

Jed Meline Oral History Interview
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Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Jed Meline served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Micronesia from 1990 to 1992 as an English teacher.

Access

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Oral History Interview

with

Jed Meline

April 9, 2018
Washington, D.C.

By Evelyn Ganzglass

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

GANZGLASS: [00:00:01] Is this on? Yes, now it is. Um, this is Evelyn Ganzglass. I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Somalia from 1966 to 1968. And I am interviewing Jed Meline, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Micronesia from 1990 to 1992. And I will start the interview by asking you, why did you join the Peace Corps?

MELINE: [00:00:28] Why did I join the Peace Corps? Um, I was raised in a little town on the plains in Colorado. Greeley, Colorado. And it seemed like a great way to.

GANZGLASS: [00:00:39] Get out of?

MELINE: [00:00:39] See the real world and contribute at the same time. Uh, I also thought it might help me get into graduate school.

GANZGLASS: [00:00:46] How did you even find out about Peace Corps?

MELINE: [00:00:51] That's a good question. I don't really know how I first heard about the Peace Corps. No one in my family had done it or anything like that. Um, you know, I was one of the first to even get a.

GANZGLASS: [00:01:02] This was after college or before college?

MELINE: [00:01:04] Uh, well, I applied while I was in college. I went pretty much like four months after I graduated. Um, I must have heard it from a colleague or on campus. I went to some informational sessions on campus, but I'm not sure where I first heard about it.

GANZGLASS: [00:01:20] And what did your parents think about this?

MELINE: [00:01:22] That's a good question. My parents were very supportive until they heard about the job offers I had. And my mom was still supportive. My stepdad swallowed. I was, I had an engineering degree, so the job offers looked pretty darn good to him at that stage, but my mom was always supportive and he was supportive too.

GANZGLASS: [00:01:44] Job offers, where? Real jobs?

MELINE: [00:01:46] Real jobs, yeah, real jobs. Engineering jobs coming out of school, which paid pretty well for that at that time. And, uh, but they were both supportive in the end. It's just he was like, ooh, that's a lot of money to walk away from.

GANZGLASS: [00:01:58] And what about your friends?

MELINE: [00:02:02] Uh, I think they sort of figured it was par for the course.

GANZGLASS: [00:02:07] This is something Jed would do.

MELINE: [00:02:08] Yes, it's something that Jed would do.

GANZGLASS: [00:02:11] Okay, so did you. What, what part of the world did you want to go in? Did you apply for a certain part of the world, or did you know you wanted to go to Micronesia?

MELINE: [00:02:21] Uh, no. I had never heard of Micronesia. Um, I had requested Pacific, Asia or Pacific were I think what I, my preferences were. So they gave me that.

GANZGLASS: [00:02:34] That's great. And what was the job you had in Peace Corps? Was it related to engineering?

MELINE: [00:02:40] Uh, not really. It was half, half time health, half time English teacher. Uh, Micronesia's, uh, landmass is about the size of Rhode Island, spread out across an ocean larger than the continental United States.

GANZGLASS: [00:02:54] Hmm.

MELINE: [00:02:55] So they speak many languages, but chose English as their primary national language so that they could speak to each other. Um, and so exams to get into high school are in English. All the schools teach English. So having people who can help teach their teachers and teach English is beneficial for the country.

GANZGLASS: [00:03:15] Did you teach at um, elementary level or what?

MELINE: [00:03:18] Yeah. Seventh and eighth grade. So the kids prepping for the high school exams.

GANZGLASS: [00:03:22] Well, let's, let's start with Peace Corps. So you got a notice. You're accepted to the Peace Corps. And where did you meet up with folks? What was your training like?

MELINE: [00:03:33] Um, so we met, got together in Hilo in Hawaii, at University of Hawaii, um, for the three day pre-departure stuff. Um, then there was a group of, I want to say like 60 of us for Micronesia. They had

one group a year. Um, and we all flew to Chuuk, which was where I ended up being posted so.

GANZGLASS: [00:03:59] Is that the capital or?

MELINE: [00:04:00] Uh, no, it's not the capital. There are four states. Um, Pohnpei is the capital. Um. Koshirae, Yap, and Chuuk. But our pre-service training for three months was at a Catholic high school in Chuuk, which was also they ended up being the state where I was assigned as well.

GANZGLASS: [00:04:17] And talk a little bit about training. Do you think the, did it prepare you for the Peace Corps experience? What was good about it?

MELINE: [00:04:26] I don't know what could prepare you for the Peace Corps experience. Um, I was terrified at teaching. I was more comfortable with the health side of things. I had been a paramedic in college, so that to me seemed more universal.

GANZGLASS: [00:04:41] Mm hmm.

MELINE: [00:04:41] Um, um, but truth be told, I think the, the three months of training as a teacher really did prepare me to at least be functional in a classroom. And I give them huge credit for that.

GANZGLASS: [00:04:57] This was at the, who was doing the training, University of Hawaii or?

MELINE: [00:05:01] No, no, this was in Chuuk.

GANZGLASS: [00:05:03] Oh, in Chuuk.

MELINE: [00:05:04] This was in country. I think it was. There were some higher trainers who were, you know, experienced volunteers, some with advanced training in teaching. And then I think half, you know, the outgoing volunteers helped. Um, and, uh, didn't do a whole lot of health

related training that I recall at all. So it was mostly English and, I mean, teaching and then the language, because we had to have language training as well. Um.

GANZGLASS: [00:05:35] And what language did you learn?

MELINE: [00:05:36] Chuukese.

GANZGLASS: [00:05:37] Chuukese.

MELINE: [00:05:38] That's what myself and, uh, 50,000 other people speak that language. I wish I could say I speak it well, now I don't really.

GANZGLASS: [00:05:45] I was going to say, did you become fluent?

MELINE: [00:05:49] I got pretty good. I don't know about fluent, but I got, I got pretty good. I could definitely make my way around, um. And even, even in Chuukese, because the islands are separated, um, people instantly could tell where I lived in Chuuk. Chuukese people would go, oh, you're from Udot? Which was the island I was on, my island, as we say. Um, it was a, I was on a big island, 2.9 square miles.

GANZGLASS: [00:06:16] Wow.

MELINE: [00:06:17] Um, that was one of the largest islands. Most of the Chuuk volunteers were on much smaller islands down to 0.5 square miles, 0.4 square mile islands.

GANZGLASS: [00:06:28] So coming from a place like Colorado, how did that feel? Big open spaces to 2.9 miles.

MELINE: [00:06:38] Uh, it was, uh, you know, it didn't feel claustrophobic to me at all. Um, unlike, I think, having gotten to know lots of other volunteers and other volunteer experiences, you didn't move around a lot because even though the other island wasn't a mile away, if you didn't have a boat, you couldn't go. And there wasn't public transport, so you had to pay for the fuel and hire a boat, which really meant just paying for the

fuel. But, um, that was a lot of money and so volunteers didn't do that often. Um, and it was a pretty dangerous place. So you would only go when you knew there was someone there to receive you and take you in. You didn't just go exploring, certainly not in Chuuk on your own.

GANZGLASS: [00:07:25] What was dangerous about it?

MELINE: [00:07:27] Um, it was pretty lawless, in fact. So your protection as a volunteer. We all lived with families in Chuuk. It was the clan or the family with which you lived. Over time, you know, your island, others get to know you and your network of supporters grows. Um. Uh, and I have an interesting tale where I was at the port getting supplies from the state capital, going back to my island, and a, you know, a drunk man accosted me. And like 75 boys ran to protect me, like a few of which I recognized, all of whom were from my island. So they all, you know, and they, it wasn't trouble, but I was having difficulty with this drunk guy, and they all came out to, to support me and be sure that I was taken care of. And they were certainly weren't all from my clan. They were just mainly people from my island who had taken me as part of their own as well.

GANZGLASS: [00:08:25] That's really great.

MELINE: [00:08:26] And that's the way everybody, certainly in Chuuk, that was your source of protection.

GANZGLASS: [00:08:30] So it's very much of a clan based protection system, is it?

MELINE: [00:08:35] Yeah. I mean they have laws and they have police, but, um, that wouldn't serve to protect you in most cases. I mean, each island had a police officer, um, and, uh. So that was your source of protection. And the tribal, you know, if someone was wronged, the tribal ways were more often than not applied to reconcile, you know, if someone was wronged, um, they would tribal elders would negotiate and say, okay, you're giving this piece of land to this family because of this wrong that this person did this. Frankly, it was trees because food was everything there. And so they'd say, you're giving this breadfruit

tree to this family now as compensation for what he did when, you know, this boy did when he was drunk or whatever. Um.

GANZGLASS: [00:09:31] And you said food was the problem. Was there not sufficient food?

MELINE: [00:09:36] Uh, food is the center of their culture. In fact, the greeting is *eta mwonga*, which is come eat. Um, uh, because, I mean, now much of the food is imported, though there's not much money to buy the food. The fishing is difficult. Um, and so breadfruit and taro are still grown, but as the population grows, you know, there's no more land to cultivate. So, um, food becomes the center of the of the culture in a very big way. Um, there wasn't starvation and that kind of hunger, but there was real hunger for the families that didn't have resources to buy food, because you had to buy food to supplement what you could grow and, and fish. Unfortunately, the reefs near the islands were pretty much fished out, so you had to have a boat and gas to get to an outer reef where the fishing was more plentiful.

GANZGLASS: [00:10:29] For somebody who knows nothing about Micronesia, that's just fascinating. So talk a little bit about, um, your assignment. You were assigned to teach in a?

MELINE: [00:10:40] I taught at Udot Elementary School and then served in the health clinic some.

GANZGLASS: [00:10:46] And what was the school? Let's talk about the school first. So you showed up and?

MELINE: [00:10:51] I showed up, and.

GANZGLASS: [00:10:52] Said hi, here I am.

MELINE: [00:10:53] Here I am. They knew I was coming. Um, they assigned me to start off teaching English in the seventh and eighth grade. Um, so reading, spelling, English language. Um, uh, it was pretty terrifying, to be honest, at first. Um, the smaller classes, I mean, I had eight in one

and then 27 in the other. They grew though once people knew I was there, I think kids started coming back to school that may not have been going. Um.

GANZGLASS: [00:11:27] Had there been Peace Corps volunteers in that school before?

MELINE: [00:11:30] Uh, certainly, but not in some time. Micronesia and Chuuk in particular is a very high ET rate, somewhere between 70 and 80 percent.

GANZGLASS: [00:11:40] ET meaning what?

MELINE: [00:11:41] Uh, early termination. So a lot of volunteers quit. In fact, my group of 15 for Chuuk State, only five finished. And that's about typical. Um, it's a, I mean, with the violence, isolation, it's, you know, illnesses as well as, of course, fixing.

GANZGLASS: [00:11:59] Let's get back to that, because that's another whole subject. So the kids started coming back to school.

MELINE: [00:12:05] Kids started coming back. I think we, uh, had a really good group the first year of dedicated kids who were interested in going to high school and had supportive families. And then more came, uh, in fact, I think some families shifted kids, you know, went, moved to a different family to come join the class. Um, and I think I got pretty good at it at the end. Um.

GANZGLASS: [00:12:30] Did the kids have to sleep there, away from home?

MELINE: [00:12:34] No, we were all on the, we were all on the same island, so they had to walk.

GANZGLASS: [00:12:37] Yeah. Not that far?

MELINE: [00:12:39] No, I mean, my walk to school was about 40 minutes. Um, some folks, some kids probably had to walk a little bit further than that, but not a whole lot.

GANZGLASS: [00:12:46] Yeah.

MELINE: [00:12:47] Um, uh, and I think also the fact that I went every school day, regardless of the weather, kind of pressured the other teachers to do the same thing, because if it were raining, they'd often say, I'm not going to go, and it rains a lot in the Pacific. So, um, but I went every day, uh, unless it was like a hurricane or a typhoon. So I think attendance went up with the teachers and then expectations rose. The second year I did, I shared some of the lessons I learned from Peace Corps about teaching with some of the other teachers.

GANZGLASS: [00:13:22] Mm hmm.

MELINE: [00:13:23] Um, you know, at first they would ask informally or what was that you were doing? And then I got a little bit more formal towards the end.

GANZGLASS: [00:13:30] These were Micronesians?

MELINE: [00:13:31] Micronesian teachers because there was, I was, there was a Micronesian teacher. He taught social studies and math and geography and the other topics. I didn't want to, I didn't want to replace him.

GANZGLASS: [00:13:40] Yeah. There were only, there were only two of you? Only two teachers, or how many?

MELINE: [00:13:44] Oh, no. No. It was a big school. So there was a teacher for every grade.

GANZGLASS: [00:13:47] Oh, okay.

MELINE: [00:13:48] Um, I mean, the lower grades, the classes were 40 or 50 kids. I don't know how they managed. Um, so I, you know, I would just step in for the English teacher in the seventh grade and in the eighth grade and teach the English courses. Um, and sometimes they would sit in and listen, some, most of the time not though. They'd go have a cigarette. Um.

GANZGLASS: [00:14:11] How do you think your teaching was different from what they were doing, other than showing up every day?

MELINE: [00:14:16] Um, I think I was a little more methodical about it, especially once I got the hang of it. Um, you know, if I noticed they had trouble pronunciation, with pronunciation, because there are some sounds in English that are not in their language. You know, we would have games, we would play out that a lot. I think interesting games in general was somewhat new to them. They were very much a dictation kind of approach. Um, and I think games, and I wrote questions in the style of the national exam, which I don't think they had thought of doing before.

GANZGLASS: [00:14:53] Mm hmm.

MELINE: [00:14:54] And so I know the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade teachers all started switching their tests and quizzes to be in the same formats as the exam, so kids would be comfortable with the style of questions. Um, and I think that's just because I had a copy of an old exam, which was a publicly available, and mimicked it. Uh, and, you know, they were, they supported that. That's totally fine.

GANZGLASS: [00:15:15] Did your kids pass the exam?

MELINE: [00:15:17] Um. The first year I had four kids pass exam out of eight. Um, the second year we had a really much bigger class. It was 28, but I think we still had like 16 kids pass the exam the second year. Um, in the previous three years, no one had passed the exam.

GANZGLASS: [00:15:35] Wow.

MELINE: [00:15:36] So, um, the second year, actually, the state gave me an award for the most improved, gave the school an award for the most improved performance in a school.

GANZGLASS: [00:15:48] Oh, that's excellent.

MELINE: [00:15:49] Yeah, it was, it was, it was really great.

GANZGLASS: [00:15:51] And then where did they go to high school?

MELINE: [00:15:53] Um, there was a state high school, a boarding high school in the, in the state capital. Um.

GANZGLASS: [00:15:58] So you have to, they have to go board. And do they have to then pay for that?

MELINE: [00:16:03] Um, I don't, they don't have to pay for boarding, but I think they have to have a stipend for food because I don't think they feed them. I think they get lunch, but they don't get breakfast or dinner. Um, or if they have family in the state capital, which many of them did, they could stay there instead.

GANZGLASS: [00:16:19] Oh, I see.

MELINE: [00:16:20] Um, most people had some form of extended family there. Most, especially the girls would generally stay with extended family. Um, there was also a private Jesuit high school, which two of my students passed the exam to get into, which was a, was essentially the premier high school in the whole country.

GANZGLASS: [00:16:39] Mm hmm.

MELINE: [00:16:40] Um, happened to be in the same state capital. It was actually the location of the Peace Corps training too. Um, and, and a couple of my students passed that exam and got to attend that as well, which was a, that's a big, that was a big deal.

GANZGLASS: [00:16:53] That's great. Well, that encourages other kids to come as well, come back to school, because they can see you can move forward.

MELINE: [00:17:01] Yeah. Parents insisting their kids go, yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:17:04] And so what did you do on the health side?

MELINE: [00:17:08] So I started in the health side, sort of working with the health aide who was in the clinic. Um, but that didn't, didn't, I mean, it's mostly first aid, and I was happy to do that, but he was more than capable of doing it without me. Um, and he spoke the language better. Um, so then I started doing more public health interventions, talking about nutrition, talking about, um, uh, clean water and washing your hands and that sort of stuff.

MELINE: [00:17:40] Had a couple of opportunities in that one was my host mom was pregnant when I was, about the time I got there she got pregnant. And, um, you know, when you're the visitor, people would give me a papaya or a fish or any, you know, gift. And I'd say, this is for the pregnant woman back home. I'm going to give this to the pregnant woman back home. Um, good, you know, this is good food for the, for a pregnant woman to eat. Um, and she had one of the biggest babies they'd ever seen. I mean, nutrition probably helped, but, um, but people saw the connection, for whatever it was worth, you know? Um, because I. But at my point was to express this is good food. It turned out she had a very big, healthy baby, which helped.

GANZGLASS: [00:18:23] Mm hmm.

MELINE: [00:18:24] Um, uh, also in the end of my second year there was a drought, uh, which is a, a bigger, a very serious concern on a tiny island. Um, the wells started running dry and it turned out there were very few water sources, fresh water sources that would continue. Um, it meant laundry couldn't be done, had to be done in the ocean, which isn't very effective if you've ever tried to wash clothes in salt water.

Because they just didn't have enough water for drinking and cooking, um, but each, each island got a grant every year to do some sort of, uh, work, um, improvement. And every year they just bought more fishing boats. So they were fishing boats scattered all over with motors with no gas to run them. Uh, every family had one, two, or three of these boats, and if they got another grant they were going to buy some more boats.

MELINE: [00:19:20] But because of the drought, I worked to try and design a water catchment tank. And so I worked. It was, it was kind of clever, but so I got a design for water catchment tank, but there wasn't enough money in the grant for every family to get one. And so I scaled it down from a thousand gallons, which was the standard in the, in the country, down to about 700 gallons. But that would allow every family to get one. Then whenever anybody was going into the capital, I'd ask them, can you get a price for the cement? Can you get a price for this rebar? Can you get a price for me? So that I'm putting together this proposal, I'd have the people go get the prices for me. So they began to get invested in the project.

MELINE: [00:20:09] And so, and at the height of the drought, I, you know, I said, I have an idea for how to use your grant if you'd like. It's to build every family a water catchment tank, even if you have one, you can have another one, or repair, repair the one you have if it's broken. Um, and here's, here's my ideas. You know, and they passed it around and discussed it. In the end, they agreed to go forward with the water catchment idea, tank idea. So we submitted that to the state for the grant for the, for the island. They approved it. And um, and so the supply started coming. No tank was finished by the time I left, but each family had received a grant, had received, the island had received a grant, and each family had received their allotment of supplies to be picked up and brought back to the island to build a catchment tank.

GANZGLASS: [00:20:59] And they knew how to do it.

MELINE: [00:21:00] They knew how, there were several. Lots of boys knew how to build a tank and they had the designs. I made lots of copies so they

knew how to scale their 1,000 gallon version down, um, to, uh, to a, to a family size. So I'm hoping that helped, because even when there isn't a drought, a catchment tank is a much cleaner, better source of water than the, the well and the pipe that they used, which generally was contaminated, uh, for drinking at any rate. That was fine for washing dishes and doing clothes, but um, wasn't safe for drinking in a catchment.

GANZGLASS: [00:21:34] Because of the pipes, old pipes or what?

MELINE: [00:21:36] Well, the pipes.

GANZGLASS: [00:21:37] Was it the water itself?

MELINE: [00:21:38] Uh, the water, I don't know, we weren't able to test it, but, um. Uh, definitely the, they were contaminated with, you know, there were pigs and chickens on the island and feces, fecal contamination. If nothing else, I got sick all the time from it, so I know they were a little hardier. Uh, but, um, but it certainly was not clean water for drinking, and they knew it. They would boil it in general for visitors, but they didn't, obviously didn't boil it enough for themselves. Kids regularly got sick.

GANZGLASS: [00:22:13] Is drought a major problem there, or is it just that year?

MELINE: [00:22:17] It happens, not that often. That was a very severe drought, apparently. Um, I mean, there's a dry season, but usually the wells, you know, they slow, but they don't, um, they don't stop flowing. Um, but this year, they're, in the end, and I don't remember how many people were on the island, but there were only three water sources left on the island.

GANZGLASS: [00:22:41] Wow.

MELINE: [00:22:42] Um, and they were like, trickles that would take, you know, ten minutes to fill a gallon of water. So that's a, a big hazard.

GANZGLASS: [00:22:51] So hopefully those water tanks still are there and working.

MELINE: [00:22:54] Some of them probably are. That was a long time ago. Hopefully, hopefully most of them got built. That to me would be a big accomplishment.

GANZGLASS: [00:23:02] Was there Peace Corps there after you?

MELINE: [00:23:04] There was a volunteer assigned after me, yes. Um.

GANZGLASS: [00:23:08] They might have continued then.

MELINE: [00:23:10] I'm sure they did. Yeah. Um, I got to meet them, but I can't for the life of me remember the name.

GANZGLASS: [00:23:17] It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. Well, let's go back to this whole, um, high attrition rate. And you had mentioned violence, and then you said isolation. Um, did Peace Corps prepare you all for that, or how did they deal with it, or did they just?

MELINE: [00:23:39] Um.

GANZGLASS: [00:23:39] Lived with high attrition rate?

MELINE: [00:23:42] Uh, you know. It would be difficult to, I'm not sure what you could do to prepare other than tell people. And certainly the, the volunteers who worked with us during training shared the challenges. Um. Even on, uh, just because it was difficult to see other volunteers and get together. Um. And, uh, and so the violence is also isolating because if you're not, you can't even go exploring your own island if it's not, if you're not safe. And I mean, it's definitely worse for women than men, but, um, but, you know, even then you're susceptible to being victimized.

GANZGLASS: [00:24:27] And that was stealing property or?

MELINE: [00:24:29] Stealing. You could be held, you know, at knifepoint. Uh, theft. You could be beaten if you wronged them for some reason you didn't know about. Um, or, uh, uh, or you could just be the victim that somebody else in your clan wronged somebody that you didn't, you know nothing about, and you happen to be in a vulnerable spot, so they'll take it out on you because they can't get back at your clan otherwise. Especially because the volunteers are a high profile member of the clan regardless.

GANZGLASS: [00:25:01] So you became a member of the clan?

MELINE: [00:25:03] Absolutely. Yeah. And they, they definitely, which is a plus and a minus because the clan then has say over what you do. It's like, oh, you can't go there because we have a grievance with that group. So, you know, you shouldn't go there. Um, in my, and in my case, it usually meant let us find someone who can go with you.

GANZGLASS: [00:25:29] Mm hmm.

MELINE: [00:25:29] Like, our clan can't go with you there. But you know, the clan, you know, just on the other side of the village can go with you to be sure you're okay there in that part of the island or whatever. Again, over time, most of this went away and my island began to own me. And so I didn't have, certainly had, didn't have any difficulties on my island. But if you were to travel to visit another volunteer, you know, they had to be there to catch you and take you in their clan fold, or you could be open to being a victim.

GANZGLASS: [00:26:01] So that really is very isolating for them as well, right? Because you have to, you can't travel, you can't really go places.

MELINE: [00:26:08] Not a lot. And then even if to leave the country, you have to go on a flight because it's so far away. And so most volunteers get one flight out at mid-service. That's the only time you ever leave your, essentially your state or your island.

GANZGLASS: [00:26:24] Where did you, where did you go, I mean?

MELINE: [00:26:28] So we held our mid service conference in Guam, which is part of the region of Micronesia, though that's an American territory. So Peace Corps paid to fly us all to Guam. And then from Guam you could catch a flight. I went to Thailand with a friend, but you know, that was all of my money I could possibly save just to get to Thailand and back. Because, you know, you're flying on Continental Airlines, you know, that's expensive.

GANZGLASS: [00:26:53] So you got the flight to Guam, but not to Thailand?

MELINE: [00:26:56] No. And then I flew back to Guam, and then Peace Corps would cover the flight back from because, um, yeah, um, on Continental Airlines was the airline, still is. One of the most profitable wings is Air Micronesia, which is Continental Airlines, which is owned by somebody else now.

GANZGLASS: [00:27:10] Hmm.

MELINE: [00:27:11] But, um, the island hopper still flies the same route. Hawaii to Kwajalein, to Majuro, to Pohnpei, to Chuuk, to Guam, and back. It takes 14 hours.

GANZGLASS: [00:27:26] And that's, those are the flights in and out?

MELINE: [00:27:29] Yeah. Or you could, I mean, you could go to Guam and fly the other way because it goes Guam, Chuuk, Pohnpei, go another direction. Um, yeah. So it's, it's located halfway between Hawaii and the Philippines. Um.

GANZGLASS: [00:27:43] Far away from everything else.

MELINE: [00:27:45] But Hawaii is halfway there, so if that gives you a sense of scale.

GANZGLASS: [00:27:50] Right. Well, talk a little bit about your family and your clan.

MELINE: [00:27:55] So the Beckys. Thomas Becky and Betty Becky. Um, they had eight children. We all lived in the same house. Um, their oldest daughter, Roxanne, was in my eighth grade class. I guess that would make her 12 at the time.

GANZGLASS: [00:28:14] Mm hmm.

MELINE: [00:28:14] Um, he was a police officer, so that helped. Um, and he was very, luckily he was very highly regarded. He wasn't like a chief or anything, but he was highly regarded and spoke very good English, um, which was also helpful. Um. Uh, and so they were very supportive. Um, but, you know, my contribution, I would buy rice and fish whenever they were available to contribute to the family's requirements. They gave me a small room, so I had a private room, whereas the rest of them slept in a big, one big room together essentially.

MELINE: [00:28:51] Um, there's a funny thing about Micronesians is that they, if they're, if they're residents of the Federated States of Micronesia, they can travel freely to the U.S. They don't need visas. And so my entire host family now lives in Portland, Oregon. I was going to go back and visit them, and they all live in Portland, Oregon.

GANZGLASS: [00:29:13] And why did they move to Portland, Oregon?

MELINE: [00:29:16] Uh, I lost touch with them for a little bit, but the story goes, they moved first to Guam for high school when, when the three older kids were all in high school, the school was better than the state school. They'd all tested in, but still.

GANZGLASS: [00:29:30] Mm hmm.

MELINE: [00:29:30] So they moved to Guam so their kids could get a better high school education. And then they moved to Hawaii when the oldest daughter got into college. So the whole family moved to Hawaii. Um, and then, um.

GANZGLASS: [00:29:43] How did they support themselves in Guam and Hawaii and?

MELINE: [00:29:46] You know, I really don't know. Um, I think they just worked odd jobs like I think new immigrants do. I mean, they're legal, so it's not like. But, um. Uh, and then they ended up, I'm not sure what. There's a large Micronesian population in Portland.

GANZGLASS: [00:30:08] In Portland.

MELINE: [00:30:08] Tacoma and Washington. There's a lot of Pacific Islanders there. And so I'm sure that's why they ended up there. Um, but so it's kind of funny, they're all on Facebook, and I see them all with kids and grandkids. And my host father passed away last year actually. But, um, so they're not back in Udot and Chuuk.

GANZGLASS: [00:30:31] You can't go visit them.

MELINE: [00:30:33] Can't go visit them. In fact I'm not even sure who would be there to visit, to be honest. I know one of the daughters went back to work for a little while. Um, the talented one, the, I mean, the smartest one. Um, she got a job at the bank in the state capital, but I don't think that lasted very long. And she moved back to the U.S.

GANZGLASS: [00:30:54] Well, what was your daily routine like? You went and taught at school and then?

MELINE: [00:30:59] So I taught at school half day. Um, and then usually stayed there to work with kids or talk to the teachers. Um, and then would come home and I'd start a garden or lesson plan. Swim, could swim in the ocean, which was wonderful. Um, for a while we had a basketball court, total absolute Peace Corps cartoon. You know, a hoop on, on palm trees, dirt, just like what you'd picture, um, just for fun and to keep the boys out of trouble. Um, but mainly it was walking back and forth to, to school and then.

GANZGLASS: [00:31:38] Well, did you socialize with the family or did you just stay to yourself when you were in your room? Or how did?

MELINE: [00:31:44] Oh no, I would, it was too hot to be inside. So it was, I was always sitting outside talking to somebody. Sometimes the, you know, the, the. I mean, I was, I was somewhere in between because I was young enough to be youth, but I think most of them treated me more like an adult, even though I was in age wise, was definitely in their youth cohort that wouldn't have been given a voice in a meeting or anything like that. Um.

GANZGLASS: [00:32:09] But you were a teacher.

MELINE: [00:32:10] I was a teacher. And so that, so I was kind of in the middle. Sometimes I would hang out with the boys, um, but not too much. It was mostly talking to more of the older, the younger parents. Um, another big problem there is the culture doesn't mix well with Western culture. And so alcoholism and suicide are really big problems in Micronesia, particularly for the men. Um, and so there were, there were large.

GANZGLASS: [00:32:39] Because of lack of job opportunities or why is that?

MELINE: [00:32:41] No way for the young men to prove themselves or gain esteem in their clan or their family. Um, there wasn't even enough land to farm, and fishing was kind of fished out. And so if you were lucky enough to get a job, that would work. But there were almost, you know, so few jobs. And if you didn't speak English and, you know, weren't really smart and connected, it was pretty difficult to find work. Um, and so they were rather, it was a difficult spot for young men in their culture to find a landing, a way to become an established part of their clan.

GANZGLASS: [00:33:21] And this is a U.S. territory basically. Is it?

MELINE: [00:33:24] It was then.

GANZGLASS: [00:33:25] It was, yeah.

MELINE: [00:33:26] It was then. Now it's an independent country. In fact, while I was there, they became an independent country. But it's still very closely aligned with the U.S. We have a, it's called a, um, there's a special treaty, which is part of the reason why Micronesians can travel to the U.S. without visas. Um, the U.S. retains basing rights where we ever needed to put military soldiers there. Um, it is, the Chuuk lagoon, Chuuk lagoon, which some people know as Truk, was the largest Japanese naval base outside of Japan during World War II, um, in the state I was in. And so in the, towards the end of World War II, the U.S. blockaded it and bombed it and sank 60 ships in the lagoon. So it's a Japanese Pearl Harbor.

GANZGLASS: [00:34:12] Mm hmm.

MELINE: [00:34:12] So even today, they, you know, they stick out of the water and you can scuba dive on them. And there's World War II wreckage, including all these gigantic ships sunk in the harbor there. Um, and it's fantastic scuba diving. Um, but, uh, so it had some strategic value in the Pacific. I'm not sure that's still the case today, but, um, certainly at the end of World War II, when the U.S. took it over, it had great strategic value. Um, and they have, because it was, they were, the U.S. blockaded it. So there was no food for the 50,000 Japanese soldiers that were there. So it was the Japanese soldiers were beginning to starve. They were very, very abusive to the Chuukese. Um, killed them and ate them, really horrible stories. So when the Americans came, they were very highly regarded and to this day are still very highly regarded to be an American. You know, they have very high regard for the U.S., which is a, a gift when you're a Peace Corps volunteer.

GANZGLASS: [00:35:11] Were there other Americans besides Peace Corps volunteers that you interacted with or?

MELINE: [00:35:16] There were two Jesuit priests and three other Americans. One was a volunteer who stayed. Another was a former volunteer who had come back to work with the state Department of Education. And one was the attorney general, because they couldn't have, they

couldn't have their own attorney general. They had to have an external attorney general, it was a lawyer who came back. So that, five non volunteer Americans in the state. Um, you get to know them pretty quickly.

GANZGLASS: [00:35:50] Well, they were in the state. So you were in the.

MELINE: [00:35:54] They were in the state capital. I was on an island outside the state capital, but. Um.

GANZGLASS: [00:35:59] And you never went by boat to other places?

MELINE: [00:36:02] Occasionally. I mean, obviously we'd go to the capital to get our mail, and there was a Peace Corps office in the state capital for our mail and support. Um, then you see other volunteers there.

GANZGLASS: [00:36:13] Did Peace Corps come out to you?

MELINE: [00:36:15] Uh, I had one official visit. Actually the country director visited my village and the, and the nurse for the whole country. The actual Peace Corps office was in Pohnpei, which was the national capital, um, which was two hour flight away. So, um. Uh, so that was the only visit. But we, we'd sometimes arrange visits. So, you know, several of the other volunteers came to my island for a day once, and we had a big dinner and walked around the island and stuff. Um, and I went to a few other people's islands on occasion. One island was very near mine, and, um, I could bum a canoe if I really wanted to and canoe over there. Um, it was like literally about 1,000 yards, but, um, but you couldn't swim it. It was too, the current was pretty rough there. So you, but you could canoe it or boat over it. And I went over there once, once or twice. She was a year ahead of me, so she was only there for the first year I was there, uh, a volunteer on that island.

GANZGLASS: [00:37:18] And then when you all met in Guam, what, what was the. Was everybody's experience similar to yours, or were there different kinds of experiences?

MELINE: [00:37:28] The other states, the other states were very different. So Chuuk State, each state had a little bit of its own character. Uh, Pohnpei State, Pohnpei is one big island. So all the volunteers were on one fairly large island. Um, and Kosrae is the same. It was another state with one, essentially one island, all the volunteers on one island. Yap, everybody was pretty much on their own islands. But Yap was very, very traditional. So, you know, still traditional dress at that time, uh, very different experience from the sort of mixed Western and Chuuk. And the country also included Palau, which was technically a different country, but for Peace Corps, they considered it all one unit at the time.

MELINE: [00:38:19] Um, and but there's, island volunteers have a lot in common. Uh, you know, you could be in Fiji or Samoa. There's a lot of island characteristics that are similar, but culturally, they're quite distinct actually otherwise.

GANZGLASS: [00:38:36] Well, when you think about Peace Corps, your, your contribution to the country, uh, Peace Corps' contribution to the country. What, what do you think the contribution was? Or maybe it wasn't. I shouldn't lead the witness. Was there a contribution?

MELINE: [00:38:55] I think we helped keep the education system from completely collapsing because, um, certainly in Chuuk State, you know, it's difficult for me to say for the other volunteers because they each had different roles. But in Chuuk State, I'm sure we contributed to the, uh, keeping the education system functioning. Um, every volunteer brings their own, uh, piece to that. Um. Uh, I think that was probably the biggest part of it. Um, I think in some respects we helped bring back some of the, because we would appreciate their culture more than they did. You know, it can happen even with the U.S. You know, everyone, you know, oh, that carving is really great. Well, to them it's ho hum. But to someone outside, that's really marvelous. I mean, I think we helped foster micro-enterprise with their traditional carving and traditional weaving that might have faded.

MELINE: [00:39:55] Um, I know when I was leaving, I asked the village elder to carve me a paddle. They had a specific way of carving canoe paddles with a very funny tip, um, because you're, there was, culturally you're not supposed to push with the paddle. You have a pole. So if you're on a low, you know, you could push out to get into the ocean, but you can't push with your paddle. So they carve their paddles with a funny point, which would break off if you pushed, um, and they had a special wood you would use to carve canoe paddles. There were almost no canoes left. They were all motorboats. But I asked a village elder to carve me a paddle. And then some young boys went up and cut the wood needed, um. And the youth loved it. They'd never seen.

GANZGLASS: [00:40:37] A paddle.

MELINE: [00:40:38] Well, they'd seen a broken paddle, but, um. And so they all sat and learned how to carve paddles with, well, he was carving mine and actually had two. I had one for a friend carved at the same time. Um, they all learned and carved their own paddles.

GANZGLASS: [00:40:52] Oh, neat.

MELINE: [00:40:53] Because the young men in their 20s were the ones that ran the boats that did run. And so having a Chuukese, in fact, it was an island specific paddle, uh, became a source of pride. And so they all learned to carve their own paddles, which I thought was very cool.

GANZGLASS: [00:41:09] It is, yeah. So what did Peace Corps, how did it influence you?

MELINE: [00:41:15] Uh, it set the course of my life pretty much. Uh, I became, uh, so I studied public health when I came back, went and got a master's degree in public health, and became a diplomat with USAID doing foreign assistance projects in the developing world for my whole career. So it.

GANZGLASS: [00:41:34] Never would have thought of that, right?

MELINE: [00:41:35] No, not at all.

GANZGLASS: [00:41:36] You were going into engineering?

MELINE: [00:41:39] Engineering, yes. And, uh, no, I would not have gone that route without Peace Corps for sure. Um, and so it set the course of my, you know, can't. Very difficult to get a job at USAID when you're not, haven't been a Peace Corps volunteer. To become a foreign service officer with USAID as opposed to State, they're separate, um, you have to speak a foreign language, have lived two years in the developing world, have a master's degree. I mean, where do Americans get two years in the developing world and learn a foreign language other than the Peace Corps, I mean?

GANZGLASS: [00:42:15] I wasn't aware of those requirements. Was that always the case or is, I guess I'm an older generation. I wonder if the speaking of foreign language, maybe, but two years overseas experience. That's interesting.

MELINE: [00:42:28] That was, that was a requirement for U.S. AID. At State Department, you take the exam. If you pass the exam, you're in State Department. AID hires specialists. So I was hired as a health officer. I had to have a graduate degree in public health, two years experience in the developing world, and experience with a foreign language so that I, they, I, they knew I had proficiency. I didn't have to be fluent, but I had to show an ability because I was going to have to be fluent in order to stay in the Foreign Service to become tenured. So USAID, that was the basic requirements to become a foreign service officer. Um, and so.

GANZGLASS: [00:43:06] What did your parents say about all of that? Your father, your stepfather expected you to be an engineer, right?

MELINE: [00:43:12] I, no, that, that was long since gone. I actually, when I came back, my first job back was as an engineer. So I got a job as an engineer while I went to graduate school. Um, but no, being a diplomat was, was good enough.

GANZGLASS: [00:43:26] Okay. And where were you stationed afterwards?

MELINE: [00:43:29] So I, first, when I first, I was newly married and my first posting was Tanzania. My wife actually ended up, who was also a Peace Corps volunteer from a different place. We met in graduate school, but she ended up starting the HIV AIDS program in Tanzania, became staff at the Peace Corps office there. Um, we went from there to the Philippines, um, back to Washington, then, uh, Nepal for a couple of years. Uh, actually we reopened with AID, U.S. AID, we helped fund and create, restart the Peace Corps program back in Nepal while I was there with USAID funding from my office. Um, uh, and then my last posting was in, actually in Germany for Libya. I was running the programs in Libya, but our embassy was closed at the time, so I was based in Frankfurt.

GANZGLASS: [00:44:18] What do you think Peace Corps' impact has been on U.S. AID?

MELINE: [00:44:24] Uh, USAID the organization or U.S. foreign assistance? Um.

GANZGLASS: [00:44:28] Both.

MELINE: [00:44:29] Uh, well, USAID as an organization is probably even today, 50 to 60 percent returned Peace Corps volunteers.

GANZGLASS: [00:44:36] Wow.

MELINE: [00:44:37] Um, because of the requirements. I mean, there are other ways to get those skill sets, but by and large, Americans generally go to the Peace Corps route.

GANZGLASS: [00:44:46] Yeah.

MELINE: [00:44:46] Um, and if you go to the Peace Corps route, then you often develop an affinity for wanting to help the developing world. So it feeds on itself. Um, I mean, that, that working in the village, living, is the

basis of how we do effective development. So it's fundamental to how the U.S. works, um, in a foreign assistance realm for sure. Um, and is often, now volunteers are part of our foreign assistance. They're often HIV AIDS outreach workers or, um, funded by U.S. foreign assistance will help support Peace Corps who hires and does their own thing. But the money goes to Peace Corps to place HIV AIDS volunteers. Do the same thing with a program on food security. So we'll fund Peace Corps to, to send volunteers to certain countries to help work on food security programs, which are important to USAID's goals even today.

GANZGLASS: [00:45:39] Do you think that's good? In the, in the old days, we were considered separate, very separate from official government.

MELINE: [00:45:48] And, and on the ground they still are. So the volunteers would not recognize themselves as part of the USAID activity. They may know the pipeline feeds back, um, but I think that distinction is helpful in the field.

GANZGLASS: [00:46:05] Mm hmm.

MELINE: [00:46:05] The fact that USAID realizes that these outreach workers can be helpful, I think is fine. As long as there's a bit of an arm's length, I think that's helpful, um, for sure. Um, because I think the Peace Corps is better served if they are viewed as volunteers on their own. Um.

GANZGLASS: [00:46:28] And so, I mean, USAID is criticized very often for not being on the ground enough, and too many contractors and, and all of that. I guess you have a different perspective with so many Peace Corps volunteers who have that on the ground experience.

MELINE: [00:46:44] Well.

GANZGLASS: [00:46:45] I guess you would, you would say that's not a fair criticism.

MELINE: [00:46:49] Uh, no.

GANZGLASS: [00:46:49] I'm not criticizing.

MELINE: [00:46:50] No, no, I, you know, I mean, in one respect, you would say the, the volunteers are another contractor. It's not a USAID person delivering it, it's another American. Um.

GANZGLASS: [00:47:01] That's true.

MELINE: [00:47:02] Uh, I mean, we are on the ground in almost every country we work in, so that, that's very real, as opposed to Treasury who's not, or Commerce that's not, or other government agencies that are not on the ground in these countries. USAID has offices in all these countries with large staffs, most of which are locally hired.

GANZGLASS: [00:47:24] Mm hmm.

MELINE: [00:47:25] So there'll be a handful of Americans and then, you know, 8 or 10 to 1 local hires who.

GANZGLASS: [00:47:31] Yeah.

MELINE: [00:47:31] Who are connected with the communities there. Um, we do pass off the resources to someone else to implement. That's the way the institution works these days. Um, uh, and in pretty much not since the Vietnam War has USAID implemented its own programs with USAID staff. So that's been phased out. I mean, we're the ultimate in outsourcing as a government agency can be pretty much. Um, but we can hire good grantees in particular and contractors too when need be.

GANZGLASS: [00:48:05] Who are probably also staffed with former Peace Corps volunteers.

MELINE: [00:48:08] Oh, you bet. Yep. Almost exclusively volunteers, in fact. Um, and they stay longer.

GANZGLASS: [00:48:15] So Peace Corps has really been a training ground for development workers.

MELINE: [00:48:19] It is the training ground for U.S. Foreign Service, foreign assistance, foreign service officers, development workers. It is the training ground. I mean, if there's Georgetown's University of Foreign Service for State Department diplomats, Peace Corps is the one and only training ground for development professionals for the United States. And almost every country, every, all the other donor countries are very jealous of the fact that almost everybody at AID comes with very real on the ground in the village substantive experience, which no other donor, Japanese, Brits, French, Germans, nobody else has that at all. Um.

GANZGLASS: [00:49:00] Is that something Peace Corps should be touting, or should that be kept as a secret?

MELINE: [00:49:07] No, it's, it's touted. In fact, in the, when we went to the Hill, that was part of the talking points, was it is the training ground for all of our foreign assistance professionals across the U.S. government, whether it's grantee, contractor, or in the government itself. Like I said, there are other avenues. It's not the only one, but, you know, all the others maybe make up 10 percent when you put them all together. The Jesuit volunteers, the Lutheran volunteers. You can go work for some companies that work in the developing world, but even then, you're not likely to be in the village. You're still going to be in the capital. Um, so it is, it's a very.

GANZGLASS: [00:49:51] Well, a young friend of, of mine was in the Peace Corps in, in West Africa and then joined Médecins Sans Frontières afterwards, but they probably hired him because of the Peace Corps experience.

MELINE: [00:50:04] Oh, absolutely, yeah. Especially MSF, yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:50:07] And now he's at USAID so full circle. So he's, he's come back.

MELINE: [00:50:12] Yeah. And that's, that's quite, quite common. In fact, it's very difficult to get in USAID now. I mean, while I say those are the

minimum criteria, most people have much more experience than that to get in the door at USAID. The minimum criteria is two years in a foreign language and an advanced degree, but most people don't join until they have ten years in the developing country and speak two languages. And, you know.

GANZGLASS: [00:50:38] So you've talked about the impact on USAID, on maybe that's the answer to the third question. You know, the impact on the United States in our communities, bringing Peace Corps, bringing the world back to the United States. Do you think there's been an impact there?

MELINE: [00:50:57] Absolutely, certainly. For families like mine that, you know, rural Colorado, rural Wisconsin, haven't, haven't a very, you know, uh, just haven't seen much of the developing world, uh, outside of the weird views you find on the nightly news.

GANZGLASS: [00:51:23] Mm hmm.

MELINE: [00:51:24] Um, and so that expands that individually for sure. Um, I mean, I've been in Washington mostly, which is certainly more globally aware as far as cities in the U.S. go. Um, so I'm not sure how much of a role I've played other than the impact on my family and talks in my hometown on occasion. Um, but I do think that flipping it around a little bit, almost every person in the developing world that has met an American, it's probably was a Peace Corps volunteer. And that is a good impression. You know, they're not the stereotype that one sees on TV. You know, it's not Baywatch.

GANZGLASS: [00:52:09] Yeah.

MELINE: [00:52:09] When you bump into a Peace Corps volunteer in Benin. Um, and, you know, I've interacted with diplomats my entire career. Almost to a one, they will say they knew a Peace Corps volunteer when they were young, and that created a very positive impression of the U.S. I mean, there probably are 40 ambassadors to the U.S. right now who were taught by Peace Corps volunteers, you know, from Africa and

Asian countries. I even have, I've even met ambassadors who were fed by U.S. government programs.

GANZGLASS: [00:52:44] Hmm.

MELINE: [00:52:45] But almost always it's been a Peace Corps volunteer who's been their contact. And that is, I think the diplomatic value of that is absolutely incalculably valuable, far more than even your best ambassador, your country team could no way over, bring more value than those volunteers, especially with some continuity if the program lasts. That impact they'll have on that country's view of Americans for the positive, you know. And Peace Corps volunteers have their flaws, but their flaws.

GANZGLASS: [00:53:21] They're people, yeah.

MELINE: [00:53:21] They're flaws of people. They're not flaws of, of an institution or a flaws of a country. And people can see them for that and know, by and large, these are wonderful people that Americans are and view Americans that way because of it. And again, no other country has that in the whole world. And so the goodwill that buys us in so many ways, in so many venues, is beyond the, the, the, you know, a calculable price.

GANZGLASS: [00:53:48] And that continues to this day, obviously.

MELINE: [00:53:51] Absolutely. Even if we ended the program today, not that we should.

GANZGLASS: [00:53:54] No.

MELINE: [00:53:55] That value would continue for those, and probably several generations past that, in fact.

GANZGLASS: [00:54:02] You were, you were in country, just going back. You were in country when Micronesia became independent. Did you, can you talk a

little bit about that whole transition, what that was like from a village up perspective, as opposed to?

MELINE: [00:54:23] It was a, it was, I was torn. So I was a Peace Corps volunteer in the United States of America because Micronesia was technically a U.S. territory when I started and all the volunteers who preceded me. Um, the fact that there's a U.S. territory that would benefit from Peace Corps volunteers to me is an absolute embarrassment for the country. In my view, the U.S. horribly mistreated Micronesia for 40 years following World War II. There's no reason why people would be, should be dying of diarrheal disease. There's no reason why there should be malnutrition. There should be no reason why schools are so poor in a U.S. territory, to me.

GANZGLASS: [00:54:59] In 1990.

MELINE: [00:55:00] In 1990. That was abhorrent. Um, there was actually, President Kennedy, uh, sent an emissary to Micronesia to look into the situation of the trust territory. This is, whatever, 20 years after World War II. The Brown Report, it was called. And outlined all the horrible ways in which the U.S. was not doing right by the Micronesians. Thirty years later, the report is completely accurate. Um, so when they were getting their independence, part of me was like, yay! Now you can establish more for yourselves. Um, you can get aid from the Japanese. You can get aid from other countries that would give aid to a poor country like this, which wasn't allowed as a U.S. territory. Japan's not going to give aid to a U.S. territory.

MELINE: [00:55:56] And now they get aid from the Germans because the Germans were the first ones to live there. And then the Japanese have long ties to, to Micronesia as well. Um, and they continue to get the grant money from the U.S. for the basing rights. So it was a win-win for them in many respects. I don't think it ever made up for the wrongs the U.S. committed to them all those years. The analogies to the American Indian are one-for-one in so many ways like that. The alcoholism, the cultural mismatch, a lot of them are very parallel to many of the American Indian tribes that Americans might be familiar with.

MELINE: [00:56:33] Um, so it was bittersweet for me. I was very happy for them. They were actually kind of sad until they realized that all the benefits they were getting would continue under the, the, the trust. There was a name for the new agreement. Um, so they were actually, they were also torn in a different way because they, they liked being part of America even though it brought them nothing but pain. Um, uh, so it was, it was a, it was a weird time and on the ground very little changed, obviously. Um.

GANZGLASS: [00:57:07] But they didn't think about you differently?

MELINE: [00:57:09] No, not at all. No. Um, and in many respects, they thought of themselves as an independent country, even though every law they passed had to be signed by some deputy assistant secretary of agriculture in Washington. Um. Now that's no longer the case. Um, in some respects, that oversight may have been beneficial, particularly in the beginning, but I think the neglect outweighed what benefit there might come from that over the long term.

GANZGLASS: [00:57:40] So when you said that the education system was kept functioning, that's under, under the American?

MELINE: [00:57:47] Under American oversight.

GANZGLASS: [00:57:49] As well as post. So you were there, what, one year during the Americans and one year after?

MELINE: [00:57:55] Yeah. Um.

GANZGLASS: [00:57:57] You didn't feel any real difference?

MELINE: [00:57:59] No. Because the U.S. government was granting money to the government, which paid the teacher salaries. Um, and that was how, that's how the whole country still functions today. And that grant didn't substantively change, uh, with this turnover. Um, they chartered it. With the turnover, they became an independent country. They got a

seat in the United Nations. Um, you know, they had to open an embassy here in Washington. Um, now, I think the grant, the amount of money the U.S. government support provides has been dropping in stages since then, um, probably to the great detriment of Micronesia, I imagine. But, um, at the time it didn't. There was no tangible difference other than they had a vote in the United Nations.

MELINE: [00:58:47] And, I mean, even then they issued their own passports. So they, that must have been happening for some time up, even though it was a U.S. territory they had their own passports. Unlike Guam, which is part of the United States proper. If you're born in Guam, you're an American citizen. You get an American passport.

GANZGLASS: [00:59:04] Oh, like the Northern Marianas was, was also.

MELINE: [00:59:08] Yep.

GANZGLASS: [00:59:08] A different category.

MELINE: [00:59:10] It's the same.

GANZGLASS: [00:59:11] Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands. Guam.

MELINE: [00:59:15] Are American.

GANZGLASS: [00:59:16] And then there is a second tier.

MELINE: [00:59:20] These are called trust territories.

GANZGLASS: [00:59:21] Trust territories. I don't understand the difference.

MELINE: [00:59:24] Yeah. The same, very similar arrangement with Marianas. Um, and the trust territory relationship.

GANZGLASS: [00:59:31] Yeah.

MELINE: [00:59:32] Uh, and so now it's a treaty as opposed to a trust territory relationship, but they still retain basing rights. And for those basing rights, the U.S. continues to make support payments to the government, which essentially keeps the governments running because they have no tax base.

GANZGLASS: [00:59:48] Well, when we were talking before, you said, you know, how should you prepare? I said, what, you know, think of stories you want to tell. Are there any stories that you want to tell that I didn't ask you about?

MELINE: [01:00:02] Um, well, everybody has a hundred Peace Corps stories.

GANZGLASS: [01:00:06] Right.

MELINE: [01:00:06] Um, the only other one that I like to tell is about, about the health work also. Um, it's also sort of a development story. So one stormy night, there was a new mom with a little baby that was very sick, really very sick, with diarrhea. And so she sent a sister over to get me. And I'm like, well, why do the Peace Corps volunteer? But I went and it was the middle of the night. You got your lantern, it's pouring rain. You go in and there's a little hut and there's a very sick little baby. And you know, my heart breaks. Like we couldn't even get in the boat because the water was too rough. There's no way we'd even get to the hospital, not that there was care at the hospital that would make a difference either. Um, so I did what every Peace Corps does, I brought my ORS packets and said, mix this up. And we made some. And feed it to your baby. It says for every water they lose, you know, you need water to live, and as you lose water, you get sicker and sicker.

MELINE: [01:01:06] Um, so we made some and I left the packets and, uh, we gave her some fuel to be able to boil more water. And, and I went with my host mom, you know, visit a young woman in the middle of the night wouldn't happen, but, um. And I went home and I was like, you know, I don't know where that baby's going to be, you know. Next morning, the baby had survived, and a day later, they said the baby was doing better. And I was just glad, you know, just frankly totally

relieved. Um, and then like a week and a half later, I was walking back from my little shower in the bush and passed the women who were doing laundry. And I heard the young mom telling the other moms how this ORS solution had saved her baby.

GANZGLASS: [01:01:51] Wow.

MELINE: [01:01:52] And I was like, that is a difference. If those other moms think to give ORS when their babies are sick, that may actually make a difference.

GANZGLASS: [01:02:01] So what, I don't know what ORS is.

MELINE: [01:02:03] Oh, I'm sorry. Oral rehydration solution.

GANZGLASS: [01:02:05] So it's, oh, it's just a powder.

MELINE: [01:02:06] It's a little packet of minerals you mix with water to treat diarrhea.

GANZGLASS: [01:02:10] Oh. We didn't have those.

MELINE: [01:02:13] So, I mean, it's a, it's a. It's universally reduced diarrheal disease around the world.

GANZGLASS: [01:02:20] Hmm.

MELINE: [01:02:20] Um. Doesn't taste very good. Um. But it's, uh, essentially like a.

GANZGLASS: [01:02:27] Electrolytes?

MELINE: [01:02:27] Electrolytes, yes. Designed for sick people and children in particular. Um, and, um, because you eventually got.

GANZGLASS: [01:02:36] So every Peace Corps volunteer should have packets.

MELINE: [01:02:38] And they, every Peace Corps volunteer gets packets of these for themselves.

GANZGLASS: [01:02:41] Oh, I see.

MELINE: [01:02:41] Because they're like, if you get diarrhea, you need to drink this stuff. But you can buy them for pennies anywhere. And Peace Corps buries their volunteers in them. So I had plenty. So I left them with her so she didn't have to buy them. But they're readily available everywhere in the world, frankly. Um, but people don't always use them because they don't taste very well and they don't believe they work. And, you know, and, you know, they give it to them and one baby dies. So they say, oh, this is useless. Um, but that baby lived. And that mom believed that was part of the reason why and was teaching other moms. I was like, that may actually make a difference in this village to save a baby's life someday. Um, that made me very, very happy. If I could have done more of that, it would have been great.

GANZGLASS: [01:03:24] That's great.

MELINE: [01:03:24] Um. Total luck. Not any particular skill.

GANZGLASS: [01:03:27] No, not total luck.

MELINE: [01:03:29] But, uh.

GANZGLASS: [01:03:29] Well, you knew what to do.

MELINE: [01:03:31] I knew something to do.

GANZGLASS: [01:03:33] Yeah, yeah.

[UNKNOWN MAN]: [01:03:34] Are you done?

GANZGLASS: [01:03:35] No.

[UNKNOWN MAN]: [01:03:36] Oh. I'm sorry.

GANZGLASS: [01:03:38] Um. So that's a really good story.

MELINE: [01:03:42] Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [01:03:42] Any other stories you want to? I'm out of questions.

MELINE: [01:03:49] What is the, what's, what's the fun one I always tell, which is the shark story. You live in a Pacific island, you got to have a shark story.

GANZGLASS: [01:03:55] Yes. Okay.

MELINE: [01:03:56] So first week or two, you know, when you go through training, they're like, well, if you're unsure what to do, just do whatever the, you know, your host family, your locals do. Whatever they're doing you can, you know, do that, you should be okay. So we went reef fishing. So you go, we went to an outer reef and swimming in the reef. And I'm just taking pictures with my camera because I'm not going to be able to spear a fish to save my life. Um, and I'm swimming around snorkeling, and I look and I'm like, oh, there's a shark. So I look around and the other guys are still fishing. So I'm like, okay, it must be okay. Shark goes away. Ten minutes later, there are two sharks. Big sharks. All right, look around there. Guys are still fishing. It's okay. All right, I'm doing good.

MELINE: [01:04:41] Come up, I turn, there are four sharks. And I stick my head out of the water and all the guys are up on the shore. I'm like? And they're like, don't you see the shark? I'm like, yeah! Why didn't you tell me? And I get scrambling out of the water and get out of the shark. Like, so much for following what the locals do. They didn't care for me at all. They left me to the sharks. It's like, don't you see the shark? Like, yeah! But it all turned out fine.

GANZGLASS: [01:05:07] So sharks don't necessarily attack right away, is that it?

MELINE: [01:05:11] Oh, gosh no. Especially well fed reef sharks. It was, you know, um, very rare. They do, I mean, they do happen, but very, very uncommon. In fact, all the islanders, these shark attacks the islanders were victim to, because they would spearfish regularly, were when they were dynamite fishing, which is illegal. But they'd get dynamite, and if you throw dynamite in the ocean and it explodes, well, it knocks out all the fish. The fish all float to the surface. It kills the reef and kills all the little baby fish and kills lots of other things too. It's very harmful. It also tells every shark within a thousand miles that there's a lot of dead fish over there. Come. And so the guys go in the water trying to gather all the dead fish, and the sharks are feeding. Those are the guys that get bitten by the sharks. Almost never does a.

GANZGLASS: [01:05:56] And that's really what the overfishing was all about? Is that what the overfishing was all about?

MELINE: [01:06:03] Um, that was less common. Overfishing was just there were more people than the reefs could support. Um, uh, a little bit of dynamite fishing, but that was illegal and kind of frowned upon, so you couldn't. By the time I was there, you couldn't sell dynamited fish. And they can usually tell when a fish has been dynamited versus caught.

GANZGLASS: [01:06:25] Doesn't look too good.

MELINE: [01:06:26] No, I mean, I mean, they're, they, they, they're. I'm not sure how they could tell, but they said they could generally tell dynamited fish from regular fish. And you could sell them individually, but you couldn't sell them to a fishmonger.

GANZGLASS: [01:06:41] Okay.

MELINE: [01:06:41] He wouldn't buy dynamited fish. Um, and so it was less common. It still happened, but was less common then. And you could, snorkeling you could see. You're like, oh, that was dynamite there. You could just see a big circle of dead coral. You're like, that was dynamite.

GANZGLASS: [01:06:56] It's really too bad.

MELINE: [01:06:57] Yeah, and they can get it because the Japanese ships are all there. They can snorkel down to a ship and pull out a, you know, a torpedo and take it apart and get the powder out of it. I mean, there's tens of thousands of them still there. So if they really, I mean, they can readily available to make their own dynamite, which of course is not the wisest thing to do either. Um, but it wasn't hard for them to get even in a tiny island out there.

GANZGLASS: [01:07:24] Well, why don't we end with the dynamite story?

MELINE: [01:07:30] I'd call it, I'm gonna call it a dynamite story from now on.

GANZGLASS: [01:07:32] Dynamite story. So thanks so much.

MELINE: [01:07:34] No, thank you. This was fun.

GANZGLASS: [01:07:35] It was fun.

MELINE: [01:07:36] Nobody else wants to listen to my Peace Corps stories anymore.

GANZGLASS: [01:07:38] I want to listen.

MELINE: [01:07:41] You were very nice.

GANZGLASS: [01:07:42] And now, and now other people will listen as well.

MELINE: [01:07:44] Well, we'll see. Yes.

[END OF INTERVIEW]