative, which like had 700 members and was run by the oligarchs in the area. It wasn't like I was dealing with the campesinos. My job was to educate the campesinos over the rights and duties of members, you know, like, I'm supposed to democratize the whole thing. And so but it became apparent, you know, here I am with jeans and meeting with these other guys who are having Tito's cup of cups of coffee that are little, they're like Turkish coffee things, and I guess a little cup. But a third of it is with sugar. I mean, they're so sweet you feel that your teeth are going to melt.

DUBINSKY: [00:18:43] So I did that and I felt I felt a little funny coming in jeans now, although nobody else had jeans there because the jeans didn't exist in Colombia. I couldn't get any clothing at the stores there. But the guy from the Binational Center told me something he said, go see Paco. Paco was a tailor. So I went to see Paco and he said, well, I can make some clothing for you. And he said he had all these bolts of fabric. And I mean, I had never been so, you know, I didn't know quite how to deal with it, but there was 20 bolts of fabric and he tells me, pick out what you want. So I picked out something. And then he took some measurements and threw some cloths over my back and I came back in a week and he threw some more cloths on my back. And then within another week, I had a, for 40 bucks, which was a lot of money because I only had \$100 in the month and the whole month to spend. I had a beautiful suit.

GANZGLASS: [00:20:06] That you had never had before.

DUBINSKY: [00:20:07] That's right. I had Barney's Boystown, you know, something like that. Or maybe a little better than and over time. But wow, it was a fantastic suit. I even have this picture of me with that suit. It's really something else.

GANZGLASS: [00:20:22] So then with your suit, you were able to meet with the owners.

DUBINSKY: [00:20:26] Yes, I was. But I rarely ever used it. I mean, but I, yes, I was equipped now to deal with what was happening. And so I worked with the *cafetarios* and I worked with some guy and I lived in town. Had an apartment I shared with another volunteer and a Colombian and learned how to give parties and worked hard on this educational program.

GANZGLASS: [00:20:57] And what was the educational? What did you teach them, how to organize?

DUBINSKY: [00:21:02] No, I developed the whole program of, you know, what to teach the campesinos. What about the co-ops, how they function, what are the rights and duties of members, and try to put something together in a fairly rudimentary way or something that people could understand.

GANZGLASS: [00:21:25] Was this a government program, a Colombian government program?

DUBINSKY: [00:21:31] No, no.

GANZGLASS: [00:21:31] It was a Peace Corps idea?

DUBINSKY: [00:21:33] Peace Corps program that I developed and then gave to the *cafetarios*.

GANZGLASS: [00:21:37] No, but I mean, the cooperatives. How did the cooperatives?

DUBINSKY: [00:21:39] The cooperatives was something that was developed by the Peace Corps to provide to Colombia. Because cooperatives were a major, I don't want to say major, but in certain industries like farming, credit, supermarkets and, you know, marketing co-ops and stuff like that were much more prevalent.

GANZGLASS: [00:22:10] And in Colombia, they were already?

DUBINSKY: [00:22:12] Yeah, they were. And even cabs were, you know, they were organized in that way. So it wasn't that that strange of an animal for people.

GANZGLASS: [00:22:26] And the bosses were OK with that?

DUBINSKY: [00:22:28] Well, they find, you know, they like the idea of having somebody there. They thought I was going to bring in money from AID, which I didn't. But, you know, but then they just ignored me anyways.

GANZGLASS: [00:22:40] But they didn't have trouble. Well, they were the members of the co-op. So yeah, they benefited from the co-op. It wasn't that you were organizing the campesinos against them.

DUBINSKY: [00:22:53] No. And so it wasn't like it was something that they were fearful of or whatnot. They, I mean, basically the members were fairly, uh, how can I say. I don't want to say disinterested, but, you know, they would. People understood that how things were organized, that the oligarchs who run the co-op, you know, were pretty much the senior people in the area. And it wasn't like there was some sedition going on that people were going to rise up and try to take over the co-op. That wasn't going to happen. And ultimately, I felt like, you know, I don't know what I'm doing here, just not doing much.

DUBINSKY: [00:23:45] But at the same time, I helped another volunteer who had to get situated in another. Lenny, he had pulled a hamstring or anyways, he couldn't come down the same time I did. And he came down about three months later and I took him to his site and they had. His side was fairly rural and nobody. Somebody sent a letter to them about him

coming there. But they sent it in English and nobody was able to read it. So it was a surprise. Make a long story short, we got there. They had a consumer co-op and they didn't have any bookkeeping system. So now Lenny's standing there and I'm talking to them. So he didn't know what I was doing. I was trying to tell Lenny, and I said, well, we could figure we could help you with it, a bookkeeping system. And then I told Lenny that and then Lenny, he went batshit. Excuse me. And he said, what do you mean? He said, I'm going back with you. You know, you've got to do that. So we went back and then I spent the two weeks helping to put together a simplified co-op booking bookkeeping system. I mean, I grew up in a family business and I understood, you know, that and I had a year of accounting.

GANZGLASS: [00:25:11] And so you knew how to do that.

DUBINSKY: [00:25:13] Yeah, I knew how to do that. I just had to write it up in a way, a rule book, so people can follow it. So then I went back with Lenny and you know, he was sort of a reluctant volunteer, Lenny, who only went to different sites. So by then, I was pretty active in doing bookkeeping systems and education program and I guess I told the director that I was ready to get out. I also was involved with, you know, emotionally, with some woman, you know, who where I could see where I could, if I didn't leave the town soon, I would be much more involved with my novia. And I didn't think that would be, that's not where I wanted to be. So it was propitious that I have a change of site.

DUBINSKY: [00:26:14] And it just so happened at the same time, there was a handicraft co-op going down the tube in southern Colombia by a volunteer in our group who was more of an artist than a businessman. And he was sort of making products. And these people who were the workers in this co-op were formerly employees of another handicraft company in that area, and they sort of broke away to develop their own firm. It was about eight of them, something eight or 10. And so I went down there and I had heard that the Peace Corps volunteer leader there and the regional director kind of muck around with, were trying to muck around with that whole program of this co-op. And for whatever reason, I said, you know, the only thing I want is to have nobody tell

me what to do because I grew up in a family business. I knew what I could do and I didn't need bullshit, excuse me, from people who don't know what they're doing. So and that's what I.

GANZGLASS: [00:27:34] And what town was this in?

DUBINSKY: [00:27:35] This was in Pasto.

GANZGLASS: [00:27:38] Pasto.

DUBINSKY: [00:27:38] So I came to Pasto and I and the guy who, the volunteer who was working there. Now, Pasto is eleven thousand feet high, in the high mountain thing, and it rains just about every day. It drizzles all the time, has 220 electricity that flows in and out, and it's cobblestone streets and you're living in the 17th century and it was just beautiful. I mean, this was a Peace Corps volunteer's dream. You know, I was no longer living in an apartment in the town. I was living in a pension where the guy who lived there before had died in that bed and the mattress was shaped in his fetal position that I had to assume when I slept there. Anyways, it was just, this is what it was.

DUBINSKY: [00:28:35] So I went to the co-op. My plane comes in and the volunteer who was there, Mike, is at the airport. And I think that's nice. The airport is an hour away from town. I thought, that's nice to greet me. And no, he wasn't greeting me. He was leaving on the next, on that same flight back to Bogota. So there was no.

GANZGLASS: [00:28:58] Transition plan.

DUBINSKY: [00:28:58] There was no transition. So I went to the co-op and there was a bunch of disgruntled people there who didn't want to have anything to do with me, basically. And I said to them, after about a half an hour, I said, if I can't do something in a week with you, then we'll give up. And I was pretty sure I could do something with them. So I worked in the help because one of the problems was they didn't have a way of costing out what each. They all made different things. Some people made *bancos*, benches. Some people made plates. One guy

was an artist and he designed things, so everybody had different roles. Some people made Don Quixote bookends.

DUBINSKY: [00:29:53] So I helped develop a cost, you know, basically how much time they were spending. And so at least there'd be some equity in terms of what each product, what they would get for a product. Even though the other guy, the other volunteer, he was making baby carriages, baby sleeping things. Anyways, he had, he got cast away and in products they didn't need to sell. And so then they. So what I found was that they hadn't been paid in a while and we needed to get money in there quickly. And at the same time, another volunteer who was in the area, who was bored in his site, asked me if I could, he could work with me and I said, great. Now Steve was a really good sales guy. He was smart also anyways. But so after about a week, week and a half, I had enough of their confidence that we could do something. And then we also set up a bookkeeping system as well.

GANZGLASS: [00:31:14] Where was the stuff marketed?

DUBINSKY: [00:31:16] Well, it was mostly with volunteers and embassy people. And what happened was they hadn't fulfilled their orders to people. They had taken money from people but hadn't sent out their orders. So we were faced with a big problem because we had people that we owed things to. And anyways, we went to Bogota and I had some samples and stuff, and I mean, we try to. And we'd made some sales, cash sales, knew people and told people who really gave us money that we would honor what they did and we came back with a whole bunch of orders. One of the things, we had these plates that had designs on them and I put A, B, and C on the designs. And I came back to our Carlos and said, this is the plates we've gotten. And I need so many A's, so many B's, so many. And he looked at me and he said, you know, I'm an artist. I'm an artist. And I said, you do anything you want, OK? That was it. So everything was whatever you want. No. Forget about mass production of the designs. You know, everything was.

GANZGLASS: [00:32:44] Original.

DUBINSKY: [00:32:44] Original. So we got the we got the place humming. After three months, the thing was really moving and shaped, and it lasted another 20, 25 years.

GANZGLASS: [00:32:57] Wonderful.

DUBINSKY: [00:32:58] Yes, it was a major accomplishment. That's the best thing I did there. And then they, after three months, they promoted me, which was not necessarily. They promoted me to a volunteer leader.

GANZGLASS: [00:33:13] Who, Peace Corps?

DUBINSKY: [00:33:14] Peace Corps did. Yeah. And for the co-op program in Barranquilla, which is the northern part of Colombia and that had some mixed things. Then I started sort of managing people who were my peers, which was not so bad. But by that time, you're either working or you aren't working, and it wasn't like I was going to make them work. I mean, you know, they already were.

GANZGLASS: [00:33:44] This was like a year and a half already.

DUBINSKY: [00:33:47] They're really set in their programs, and I did some site survey and stuff and your friend Bob, you know, he, I guess, well, let me digress. He got sent to a new site on the river, this Magangué, which was a hell hole. It was hot and sweaty, and he got sent there because the director of our program didn't think he was working. So he sent Bob, who was in a rural site in Medellin or in Antioquia, to this site. And the guy who was in the site wrote, the volunteer, wrote some very detailed reports about how much he was doing.

GANZGLASS: [00:34:36] Mm hmm.

DUBINSKY: [00:34:37] And uh, and Bob got to the site, was complaining and said, there's nothing here. There's nothing here. So the first thing I had to do was to go to that site. And Bob greets me at the airport and he screams at me, there's nothing here. There's nothing here. There's

nothing here. I said, Bob, we're going to just go. I got the reports. We're going to go to the site, but we're going to go look at everything. And sure enough, there were about two or three days. There was nothing there. They seemed to remember the volunteer, you know. So I had a donate, I guess, a couple of bags of rice to Bob's new consumer co-op.

DUBINSKY: [00:35:25] And then I went back to Barranquilla and I met the guy who wrote the report. And he was, he used to be 240 pounds and now he was down to 160 or 70. And, you know, we were sharing a room for that day or something, and you could see he was skin and bones. And he had picked up every disease. I mean, he had TB and whatever it is, he just ate everything, which was crazy. And then I try to say in a very diplomatic way, what you know, I said, I checked things out. I couldn't quite see what was happening. And he screamed at me and said, what do you expect me to do? There was nothing there, you know? And then I just sort of dropped it. And I guess there was nothing to be said. Some people worked out well. Some people, volunteers, didn't.

GANZGLASS: [00:36:23] Did you think it was volunteer's fault or staff fault? Or a combination probably?

DUBINSKY: [00:36:30] I think it's more his lack of initiative. I think he was not, you know, he was more accustomed to working in set, you know, set-up projects and stuff like that. And he would have been better off being a teacher in some kind of a system, not a freelance volunteer trying to organize people. That was not a skill.

GANZGLASS: [00:36:57] You hear that in so many countries, that the co-op and this community organization one. You always had to figure out what to do. I was a teacher. I mean, I knew to go, you know, I went to the classroom and you taught.

DUBINSKY: [00:37:11] That's exactly what this guy did subsequent to that, he became a teacher and that's what he did.

GANZGLASS: [00:37:19] But this free lifestyle suited you fine? Did it suit you fine?

DUBINSKY: [00:37:25] Yeah, I kind of liked the idea of being thrust somewhere and trying to figure out what to do and figure out a skill set. In fact, when I was in Manizales, I wrote a literacy book on co-ops, a little booklet, all about literacy. So I felt like I was really alive. You know, I could do different things, which was novel. I mean, here, I guess I'd never done anything like that. You know, I the only thing I'd done was in my father's meat factory growing up, making, you know, small little frankfurters, salami, pastrami, corned beef. So I mean, I knew how to pump corned beef. And so that was a different skill set.

GANZGLASS: [00:38:12] Totally, totally.

DUBINSKY: [00:38:13] Yeah. So.

GANZGLASS: [00:38:15] And did you get to travel to other countries as well?

DUBINSKY: [00:38:18] Yeah. After I did that, we went to, um. I went with two other guys, we flew to Peru, to Lima and then to Cusco to go to Machu Picchu. And we went to the get the train at Machu Picchu and then we were told we didn't have tickets. You had to buy them in Lima. And I think we tried to bribe the guy and that didn't work. So then we just left that and took the steamer across Lake Titicaca to Puno and up to La Paz. And which was really fascinating. Well, and scary because you just saw people living at fourteen thousand feet in sort of rock houses and stuff. I mean, if I saw poverty in Colombia, I didn't see it like that, you know. And La Paz was really very, very poor.

GANZGLASS: [00:39:28] Bogota was not at that point.

DUBINSKY: [00:39:30] No, Bogota was, you know. Yeah, I mean, it had buildings, apartments, and it was a fairly metropolitan area. On the edges of it, there was things and there's everybody selling lottery tickets, but it wasn't a shabby place. It was the central city and other places were fairly well developed. Pasto, on the other hand, was not.

GANZGLASS: [00:40:06] How big was Pasto?

DUBINSKY: [00:40:07] It was maybe 30,000 people or something, and it was cobblestone streets. And if you saw three cars in a day, that was a lot. And so that was.

GANZGLASS: [00:40:24] And you went by plane, so people, I guess, did locals also fly from one place to another or was that really just for foreigners?

DUBINSKY: [00:40:36] Well, everybody went on a DC3 or DC. A lot of people had to fly there because the distances in Colombia, because of the mountain ranges, were pretty severe. I mean, if I were to go from Pasto to Bogota, it would probably take me three or four days.

GANZGLASS: [00:40:56] Because of the mountains?

DUBINSKY: [00:40:58] Because of the mountains and then even in Manizales, it would have been, yeah, it's a long trek.

GANZGLASS: [00:41:04] So just going back to your co-op, how do you know that it existed for another 25 years?

DUBINSKY: [00:41:10] Because we, you know, I've been a member of the Friends of Colombia for God knows, since the beginning.

GANZGLASS: [00:41:15] Talk a little bit about that, Friends of Colombia.

DUBINSKY: [00:41:20] All right. Well, let me just finish up. Because we had other volunteers who were in Colombia and we sort of, I heard at different Peace Corps meetings and subsequent that it was, people were still involved with it. And in a way I felt bad because my goal was to teach them how to use their bookkeeping system, how to market, and to do it themselves. And so, it lasted 20 years with a lot of other people and subsequent. When I went back there, I went back there about in 2000, about 40 years later, and some of the same guys were working, but they had their own co-op, so they had spread out. So they were in their own business.

GANZGLASS: [00:42:07] Oh, so that's still a success. They closed that but did something else.

DUBINSKY: [00:42:12] Yeah. Let me digress for one second, because Steve and I went back and we looked up people. Now, Pasto, now they had paved over the cobblestone streets. They built some of the hotels. And I was heartbroken. You know, the town I knew, that was just it was different. It was developed. God, I hated that and they even had a like a McDonald's, 24 hour McDonald's in the square, that I couldn't even believe it. And we looked up one of the guys that made the Don Quixote bookends and he invited us over to his son's house, where he was living. So we go to this almost townhouse section that didn't exist in Pasto, and we walk in there and to the left is his son, his 10 year old kid working on a computer. I meet his son and his son is selling these products that we made, but now making them in shapes of birds and not play, you know? And he's selling them in Europe and France and stuff. And it was just.

GANZGLASS: [00:43:35] 40 years, 40 years later.

DUBINSKY: [00:43:38] 40 years later, and it was just sort of, I mean, it was fantastic, just fantastic to see how the whole thing had progressed and done. Anyways, getting back to your point.

GANZGLASS: [00:43:51] So I was asking about the Colombia volunteers because I know you've been very active and some groups have been and some have not.

DUBINSKY: [00:44:02] Yeah, I've been active. I could not be active. Bob pulled me into the group, I guess, and so I've been on it. I don't know how many years already, 40 years already. So and we've been, you know, we've been giving some money to certain projects and doing that over time and then having a newsletter and stuff like that. And it's, I think it's, we were almost getting running out of steam because we're all getting older.

GANZGLASS: [00:44:36] Mm hmm.

DUBINSKY: [00:44:37] And a wonderful thing has happened. They had new groups of volunteers going to Colombia the last three or four years, and now they've graduated, and now we've incorporated two or three of those people.

GANZGLASS: [00:44:52] Oh, great.

DUBINSKY: [00:44:53] In our thing. And I was head of, I guess, one thing, the internet thing. Had my name and numbers all over there and I had Michael, I gave it all to Michael and said, you got to put your name and stuff. In other words.

GANZGLASS: [00:45:10] You passed the torch.

DUBINSKY: [00:45:11] I passed the torch. So I think it's fantastic. We're going to, we've got three or four people involved with it.

GANZGLASS: [00:45:23] Are there volunteers in Colombia now?

DUBINSKY: [00:45:26] Yeah, they are volunteers. And I think we're making some kind of a headway with the director down there to do some kind of joint. We gave them some money. She wanted money for a conference, so we gave her some money and we've had some project we've been funding for the last 40 years. And so we continue that.

GANZGLASS: [00:45:50] And you mentioned you've been back once or twice.

DUBINSKY: [00:45:57] Twice. I was back once, I think, in 1999, and I went back to see what was happening in Manizales and in Pasto. But the interesting thing was I flew into Cartagena and I had to change planes and we were in the waiting room and I didn't see anybody in Colombia for 40 years. And I get in this waiting room and everybody's got jeans on and Michael Jordan's shirts and hats, and I don't know where the hell I am, and I don't know who's a Colombian, who's an American. You know, it doesn't make sense to me, you know, I mean, it just totally, totally different thing. And I see this one woman, I swear she, and I didn't

know how to use the phone there because it was a different setup. And I'm sure she was an American. And of course, I went up to her and I, in by this time my broken Spanish, because I only time I speak Spanish is somebody parking my car or whatever anyways. And she was a Colombian, you know, which is unbelievable how.

GANZGLASS: [00:47:14] Well, there are lots of Colombians who come to the United States, too.

DUBINSKY: [00:47:18] But everybody, it wasn't just in the airport. I mean, you go to Bogota and they had shopping centers that were the same thing, look just the same thing as the shopping mall in Georgetown Park, I mean, it was the same thing. And you know, we went out to eat there because one of my, well, Colombian friend Gael wanted it. Anyways, he had a relative of his wife's in Bogota, and she sort of took us around for a day or two in Bogota and wanted to take us to this shopping center. And we said, we want to eat some Colombian food, you know, beans and rice or *frijoles con chicharrón*. And where does she take us? She takes us to this, you know, place that has nothing to do with Colombian food. It's a fast food place, you know, and I can't believe that I'm not eating Colombian food. I can't believe what I'm looking at. You know, there's Ben and Jerry's, it's just Jerry's, and there's Kentucky Fried Chicken and you know.

GANZGLASS: [00:48:38] Things have changed. So what was Peace Corps' role in in all of that? Do you think Peace Corps contributed a lot to development or how did that all happen?

DUBINSKY: [00:48:49] Well, I think. I mean, you know, when I was down there, you thought, especially in the rural places that you know, just you don't know when they haven't developed. Let me just digress for one second. The most significant, one of the most significant places I was in, it was in southern Colombia. They were making baskets. Guy from Sears Roebuck was, now retired, was trying to help the Colombian industry and selling baskets to maybe the States. And he found them making baskets in Pasto and he said, they're not making them quite right and he designed it. And so he had this one guy, some guy in the

marketplace who didn't speak Spanish, he spoke, uh, Quechua. So we had to have a Colombian speaking Quechua. I'm translating from Spanish to English to this guy.

DUBINSKY: [00:49:59] Make a long story short, after two weeks we go visit this guy's home and he made the baskets. And then we try to tell him, if you make a lot more. You know, I think he wanted \$5 for the two baskets or something. And then we said, if you make 10 baskets, we can pay you less per basket, but you'll make a lot more money. And the guy said, look at the tree and how many leaves are in the tree, how many you could be making. And this guy who lives in a shack, you know, the mud hut, you know, thatched roof and smoke coming out of the house. And he shook his head. And he basically said, if you want more, if you want more, it'll cost you more, more and more. I mean, if you wanted, if it was \$2.50 for one, if you want, if you wanted to make two, it would cost you \$3. It was going in the wrong direction.

GANZGLASS: [00:51:14] What was his logic to that?

DUBINSKY: [00:51:15] His logic was to that was very, he says, if I do that, I have less time for my family.

GANZGLASS: [00:51:25] Oh.

DUBINSKY: [00:51:26] And I would just sort of blown out, you know, I mean, because, you know.

GANZGLASS: [00:51:31] He had his priorities.

DUBINSKY: [00:51:33] He has priorities, this guy is in the bush. And so anyways, sorry to digress there.

GANZGLASS: [00:51:40] Well, it's a good a little story.

DUBINSKY: [00:51:42] And your question was?

GANZGLASS: [00:51:46] What was Peace Corps' role in this development?

DUBINSKY: [00:51:49] Well, it wasn't the drug problem. I mean, when we were there, there was no drugs in '65. I think some of the volunteers, you know, some projects were better than others. And by and large, you know there was a productive country. I mean, they had a good agriculture. They made coffee. It was a market for the coffee and other things. And there was a governmental system that seemed to work. I mean, it flipped from one party to the other party. It got a little crazier in the last 20 years.

GANZGLASS: [00:52:31] With the drugs, yeah.

DUBINSKY: [00:52:33] And the drugs and stuff like that. But there was a good market. People were, if you gave people an opportunity they took it. And I saw that everywhere, even on the coast or anywhere. One of the volunteers now is in the microloan program and she's been doing it. And still doing it. So in some ways, it was an ideal environment. And a lot of Colombians come to the States and fit right in, you know, they're basically hard working, family oriented, and they're good businessmen. I mean, at all levels. So I was very impressed. I mean, when you get down there in the sixties, you don't, you know, you can't believe what you're seeing. When I went down there in 2000, you know. When I was down there, you'd see people in black all the time because somebody had died. And it was. And the same poverty I didn't see at all. I mean, you'd have to, not that it didn't exist, but there was significant change. And what role did Peace Corps play? I think we modeled things for a lot of people.

GANZGLASS: [00:54:07] But they were ready to take it.

DUBINSKY: [00:54:08] They were ready, I mean, you know, and some of us did more than others. But I don't, I don't want to say we made development work in Colombia. I think we learned a lot more.

GANZGLASS: [00:54:21] That was my next question. So what did Peace Corps do for you?

DUBINSKY: [00:54:24] Oh, well, gave me a lease on life because I came back and I was pretty confident that I could do different things and so I just was determined to see what I could do. I wanted to go back overseas and it wasn't a good time because it was 1965. The war was raging and so I got into graduate school. And I feel guilty about that, because other people got drafted right away. One of the guys that we worked with, another volunteer, died within three months of coming home. His name is on the wall. So I, you know, I ended up getting a master's degree, then another master's degree, then a PhD. Taught at GW and got burnt out teaching and not making enough money. It sounds like bad and sour grapes, but this vision of being, you know, a professor and, you know, at a not quite Ivy League place, but GW was more of a factory. It was a, I don't know, it wasn't a good fit. I had a different background to the people I taught with in the department.

GANZGLASS: [00:56:01] You'd been overseas, you're worldly.

DUBINSKY: [00:56:05] Yeah. And none of them were, they were in a very traditional mold. I had new skills and program evaluation and research methods. And it was like oil and water. And I just didn't.

GANZGLASS: [00:56:22] But you went on to do lots of other things. So that's fine.

DUBINSKY: [00:56:25] Yeah, I had a great. I did what I wanted to do and there were costs involved. I mean, I joined the government and I had my nose up, you know, in the air. And if I rose up and I rose down, you know, and I wasn't afraid to change. So it wasn't like I had this stellar career in the government. Ultimately, I got burnt out when they told me not to do anything. I mean, I couldn't take that. I could not take sitting in a, I was a 15 towards the end and had a nice sized office. So I was on the road to becoming a senior executive. And I could not take not doing anything and just sitting and pushing buttons. And so I went back, went to school, got a clinical degree, and I was very happy becoming a psychotherapist and I was a really good one.

GANZGLASS: [00:57:28] Great.

DUBINSKY: [00:57:30] So I'm not sorry what I did.

GANZGLASS: [00:57:33] So you can think of the psychologists who deselected people, way back when.

DUBINSKY: [00:57:39] Well, but the trouble was they didn't know who was going to make it and who didn't, you know. They had, what they were using, what they thought was some measures. And because some of the people that did, they took people at the margins who were really looked a little bizarre. That's about it. I'm not sure they took out wrong people.

GANZGLASS: [00:58:08] So we had a guy who we all disliked because we didn't like the whole process. And then years later, I was at a professional conference and there he was up on the stage. I can't even remember what he was talking about, but a perfectly nice guy. But, you know, it was a different role. I was in a different role.

DUBINSKY: [00:58:28] Right.

GANZGLASS: [00:58:28] But yeah, it was a difficult thing at that point.

DUBINSKY: [00:58:31] Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:58:35] Nobody liked deselection.

DUBINSKY: [00:58:37] Oh yeah, it was crazy.

GANZGLASS: [00:58:38] The term itself was not such a great term.

DUBINSKY: [00:58:40] It was, like I said, it was frightening. Frightening because, you know, here you are. You're supposed to be on a track somewhere, and you can't come back. You can't come home.

GANZGLASS: [00:58:54] That's true. Right. So anything else you want to tell me or put it down for posterity about Colombia, about the Peace Corps, about your reflections looking back?

DUBINSKY: [00:59:07] Let me see. I like to think that it's not that different now than it was. I meet some of the people. And I think teaching is nice because it's that, but I think the community development stuff is different and that requires a different skill set. And like they said, you take a lot more yourself in terms of your own development than you give. And it's hard to know how much. Well, I was. Yeah. I think I was in Thailand with somebody and mentioned I was in the Peace Corps. And he said, oh yes, you know, they knew about it and he said some friend of his or his father really benefited from it. So. But, you know, we're sort of a small thing, but over time.

GANZGLASS: [01:00:24] It adds up. How many volunteers have been in Colombia, do you know?

DUBINSKY: [01:00:29] Um, probably close to 4,000, I think over time, because we had the biggest program. Maybe more than that.

GANZGLASS: [01:00:38] Somalia total had four hundred, over all the years.

DUBINSKY: [01:00:43] Yeah, we had. When I was down there, there was several hundred. You know, the only other thing that I remember. We had a basketball game, maybe that'll give you some sense. One of the guys who organized the basketball game to play in this town called Cucuta, which is on the border with Venezuela. And so from our group, there was me and then five other guys. Actually, four other guys, we just had five to play. And I flew out to Cucuta and we really didn't have permission to do this. We didn't tell anybody we were doing this. And I flew out to Cucuta and I didn't. I forgot my wallet. So I got into the town there and they, the border people, you know, didn't know who I was. And the other volunteer who was in Cucuta vouched for me, but they sent a wire to the Peace Corps. And do you have any recollection of this person? And the Peace Corps shot back, no, we don't know who this person is. That was not true. So I was had to just suck it up, you know, because one of the words was, you know, you need to take care of yourself or don't expect us to save you.

DUBINSKY: [01:02:18] And we played this game and one of the guys was on, it was on the radio this game, because we were playing against the all-stars from this region and we were losing badly. Maybe that's, you know, and most of us, I was relatively good shape, but most of us had stopped moving from one side of the court to the other side. They were too tired, OK, and then half time. One of the guys from our side got on the microphone and the radio and said, well, we're going to come back and beat you guys, you know, something like that. And he was really boastful and I don't know how. We must have lost by 50 points. And then finally, I sheepishly caught the next plane back.

GANZGLASS: [01:03:11] Well it sounds like you had a good time.

DUBINSKY: [01:03:14] I had a good time.

GANZGLASS: [01:03:15] So thank you for the interview.

DUBINSKY: [01:03:18] You're welcome.

[END OF INTERVIEW]