

**G. Toby Marion Oral History Interview**  
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection  
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**Creator:** G. Toby Marion  
**Interviewer:** Candice Wiggum  
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**Biographical Note**

Toby Marion served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Afghanistan from 1971 to 1975 in an education program.

**Access**

Open.

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Oral History Interview

with

G. Toby Marion

February 3, 2020  
Oakland, California

By Candice Wiggum

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

WIGGUM: [00:00:02] All right. Today is February 3, 2020. This is Candice Wiggum and I am interviewing Toby Marion, who is a Peace Corps volunteer in Afghanistan from 1971 to 1975 as a science teacher. So welcome, Toby.

MARION: [00:00:23] Thank you.

WIGGUM: [00:00:24] And let's start off with why you joined Peace Corps.

MARION: [00:00:28] I graduated from college in 1970. And the month before or two months before we graduated was the first draft lottery and I ended up getting a high number. So I was out of danger or chance of becoming drafted for the Vietnam War. And I went and got a masters degree in chemical engineering, which was my subject. And as I came out of that in this at the end of 71, I had job offers from industry, from Chevron and some chemical companies. And I also was pursuing getting a teaching

post in Africa because I had met a Nigerian fellow at MIT where I did my master's and thought I had that all lined up until I realized that they were expecting somebody to be paying my way. And I was expecting to come on just as a junior teaching assistant. And so that fell through. And so I applied to the Peace Corps. I was offered Western Samoa and Afghanistan. And after some review of that and talking to friends, I decided to go to Afghanistan. There was no problem in my family. My older brother had joined the Peace Corps and had gone to Guatemala. My father was an officer in the Navy in World War Two and had actually discouraged me from joining Rozzi when I was in college because he said, well, you don't need you don't know if you'll need to serve, but why don't you just wait and see and go to university and see what happens after that? So anyway, I guess I joined the Peace Corps because at that time we felt two things. One, that there was a need to serve the country one way or another. And I was opposed to the war. I wasn't going to be doing that. And to to see the world. I couldn't see myself working in an oil refinery immediately at the age of 21 or 22 with a long life ahead to do that kind of thing.

WIGGUM: [00:02:28] And, and how soon after you got accepted did you go to training?

MARION: [00:02:34] It was fairly quick because I ended up working for Union Carbide Corporation in New Jersey the summer of 71, and they wanted me to stay on. In fact, that was even a bit enticing because they were going through a 30 percent layoff. But they liked me. So they wanted me to stay there and they let me stay as long as I wanted. So I stayed for five months and made pretty good money. But I was able to leave them in October and join the Peace Corps in November of 71.

WIGGUM: [00:03:02] Yeah, great. Great. And where did you train?

MARION: [00:03:06] Well, it was kind of weird. We had what was called a priest in those days, a priest invitational staging in Denver. And so they flew us all out to Denver. And this was a four day meeting. And it was bizarre because I walked into my hotel room, we shared rooms and I looked at a

guy that I recognized, like he lived next door. And he, he ran track at Cornell and I played tennis at Cornell. And we'd seen each other running around the track in the springtime for the last three or four years. So anyway, we joined we were only a dozen in our group or maybe 13, I don't recall. And the presentational staging was very hierarchical, shall we say. They had returned Peace Corps volunteers. They had staff members, they had a psychologist and a doctor. And we went through a whole series of different presentations which were trying to give us a feel for what the culture and society of Afghanistan would be like. And there was also a chance, I think, to wash out at that stage if anybody had, you know, freaked out, but nobody did. We just, you know, worked all day long and went out and partied at night and then bang, they put us on an airplane and we flew to Rome where we got 20 hours off and we all are 28 hours off.

MARION: [00:04:24] We all ran around and saw the basilica, the Colosseum and whatever else. And then we got on another plane. We went to Tehran, spent four or five hours waiting in Tehran, drinking rum and coke at the bar. And then we got in a plane and flew to Afghanistan. And we saw this landscape like nothing we'd ever seen before. It's just solid brown mud houses and mostly nothing but Rocky Mountains. And we landed and went straight into classrooms and we were all completely wiped out. And the classrooms, the downstairs, they said, welcome. This is pretty big compound in the middle of. And they said welcome and you're going to be doing this, that and the other blah, blah, blah, and then they sent us upstairs to language lessons, which was unbelievable. So we sat down and they gave us language lessons and they taught us a bunch of sentences by rote. And then we after

WIGGUM: [00:05:16] This is without any sleep or

MARION: [00:05:18] Without any sleep, without any food, nothing. So we went straight then to our homes where they had homes booked for us. And they were typical Afghan homes, very basic made of concrete, which is unusual in that time. Only the big cities had concrete buildings and we had a cook

and a houseboy and the cook came out and they spread tarpaulins or whatever, you know, coverings on the floor. And we sat cross-legged, we ate rice and chicken and had a meal. And then we collapsed, exhausted our beds, you know, early, early evening and about three o'clock in the morning, we all woke up with dreadful jetlag. And it was blackest night. And before we gone to bed, we said, what was that language all about? We can't remember. Even one word from what we'd done is how why do they do that? And so we wake up at three o'clock in the morning and blackest night in the distance, you start to hear donkeys braying and things you've never heard before in your life. And pretty soon cock, you know, cock a doodle doing and all of a sudden, bang, all those sentences came right out. We were able to repeat verbatim everything we learned in those language lessons because it had sat in the back of our heads. Anyway, that was that training went on for four months, nine to five language because I was in a group of a dozen science teacher trainers, the United Nations, I think it was you. NDP had developed boxes, big boxes, about four feet high, two feet wide and three feet. OK, they developed boxes with all the equipment inside to do the experiments in the physics, chemistry, biology textbooks, the schools in Afghanistan at that time were based on the French say system, which meant that the students took something like 12 or 13 different subjects every year, all throughout their progression of middle school and high school.

MARION: [00:07:17] And so this meant they had a little bit of physics, a little bit of chemistry, a little bit of biology every day. Now accompanying these textbooks, of course, were accompanying the textbooks, were descriptions of experiments, but none of the students had ever done the experiments. None of the teachers had ever taught the experiment. So what they did is they sat there and they memorized what was in the textbooks. So if it was hydrolyzed water into hydrogen and oxygen, they sat there back and forth and they said, well, you, you hook up a battery and you put a wire in the water and you energize it and it splits into hydrogen and oxygen. And after a while, you collect so much hydrogen and you take a match and you turn around and you put the match to the hydrogen and it pops it makes an explosion because hydrogen is highly flammable. And so they would

memorize this in Farsi, which was their language, and but they'd never done this. So what we did is we went I had nine middle schools, seven high schools in the province of copies. And I would go to all of these different schools and teach the teachers how to do these experiments. And of course, we came with the equipment and then gave that equipment to the schools, or in some cases, the schools had already had the equipment delivered to them. And this was kind of exciting for everyone because they they'd never seen a foreigner before. And B, they were now able to do what they were supposed to be doing in their in their curriculum.

WIGGUM: [00:08:51] And was this all schools around Kabul, outside of Kabul?

MARION: [00:08:56] All of us. Everything was out of Kabul. Yeah. Because Kabul itself is relatively advanced. It had had its moments in history. It had had a king in 1919 that turn back the clock and kicked the women out of the schools and so on and so forth. But basically they had had various movements to get modern education. So all the provinces all around the country is where we went.

WIGGUM: [00:09:20] Yeah, yeah. And how did you get around?

MARION: [00:09:24] You got around through public transport, which was basically busses and trucks and Russian jeeps and the basic mode, the Russian jeep, for example, which is about the same size and looked the same as a jeep from a World War II movie. One time I counted there were 17 people in that jeep. It was absolutely astonishing. The driver would sit way over and the left hand side and there would be three other people next to him. And then in the second row, there would be five people crammed in. And then the back there were two opposing benches and there would be two people opposing each other. And then there'd be five men standing up on the back on the bumper holding on. So these things were, you know, right down to the their shock absorbers, you know, and going over bumpy roads. The busses were equally bizarre. They were rather small. What we would be bigger than a minivan, but a lot less than a, it would be like a small school bus and they would be filled with people. And sometimes

they would have sacks of grain with them. Sometimes they would have a goat with them, sometimes they'd have a chicken with them. And then on the roof they would have a rack that had a high rail all the way around and up. There would be all kinds of produce and what have you. So sometimes you'd end up in one of these busses, like I worked in Panjshir Valley, which is one of the high school districts, which is a very rugged valley, because I was living at 5000 feet and we would go up to seven or 8000 feet to the schools and it would be switchback roads through the most bumpy, rocky roads you could possibly imagine. This is one of the places where the Soviets stubbed their toe and their 10 year war with the Afghans. And that, like many places in Afghanistan, the terrain is unconquerable. You know, there's no way to go in there and take anything over. It's just impossible.

WIGGUM: [00:11:15] So I imagine you had lots of frightening experiences on the Jeeps in the bus. Did you ever have any really dangerous ones?

MARION: [00:11:24] Not really. I think probably one of the most frightening things we had happened was during our training period, the first Iran Pakistan war, maybe the second it was a 71 war, 72 war. And so all the Americans were evacuated from Pakistan up through the Khyber Pass into Afghanistan to a place called Jalalabad. And we had which is right on the eastern border there, are close to the eastern border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. And it's sort of. For that country, it's sort of like a Florida in the sense it has palm trees and it's warm and it's relatively lower latitude and significantly lower elevation. And so we went down there and the town was just filled with Americans from USAID and from the embassies and consulates who had been evacuated because this war had started, which didn't last very long. But it was concerning, you know, and I'm sure that the way things are, I'm sure my parents back in America and other people would be thinking, oh, they're over there in a war zone, you know, which of course, you're actually very, very far from anything. But the only other time that I had a really frightening experience was actually during a holiday where I traveled overland, going west to Iran and I took a bus from Tehran to Isfahan going south. And at that stage, they used to say about Tehran, if

you visit from the east, it's like Paris. And if you visit it from the west, it's like a dump, which is overstated in both cases. But Iran was vastly more developed than Afghanistan and everything about the place was very well developed. And I got on a bus and I was heading south and it was it's icy and cold and snowy in the middle of winter. And this bus came around a corner and he lost control of the bus, started skidding on the ice. And as we came around the corner coming towards us was a massive 40 foot Mack truck, you know, with a great big whatever on the back. And everybody in the bus started saying Allah Humma Salle ala Muhammad, you know, which is like a Shia Muslim expression of save me God, you know. And that literally scared the daylights out of me. And the, the bus driver just grabbed the wheel and turned it left and right and got it immediately back under control and turned back into his lane. But for a moment there, I thought, this is going to be the end. You know?

WIGGUM: [00:13:55] Yeah. So now you've been for four months in Kabul?

MARION: [00:14:01] In this training house in Kabul. And then we moved to Kapisa and we were taken out there and introduced to the, the authorities and given our marching orders as to which schools we'd visit and what mean. And we were introduced to counterparts as well. I had two counterparts and they were young Afghan men who were a few years older than I was. So they were probably 25 and 30. And I was at this stage, you know, 22. And we went about our business. We set up a schedule with schools we'd go to and we met with ourselves as to how we do this. And they were kind of waiting for me to, you know, lead the way because we had already been through the kids and how to do all the experiments in our training program with the U.N. and in Kabul. So it wasn't like, you know, opening a box and figuring out how to put things together for the first time. And so off we went.

WIGGUM: [00:14:58] And you say we, so there is more than one of you that?

MARION: [00:15:02] Me as the Peace Corps volunteer and my two education counterparts.



WIGGUM: [00:15:05] Yeah. And you went to different schools in the area?

MARION: [00:15:07] That's right. And a couple of them were day trips, you know, so one of the first things we had to do was find housing. So I found I was based out of basically Gulbahar, which is a fairly large town at the mouth of the Panjshir Valley. And in Gulbahar, the Germans had built it as an aid project, a textile plant. So they had a big compound there that had concrete housing and had running water and electricity and so forth. And the governor of the province wanted me to live there. But I guess being me, I was a bit headstrong. I didn't want to live there. I wanted to live, you know, the real country experience. So I moved a couple of miles south where I found a house that was right on the main road. There's only one road in a province like that. It runs down the middle of the province. And it was a mud compound, which is what they all are, about 30 meters square with six meter high walls. And along one wall was five rooms. There was a kitchen and a living room and then a stairwell up to the roof and then another room, which is a bedroom and then another room, which we used as a storeroom or could have been another bedroom. The first three all had glass doors, louver doors that you could open and get into the garden. The garden itself was big, big enough for a vegetable garden.

MARION: [00:16:35] And then in the far corner was the so-called bathroom. And that was the only place where there was any concrete. There were two rooms to the bathroom. The first one was a room with a concrete floor, and then it had a table and wooden *bukhari*. *Bukhari* means steamer. Actually, it means where? To make steam, so it's a little wooden stove that you put wood in the bottom and it heats what's basically a large bucket of water and the chimney goes up through the middle of it. And this is how you heat the house as well. But there's no water. There's another simple *bukhari*, which is you just burn wood and there's a stove pipe that goes out the window and that heats the room up. So anyway, that was the bath bathing room. And then the next room along was the toilet, which was just it was raised up a couple of feet. And it's just a flat mud floor, adobe type floor with a hole in it. So you squatted there and did your business and it

was off the ground a bit because on the back side of the house underneath it's open and there's a person who comes around and collects your refuse and they use that to fertilize the fields, which is one of the reason why it's dangerous to eat any vegetables without cooking and washing and so forth.

WIGGUM: [00:18:03] Yeah, tell me more about how you lived, how to cook, how to, you know, what was your daily life like?

MARION: [00:18:11] Yeah, we had a unique feature to our experience in Afghanistan, and that is that at the time we were told we were one of only two out of 55 countries where the volunteers made a lot more money than the local people. So our salaries worked out to about 90 dollars a month. Which, you know, in retrospect, if I had gone into industry, I would have been making a thousand and fifty dollars a month, that was what a couple of my offers were at. So I was thinking I'm really lowly paid. But in fact, I think the prime minister of the country made about a hundred dollars a month, you know, so it turns out that the house rent was about six dollars and fifty cents and all the vegetables and meat and fruit and whatever that you could possibly buy was about six dollars and fifty cents a month. And we had a manservant who had been recommended to us by the by the Germans because they all had servants. So we had a man servant. He cost six dollars and fifty cents a month. So for about 20 bucks a month, we had everything we could possibly need. And the man servant, he brought water from the stream, which is called a juy in front of the house, and then boiled it in order for it to be safe, for us to use for, you know, tea and drinking and cooking and so forth. And he bought all the food and vegetables and he did all the cooking and he washed our clothes and we just did our business.

MARION: [00:19:39] When we got there, we were told, if you want to earn respect from the locals, you need to dress appropriately for a teacher. If you have long hair and you wear jeans and scruffy clothes, they said you'll be identified with what the Peace Corps euphemistically called WT's, which is stood for world travelers, which is means hippies, which there was a train,

metaphorically speaking, from Paris to New Delhi. And these busses went along every day and people could, for a fairly nominal amount of money, buy a ticket on this bus and get on and get off wherever they like to go all the way through Europe and Turkey and Iran and Afghanistan and Pakistan all the way down to India. And a lot of these people were, you know, what we'd been a little bit like in our latter years at college, but they were big time hippies and they had long hair and they often times went native with their dress and they smoked a lot of hash and some of them got into more serious drugs. And a lot of the women were, quote unquote, promiscuous. So are the men, of course. And so they were really looked down upon. So they said you don't want to in any way be identified with those folks. So what you need to do is go to used clothing bazaar in Kabul, where they shipped out containers full of used discarded suits from Germany. And these were usually worsted wool suits and they were three piece suits and they were in great condition. Relatively speaking, they'd been cleaned and pressed and they cost about ten dollars a pop.

MARION: [00:21:15] So we all went nuts. We got our hair cut short and we went to the bazaar and we came back with three or four of these beautiful suits which you wore with the shirt. Nobody wore neckties. And if you put one of these things on and went on a bus into the countryside or whatever people would, and you're a foreigner, people would treat you with respect and they would offer you their seats or they would help you to get your luggage on and off the bus or whatever. So anyway, so our daily life, it was just what you'd expect from people working in education. You'd get up, you'd have breakfast, you'd head off. I had a bicycle so I could ride my bike to the local schools, which is just one more mustardy high school, just a couple of miles down the road where I'd get to hitch a ride on a jeep, which is basically an open platform taxi to go to Mahmud Iraqi, which was the next high school, which is a couple of miles down the road, like five or six miles down the road. And this form of community taxi is universal in the Third World, throughout the Middle East and India and South America and whatever. It's just very common. You know, if you need a ride, you go out in the road, you put your hand up, and if it's one of these, it stops and it

says fifty cents, you know, and on you get, off you go. So and so we go and we teach.

MARION: [00:22:29] And then at the end of that, they give us a lunch, which was typically, again, you spread a covering on the floor and six or eight teachers sit around and they'd have a big bowl of soup. And with that had been cooked some chicken or some lamb. Beef really wasn't never. It never was it lamb? Some, some chicken, some beef, some mutton or some camel meat and maybe a few vegetables and some fresh onions. And then each person would get one of these big breads, which were very substantial, maybe two feet long or eighteen inches long and ten or twelve inches wide. And they were shaped sort of like a horseshoe. And they were thick, very rich, delicious wheat bread. And you take half that vegetarian half, then everyone would tear one half into little pieces and chuck it into the bowl, which would then absorb all the liquid and then with the other half you. Tear off small pieces of bread that could form like a spoon in your hand, and you you'd be given by the host your chunk of meat, so you'd grab a little bit of your meat, then you'd scoop in and scoop out some of this wet, moist, soaking bread with your dry bread and you'd eat that. You always eat with your right hand because your left hand was used for personal hygiene purposes. And the meals were actually very simple, but highly nutritious. And I mean, never saw fat people in Afghanistan, that's for sure. So we'd have the lunch and then at the end of that would be done. We go home.

WIGGUM: [00:24:05] At what time would it be done?

MARION: [00:24:08] You know, I really don't recall specifics, but early afternoon.

WIGGUM: [00:24:11] Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's what I was getting at. Did you have a lot of time afterwards?

MARION: [00:24:15] There was a fair amount of time.

WIGGUM: [00:24:16] How did you usually spent that?

MARION: [00:24:17] Not enough. Once I played volleyball with the guys at the school and they were really good volleyball players, we had a great time. And this one fellow teacher who was about my age had an older brother who'd gone to college in America. So he was knowledgeable about what things were like in America because he'd heard all these stories from his older brother. But we would typically go back with where my house was, was on a local bazaar. The little town was called Bakuham, and there would be maybe 12 or 15 shops, five or six or seven on each side of the road. And one would be textiles and one would be fruit and one would be meat and one would be, you know, pens and pencils and what have you. And sometimes I go out there and sit with the locals and chat with them and have a lot of experiences. I know politically there were some interesting things that happened. This was during the time of Watergate. And I picked up like immediately in November of '71. One of the things you went out and bought was a shortwave radio. It was about the size of a lunchbox and it had a long antenna that you'd pull out. And BBC World Worldwide was where we got our news. And I still get my one of my primary sources of news from that today, because it's the most, I think, independent and also very efficient.

WIGGUM: [00:25:52] And it covers more of the world.

MARION: [00:25:52] Yeah, and it's quick. It's absolutely the quickest to an international issue. So I'd been listening to that for years. And when Watergate came down and one thing we had in the Peace Corps was a free subscription to Time magazine and a weekly copy of the New York Times News of the Week in review and getting mail back and forth from the states took three weeks. There was no telephones and there's no TV in the country at that time. And so you really were isolated. But once a week we'd get delivered. We'd have to go into Kabul to pick this stuff up. So oftentimes we would go in on the weekends or somebody would actually not too often would anybody come out our way. But for a while, I had had a roommate, by the way, who was working on the Food for Peace program. They had a terrible drought I this time, and people were dying of

starvation. So we sent in lots of wheat with USAID and lots of Peace Corps volunteers to help to distribute that. Anyway, it was fascinating, the whole thing of Watergate, because I'd be listening to BBC and they'd be saying, well, the president is being investigated for, you know, this break in and that he claimed he knew nothing about it, but it kept building and building and building.

MARION: [00:27:13] And I'd be sitting there at one stage having read an article in time about what was happening, what was likely to happen, and these local shopkeepers who were illiterate at that time, Afghanistan was 92, 96 percent illiterate, something like that. They said, well, it doesn't, they listen to the BBC as well. They listen to the Persian language service. They'd say, well, it doesn't really make much sense what's going on in America. They're talking about putting your Nixon on trial, but they said he's the king. You can't put a king on trial. You have to take him out of being king first and then you can put him on trial. And I'd be reading TIME magazine saying, well, there's severe constitutional crises involved here and that it said that a sitting president can't be called before the courts. You know, he has to be impeached first. You know, so I was saying, you know, the wisdom of people is not related to their literacy or to their wealth. It is something that a culture develops over millennia. And people understand basic principles of government, whether they know what democracy is or whether they know what a written constitution is, is pretty fascinating.

WIGGUM: [00:28:26] Yeah. Speaking of that, did you make friends there? Did you have people that you would go to their homes and visit and what was that like?

MARION: [00:28:35] Yeah, quite a few. I hesitate slightly because there's one family I got really close to. And this was the fellow who was the director of the culture program in the training program. And he came from a family that was his father had been a had been the private secretary of the king. And he had two wives and he had 13 sons and four daughters. And I became good buddies with this guy. And I ended up going to their house once or twice a month for three years. And they treated me like a like a son. They

were they're very hospitable people. So they treated, you know, a lot of people that way. But as it turns out, we became very close friends. And in the end, he had a lot of his family emigrated to the states as not refugees, but political asylum. Asylum. Yeah. And one of his one of the brothers I got to know all the brothers and sisters very well from his half of the family, which was about half of the 13. Seventeen children and four or five of them live here in the Bay Area and one lives over in Lafayette, and I see him rather regularly, so I got to know that family very intimately. Had many, many, many meals at their house, both just with the family or in big parties and with the family, was always interesting because it was predominantly men. But the guys would go into the kind of private dining room off the kitchen, which is big enough to seat a big table, I don't know, eight or 10 of us around the table. And guys would all eat in the sisters and the wives would stand around behind and they would serve us, you know, and when we finished and got up and left and they'd sit down and they'd have a meal and have a women's party, so to speak, and stay as long as they liked, etc., but so it was pretty exciting. To get to know that family and to see how they operated and

WIGGUM: [00:30:41] What was culturally was most interesting to you or most challenging to you?

MARION: [00:30:48] I guess the thing that happens when you join the Peace Corps, there's two language groups in Afghanistan. One is Farsi speaking. They call it Dari and the other is Pashto or Afghani, or spoke to the Afghans actually as a culture group. And one of the things that's so distressing about our current war in Afghanistan is that we're on the side, which is against the Afghans, because the Taliban are the Afghans, basically, and that's also the majority group. And there's a large it's more than, say, half the people in Afghanistan and there's an equal number over the border in Pakistan. So it's an artificial border that was drawn through there by the British several centuries ago. Anyway, the Farsi speakers are and they call it Dari because that's kind of a nationalist thing. But it's different in the sense that the language which the world thinks of as Farsi developed in Iran, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and in the Soviet socialist

republics that were in the center of the north of Afghanistan. So, yeah. So it's quite a big language group spread over quite a large area. Now Iran intends tends to be overwhelmingly Shia. In Afghanistan is overwhelmingly Sunni, and they're different ethnically, but they speak the same language. And so that's interesting. But fundamentally, it's like English and American, except that in America we are, you know, children of Britain, if you will, whereas in that part of the world, the language developed in the 10th century, the 9th, 10th, 11th century when Islam brought Arabic into older language group.

MARION: [00:32:44] And Farci is an Indo-European language, it has a grammar that's not unlike Spanish, except there's no masculine and feminine and it has a huge amount of Arabic vocabulary, kind of like we have a lot of Latin vocabulary, even though the language is more fundamentally German rooted, you know, English with the Norse and the Vikings and so on and so forth. So culturally, the most interesting thing is to learn a new language and to see how people think about things. And every time you do that, you learn a new way of thinking about things and you also reflect upon, well, why do we do it this way? And they do it that way. Yeah, yeah. So step by step, it's just an absolutely amazing. You also question your own ways of doing things and realize that. It ain't perfect what we do. You know, it's just how it developed or in some cases it is perhaps a better way to do things. But nonetheless, you have to take seriously what the other people think when you're a minority of one living in a large cultural environment.

WIGGUM: [00:33:54] And what was. What's their biggest curiosity about you? What did you get asked the most about your comment at the most about?

MARION: [00:34:06] Well, a range of things. The students were just amazed to see a foreigner, right? So after we'd give a lecture, I remember one time in particular, the students would all come and gather around, you know, and be asking questions. At one point they said, would you would you just talk, just say four or five sentences in English, you know? So I sort of stood back and said, well, OK. And I said four or five sentences in English. And



they all started laughing and talking to each other and going tchalkchalkchalkchalk, because that's what I sounded like to them.

WIGGUM: [00:34:39] All sounded like gobbledygook.

MARION: [00:34:39] That's right. And they all laughed and very respectfully, OK. This wasn't ridicule. Yeah. Yeah. And then the other said, well, would you write something on the board, you know, just write. And so I would write and they thought it was so interesting that I wrote from left to right and not right to left. And B, because all the things stuck together, you know, so that that's the sort of simple stuff. Yeah. The other things people were interested in way of life in the West. And what we had, there were some who basically said, how can the world be round when you can see as far as you can see and it's flat. You know, this is high school students. Right. And then the third thing, which would always come up again in a very academic and respectful way because we traveled a lot. So the two high schools that I went to that were close, that was that. I went there and I came home. But the other places I went to were always far away. It took a day to get there and you'd spend two or three days there. You'd sleep in a room in the school because that's the only place you could sleep and they would attend to you sort of day and night, you know, bring you lunch and your dinner and your breakfast.

MARION: [00:35:57] And then you'd finish your work and you'd go back. But as a result, you spent many evenings talking to people and I ended up learning the language quite comprehensively. So as time went on, we could talk about anything. And the three things that they always came at me for were Vietnam, apartheid in South Africa and Palestine and Israel. And they were opposed to the American positions and all those. And they would say, well, you know, why does it make any sense for the American Americans to be using these B-52 and dropping bombs on rice paddies? Right. Or how can America support segregation of a society based on the color of the skin? Or how can America support the taking of the land? And the Palestinians who we like, the Jews, we respect the Jews. There are people of the book like we're all people of the book. But it's not fair that

they've taken Obama. So, you know, and most of these cases, I went there being opposed to the war in Vietnam as well. But when you get attacked like that, even if it's academic, you end up saying, well, we're not doing it for evil reasons. We're doing it because some people believe that that's the best way to hold back the tide of communism, which is against the way we live.

MARION: [00:37:15] So you find yourself basically giving reasons why you're not against what you actually are against. So you get tied up in knots over that. And of course, later on, actually, it had already happened. The Pentagon Papers came out and more recently we saw the movie The Post, you know, which really puts it in black and white that, you know, the government knew what we all knew as college students, that they were lying through their teeth to us and they had to be stopped through public action, you know, but anyway, that's a very hard thing to deal with when you're a foreigner in a in a primeval environment like that. So anyway, these people, they'd be nice. You know, they come and I'm also talking about age gaps because the people I'd be having dinner with would be 40, 50 years old. And they'd been teaching for 20 years. And they were the literate ones, the knowledgeable ones. They read history. They would constantly be talking about, you know, the Russian Revolution and World War Two and telling jokes about all those things. And, you know, I was learning a lot.

WIGGUM: [00:38:25] Did you date all over there?

MARION: [00:38:27] I did. I dated American girls and I had an Afghan girlfriend for a while, which was dicey. But.

WIGGUM: [00:38:35] Well I was wondering about that, you know, what was it what was it like to because I know they're very protective of their women. Well, foreigner to date, Afghan. He must have been interesting.

MARION: [00:38:46] Yeah. I mean, the people that we got to know were the upper echelons of society and these are people who had traveled abroad and so on and so forth. So you were careful about what you did.

WIGGUM: [00:38:55] Yeah, interesting. Any adventures that you had?

MARION: [00:39:04] Well, I should yes, I had one terrific adventure and it kind of comes on. I did two years of this job of teaching high schools and middle schools. And then my buddy Yuri Zagarynch, who was in the same program, had found out that Kabul University's Faculty of Engineering USAID contract with Stevens Institute of Technology in New Jersey was coming to an end and the professors were coming out and going back to New Jersey and that they could use help. And so he and I both had actually been graduate students at MIT. So we had reasonable credentials and had studied engineering. So we went we talked first to the Peace Corps and then we went to the faculty of engineering and talked to the head of the department. And I read up and I got a job as a professor at the Faculty of Engineering. So that was beginning in the autumn of 73. And I taught three semesters there and I taught things like thermodynamics and chemical process topics and chemistry. But between the finishing of our first assignment and the beginning of the second in the summer of 73, we took a hike through central Afghanistan.

MARION: [00:40:19] So, no, I got that wrong. We did it the following summer after we'd already been there because one of the guy who organized it with us was also a teacher, a professor there, a young Afghan guy. And so we headed out to Afghans and me and Yuri and with packs on our backs. And we took a bus trip up past Baghlan and a little bit west of that in the center on the north side of the Hindu Kush Mountains. And we headed off and we hiked through the central mountains of Afghanistan for 46 days. And we lived off the land, you know, and it was those places have been this is a medieval country anywhere. And there it was exactly the same as it would have been like 2000 years ago, except that in any given village, there would be a few people with watches and there would be a few people with

actually many people with shortwave radios. And that's how they were connected to the outside world.

WIGGUM: [00:41:18] And where did you stay?

MARION: [00:41:21] Well, we camped, so we had sleeping bags and we used tents. Occasionally we carried very lightweight tents, mostly sleeping bags, just slept in the open area. So one time I remember we went to a little place called Putinato, and we had hiked all day long and we didn't know if we were going to find water or not. And we got there and we did. And we bought up like thirty four eggs and they didn't have wheat bread there. They had barley bread because it was too cold. It was 10000 feet. It was too cold for the wheat to properly mature. Yeah. And so they brought barley bread and a couple of huge chunks of butter and we cooked a gigantic omelet and we ate this bread, barley bread and this omelet. And we were just amazed and just wonderful. And then we we had a shotgun with us and a great big six six shooter, you know, because Abdullah Cauca was our our guide, basically. And he had organized this because in theory, you could be at risk. So you needed some form of protection. I say in theory, because a country like Afghanistan, literally, it had a population in those days that was said to be around 60 million and there would be one or two murders a year in the country.

MARION: [00:42:48] And now maybe there's more you don't hear of. But that was the news. So another time we headed off. And of course, this is just a situation where you head out of a village and you one time we contracted for a donkey to carry our good packs and the donkey was pregnant, so had a great big belly. And we got about half an hour out of town and the donkey was not going to do it. So the guy apologized, gave us our money back and headed back. And so we had to pick up these heavy packs, which we added some food and things to. Yeah, yeah. So as you go along, you'll see the odd sheepherder and you're talking about a landscape that's just brown and very hilly and shrubs, but no forests, no trees, just absolutely brown as far as the eye can see. And so we'd see a herder and Abdullah would go to him and say and have a chat. You know,

we're not talking about a one minute chat, like a 15 minute chat. You know, this guy would say basically, well, you hike along and this is the main trail and there'll be trails going off the left and right.

MARION: [00:43:55] But you want to. See this rock in the distance or had just to the east, you know? Yeah, and so we hiked from like nine o'clock in the morning or eight o'clock in the morning until 4:00. And it was going to be sun setting, you know, at 6:00 and. Our water had run out and we were getting scared, and about that time we started hearing the falling of water just falling of water, you know, and this was like the most amazing thing we'd ever heard. And we got closer and closer and there was more and more. And we've been told there was a spring in the middle of nowhere. So we got down into this valley and sure enough, it was a steep, steep cliffs on both sides and a flat floor that was probably 100 yards wide. And at one end was a waterfall that came down into disappeared into the earth. It was just one of those wonders of the world. Yeah. And it was fresh, beautiful water. And of course, as we did every night, you scrounge around and you get driftwood and brush and so forth, or cowpats, which are dried up completely there like, uh.

WIGGUM: [00:45:07] Like peat.

MARION: [00:45:10] Yeah, like peat. Yeah. And we would start a fire and we would boil the water and make tea and we had bread with us and we had hard candy that we would eat during the day just to give us something in our mouth. And we'd have some boiled eggs or some, you know, whatever leftover from the last place we'd been where there had been any people. And anyway, that was a marvelous night. They were just amazed.

WIGGUM: [00:45:36] You must have been so thin and in such good shape?

MARION: [00:45:39] Well, you just had one nail on the head. I figured out by the time we finished that 46 days, I got down to about 146 pounds, you know, and even playing tennis in college, I've not been below 155. You know, I've been 165 to 175 at that point. And it was kind of weird because Yuri and I

would see each other at parties over the next couple of months. And typically we'd be off in the corner with a big plate of food, slowly eating, eating rice and lamb. But as we got to the end of this, we finally got the Bamyán, which is one of the most beautiful central places, which had those fabulous, huge Buddha left over from the six and eight centuries that were blown up by the Taliban. And the big international sad story. Yeah, and it was suddenly they have these famous lakes that are formed by I think it's calcium carbonate is basically a mineral that forms on the edge around these big lakes. And then they're just crystal clear. Dark blue against the sky is one of the great scenes. And so we arrive and around the edges would be grass, you know, like grass, like the greens of a golf course, you know, because the water would be seeping over the edges of these lakes and it would constantly keep wet the grass in the summer. So it was just and after being green.

WIGGUM: [00:47:08] That must have blown your mind.

MARION: [00:47:09] The green and the blue and that we can have as much food as we want. It is really amazing. But it was a great experience.

WIGGUM: [00:47:16] Yeah, sounds like it. Did you come home directly after that or did you when you when you got out of the Peace Corps, did you travel more than just that that big hike?

MARION: [00:47:26] Looking back on it, I think between when I extended, I went back. You get a trip home when you extend. So I got a trip home. My brother was down in Guatemala and my parents gave me a ticket to go down to see him. They sent me down to see him. So I went to Guatemala and saw where he lived 8000 feet to Tony Kapone in the north of Guatemala in Indian country. And then I went back to Afghanistan. Teaching in the university was a fascinating experience because you discover, as all teachers do, except for a few, I suppose, that you have students that are smarter than you and are brilliant young people. So, you know, and I spoke Farsi perfectly at that stage so I could and it was engineering and mathematics and so forth. So that's not as difficult to

teach language wise than, say, philosophy or history. Yeah. So I could explain to the students whose English was very weak, you know what, you know, problems and resolution of issues and so forth. And then and had some students that were really brilliant and asked really difficult questions or saw right through to the end of most typical assignments, you know, very effectively. So that was that was fascinating. And it turns out one of my students, who's about two or three years younger than I am, is in Dallas. And he had an American mother and Afghan father, and he works in the electric power industry, although he semi retired now. But we we've gotten in touch in the last two or three years by chance. You know, he was on Facebook or dinner or something. And he saw my name and he wrote me and he said, Are you the Toby? And that was in Afghanistan in the late 60s, early 70s. So, yeah, very cool.

WIGGUM: [00:49:12] That's, that's the nice thing. Now, about Facebook, you can keep in contact with people. Back then it was much harder.

MARION: [00:49:20] But anyway, teaching was interesting and I learned a lot from that. Two things stick out in my mind. One was one day I was in the library at the Faculty of Engineering and I was in the back researching something, Ministry of Industry, and asked us to test some coal to see what quality coal it was. And one of the lab technicians and another guy from the faculty, not professors, but guys who work in sort of the administrative area we're talking, didn't know I was back there and they were in Farsi and they were saying, wow, it's amazing what's happened, what's, what's happened in America with, you know, Nixon being kicked out and Americans are losing the war in Vietnam and America is finished. And that'll be fantastic. The future belongs to the Soviet Union because they're the only power. They have the power. They have the strength, they have the discipline. Whereas America is just dissolved into trouble and will be able to take back Palestine from the Israelis. And, you know, the world, the Muslims will once again, you know, have a chance in this world. And eventually I got up and left and they saw me come out and their eyes were like, whoa.

MARION: [00:50:38] The other thing that was interesting, which is, I suppose a little bit I don't mean to be outspoken about this, but we finished this school assignment and then the faculty, the, the minister of industry, one of his people called to get the results. And I talked to this guy for about a half an hour on the phone and explained how you do it. You know, you take a call sample and you basically put it into a thermal environment where you treated at very high temperature for a certain period of time and then basis. How much burns off and watch? You can you can establish the carbon content. And therefore, is it a hard cold or a soft, cool and high, high energy content or not? And at the end of the half an hour, he asked me my name and I told him my name. No, no, no. I want your name. I told my name. I said, no, no, that's not your name. What's your. He didn't know I was an American. Yeah. So I thought that was the best test I had on my leg, you know.

WIGGUM: [00:51:39] Well, it must have been difficult contemplating coming back home as you reach the end of it. Or was it easy?

MARION: [00:51:46] Well, you know, you talk about how does it affect your life? Basically, I said I want to be an internationalist. And in our group, it ran the gamut. I had this fellow friend of mine who'd been at Cornell with me. He was the opposite. He said, I'm going to go back and I'm never going to go abroad again. And he became a very successful lawyer in the Midwest, you know, and God bless him. But I said I wanted to be an internationalist. So I interviewed companies in Iran. This is 75 and several. One was a Dupont subsidiary. And then I interviewed the Bahrain Petroleum Company in the Persian Gulf. And I got offered a job by then, which was Caltex oil at that time, California, Texas Oil Company, which is now 100 percent Chevron subsidiary. But this is one of the old companies that was involved in the first development of oil in the Persian Gulf in the 1930s. And so I just wanted to go overseas again. And at that time, this is one of the few companies that could do that for me, because mostly the American way of doing things and most of the countries in the world were doing these things is they don't send youngsters overseas.



MARION: [00:53:01] You know, you got to go work for a company for 10, 15, 20 years and establish a reputation, whatever, before you consider sending it abroad. So I took that job because I want to go back right away, probably a bit compulsive or impulsive of me, insofar as when I went back to New York and lived in Manhattan and worked for Caltech at 380 Madison in New York. I fell in love with New York when it came time to go abroad, which is what I'd promised to do about fifteen months into the company. I was scratching my head, said, What the hell am I doing this for? You know? But I did. And I ended up being once again bitten by the bug. And I spent most of my career next 38 years, most of it overseas. How did you meet your wife? I met her in Bahrain. So she's an English girl and she was a teacher and I was an oil company engineer. And we met and got married there.

WIGGUM: [00:54:01] And what did your family think about it? Sounds like your whole family or international.

MARION: [00:54:06] Yeah, my dad had been, he joined the Navy after three years at UCLA. He was in the Navy during World War II, and he came out and finished there and got a doctorate at MIT. And then he stayed in the naval reserves, flying planes. He was an aviator for twenty years and then his job was in technology. And he went abroad to many countries around the world because they were selling partial oxidation, which is a way to create syngas, which is a precursor to fertilizer manufacture and using partial oxidation. You can do that from anything from natural gas to that, you know. So it's a very useful technology. So he I mean, India, China, South America, Africa, he was overseas for one or two trips a year throughout the time I was growing up. So my mom always said, kind of, what do you want to do this for? She said, you'd be really happy just going and living in Pennsylvania and joining a golf club or tennis club and, you know, raising kids and what have you. And I said, oh, mom, in retrospect, she was right and I was right, you know.

WIGGUM: [00:55:29] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MARION: [00:55:31] The world, one of the things about people our age is that the world has changed dramatically and maybe it does for everyone. But in my life it was like every single stage was at the point of cutting the cutting edge of change. You know, like even the whole expat experience, like I was an expatriate throughout the period when we lived like kings, right? That's just economically speaking, you know, we got our salary, we got cost of living allowance, we got education, we got cars, drivers, we got home leaves and airplane tickets. And that's all washed away largely, right? Yeah, the same thing in Japan. I was there 83, 86, and we had tremendous. Operations there, because we've been handed a quarter of the market after World War Two, so when I went to Celtic Soil Japan, it was the largest borrower of finance from the big American banks in the world. Know, we provided the capital to Nippon Oil Company and all kinds of wells and No. One oil, no oil company in Japan. And we sold out a few years after I left, you know, because they didn't want us there, really.

WIGGUM: [00:56:48] Yeah, yeah.

MARION: [00:56:49] You know, it was all like after World War II, that supreme allied commander came in and they carved up the market, gave a quarter of it, ExxonMobil, a quarter of A to shell a quarter of it to us who were newcomers and a quarter of it to the oil companies that had existed prior to World War Two. So if you look at all these things culturally, whatever, it's all been changing throughout my life. So working and Caltex, for example, I found myself as I got to be senior, sort of scratching my head because basically none of the local countries want to have an American foreign boss when you get down to it.

WIGGUM: [00:57:27] Right.

MARION: [00:57:29] But we had a cadre of a couple hundred people that moved around from country to country around the world. And it was a cohesive team, but it was also built on the old fashioned hierarchical corporate structure, which has disappeared because technology has made it possible to run on specialties and a little bit of management. You know,

you don't need, you know, multiple layers of vice presidents and general managers and managers and supervisors and all that stuff.

WIGGUM: [00:57:58] What's been, you know, Afghanistan has had a tumultuous history since you left. You know, how have you reacted to that?

MARION: [00:58:09] Mostly I'm sad. In 73, Daoud Khan, who was the cousin of King Zahir Shah in Afghanistan, overthrew the shah, the porch on the shores in Afghanistan. Partitions were there, those kings that reported to him in the ancient times. This was actually predictable since nineteen fifties when the U.S. turned down Afghanistan's request for a military arrangement, you know, a treaty. And we chose center, which is based on Turkey and Iran and Pakistan, and therefore we drove Afghanistan into the Soviet bloc with India. So 90 percent of all military officers were trained in the Soviet Union from the 50s until 73, and 10 percent were trained in France, Britain and America. So needless to say, the entire army was Soviet trained. And so, as I discovered at the faculty of engineering, when I looked at the transcripts of the guys who got in there and their engineering degrees from the Soviet Union, they would have, you know, modern communist theory as their elective. And that's a bunch of propaganda. And my counterparts would say, no, no, that's not propaganda. When the students go to America and study, the advisors says take a course in American history. So that was the elective that they would always take, you know, something about America. So that's just what happens. So with this pro Soviet military, it was just a matter of time before something like that would happen. And then in 78, 79, there were three more coups. And the third one was led by a guy named Babrak Karmal, who was. There were two communist parties. One was called Parcham, which means flag, and the other was Shola-e Javid, which means eternal flame. Parcham was pro Soviet soldier. Shola-e Javid was pro China, and he actually announced his coup from Tajikistan on the radio and then was flown in by the Soviets as they invaded Afghanistan.

MARION: [01:00:29] And as we know, it was a 10 year war without success because places unconquerable and of course, the people suffer. And as we know

from Charlie Wilson's War and Tom Hanks, the U.S. supported, you know, the anti Soviet activity and gave missiles and what have you, guns, money. And then as soon as that the Soviets were driven away, we wash our hands of the place. So we'd spent 10 years talking about how godless Soviet Union needs to be defeated. And we are people of religion and all this kind of stuff. And then as soon as that ended, we walked away from it and. Eventually, I guess this led to a situation where the precursor of the Taliban became the Taliban took over, and then they started rolling the clock back and stopping girls from going to school and allowing al-Qaida to establish training bases there. And that led to ultimately 9/11. And then since then, we've been fighting this war that miss well, sadly, there's nothing I don't think there's anything known about it. You don't read in the newspaper anything about the cultural divisions within the country and that we're supporting the minorities against the majority. And therefore, you know, it's, it's like no hope for success. And now, recently in his Washington Post articles, the last few months, it's coming out that, well, maybe we didn't ever know what you're doing there, you know, so, so I feel very sad about what's happened in Afghanistan, particularly for the people who are progressive and then want to modernize the country and they want to educate their women and they want to, you know, try to catch up to the modern world.

MARION: [01:02:24] And I've never been back. And I always assumed I'd go back many times. But by the time my brother ended up actually working there for a while and credit unions helping them establish some financial infrastructure, and he asked me to come back on Christmas 10, 15 years ago. Just out of the blue at the last minute, I said and I said, I'm sorry, I just I don't want to go to a war zone, you know, it's just not the time to be doing that, you know? So I respect what you're doing and you have some infrastructure and support and what have you to be doing what you're doing, because that was in a USAID contract. But. No, it's tragic what's gone on there, and the country's been in many ways, if not wrecked and certainly degraded, it used to be very elegant in a 19th century sort of way, you know, beautiful trees and avenues and structures and excellent food and vegetables, fruits.

WIGGUM: [01:03:27] But. What impact do you think Peace Corps has had there?

MARION: [01:03:34] We had a good reputation of doing things that needed doing, teaching English were always a big one, teaching like science as we did nurses, agricultural extension programs, which was typically farmers that would go and help people to do things. And overall, I think the attitude of the people was that we're there to help, were there not to take advantage or propagandize, and therefore it's a positive thing. Yeah. I think. I think an interesting question also is what do we get out of it? And I've always been convinced that Peace Corps volunteers get more out of the experience than the countries that they go to get. But I mean, there's we read quarter of a million Peace Corps volunteers explosives in the U.S. today. They certainly have a much broader understanding of the world after they experience than before. And that adds to the body politic. You know, the country.

WIGGUM: [01:04:45] Mm hmm. Well, then I've always thought such a huge percentage of the State Department ends up being populated by former Peace Corps volunteers.

MARION: [01:04:55] Is that right? I've never, I've never seen a statistic on that. My experience was that the Peace Corps volunteers sort of went left or right. I don't mean that politically. A lot of people ended up in industry looking for oil companies and banks and traders and all this kind of stuff. And a lot of people ended up working for the federal government or local governments or State Department or whatever. So it is a leg up, I think, in terms of that process.

WIGGUM: [01:05:23] And what impact do you feel like it had on your life?

MARION: [01:05:29] Well, it made me an internationalist. It made me want to live and move all around the world. It enabled me to see other points of view more readily. And in some ways, as I got older, it's kind of like became a bit too difficult, you know, in the sense that sometimes I see things that I

think I mean, I was at a party in in Hong Kong where we lived for 19 years before we retired in 2015. And it was a party for put on by the consul general people. He wasn't the consul general himself. It was one of the people who worked for him, for the new generals and admirals. And the military does this every year. They take all the newly promoted generals and admirals. They send them on a trip around the world and they meet all kinds of people. And I was talking to this one guy who was an army general of logistics, and he found out that I'd been in Afghanistan. The Peace Corps asked me a whole bunch of questions and he said, why aren't you involved in this? You know, this is this is a war. This is an all out thing. We should be using all of our resources. If you speak the language and understand the country and what have you, you should be involved. You know, and I remember thinking at the time, I'd love to be involved, but I learned long ago that the country is just too complex and too, you know, politicians don't listen to each other. Sometimes they don't listen to the State Department. Sometimes you have different factions within the State Department. You have the gaps between state and military and on and on and on. It's just for any one individual to influence this kind of thing. It's only possible if you make that your life endeavor. And even then, the chances of you necessarily being listened to is small.

WIGGUM: [01:07:19] The chance of your heart being broken is large.

MARION: [01:07:21] Right. The Iraq war. I mean, it's just when I heard about it for the first in March of '82, you said that's a bunch of baloney. I said not even the U.S. government could be so stupid as to invade Iraq. Anybody who's been in the Middle East or understands anything about that knows it would be a fiasco. And in '83, one of my best buddies came back from a meeting in Washington and he said, oh, no, it's a done deal. It's just a matter of what month they're going to invade. And I was absolutely blown away. And of course, it turns out it was a terrible fiasco and based on completely false information and it has accomplished nothing other than to set the whole region on fire. So, you know, so I tended to I read a hell of a lot and I vote and I write some letters to the editor from time to time. But I haven't really contributed anything to world peace.

WIGGUM: [01:08:17] Is there anything else you want to say? Any, any other things you want to add?

MARION: [01:08:27] I guess only that I support Peace Corps as a, as a very viable program and a very good thing, and I think it's extremely important to keep up high standards. The one thing that happened that was kind of interesting at the end of the time that I was in the Peace Corps is that there was a change in the attitude of the volunteers coming in. I think I mentioned that to you the other day. You know, instead of being told where you need to cut your hair and dress conservatively and we did it immediately, the volunteers were like, no one's going to tell me I can't wear jeans and have long hair. That's who I am, you know. And if you're going to do something like Peace Corps, I think you need to go into it wholeheartedly. And I think most volunteers do. And I think it's a wonderful program and I'm very positive about it. But I think it's really important that it have good goals and good jobs and good benefits for the countries in which we operate, because that's where it's really appreciated and that's why it does something good. So.

WIGGUM: [01:09:27] Ok, great. Thank you. Thanks, Toby.

MARION: [01:09:29] Thank you. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]