

Jonathan Pearson Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Jonathan Pearson served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Micronesia from 1987 to 1989 as a teacher.

Access

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Oral History Interview

with

Jonathan Pearson

November 18, 2016
Washington, D.C.

By Evelyn Ganzglass

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

GANZGLASS: [00:00:02] All right. I'm Evelyn Ganzglass, and I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Somalia from 1966 to 1968. And I am interviewing Jonathan Pearson, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Micronesia from 1987 to 1989. And he was in an education community development project. With that, let me ask you my usual first question. Why did you join the Peace Corps?

PEARSON: [00:00:34] I joined the Peace Corps at a slightly older age than I think sometimes people often have the misconception that everybody who joins the Peace Corps, uh, joins straight out of college. I joined, uh, in my late 20s after an interesting, interesting route that brought me to the Peace Corps. That I always had a, I was brought up in a family that, um, had a commitment to the idea of service, whether I grew up, uh, my parents were, uh, were leaders of 4-H clubs. My, uh. So I got the involvement in doing community service projects, volunteer projects. That was kind of instilled in me at an early age.

PEARSON: [00:01:30] And when I was at, in college, and as I started, uh, moving through my college years and started to think about the next step after graduation, I thought about, well, maybe I should enter into service. And I thought, well, maybe I could do the Peace Corps. And I said, no, no, absolutely not. And I said that right away. And the thought I had at the time was I don't want to go overseas. I'd never traveled overseas. Maybe I'd been to Canada once.

GANZGLASS: [00:02:05] Where are you from?

PEARSON: [00:02:06] I'm from Connecticut. I was growing up in Connecticut. I went to college and I'm a graduate of Boston College. I, so I was a New Englander and had never traveled overseas. And the thought of going overseas for two years just seemed daunting and out of the question. So I thought about becoming a VISTA volunteer. Um. And I applied for VISTA, but at the same time I was applying for other jobs in my field of work. I was a mass communications, broadcast communications major. I did get a job, um, and pursued that job, which was also in Connecticut, and worked there for about 6 or 7 years.

PEARSON: [00:02:50] And then, then the idea of serving again, I think it was a combination of a couple of things. It was having been at a job for a seven year period and starting to feel the urge to move on to something else. And I distinctly remember the trigger for me was a television commercial that, um, I was sitting at home, didn't have any, any clear plans or directions. I had been applying for other positions in other cities and, and then this ad came on about joining the Peace Corps. And it made me think about it again, and it made me think about serving again.

PEARSON: [00:03:28] I decided to apply then. I think I felt over the, uh, feeling over the, uh, the, the whether it was fear or just trepidation or just, just concern of whether I could, whether I could do it or not. And then I know this will sound kind of strange. And, um, I went on a vacation trip to the Bahamas, and this was all during this period of kind of assessing where I was and what I wanted to do. And for those who've been to the

Caribbean islands, and there are some Peace Corps volunteer station, programs in some of those islands. But in the Bahamas, like so many people that travel there, there's a very, you know, area near the beaches that's all commercial and all modern and everything.

GANZGLASS: [00:04:17] And then there's the rest of it.

PEARSON: [00:04:18] And then there's the rest of it. Yeah. And, and so what I, um, while I was on that trip, I'd been thinking about, you know, my next steps in life. And I said, well, let me just go take a walk, uh, and walk outside of the downtown area. So I just got on a road and walked for about maybe 2 or 3 miles and, um, and, uh, and obviously the, the, the, the environment changed. But as I walked, I said this feels right. This feels comfortable. And that was another kind of triggering moment that said, yeah, I think I'm ready to do this. And I applied and was fortunately selected to serve. So that's really how I got involved.

GANZGLASS: [00:05:05] And they came and said Micronesia is it, or how did that happen?

PEARSON: [00:05:09] Well, um, that's another interesting, uh, story, too, in a sense, in that I had a, um. Yeah. It was another interesting situation with how I ended up in Micronesia. I had a really good interview process with a really great recruiter up in Boston, who really took a liking to me. Uh, and he first offered me a position in, um. And I don't remember the country, but it was in central South America, and it was a position that opened up and, uh, it was in forestry. And so I called him up and said, gee, I'm glad to get this offer, but forestry? And, and he made the assumption that, well, you were in 4-H.

PEARSON: [00:05:58] And just thinking about what, what that might entail. And, and I just didn't feel again right, that that was the best fit for me. When I applied, like so many volunteers do, I said I'll go anywhere. Um, and so I took the chance and I talked it over with them about, well, I'm not, I'm just not sure if that's going to be in my best interest or especially in the best interest of where I was going. So we agreed that I would turn down that offer and wait and hopefully see if something else emerged.

And then indeed, a couple of other opportunities emerged. One was, uh, one was Benin in West Africa and the other was Micronesia.

PEARSON: [00:06:46] And, uh, and again, to be perfectly honest, one, one of the big factors. There were a couple of factors. The less embarrassing factor was that I, when, as I thought about it and thought about the length of travel and the distance and everything that, that traveling to Africa, it was something in the future that seemed more plausible than the distance to try to go from the eastern coast of the United States all the way half, literally halfway across the world to a small Pacific island nations. But the other factor that's rather embarrassing was as I grew up in life I had this fear of snakes. And then I thought about it and said, well, what if I'm in Micronesia or where most of the islands.

GANZGLASS: [00:07:35] I was going to say, there's snakes in Micronesia.

PEARSON: [00:07:36] They're, in some places there are. But in many places, and at least at the time, there were not. Um, so, um, for a variety of factors, but some, uh, thoughtful and some kind of silly, I decided.

GANZGLASS: [00:07:51] I thought it was tropical island that attracted you again.

PEARSON: [00:07:55] Yeah, I, it was not. It wasn't that necessarily. No, I think it was, uh, it was just the idea of. And I don't remember what the Benin assignment was, but I knew that the Micronesia assignment was going to be related to education. So for a variety of reasons, there were some pretty good fits there and I, uh.

GANZGLASS: [00:08:16] So then where were you trained?

PEARSON: [00:08:19] So we were trained, um. It was a really great experience. We were a group that first of all, um, while it's not done anymore, we had a session called CAST, which brought us all together stateside. I don't remember what the acronym stood for, but it was a, uh, experience in which, uh. There were approximately 40 in our group. Uh, and we all came together actually in Luray, Virginia, uh, for, uh. And we stayed at a small hotel near the Luray Caverns, and we were

there for a week. We first all came together in a hotel in downtown Washington, and the next morning we were on a bus to Luray.

PEARSON: [00:09:05] And this was kind of a prep session where they informed us we were not yet selected to serve. We could still be deselected. Um, and it was it was a variety of activities, some of it related to getting to know more about the country and more about our assignments. Um, some of it being sessions to be thinking about your decision and really thinking through, is this what you want to be doing? Some of it, I'm sure, to socialize and connect with the other people that you would be in some form or another serving with. And then finally for the, the facilitators to assess us and decide whether they thought we were appropriate to be invited to serve.

PEARSON: [00:09:50] So we started in Luray. There were a couple of folks that either were not invited to go forward, or a couple that decided that it wasn't right for them at the time. We then met in, uh, came together about a month later in Los Angeles, and from there flew out and took the, at the time, Air Micronesia island hopper. That took us first to the, the capital of Micronesia in the, the island state of Pohnpei, where we, uh, were supposed to. Actually, actually, as I recall, though, we were supposed to do our training in Pohnpei and we eventually did, but because of some problems with, uh, either the airport or the ship, we had to fly first to the island state of, uh, what was known then as Truk and is now referred to as Chuuk.

PEARSON: [00:10:51] Uh, and we went to, uh, Chuuk, stayed there for a few days. Then we got on a boat that, uh, a ship that took us to Pohnpei, where we did about a month's worth of training at a place called the, uh, Pohnpei Agricultural Training Center. And, um, and then from there, we split up into our individual states. So about 8 or 9 of us, uh, then proceeded on, in my case, to Yap State in the Federated States of Micronesia, where we completed our, our, uh, training and, uh, did in particular then really focused in on culture, language, and so on.

GANZGLASS: [00:11:38] So how many states are there in Micronesia? I don't even know that.

PEARSON: [00:11:43] Yeah, there are four. Um, the four states are, are Yap, and, uh, Chuuk, Pohnpei, and Kosrae are the four states that make up the Federated States. And we had in my, in the volunteer group I was serving with, we had people going to three of those states. We did not have any volunteers going to Kosrae, which is the smallest of the four states. And then we also had um, uh, volunteers who went to the island of Palau, which is, uh, has I think been pretty common for Micronesia volunteers, is there are, there have been up until recently, I think Palau volunteers teaming up with volunteers who go to the Federated States of Micronesia.

GANZGLASS: [00:12:35] And I saw, um, that you were in a group that was both education and community development. What part were you part of or was it a combination?

PEARSON: [00:12:47] It was a combination. And we also had some fisheries volunteers within our group. Um, I'm trying to think. I don't recall if the other states had any others, but in our group that was in Yap. Uh, the other thing about, um, service on the islands at that time was that, um, a new group would come every year and it would alternate between, um, the main island of Yap, which is relatively significant in size, and then the outer islands, which are very, very small. And so I was part of a group that consisted mostly of volunteers that were going to the outer islands. And we had, I think, four within our group of about, I guess, ten who were staying on the main island as fisheries volunteers, but part of their work would bring them out and back and forth on the islands.

PEARSON: [00:13:43] Um, so we, uh, so we were trained, at that point. When we trained as a whole group in Pohnpei, everybody had training in education. We were basically assigned to be, um, ESL teachers. And so we got a lot of our, our teacher training, uh, as a, as a large group in Pohnpei. And then when we got to Yap, we started to get more of our training and language preparations as well as our community development, which in our case at the time was the promotion that was being suggested was community gardening. And so we had some training in that. And again, our, our friends, our colleagues who were

fisheries volunteers obviously were doing something slightly different. But, but, yeah, that's how it broke out.

GANZGLASS: [00:14:43] How was one trained in community gardening?

PEARSON: [00:14:46] Well, not so well. I think, uh, the training was, as a whole was great. The training and community development around community gardening had, um, a lot to be desired in my personal opinion. It was not my strong suit. Again, thinking back to, you know what I said earlier about being a forestry volunteer?

GANZGLASS: [00:15:14] Forestry volunteer.

PEARSON: [00:15:15] So gardening wasn't necessarily my strength either. Um, and it was, uh, but the good thing about the training was part of the training also included sessions with various individuals in the state government and, and other expats or other people from NGOs who we had sessions with to talk about resources and opportunities and so on. So, and the, and we had excellent language training. I think we felt as soon as we got, um, to our training area, we were, um, placed with host families. Um, so we were immediately immersed into, um, the culture.

PEARSON: [00:16:01] And it was very interesting to kind of be weaned away from our, our, our cohort of, of volunteers, because when we all came together, uh, all 40 of us in this first grouping of training in Pohnpei, we were all living, in essence, in a, in a school with a dormitory where we all had, had meals together and everything. And then when we went to our states, we were in a situation where now we were staying with sponsor families. We were on an island, though, where we would. So we were scattered about this one island, but then we were all coming together for, um, class and lunch and, uh.

GANZGLASS: [00:16:41] So they're small enough so you can come together that easily?

PEARSON: [00:16:45] That's right. Very much so. And then, um, so it was interesting. And then obviously the next step was when we all, um, after we were sworn in, going to our individual islands where we were the only volunteers there, um, for the most part. And, um, so it was, it was an interesting experience, the way that kind of worked its way out.

GANZGLASS: [00:17:09] So was that a conscious decision to do the weaning? I mean, this is such different training than, than I experienced or a lot of the earlier volunteers experienced.

PEARSON: [00:17:19] Yeah, I don't know if it was exactly, but I think there must have been. If it wasn't, it worked out well. And my guess is that it probably was something that was kind of thought. And, you know, certainly the thought of having once we got to this second phase of training, they really did want to have us with sponsor families because starting to integrate with your, your host families was going to be so essential, I think, to your well-being and your feeling, uh. Because I think, I think we're, in our circumstance again in certain cases, there's all sorts of challenging circumstances that volunteers face, whether it's, uh, uh, just areas where there might be higher levels of, of violent activity. There's some areas where, uh, there's a lot more challenges with diseases.

PEARSON: [00:18:17] Um, in the case of where I was, I think the biggest challenge we probably faced, it varied from place to place, but certainly isolation or just being kind of out there on your own was the one thing that probably was very critical. And I think so the idea of starting to get you used to the fact that, yeah, you're going to be, this is going to be your living circumstance for the next two years, and you're not going to be seeing your U.S. buddies every day by any stretch of the imagination. So get used to it, kind of.

GANZGLASS: [00:18:49] So how far was it? But you traveled by boat among the islands or how did you get?

PEARSON: [00:18:54] Yes. So, um, going back to when I learned about Micronesia, and it's one of the things that gives, puts it in perspective is

the area that we're talking about. It was described early on as being, it's an area where we were serving that if you, if you went from one end of Micronesia, uh, to the other end, the area is as big as the continental United States. But if you took the land mass of all the islands that compromise [comprise] Micronesia and you put them all together, it would be the size of the state of Rhode Island.

GANZGLASS: [00:19:33] Wow.

PEARSON: [00:19:34] So in my case, so these were islands that were very small, very, um.

GANZGLASS: [00:19:39] How many people lived on Yap?

PEARSON: [00:19:42] Uh, Yap, the main island probably had, I'm going to, I'm going to guess here, somewhere in the range of six to 8,000 people probably lived there.

GANZGLASS: [00:19:53] So you were in Yap, right?

PEARSON: [00:19:54] I was in that state, but I was on an outer island.

GANZGLASS: [00:19:58] Oh.

PEARSON: [00:19:58] The outer.

GANZGLASS: [00:19:58] So the state is not the island.

PEARSON: [00:20:00] Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:20:00] Oh.

PEARSON: [00:20:01] Yeah. So, so the state consisted of, in this case, the main island and then a whole series of.

GANZGLASS: [00:20:08] Series of small islands.

PEARSON: [00:20:09] Of small islands. Many of them inhabited, some of them uninhabited. But the outer islands varied in size. Um.

GANZGLASS: [00:20:18] And the one you are on was how big?

PEARSON: [00:20:20] The island I was sent to, uh, uh, and assigned to was called Lamotrek, which is, um, one of the, in, in the state of Yap when, and you, you alluded to this. Um, we would travel by ship to get out there. There was no airstrip even to this day. That island where I was doesn't, it's not big enough to take an airstrip there. So you, you had a string of islands, and Lamotrek was the next to the last in the chain going out. And you'd, the trip that we took, because it was again an island hopper servicing all the islands, it would take about anywhere from six, no, more like 7 to 10 days to get from Yap State to get all the way out.

GANZGLASS: [00:21:12] Wow.

PEARSON: [00:21:12] You know, stopping along the way, getting out to Lamotrek. The island I was on was one square mile. Um, you could walk around it in about an hour's time, and it had a population of about 300 people. And other islands that were out there were, some were smaller, some were a little larger. Uh, we did, part of our, when I was talking about our training as a group, um, of, of ten in Yap, we actually. There was an airstrip on the island of Ulithi, which is where we did our training, and that was an island that was, again, somewhat bigger and probably had a population of maybe I'm going to say five to 800. It's where they have a high school there for the outer island children, the, the high school students.

PEARSON: [00:22:04] So it's a, it's, it's, it's a. And, and you know, relatively speaking it seems really big compared to where I was and then. And then Yap the island, that had, uh, you know, some restaurants and, you know, hotels, you know, a few hotels. And everything seemed absolutely massive when, you know, by the time we worked our way back.

GANZGLASS: [00:22:27] So you were out there. Seven to 10 days to get there.

PEARSON: [00:22:30] Seven to 10 days to get there. Um, very crowded field trip ship with, uh, really quite a, uh, quite an experience because it's just, uh, it's just every day people. Um.

GANZGLASS: [00:22:45] So do you, are there sleepers or how does that?

PEARSON: [00:22:48] There were a few cabins, but you're most, you're basically sleeping on the deck. So when it gets, when the ship gets crowded. I remember one time I forget what island we stopped at, but I was, um, I kind of had my little, uh, my little mat, and I was. And I had a pillow I think. And I was sleeping on it, and it was relatively, it was relatively. I had some pretty decent space. And then I think I woke up at one point and there was just like a mass of humanity around me because.

PEARSON: [00:23:20] Because the next people that come on to get on to the next, the next ship, I think in part it was, there was another there's another island in the chain, uh, that's named Woleai, where they have the junior high school. And some of the traffic often is getting, getting families and students back. I think because, because we were teachers, we were on our way out to be out in time for school. So a lot of the traffic was related to the school.

PEARSON: [00:23:48] But I just remember this one time where I was, I was on the deck and sleeping, and then all of a sudden I woke up and there were probably, you know, 25 people around me and, you know, some, some, you know, over in the corner there was somebody's pig and there was all sorts of, uh, you know, food and provisions that, you know, breadfruit and taro and, uh, and just a, it was just a mass of humanity in a very, very basic, rustic way. And it was something that, um, you quickly said, okay, this is what I'm, this is what I signed up for.

GANZGLASS: [00:24:27] I'm here.

PEARSON: [00:24:27] Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:24:27] So what, what was your living, um, arrangement on the island?

PEARSON: [00:24:34] Uh, we had sponsor families that the Peace Corps had arranged for us. I had, um, like so many others, I, I'm. This is universal. When you talk to Peace Corps volunteers, you hear them say how incredibly generous and kind people are. It was no different where I was, and the sponsor family I had was just remarkably great. They, um, understanding. They'd had a lot of Peace Corps volunteers on this island over the years, over the previous 25 years. They, um, so they knew what to expect. They actually built a little thatch hut, um, for me.

PEARSON: [00:25:17] Um, so the family, uh, and it's slightly an extended family, lived in a, there was a compound where there was a larger house that, um, that they lived in. No, no furnishing also. No, no chairs. No. It was all pretty much just the, a structure. Um, and, and then that's, you know, for the most part, people would be outside. There might be a loom in the, in the house where the women would be weaving. Um, but no other kind of chairs or sofas or anything like that. And they built a little, um, but very comfortable space that was mine to use and mine alone.

GANZGLASS: [00:26:02] In that house?

PEARSON: [00:26:03] Next to that house.

GANZGLASS: [00:26:04] Oh.

PEARSON: [00:26:05] So. So when I got there, they had had that built and it was ready for me. Um, and again, it was very generous because there's a big sense of community and togetherness. And one of the things we were prepared for was that, uh, you know, be prepared that you're not going to have alone time. And the, and the concept of, of, hey, I just want to go off and be by myself, um, isn't something that really registered within the culture. Um, and so, uh, this was a recognition of kind of that cultural difference. So that if I needed just to find a little respite there to read or just kind of.

GANZGLASS: [00:26:47] Chill out.

PEARSON: [00:26:48] Have a little downtime, um, they were pretty respectful of that.

GANZGLASS: [00:26:52] So that family had had volunteers before, or did families take turns taking volunteers?

PEARSON: [00:26:57] Families took turns. I think they may have had some others in the past, but there were. I know that the, the person that followed me had another family from another part of the, another part of the island. So I think they moved it around. And the agreement was that the families received a stipend. And then we, through, as part of our, um, uh, through our Peace Corps living allowance, would contribute to the family purchasing rice or purchasing some other things. And, uh, um, so it was a, it was a, an agreement that it worked, was worked out and with a level of expectation through the Peace Corps and the sponsor. Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:27:45] So what was your job then? So you, well, so you arrived there, they welcomed you to the house and then what happened?

PEARSON: [00:27:54] Yeah, I guess I, uh, I just started to figure out what, what was going to be. And I think it was, uh, it was interesting in that my sponsor father was the most incredible guy. He's passed away now, but he was, uh.

GANZGLASS: [00:28:10] This was all in Micronesia?

PEARSON: [00:28:13] This was on the island of.

GANZGLASS: [00:28:15] Did they speak any English or?

PEARSON: [00:28:17] There were English speakers. There were, there were people, especially the fellow teachers that I'd be working with, they all spoke really good English.

GANZGLASS: [00:28:24] Okay.

PEARSON: [00:28:25] Um, the, um, some people did not. And it was a whole mix.

GANZGLASS: [00:28:30] And your host family?

PEARSON: [00:28:31] My host family, pretty. Well, it was interesting. That was the thing with my sponsor father in particular. My, my other, the other, most of the other people at the compound on a daily basis did not speak, uh, speak English. Um, and uh, again, I think the training was good enough so that I knew the basics and we could do some basic communication, but there was always somebody.

PEARSON: [00:28:56] So not like, so for example, every morning, uh, the men. And it was very kind of a gender, um, roled society where there were certain roles for women and men. But in the morning, the, the, there'd be coffee and breakfast and the men would kind of sit around often just to get the day started. And so often there would be somebody, one of the teachers or somebody who spoke English would come by and was, was able to help me figure out what was what, if there was a question or something like that.

GANZGLASS: [00:29:37] That's great.

PEARSON: [00:29:37] So it really, it was, it, it. There was enough of a, uh, enough people that it wasn't a worry if I was really in need of trying to figure something out.

GANZGLASS: [00:29:50] And I distracted you or diverted your. You were talking about your host father.

PEARSON: [00:29:55] Oh, yeah. And I think, you know, one of the things I came to learn is I think he, he never spoke to me in English. Um, and, but I, but he was, and he was a very. He was a very smart guy and, and I think he. I still don't know. I know he, um, I know for a fact that he knew some English, um, in that there were times when I remember listening

to him reading with his kids or with his, you know, to help kind of encourage them to be learning English.

PEARSON: [00:30:35] And then I, I have this other memory, and I wish I could remember what the, what the word was or something, but I was talking to him and trying to explain something, an item. Let's just say it was a, you know, a, uh, a motorboat or something like that. And I was trying to explain to him in, in the, in the local language, uh, what I was, uh, what I was trying to convey. And he's like, looking at me and looking at me and, you know, listening to me try to explain it. Then finally he just says, motorboat, you know? And I said, yeah, that's it! You know? And I was just thinking, yeah, this guy knows a lot more than he lets on.

PEARSON: [00:31:17] And, and I appreciated that with some of the, some of the, um, people who I worked with. It was, it's one I, I've, I wish I knew language better than I do, but I have a great appreciation for language and love it. And, uh, even though I'm, I'm mildly fluent in this dialect that I learned.

GANZGLASS: [00:31:38] And what, what is the language?

PEARSON: [00:31:40] It's called Woleaian. It was a local language. So that, that, one of those islands we traveled to was called Woleai. And there was probably a series of about 8 or 9 islands where that was viewed as the, the, the main language there. And it, it differed from place to place. Now on, on the big island in Yap, they spoke a language called Yapese, which was quite, had significant differences to the outer island languages. The outer island languages, all kind of, uh, were similar in many ways. But as you move from one place to another, there'd be subtle changes. Um, but.

GANZGLASS: [00:32:23] And what type, what, what category of language is it?

PEARSON: [00:32:27] Um, I don't know exactly.

GANZGLASS: [00:32:30] Is it related to anything else or it's just in the Micronesian?

PEARSON: [00:32:34] Yeah. I, uh, I'm not sure how it's categorized, unfortunately, but it's, uh. Um, but it's, it's a relatively. It's an interesting language in that it's, it's not super hard to learn. I mean, it wasn't, um, for example, um, you know, the, like, say, a tonal language. It wasn't, it wasn't tonal in nature. There were, there was. One of the most interesting things about the language is the these islands have been, um, uh, colonized over the course of history by, by many different, um, nations. So early, early on, Spanish explorers came through and established, um, a trading and transport in those areas.

PEARSON: [00:33:26] Then, um, after, I guess World War I or so or. I again, or maybe, maybe it was my history is a little off, but eventually Japan, um, uh, occupied the areas leading up to World War II, and then afterwards, um, the United States became the, um, the colonizer in essence. Um, and we, um, so the interesting thing is that within this language which has very, um, you know, unfamiliar words, um, that I'd never heard of before. The word for church was, was pronounced *helesia*, like *iglesia*, and the word for. And at night, um, you would say, it was very common to say *adios*.

GANZGLASS: [00:34:19] Really?

PEARSON: [00:34:20] And yeah. And so, um, and then at a later time, uh, words, uh, the word for teacher is sensei. The word for, um. Uh, um, I'm trying to think of. I think ship or some of the words around motorized vehicles.

GANZGLASS: [00:34:40] Were Japanese?

PEARSON: [00:34:41] Had Japanese influence. And then, you know, these days they're using the word computer. So it's all based on kind of who was there at the time. But, but 95 percent of the language is, uh, is indigenous. And again, uh, um, interesting. And one of my regrets, I think, was that I learned the language. I was happy that at the end of my service, um, I realized I could have tried to learn the language better, and I was okay.

PEARSON: [00:35:18] But at least at the end of my service, when the new volunteer that was coming on to replace me arrived, um, there was an old, uh, chief who I hadn't really had much involvement with because he was from, you know, a different part of the island. And the men would come together in each night at a drinking circle, and they had these little huts that were there for their, you know, primarily for, um, their, uh, fishing equipment and everything. And so those were, those were pretty much, um, uh, determined that, oh, if you're in this compound, you go to this place that evening. You could, people could move around, but.

PEARSON: [00:36:11] So anyway, this chief, um, who is one of the high chiefs on the island, um, was going to be hosting the next volunteer, and he, um, he invited me over to do the translation for her, for the new volunteer, because he wanted me just to tell her, you know? You know, don't be afraid. Everything's going to be good. If you ever need food, you come to, you know. And I was pleased that I at least could be able to hear him and understand it and translate. But, but still, there was so much that I was not able to keep up with in terms of general conversation and everything.

GANZGLASS: [00:36:50] So talk a little bit about the actual work you did and, and how English and I guess gardening come together.

PEARSON: [00:36:59] Yeah. Well, gardening pretty much went out the door. And I think that's a common thing for Peace Corps volunteers. And one of the best things and the best advice. So the other thing, and this gets to the best advice I got, um, while we were far out in the middle of nowhere, it wasn't as if we were totally isolated in that there would be occasional visitors. And one of the visitors was a great guy, uh, a U.S. anthropologist who was doing, um, uh, work on this island. He was a great, he's been a, he's been a great, great friend, uh, to, um, these, uh, this community on Lamotrek for 30 years.

PEARSON: [00:37:43] His name is Eric Metzger, and he's written about, um, and filmed about traditional navigation and to some degree, traditional medicine. And, uh, he was there and came for a visit while I was out

there, still kind of in the early phases. And he gave me the best advice that, that I could have gotten because at one night, you know, he was, he said, how's it going? And we were just sitting there and talking and catching up. And I said, as a typical, um, type A American, uh, going out to change the world. I was getting all nervous because it was like three months in or two months, however long I'd been there, and I was feeling anxious about what I was going to be able to accomplish and what I was going to be able to do. And, and, you know, here's, here's maybe a plan.

PEARSON: [00:38:36] And, and he just said, he said, you know, relax. And he said, you know what? What you want to do. And I think Peace Corps in their training does this in a, in a variety of ways. But I did not, I did not internalize it enough as the idea of saying, you know, sit back and get to know the community and just learn the language, learn what's going on, get to know the people, and the project will come to you. You'll, you'll learn about it, because then you're going to be integrated. And, uh, and that was the advice he gave me.

PEARSON: [00:39:10] So back to your question. Um, I pretty much at the outset, um, set aside the, the gardening project. And because one thing is that the islands that we were assigned to did differ in a great deal, but the island I was on had a pretty good local food source, had some sufficient, um, number of breadfruit trees. Obviously lots of coconut trees. Had a very expansive and plentiful taro patch. Uh, had some obviously bananas and had some, um, other fruits and local peppers and things like that.

PEARSON: [00:39:56] So, so on the one hand, I didn't necessarily. I didn't feel that there was a lot I could necessarily bring to the table on that front. And, and it wasn't clear to me that that was something that was really being needed. So the good thing for me to address my, the personality in that anxiety I think so many volunteers feel, was I was assigned to be a teacher, so I would have my classroom or my classroom work to be able to. uh.

GANZGLASS: [00:40:28] This was what, elementary school?

PEARSON: [00:40:30] It was, yes, an elementary school. So grades one through, um, I think it's grades one through eight. And so the interesting thing there though was, you know, we were, we had gotten our training. I was feeling pretty good about it. I'd done a little bit of teaching prior. I really felt confident about my ability there. Um, and again, the role and the goal was to be English as second language teachers for the various grades and just work from grade to grade.

PEARSON: [00:41:03] So I get there and, um, I'm introduced to the head teacher and I say, hello, how are you? And then he, and he, he spoke some English and he, or he spoke English, and he said. He looked at me and he said, you're going to be our eighth grade teacher. I was like, okay. Um, which was fine, you know? But then I thought, okay, so I guess I'm not teaching ESL, you know, to all the, all the grades. I guess I'm just teaching eighth grade. And it was a, it was a good.

GANZGLASS: [00:41:34] Eighth grade English or eighth grade?

PEARSON: [00:41:36] Eighth grade everything. So I became the, the English teacher, but also the math teacher, the science teacher, the history teacher. Um, luckily they had a cultural teacher, and I didn't have to do that. Um, but just the basics of, uh, of different, um, uh. And, you know, after getting over a brief initial kind of surprise, I was like, okay, I can do this. And, um, and I think it was a. [phone rings]

GANZGLASS: [00:42:05] No, just keep going.

PEARSON: [00:42:07] I think it was a, I think it was a good idea to have done that because he had very competent other fellow teachers that could teach, uh, the, uh, the students English, um, at the early grade levels. And what his goal was, was to really, um, immerse his eighth grade students, immerse them into a, um. [phone beeps]

GANZGLASS: [00:42:39] Trying to turn it off.

PEARSON: [00:42:40] He, um. So the head teacher really wanted to immerse the students into a day long ESL class. Um, and it worked out great. We had, uh, being on such a small island, I had a student teacher ratio that people would die for. I had eight students in my eighth grade class.

GANZGLASS: [00:43:02] Wow.

PEARSON: [00:43:02] Um, so it was really wonderful. And that I really got to know the students, really got in, in some cases to work individually with them on whether it was math or English. Um, and, uh, you know, it was for both years with both classes. It was really a fantastic experience.

GANZGLASS: [00:43:20] Do they have a curriculum that you could follow, or did you have to just figure out what eighth grade math was?

PEARSON: [00:43:26] Yeah, they did. They had a, they had curriculum and it was, um, the. There was a relatively good, um, amount of resources. There was, uh, first of all, one of the, one of the government projects in many of these islands just preceding our arrival was to build some new schools. So they had a, they had two schools. One of them really beat up and with leaking roofs and very problematic. But then they had a whole nother new school that consisted of, it was one story and maybe 4 or 5, four classrooms. Um, so they had enough, enough rooms for every different class.

PEARSON: [00:44:07] And there was enough, not, not bountiful resources. But, you know, I don't, I'm trying to think. I don't think it was as if the students had, um, uh. They didn't have books necessarily, but we had lesson plans and we had assignments that we could give them and, and make out for them. And we had a, we had a copy, a copy machine where if we wanted to give them homework, we could do that. And, um, and so it was, it, it was nice because there was really a, a strong feeling of that there was a lot of good learning that, that did go on.

GANZGLASS: [00:44:46] And all, you taught everything in English?

PEARSON: [00:44:49] I did, I did.

GANZGLASS: [00:44:50] So their English was good enough by eighth, was their English good enough to learn the subject matter?

PEARSON: [00:44:57] I think it was, um, it was good. I think it depended on. There were a couple of students that I think really did struggle. Um, certainly the, the math was pretty easy to transfer. And I think one of the interesting things that, that I caught on to is, well, was that as we went along with English, we, um. And we did have some. Let me just back up and say several of the students, especially in the first year class that I had, were quite, quite bright and quite good English speakers from the outset, at least, at least two of, at least three of them, three of the eight were, were quite good. So they probably helped play a role with their, with their cohort.

GANZGLASS: [00:45:47] Oh, they did some of the translating?

PEARSON: [00:45:48] Yeah. In times where people were confused. But certainly the math was, was pretty easy to, to kind of work through. The history was another matter. But what I, what I did find was one of the interesting things as I went along, was just picking up that there were ways that certain, certain words or phrases or things we were talking about in our English class that I could then bring up in whether it was history or something else or science, um, that, um, could be, um, uh, transferable or just reinforcing.

GANZGLASS: [00:46:24] That's the best way to do it.

PEARSON: [00:46:25] The English language. Yeah. Yeah. So it was, so it was very, um, very fun. And then the other thing that actually happened. So in terms of my, beyond teaching, we were blessed. So again, I've talked about the community gardening project that I kind of put on hold. But at the same time there was a woman, um, not in our, our group, our cohort, but who had been there for two years and was extending. And she was this amazing, um, uh, 70-ish year old, um, uh, former librarian from Portland, Maine, uh, who was working with the state

Department of Education to improve library programs and, and establish libraries on different islands.

PEARSON: [00:47:21] So she made us aware. I think, again, this goes back to our training, that she was able to share with us her, um, what she was working on. And it, it became something that we quickly talked about with the teachers and they said, yes, let's do this. And they set aside one of the rooms in the new school building to set up a library. Um, and again, through many groups that are out there in the U.S., probably a little less so than today than back in the 1980s, um, many groups that would be book sending organizations that we reached out to. And, and so one of the, one of the projects became, um, establishing a library and trying to catalog the books. And, um, and we really had a, it was. At the time there was, I think, a great deal of excitement and, and success. Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:48:20] So you spent time doing that?

PEARSON: [00:48:22] I did. So that was another thing where we, you know, we. So and again it was a great. There was, there was community input as well because there was interest in, okay, what so. Whether it was the teachers or other men or whoever, some people took it upon themselves to create bookshelves. And then so to kind of get the, the library set up, and then I worked with some others just to try to see how could we categorize. I remember I had a friend of mine who was, uh, a, uh, I was writing to who had been a librarian. And, and she was just lamenting, do you really have to teach? Do you really have to expose those poor people to the Dewey Decimal System? And then we did, and it worked out okay, I guess.

PEARSON: [00:49:11] And but we had some fun times in there, especially with the, the class. One of the things we actually did that was, I always remember fondly was, um, towards the end of that first year of school when the library was functioning, we, I decided that every Friday after lunch would be library time and. And they'd go and then take time just kind of hanging out, just much easier going, reading, looking at books. There were some magazines, looking at things like that. And then

there actually were a couple of books where we had duplicates like Jack and the Beanstalk or something like that. So we, we had as a project ones where the students would, would read the book, but then with the other book, create a translation of the book in the local language.

GANZGLASS: [00:50:01] Oh.

PEARSON: [00:50:02] And, and then for those that you know, so the ones that were probably the sharpest on the language worked on that. But then a couple of the others worked on kind of some illustrations that they, that they made to accompany the written part. So it was a, it was a lot of fun and it was just, it, it was really rewarding. It was really, um, it was a great experience.

GANZGLASS: [00:50:25] Good. So you did that for both years?

PEARSON: [00:50:28] Yes.

GANZGLASS: [00:50:28] Taught, taught, uh, eighth grade for two years?

PEARSON: [00:50:32] Taught eighth grade for two years. And the next group was, the next group was really interesting too. They were a little, um, academically, there were, I mean, one of the things that really is. One of the most exciting things was that I think three of the girls in my, in the first class that I taught went on to college. And from what I was told, they were the first girls from the island to ever go on to college. And I think, at least I think they all went to nursing school.

GANZGLASS: [00:51:04] So first they went to high school.

PEARSON: [00:51:05] First they went to high school. Yes.

GANZGLASS: [00:51:07] And then college.

PEARSON: [00:51:08] And then on to college. And a lot of girls would go on to high school. The second year, the one thing I remember in particular that

really was exciting and then subsequently kind of, um, sad in a way, but, you know, you had to accept it too, was, um, a similar size group of students. Um, they, they were they were a good group. They, they probably weren't the, the academically or at least in terms of English, um, as high level as the first group I had. Um, but they worked hard and they, they did good.

PEARSON: [00:51:43] And but there was one student in that, in that um, group the second year who, um, really was kind of a knucklehead and just kind of acting up and, and seemed to, um, struggle a little bit, uh, and acted out. Not, not in any horrible way. I mean, the, the, the, the kind of acting out that that was done there was so mild compared to what other people in teaching face. It's almost not worth mentioning. But, um, but at some point, um, she got real serious, it seemed. And she, she really got into her studies and went from being. So whenever there was a test at the beginning of the year, you know, she was getting Ds and D minuses and maybe some Fs, in whether it was math or even English or whatever.

PEARSON: [00:52:44] And then, um, and then at the end of the year, she started really doing, doing great. And, and she, we, they had a, they had a graduation ceremony at the end of the year. And I was really excited to give her the student of the year award from our class, not because she ended up the strongest academically, but because she had made so much progress. And it was so, I was so proud of her. And I'm, and I think, you know, and what ended up happening was she, I think, was looking forward to going on to the, to the next phase of school. But her, her, her family decided they didn't want her to go because they were fearful that she'd get pregnant, you know, being away from the island. And, um, so they, they didn't allow her to go.

PEARSON: [00:53:33] And then I did make a trip back to the islands, like about five years later. And she had a child. And, you know, I hope all went well for her, But it was a little, a little sad that I think she really was looking to see where, what that next step could take.

GANZGLASS: [00:53:51] Happens all around the world.

PEARSON: [00:53:52] It does, it does. And yeah. And so it's, it's, it's really, uh, it's, it's really. And you know, right now at the National Peace Corps Association, we've been supporting uh, uh, as the Obama administration closes, one of the things that we've been trying to help promote is the First Lady's Let Girls Learn initiative. And, uh, and you're right, it happens all around the world, I mean, from the, from some of the largest countries where there's economic disparity to small islands in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

GANZGLASS: [00:54:27] Right. So just to finish, before we get on to Peace Corps Association. So did you travel at all when you were, uh, during summer break?

PEARSON: [00:54:39] I did.

GANZGLASS: [00:54:39] Or whatever the break time is in Micronesia.

PEARSON: [00:54:42] Yeah. So we, uh, we, well, one of the, um. We had some great opportunities, and the opportunity was first that we had our mid service conference in Guam. So we all congregated in Guam, which seemed like, you know, seemed like New York City, um, from where we were coming and had about a week there. And then from there on we went and scattered about. I, um, in my case, a couple of my very best friends to this day who I served with, we went together for a few days in the Philippines. Um, and then we kind of went in different directions. And I ended up going to Hong Kong and China.

GANZGLASS: [00:55:24] Ah.

PEARSON: [00:55:24] And, um, uh, and I always remember hitting the streets of Hong Kong for the first time. And it was like that after being, you know, on this island.

GANZGLASS: [00:55:34] Now, that is impressive.

PEARSON: [00:55:35] Oh my gosh. It was like getting off the airplane. I mean, I remember we were, we were all excited about just being on an airplane again and how, how exciting that was. And then but then getting and just getting off on the shuttle bus and just seeing, just seeing all the bright, all the blinking, you know, lights and, and just tons of people. It was just a shock to the system. But, um, but great experience.

PEARSON: [00:56:02] And then China was, um, fascinating. And as it turned out, I went back a second time to China, um, after my service had ended. And one of the reasons I made that decision was because in between my first trip and what turned out to be my second trip was the Tiananmen Square massacre. And I wanted just, because I had such an incredibly warm experience when I went the first time, I just was curious to see what, what it would be like going back after, um, after Tiananmen. And so that was really.

GANZGLASS: [00:56:42] Was it different?

PEARSON: [00:56:43] You, it. People were still quite friendly and everything. There was, the only thing I would say was there was, um, more hesitation to approach you. I mean, I think when I first went, and of course now, you know, all these years later, I'm, again, I'm sure China is obviously so much more open and, and, and, uh, everything is, uh, quite, um, uh, you know, modern. Um, development has just taken off. And, uh, you know, it was, it certainly was. It wasn't as if you were, um, it wasn't as if you were the only tourists there that were from the West.

PEARSON: [00:57:29] But, but certainly, um, there were people that were very interested in, in practicing their English. And so they would very much engage you and want to, you know, some, some people said, let me take you out to dinner or let me, let me do this or come into my house or, um. So it was very welcoming. People were very kind. And they were equally kind on the second trip. But it was just, there was a little bit of reservation of like, you know, talking to you. Um, because of maybe some concern about how it would be viewed. And I, you know, I

don't know. I imagine that things have gone back in, again, um, in the opposite direction.

PEARSON: [00:58:11] But I think there was a, there was. I remember a museum that I went to that was, I forget the specifics of it, but it was clearly, um, talking about how outside forces were, were the, were responsible for trying to provoke the students to, to. You know, so there's a lot of blame that was being made by the, by the government against outside forces agitating the students to, to rise up. And so there certainly was concern, but, um, but still very, you know, great experience.

GANZGLASS: [00:58:49] So let me, um, ask you. Well, two questions. First is after Peace Corps, what did you end up doing then? How was reentry?

PEARSON: [00:59:00] Yeah, so reentry was okay. Um, I, uh, um, I did a little traveling afterwards, like I said, to China. I actually also went to India on my way home. Um, I had, uh, for a long time, uh, through one of the sponsorship programs where you sponsor a child in a country, had sponsored a little girl in southern India. So I was able to make arrangements to go meet her and meet the, the people that worked on the program. And that was amazing. Um, it was fun too.

PEARSON: [00:59:34] One thing I remember from that that just shows, shows what an amazing world we live in was, um. One of the things that was available on the main island of Yap, not where I was in my main service, but on the on the big island where I would go to on occasion was, um, betel nut, which is a mild narcotic that you would kind of put in your mouth and chew and, um, just a nut off of a tree. And, um, would just give you a little bit of a buzz, you know, and, uh. And then I, um, when I went to India and went to this village, and they did a really nice gathering for me, and I sat down and sat down with some of the village elders. And next thing I know, they're like.

GANZGLASS: [01:00:21] Betel nut.

PEARSON: [01:00:21] Pulling out betel nut. And I said, hey, that's, you know, I didn't speak it, but I said, is that? I think I said to somebody, is that

betel nut? It didn't look exactly the same. But, and I said, oh yeah, let me. And they were like, you know about this? And so it's, it was, that was kind of a fun moment. And but after India, I then had some family friends that were living at the time in Athens, Greece. And I, that was kind of nice because I got to see them for about 3 or 4 days, and that was my first kind of foray back into the world I left with friends. And then flew from there back, back home. And, um.

GANZGLASS: [01:00:58] My husband and I flew back from Somalia through Ethiopia, et cetera, et cetera. But our first European stop was Athens. And I remember standing in the corner of a market.

PEARSON: [01:01:10] Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [01:01:11] Overwhelmed by the traffic and the noise. It was the same kind of thing you were talking about.

PEARSON: [01:01:15] Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [01:01:15] You know, there really is a reentry.

PEARSON: [01:01:17] There is, there is. And it's, uh, and the other thing that I think that was probably the most noticeable. I remember when we went to Guam, being in a restaurant and, and looking at, you know, the menu and going, oh my God, I have to choose? You know, because it was just like you, for the last year you ate what you were given. And um, uh, and then, um, the other thing that I think that was interesting was there was, I think. So I did get a job that brought me down to the, the Mid-Atlantic region, working for a grassroots environmental group that worked on stream and river protection and restoration. And, um, the one thing I remember that was hard to adjust to was, uh, um, when I was back in Micronesia.

PEARSON: [01:02:14] And again, I regret this to some degree, but, uh, sitting in the men's hut and hanging out, and sometimes if I could do anything over again, I wish I had concentrated more because I found myself daydreaming. You know, thinking back, oh, I wonder what's going on at

home now. I wonder what people are doing or. And I guess that's natural. And you kind of have to do that to get through it. But it was kind of lost time. But I think I got into that daydreaming, that became part of my daily routine. So I think one of the first things I realized when I got back into our, our, our U.S. workforce was sitting in a meeting and people are talking and suddenly I'm thinking about something else, like, you know, what's going on in Lamotrek right now? And, uh, I found that that was something I had to kind of readjust to again.

GANZGLASS: [01:03:06] Interesting. So I know that you have worked for the Returned Peace Corps, National Peace Corps Association for quite a few years now. And let me ask you to reflect on the three goals of Peace Corps from your own experience, both as a volunteer and now working with other volunteers and, you know, working nationally. So providing technical assistance, you know, should I read you the three goals or do you know the three goals?

PEARSON: [01:03:35] I know them not by chapter and verse, but I know the basics of them. Yes.

GANZGLASS: [01:03:40] Providing technical assistance to the country you're in. Better promoting understanding of the U.S. by people in other countries. And then promoting better understanding of the world by Americans.

PEARSON: [01:03:54] Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [01:03:54] So reflect a little bit about your experience as a volunteer and since then about the, achieving the goals of Peace Corps.

PEARSON: [01:04:03] Well, as you, as you say, those goals, it triggered another memory that I remember having that will always stick with me when I was out in Lamotrek in, um, an area that was again amazing with, with wonderful people and had challenge, you know, certainly had challenges by, by no, um, uh, no question about it. But at the time, Peace Corps would send us Newsweek magazine with our, when the ship would come and would bring us mail.

GANZGLASS: [01:04:36] A little old but.

PEARSON: [01:04:37] A little old, but we'd get it. And then I do remember a couple of times when I was there, uh, flipping through and reading my Newsweek magazine and then thinking to myself, gee, maybe I should get back to the United States where they really need my help as opposed to here, just because of the, the challenges we face as a society. And certainly here in 2016, it's as evident today as it has ever been. And I think the Peace Corps community has, um, is a, is a beacon of light and some of the amazing things that returned Peace Corps volunteers do are a beacon of light and a beacon of hope.

PEARSON: [01:05:24] Uh, when it comes to, uh, technical assistance, I am just amazed at the amount of ongoing good works that returned Peace Corps volunteers continue to do to make a difference, and it really is.

GANZGLASS: [01:05:42] In their host countries?

PEARSON: [01:05:43] In their host countries or in their communities. But, but thinking about their host countries, um. Uh, we, the amazing response to, for example, um, Ebola when Ebola broke out in, um, Guinea and Sierra Leone and Liberia. And the returned Peace Corps volunteers from those countries mobilized and, and got their communities to, uh, collect, um, financial resources to purchase, help purchase and ship the medical protective gear that, that, um, those countries absolutely needed.

PEARSON: [01:06:27] To think about, um, one of the other amazing things that the National Peace Corps Association played a role in, in that was as, as those groups mobilized within their networks, we similarly tried to mobilize the broader community to say, this is obviously a crisis everyone knows about. Here are these three groups that are doing great work and contribute to them. And that helped to infuse even more, um, financial resources to those groups, which then set up, um, a grant making process for, um, indigenous based or, or groups in

those countries to put forward small scale or projects to try to help address various things related to the Ebola crisis.

PEARSON: [01:07:19] And the thing about it was that you had a steering committee then that was going to make the decisions, and they, they were made up of RPCVs who knew the country, knew the language, might know the NGO that was making the application and could vouch for whether they were reliable or not. Um, and all those kind of knowledge based aspects of a, of a, of trying to conduct good works that help to just make sure that the, the funds that were sent in those particular projects were effective and targeted and so on.

PEARSON: [01:08:00] And, and so that's just one example. But you have other groups, so many groups that are working on education around the world. And again in countries now where people would shudder, probably to think, oh, there were Peace Corps volunteers in Somalia, like, like, like you were. Or, um, Afghanistan or, uh, Nigeria or, um, all over.

GANZGLASS: [01:08:27] Yeah, we're all still supporting.

PEARSON: [01:08:29] Still supporting and still doing great things and so respected. Um, and again, and being thoughtful in terms of, of what's going to be effect. Excuse me. What's going to be effective?

GANZGLASS: [01:08:43] Mm hmm.

PEARSON: [01:08:44] Excuse me. Um, in terms of the. And I think it, it almost goes without saying and I think this is something all, every returned Peace Corps volunteer is, is confronting right now is, um, not only in the United States, certainly in the United States, but all around the world. Um, there are, um, elements of societies that are being inward looking and looking to potentially be more isolationist and to victimize others who, um, don't look or sound or act exactly like them. Uh, it's a, it's a big issue. Again, that's not restricted just to the U.S., but, um. And I think we have a, an important role to hopefully play in trying to convey the, the goodness in all of us.

PEARSON: [01:09:44] And we're excited to have a group that's emerging right now to work on, um, refugee issues. And certainly, and again, I think that's the other thing about it. So while, while the returned Peace Corps volunteer community, um, through the National Peace Corps Association, um, are finding ways to do that work. The other thing that is evident is that no matter what non-governmental organization or um, uh, our diplomatic corps, our, uh, such that so many of those folks are, uh, returned Peace Corps volunteers that, that are, um, uh, you know, in those positions. Um, I'm rambling here a little, but let me, because it reminds me in the aftermath of our election and everything.

PEARSON: [01:10:38] When, when, when, um, when she was secretary of state, um, uh, after the attack in Benghazi, um, that resulted in the deaths of four Americans, one of them being Ambassador Chris Stevens. Um, Secretary of State Clinton, I remember listening to her remarks in announcing the news, and when she spoke about Chris Stevens, the first thing she said was Chris Stevens fell in love with the Middle East when he served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco. And as I understand it, one of the reasons that, um, Ambassador Stevens was in Benghazi on the day of the attack was his continued effort to get outside the bubble, to get to the street, like so many good ambassadors do.

PEARSON: [01:11:34] And I bet almost any ambassador who's, who's served in the Peace Corps knows that is a fundamental part of their job. And I know of others that have been equally like Chris Stevens was in wanting to get out in the street, get out and meeting the people, conveying, um, the goodness of America. And I think on that day he was he was in Benghazi working on a, on a, on a library project. Um, and so, um, it was, uh, uh.

GANZGLASS: [01:12:04] It was really unfortunate.

PEARSON: [01:12:05] It was really unfortunate. And, and again, I think whether it's our diplomats or our Peace Corps volunteers, while there's a lot of efforts, every Peace Corps director will say safety and security is, um,

our, our absolute number one priority for our volunteers. And that is the case. But we have to give our volunteers, um, some space to do their work. And, and with that space comes risks. And as you know, Evelyn, and I know other people listening to this will know we've had well over 200, 200 to 300 people who've died in service of the Peace Corps. Some, some through, a variety, many through accidents or illness. But, um, uh, but.

GANZGLASS: [01:12:55] Most, most of them.

PEARSON: [01:12:56] Most of them through those causes. But, but it just reminds us that, um, that when you're traveling overseas, um, uh, not that we're, not that we're risk free here in the United States, but, but your service does come with risks as well.

GANZGLASS: [01:13:12] Sure. Well, I think that's a really good place to end. Is there anything else you want to say?

PEARSON: [01:13:19] I'm just honored to have the opportunity to be interviewed. It's, uh, as everybody says, Peace Corps is one of the most transformative, uh, um, moments and decisions in my life. And I hope that, uh, you and others will be interviewing people 50 years from now talking about their most recent Peace Corps experiences. So thank you very much for having me.

GANZGLASS: [01:13:43] Thanks.

[END OF INTERVIEW]