

**Ronald L. Weber Oral History Interview**  
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Ronald L. Weber  
**Interviewer:** Robyn Michaels  
**Date of Interview:** April 29, 2006  
**Location of Interview:** Chicago, Illinois  
**Length:** 34 pages

**Biographical Note**

Ronald L. Weber served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Brazil from 1964 to 1967 in an urban planning and public health program.

**Access**

Open.

**Usage Restrictions**

According to the deed of gift signed June 15, 2006, copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. This interview is in the public domain.

**Copyright**

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

**Technical Note**

This transcript was created by Sonix software from the MP3 audio recording of the interview. The resulting text file was lightly edited and reformatted according to a standard template.

**Suggested Citation**

Ronald L. Weber, recorded interview by Robyn Michaels, April 29, 2006, page #, Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

## DISCLAIMER

This transcript was generated automatically by Sonix software from the audio recording. The accuracy of the transcript cannot be guaranteed. Only the original audio recording constitutes the official record of this interview and should be used along with the transcript. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy or would like to recommend corrections, they are encouraged to contact the library reference staff.

Oral History Interview

with

Ronald L. Weber

April 29, 2006  
Chicago, Illinois

By Robyn Michaels

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

MICHAELS: [00:00:00] All right, here we go. This is Robyn Michaels, I'm here interviewing Ronald Weber, who was in Peace Corps in Brazil and what year?

WEBER: [00:00:10] In 1964 through 1967.

MICHAELS: [00:00:13] So that was like three years, you extended.

WEBER: [00:00:15] Yes, I extended.

MICHAELS: [00:00:15] What a guy. And we're doing this interview in my house in Rogers Park on the north side of Chicago on April 28, is today?

WEBER: [00:00:25] Twenty-nine.

MICHAELS: [00:00:25] Twenty-ninth, see, there you go. 2006. And I served in Peace Corps in Malawi, in southern Africa in 1992. And so Ron is actually my first interview and we'll just see how this goes. Anyways, what were your initial reasons for joining Peace Corps?

WEBER: [00:00:53] I had reasons. Probably didn't know quite what else to do with myself.

MICHAELS: [00:00:58] You'd graduated from college.

WEBER: [00:00:59] I'd graduated from college. I hadn't gone to graduate school yet.

MICHAELS: [00:01:03] You were planning on it?

WEBER: [00:01:04] But I was planning on it.

MICHAELS: [00:01:06] Your degree was in?

WEBER: [00:01:08] In anthropology. My undergraduate degree is anthropology. And I had attended a summer field school, an archeological field school in Wyoming, and then started classes at the University of Oregon for just the summer. And I was going to go with graduate school, but I was accepted into the Peace Corps and thought it was a great opportunity.

MICHAELS: [00:01:34] Well, but you didn't just like, I mean, did a recruiter come to your campus or did you? I mean, you picked up an application while you're picking up job applications? Or did you talk to your friends about this?

WEBER: [00:01:47] Or I suppose just newspapers, ads, and hearing about it. And at the end of being enthusiastic about the high ideals which at my age I appreciated greatly, still do, but I'm afraid that we lose them in our present political situation.

MICHAELS: [00:02:12] And it was to bring development or bring democracy or bring innovation.

WEBER: [00:02:22] I don't think I had that high of hopes at that time. I thought that I could probably contribute something, and I thought that I would probably gain quite a lot at the time, the opportunity to learn a language fairly well. The opportunity to see another culture was very high on my list of things that should be done.

MICHAELS: [00:02:49] When you were decided to study anthropology, did you just sort of fall into that or was there some aspect of anthropology that you were specifically interested in?

WEBER: [00:03:00] I sort of fell into the field of anthropology, actually through an art history course. So this interest in archeology and found anthropology was the subject that one studies if one wants to do archeology.

MICHAELS: [00:03:17] Oh yeah, right. From the time you filled out the application to the time you actually left, how long was it, do you remember?

WEBER: [00:03:26] I think probably two months, but I don't really remember quite.

MICHAELS: [00:03:30] It was very quick.

WEBER: [00:03:32] It was fairly quick. It could be three months. I really don't have the accent.

MICHAELS: [00:03:40] Because now some people wait up to two years for an assignment.

WEBER: [00:03:43] Nothing like that. It was well under a year, well under six months I'm sure.

MICHAELS: [00:03:48] And what did your family say when you said, I'm going off to Brazil? I've joined Peace Corps.

FAGAN: [00:03:56] He was just going to training.

MICHAELS: [00:03:58] Yeah, because here's the thing is that, you know, I mean, Peace Corps is still relatively new. Back when it was like, what year was this?

WEBER: [00:04:07] It was the second year I suppose. It was 1964.

MICHAELS: [00:04:11] Really? So I mean, hardly anybody knew about Peace Corps, by the way. The other voice you're hearing is Nancy Fagan, Ron's wife. But anyways, go ahead.

WEBER: [00:04:18] So it is 1964, and I had was able to make some selection. I wanted it to be a South American country. I was thinking Spanish because I had some learning of Spanish already and it turned out to be Brazil. That was a little switch, so I hesitated, but I thought that'd be fun too. I'm rather happy that it turned out to be Brazil now because I have become involved in tropical forests type prehistory, or did become involved in it, and that this guided my direction by going to Brazil.

MICHAELS: [00:04:59] But your family. You went home and you said, I'm going to Brazil.

WEBER: [00:05:05] I don't think they had anything to say about it at all.

MICHAELS: [00:05:09] Nothing! Not encouraging or discouraging or just have a good time?

WEBER: [00:05:12] They thought it was a good idea. Sure, they were positive about it, but they never, I really didn't consult with them with my application or tell them much about it until I accepted and they went along with it. In fact, they ended up visiting me when I was there.

FAGAN: [00:05:38] They didn't think like you're not going to take over the family business or?

MICHAELS: [00:05:44] Was there a family business?

WEBER: [00:05:45] There was a family business, but I don't think there was any idea that to me that should be continued. It was a one-person endeavor. It could have been taken over and would probably much better off for having done it.

MICHAELS: [00:06:00] Now was your training in country? Was it in Brazil or was it in the U.S.? Or was it in another country?

WEBER: [00:06:06] Actually in Tempe, Arizona.

MICHAELS: [00:06:09] Yeah, that must have been really a lot like Brazil, huh?

WEBER: [00:06:12] Not very much like Brazil at all. Tempe is just outside of Phoenix, so it's an urban university center, actually.

MICHAELS: [00:06:20] And so that's where it was, at the university?

WEBER: [00:06:22] That's where training was, at the university campus. The linguistic instructors were hired and recruited from the Mormon church, from missionaries, that were the language instructors. I suppose the building that we stayed in was probably a fraternity like structure. It was some sort of residential compound adjacent to some farmland.

MICHAELS: [00:06:54] And how long were you there?

WEBER: [00:06:56] I recollect approximately three months, but probably slightly less than that.

MICHAELS: [00:07:04] And how many people were in your initial group?

WEBER: [00:07:07] I was going to bring my photo album so I could actually tell you. I have to estimate that it's 50. Maybe 50 is probably a close estimate.

MICHAELS: [00:07:19] Evenly divided between men and women?

WEBER: [00:07:21] It was. It was pretty evenly divided, as I recollect. Both men and women, many different age groups, people ages, maybe 60 down to.

MICHAELS: [00:07:35] Really, 60? Okay.

WEBER: [00:07:38] Almost everyone was a college graduate, so the 20 range, 60 to 20 in our training. Our training had a lot of medical quality to it. We learned to give injections to basically look at health posts in Brazil.

FAGAN: [00:08:00] You even helped on a delivery? Or observed a delivery.

WEBER: [00:08:04] We assisted with deliveries.

MICHAELS: [00:08:07] Was this in training?

WEBER: [00:08:09] In training.

MICHAELS: [00:08:10] Really. And so that's was that the focus of most of your group is that you're going to be medical, some sort of medical assistance. Or public health, something like that.

WEBER: [00:08:19] Yes. Public health workers of some sort. We were taught to make filtration plants and to do agricultural work, to do nutrition type work, vaccinations, all sorts of health type activities. And particularly with the town where I was stationed at Santo Antônio do Leverger in Mato Grosso, a town that's probably was established in the late 1500s. So very old old town. They just put in a deep well. And the main activity was trying to encourage people to use that water since it was at that time fairly pure.

MICHAELS: [00:09:06] Rather than a river?

WEBER: [00:09:08] Rather than, really their favorite water was groundwater. Just rainwater that accumulated in the ponds or river water would also be used. But people liked the flavor of the water. They didn't really like the well water.

MICHAELS: [00:09:25] Well, you know how that is.

WEBER: [00:09:27] It's salty.

MICHAELS: [00:09:29] Was it?

WEBER: [00:09:29] Not to me, but to them it was. They did not believe that it was this tasty. They didn't like it.

MICHAELS: [00:09:35] Oh yeah. I mean, I believe that. Chicago has the best water and it's hard to get used to water in other places.

WEBER: [00:09:41] So a lot of our activity was convincing people to drink the water and to use it, and that the water that they were using was causing a lot of their dysentery.

MICHAELS: [00:09:53] And so how successful were you in the time you were there to get them to switch over? Did you start with the kids or, I mean, how'd you do it or did you not do it? Did you never succeed? They just always felt.

WEBER: [00:10:04] We just talked about it all the time. Whenever we'd make visits to the houses and usually we talk to the adults at the time and we would do the two activities that we were doing. We were encouraging the building of privies, cement holes in the ground with a cement slab over them. It had a lid to prevent fly contamination of food and edibles. And then encouraging people to use this deep well water or boil their water. I suppose we probably convinced some people. Certainly the health of those people started rising. And I suppose just being an American, we have probably some prestige. Certainly we were prestigious people. Higher class people in the village would like offer us to use their car to drive around the town once or they'd invite us to dinner or things of that sort. If we didn't have a prestige, so using that prestige to get people to drink the water was probably slightly successful.



MICHAELS: [00:11:31] When you when you got there, was there any training there before you were sent to your specific post?

WEBER: [00:11:38] There was a little training.

MICHAELS: [00:11:39] It was like, you're just off the plane and?

WEBER: [00:11:42] We had to get driver's licenses, we had to get various Brazilian papers. That's basically it. So we were in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo for probably two weeks before going to the field, and we were assigned the field locations. Mine was an introductory field station that I went to in Cuiabá, Mato Grosso, where I stayed with other Peace Corps people for roughly a week and then was assigned a location to go to. And we were assigned in pairs.

MICHAELS: [00:12:28] Ok, wait, a second. You were there two weeks and then it's like, you're told you're going to go there. Did you have to make your own arrangements to get to your post? Or did they like, give you a ticket and you're going here and you're going to be met by so-and-so or anything?

WEBER: [00:12:47] Are you recording?

MICHAELS: [00:12:48] Yes.

WEBER: [00:12:49] They told us to take the bus to go there. That was it. There was no arrangements. We had to find a pension and so on.

MICHAELS: [00:12:58] So you had to find your own actual place to live once you got there too?

WEBER: [00:13:02] Yes, and stayed there at the pension for a good period of time and then rented a house. The woman that I had spoken with, who was a nurse, she stayed at the pension and I rented a house. It's probably a good activity. Nice to maintain a house. Had to build a privy there of course.

MICHAELS: [00:13:25] You had to build your own, interesting. So there was there really wasn't much basic sanitation, even though this was, was this a somewhat urban area or was this very, very rural?

WEBER: [00:13:35] It's fairly rural. No paved roads. They were just putting in the running water system from the deep well. Other than that they had no running water. They had no electricity, except a generator that they would operate once a week. And I think on Friday night.

MICHAELS: [00:13:52] And what was that, why did they?

WEBER: [00:13:54] For parties and bars and things like that.

MICHAELS: [00:13:56] The important stuff.

FAGAN: [00:13:59] Movies or something?

WEBER: [00:14:01] I showed movies but the movies were not something that they had.

MICHAELS: [00:14:05] You brought movies.

WEBER: [00:14:06] I borrowed a projector and showed movies.

MICHAELS: [00:14:09] Which or what movies? I mean, were they in English, or were they in Portuguese?

WEBER: [00:14:19] Portuguese.

MICHAELS: [00:14:20] Was there another local language that was spoken there rather than?

WEBER: [00:14:23] Not at this time. It was all Portuguese.

MICHAELS: [00:14:26] And how long do you think it took you before you were intelligible to your neighbors?

WEBER: [00:14:35] I think that we probably communicated right away. I probably improved, and I've never been a very good linguist or a very good speaker of any language, but it is pretty easy to communicate if you try. And if people are willing to wait.

MICHAELS: [00:14:55] To get the words out?

WEBER: [00:14:57] To get the words out.

MICHAELS: [00:14:58] Never mind the syntax, huh?

WEBER: [00:14:59] And sometimes you have to ask, please repeat.

MICHAELS: [00:15:02] And slowly.

WEBER: [00:15:04] Slowly and sometimes with Brazilians who have, maybe older ones, the people that don't have many teeth or something. Sometimes this particular language problems, but I don't remember ever not being able to communicate.

MICHAELS: [00:15:23] Oh, that's great. And did you see your country director at all or on a regular basis or your APCD or?

WEBER: [00:15:32] The Mato Grosso director I saw maybe three times? So very, very rarely. He visited the site at least twice during the three years, and then I visited Cuiaba, which is the capital of Mato Grosso. Mato Grosso now has actually been divided, so it's two states. But while I was, there was just Mato Grosso, and Cuiaba was about an hour bus ride. That wasn't bad. And this city was actually a place for, people came to go to the beach. And so the beach on the river and fish of a special type called pacu was available.

MICHAELS: [00:16:21] How was that?

WEBER: [00:16:22] And it's probably the best fish I've ever eaten. Really extremely good. And the people at the pension that I stayed at had opened up a kind of a restaurant on the beach during the summer with a

low water period and tourists came out to eat fish and drink beer, basically.

MICHAELS: [00:16:49] So there was somewhat of a social life there.

WEBER: [00:16:52] It was a bit of a social life. Yeah, probably. I did not involve get involved in that upper-class sort of social life. These people were kind of lawyers and doctors and that sort of thing from Cuiaba, and they really didn't. They sort of stood, kept their distance.

MICHAELS: [00:17:16] But they came actually because it was a sort of a resort type of the closest resort type area available to them that they could get to easily. Interesting. About how many people would you say was in the like municipality or local authority or whatever?

WEBER: [00:17:30] I think it's about 1800.

MICHAELS: [00:17:32] So it was a very small town. So it's a small town.

WEBER: [00:17:36] Actually, I have the number here, but I think it's around 1,800.

MICHAELS: [00:17:40] So I would imagine everybody knows everybody's business.

WEBER: [00:17:45] Pretty much everyone knew what was going on. It was a lot of interaction. There are several little villages outside of this major town, which maybe, maybe have two or 300 people. And maybe a half hour bicycle ride away. We'd occasionally visit these other places to introduce privies.

MICHAELS: [00:18:13] So that was part of the sort of public health thrust is more sanitation?

WEBER: [00:18:18] Yes.

FAGAN: [00:18:18] How are you funded?

WEBER: [00:18:20] Oh, I received regular pay.

FAGAN: [00:18:25] But how were the projects funded? You were building an outhouse?

WEBER: [00:18:31] I basically worked for the Mato Grosso sanitation department and they had a health post so that they had the materials, they had the cement slabs, they had medical facilities. A doctor visited the town almost every other week.

MICHAELS: [00:18:51] Oh, that's good.

WEBER: [00:18:52] And a dentist came once in a while.

MICHAELS: [00:18:54] So did you have like a bank account there and Peace Corps just automatically deposited money? Or did they send you a check? Or how was it that they gave you your stipend?

WEBER: [00:19:01] I must have gotten cash, but how did I get it?

MICHAELS: [00:19:05] And you said, you said there's another volunteer with you who was a nurse. Were there any other Peace Corps volunteers in the town or did they?

WEBER: [00:19:11] There was one other Peace Corps volunteer in the town that was working on fisheries. He basically worked on fisheries and tried to introduce a project of growing, setting up ponds for growing tilapia. It really was not very practical.

MICHAELS: [00:19:39] I have a feeling that Peace Corps ultimately learned that some places you could do that and some places you really can't do that, it doesn't make sense.

WEBER: [00:19:45] There's a lot of things that we should have thought about that sort of needs some help because the whole idea of building privies in this area is probably absurd. I know from my recent experiences in Peru that this is on a large flooded area called the Pantanal, which floods annually and the city would actually flood annually also. The town of

Santo Antônio do Leverger so the plaza and the privies would be flooded once a year.

MICHAELS: [00:20:16] How would people, I mean, they just sort of coped with it, it's that time of the year, it's going to be over soon. The water will go down.

WEBER: [00:20:22] Yes.

MICHAELS: [00:20:23] Well, then how do they ever ultimately, because didn't the well get polluted then?

WEBER: [00:20:29] The deep well did not get polluted, but it probably has potential to be polluted because they used plastic pipe, for one thing. And there would be some seepage as that system gets old. And we never really dealt with that.

MICHAELS: [00:20:46] Well, how did, I mean, were they ever? Did they ever? I don't want, say, joined the modern world, but did they ever change their sanitation habits? It is a tough one, and it's still a tough one in most of the world, getting people to. I mean, where I was, I was in an urban area, so it wasn't such an issue, but it was sort of an issue that the schools did not have pit latrines. And when I was serving, they wanted to introduce lined pumpable pit latrines, but to line a latrine, you sort of like dig a deep narrow hole. Then what put bricks in there? You know, it should have something where you could just like drop a liner in, like a metal or a plastic liner, but that wasn't what they were doing. And so that's why I'm wondering, you know, you said you have to dig a latrine, but if it's going to get flooded.

WEBER: [00:21:35] I think that maybe be a lot of latrines that were built wholly above the, not above the water table, but above the area that is absolutely flooded. That they probably did get in the water table came up to the inside.

MICHAELS: [00:21:52] Oh, so how did they?

WEBER: [00:21:54] I mean, it was not a practical thing. They should have invented something, thought of something else.

MICHAELS: [00:22:01] But it wasn't thought of by people, people who do this kind of thing, they're theorists. They don't actually go and see how this is going to work.

FAGAN: [00:22:09] One type fits all.

WEBER: [00:22:10] It is one type fits all. This was for areas that are a little drier. So it may have helped, but it may not have. It may have been harmful. It may have been better to allow the fecal material and the waste material to be purified by the sun and just leave the old system going on.

MICHAELS: [00:22:33] Yeah, really.

WEBER: [00:22:34] We're in the same situation with the people we work with today, that they don't build privies. They don't like privies. They think they stink and it's a bad idea.

MICHAELS: [00:22:44] So they just go out in the woods?

WEBER: [00:22:45] They just go out into the woods and they don't bury it. But the dung beetles and the sun cure the problem within a couple hours.

MICHAELS: [00:22:55] And as long as they don't become a very densely populated, it shouldn't.

WEBER: [00:22:59] It shouldn't be bad. And when they do build privies for visitors like us and they become obnoxious places very quickly, and the fecal material stays in the dark and in moisture and keeps it slippery, becomes a fly area. The solution is not to build privies there. It would be all right to have an aboveground toilet system with a sewage system.

MICHAELS: [00:23:24] Or composting system.

WEBER: [00:23:26] Composting won't work because the compost is going to get flooded.

MICHAELS: [00:23:30] No, no, they have these. They have these toilets now where you could turn it over. You put straw in too and then there's a gas pipe in between that and the gas pipe.

WEBER: [00:23:40] Something like that would probably work if they kept it above the water. But it's a flooded area again and annual flooding. They know exactly how high the water is going to come. The water would come right up to the doorsteps of these houses. And I mentioned the village was maybe 400 years old and it probably was built on an Indian village before that.

MICHAELS: [00:24:05] So they knew, I mean, they knew where to put the house.

WEBER: [00:24:07] The houses have been there, and the Pantanal is a very large area that is the size of half of Illinois so that when it gets flooded, the water keeps going out and out, and they know that it's not going to come up more than two more inches. And the houses never got flooded, so you could put the privies in localities that would not be flooded, but they'd still be down into the water table.

MICHAELS: [00:24:39] So there's about 50 of you that started. Did they all serve the full two years or did those are a lot of people dropping out?

WEBER: [00:24:47] In those days there was something called deselection.

MICHAELS: [00:24:50] Oh, really? I mean, where the country director would come and send you out?

WEBER: [00:24:54] No, it wasn't the country director. It was in the training program. Psychologists and administrative people would decide that some people were not appropriate and they were told they have to leave.



MICHAELS: [00:25:10] And this is in training, though, this wasn't actually when you were in-country?

WEBER: [00:25:14] It was probably 30 percent of the people that were so-called deselected. I don't quite understand the procedure, why this was good, a good system or not. And there were still people that had problems in the field, at least two cases where people went mildly, had mild mental problems.

MICHAELS: [00:25:44] They weren't deselected because of the clinical reasons like he's a communist we don't want nobody in the field like that.

WEBER: [00:25:51] This was the Johnson administration. The Vietnam War hadn't even really started up. The country was not all that worried about communism, I don't think at that point in time. But it is a concern that the people would not produce a positive view of the United States, I think, that they wanted people that were going to be content there and that could interact and they can be positive role models.

MICHAELS: [00:26:29] Was there any minorities in your group?

WEBER: [00:26:36] I'd have to look at the flier. It certainly was, uh, there must have been at least one or two Blacks. Maybe one or two Hispanics, but certainly a minority again. Most everyone was college educated, so it was, uh, at that point in time most people who are college educated would tend to be white.

MICHAELS: [00:27:09] Yeah, that's true. So how was it adjusting for you? How long did it take you before you felt? Or did you never feel that you were in the right place? Or did you feel immediately that you were in the right place?

WEBER: [00:27:22] I felt comfortable right from the very beginning, and felt comfortable all the time.

MICHAELS: [00:27:26] That's great.

WEBER: [00:27:27] I thought it was a that I was trying to do something that was worthwhile, and I certainly felt that I was gaining.

MICHAELS: [00:27:34] Did you feel that your anthropological education was helpful in helping you understand?

WEBER: [00:27:40] No, really. My anthropological education didn't help very much. I was really trained as an archeologist, and I should have been even a little bit more, taken on more observation of the situation in terms of archeology. There are several things that were interesting, in hindsight, that should have been investigated archeologically. And anthropologically I did work a little bit with a potter on some weekends and she was probably a potter in the native Bororo tradition, the Native Americans that were living at that site for a long, long time, though she didn't recognize herself as being Indian but the pottery this very much in the style of the Bororo.

MICHAELS: [00:28:35] Did you bring some of that back?

WEBER: [00:28:36] I have a little bit that I brought back, and we did build a kiln for her, which probably was a bad idea too.

MICHAELS: [00:28:45] Why do you say that?

WEBER: [00:28:46] I thought it was interesting because I had the directions for doing it, but it changed the pottery's style.

MICHAELS: [00:28:52] Oh, really? How was she firing stuff?

WEBER: [00:28:56] She fired it by open fire, which was fully adequate. And we introduced a few forms that were not traditional.

FAGAN: [00:29:06] Like a piggy bank or something?

MICHAELS: [00:29:07] Well, you know, but the thing is, I mean, art does evolve and people are influenced by other things that they see.

WEBER: [00:29:14] It was actually a dead-end style anyway. She didn't have any apprentices and she was 80-ish, so quite quite old. I didn't realize at the time that she was probably of the Bororo tradition, but looking back, I could see the difference. And then also, some of these villages were probably Bororo villages too, see circular villages. Modern villages but they're on circular mountains. [alarm rings]

FAGAN: [00:29:47] Time's up, huh?

MICHAELS: [00:29:50] We're going to turn the tape over. Yeah, go ahead. You're talking about the Bororo.

WEBER: [00:29:57] It was an area occupied by the Bororo a long time ago, and some of the villages were probably on Bororo sites, were established on them. That's partially the reason that they had already developed just above the waterline, because the old sites were above the waterline. And the Bororo didn't make much pottery, but they did do a little potting. And I should have looked for some archaeological pots, pottery or signs of sites. I should have looked a little bit more into making a ring shaped villages into modern villages.

MICHAELS: [00:30:33] Why do you think you didn't do it at the time? You were doing other things, right?

WEBER: [00:30:35] I was doing other things that seemed important to me at the time, and I suppose archeology doesn't have too much importance to them, but you could have guided it in that direction. The other thing was that when they were putting in the water pipeline, they did hit a cemetery. And they dug up some skeleton material, which I never really saw. I probably could have seen if I wanted to. People there were very superstitious about skeletal material, but it could well have been. It wasn't necessarily Portuguese skeletal material.

MICHAELS: [00:31:12] It was probably Indian.

WEBER: [00:31:13] It could have been Indian, and we don't have any idea if it was or was not now.

MICHAELS: [00:31:17] Of course, back then there wasn't as many ways of testing as there are now.

WEBER: [00:31:22] We could have probably noticed by looking at them. We probably could have found out.

FAGAN: [00:31:27] At least facial characteristics.

WEBER: [00:31:29] There would have been some cultural items, probably if they were white.

FAGAN: [00:31:33] Or black slaves.

WEBER: [00:31:35] Whoever they were, they would have been some data that was there and it was never really checked out. I knew of it, but I didn't take the time to do it because I was doing health post work. It has become a fairly interesting area for archeology in the last 10 years. Back then, it was not really thought about.

MICHAELS: [00:32:02] Well, I think that people are sort of scrambling to find stuff before it gets totally destroyed. What was the most valuable thing you think that you learned while you were there, either about life or coping or your future plans or anything?

WEBER: [00:32:23] I suppose I matured a little bit there. I did decide to come back and go to graduate school in particularly Brazilian archeology. I found out, or you're told that in anthropology, but you find out that people are pretty intelligent and ingenious in their own environment and that if you go in there and attempt to change things, you certainly have to change it along the lines that they're willing to accept. You have to really work with them, and that you're likely to learn at least as much as they're going to learn. So that, I suppose, had made a. It certainly made me less radical if that were radical at all. Probably never was very radical.

MICHAELS: [00:33:21] You tried it politically or socially?

WEBER: [00:33:24] Socially, but I thought their life was really pretty, pretty good to begin with. They could be, the life expectancy was probably half of mine. They were fairly content. They ate fairly well. They smiled just as much as anyone smiles in this country and didn't know that they were poor. Probably weren't poor, they certainly weren't poor mentally.

MICHAELS: [00:33:53] You know, we went we went to a very rural village once while we were in training, which was in-country in Malawi. And I remember one of my fellow volunteers who had no background in development or culture or anything say, you know, these people, they have a pretty good life. They farm, you know, they have a good social life here. Their water is pretty decent. They're relatively healthy. All things considered, you know, it's like, what are we doing here? And I think in America, we have this view that people are so wretched in so many places. And I think actually there's more like Fanone said, they're more rich in the urban areas where they don't have access than in the rural areas.

WEBER: [00:34:38] There were people that were fairly, really, really poor. I mean, were concerned about where they were going to get their next meal. But there are definitely a minority and people did help them to some degree. There were children that were going to die because of mostly parasites and poor health practices. There were people with tuberculosis. There are people that rotten teeth. There were people with as many as five or six types of parasites in their intestines, all at the same time. Almost everyone was infected in some way the parasites things. Things could have been better. But still, there weren't all that bad, either. And in terms of cheerfulness and politeness. They were pretty good about that. Much more so than you'd find in the Chicago street today.

MICHAELS: [00:35:50] Did they have a formal education system there?

WEBER: [00:35:54] There was a Catholic school. Everyone was required to go to. There's school uniforms, and I suppose they went to at least the fourth or fifth grade.

FAGAN: [00:36:11] Was it a state school or was it tied to the church?

WEBER: [00:36:13] It was tied with the church but it still was a state school. It was funded by the government, by the state of Mato Grosso.

MICHAELS: [00:36:23] You know, I actually, when I was in Kenya, and I think it's true most of, well, the colonial countries is that they couldn't afford to build schools, that they'd make some sort of agreement with some sort of mission that was providing schools. And you got to look at it this way. At least they're getting they're getting some education, no matter how, you know, there you go. So there's that you got you got to start somewhere and you can't just say, oh, well, you know, I'm rich and not have anything.

WEBER: [00:36:52] It was a dominantly Catholic area. There were some Protestant groups, but they're really, really a minority. And I suspect their kids probably went to Catholic schools, too.

MICHAELS: [00:37:04] Did your friends or anybody send you anything that you really that you remember that that they sent, like, oh wow, this is great. I'll tell you, once somebody sent me Cracker Jack and I didn't realize how sweet it was, but it was so cloyingly sweet. I wasn't used to it. Somebody sent me shorts. I thought, what were they thinking? I told them, you have to wear a dress. And I ended up, well, auctioning off the shorts because some of my counterparts wanted the shorts.

WEBER: [00:37:38] I can't think of anything that I got.

MICHAELS: [00:37:39] Nothing. Did you bring anything with you that you were glad you brought? Or was there anything you didn't bring that you wish you had brought?

WEBER: [00:37:48] I did bring a slide projector, which was kind of nice, so I could have slideshows. But when there was electricity.

FAGAN: [00:37:54] I thought that would be [inaudible].

WEBER: [00:37:57] Actually, I purchased it in in San Paulo.

MICHAELS: [00:37:59] Really? And you had slides that you showed?

WEBER: [00:38:02] Yes.

FAGAN: [00:38:03] Health slides or something else?

WEBER: [00:38:04] Just slides that I took. People always love to see photographs of themselves and that always attracts people. And so it was easy to do. I didn't bring any fishing equipment myself. I should have had some fishing equipment because it was an activity that I did do, and people occasionally go out as a group and go fishing in the evening sometimes.

MICHAELS: [00:38:30] They fish with nets or they fished with worms?

WEBER: [00:38:33] Just hook and line. The commercial fishing was done with nets. Santo Antônio do Leverger was also a supplier of fish to other parts of Brazil. They would catch fish as many as maybe as much as a ton of fish in a single netting, and they had an ice factory in the town and they would pack the fish in ice and put them on a truck and drive them to other states.

FAGAN: [00:39:10] I wasn't even familiar with them. You bought a fish smoker, did you try to use that?

MICHAELS: [00:39:14] For preserving it?

WEBER: [00:39:20] For preserving fish. It was fairly difficult to preserve them. Ice was very expensive. It was fine for transporting the fish out.

MICHAELS: [00:39:29] I mean, you had to do grocery shopping every day, right?

WEBER: [00:39:32] Well, I ate at the pension all the time. The meals were prepared.

MICHAELS: [00:39:36] So you didn't cook the whole time you were there?

WEBER: [00:39:37] Whole time.

FAGAN: [00:39:39] What a guy.

WEBER: [00:39:41] I did have a fish smoker, though, and I thought that I could introduce smoked fish.

MICHAELS: [00:39:46] And you had had experience smoking fish?

WEBER: [00:39:49] I did, yeah. My dad used to always smoke fish. It really was quite successful, I thought. But I never really got other people interested in it.

MICHAELS: [00:39:59] They didn't like the flavor, or did they not like the smell?

WEBER: [00:40:03] I'm not sure why they didn't. I just did it by example. I smoked fish myself and served it to people. And it was preserved for as long as six to eight weeks perfectly all right. And that was quite, would have been quite helpful I would think.

MICHAELS: [00:40:22] You know, when I was, one of my fellow volunteers was trying to institute more energy efficient cooking. And so he tried to introduce solar cooking. But the Malawians didn't like the flavor because it came out to dry, and they like things like sort of fried in oil. They like the oil. They felt that fat made it healthier. And of course, they really did need the fat because really, they spent all their time farming, very physically intensive. But so that solar cooking really didn't catch on.

WEBER: [00:40:55] For me, this smoked pacu was just as good as smoked salmon here. It was an extremely good delicacy.

MICHAELS: [00:41:03] Nobody liked it?

WEBER: [00:41:05] Nobody liked it, even though it's just not the taste that they wanted.



MICHAELS: [00:41:11] Did you miss anything in the United States or did you miss anything that was considered newsworthy now, that, you know, culturally?

WEBER: [00:41:20] Sort of missed the whole Vietnam War.

MICHAELS: [00:41:25] It was really on TV every night, actually. You probably heard about that, right?

WEBER: [00:41:29] I knew that was going on and I was probably defensive. I thought that we thought we were doing the right thing and the government is probably right at the time.

MICHAELS: [00:41:41] Until we learned that we were really killing a whole bunch of innocent people.

WEBER: [00:41:46] I just sort of, I wasn't didn't rave about the war, but I.

MICHAELS: [00:41:51] Thought they were fighting communism.

WEBER: [00:41:53] I took the position that we were trying to do what was right and what was honest and just and I didn't realize that we weren't.

MICHAELS: [00:42:05] Yeah, we were so naive back then, weren't we?

WEBER: [00:42:08] I think it was naivety. Yes.

MICHAELS: [00:42:12] Now, have you gone back to your village?

WEBER: [00:42:14] I have not been back. I don't think anyone would be alive there. It would be kind of disappointing now.

MICHAELS: [00:42:22] Actually even where I was because of AIDS, I mean, very few of the people that I knew then, unless they got out of the country, are still alive.

WEBER: [00:42:32] I suspect there be no one that would remember me.

MICHAELS: [00:42:36] But wouldn't you want to go back and see what the village looks like now or if things have improved?

WEBER: [00:42:41] I have other places that I'd rather go to. I don't think things are probably improved really to the better. There's probably paved roads and architecturally a little better and probably more extreme class differentiation, I suspect, yeah.

MICHAELS: [00:43:00] And guns too. I think it's.

WEBER: [00:43:02] Oh, there were guns there already. There were at least two murders while I was there. One was just a shooting of a photographer that was impolite to someone and the other one was a knifing, and that was just a drunken sort of thing.

MICHAELS: [00:43:24] Were any volunteers killed while you were?

WEBER: [00:43:29] There's really not that much danger. It's Brazilians killing Brazilians.

MICHAELS: [00:43:36] No, I mean, well, we had several volunteers who were killed in traffic accidents.

WEBER: [00:43:41] Um, none that I know of. I don't think anyone was killed or died in the field in that period of time. There might have been some later but I would have heard about it I'm sure and I have not.

MICHAELS: [00:43:51] Are you in touch with any of your Peace Corps group?

WEBER: [00:43:53] No. I've really adapted in every area that I work with so that I'm in South America, but I probably don't have time to work with these people in Brazil and to do it, and I have much closer ties and kinship ties. I know that I'm respected.

MICHAELS: [00:44:12] How was it that you ended up then in Peru?

WEBER: [00:44:16] It has to do with my education, that I wanted to do tropical forest archeology, ideally in Brazil at the time. I came back to the United States and there were two places where I could go to school where people were working in the area. One was the Indiana, University of Indiana, and one was the University of Illinois. And I chose the University of Illinois, and it turned out that instead of working in Brazil, I worked on the upper part of the Amazon, which is in Peru. And that introduced me to the people that I work with today, who are not nearly as state oriented as the people in Brazil. Brazil, they were Western. They spoke Portuguese. They didn't think that they were Native Americans. They thought that they were Portuguese, Brazilian people. And the people that I work with in Peru are indigenous people. They do speak their native language and they maintain their native culture. And it's a much warmer environment. Because it's a smaller tribal type society rather than a kind of a political system. Santo Antônio do Leverger had a perfecto, kind of like a mayor. And there were elections politics, elections for president, and people were very vehement about who they wanted to vote for or who they didn't want to vote for. It wasn't a kinship-based society. Well, today we work with, I work with kinship-based system society. The people in Brazil would not consider me a relative, and in Peru I get addressed as a relative. It's just different, it's a lot more rewarding to work in Peru.

MICHAELS: [00:46:39] Did you get to travel around Brazil?

WEBER: [00:46:42] I did travel quite a bit around Brazil. You get a period of time where you were at that time, you get vacation times and I managed to get to a certainly Sao Paulo and Rio. But I also went around to Montevideo, through Argentina into Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Venezuela, Colombia. The Amazon.

MICHAELS: [00:47:14] You really went all over the continent! Did you get to see other volunteers in their projects or you just went to wherever you want, you just want to see the rest of the country?

WEBER: [00:47:20] The country. I went with other volunteers.

MICHAELS: [00:47:24] Did you know of anybody who felt that they made an impact? Or, uh, you know, or they decided, you know, this is a waste of time. What are they doing here? There's a lot of that. I mean, you know what they say, they say that volunteers that serve in Asia come back more mystical and volunteers that serve in Latin America come back more political, and volunteers that serve in Africa come back more cynical, you know? So there's the world. And I'm wondering, I mean, do you think that most volunteers were radicalized or politicized by being in?

WEBER: [00:48:05] No, I don't think they're radicalized or politicized at all. I think most of them didn't create great things or anything special, but they probably did do the role of saying that Americans are humans too.

MICHAELS: [00:48:26] And we don't know everything.

WEBER: [00:48:27] We don't know everything, and they are just like the folk. And I think that's probably was the most important message that we should have gotten across and that we should be still getting it across, I think.

MICHAELS: [00:48:44] Oh no, I think unfortunately, there's still a lot of Americans that still think that we have something to offer the rest of the world. We have the market cornered on innovation and education. And I mean, I'm amazed at the number, that when I was at Peace Corps and that I still meet, who really think that we know how things should be.

WEBER: [00:49:04] I think that a lot of people that believe they know how things should be. And our president is an example. It doesn't work. It doesn't have long lasting effects. And it turns people against you.

MICHAELS: [00:49:21] There you go. You said you brought back some pottery. Anything else that you brought back that?

FAGAN: [00:49:26] Wooden bowls.

WEBER: [00:49:27] Cheese from San Paolo. Some wooden bowls. Quite a few hammocks, because the people hand wove their hammocks on standing

upright looms, a very slow process. They spent a month making a hammock, and I brought back three of those.

MICHAELS: [00:49:52] Have you slept in them?

WEBER: [00:49:55] I've slept in hammocks, but I am not accustomed to sleeping in a hammock. It's not something I like to sleep in. It's all right to rest in them. But many Brazilians in that area slept in hammocks. There have been I'm sure that it's probably just good that you don't live too long. I'm sure that causes back problems and all sorts of things. It must do things to your skeletal system. No, they don't, they do tend to sneak in at a horizontal position because they sleep diagonally in the hammocks. But still, you're rolled a bit.

MICHAELS: [00:50:37] Oh yeah, I guess that's true.

WEBER: [00:50:39] I suspect that it's, I suspect it's not too good, I don't know. I can't think of anything that, any reports from the CDC.

MICHAELS: [00:50:48] Well, you extended. What made you decide to extend?

WEBER: [00:50:54] I was avoiding the draft.

MICHAELS: [00:50:56] So that's ultimately what it was?

WEBER: [00:51:00] It's pleasant to be there, but I certainly didn't want to go to Vietnam at that point in time.

MICHAELS: [00:51:06] And you feel that if you or you were told that if you went back to the U.S., you would be drafted?

WEBER: [00:51:10] I actually was drafted out of the Peace Corps. And so I didn't finish that whole last year. I came back and failed the physical examination, and they didn't want to send me back to Brazil. So they had another couple of weeks or so.

MICHAELS: [00:51:27] Oh, I see. Did that happen to a lot of volunteers?

WEBER: [00:51:33] I don't think there are many people drafted out of the Peace Corps.

MICHAELS: [00:51:35] They sent you the letter while you were in your village?

WEBER: [00:51:39] Yeah.

MICHAELS: [00:51:40] They found you or they asked your parents where you were?

WEBER: [00:51:42] I think they went through my parents, my parents forwarded the letter. There was some sort of conference and talking with the administration in Cuiaba. It was agreed that I had to go back and it took a little bit of time to communicate and everything. It was probably all right, and I had been there long enough. I think I gave enough. I'm sure that I was contributing, or at least you're contributing your salary and your money that you receive, your subsistence. So it's getting some money into the economy that way. And I had a garden growing down in the health post kind of demonstration, demonstration of vegetables, basically for people who use vegetables and plants.

MICHAELS: [00:52:43] Were they not generally planting vegetables?

WEBER: [00:52:47] There's some planting, but not to the extent that I was. I planted quite a lot.

MICHAELS: [00:52:54] So where were they getting most of their food?

WEBER: [00:52:57] It's mostly manioc. Manioc grows quite well. Okra grew quite well.

MICHAELS: [00:53:05] That's sort of a starchy diet, huh?

WEBER: [00:53:08] Of course. A little bit of animal protein. Fishing was available. Fish was available. Some bananas were available. Watermelons were growing and our peaches and things. Some peanuts.

FAGAN: [00:53:28] Turtles?

WEBER: [00:53:29] Wasn't much turtles, many turtles. A little bit of turtle eating probably, but the turtle was not real important. Alligator was, which I was surprised.

MICHAELS: [00:53:39] There's a lot of alligators?

WEBER: [00:53:40] There was at that point. There probably aren't now. They hunted alligator for skin. But they didn't, I guess they weren't real real common. But the diet was, manioc was the easiest thing to grow, and some people just basically ate manioc as their diet.

MICHAELS: [00:54:00] Filling.

WEBER: [00:54:04] It's filling, but not terribly nutritious.

MICHAELS: [00:54:10] But you had had experience growing, having a vegetable garden, before you were in Peace Corps?

WEBER: [00:54:17] Yes, and they also had us planting a little bit in the Peace Corps. And you also raised rabbits in the Peace Corps.

MICHAELS: [00:54:28] How did rabbits do there?

WEBER: [00:54:29] We didn't try rabbits actually. I tried guinea pigs for a while, but they never really did very well in Brazil.

MICHAELS: [00:54:38] Really. You would think that they're pretty hardy little rodents.

WEBER: [00:54:41] Yeah, guinea pigs should have done all right. I never really ate one even.

MICHAELS: [00:54:45] I can't imagine there's much to eat. I mean, don't they eat them in Peru?

WEBER: [00:54:51] I had guinea pig in Peru. It's not my much favorite dish, similar to rabbit.

MICHAELS: [00:54:54] I was going to say Cornish hen.

WEBER: [00:55:00] Boney and there's not a lot of meat on them, so it's not something that I would.

FAGAN: [00:55:04] I once saw something in Spanish like, you know, 101 guinea pig recipes or something.

MICHAELS: [00:55:11] Oh, in the store? I know there's, so they thought it was interesting that you would grow these things. But you know, I can tell you when in my yard in Blantyre, there is a weed. I forgot what it was called, but it was amaranth, basically. And my neighbors told me that the very poor people eat this. It was a very high protein, you know, dark leafed.

WEBER: [00:55:40] Amaranth is a domesticated crop. There's a domesticated variety.

MICHAELS: [00:55:43] Oh, I know, it was called *bonongwe*. That's what is was called, *bonongwe* in Malawi. And so I cook it into like a stew type of thing. Although it came down to when I got into the swing of things, if I really wanted protein like I might have eggs a couple of times a week, I might have beans, but basically on the weekends I went and visited somebody who raised chickens, you know, or might have had goat or something like that because it was just me and I wasn't going to cook like that. But you say you didn't really cook at all. You just went, somebody else prepared the meal. Whatever it was, it was fine with you.

WEBER: [00:56:16] Yes.

MICHAELS: [00:56:17] Because somebody else cooked, it was no hassle.

WEBER: [00:56:21] It was fairly good cooking. It was at the probably only restaurant hotel in the town. The fish were really quite good.



MICHAELS: [00:56:29] Did they cook your vegetables?

WEBER: [00:56:35] Yes. A little bit. Most of the vegetables I didn't take for myself and the stuff that grew well was things like mustard greens, which are probably nutritious, but they grow easily. Actually, tomatoes did pretty well. They were good tomatoes.

FAGAN: [00:56:51] You gave those away to the community?

WEBER: [00:56:53] Usually to the health post people. The one two, three, four, five attendants at the health sites.

MICHAELS: [00:57:06] But that wasn't generally part of the diet where you were, tomatoes?

WEBER: [00:57:11] Tomatoes were there that they were clearly not very common and they really grew pretty easily in the soil. The soils weren't very good and I shouldn't have probably, I should have known more about soils, the proper places to plant.

MICHAELS: [00:57:27] Now we know what we should have known, you know, but we didn't know that then it was just like one big world. We're sort of coming to the end of this. Is anything you want to you want to say that I didn't ask you about, that you can think of?

WEBER: [00:57:44] I really can't think of anything special. Anything I should say, Nancy? Overall, I think it's a positive experience, I think that ought to be continuing. And I think that it probably helps Americans really very much. A lot of people I know are Peace Corps volunteers and I tend to be sympathetic that individual people know.

MICHAELS: [00:58:10] You know, that's the thing, that we learn more about the world because we're willing to go and actually live in a place. We're not tourists, you know, we just, you know. You get you get a better feel for a place when you spend some time there and you don't feel more as a visitor, you feel like you're actually living there.

WEBER: [00:58:26] I think it makes kinder, more humane people. Other people that can be rather egocentric and everything.

FAGAN: [00:58:35] An example is Tom Meyers was never part of the Peace Corps.

WEBER: [00:58:40] No, he was.

MICHAELS: [00:58:45] They are anthropologists?

WEBER: [00:58:46] Yeah, a lot of anthropologists have had Peace Corps.

FAGAN: [00:58:49] I noticed that. I know when I go to conferences and stuff and so many have started out as Peace Corps volunteers, then they decided to go to graduate school.

WEBER: [00:58:57] And I don't think we did much harm or hurt the economy very much in the United States, but it's probably been very beneficial to people that go and come back here. I think it's uplifting. I wish we could try a little bit harder in sending people and I think we probably shouldn't just worry about the technology, but we tend to want to send doctors and accountants and people that promote maybe things that are not necessary to promote because they just need humanists, people that would like to do some good and contribute and let them know that they can try and that it's not too easy.

FAGAN: [00:59:54] Back in the late '70s, let's say '76, I think. My first brother-in-law, my first set of brother-in-law from my first marriage, and he had been in the Peace Corps in Nicaragua. And to me, I think in hindsight he was doing a lot of things wrong, like he would go and spend his evenings with, you know, basically with the landlords, with the gentry, each night, as opposed to, you know. They were basically health post workers or his wife partly was, you know, childcare and birth control. But then they spend the evenings, you know, with the hotshots. It was sort of like a mixed message.

WEBER: [01:00:41] It's certainly possible to do that because you are prestigious.

FAGAN: [01:00:44] Yeah, I can see like if you, maybe once a month. But I think it got to a point too cozy.

WEBER: [01:00:50] It raises the class status of people.

MICHAELS: [01:00:51] But I mean, that's Americans, and you just don't. I mean, they're getting a view of real Americans, and that's how some Americans are. When I was in country, there's a group coming in. They immediately joined, basically, the health clubs and would go swimming all the time. I thought, my god.

FAGAN: [01:01:10] It's like, you know, you know, the British Raj where you're working in India, but then you spend your evenings in the club away from everybody, you know?

MICHAELS: [01:01:20] But those are Americans, too. Yeah. You know, well.

[END OF INTERVIEW]