

**Patricia Hogan Oral History Interview**  
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Patricia Hogan  
**Interviewer:** Julius Sztuk  
**Date of Interview:** August 3, 2019  
**Location of Interview:** Elkridge, Maryland  
**Length:** 23 pages

**Biographical Note**

Patricia Hogan served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Armenia from August 2015 to August 2017 in a community youth development program.

**Access**

Open.

**Usage Restrictions**

According to the deed of gift signed September 23, 2019, copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. This interview is in the public domain.

**Copyright**

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 The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form.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

**Technical Note**

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

**Suggested Citation**

Patricia Hogan, recorded interview by Julius Sztuk, August 3, 2019, page #, Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

## DISCLAIMER

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

Oral History Interview

with

Patricia Hogan

August 3, 2019  
Elkridge, Maryland

By Julius Sztuk

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

SZTUK: [00:00:01] Today is August 3, 2019. My name is Jay Sztuk I'm an RPCV from Fiji, 1974 through 1976. Today I'm going to be interviewing Patricia Hogan, who was a volunteer in Armenia from August 2015 through August 2017, working in community youth development at a women's resource center.

HOGAN: Correct.

SZTUK: All right. Tell us something about your background and what inspired you to join the Peace Corps?

HOGAN: [00:00:34] Ok, I was actually working at a community college in Bel Air, Maryland, and I was involved in community education. And one of my history instructors shared with me his time in Warsaw, Poland, with his wife restoring churches in the 70s for the Peace Corps. And I was amazed

because I really thought that Peace Corps was all about Africa, South America, Central America being in a place that was hot and needing water. And when I found out that there were opportunities to work in not necessarily a city, but in a developing country, that a climate would be more akin to what I was used to. And so he was the one, I think, that planted the seed. And I began to think about joining Peace Corps as part of my retirement plan.

SZTUK: [00:01:41] So you had no thoughts about it when you were younger, did you?

HOGAN: [00:01:45] No, not really.

SZTUK: Did you have any friends that joined or anything?

HOGAN: No, no. But after I made my initial decision to consider Peace Corps as an option, of course, I started running into everyone, everywhere. I just believe that when something goes out to the universe, it comes back exponentially. And so I heard a lot of people that served in the Peace Corps and shared their experiences with me.

SZTUK: [00:02:14] And what did your friends and family think when you made that decision?

HOGAN: [00:02:19] I actually I asked permission, if you will, of my children who were young adults. My daughter had married, my son had not. And my mom was in her 80s. And I said, how do you feel about me going away for two years? And those were the people that were most important to me that said, absolutely, go for it, stay in touch, have a good time. Which I knew that they would support me in that effort. And I think that my friends were not surprised, although some tried to discourage me by saying, are you sure that's a safe thing to do? And I said, well, we're going to find out. But I was I was enthusiastic and ready for the challenge. So I thought, I'll find out if it's a safe place to be.

SZTUK: [00:03:09] So when you applied, you did kind of have a certain climate, maybe not a specific country in mind, but it sounds like you knew where you didn't want to go.

HOGAN: [00:03:20] That's correct. But and I'll share with you that the year that I did make application was the year that you were able to list your top three alternatives. And before that, I was counseled, actually, because when I did some investigation into Peace Corps after the seed was planted, I heard from a recruiter, don't ask for a placement, because if you don't get it, you might not be considered. And so I was very careful to think I'm just going to go wherever they send me. And when I finally got around, he also said, don't make application early, because if you're not ready to go, it's they're not going to wait for you. So it was very well thought out, if you will. By the time I knew that I was ready to retire, I was ready to make my application and the process had simplified considerably. It was a shorter application and you are allowed to choose your top three assignments where you would like to go. And so actually, I chose Macedonia, Macedonia, question mark. The only reason being is that I knew Macedonia was somewhere near Greece. And I thought, well, that could be interesting. Yeah. So when they told me Armenia, I, like many people said, where is Armenia? And let me start doing some research about it. And I found out that it was actually the size of Maryland. It had half the population of Maryland, but basically the same climate, so that was encouraging to me that this this was the place I wanted to go.

SZTUK: [00:05:06] Ok, so when you got the invitation to go there, you were pretty happy?

HOGAN: I was, yeah.

SZTUK: And so how long did that process take, application?

HOGAN: [00:05:18] And I think I started making the application in September and I didn't hear anything until January or February of the following year. So I applied in 2014. And then I heard at the beginning of 2015 that I was

invited to serve. But now I needed to go through all of the final application, the legal process, the physical process. And it really took up until probably two months before I was ready and scheduled to leave, that everything was done. So but it was with great anticipation. I was delighted to be selected to serve because I heard when I had my initial interview that only one in four people actually made it to the final cut. And I thought I would love to be part of that 25 percent. And so, yeah, it was very exciting.

SZTUK: [00:06:21] Yeah. And then was there any kind of orientation before you left or did you could you go straight to our meeting and begin training there?

HOGAN: [00:06:28] There was an orientation, actually there was a Skype language orientation. About six to eight weeks before we left the country. We were introduced to an Armenian language instructor. We were paired with another person that was going to the country. And so my pairing, if you will, was a woman from Tucson, Arizona. And we would be on a Skype chat with Armenian instructor. And there was a format that was followed. So by the time I got to Armenia, I knew enough polite introductory phrases that you begin to assimilate right away.

SZTUK: [00:07:11] Wow, so you got a head start on the training?

HOGAN: [00:07:13] Did get a head start. Additionally, what I did was get the Pimsleur language tool. Yes. So I did those five for the next six months, eight months, and just listen to those daily in my car. So that was you know, I, I went ready to learn and I came from a background of community education. The job that I had at the community college was director for Community Ed, which meant that I was in charge essentially of all of the recreational avocational classes in Noncredit. And so I also was responsible at one time for overseeing a women's business center through the Small Business Development Center, Small Business Administration. And so I counseled actually one hundred women about going in or going out of business or expanding business. So at any rate, I felt like I came from a good platform. And before that I ran a small business, which kind of qualified me to do that teaching and did that for about 15 years. And

before that I was a nurse. So no, but I have found that I leaned always towards a helping profession. And anyway.

SZTUK: [00:08:42] On topic, had you done any volunteer work before then?

HOGAN: Oh yeah.

SZTUK: You had done some things, not two years but?

HOGAN: [00:08:53] Right. But honestly, when I when I moved to Maryland and married that was in 1984 and started a small business, I felt it was important to engage in the community. And so I joined the Chamber of Commerce, I joined the American Association of University Women. I ended up joining the Lions Club and becoming working my way up to the presidency. Lots of local organizations I took part in. My kids were involved at school. I was in the PTA and held all of the offices for PTA, a lot of community service. So I felt like I was really community service driven, which landed me in a good place. I think I had a great resume actually to share with Peace Corps head.

SZTUK: [00:09:48] You traveled overseas?

HOGAN: Not much.

SZTUK: So you had never been to that part of the world before?

HOGAN: [00:09:53] No, I know. Well, I'll take that back. I had actually been to Russia with the Smithsonian on a domestic, foreign study tour back in, oh, my gosh, 1978, 1979, so it was kind of a Cold War type of experience and I'd been to England before. But other than that, really in Germany, but not to the Caucasus, certainly.

SZTUK: [00:10:21] So then do you recall your first impression when you landed there? You must have been pretty excited, too.

HOGAN: [00:10:30] Excited for sure. And I remember we left from Philadelphia. We spent probably two or three nights in Philadelphia just meeting the other rest of the cohort and getting some basic information about what to expect. When we got in country and we landed in the middle of the night at the airport and got on a bus and went to a kind of a resort place called Aghveran. And when we got to Aghveran, they said, this is where you may have all the all that you can eat. And a lot of it was American style food. And you'll have all the hot water you want. And by the time you get to your training village, you might not have any of those comforts. And so that was a little bit scary. I wasn't sure what to expect, but they basically laid it right out there that. You just didn't know what you were going to get.

SZTUK: [00:11:35] And is that where you did your training, in Aghveran?

HOGAN: [00:11:37] No, that was only the introduction to Armenia then the training village was called Azatavan and Azatavan was a village of maybe a thousand people, if I'm not mistaken. And I lived with a host family that consisted of a mom who was half my age, two teenage daughters and a 10 year old son and a husband that was working in Russia, which was typical in many Armenian households.

SZTUK: [00:12:13] The husband would be absent?

HOGAN: [00:12:14] The husband would be absent. Yes, to be gainfully employed. After Armenia became independent of the Soviet Union, when the USSR kind of left Armenia, they took everything with them, like they closed down all the factories they took out. They gutted them basically. And so most of the men, there was no work left. And a lot of the women to the women also worked in factories and research labs. And it was a whole new awakening for this country that was glad, I believe, to be a democratic country. But now not knowing how to deal with redeveloping their their entire nation. So a lot of the men would go to Russia to get work and send sometimes they didn't come home but

SZTUK: [00:13:10] Send money back home?

HOGAN: [00:13:11] They would send money back.

SZTUK: [00:13:13] So, you know, you lived with a family during your training?

HOGAN: Correct.

SZTUK: Not with the other volunteers?

HOGAN: [00:13:19] Right. We lived with a family in the training village, and there were ten or twelve of us that were in the seaside community youth development component. And so we went to the same school every day and got our language training. It was usually four hours a day of language training, six days a week. And on the other days there would be some technical training, safety and security issues, cultural components. We had language and cultural facilitators, if you will. And then once a week we would go and gather with the whole cohort, which consisted of about 40 or 42 people. And that was what we call Central Day, where we all came together and learned just general information about the country.

SZTUK: [00:14:12] So living with family must spit up your acquisition of language and understanding the culture sort of. Do you think that was a good, good way to do training?

HOGAN: [00:14:23] For sure. It was a good way to assimilate. I will say that the family that I was placed with was very gregarious. They were very musical. The oldest daughter had actually won a competition that was similar to America's Got Talent. It was like Armenia has got talent. She was very talented. And so her mother was very proud of showing off her daughter's skills. You know, she had, you know, videos and so forth. But everybody in the family played the piano. They all saying they all dance. They were just very engaging. And so I had just the best assimilation into the culture, if you will, because of this family. Sounds great. They were they were great to me.



SZTUK: [00:15:16] Any memorable experiences during the training period there?

HOGAN: [00:15:21] I guess the most unusual thing for me was living in a village that I lived among the animals, that our my family had an enormous garden, as did most everyone in Armenia. They their backyards were all gardens with fruits and vegetables and nut trees and so forth. But we raised pigs. And so that was just, you know, there were chickens walking around and turkeys and the cows would wander the streets. And so it was very different for me because I was not familiar with that at all. I was amazed by the hospitality of not only my family, but everyone in the village was ready to invite me in for coffee and refreshments, and they didn't speak English and I didn't speak good Armenian. But somehow there you find a way to communicate. And I remember specifically one day when I was out walking and I said, oh, my gosh, I forgot my water bottle. And someone must have read my mind because they called over a fence and said, would you like to come in for coffee? I knew the word for coffee and and I ask instead for water, and what I got was a table laden with food and coffee and water and whatever.

SZTUK: [00:16:42] Everything then.

HOGAN: [00:16:43] Yeah. So it was it was

SZTUK: Hospitable.

HOGAN: Very.

SZTUK: [00:16:47] And how long was your training?

HOGAN: Three months.

SZTUK: Three months.

HOGAN: Yeah, three months.

SZTUK: So then you completed training and where were you assigned?

HOGAN: [00:16:55] I was assigned to Goris, which was in the Syunik region, which is southern Armenia, and it was about four and a half hours south of the capital city of Yerevan. And it was a town versus a village. And so in the town was the Women's Resource Center that I was assigned to work with on a daily basis. And I now lived with a second host family that had a mom who was my age in her 60s and a daughter who was twenty six, was the age of my daughter, and a husband who spoke no English. The mom was an English teacher in school and the daughter was the one that worked at the Wings of Tatev. So she spoke excellent English and everyone spoke Russian, you know, Russian at all. But everyone else spoke Russian. And they all the people in this town that I met either had a third language of English or French or German. So everyone was multilingual and made me feel quite inadequate in terms of my language abilities.

SZTUK: [00:18:16] So you lived with a family. Did you ever feel like a need for privacy or did you enjoy that?

HOGAN: [00:18:25] Or I enjoyed my time with you on your own. So I was with them for three months. Again, they recommend, Peace Corps recommends that you stay with your host family. There was no choice and preserve was training. That was it. But when you reached your permanent site, you had the option of leaving your second host family and going out on your own. And I was enjoying myself so much, I said, oh, well, maybe I'll just stay here. And I kind of presented that and they said, now we'll help you find a place. So they were ready to reclaim their house because they had given me what was once their living area. And so and everyone shifted around to accommodate me. And but it was the best learning experience possible because the daughter became my tutor. The Peace Corps would pay for you to continue with a tutor after we finished our three months of language training. And so I didn't want the mom to teach me. I just felt like that was too close. But I asked Armena, hey, the daughter, would you be willing to teach me? And she said, of course. So she would her mom would help her make up lesson plans. And the best thing about it was she was willing to

be what I called experiential. So if I needed to go to town and buy meat, I would say, come with me and tell me how to ask for meat, OK? If I needed something from the tailor, like if they needed to him a dress or something, I would say take me to the tailor and walk me through. So whether it was shopping or or something technical, Armena was always there to kind of tell me what the rules were or how to ask for what I needed.

HOGAN: [00:20:20] And one of the experiences that I remember after I moved out of their house, I went into a Soviet style five floor apartment. I was on the fifth floor, steps up and down, no elevator, no elevator and living alone. I needed hot water. I didn't have any. I did have I did have running water in the bathroom. So that was the good news. They did put it in a sink for me, which in the kitchen, because there was no kitchen sink when I arrived. But I had the best view of the hills of Goris, which was an old cave village that you would see where people used to live in the caves. So shortly after my arrival there, I knew some words and there were three apartments on every floor and one of the neighbors came to me and said, *mahats'av*, which meant someone died. And so I knew that something was going on and I quickly called Armena and I said, I think someone died, how do I know for sure? And she said, well, there will be a light bulb over the door and it will be on constantly for the next three days. And it was she said there will be a coffin lid at the entrance to your building with flowers. And yes, there was. And I said, well, Armena, tell me, what's the politically or the culture culturally correct thing to do now? And she said, go to the florist, get to white flowers, take them to the person. The door will be open and visitors will be accepted.

HOGAN: [00:22:14] And she'll she said, go in and you'd it was a body in the room and there was no funeral home. And you basically say, you know, I'm sorry for your loss and, you know, essentially peace be with you and you put your flowers with everyone else's into this maze of sorts and then you sit down for 15 minutes or some respectable, respectable, respectful amount of time. And and then I could take my leave. And so I did all of those things and went back to my apartment. And the next day there was a o'clock at night there was a knock on my door. And I thought, oh, my

gosh, should I answer that? I go to the door and it's the woman, the the wife of the husband who had died. And she told me a time she said 12 o'clock. And I nodded and I said, OK, called Armena the next morning. I said, Armena, she told me twelve o'clock. What does that mean? She said, that's the time that they're going to have the ride to the cemetery. You've been invited. So it was a great experience that I had somebody coaching me. Essentially, it was like phone a friend to figure out what to do next. And I think because I went out of my way to pay my respects, she invited me to the gravesite and then back to the hall where they had similarly, we would have a reception of sorts following someone's burial. And so really, I had some of the best experiences because I had someone to turn to for everything to help.

SZTUK: [00:23:53] Yeah.

HOGAN: [00:23:53] Yeah. And I said I wanted to witness or be part of a birth and a death and a marriage and all of those things happened for me.

SZTUK: [00:24:04] So, yeah. How big was this town where you were staying?

HOGAN: [00:24:08] I want to say twenty thousand people that that was official, but I don't think there might have been half that many.

SZTUK: [00:24:13] It was bigger than your training?

HOGAN: [00:24:15] Oh, definitely. Definitely. And it had a lot more amenities. It had many shops. It had some restaurants. The training village where I was really didn't have anything besides a market where you could get food. But that that was pretty much it. So it had everything I needed. A post office, one of my best post office stories was I needed to provide friends and family with an address of my host family that don't send anything to the Peace Corps office, send it to this, to Goris. And one day I got a piece of mail and it was delivered to me at my house and it said Patricia Hogan. Peace Corps worries some people never got their mail, no matter how explicit they were about the address. But for some reason, I got this weird

piece of mail that whoever sent it didn't know where I was or what I was doing. They just knew that minimum amount of information. And I and I got the mail, so.

SZTUK: [00:25:24] That's amazing.

HOGAN: It was great.

SZTUK: So then you started working at the Women's Resource Center there in Goris?

HOGAN: Yes.

SZTUK: Tell me, what's your what your job was like? What was your typical how did your typical day progress?

HOGAN: [00:25:40] Ok, I we were required to work twenty hours a week minimum at our primary site and we were encouraged to do secondary work. And so primarily I went to this office and there was an office every day I had my own computer. They did not have one for me. And they said, if you don't mind using your computer, there was always a counterpart that spoke English. So I was able to get information like critical information from that counterpart. The other people in the office did not speak English. So I had to kind of find my way and determine what it is that they needed or wanted for me and how I could help them. But at a women's resource center, they really did three things primarily. Number one, they were trying to get women involved in politics because it's a very now, men rule, however, you say that men rule and women really took a secondary position in the family and in the community and certainly politically, there were not many women at all involved in politics. So that was one of the things that we worked on. The second thing was that women really didn't understand domestic violence and abuse was wrong, that they accepted it as part of their relationship. And so we were educators to women that it's not OK for you to suffer at the hands of your husband or another male abuser. There was a problem with selective abortion. It was important that women for

boys and often they would abort their girl children because they couldn't afford to have lots of children. So they would abort the girls and essentially hope for the boys. So we were trying to say it's OK to have girl children and they can be useful members of society as well.

HOGAN: [00:27:48] Additionally, there were two social enterprises and these enterprises were established because most women didn't have income, they didn't have jobs, and some of them were very smart. Almost all of the women went to college. Not all of the men did because the boys had to go join the military at age 18. They had the opportunity to defer that. Most of them that I knew decided to take on that military obligation and go to college later. But often they never went to college later. But women did. So the women I worked with, I thought were incredibly just smart and civic minded and had a great work ethic and were doing things in the community to make Goris in the Syunik region a better place to live for women. So they created these enterprises. One was called Goris Crochet and the other was called Wool to Carpet. And women were trained to make tiny handmade animals no more than two inches large. And then the Wool to Carpet women were trained to work in a wool factory, getting the sheep from the farm, getting the wool from the sheep, from the farmers, cleaning it, carting it, spinning it, weaving it. And then they would make products like small rugs, larger carpets, table runners, handbags, that sort of thing. So my background was pretty much in marketing and I came to the table and said I could not have an in-depth conversation with people about the other topics that I mentioned to you. But I felt like I knew how to communicate in terms of marketing their product and what might be helpful to them.

HOGAN: [00:30:00] So what I did was work with them to secure a grant from the Peace Corps. It was equivalent to about five thousand dollars, I guess. And with that money, we actually hired a marketing specialist because the information that I gave them, they said, you don't know how Armenia runs. So as much as we'd like to believe you, we really have to hear it and understand from our own people. So I said, let's go to Yerevan. Let's find a marketing specialist. We hired that person, worked with them for a

period of about six months, you know, developed all of the parameters for what was going to be included in this exchange. And ultimately, what came out of it was a marketing plan and the opportunity to build to. This structure, I can't even think of the word, but showcases, if you will, for their products, so for the larger products that they were at, this world's a carpet factory. They had someone design something that was capable of holding all of the types of things that they made. And it was an open air display in the office where I worked, which was where the grease crochet women would come and make animals and create inventory. They used to have it like in a box or a bag. And whenever someone said, let me see what you got, they'd go to the box and they pulled things out. So we hired someone to create this really wonderful display cabinet that was all glass, but it had many drawers and for inventory so that they could have extras and showcase what at least one of everything that they made.

SZTUK: [00:31:58] This grant was up through the Peace Corps partnership program?

HOGAN: [00:32:00] Yes. So I felt like that was what I did best for those people, for my resource group. And I had encouraged them to create some sort of an umbrella name that would incorporate the two businesses, the two enterprises. And indeed, they came up with the name Goris Handmade, covering the two products.

SZTUK: [00:32:32] So how many people worked in that office?

HOGAN: [00:32:34] So there was a director, there was an accountant, there was a kind of an office manager. And then there were about 40 women that would come in that would actually they would come for training and to perfect their art. So and that took place under the auspices of this training manager. And then there was a woman that actually did design and then there was a woman that did housekeeping. So on a daily basis, I interacted with about five or six people regularly. And when the other women came in, I became friendly with them as well.

SZTUK: [00:33:14] So you established some good working relationships with everybody, an idea pretty accepting of you?

HOGAN: [00:33:20] Yes, they were, because I was older. I think that makes a difference in a society where their elderly are pretty much respected, that the families were nuclear, in that the youngest son would bring his wife back to his parent's home. And often in that home, we're not just the parents, but the grandparents. So it kind of kept this nuclear family going and going. And the elders were respected. There were no such thing as nursing homes, really. That they were all taken care of by family. And I felt like they really took care of me.

SZTUK: [00:34:00] Do you think that made it easier for you to be accepted?

HOGAN: [00:34:03] Oh, for sure. I was glad not to be to have some of the hassles, I guess, that some of the younger women had in my cohort. Sure. Yeah. And so not to say it was perfect, life wasn't perfect. You know, there were days that I'd show up for work and nobody else would come. And I'd say, how come I didn't know about that? We've been talking about scheduling and meeting deadlines and keeping appointments and so on and so forth.

SZTUK: [00:34:31] So they would have some event and you wouldn't know about or?

HOGAN: [00:34:33] Yeah, it could be that there was something that was happening off premise or a decision was made late in the afternoon or early that morning before I was on board. And I it was I was constantly reminding them to keep me in the loop, keep me in the loop. So it happened. I don't want to say it was pervasive, but it certainly did happen. But I will tell you that I became much more relaxed in terms of deadlines and scheduling and appointments and so forth, that I still carry on with who I am. But I must say I have not the sense of urgency that even then I went over there with today, I. I think that I was adapted to my retirement. Well, that was good training.



SZTUK: [00:35:29] Maybe. So and then you said you had some secondary projects also. What else could you what are you doing here?

HOGAN: [00:35:35] I taught a lot of English. We got a local hotel called Mirhav Hotel and I was asked to come up and talk to their employees about interacting with foreign customers because they had a lot of American people.

SZTUK: [00:35:49] And this was just volunteer?

HOGAN: [00:35:51] Yes, everything was volunteer. And I also was asked by one of the teachers at the local high school, there was an English speaking program called Access, and those students were really very good at already they progressed in their English speaking skills. So I would go in and help them with two primary projects. One was called the National Poetry Recitation Contest. And Armenians are very good memorizers and reciters. These were English, English poetry. And they could choose from a variety of authors. And some were very short and some were longer. But like I said, they were really good at memorizing things. So the poetry recitation was good for them. And what I would do is coach them through. Do you understand what this poem means, what these words mean? And now let's try to give you the opportunity to inject some not language, but some enthusiasm, some emotion, some emotion into reciting your poem. And they worked at a local level. And then if they qualified, they moved on to a national program in Yerevan. There was another writing opportunity. It was called Write On, and it was a creative writing opportunity.

HOGAN: [00:37:32] And they were not so good at that because they were very dogmatic about, they were not good creative thinkers. They were good memorizers. And so if I would give them the task of you could be any movie star or TV person in the world, but you can't go home again. You can be that person and live that life, but you can't go home again. They all said, well, we won't do that because our family is way too important. I said, no, this isn't real. This is imaginary and it's creative. And I want you to think as though this were the case. But really, we know that you're going

home to your family. And at the end of every story they would say, but we would never do this. We would always go home. So at any rate, it was very interesting to work with them at that level. And I took on a lot of students that were practicing for the Flex program where they would be coming to the United States to go to high school or they were going into university in Yerevan. Yeah. So I had lots of great experiences.

SZTUK: [00:38:45] Had these people had much interaction with Americans before?

HOGAN: [00:38:49] Yes, because there were volunteers in Armenia since 1992. So we were basically celebrating the 25th year of being in country and so many of them were familiar and everybody wanted a Peace Corps volunteer and when they couldn't get one in their office, then they would find the one in town and say, come and work with us. So it was my privilege.

SZTUK: [00:39:13] So they were anxious to have the volunteers there?

HOGAN: [00:39:15] Yeah, yeah. And I'll just one other story. There was a young girl who was in this access program and she met me and said I learned how to teach yoga from a prior volunteer. I said, well, that's really wonderful. She said, would you come to the class? I said, sure. And so I started going to her class and then I started advertising it through where I worked. And the next thing we had, you know, twenty women coming and students coming to take this yoga class. No one was professionally trained, but that didn't matter. And so that was a great experience. And I was able to reciprocate to this gal to say, come with me. We have a yoga program that's going to be happening through someone coming from the United States to Armenia and teaching you how to teach yoga. So at any rate, that was also a really good experience.

SZTUK: [00:40:21] Did you get to travel much outside of that town or did you spend your whole two years right there?

HOGAN: [00:40:28] I spent my two years there, but I really enjoyed Yerevan as a city. It was very cosmopolitan. There was a lot to do there. They had an opera, a lot of culture, a lot of museums, all of the things that really sing to me. And what I did was volunteered for two primary committees. One was called VAC and the other was PAC. And I was the volunteer coordinator, if you will, for my region, where I would kind of assess what was going on in the Syunik region, what problems did I need to bring back among volunteers?

SZTUK: [00:41:07] So these were volunteer committees?

HOGAN: [00:41:11] Peace Corps committees that were organized by Peace Corps Armenia and they would ask for representatives from each of the regions. So I volunteered for we had to be voted in, but I made a strong case and plus I was old. So, you know, I got in and the other was the programing advisory committee. And so I got to go and help program to be ready for the next group of volunteers that was coming in. So I spent a lot of time in Yerevan doing this committee work. And I also volunteer to be a facilitator at some of the trainings for incoming volunteers. Okay, so, yeah, I kind of like filled all of my necessary bills, if you will.

SZTUK: [00:42:03] So you go back and forth between?

HOGAN: [00:42:04] I went back and forth. It wasn't that I spent a lot of time in Yerevan, but enough. And again, it was a four and a half to five hour trip. We had regularly planned Peace Corps meetings, you know, for the entire contingent. And so, yeah, that was expected of us, of course. But so I had some other opportunities to go into the city as well. And I had my first hostel experience, H-O-S-T-E-L. I never stayed in one so and I thought, this is delightful. It was a great way to travel. It was a wonderful hostel and yeah, and affordable.

SZTUK: [00:42:44] So did you get to other parts of the country as well?

HOGAN: [00:42:48] Yes, I did. I mean, of course we knew everyone in every region.

SZTUK: [00:42:52] So. So you'd go visit other volunteers?

HOGAN: [00:42:55] I'd visit other volunteers. And usually if there was some sort of a festival or fair or an event or something going on, you know, I would ask what was going on. I would find my way because we had quite enough downtime that I could go on the weekends and visit with people and, you know, come back on Monday for work. So, yeah, a lot of good opportunities. And interestingly, while we were in country, the Pope came to visit. So I got to see the Pope in Yerevan. Conan O'Brien came with his Armenian assistant. So he was in country just before we got there, Kanye West and Kim Kardashian were there. George Clooney and his wife were part of an award program that that happened around the genocide. And the genocide was a big deal in Armenia. And anyway, so we had a lot of visitors. So Armenia got a lot of notoriety while I was there. And so I was able to tell my friends and family back in America, oh, by the way, I guess it was happening where I am.

SZTUK: [00:44:13] So what did you enjoy most about your and the place where you lived and work?

HOGAN: [00:44:25] Well, it all comes down to the people. I mean, the people were just so welcoming and so caring and great hostesses. Those women worked so damn hard. I will tell you that I was so impressed by it. Not only did they come and give their all at this women's resource center, they still had to go home and garden those gardens that could be acres and take care of the house and the children or the grandchildren. They worked constantly. And I was always impressed at just how little they complained because I thought that, yeah, no room to complain, but they did not. And at any rate, so definitely the women and their willingness to expose me to things that I wouldn't have had the opportunity to see or do. They let me take place in trainings both in Goris and when something was happening in Yerevan. And my group actually.

SZTUK: [00:45:32] Trainings for the women's?

HOGAN: [00:45:33] Trainings for the women's group, so they would take me with them, even though I really couldn't understand everything that was going on. I had someone that would kind of fill me in or sometimes they would have an interpreter and I could listen through an interpretive piece about what was going on to listen that was translated into English. So just great opportunities.

SZTUK: [00:46:02] It's only been a couple of years, but have you, did you make some lasting friendships? Are you still in touch with some of the people?

HOGAN: [00:46:07] That's all Facebook stuff, but they're all Facebook driven. Yeah. And they're always saying, when are you coming back, you know, we're waiting for your visit.

SZTUK: [00:46:17] Yeah.

HOGAN: [00:46:17] And I will go back. I will go back. I have taken the opportunity since I've been home to talk to my Lions Club. I've talked to the American Association of University Women, my college. I'm going to talk to the 50 plus center here. So lots of opportunities for me to share my, you know, Peace Corps experience and constantly be driving people back to the website of, you know, the kinds of things that my people had to offer for sale.

SZTUK: [00:46:57] Ok, so in doing this here, you're promoting Peace Corps and you're also promoting the small businesses to develop over there.

HOGAN: [00:47:07] Yeah. So on-going experience, actually.

SZTUK: [00:47:14] Have you maybe inspired any of your contemporaries to join Peace Corps?

HOGAN: [00:47:19] Sure, I talk about it all the time. And I'm able to.

SZTUK: [00:47:22] Do other people tell you that? I mean, I never thought of this, but maybe I'll go.

HOGAN: [00:47:26] When I just I belong to the 50 plus center here in Elkridge and there are about six or seven of them around Howard County. And I had cause to go to one over in Ellicott City. And when I spoke with the woman there about whatever for whatever reason I went there for and I said something about, oh, I was in Peace Corps for two years. And she goes, I never thought of Peace Corps because she said, we have older adults coming in all the time. Over fifty. So some of them are still very young and able.

SZTUK: Oh, 50 is not old.

HOGAN: Exactly. And so she said, I never thought of Peace Corps. She said, you have to come and start talking about Peace Corps. So I'm on the calendar for September or October to come over and talk to them and say, yeah, did you ever consider this? And a lot of people still think it's for kids in college. They said, oh, no, I thought it was just for those 20 year olds. And I said, no, I think that it's about a quarter of the volunteers are actually 50 or over.

SZTUK: [00:48:35] Yeah, you're right, a lot of people may not know that they're eligible. One of Peace Corps is goals is to promote better understanding of Americans, think you had some impact there?

HOGAN: [00:48:48] Yes, well, I think I definitely took a good work ethic with me. I took my enthusiasm and ability and skills and knowledge and I think shared those things well. And I was always willing to share my cultural experiences and holidays and so forth with them, as well as learning about things I didn't know that went on in Armenia. And so, yeah, we for every holiday that came up that was shared like Christmas or New Year's or something around Valentine's Day, we would have this kind of reciprocal exchange. And, you know, sometimes I would bring things into work for St.

Patrick's Day. I said, OK, who knows what St. Patrick's Day is, let's all dress in green and whatever and wish each other good luck and so forth.

SZTUK: [00:49:53] Yeah, I bet that was fun. Another goal is better understanding of other people by Americans, so. Well, it sounds like you're continuing to do that with you're going to speak to these groups. There other groups while you're here.

HOGAN: [00:50:10] Yeah. And always. Every day there is no better culture than another or a better place to live. It's just different. And that's what I try to express, whether when I was in Armenia, they said, oh, is it better in America? I said, no, it's different. And I think that a lot of them have an idea or a dream to come and visit America to see what it's like. But I think they would always choose to go home again, for the most part, they would choose to go home again. Yeah. Ninety six percent or ninety eight percent of Armenians are Armenian. There's only two percent that fall under some other, like nationality living in the country. And there are 10 million diaspora spread all around the world that were either exiled or driven out of Armenia or left and continue to send money back to the country. That's really what keeps it afloat, is that there are some very prosperous diasporan who give money back to their country.

SZTUK: [00:51:26] Do you think the Peace Corps is making an impact or helping out quite a bit?

HOGAN: [00:51:30] I think Peace Corps makes an impact everywhere. I would expect and as we alluded to earlier, you don't even know the difference that you make in someone's life. You may never know. Some people are good about expressing it or something that I said or something that I did. The people in Armenia that I worked with actually got to come to Washington, D.C., last year to the Smithsonian Folklore live. And so they were here for about a week. And I think the timing of that was just so incredible. I had just come back and, you know, people were asking me, what was it like going home again? And then they had the opportunity to

come and see a little snippet of what's it what's life like in America, in Washington, D.C.

SZTUK: [00:52:25] Well, that must be exciting for you to see those people. Anything else you want to share or any other memories? That town.

HOGAN: [00:52:38] I just I continue to say that, you know, in my daily life, I just try to take advantage of every opportunity that's put before me. And, you know, when there's a door to open, just look and see what's behind that door. And sometimes it's good. And sometimes you walk out and say, that wasn't the right thing for me, but Peace Corps is definitely the right thing. I was on the right bus at the right time. And yeah, I'll continue to share my experience.

SZTUK: [00:53:11] Do you think you would volunteer again or no?

HOGAN: [00:53:13] No, I don't. I actually what I'm doing now immediately is I'm actually in training with the Red Cross to be a disaster assistance volunteer. And so you have the opportunity to help out in domestic situations for two weeks at a time. Floods, fires, earthquakes, that sort of thing. And you also have opportunity to be part of the international disaster relief program. So, again, we'll see how that evolves. But that's really it's something that I heard about again once upon a time. And I said it's time to act on that. I'm home now. And what I do now will probably be here.

SZTUK: [00:53:57] OK, great. Well, thanks very much for your time with a great interview.

HOGAN: [00:54:02] Thank you. Yeah.

[END OF INTERVIEW]