

**Paula Hirschhoff Oral History Interview**  
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection  
Administrative Information

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**Biographical Note**

Paula Hirschhoff served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Kenya from 1968 to 1970 in a secondary education program, and in Senegal from 2005 to 2007 in a small enterprise development program.

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Oral History Interview

with

Paula Hirschhoff

May 29, 2019  
Washington, D.C.

By Evelyn Ganzglass

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

GANZGLASS: [00:00:02] This is Evelyn Ganzglass. I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Somalia from 1966 to 1968. And today, May 29th, 2019, I am interviewing Paula Hirschhoff, who was a Peace Corps volunteer, first in Kenya from 1968 to 1970, and for the second tour, she served in Senegal from 2005 to 2007. So perhaps we should start with the first tour and then move to the second tour, not to be too linear. But Paula, why did you join the Peace Corps in 1968?

HIRSCHHOFF: [00:00:48] Well, I decided to join in 1963. I remember the moment when I knew that I was going to be a Peace Corps volunteer. I was in my parents' backyard and it was summer. And I had just read this little book, which I still have, called *The Peace Corps*, Introduction by Sarge Shriver, Pictures by the Peace Corps. And I just knew at that moment that this was what I was going to do. And, um, and I knew I wanted to go to Africa. But the story behind that.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:01:30] It's very difficult to separate my Peace Corps experience with the rest of my life. So coming here to talk about it felt somewhat overwhelming because it was like Peace Corps is so interwoven into my whole life, like my values, my, my goals in life, my, my career, my graduate school experience, everything. So it's hard to separate out what, you know, what comes from Peace Corps. And it's just the whole thing is almost.

GANZGLASS: [00:02:05] We're going to talk about all of that, and you're not the only one to say that.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:02:08] Yes, yes.

GANZGLASS: [00:02:09] The Peace Corps tends to do that. So how old were you in 1963?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:02:15] I had just finished my freshman year.

GANZGLASS: [00:02:17] In college?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:02:18] In college, yeah. So to back up a little bit. I had, my parents. My father was an immigrant, which probably influenced me to some extent. He came to this country when he was ten years old. And both my parents grew up in poverty and even knew some hunger as children. And, uh, but they were very empathetic people, like my father joined the NAACP in the 1940s, and my mother was always the one to take casseroles to the neighboring widows and that kind of thing. But they were also a little bit outside of the norm, you know, of the average American suburban style life. We actually grew up in the city, in Minneapolis.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:03:07] And one example of that is my mom, the last child in the family, my little sister was born with Down syndrome. And so my mom was just defiant when the doctor said put her in an institution, and she brought her home. And I was, you know, recruited to help raise this child. So I really think that influenced me to, to, it influenced me to feel a sense of responsibility for other people and to always try to be

helping them and serving them in some way. So I think that had a huge influence on everything in my life.

GANZGLASS: [00:03:50] So you grew up in Minneapolis?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:03:53] Correct.

GANZGLASS: [00:03:53] And where did you go to college?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:03:55] So we were the first generation on either side of the family to go to school, my brother first and then I was next. And we didn't have enough money to send me away. So I looked around the Twin Cities and right across the river was Macalester College. So I liked their pillars of their mission, which were racial and cultural diversity, community service, and international affairs. And so that's where I went. I also liked the fact that they had started already, before I got there, a program of exchange with an all Black school in the South. So for my junior, first semester of my junior year, I studied at Knoxville College in Tennessee.

GANZGLASS: [00:04:51] Oh.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:04:52] So I joined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and registered voters and felt to some extent, part of the, um, part of the civil rights movement. So I think that too was a big influence on me because I, in college, I got to know some African students and they talked a lot about the independence movements in Africa and about Pan-Africanism. So I saw it as an extension or a broader interpretation of civil rights, and I wanted to be part of that. So, so I, and that's when I really knew I had, I wanted to go to Africa.

GANZGLASS: [00:05:33] And did you study international relations in college?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:05:36] No, no. I was good at English and I became an, um. I knew I needed to find a career where I could make some money. So I became a teacher, a high school teacher, and I even got certified at Macalester. And this was very useful. Then after I graduated, I taught.

I felt, I knew I wanted to join the Peace Corps already, but I felt that I didn't want to inflict myself on a developing country as an untrained, inexperienced teacher. So I really felt, um, I needed to get some experience in as a teacher. So I taught for two years and then I joined.

GANZGLASS: [00:06:25] In Minneapolis?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:06:26] No, um. I had gone overseas my, um, right after graduating, so I was in France on a Macalester program called the Student Work Abroad Project. And, um, and when I came back, it was too late. The timing wasn't right. So that fall I substitute taught in Minneapolis. But then I went to Michigan, the Upper Peninsula actually, to teach, where I taught middle school, what we now call middle school. Back then it was junior high. And then I went on to the East Coast to teach. I thought I was going to teach in New York City, but they needed a fifth year. So I went to New Jersey and I taught in the New Brunswick, New Jersey, High School.

GANZGLASS: [00:07:10] So then what? When did you decide to finally apply? What, what caused you to do that?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:07:16] Well, because I had known all along this is what I wanted to do. So after, you know, right midway through my year in New Jersey, I applied and I was accepted first for, actually for Ethiopia. But that would have meant leaving school early. And I just couldn't do that. My contract went through June. So I came home for the summer to Minnesota and then I, the program they opened, that opened up in the fall was Kenya. And I just could not have asked for a better, you know, for a better program.

GANZGLASS: [00:07:55] So, so let me ask you, where did you train? So you applied. Was it a complicated process to apply at that point?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:08:02] I don't remember that it was. I think it was so much easier back then. But yeah, I was used to filling out applications, I suppose, at that point in my life. So I have. But the training was actually in New York, so we took classes at Columbia in teaching methods and we did

a live-in in Spanish Harlem. I lived with an African American family for a month and taught at Cathedral High School. That was my practice teaching. And then we went upstate, um, to the town of Monroe, New York, where we all piled into this old hotel for our one month of intensive training in Swahili.

GANZGLASS: [00:08:46] Ah.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:08:47] Yes.

GANZGLASS: [00:08:48] And that was in Monroe?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:08:49] Yes.

GANZGLASS: [00:08:51] Interesting. Our group was also trained at Columbia University, but we didn't have a home stay. We just lived in a hotel.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:09:01] Okay.

GANZGLASS: [00:09:01] So things change each year that become.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:09:06] I know, they were always experimenting.

GANZGLASS: [00:09:06] The training really has changed tremendously. So you went through training and did you learn Swahili?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:09:14] I did. Um, I didn't use it that much when I got to Kenya because I was placed with the Luo people. They are the people of Obama's father's family. So basically Obama was half Luo. And they are a smaller tribe in Kenya and they have formed the active opposition for decades since independence. And I have an incredible story.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:09:52] Well, first of all, so when I got to Nairobi, um, nobody knew where my site was. I had asked for an isolated site because I didn't want to be near other Peace Corps volunteers. I wanted to be out of my own. I felt I could assimilate, learn the language, everything better

that way. And so I got a school that was called Harambee, which in Swahili means "let's pull together." And in those days it was very rare for volunteers to be assigned to Harambee schools. Today, I think it's very common.

GANZGLASS: [00:10:29] So what is a Harambee school?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:10:30] Well, it's built by the community. Let's pull together. And, um, and so there's no government support. And that is the school I was assigned to. It was called Nyamira Girls Secondary, and it was a boarding school that took in forms one and two, the first two years of high school.

GANZGLASS: [00:10:51] Before we do all of that, let me just go back to training a little bit. So did you think the language training was, was good?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:11:01] Language training was good. We had wonderful Swahili teachers from Kenya and Tanzania and, um. Yes.

GANZGLASS: [00:11:09] And what about the cultural training? Did you find it?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:11:12] I don't have many memories of the cultural training. I think it's, you know, in that brief time, I think I learned something of Kenya's history, but not a lot, because I didn't learn much about Mau Mau at all, you know. So we learned maybe about British colonialism, maybe about some of the different tribes, but, but not the deep hidden stuff. And, um, and then, of course, they focused a lot on teaching methods. But for me, that was irrelevant since I'd just spent.

GANZGLASS: [00:11:47] I was going to ask.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:11:48] About four years becoming a teacher so.

GANZGLASS: [00:11:50] So the teaching methods didn't really help you at all?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:11:53] No, I felt I was already pretty well trained in that.

GANZGLASS: [00:11:57] And then what about the homestay? Did it help you learn about living in a different culture? I guess that was the.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:12:07] I already lived down at Knoxville College and in France. Maybe I had picked up some of that knowledge already and, uh, but it probably it did to some extent. I remember the young man who, the son in the family, teaching me. Because they lived in, I guess, what you might call a project or a tenement building. And he taught me, I'll never forget this training. If, you know, when you're, don't step on the elevator to go up to our floor until you know whether someone is over in the corner that you can't quite see as, you know, before you step on. Or if you're taking the stairs, if the elevator is out, then you have to check each landing and just be aware. I think he, he tried to teach me to look around me all the time, and that was useful training. If I could remember.

GANZGLASS: [00:13:02] Maybe even not in Kenya, but coming back home.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:13:07] I know, I know.

GANZGLASS: [00:13:08] So you, uh, you went through training in New York and how, was it all English language teachers who were being trained, or was your group a more diverse group?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:13:18] We had, I think we had a combination of nursing and, nursing education, and if I remember right. We were a large group, over a hundred, and people were, some people were getting deselected. I remember that terrible, um, threat. I remember protesting when another, someone, a friend, got deselected, you know, so, um.

GANZGLASS: [00:13:47] Deselection is a big thing for people in the sixties. Do you have any thoughts about that? How effective a process that was?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:14:01] Well, I think it's better, if there are some real questions about someone, to, um, to not take them to the country of service. Because we had someone come in Senegal. There was something

called demystification, demyst for short, which was when the trainees, because of course the trainees now are mostly, most of the training is done in country. And so this woman came out to stay with us and in every way she was not appropriate for the Peace Corps. And I think it might have been better if she'd been told that before she. But at the end she said, well, you know, I don't think they'll take me, but at least I got a trip to Africa out of it.

GANZGLASS: [00:14:52] Maybe that was the whole idea. Okay, so you finished the first training. We'll go to the second training later on. And you ended up in Kenya. And I assume you flew to Nairobi?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:15:07] Yes.

GANZGLASS: [00:15:08] And so talk a little bit about your experience in, in arriving in Kenya.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:15:15] Okay, so I found my site on the map, but nobody really knew how to get there. So, um, I, you know, because I had a bunch of luggage with me. And so I finally I found someone, though, who agreed to drive me all that way. It was about a five or six.

GANZGLASS: [00:15:38] But nobody from Peace Corps was?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:15:40] No, no. In those days, they didn't help you get to your site. Or at least they weren't helping me get to my site. But that was fine. I wasn't afraid or, I just wanted to get there. I was very excited about reaching there. But when I arrived, there was a house where I was supposed to live, a teacher's house, and it was full of chickens and goats. And so, and there was no furniture. So the other teacher who was there and had welcomed me said, you know, I went five miles away to the, or several miles away to the nearest Peace, other Peace Corps volunteer and stayed with him.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:16:20] But what is significant here is that this school had been founded by Oginga Odinga, who was a leading politician and statesman in Kenya for many, many years. And he was a founding

father, you know, he helped the country gain independence and get, he got Kenyatta out of prison. And eventually he was instrumental in getting multiparty democracy going again in Kenya after the Kenyatta years. And he had founded my school.

GANZGLASS: [00:17:04] Mm hmm. Was he from that village?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:17:07] Yes. His compound, his family compound, was next door and the school was on a little hill so you could see for miles. And probably this was his ancestral home, though I've never really ascertained that. But I have a little story here that I'm wondering if I could read?

GANZGLASS: [00:17:27] Sure.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:17:28] And I wrote it for the Friends of Kenya newsletter when Jaramogi Oginga Odinga died. So. When I heard that Oginga Odinga had died, my thoughts raced back 25 years. This came out in, he died in 1994. To my first encounter with him. He was a courageous leader, skilled in dealing with heads of state as well as political enemies. But he also looked after human concerns that were closer to home. It was January 1969 when I first set off from Nairobi for Nyamira Harambee School, 40 miles west of Kisumu. In those days, PCVs were rarely placed in Harambee schools, but Nyamira was adjacent to Odinga's home. He helped found the school and probably played a role in getting a Peace Corps volunteer assigned there. It was in his interest to see that I liked Nyamira.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:18:25] When I arrived at the house where I was supposed to live, no one seemed to have the keys. Peering inside, I saw chickens, but not a stick of furniture. Someone handed me a letter indicating that I could not be Nyamira teacher until the Board of Governors gave its official approval later in the month. I dutifully took all my bags to nearby Maranda school to stay with another PCV and wait. A couple of days later, Odinga visited Maranda and sent for me. I'd heard enough about Jaramogi to feel intimidated, but he was warm and engaging. After we chatted, he told me to prepare to move to my

house. At 5:00 pm, a black Mercedes came to take me to Nyamira. As we pulled up to my house, the door opened to reveal a crowd inside, and Odinga stepped out to welcome me.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:19:18] Beer was served to all the guests. Before we drank, Odinga poured a little on the floor. At that time, I wrote in my journal that this custom was part of the welcome. But later, of course, I understood that its real significance was a tribute to the ancestors.

GANZGLASS: [00:19:37] Oh.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:19:37] And asking them to ensure their participation and approval of my stay. Next, we went to Odinga's home, where we feasted and danced to the haunting strains of traditional Luo harp music. Odinga flung his yellow and green staff here and there for emphasis as we danced. Everyone applauded when I carried money to the harpist. After the meal, people made long speeches in Luo, praising Odinga and welcoming me and Maranda PCV Ron Smallwood, the one I'd been staying with. I was brand new to Kenya and totally overwhelmed at the events of the day. Finally, I rose to express my gratitude which, you know, a speech which I wasn't prepared for.

GANZGLASS: [00:20:22] In Luo?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:20:24] I had learned Swahili, but they spoke Luo there, they didn't. Luo was more important than Swahili. I slept in my own house that night. The chickens were gone, but the empty rooms magnified the bumps and thuds from above and outside. After a few nights, my terror disappeared and I grew to love Nyamira. When I left two years later, Odinga was in prison, detained for political activity. I wish that I had found a way to thank him for helping to ensure the favorable intervention of the ancestors in my Nyamira experience. And I still cry when I read that.

GANZGLASS: [00:20:59] That's lovely. Very nice. So you had an official welcome.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:21:03] Oh my gosh, I mean, how incredible. And this was before he went to prison, so it wasn't too much later that he was detained.

GANZGLASS: [00:21:11] And he was imprisoned for?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:21:14] Two years, I think for two years. But then after that, he was forbidden from political activity. But later he founded the opposition party and after. And now his son, of course, became prime minister later, the election. I think his son, Raila Odinga, who I knew, actually stole the election in 2008. But anyway, that's not part of this interview probably.

GANZGLASS: [00:21:39] Well, unless you'd like to say something about that.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:21:43] Well, it was my second trip back, but I'll talk about the first one.

GANZGLASS: [00:21:48] Okay. So you got to the school. You were welcomed royally, clearly. And then did you end up learning Luo?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:21:59] I tried, but let me explain what happened to me there, because it's, um, it's a little complicated. I loved the school. It was incredibly beautiful on this hill with these, you know, waving stands of yellow grass and all around us and beautiful sunsets near the lakes. So they brought fish sometimes.

GANZGLASS: [00:22:21] So where was this, north?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:22:23] This is 40 miles west of Kisumu, not far from Lake Nyanza or Lake Victoria. And so, um, it's in western Kenya. Sakwa Location. Bondo is the name of the town nearby. And but back then it was a tiny town. And Nyanza Province, which is in the west. Um. So what happened then was the students started arriving and, um, it's a boarding school. And I really fell in love with these girls, 80 of them. And these were girls who had not tested well enough to get into the government schools. So they felt second rate. And I decided my job was to make them feel first rate.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:23:21] So I was going to do my best so that they could pass the KJSC, the Kenya Junior Secondary Exam, and get into the government schools after two years. It was a very basic place. I found, actually I found in my file that one time I started going through my letters and writing excerpts. And there was a few here from, um. February 18th. It says, the more I see of other schools, the more I realize everything looks better than Nyamira and the more fiercely fond I become of this place. So I became very protective. Um. And I, there were only, at first only one other teacher and then two.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:24:11] So I was teaching at various times English, history, geography, math, science, and even PE. And I remember one time I even took over the Swahili class so. So I was busy and a lot of times I just had to keep a lesson ahead of my students, like math and science. So, um, and at first I was so busy that I didn't realize that trouble was brewing, and it seemed there was never enough money to pay for any supplies or even for food. You know, the school was going into debt. I didn't know what was going on at first.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:24:54] But we had a headmaster who had come after I arrived and he kept accepting students and insisting they pay the full fees. It turned out that he was a con artist and a crook, and he really had not been a headmaster at the other schools that he said. So, and worse. Then the worst came out, which is that he had seduced students and one of the girls who was our best student was pregnant. And, um, I'll never forget. That was probably the low point of my Peace Corps career, because I'll never forget how distraught and enraged I was.

GANZGLASS: [00:25:33] So where was the money coming from?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:25:36] Well, when the girls arrived, they had to. They had to pay. The parents had to bring their money.

GANZGLASS: [00:25:44] Ah, so they paid tuition.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:25:44] You could be a little lenient somehow and put them on a payment plan. But these were mostly subsistence farmers, you know, and they, most of them didn't really have a way of raising the money. But when, um, but I think the headmaster had been insisting they pay full fees.

GANZGLASS: [00:26:01] And then he took the money.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:26:02] And then pocketing it. Yes. But luckily, the board of governors was on the case, at least a little belatedly. But they, um, there was a trial and Codway went to prison. So then the board of governors said I should be the headmistress, even though sometimes I have been disagreeing with them because, well, for example, the student who was pregnant, they thought she should be sent home. And I said, no, she should stay and continue her studies as long as she can. But even with such disagreements, they seemed to feel I should be the headmistress. Well, I knew that this wasn't quite in my description of duties. So, um, but there was no quick means of communicating with Peace Corps headquarters.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:26:57] And I sent a letter and the letter came back and it was kind of ambiguous. So I told the board, well, okay, I'll step in temporarily. But the temporary position went on for a year and a half, so I stayed for the rest of my period I was there, I was there as the headmistress of the school. And of course, it was a lot of work. You know, I think I worked 80 hours a week. I would work from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. every day, because I was still teaching. And I was still teaching at least three subjects, three or four subjects, and, um, and I really had a ball though. I really loved it.

GANZGLASS: [00:27:41] So what were your, your big challenges as headmistress of the school?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:27:46] Wow. Um. Well, first it was kind of getting the finances back in order and, um. But one of the challenges came one morning when the girls were pounding on my door and I burst out and there was no roof on the school. There had been a bad wind in the night and that

was a corrugated metal roof and the wind had just lifted it up. Someone had left the windows open by mistake, we knew that was what, and the wind had got inside and lifted the roof. But another thing was about once a week a girl would come down with malaria. And so, you know, we had no car and I would have to arouse someone in the vicinity who had a car and get, get her to the clinic in Bondo, which was about five miles away or, you know, just, um. I guess.

GANZGLASS: [00:28:41] So I'm still. So did you communicate in English or you just learned Lao?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:28:47] Luo.

GANZGLASS: [00:28:48] Or Luo.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:28:49] Mostly in English.

GANZGLASS: [00:28:51] Oh, okay.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:28:51] Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:28:51] And the students spoke English as well?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:28:53] They did. I mean, they had started English at a pretty early age, I think in standard three or something, or even before that, they start English. But, you know, when I needed to, I used Swahili, but, um, and I tried to learn Luo.

GANZGLASS: [00:29:13] And then how many teachers? How many teachers did you have?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:29:16] There were never more than three, including me.

GANZGLASS: [00:29:19] Including you, so.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:29:21] So, um, I think at one point there was four, because at one point the Swahili, we had to, no one was qualified to teach Swahili. So

we had to get someone else who could do that. So we brought her in and she lived with me. So, um, that was nice. And yeah, so it was mostly in English and I always felt bad that I hadn't really learned Luo but.

GANZGLASS: [00:29:45] So you were super busy, running the.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:29:48] Super busy.

GANZGLASS: [00:29:49] Running the school and teaching.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:29:52] Mm hmm.

GANZGLASS: [00:29:53] And what was that all-consuming or did you have did you have a private life as well?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:30:00] No, not much.

GANZGLASS: [00:30:01] Were there Peace Corps volunteers? There was somebody you said five miles down the road. Did you see that person?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:30:08] Yeah, that was at the boys school. Um, rarely. Once in a while. Once in a while, there would be, for example, a combined, um, combined party or something, a dance party with the boys. So then he would come over sometimes, although actually, sometimes another teacher would come.

GANZGLASS: [00:30:30] Well, who you do?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:30:31] Well, I had, I had a close friend at Nia Girls School, which was about 20 miles away, but it was an all-day trip to get there. So I would see them I would say maybe once. You know, there were three semesters during the year, I think, in that system. And so once in a while at the semester breaks, I would, we would travel together, maybe go on safari.

GANZGLASS: [00:30:59] She was in the Peace Corps with you?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:31:01] She was a Peace Corps volunteer at a government school that had been founded by missionaries. So and then there was another woman with her. And those two are still my closest friends from that era, from that, from the Peace Corps Kenya era. So, um, yeah, and then it became, then I decided that what I needed to do, since I wasn't so sure my girls were going to get into government schools, that I should make Nyamira a government school. So I started writing letters to the Ministry of Education and also to our member of Parliament, Mr. Omalmo. And eventually they came to the school for a visit, and we spent days preparing for this visit, you know, with, of course, a program of singing and speeches. And we had to clean up the school, you know. It was.

GANZGLASS: [00:32:05] Like an accreditation visit?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:32:07] Yes, yes. And I remember we also went out to work on the road because during the rainy season, the road out to the main road where you got the bus to Kisumu that, it was almost impassable during the rainy season. So we actually went out there and tried to fill in the ruts with rocks. And, and I went out there to prove I could do it too. And I worked with the girls for a while. I don't know if we made much progress on that road, but we tried. Um. And so they came and, um. The biggest celebration we ever had at the school was at the end where we got the letter that the government had agreed to take our school as a government school, and we really celebrated. Oh my gosh.

GANZGLASS: [00:32:58] Congratulations.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:32:58] And that school still exists today.

GANZGLASS: [00:33:01] So what, what did it take to become a government school?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:33:05] I think they needed to see that the school was stable and that there were teachers there. I think unfortunately it was probably a mark of distinction that there was a foreigner there teaching, you

know, a white woman. Um. And that the school had been able to attract and keep someone and. I don't know. I'm sure I provided lots of records, showed them that the records were being kept well.

GANZGLASS: [00:33:35] So once, so all of your students then became, became students in government schools?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:33:40] And they only, yeah, and they added only a year at a time. So I think, I think maybe the first year that was still going to be the form one and two. So some of my students still needed to get in at other schools, um, and then the next year was going to be form three and then form four. So, um.

GANZGLASS: [00:33:58] So it started out with just two years and then went to four years. Well, that's really exciting. That's a major accomplishment.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:34:06] Well, yeah, it was. And years later, when the first time I went back was 20 years later in 1990, and I went back with a film crew. I had answered, one of my friends had showed me a little ad seeking a Peace Corps volunteer who was going back to her country or his country of service for the first time in ages. And this was for a program called Reunions. Sort of reality, early reality television maybe, in 1990 on the Fox Channel, which had a slightly different reputation back then. But anyway, so I was accompanied. I went back with one of my students who I'd stayed close to, because she came to the U.S. and looked me up.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:34:57] And so we went back together and then we were accompanied by this film crew, which made. They even hired a young actress to play me as the young Peace Corps volunteer. But what they highlighted was, and I hadn't even really thought of it before then, that that was a big accomplishment. But in the film they made that, it was only 5 minutes long, although they filmed for hours and hours, but they made that seem like it was. And that was the first time I really realized, well, yeah, I guess that was.

GANZGLASS: [00:35:29] Getting the school approved?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:35:31] Yeah. That was an accomplishment. But I always kind of thought that, um, the connections I established with people was, you know, that's my philosophy about Peace Corps is that, in terms of impact, that the connections you make with people are really the, the biggest accomplishment and how that affects their lives. So, um.

GANZGLASS: [00:35:54] So you were still in touch with one of your students?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:35:57] Well, with one of them. And that, I had written to people for the first maybe five or ten years. But on that trip, I also found two of the teachers I'd been close to, one of whom had been that Swahili teacher who came to live with me. And she eventually, her husband had just been killed in a car crash and she had seven kids to raise, and she'd been laid off from her job because of ageism at, you know, once you're 50, you're out. This was at Kenya Breweries, which was a big employer then. And so a couple of years later, she came to the States and came to Washington, D.C., and she's been here ever since. And she's really my closest friend here in D.C. And our home is basically her home and.

GANZGLASS: [00:36:45] She's still living with you?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:36:47] Well, she uses it as her official address, but she has her own little place too. So, um, you know, she uses it as her official address to have a D.C. address for certain official reasons. And, um, and so she's, and we've helped her build a little house back in Kenya. So now she's, we say our house here is her house, and she says that one is going to be ours too.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:37:18] And, um, and then I got in touch with Beatrice, who was also a teacher at Nyamira, and she was close to both of us. And when I walked into her, she had known I was coming because I sent snail mail. But the letters were, you know, addresses had changed. The only reason I was able to find my friend who then came to D.C. was because I sent it to Kenya Breweries. And even though she'd been laid off, there was a friend, she still had a friend there who brought the

letter to her house. And so things got, those letters got to people, but just kind of late. So when I was planning this trip, my friend Beatrice, her daughter gave birth to a baby girl. And she named that baby girl after me.

GANZGLASS: [00:38:13] Nice.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:38:13] And she hadn't heard from me in 15 years. So I walked in her front door and there was this daughter with the little baby. And they said, well, this is little Paula, named after you. And I was just, I mean, that was one of the most incredible experiences of my life after the Oginga Odinga experience. And so naturally, you know, I became, I sponsored her through grade school, high school, and she got a master's degree. And she now is working in early childhood education.

GANZGLASS: [00:38:53] In Kenya?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:38:53] In Kenya. Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:38:54] Wonderful.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:38:55] So that's little Paula.

GANZGLASS: [00:38:56] Little Paula is now grown up.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:38:58] She's 30 years old, or 29.

GANZGLASS: [00:39:01] Wow.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:39:01] And, um, so then I got, so I got in touch with the two teachers with, um, and then with a student who'd been a favorite of mine, whose name was Bernadette. And she really struggled in school and was not necessarily a good student. But she was a riot. She had a fabulous, my girls had such. My girls were incredible, all of them. You know, I really at the time didn't show favorites at all, but they were unbelievably resilient and tough and talented. Oh, in fact, I

was going to read one other little excerpt here from my letters home. It said, the first time I heard them sing, I got chills and felt tears rushing to my eyes. It was the most beautiful sound I'd ever heard. You know, they could sing a cappella at the drop of a hat. It was unbelievable.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:39:59] And, um, so this was one of these students. She was a, I put on plays as a form of entertainment with the girls, and she was a star performer, this Bernadette. So she, I was visiting the student who lives in the U.S. now. She was, I was at her family home in western Kenya, and Bernadette heard I was, the letter that I'd sent to her family home caught up with her in Nairobi, and she got on a bus all night long to come up to, to visit, to see me. And so from that we reestablished a connection. She had been abandoned by her husband because she wouldn't, couldn't give birth to sons, only daughters. So she went back to her family home in this impoverished little compound where I had visited her years ago and started taking in AIDS orphans.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:40:51] So I started supporting her in that endeavor. So she's still doing it. She's, these girls. My girls are now 60, in their sixties, early sixties, and she's still taking care of AIDS orphans. So when we talk about the impact that Peace Corps has, I think of tens of thousands of Peace Corps volunteers with, not all, but most of them with connections like these. Because you hear these stories again and again and again and you think, um, that there is an impact, even if it's not measurable, even if it's, if it's not quantifiable.

GANZGLASS: [00:41:32] Well, it's measurable, it's quantifiable. It hasn't been done I guess, people haven't tracked all of this down but.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:41:39] Right.

GANZGLASS: [00:41:40] Tremendous impact on these individuals and clearly on you.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:41:44] Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:41:44] So you did this for a year and a half or I guess two years?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:41:49] Well, I taught there for six months and then a year and a half as headmistress.

GANZGLASS: [00:41:52] So when your two years were up, what, what happened then?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:41:57] Well, first the community gave me this lovely party that I mentioned to you where I got the little beaded crown, and it was actually in. I have to find this if it's here. Well, I guess I didn't bring it, but um. Oh, here it is. No. They somehow it got in the Daily Nation, which was the Kenyan newspaper, a little article about it, with a headline that said Peace, uh, "Community Praises Peace Corps Volunteer." And then there was another newspaper called the East African Standard, and it was there in a little photograph, and that was quite lovely.

GANZGLASS: [00:42:49] You had quite some recognition. You started off with a famous man and you ended up in the newspaper. And then and then, uh, did you come straight home or had you thought about staying?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:43:04] That's the Daily Nation in the lower right. It was the East Africa Standard. And you can see the little crown.

GANZGLASS: [00:43:11] Yeah, very nice. It's a picture of her in a little beaded crown. Very nice.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:43:19] Anyway, so then my friend from Nia School and the other woman who had taught at Nia and I went on the road for six months. And originally we'd planned to go through India, but we changed plans and we spent all six months in Africa. So, um, we had so many adventures along the way. Usually we hitchhiked, you know, and, um, tried to be Peace Corps volunteers even though we had finished with our service. As you know, that's the way Peace Corps volunteers travel. So we're on the road and it was a fabulous experience. We first went south to Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe. We tried to get

into South Africa. They wouldn't let us in because we had, I suppose because we had been Peace Corps volunteers.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:44:17] And then we flew, oh my gosh, brush with history. We were due to fly to West Africa through Entebbe, with a fuel stop in Entebbe. But the pilot said that the plane had been diverted because there had been a coup in Uganda and Idi Amin had just taken over. And I thought if we'd been a day earlier, we would have been, who knows? Messed up with that whole horrible happening. But instead we were back in Nairobi just for a night.

GANZGLASS: [00:44:51] They took hostages in, on a plane in Entebbe, you remember? The Israeli commandos saved, it must have been an Israeli plane, I can't remember the details. But there was a whole rescuing people.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:45:06] Yeah. I remember the rescue mission for the Falasha in Ethiopia. The Jews.

GANZGLASS: [00:45:11] Yeah.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:45:12] But I'd forgotten this. Well, so then we got to West Africa and we went, we traveled to Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana, Ivory Coast.

GANZGLASS: [00:45:29] So you saw a lot of Africa, clearly.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:45:31] Mali, Morocco. Yes, we did. And over the years, I've been to 24 African countries so, for all kinds of things.

GANZGLASS: [00:45:43] So you traveled and then you came back to the United States.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:45:48] Mm hmm.

GANZGLASS: [00:45:48] And did you go back to teaching or what?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:45:50] I didn't because I had another strong pull. I wanted to become a writer. I loved writing. I was always a compulsive writer. And, um, so I became a newspaper reporter on a weekly outside Minneapolis and loved that job. And, um, and then I married another Peace Corps volunteer. And we.

GANZGLASS: [00:46:21] Not from Kenya though?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:46:23] He was from Ethiopia. And then after several years, we moved to Washington in 1977. And I continued my career as a writer here in Washington. He worked, he was working for the Housing and Urban Development. Anyway.

GANZGLASS: [00:46:50] Then you ended up back in West Africa in, I forgot, in?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:46:57] Senegal. 2005, yeah.

GANZGLASS: [00:46:58] 2005 in Senegal. So how, how does a reporter in Washington, D.C., end up in Senegal as a Peace Corps volunteer?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:47:09] Well, one thing, I mean, I kept up my interest in Africa through all this. So that's why I say is Africa and Peace Corps are woven throughout my life. So it was like I was always trying to get back to Africa somehow. Um. So I would, sometimes I wrote freelance and I tried to write about Africa, but at one point then I became a writer and editor for USAID contractors. So I worked for a while for Abt Associates, and then I went to work for Keylonix International. And, um, and after that, I decided, I always wanted to earn a graduate degree. And from working with these USAID projects, I'd become interested in the role of anthropologists in development.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:48:08] So I, by that time, I had, well, I had long been divorced. Oh, first I had gone up to New York City for a while in the late eighties and worked for a magazine called Africa Report, which is the only magazine, actual full magazine that I know of that covered just political and economic affairs in Africa. And, um. And then I came back to Washington. And when I came back is when I met my, the

man who became my second husband, who had served in Nepal, and his name is Chuck Ludlam. So, um, the other thing I had done, starting in 1989, was I became a docent at the National Museum of African Art. And that has been my commitment now for 30 years.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:49:15] So I feel like if the third goal is to teach Americans about, to bring the world back home, to teach Americans about the countries where we served, that I was, I have been fulfilling that role ever since because I give tours there and the exhibitions continuously change. And, um, and so I'm able to convey a lot of times to schoolchildren what Africa culture and art is, is all about.

GANZGLASS: [00:49:46] How great.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:49:47] Yeah. So I'm trying always to do creative tours, educational tours.

GANZGLASS: [00:49:53] So Africa has been in your blood.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:49:55] Yeah, it has.

GANZGLASS: [00:49:56] So. So you came back, you married this former Peace Corps volunteer, and then did you go to Senegal together?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:50:04] Yes. So he has always worked on the Hill and, um. And he was getting towards the end of his career on the Hill. At one point he went off the Hill for a while, but then he ended up back on the Hill working for Senate, committees on the Senate side. And he was close to retiring.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:50:32] And also I'd gone through a period of looking after my parents from long distance because they were still in Minneapolis. And they died in 2001 and 2002. And during that time, I had a part time teaching job at the University of D.C. So, um, that's what I was doing, that was taking care of my parents long distance, flying back and forth. Also, of course, my sister was still with them, the one with Down syndrome. So that was a complication and it took a lot of effort

to figure out how to arrange their lives at that point. But they died in 2001 and 2002.

GANZGLASS: [00:51:25] Is your sister still alive?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:51:26] No, my sister, um. There's a good group home. There's a good social services system in Hennepin County, which encompasses Minneapolis, and we had found a group home for her. But I was, I became her guardian along with my other sister. Um. But my other sister agreed that if I was going to go back in Peace Corps, that she would take over the guardianship duties while I was gone.

GANZGLASS: [00:51:55] Mm hmm.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:51:56] So, by the way, I have a. How do you know this is, are you able to read? How do you know if it's recording well?

GANZGLASS: [00:52:05] It's, it's doing it.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:52:06] Okay.

GANZGLASS: [00:52:07] It's doing it. Not to worry.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:52:09] Okay. Just curious.

GANZGLASS: [00:52:10] Yes, it keeps going.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:52:12] Because I see we've, I've been talking for almost an hour.

GANZGLASS: [00:52:16] It's fine.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:52:17] Yeah. So, um. So my husband immediately agreed. He had served in Nepal in the same years as I was in Kenya by coincidence, '69 to '70. And he had loved it. He had loved his small village and the whole experience. And so when I said, shall we rejoin the Peace Corps? He immediately agreed. And then I said, but I want it to be Africa. And that was fine with him. So we were assigned to Senegal.

And that was a point when Peace Corps was trying to get volunteers who are older. I don't know if they're still recruiting that way.

GANZGLASS: [00:53:12] I don't know. But I've interviewed quite a few people who are older.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:53:16] Yeah. Good. Well, anyway, um, so we went. And I'll never forget the day when he called to say that we had our assignments. And I had assumed that since much of my career has been writing, editing, teaching English, teaching writing that I would be assigned to something like, since this is a francophone country, something like English curriculum development or something like that, who knows? But instead I was assigned to SED, which is small enterprise development. So I said, well, no way, we'll just have to go back to them and get another assignment, because I don't know anything about starting small businesses. But he convinced me I could do it and should do it so. And his assignment was to plant trees. So, um.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:54:11] And this time we went over there for our training in country in the town of Thies and found ourselves with 25 of the most incredible 20 somethings. I mean, this was just a remarkable group of young people. And perhaps I would have said that no matter who we were with, just because, you know, you bond with. I bonded much more with that group than I ever did with the Kenya group for various reasons. But we were, we could have been grandparents for most of them in terms of age. There was only one other couple and they were kind of midway between the two groups. But they accepted us. You know, we were so grateful and sometimes even looked to us for advice. And so we went through training there. I felt much more critical of the training.

GANZGLASS: [00:55:13] What was the training? Where was the training?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:55:15] In Thies?

GANZGLASS: [00:55:16] Oh, in Thies.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:55:17] The city, which is inland from Dakar by about 2 hours. I think it's the third largest or fourth largest city in Senegal. And there's a Peace Corps training center there that I believe they still, they still are using, a lovely setting for it. And we had a homestay with a family that, we stayed with families in Thies, and that was a good experience.

GANZGLASS: [00:55:48] So you were about to say that you were more critical of this training?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:55:52] Yeah. And I think I needed the training more at this point because before I was being trained as a teacher, but I'd already learned how to be a teacher. And this time I had to learn how to start a business. But what they emphasized, I don't think they do it anymore. I think they realized it was the wrong thing to emphasize. They emphasized trying to keep accounts, trying to teach Senegalese entrepreneurs how to keep accounts. And I don't feel I was ever very successful at that. Instead, what I did was I helped different women's groups start small businesses. And I feel like I was, I was successful with that. But I also had, perhaps because I was a little frustrated with the small business end of it, my projects didn't come to real fruition until the second year.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:56:52] So I actually had quite a lot of other projects, quite a few, and my favorite one was my girls club with ten bright middle school girls. And we met. We met twice a month on my front veranda and what I wanted I, they called themselves Young Women of Excellence for Always, *pour toujours*. And I think they're really living up to that because Chuck and I went back last year for our ten year reunion with Senegal and our friends there. And one of the girls, the one who actually adopted us as her mom and dad because she's an orphan. So this girl who was in the girls club arranged an interview, I mean, not an interview, a reunion with, with the members of the club.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:57:53] So they all gathered in Dakar, six or seven of them. And by the time I left Senegal, I had seen all but two of the girls.

GANZGLASS: [00:58:03] How nice.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:58:03] And they're doing amazing things. One of them is the Senegal representative to the African Development Bank. I think it's headquartered in Lagos. So she was heading to Lagos. Another one is a math teacher, another one. They're all doing just fabulous things. But anyway, so we met with them and we met, we went back to our town, we. But I'm jumping ahead of myself. I haven't really fully described what I did there.

GANZGLASS: [00:58:37] Yes, so what? Yes, I was going to say. So you helped them. How did you find the women and what did you? How did you help them?

HIRSCHOFF: [00:58:43] Well, there's something in Senegal called the Michele Sylvester Scholarship Fund. So the school, the lycée, helped me find. And it's supposed to go to a girl who's 14 or 15 years old and just help her with her school expenses so she can go to lycée. And Michele Sylvester was a Peace Corps volunteer who died in Senegal years ago, and her family started this scholarship fund. So I don't think any of my girls actually won the scholarship. But it's a means of having the school help you find some really promising young women. And a lot of the volunteers there did start girls clubs. And it was my favorite thing, you know, and I really worked hard. And my idea was empowerment for these girls. And so I would have Senegal women come and speak to them, professional women.

HIRSCHOFF: [00:59:44] And we had a fabulous Senegal women who was in charge of culture, cultural training for Peace Corps in Senegal. Her name is Awah Traore. And she, she drove all the way out to our site in Guinguineo one time to speak to the girls. Another time I got a van to take them into the city of Kaolack so they could visit the Chamber of Commerce, which is where the top officials were women. And they spoke to the girls, treated them like celebrities. We had lots of really fun activities like that. And, um, mainly I just wanted them to hear from as many professional women as possible. Our, uh, we lived with a family in Senegal and, which I haven't done in Kenya, but it was a

wonderful family. And the father had a brother, I mean, he had a sister who lived in France.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:00:59] And this sister was home from Paris on a visit visiting her brother, and I asked if she would speak to the girls about what it's like to be an expat in France. So she did. She was very honest about it, how hard the life is and how the, you know, what it's like trying to make friends with the French and whatever else. So I tried to find creative things like that for them to do and, um.

GANZGLASS: [01:01:28] That's great.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:01:29] Yeah. So that was my favorite thing, I think, of anything.

GANZGLASS: [01:01:32] And what kind of businesses did these women start?

HIRSCHOFF: [01:01:33] Well, I found a group of Bambara women descended from the families that had settled. Our town was called Guinguineo. And it was actually a fabulous site, kind of a peaceful town, about 20 K north of the city of Kaolack in Senegal, which I would not have wanted to be placed in a city. But this town, maybe 20 or 30,000 people, was just ideal. I mean, it was not on the road to anywhere so you didn't have cars racing through town or anything. Someone might say a good place to raise your kids.

GANZGLASS: [01:02:16] Yeah.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:02:16] You know. And we just got, I think by that time I had my master's degree in anthropology. So I think I really, at first I just was at a loss as what to do. So I decided to really get to know Guinguineo. So I went around doing, you know, participant observer interviews all over town and writing up all my findings and trying to understand the town. Getting to know a lot of people too, which was useful. So I found this group of Bambara women who lived in a kind of enclave at the edge of town, and, um, and they seemed to be really together as a women's group. And they seemed eager to have me come. And we decided to do a porridge project because they're, they were famous

for the porridge that they, uh, millet porridge that they had made years ago.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:03:11] And I saw all these kids eating white bread for breakfast. And it's just, I know if I eat white bread for breakfast, I'm hungry by 10:00, you know. And it was sort of a legacy from the French, I think. But anyway, so I thought it'd be great if everyone could eat this porridge. So we went through the whole process of making it and bagging it and putting the labels on, and it was just so much fun. We had a great time with those women working on that.

GANZGLASS: [01:03:43] Did it survive?

HIRSCHOFF: [01:03:45] No.

GANZGLASS: [01:03:48] Ah.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:03:48] They didn't carry it on without me, and I'm not sure why. I think it could have been that they didn't have, that I hadn't focused on developing a good process for how the profits were going to be used and that maybe the profits just disappeared. And maybe it was too near the end of my service and I had hoped that the Peace Corps volunteer who followed me would take it on and look after that. But oftentimes, because they didn't have that kind of direction for the Peace Corps, to carry on previous volunteers' projects. They were supposed to do their own thing and, you know, that. It didn't work. She didn't get involved in that.

GANZGLASS: [01:04:33] When you say the money disappeared, it wasn't, was it stolen or it just?

HIRSCHOFF: [01:04:37] No, I'm not sure what happened to it, because by then I was gone. And I went back to see them afterwards and that was kind of the explanation they gave as to why the project did not continue. They, you know, but we sure had a good time, those six or eight months working on and selling. Oh my God, that porridge was so delicious. You know, I bought so many that, you know, and always

served it to our guests when they came. Really good and really filled your stomach in the morning and very healthy too. So I did that. And then we also adopted, um, we had some trouble making inroads into Guinguineo itself. You know, it had its little cliques and *cartiers* and.

GANZGLASS: [01:05:24] This is all in French?

HIRSCHOFF: [01:05:25] Yes, this was all in French. Well, I was supposed to learn Wolof, but by then I was 60 years old and I just found it really difficult to, um, to learn a new language at that stage in my life. I learned enough so that I passed the exams during Peace Corps training, but then I switched, in the, in the town I switched to French. And almost everyone there had some French. So we went, we kind of adopted this village, or we should say the chief in this village adopted us. This often happens in Africa, as you probably know, that someone decides they're going to be part of your lives. You know, like my girl in the girls club who said we were her mom and dad.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:06:12] But anyway, this chief adopted us and we were the volunteers for this little village called Maka Baye. And we loved going out there, but we only made it out there about once a month. And we would go out there on a horse drawn charette, a little wagon. And it was. We, Chuck worked up there with the women starting a vegetable garden, and I worked with another group of women starting a little grocery store, because they had to come into Guinguineo to get any food, their groceries, and if they could just have a place there where they could buy flour, sugar, or whatever they needed if they ran short. And I trained the women, you know, like I had been trained in Peace Corps in Thies to, um, to do the accounts, you know, to keep track of the money.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:07:03] But, um, what happened, I think what really was a blow to that project was when the, um, everything was stolen one night, all the goods from the store and someone broke in. And I'll never forget the chief arriving at our, on our veranda to tell us that. He was, he was distraught and he was in tears. He was screaming and yelling. And it was hard, very hard to figure out what had happened. So I don't think

it ever quite recovered from that. But they, they gave credit to everyone in town and they just couldn't survive by giving, letting everyone, because everyone was poor and everyone was a relative. It was just a small village.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:07:53] So, um, again, I had a great time training these women and they became my friends too, you know. And they would even come in to Guinguineo sometimes for, for lessons in running a little boutique.

GANZGLASS: [01:08:11] So when you think back at your two Peace Corps stints, how do you compare and contrast as a young person, as a single young person, as an older married person? How, how was your experience different?

HIRSCHOFF: [01:08:34] Yeah, well.

GANZGLASS: [01:08:35] For you, and then I guess from the point of view of impact. Maybe there really wasn't any difference.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:08:44] I mean, so one was Anglophone, mostly Christian country, East Africa. The other was Francophone, mostly Muslim, West Africa. So there were huge differences in terms of the culture and history of the countries. And then, you know, like everything was different about my personal experience because, I mean, there I'd been, this young woman who was just all by myself out there and given this huge responsibility to run the school and succeeded. And, you know, what a, I think it gave me enough confidence to propel me through life from that point. So that was fabulous.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:09:34] And the second time, not only did I come with my husband but also we were part of a family, so we weren't so independent. We always needed to report. I'll never forget one time the.

GANZGLASS: [01:09:51] You were part of a family?

HIRSCHOFF: [01:09:52] Well, in, um, at our site in Guinguineo because it's a Muslim country so all volunteers are placed with families. And I think

that happens in some even non-Muslim countries too. But it's just thought that you can integrate better if you're considered part of a family. So most families have compounds.

GANZGLASS: [01:10:12] So you lived on the compound?

HIRSCHOFF: [01:10:14] And we had our own little house, but it belonged to the family. And it was, you know, there was a fence around. We were included. And we were right next door to the main family house. So we participated a lot, especially on holidays. You know, we would become part of the, the family celebration or special, you know. When the adult children would be visiting, we'd be invited over. And actually we took our meals, our mid-day meals, with the family every day. So that was.

GANZGLASS: [01:10:45] So clearly, a very different experience.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:10:48] Very different. The other thing that made it really different for me was adjusting to the needs of my husband. You know, we, we think of the whole experience very fondly. You know, we love, we love Guineo. When I think about the two sites that I was given, Nyamira and then Guineo, I think there just couldn't be two more wonderful sites. It was just a lovely little town and the people were so welcoming and a lot of them had come there, well, their fathers or grandfathers had come there to work on the railroad. Because when the French built the railroad that went to Bamako, you know?

GANZGLASS: [01:11:28] Mm hmm.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:11:28] Through Senegal, all the way to Bamako, which really doesn't operate much anymore, but it went through Guineo. That was one. And so the old train station is still there.

GANZGLASS: [01:11:39] Oh, nice.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:11:39] Some of the old cars. Yeah, it was really, whenever friends would come to visit, we'd take them on a tour of the old railroad

station and the big warehouses where the old cars were still, some of them were still there.

GANZGLASS: [01:11:54] But you were saying that?

HIRSCHOFF: [01:11:56] But the other thing is that my husband had another priority. So he had worked on the Hill for 40 years, and he had oftentimes worked on legislation to reform something in the government. I mean, it was just his nature to want to write legislation to change things, to make them better. So he took on the whole Peace Corps while we were there and decided that reform was needed. And because I was living with him and traveling with him and even, you know, we worked on some projects together, um, I was kind of drawn into it. So I became a co-reformer. And he was still in touch with some of his people he'd worked with on the Hill. And one of them happened to work for Senator Dodd, who, as you know, was I think the only Senator who has been a Peace Corps volunteer. Or is there another one now?

GANZGLASS: [01:12:58] Oh.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:12:59] Anyway, um, at the time he was head of the Foreign Relations.

GANZGLASS: [01:13:03] He was, I think, the only Senator to ever.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:13:05] Right, no, lots and lots of Representatives.

GANZGLASS: [01:13:08] Representatives, yeah.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:13:09] But anyway, so he was head of the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, the Peace Corps, and whatever else it covered. So, um. And of course, he was always interested in the Peace Corps and loved his time. I think he still said that was the best thing he ever did, you know, so, um. So Chuck got in touch with one of the staffers who he knew. And together, I think mostly Chuck, developed this reform legislation to reform the Peace Corps. There were a lot of

things that we saw that could have been improved. We, we felt that since we'd been in the Peace Corps that there had been so many regulations passed. You know, every time something goes wrong, then there'd be a new regulation. But just like with the federal government, the regulations are never eliminated. So there's this hole.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:14:09] And he felt that it was way too hierarchical. I mean, for example, my wonderful experience being a headmistress probably couldn't happen anymore because the Peace Corps would have said, no way, that's not what you're supposed to be doing. So, but back, you know, the first time there, the Peace Corps was very young, very flexible. There weren't that many regulations, we could do pretty much.

GANZGLASS: [01:14:31] Everybody had motorcycles and no more motorcycles.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:14:35] Well, we weren't allowed to ride motorcycles even then. This was the late sixties.

GANZGLASS: [01:14:38] Okay.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:14:39] Yeah. Although I think the ag volunteers could, but not us.

GANZGLASS: [01:14:42] I was just going to, okay, people keep talking about these motorcycles.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:14:47] I know. Yeah. So eventually this Peace Corps, this legislation was, Senator Dodd introduced it and said he was going to have a hearing on it and invited us to testify. And so we decided we would go. This was to be in July 2007.

GANZGLASS: [01:15:10] So your husband actually drafted it when he was overseas?

HIRSCHOFF: [01:15:14] Yeah. He did. And in communication with this, with the staff on the subcommittee. And, um, Peace Corps headquarters, well, the Dakar office had already had some run-ins with my husband, or I

should say he had some run-ins with them. So, you know, we felt a little threatened already. But when they heard that we were, we wanted to go testify, they said, well, you don't have any vacation time to do this. Or you don't have enough vacation time. And then we said, well, we'll take leave, you know, there was also a category of leave. And, um, and they really wouldn't give us any extra day to do this. They said, we're not going to allow you any time. But somehow we fit it in to the one or two days of leave we had left and a weekend.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:16:09] And I don't know how we did it, but it was, the whole trip to D.C. and back was crammed into like four days, five days. A very exhausting. And so we went to this Senate Subcommittee hearing dressed in our really most beautiful Senegalese clothes. And when Senator Dodd saw us, he said, wow! He said, looks like the Senegalese Chamber of Commerce dressed you for this occasion. And he was delighted. He was very welcoming. But, of course, Peace Corps headquarters was not so happy that we were there. And they testified too and said everything was hunky dory. But we had really found, um, that Peace Corps was cracking down too much on the volunteers.

GANZGLASS: [01:17:03] So what was the essence of the reform?

HIRSCHOFF: [01:17:05] Well, there were quite a few different, um, different items. One of them was we wanted, we felt Peace Corps was the only agency where I think neither staff nor volunteers had whistleblower rights. And that was a key thing. And I believe what happened eventually when we got back from, um. We also thought there should be an easier way to get funding of projects because it was so bureaucratic to go through that, that Peace Corps, and I can't remember the name of the fund, but that fund that provides some money.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:17:47] And we felt we really needed better training. Neither he nor I had had training that really enabled us to do what we should have done. I felt that a business training program focused on trying to get the Senegalese to do better accounting was not the right way to go.

We also wanted better language training because as older learners, we, you know, some of these things are specific to Senegal, but other things could apply to.

GANZGLASS: [01:18:23] Mm hmm.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:18:23] We felt that probably across all Peace Corps countries, there were programs that were just not working, that just went on and on and on. And nobody, what we wanted was more, a means for volunteers to communicate their views of the program, the training, the program, so that they could participate in how they make, to make it a better program. And eventually we worked with Carrie, the Peace Corps director.

GANZGLASS: [01:18:56] Hessler-Radelet.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:18:57] Hessler-Radelet, yeah, and she was fabulous. And as you probably know, she made so many wonderful reforms. But we worked with her. My husband especially worked with her for about the last couple of years that she, that she was director. And it was.

GANZGLASS: [01:19:15] So did the legislation ever pass?

HIRSCHOFF: [01:19:16] Yeah, she took a lot of things that were in there so, but I mean she had her own ideas for like.

GANZGLASS: [01:19:22] But it didn't pass as legislation?

HIRSCHOFF: [01:19:24] Not specifically, because what happened was Senator Dodd kind of abandoned it when he started to run for president. And, uh, and then he didn't, eventually didn't come back to the Senate anyway.

GANZGLASS: [01:19:37] Okay.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:19:37] Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [01:19:38] So then you came here, you testified, you went back?

HIRSCHOFF: [01:19:42] Yeah, we, we had about 50 friends who filled the hearing room. It was a riot. And Chuck's aged father, who was 92 at that point, flew in from California. My parents weren't around, but for the. And then he took us all, all 50 friends out to dinner, or lunch I guess. And so it was, it was a lot of fun. And I think maybe our voices were heard by someone and, you know.

GANZGLASS: [01:20:13] So you had an impact that way as well.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:20:15] Well, I hope. My husband certainly believes we did. I'm always a little more, less certain about impacts than other people are. I think it comes in many indirect ways.

GANZGLASS: [01:20:28] So then you went back and you finished your service?

HIRSCHOFF: [01:20:32] Yes. Yes, we did. And, um, and it was a wonderful two years. We really felt part of that community. We were the first volunteers there. But and our family, for family reasons, wasn't able to let Peace Corps stay in that little house anymore. So we decided we were going to find another place so that the tradition could continue in Guinguineo, because it was a, we thought it was a great site with lots of opportunities.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:21:06] So there was a wonderful man named Pop Jope who we got to know really well, who was severely handicapped, born with a useless, withered right leg. And yet, and he became, he was a butcher. So that's how he tried to make a living. But it's really hard work. You know, he had to kill a goat every day and butcher it in his back yard. And then they wouldn't let him do it there anymore. So we thought, you know, he needed another means of income. And he had a little room attached to his house. And so the Peace Corps gave him the money to fix that up for volunteers. And then for ten years, there was a succession of volunteers who lived with him and that finally, he and his wife finally decided they weren't going to do it anymore. But his dream was to come to America.

GANZGLASS: [01:22:05] Mm hmm.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:22:06] And in 2016, the volunteers who had lived with him got together and sponsored his trip to the U.S., and he came and stayed with us in D.C. for a week. He was by then working with handicapped, the national handicap NGO, or the national NGO for the service to the disabled. In French, I think it's *handicapé*. But anyway, um. And so I took him around to about, this is what he wanted to do. He wanted to visit all the NGOs in D.C. that he could find that were serving the people with disabilities in this country. So that was pretty wild. But we had a wonderful time.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:22:57] We had a big party. And some of the people who had, and it wasn't just that he was, that he hosted, he and his wonderful wife Bonnie hosted the volunteers, but that their home, even while we were there, before people started living with Pop Jope, they were sort of Peace Corps headquarters in Guinguineo. So anyone passing through to little villages out in the bush would come there and he, and they would, you know, buy Pop Jope's fabulous meat that he served. And, um, and they would just sit around and talk.

GANZGLASS: [01:23:35] Nice. Very nice.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:23:37] Pop never became fluent in English. But his nephew, who grew up there, did. And so when he came to the U.S., his nephew came with him. And since then, I've, I've tried to, to help him a little.

GANZGLASS: [01:23:52] So you have many people that you've stayed in touch with and helped over the years.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:23:56] And the best one. We have, we don't just have this Fatica who's our. And this is a wonderful story of what happened to my, our Senegalese daughter Fatica, the one who was orphaned at age ten. She completed lycée, she went on to the university in Dakar, and got a master's degree in international human rights law.

GANZGLASS: [01:24:20] Wow.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:24:21] She did this pretty much on her own, she had scholarships. But when there were extras, we tried to help her out. Like there were special trips where she visited South Africa, Ethiopia, and Burkina Faso. And we would help her with that. Or once we sent over a used computer for her. But anyway, she did it pretty much on her own.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:24:43] And then just before. I've been friendly with Liz Fanning, who founded CorpsAfrica. She lives right over near us. And, um, and do you know about CorpsAfrica? It's a mini Peace Corps in Africa. It's a fabulous program. Liz was a volunteer in Morocco. And while there she, this was about 20 years ago, and while there, she had a lot of young Moroccans say, well, can I be a Peace Corps volunteer? I've got a university education. I want to help my people. She said, no, it's just for Americans. But she came home and she worked and worked and founded this. She just got the Shriver Award.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:25:30] Oh, okay.

GANZGLASS: [01:25:33] Liz Fanning. F-A-double N-I-N-G. By coincidence, we're good friends with Mamadou [Sarr], who is the AfriCorps, CorpsAfrica sorry, director in Senegal. But so I was aware when they were first starting the program in Senegal, which was a year ago last fall. So I, Fatica was just finishing her masters and I said, you may know someone. I didn't think she would do it. I thought she had to find a job right away. And she said she was applying because she wanted to follow in our footsteps and become a volunteer at the grassroots level. And of course, they took her. She was just an outstanding candidate. She had a fabulous program in this little village down by the gold mines in southeastern Senegal.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:26:30] But two incredible things. I mean, I keep thinking of these little stories as, as serendipity or little miracles in my life. At the end of her one year stay, because CorpsAfrica is for only one year, she, um. She welcomed a Peace Corps volunteer to her site, to the same village. And then she helped this Peace Corps volunteer start a girls

club in that little village. She said, you should do this. This is the most wonderful thing you can do.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:27:07] And then the village, Maka Baye, that Chuck and I have adopted, or maybe the chief had adopted us, outside of Guinguineo. That chief had always wanted a volunteer to live there, and we had mentioned it the Peace Corps. But there had been no Peace Corps volunteer assigned to Maka Baye. Fatica somehow arranged to have a CorpsAfrica volunteer assigned to. So she sent me the picture and the chief is just beaming beside this young Senegalese woman who was going to live in his village and help him do projects for a year. So, I mean, it's just like full circle again and again.

GANZGLASS: [01:27:51] Well, you've trained the next generation as well. That's really great.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:27:55] Yeah, and this program is, Liz Fanning thinks it's going to go, and she says by the year I think 2030 it's going to be in every country in Africa she says. Right now they're only in four countries. Morocco, Senegal, Malawi, and Rwanda. So.

GANZGLASS: [01:28:20] That's great.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:28:20] Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [01:28:21] So you've had a full Peace Corps life and you've brought Peace Corps back.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:28:26] Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [01:28:28] And you've been talking.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:28:29] And the other one I have to talk about just briefly, because I can't bear not mentioning him. There was a student in Guinguineo. He was at the lycée and used to hang around our house a lot because he was the best English speaker and he always wanted to practice English. And he sort of became our Senegalese son. He's got

parents, but they're divorced, so it's not a happy family. Anyway, um, this young man, he went on to the best university, the one in Saint-Louis, Anta Diop University, and there he got a master's in linguistics, even though his professors said, no, don't, they weren't. He wanted to study early childhood language development.

GANZGLASS: [01:29:15] Mm hmm.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:29:15] And they said that's not something that we study here in Senegal. But he did it, did his thesis in it. And then by enormous coincidence, there was a fabulous NGO in Senegal called Tostan, founded by Mollie Melching, who, she was a Peace Corps volunteer at one point but that's not how she really got started in Senegal. And, um, she, this, this NGO has pretty much been responsible for eliminating female genital mutilation in the villages of Senegal, but it wasn't that widely practiced there. So but they've gone on to do the same thing in other countries. So they're working in Somalia and many other African countries now, but they do more than that.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:30:07] What they do is they go into a village and they do development from the ground up through literacy training of women and then teaching them their human rights, and that Senegal's a signatory to the UN Declaration of Human Rights. Anyway, this incredible organization is, was just starting when, when, when Yatma, our Senegalese son, was finishing his master's in early childhood language development. They were just starting to evaluate a research project on early language development in Senegalese children, to see what affected it, what impact it had on their learning in the primary schools. And they had hired all the, their Senegalese researchers at that point and Yatma came along and they said, oh my gosh, you're perfect for this job. We'll have to create a position, another position for you.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:31:06] So he's had three years there and now he's here in the U.S. He got his master's first in early childhood development, and now he's getting his PhD, all on a full scholarship. And every holiday for five years he's come and spent three or four weeks at our house.

Now, this past year, his wife and toddler son came and spent that time with us too. So we have a household that's very often.

GANZGLASS: [01:31:35] Filled with.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:31:35] Hosting people from Senegal, or Kenya too, because Gerry, my Kenyan friend, lives in D.C. and her children often come through so. So that's, you know, I really, in terms of impact. I think Peace Corps has had a tremendous impact in this country because every time I find out about some project where there's a new medical intervention that, you know, is really doing well in developing countries. Or some, oftentimes at the museum, there will be an anthropologist who comes through and has curated this incredible exhibition or something, and it's.

GANZGLASS: [01:32:19] Some Peace Corps.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:32:19] And you look into their bio and you look back and back and back and they don't always make a big deal of it. But you often find that Peace Corps was a factor. And I think it goes for leadership in a lot of federal agencies, at least in the past, I don't know what's happening now. But, you know, State Department, USAID, all the NGOs, the top NGOs.

GANZGLASS: [01:32:41] Filled with Peace Corps volunteers.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:32:41] Filled, yeah. So I think that's, you know, that we've had an impact, that Peace Corps has had an impact that way. So it certainly was, you know, a crucial theme throughout my life. Everything.

GANZGLASS: [01:32:58] It had an impact in the country. It had an impact in the United States. And clearly, personally, it's having tremendous impact on your life.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:33:05] Yeah, unbelievable. So I hope it goes on for many decades to come.

GANZGLASS: [01:33:13] Well, good. This has been a really great interview. Anything else? Anything else that you wanted to talk about?

HIRSCHOFF: [01:33:18] You know, I stopped. I stopped looking here. So let me see if there is anything else that I.

GANZGLASS: [01:33:29] You've told lots and lots of stories.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:33:30] I have. So I think I've covered pretty much what I wanted to say. And, you know, I just, I guess I've said this and it sounds really hokey, but I've said it before, in that I'm just grateful to live in a country that has a Peace Corps. And that I was lucky enough to go. I mean, imagine being in Africa just when these countries, I was in Kenya just after independence, and it was still, there was so much hope and joy, you know, yet before.

GANZGLASS: [01:34:04] Many bad things happened.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:34:06] Yes. So it was an amazing time to be there. But I would say that being in Senegal 40 years later was also an incredible experience. And, you know, it gave me a son and a daughter. I don't have children of my own. So it's wonderful to be able to, to help and to mentor all these other children. Young people, they're not children. Yeah.

GANZGLASS: [01:34:33] So thank you so much.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:34:34] You're welcome. Thank you for doing this work. It's, um.

GANZGLASS: [01:34:40] It's good to remember those stories.

HIRSCHOFF: [01:34:42] Yes, it's fabulous. I love just reliving some of it. And I still have this, um, look at this letter from Jack Vaughn.

GANZGLASS: [01:34:52] This is a letter inviting her to join the Peace Corps in 1968. So I'm going to end the interview right now.

[END OF INTERVIEW]