John Fanselow Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note
John Fanselow served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Nigeria from 1961 to 1963 and in Somalia from 1966 to 1968 as a teacher trainer.

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Oral History Interview

with

John Fanselow

September 23, 2016
Arlington, Virginia

By Evelyn Ganzglass

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

GANZGLASS: [00:00:01] This is Evelyn Ganzglass, who is a Peace Corps volunteer in Somalia from 1966 to 1968, Somali IV volunteer. And I'm interviewing John Fanselow, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Nigeria in Nigeria I from 1961 to 1963. And then he was staff working as a contractor with Peace Corps and was a language and teaching ESL resource person, I guess, for Somali volunteers, for volunteers in Togo, Ivory Coast, and Senegal. So that with that brief introduction, let me ask you, John, why did you join the Peace Corps? You were in that first group?

FANSELOW: [00:00:55] Well, I applied to the Peace Corps right after Kennedy announced it and Sargent Shriver started to set it up because I wanted to improve my Spanish. I was a Spanish and English major, planning to teach high school Spanish and English in Chicago, Illinois. And my spoken Spanish was not terrific, so I thought this was a great

opportunity, I could live in Latin America for a couple of years and develop my Spanish. So in the event I got a telegram saying we have an opening in West Africa and teaching. Are you interested? So I called up the Peace Corps and I said on my application, I put Latin America. They said, we know that. What? Because you're a teacher and an English teacher, you know, that's your preparation. We have no programs like that in Latin America. We might in a year or two. But now if you want to go now, it's by that time they knew it was Nigeria rather than Ghana, which was another country. That was one of the early. You know, first groups to go in 1961. So off I went to Harvard University for the Peace Corps training program. We were there about six weeks. We had the training and the business school and then we.

GANZGLASS: [00:02:23] Why in the business school?

FANSELOW: [00:02:24] Well, it was empty during the summer. Oh, and so that was the only one of the only schools that didn't have a summer program. So we lived in the dorms and had the classes in the business school and stayed in the business school cafeteria and went in the evening to Harvard Square to have a few drinks through long days. And the big issue then was and in the early years, I don't know what it is now, but it selection, deselection, the selection of who's going to go and what criteria they're going to use. So I remember being interviewed by a psychiatrist, just like with a tape recorder, just as we have one here, he said. Now, as a result of this interview, I may decide that you are not fit to go to Nigeria as a Peace Corps volunteers. Nice way to open an informal interview.

GANZGLASS: [00:03:21] It was right at the beginning.

FANSELOW: [00:03:23] Right at the beginning. So anyway, I wasn't deselected. And then we were given, I think, two weeks on leave because the bulk of our training was going to be in country in Nigeria. So I went home and then we flew to Lagos and then stayed there a few days. We got there right around in the first year of independence, October 1st. So that was

a big party at the American embassy to celebrate the first year of Nigerian independence. And we had a few meetings here and there with people from the United States information agency, things like that. And then we took busses up to Ibadan where there was a university college called University College Ibadan. And that's where we had our own country training and we had classes of late afternoon. We went to do practice teaching every morning in a Nigerian, in most cases secondary school. OK, so secondary school. And then during our training, there was an incident in which one of our volunteers had written the postcard to her boyfriend saying. People eat in the streets, they sleep in the streets, they even go to the toilet in the streets, nothing in training could prepare us for this. And somehow the postcard got into the hands of a couple of students, whether they took it from the postbox, whether she dropped it on the ground instead of put it in the postbox, who knows? But anyway, they made mimeographed copies of it and spread it around campus and said, you know, Peace Corps, go home.

FANSELOW: [00:05:10] So the students who were, you know, one day earlier, we were having lunch and supper and breakfast with and talking with in the dormitories because we all had different dormitories with the Nigerian. Undergraduates didn't talk to us and said, go home. So anyway, the Peace Corps director at the time was negotiating with the government to kind of settle things down with the Peace Corps. Washington was pretty tense about it. So they decided to evacuate this volunteer whose name was Margery Michelmore, and it made Time magazine on the cover. So it was really a big, big deal. But once she left and everything went back to the way it was before, no hard feelings. So. It was a wake up call, I think, for Peace Corps volunteers all the time, you know, you never know. Having said that, almost all of us wrote the same things.

GANZGLASS: [00:06:08] But in closed letters?

FANSELOW: [00:06:10] In closed letters. But there's little. And, of course, you.

GANZGLASS: [00:06:13] Those little blue aerograms.

FANSELOW: [00:06:15] Right, like we were going to do. So it turns out, of course, this was in the newspapers every day, but it was written by Nigeriens, which makes a difference if you're a foreigner in a country writing the same thing that the people who live there. Right. So it has a different effect. At any rate, after the training, since schools didn't start until January, we had a few weeks, so we took trips. Those of us who were assigned to the southern part of the country went to the northern part of the country and the people assigned to the north took trips around the south. That was good because we got a better picture of the country than we did just living in Ibadan for the whole time and reading about Nigeria in Cambridge, Massachusetts. And the bulk of the there were 39 in our group. The bulk of the people on the group were assigned to secondary schools. A few of us were assigned to teacher training. Colleges were which were at the same level as the secondary schools academically. But they prepared teachers, in my case, English teachers, for all subjects. But I was in charge of practice teaching for English in the curriculum. There was another person on the staff who did math and another person entered history and geography. But at any rate, here I went to this teacher training college boarding school of 200 students in the eastern part of Nigeria. It was a government college. So we had students from all over the region. There were private and religious teacher training colleges, but they tended to be more local. So they tended to speak the same first language. And I mention that because it helped the students, because English really had to be the lingua franca on the campus.

GANZGLASS: [00:08:03] So they couldn't understand each other at all? In their own languages?

FANSELOW: [00:08:08] Some were related languages and some knew two languages, but a lot of them didn't. So English was good. For that, anyway, there were two groups of students, one in what they called a

grade three certificate, which was people who had talked for maybe four or five years, and then this was their first certificate. And then other people had talked for maybe four to 10 years or longer. And they had this first certificate. They came for the second certificate. So the first certificate I just talked and my English, we did short stories and had a textbook in English. But the senior students, the ones who were taught more and had already had this certificate, I supervised them practice teaching about five weeks every semester in local primary schools and then taught the literature, basically the Merchant of Venice, Androcles and the Lion, The Ascent of Everest, Booker T. Washington up from slavery and a book of poetry and Chinua Achebe, things fall apart. It was the first time that there was a non British book on the syllabus, also Booker T. Washington and The Ascent of Everest by Hillary. So it was a new curriculum because of independence. One semester each book. When I was an English major, we did, you know, half a dozen books a week, which in retrospect it was OK. But doing one book for a term, you really got into it much more deeply. And the students loved literature they loved. The drama of Shakespearean would do scenes, they really enjoyed that a lot, and I enjoyed them anyway. I was supervising practice teachers who were teaching things that I didn't know, Nigerian history, Nigerian geography and the British system of currency and measurement. So. I had to take copious notes, so there were two first graders to certain grades to vote, so I would sit in for the first 20 minutes of one class, write down everything the teacher said that I would, and the next 20 minutes.

GANZGLASS: [00:10:30] Go to the other one.

FANSELOW: [00:10:31] Other one who was teaching the same subject, wrote down. And then I met them after school and said, Now, you know, Okon tried this so Onuzium, why don't you try this? And Onuzium did this. You know, did this Okon, why don't you try this tomorrow? So that very small changes, but that's the only way I could suggest alternatives.

GANZGLASS: [00:10:49] Ok, well, let me ask you, were you trained as a to teach teaching or, you were an English major? Was that all in Peace Corps training?

FANSELOW: [00:10:59] No, as an elective. I was a double major in Spanish and English, both from my B.A. and M.A. at Northern Illinois, what was a state teachers college, when I went there, turned into a university, but I took practice teaching and the required courses in teaching. And I did practice teaching for two semesters.

GANZGLASS: [00:11:18] Ok, so you had some background.

FANSELOW: [00:11:20] So I had a background. And that's one of the reasons and that's the reason I was sent to teacher training, because none of the others have had this experience. So that's why I was handed the teacher training college. So I had a lot of experience, I mean, more experience than the others. And then there was a man from the British Council called John Rogers, who was stationed in Enugu, which was the capital, and he visited schools and made suggestions about teaching visit classes, the demonstration lessons, gave books courtesy of the British Council. And I was one of the only teachers who was really interested in what he was doing. So he came back quite a few times. And when I visited Enugu, I always visited him. And then there was another person from the Canadian Foreign Aid Service, John Kerans, and he visited me a couple of times. He was stationed in Enugu and he made quite a few suggestions and suggested other books. And then two people from our training program at Harvard in Cambridge and also Ibadan. One, Catherine asked to be taught English in Nigeria and her husband taught the history. In fact, University College, Ibadan, so they came to visit and make suggestions. This is important because at the end of my two years, we had a completion of service conference back in Ibadan to reflect on our experience. And when I got there, there was a cable awaiting me from Teachers College, Columbia University in New York City, from the director of the Peace Corps training program, saying, we would like

you to come back and participate in the Peace Corps training program at Teachers College next week.

FANSELOW: [00:13:09] I mean, right after the conference, completion of service conference. So I sent the cable back saying I want to travel on my way home and I'm not interested in living in a big city. So I traveled and I got to New York, I had planned to meet my older sister there to see New York and a friend of mine from Nigeria was working in the Peace Corps office. She said you should at least come up and introduce yourself to Karl Bran, the director. He sent you a cable. It's a courtesy. So I went up. He said, we've got another program starting in January. We'd like you to participate. I said, thank you. I want to teach high school English and Spanish in Chicago, and I don't want to live in a big city. So I went back to Chicago, had my TB x-ray, went to the Board of Education. Bad time to get a job in January to be assigned to a school rather than be a substitute teacher, which I didn't want to do. So I called Karl Bran back and said, I'll come for one semester. Anyway, the reason that I'm talking about this now and I'll go back to my experiences in Nigeria was the reason that Karl Bran sent me this cable was John Rogers when he finished his tour in Enugu, went to teachers college on some fellowship.

FANSELOW: [00:14:48] Ian and Katherine Espie went back to teachers college to do some kind of fellowship. And John Karens from Canada went back just for one semester. So Karl Bran asked all of these people who had been in Nigeria to suggest the names of people who could participate in the. He's got a program, and they all suggested me, and of course, the reason was multiple, but one was Ian, of course is Scottish John. So the first name that comes to their mind when you say John is John. So three Johns said, ask John.

GANZGLASS: [00:15:26] I don't think that’s actually the reason, but OK!

FANSELOW: [00:15:28] But anyway, I read voraciously because I really wanted to know what I was doing. And so I learned a great deal. And my time in

Nigeria transformed my life, both because of the experience of being on your own, although we had a lot of support. But this supervision of the professors, teachers got me into observing what teachers actually do. I had to observe what they did in order to make these suggestions. So when I went down to. Well, as Peace Corps staff, we weren't paid very much, but we got free tuition, nine credits, recruits per semester, so. I took courses and then after a while, one of my people who was. On the staff that working on his doctorate, teaching part time, said, you know, you're taking all these courses. Why don't you consider working on a Ph.D.? You know, I never thought of that. I just enjoyed the Peace Corps training. So anyway, I started a degree. But before that I went after I taught in the training program a couple of times I, I went back to Skokie, Illinois, which is a suburb known for Nazi marches. It's a very Jewish community, but they have Nazi marches every year.

FANSELOW: [00:16:50] So I taught in Skokie for one year. And in the spring of that year, I got a call from Karl Bran said, John, we've got a contract with the Peace Corps to train groups of volunteers to go to Somalia. And the person who trains them has an opportunity to go over and work with them and in-service training. And remembering my time in Nigeria that the visits from John Rogers, Katherine Aspey and John Conyers were so important. I said this is very much this is a very good idea. And I miss Africa. I don't know why. So I told the principal, Nicholas Mannis, I said, I love teaching here. He said, but I have this offer to go back to work in Somalia and teach there. He said, John, door's always open. So that was reassuring. So I went back to train the group that Evelyn was in, Somalia IV, went over with them and visited schools for a while. I was on the road almost all the time and then went back to train another bush, prepare another program group in New York.

GANZGLASS: [00:18:02] Another Somali? Somali V was it?

FANSELOW: It was six, I think.

GANZGLASS: Six.

FANSELOW: [00:18:08] And then instead of having all the training in New York, we had some in New York, but we went to a summer resort area. But it was in the spring. Sure, it was empty, so it was very inexpensive and for intensive language training, it was better than in New York and everyone was close together instead of staying in a hotel and then going up to classrooms of teachers college. So I had a bit of training in New York and then went up to the Catskills and had the rest of the train. Went back to Somalia with them and worked with them a couple of years, and the Somalia was a tough country. It was easier for me because I was only a week in one place. And then I go to another school and visit for another. But a lot of the posts were very isolated and some of the students were very, very tough. There was one school where where there were many schools, but there was one school in particular where if they didn't like what the teacher was doing, they would during the break they would throw stones at teachers when the teachers were off from the classroom to the teacher's room, which was kind of well, it was tough. It was tough, to say the least. And the living conditions were not.

FANSELOW: [00:19:26] Easy in many places, the water was very harsh in the northern part of the island, very alkaline. I mean, you wash your hair and you stood up straight and it tasted terrible, the water. So it was a tough situation. So I admire the volunteers there, and some of them decided that they really found teaching very almost impossible. So one of the directors at the time was quite flexible and. If people developed an alternative project, we thought that was fine. So some people made contributions in other ways. One volunteer had studied pharmacy. He worked with a Peace Corps doctor and his wife to do a TB inoculations, for example. And it's ironic because this person who didn't find teaching to compatible in Somalia went on to become a principal of a school in Bahrain for many years and became very involved in education. Many will not many, but quite a few volunteers did come back and become involved from Nigeria. They tended to

become university professors, we had, I would say more than a third of the people went on to become professors when they came back.

GANZGLASS: [00:20:59] Were they in education to start out with?

FANSELOW: [00:21:03] No. The most, one was in history when I was a child. But I was I think I was the only one who, when I returned, ultimately became a professor at Teachers College at Temple University. I was one, I think the only one that went into education after high school, but they went into other other areas.

GANZGLASS: [00:21:26] Just to say I was one of the people switched jobs. My second year, I worked in the National Museum.

FANSELOW: [00:21:33] That's right. And I think I think it was good because it was more enriching for the volunteer to do something who was personally satisfying and it was more enriching for the country, I think to do something, you know, have people in different areas. And then people met people in different areas. So getting back to Nigeria, it was. I was robbed once in the house, I mean, I slept through it, but there were some thieves who came and just went, all of the staff lived in the compound, the students lived in the compound, and they just went from house to house. They were very quiet and I didn't have much. So they I don't know if I had a record player, which they didn't take. I don't know what they took, but maybe a couple of items of clothing. But other than that, it was very safe. And even women at that time could travel from city to city in a public taxi or the truck, mammy wagons, they call them I think. It was very safe.

GANZGLASS: [00:22:36] How big a town where you went?

FANSELOW: [00:22:41] Well, they had one bank, one what they call cold store, where you could get they had a refrigerator and one gas station, I would I don't know if it was, you know, 20,000 or it was very I mean, not big. And the caller was on the outskirts. As I said, it was 240

stores. There was another secondary Catholic secondary school nearby with about maybe 300 secondary school students. And a few churches.

GANZGLASS: [00:23:13] And were your students coed at that point or not?

FANSELOW: [00:23:15] No, my college was all men, women and. Secondary school was all one, the one Catholic school nearby, the primary schools tended to be. Boys and girls in some of these secondary schools were both, but we had both the Catholic school and our teacher training college or boarding schools, and I guess they just decided it was easier to have just male and female on separate campuses. Having said that, many of my students were married and had families themselves. I was the youngest person on the campus. All of my students were older than I was because they had taught already many years before they entered the college.

GANZGLASS: [00:24:03] Was that a problem of respect?

FANSELOW: [00:24:06] No, actually, it was when I would go into the classroom, the traditional you know, the students would stand up and say good morning. Sure. There was a platform in front of the teacher's desk was. And then I said, good morning, class, sit down, please. No, it wasn't a problem at all. And they were very mature. And I, I was every teacher was a form master. You in charge of one class like the homeroom teacher. So you talk to the students, you know what was going on if they had issues. And then I decided to ask the principal, I said I'd like to get to know them more personally. So is it OK if I have them over for supper? So every Friday night I had three students over for supper and I had the same thing every time New Zealand lamb chops, which I could get at this call store, they were frozen lamb chops, green beans, the mashed. Yams, they usually had yams, but not mashed and fried in butter and then fresh pineapple with ice cream. Same thing every week. And the first time I heard bones cracking and. My cook steward had a dog, but he usually didn't come to the veranda, which is where

we ate and I looked down the door, was never the students were chewing the marrow from the lamb chops, which made sense. They had chicken a lot, but beef only occasionally and never out. So that was a good experience to get to know them in a different level. And then also we had rotation to visit the dorms to do inspection on Saturday. It was probably once every two months. And I mentioned I was teaching up from slavery and Booker T. Washington used to go in and he'd stand up on a chair and rub his fingers along the top of the doorframe to see if there was any dust. So I would do that. And the students just laughed uproariously and they said, you know, Booker T. Washington.

GANZGLASS: [00:26:25] So that's great.

FANSELOW: [00:26:26] It was anyway, teaching at Achebe was good because a number of our students were from the same group that he was with, Ebos, and in fact had grown up where he had grown up when he was just about 40 miles away, so they would fill in on some of his, you know what he talked about in that's terrific now and some years later, I worked with the Phelps Foundation out of New York and one of the missions they work with poor black, poor whites, blacks and American Indians. And one of their missions was to bring people from Africa over to introduce black colleges to some people in Africa, so they brought Achebe over and we did some workshops together with two or three of the black colleges. So it was quite an honor to spend time talking about his work with him on the panel, saying how I taught it and the students reactions to it. But then hearing him talk, it was very, very I was very happy.

GANZGLASS: [00:27:33] And what was the American students reaction?

FANSELOW: [00:27:36] Well, the American reaction at the black colleges, there was a banner. Welcome, Chinua Achebe and I would be walking on the campus and I said, are you going to come to this? You know, presentation, you know, tomorrow afternoon, this afternoon or

whatever, and they said, who's Chinua Achebe? And of course, that's what Phillip Stokes had in mind. Dr. Marie Gadson was the person who was at fault. Stokes who brought me to focus. So she was earlier the director of Africa training. And then she had the same position I did in Kenya and Uganda and Tanzania. She was the contractor overseas representative from Teachers College. At the same time I was in Somalia. So I visited a couple of times in Nairobi and we compared notes and how we operated, you know, with the teachers. So she was very enriching to my life, both for Peace Corps training. She subsequently invited me to go to Togo and Ivory Coast to do some in-service training programs in those in Francophone Africa. She was the director in Ghana, the Peace Corps director for a few a couple of years when I went to. And Sam Stokes, a relative of the Stokes family, was the Peace Corps director in Benin, which used to be Dahomey.

FANSELOW: [00:29:00] So I went there and I trained volunteers earlier in Togo and I visited them at the posts. In 69, when I was, I went back to Somalia in 1969, the Peace Corps asked me to do an evaluation in 69, so I went back there for a couple of months when I was there. The president was assassinated. And I knew that the corps would be invited to leave or ejected. So there were a couple of weeks after I finished the evaluation, which was not needed because, you know, part of the evaluation is to recommend next steps, but the next steps, we're not going to take place. I remember going to the ministry to meet the minister and he said, oh, thank you, John. Glad to see you again, because I had been gone for a year. He said, you know, we'd like another 100 volunteers. I said, OK. And I went to the Peace Corps office and said, send a cable to Washington saying they're going to eject us from the country, which they as I said, they did.

GANZGLASS: [00:30:05] Did you think the program was effective? Would you have recommended more volunteers?

FANSELOW: [00:30:11] Yeah, I would have recommended more volunteers. And one of the reasons was that when we got there, they had an

examination that was examined, very esoteric things, rather than the common patterns of English. And after much negotiation and discussion with people from the ministry, they agreed to keep part of the exam that everybody was used to, to be fair to students and to be fair to the Somali English teachers. But they broadened the exam to test common patterns and more frequent vocabulary rather than only esoteric words. So that was a very big step forward to liberalize the English curriculum. So English became much more useful to people and they could read things that were very complicated, things they were asked to read. So they, as I said, combined what they had been doing and they liberalized it a bit in the southern part of the country, Italian had been the lingua franca and our role was to start in the junior highs and introduce English slowly. So in the southern part of the country, from the beginning, they kind of did exams that were more compatible with modern language teaching. But then in the north, the idea was to just train an elite, which had been the tradition in Nigeria. Well, that was the British tradition,

GANZGLASS: [00:31:38] The A- and the O-levels, right?

FANSELOW: [00:31:39] So, yeah, the O-levels, the A-levels. So that was still going on. They had to prepare them to take these standardized exams that were sent to England to be checked, to be sure that the standard was kept high. But that wasn't the case in the south. But in Nigeria, as I said, they liberalized the curriculum, too, with the introduction of a Nigerian novelist, American autobiography, and Hillary's.

GANZGLASS: Right.

FANSELOW: [00:32:14] When I retired from Teachers College, I moved to Japan, where my family was, I been commuting back and forth and I had occasion to work with a Japanese college in New Zealand. From the beginning, it started some years earlier. And I was a consultant, I went to New Zealand quite a few times as a consultant and when I went retired from teachers college and moved to Tokyo. They asked me if I

would come to become president of this college because the president had been recruited by another college and he decided he wanted to go to this was a larger college. So it was a step up for him. So they said, can you come out for six months? So anyway, I stayed for eight years, but the connection is that I never thought when I was in Nigeria eating Nigerian lamb chops that I would be living in New Zealand with 80 million sheep running around and I would never dream have dreamt of meeting through Edmund Hillary. He was the honorary president of the returned New Zealand overseas volunteers. And one of the members of our staff was the president of the Returned Overseas New Zealand Volunteers. So she always invited me to receptions in Wellington, which was the capital, the political capital, and they would hold it at the State House Government House. And Sir Edmund Hillary will always be there to speak.

GANZGLASS: [00:33:53] All right, so we turn to New Zealand volunteers, but they have a Peace Corps as well?

FANSELOW: [00:33:58] Yeah, well, they call it voluntary service overseas. It was the same as England and Australia. Well, Japan has the same thing. I mean, they call it something else.

GANZGLASS: [00:34:06] But is the same idea.

FANSELOW: [00:34:09] So anyway, I had occasion one time to there was a Nigerian from Port Harcourt, which is about 80 miles from where I lived. So I had I didn't have a camera with me. But anyway, I asked Sir Edmund, Hillary had a person was took pictures and but he never sent it to me. The photographer I gave my business card. That was the only disappointment. And then I went to a couple of other things that Hillary spoke at. So that was quite something I never would have dreamed. And I told him, you know, I thought the ascent of Everest to students who had never seen a hill. And ice, snow, it was it was it was an expanding, but most.

GANZGLASS: [00:34:53] So just go back to Nigeria a little bit. You got to know your students a little bit. But did you make friends with other teachers?

FANSELOW: [00:35:02] Not too much the even though everybody lived on staff. They never interacted socially. In other words, like at the Catholic Secondary School. Well, it was different. They were all there were nuns and then there were some Americans and British all in on campus, but they were all the same age and simmering background. But the age difference at my campus, the different subjects, and they were from different tribes. I mean, not that they were antagonistic. Everyone was friendly in the staff room. And we had social events when somebody left, when somebody came and it was all very amicable, but they simply didn't it wasn't the custom to have other people over for a meal. So in two years, the principal asked me, like the day after I got there or the night I got over for dinner, that was that was that was it. So we were very friendly. But I really the other thing that was quite a bit of turnover. So I got to know a couple of you know, we could talk in the staffroom and compare notes, but also we talk very there were a couple of other English teachers where we all thought different levels. So we didn't have that much in common to talk about.

GANZGLASS: [00:36:53] Should I stop it?

FANSELOW: [00:36:55] Yes, stop it, sorry.

GANZGLASS: [00:36:57] So you were saying that people weren't socializing with each other too much. What did you do at night?

FANSELOW: [00:37:06] Well, I.

GANZGLASS: [00:37:08] Read the Peace Corp book locker?

FANSELOW: [00:37:12] I spent a couple of nights in the library. The library was in totally total disarray when I got there. So I asked the principal if I could organize it and, you know, get cabinets and things. He said, fine, sure.

I organized the library committee. And students would look at the Dewey Decimal System and classify the books, put labels on and make cards, and so a couple of nights a week, I went through to work with them. And then the other night, between getting ready for class and reading, what students wrote was pretty busy on the weekend. I often visited the teachers at the half the girls who I went to for breakfast. Well, I went to for Mass and then stayed for breakfast.

GANZGLASS: [00:38:02] Were there other Peace Corps volunteers there or not?

FANSELOW: [00:38:05] Yeah, there was one piece volunteers, but the others were with the Mission Catholic Mission Society. And then some weekends, not too often, I would go away to visit volunteers and other places, but most of them were kind of far away. And it was it was kind of a hassle to do. I had a car for a while. Well, here's what happened. Peace Corps volunteers weren't supposed to have cars because you're supposed to live like the other teachers were in the event, the other senior. What we would call senior staff all had cars and in fact, the. The houses that we lived in were approximately, well, I don't know, 300 feet, 400 feet from the classroom block. But the senior staff drove. I I couldn't understand that, but the idea was they had a car, they got a government loans because they were senior staff and having a car was a big deal. But the principal asked. Peace Corps to give me a car because he wanted me to drive the teachers to the sites for practice teaching, there was only one site close by and that wasn't that close. So the students had a cycle and I was I never.

FANSELOW: [00:39:20] So when I left, so I cycled once, but it was not good. Yeah, I had to cycle on the road and it was down the hill. So anyway, the principle prevailed on the Peace Corps to get me a vehicle. So I could take the teachers to the site and practice teaching, they would find out what the inspector that inspection and the practice teaching and they found that what the inspector. Thought was good teaching and one of the inspectors is big on visual aid, so usually we all fit in the car comfortably. Maybe there were six of us. I mean, six teachers plus me.

I had a Volkswagen. Then is that what they call them, but anyway, that day I had to take like three trips to carry on the reality and stuff. But anyway, after a while. The principle I would get a note from one of the clerks. You are wanted by the principal. So then I would walk down to the office and the principals would say, you know, so-and-so is sick, we'd like you to drive them to his home village with a few of the other students from the home village.

GANZGLASS: [00:40:35] So you became the shuttle service.

FANSELOW: [00:40:39] And the reason was they had a truck. But to send the truck with two students, I mean, it was a truck so that they could carry like like we had a track team and a soccer team, and when they went to games, they took the whole team but the tech to students and then they had a he had to pay the driver extra well. So I was free and I got an allowance. From petrol, but that was all so it was much cheaper, so I had all the these go please make up some excuse and take my car away. So but it was good and I had a couple of good trips that were good with the students. And you're going to get to know them in different ways that way. So it was it was OK. But the irony was that. You're supposed to look like the other teachers, but they had cars, but I couldn't have. But the Peace Corps at that time was kind of right handed about policies, and I wanted to I met my high school English professor. We decided to meet in Athens and traveled together and he wanted to come to Nigeria to see what I was doing. But afterwards,

GANZGLASS: [00:41:56] This was in the half year?

FANSELOW: [00:41:57] Half year, after the first year or so after that, this set of policy, you can only travel in Africa, essentially that was which made sense. Having said that, it was a good break and I got a lot of slides from different countries and then shared this visit, you know, to the middle of Turkey and Greece, Israel and Jordan.

GANZGLASS: [00:42:19] Wow. That was quite a bit.

FANSELOW: [00:42:22] Egypt with the students, so it was quiet, it was very informative and helpful for the for the students. We had quite a few evenings. It was voluntary, of course, but almost all the students came to these sessions. We had electricity two hours a night. There was a school generator. There was no electricity in town, except it is an individual dance hall with the banquet that a generator, everybody had a generator. So two hours a night and then we use the lantern. If we stayed up late or we used the lantern before eight o'clock, it was just on from eight to 10. But when I did the rounds at night. There was a curfew that was supposed to go to sleep by 10:00. That's why they turned the lights off, but when they were studying for exams, they would have a flashlight under their blanket. And of course, they usually hear you coming in would turn it off, but one guy didn't hear me coming. So I said, Benedict, what are you doing? Sir, I am sleeping.

FANSELOW: [00:43:28] But generally, they were very they adhere to the rules. And of course, they had the. What did the British call that system? Where senior students are responsible for junior students after do an infraction, they give them punishment. So it worked pretty well and because they were mature, they didn't misuse their authority very much because the other students were of a like age or they weren't there. So that was good.

GANZGLASS: [00:43:58] Did you think, thinking back, that was the first year of independence? You said they changed the curriculum. Were there other things that were going on at that time?

FANSELOW: [00:44:11] No, I mean, not that, I mean,

GANZGLASS: [00:44:13] Not that, you know.

FANSELOW: [00:44:14] I didn't talk about it much, you know.

GANZGLASS: [00:44:16] They didn't talk about.

FANSELOW: [00:44:17] No, we. Well, I should. Every morning we had assembly.

GANZGLASS: [00:44:27] Yeah, it's good.

FANSELOW: [00:44:29] The principal made announcements about the students sat in the lower section and it was a stage where the staff sat and then after the announcements, we always sang an Anglican hymn and not all of the students were Anglican. Not all of the students were Christian, but they loved singing these hymns, just like they loved reciting and acting out Shakespeare. Well. And so they love the hymns and we didn't sing the national anthem every day, but on certain holidays we sang the national anthem and they raised the Nigerian flag and. When I got there, there was a very, very weak flagpole, so I got a note from the clerk delivered by the clerk saying you are wanted by the principal. And he said, John, I would like you to.

FANSELOW: [00:45:48] If I was going to put up a fight or I didn't want it to fall down, so I had the. Grounds crew dig a hole two feet deep and about three feet in diameter and we put the well, we got a new poll. I don't know where they got it, but a huge poll we put it in and held it up with. bamboo trunks and then put in some cinder blocks and then cement and then I built the I asked them to build a wall two feet high, it was round of round to put more cinder blocks and then more cement two feet above the ground. So it was four feet, four foot concrete base for this flagpole. And then they put mortar on to smooth it out. That was a very nice little inflatable stand. I mean, flagpole still stand anyway. I mention that. But also, if things went wrong on campus sometimes on the weekend and the ground staff went around. The principal would somehow get me a message to the Croxton works, or maybe he would get a student to come to the house, and I remember one time the there was a problem with the toilets in one of the dormitories. So he asked me if I could help fix them. And it turns out I was able to, but he didn't know. I used to do plumbing and electrical work in summers to make money for college.

FANSELOW: [00:47:30] But somehow we had this idea that I could do these kinds of things. And you could. And I could. Fortunately, I could, but so that was good. And then again, the student saw me in a different light, but my main deliver was a way to really get to know them and talk to them informally. And then during the vacations, we weren't we had a certain number of days leave, but we had longer. Days to do vacations, then we had to do leave, so then we were supposed to do a project, so I did a project and a teacher training college about 10 miles away, Catholic teacher training college, redoing their library in the principal. And some of the staff member came to our campus for a track meet or something and saw the library. And he said, boy, that's great. So I said, well, I got a month off during the vacation. You want me to do yours, I'll do yours. So I did the same thing. It was during the vacation, but he asked a few of the students if they would mind staying during the vacation. Of course, they were happy to stay. They got free meals and were able to learn something. So we had a good time at that other college, too. And I mentioned track and field. It turns out that for some reason I was in charge of the track and field.

FANSELOW: [00:48:55] I mean, I knew nothing about track and field, but they had the hurdles which when they set them up, they set them up. So they didn't go over. They set them up with the side that was supposed to go over when, you know, knocked into it, go down. They set them up the other way and they said, well, you know, if we set them up that way, then they fall down. We have to open them up again. But I said, don't you hurt yourself if you run into this thing and it doesn't fall down? So I finally convinced them to turn them around. That was my contribution. Well, that was to turn it around. So I, I, I saved a few injuries doing that. And then when I left, they had a big send off and they played an intramural soccer game in my honor. I have no interest in sports or soccer, but it was very nice. And then they sang God Be With Us to a meeting and it was very touching. So it was very tough leaving. And I kept in touch with a lot of the students for a couple of years. But then

Biafran War started shortly after and that was the end of keeping in touch with the students. So I lost touch with all of them.

GANZGLASS: [00:50:04] Have you been back to Nigeria at all?

FANSELOW: [00:50:06] No. And one reason was because of the war. And then later it was I mean, I didn't know anybody. Everyone was dispersed. Uyo, which is where I was, now has a university and a medical school and a fantastically modernistic stadium and the flyways and the four lane highway through the city. It's unbelievable to me, although, you know, 55 years, it was at a crossroads. So it grew tremendously. It was at a crossroads, basically. So that's one of the reasons it grew. So it's it's really great to see the progress that took place. And because of corruption, the country is not in great shape. And you could see that corruption starting when I was there. If people went to the hospital, if they wanted a bedpan or something, you know, they'd have to give a couple of pence to one of the attendants. You could see it starting. And I was very naive when I left. I took a ship, a freighter from Lagos to Liverpool, which stopped in Accra and Monrovia. And a couple of other places, and when I showed my passport to get on the freighter, the person in immigration, said, you know, you don't have to write a paper, you know, don't you have the paper you got when you came here two years ago? I mean, I didn't have the paper. I don't remember having received the paper when I got there. And in the meantime, I had all these other visas from other countries that I visited in the Middle East. Europe, so he took the passports of them without the papers, you can't leave. Well, in the end, you know, the freighter was getting ready to leave. Some of it came from the freighter and said, you know, you've got to get on now. So when I got on, there was a retiring civil engineer who had been in the colonial service and after independence of. They wanted to phase out the colonial service and the people in the Colonial Service wanted to go back to England because they were filling all these posts rightfully with Nigerians. And he said, well, he wanted a bribe. OK. Anyway, getting back to

GANZGLASS: [00:52:39] Did you pay the bribe?

FANSELOW: [00:52:41] Oh, no, I didn't. I mean, I was I didn't know he was wanting a bribe until this civil engineer on the freighter.

GANZGLASS: [00:52:47] And then having to get your passport. He gave it back?

FANSELOW: [00:52:49] The guy came from the ship. He said, you got to get out. He won't give me the passport. He said something and he gave me the passport anyway, when we got to Nigeria. And talk to some of the people at the university, the people we were sharing dorms with were undergraduates, but they had a couple of graduate program. There were many graduates from the United Kingdom. From the United States, who came back with degrees after independence there could have easily staffed. I mean, there were 39 of us. There were 39 Nigerian graduates who could have gone to the places we went to. But one problem was. Many of the Nigerian graduates did not want to go to Uyo or Birnin Kebbi or all these small communities that we went to. They wanted to be only in the big cities, volunteers. Wanted to be in the small town in this small town, and when the people got their postings to be in Lagos or Ibadan, initially, they were very disappointed. They wanted to be in a small place. The only request I made when I saw the posting, I said, I really don't care where I go, but I would like to be near a place where I could go to mass on Sunday. So in the southeast, very Catholic. So that's one of the reasons I was sent to the southeast rather than the north or the West because I wanted to be near a Catholic church. And in fact, there was a Catholic church in town, plus there was a chapel at the Catholic Girls Secondary School where I often went, but I sometimes went to the town. I found that much more moving in town because the people sang some of the hymns in the vernacular and they were very moving to me the way they sang there. Everybody participated. It was very moving.

GANZGLASS: [00:54:47] Was the priest Nigerian?

FANSELOW: [00:54:49] No, at that point that, well, the bishop was Nigerian and there were some Nigerian priests, but the priests, the parish were all Irish. And when I went out to outlying schools to give the entrance exam, I wouldn't go alone. I would go with another member of staff. But I was the only foreigner on the staff when I went to these outlying villages, which, of course were much smaller than Uyo. They all said, you know, good morning, Reverend Father. Oh, because the only white person they normally saw was a Catholic missionary. Catholic missionary. So good morning, Reverend Father. Good afternoon, Reverend Father. Thank you, Reverend Father.

GANZGLASS: [00:55:33] So you were elevated.

FANSELOW: [00:55:35] Elevated to Reverend Father.

GANZGLASS: [00:55:37] Right.

FANSELOW: [00:55:38] Ok, so but anyway, getting back to observation, my whole all my research has been in classroom observation based on visiting practice teachers in Nigeria not knowing what I was doing. And I was very inspired by the primary school students who came from homes where their parents were, in many cases illiterate. Often they didn't read their first language because many of the first languages were just in the process of being written. And these kids form in a form, you know, one desk, one textbook, a teacher was just sometimes two years of training. English worked diligently, wrote they each had a notebook, wrote notes. It was very inspiring to me to see these kids work and be so interested in and curious about everything, you know, Nigerian history at one point in one level, I mean, the kids from a small town, what but they were very fascinated by this. So that was inspiring. And in 2005, I received the Distinguished Alumni Award from Teachers College. They give two or three years. There are 80,000 graduates, though, so it's quite I was quite touched. But the president in the citation said, you know, I don't know where you got this. Maybe one of my personal statements when I was up for tenure with whatever, you

know, your your dedication, you know, inspired by the students you saw in Nigeria, is very moving. And it was so my whole life was transformed by visiting these practice teachers and seeing these kids work so hard to learn. And I wish I could have done more in the inner city in New York to get the same attitude from some kids who grew up in very impoverished situations. But there were other things going on in New York that weren't going on and Uyo that made the kids want to study.

GANZGLASS: [00:57:52] But you inspired all these teachers, all these volunteers in other countries.

FANSELOW: [00:57:56] Yeah, and then when I became teachers. Yeah. And when I went back, you see, when Dr. Gasten invited me to go back for Peace Corps training in country and then the Peace Corps invited me a couple of times to do workshops for. Language teachers who from all over West Africa did that in the car a couple of times, in fact, I went there with my older daughter. She celebrated her sixth birthday in the car when I did this workshop for Francophone language teachers from all over the Francophone and from. To introduce them to a wider range of techniques, and I know that's what I did in New Zealand, I did professional training as the president of this college and public relations, visiting schools to raise the profile of the college schools in New Zealand, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and, of course, Japan all over the world. So I've had a terrific career starting as a result of wanting to improve my Spanish by going to Latin America and I'm going to Latin America for the first time in my life in February. I have two daughters, our younger daughter married a man from Bogota, so he and she now live in New York, they met in business school and she's developing a Spanish. My oldest daughter is totally fluent in Spanish. She went to Mexico City for a couple of years to learn Spanish. She's a human rights lawyer and a lot of she has a lot of dealings with Latin America.

FANSELOW: [00:59:37] So she wanted to improve, which improve her Spanish shoes. So both of my daughters are very into Spanish and I'm going to Bogota for a week in February when they're having a celebration with his family. Wonderful. So that's the fulfillment of my dream 56 years later. So full circle. But it was very good. Having said that, Nigeria could have done without us. When people ask me, you know, Nigeria and Somalia in the news all the time, when people ask you, do you think you did any good? I say, well, I don't think I did any harm. And I learned a lot both in Somalia and Nigeria, in Francophone Africa. It just opened up my eyes, a stupid incident. But when we first got to Nigeria, I turned on the lights, which in the hotel, and it was in the opposite direction, you know, up was down instead of up. And I used to do electrical work and it was always up was on. I mean, it was a ridiculous thing. What was it like? I got so annoyed and I said, wait a minute, you're in a different country, different. And, you know, they have different kinds of plugs. It was all about why wouldn't it be so? It was very provincial. Generally, and I think, of course, it depends on what you do when you travel.

FANSELOW: [01:00:57] It doesn't necessarily broad new. Some people get very bitter when they travel the trail. But it can be very in my case, I think it was very continually enlightening. I have lived in Japan off and on for 20 plus years. There's always a veil. You think you understand something in another veil. So that was, I think, one of the lessons from my first time in Nigeria and I continue to say, isn't this amazing, isn't this amazing, some difference, you discover that you thought you knew something and he did it. So you know my first book was Break. Well, my first book was Teaching English in Exhilarating Circumstances, which was a play on words from Teaching Evolution in Difficult Circumstances, which was written by Michael West, who wrote General Service List of English in England when Thorndyke did the same thing at Teachers College in New York. He wrote textbooks, teaching, learning English in West Africa or whatever, which I use in primary schools. Anyway, he wrote this book on teaching English in Difficult Circumstances was a great book, and I said, well, it was

difficult, but it was also exhilarating. So I put together a series of lesson plans with Peace Corps volunteers doing training, which I did three or four editions with different volunteers, each time teaching evolution exhilarating circumstances. It was used in quite a few countries in addition to Nigeria and Somalia.

FANSELOW: [01:02:36] And then anyway, the first book that was published by a local publisher was called Breaking Rules. And the cover is a bit of a tapestry from Dahomean, which is not Benin. The kingdoms in Dahomey used to record their history by doing tapestry, showing sketches of different incidents. They have huge round mud huts where they put these tapestries around and you see the chronology of the kingdom they were and everybody buys them when they're in Francophone Africa. I mean, you can get them in New York now. So I took a picture of one of them, Bird, and I put it on the cover of Breaking Rules. And the second book was a contrast in conversations. I have a piece of cloth from Nigeria. I bought loads of cloth. At one point I was going to be a cloth dealer in New York. But dark horse dealers, I mean, so many people there now, they do it all the time. But anyway, I enjoyed the cloth and the other book was published in Japan and Japanese. So I didn't do an African cloth. I did a kaleidoscope. And my latest book is called Small Changes Big Results with a lot of incidents from Somalia and Nigeria and other places. And the only graphic on the cover is a picture of me. That's what the people I'm working with said I should have the coverage instead of another crossword tapestry.

GANZGLASS: [01:04:13] Because now you're so well known.

FANSELOW: [01:04:16] Well, or else I'm not one on that figure. Who is this jerk? So I have to see what I look like.

GANZGLASS: [01:04:23] Oh, I'm glad that you agreed to tell your stories. You have so many stores, it’s great.

FANSELOW: [01:04:30] Well I’m glad you asked me. A lot of this is the short version.

GANZGLASS: [01:04:32] I'm sure.

FANSELOW: [01:04:34] And the article I wrote called The Postcard Realities. Well, it's a book chapter. Actually, that was a. A person who wanted to people, so-called leaders of TESOL, I was president of the TESOL professional organization, the international organization, the state affiliate, and she asked a number of us to write about our professional growth using no jargon. I think she asked the audience. Only 20 could do it, and it took me three times, I mean, I did it, she said, this is John, this is jargon again. So the finally the postcard realities. And I started I said I was on jet lag and it started with Margery Michelmore and the postcard and said, how do you see something different? You know, you look at a postcard, there are no mosquitoes on the postcard. I mean, you might write about mosquitoes in your message, but don't ever. So I said, that's the same thing. Don't you look at the front of the postcard, OK, you've got to look at multiple interpretations of the same event. So postcard realities and the teachers I work with say, John, why don't you write like this more regularly? It's accessible. You get this academic nonsense in. My new book is accessible.

GANZGLASS: It's great.

FANSELOW: Thank you very much.

GANZGLASS: [01:05:58] So thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]