

**Dan Diliberti Oral History Interview**  
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection  
Administrative Information

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**Interviewer:** Paul Kinsley  
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**Biographical Note**

Dan Diliberti served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Chile from 1969 to 1971 as a home construction instructor.

**Access**

Open.

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Oral History Interview

with

Dan Diliberti

February 1, 2011  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

By Paul Kinsley

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

KINSLEY: [00:00:03] Ok, today is February 1st, 2011. This is Paul Kinsley, and I'm interviewing Dan Diliberti, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Chile from 1969 to 1971 as a home construction worker. Ok, Dan, kind of let us know what your present family, work, and interests are. How are you doing today?

DILIBERTI: [00:00:36] Well, right now I'm the Milwaukee County Treasurer, Milwaukee County government. It's an elected position. I'm still married to my wife Ann, we were in the Peace Corps together in Chile from 1969 to '71. We went down there together right after we got married. And we have three children, three girls, one of whom also worked in housing construction, self-help housing construction in the United States and with Habitat for Humanity for two years as an AmeriCorps volunteer.

KINSLEY: [00:01:01] Ok. Do you want to elaborate on your interests or anything?

DILIBERTI: [00:01:07] I guess that's good enough for now.

KINSLEY: [00:01:09] Ok, now kind of think back to the year before that, you joined the Peace Corps and talk about what life was like then. You can include your childhood, education, or other experiences.

DILIBERTI: [00:01:24] Well, I was influenced a lot by John F. Kennedy when I was in high school. He was elected in 1960. He was killed in 1963. I went to college in '65 and I graduated in '69. When Kennedy started the Peace Corps back when I was in high school, I actually sent an application and I was still a high school kid. I was so enthralled by the idea of just going out there and making a difference in the world. They wrote me back a nice letter saying that I should wait until I went on to college and got some skills and abilities that they thought I could contribute. So I was always thinking about joining the Peace Corps all through my college days. And when I met my wife, my future wife Ann, we talked about it and we decided to join together. So we applied back in, like in the fall of 1968 and got accepted to go to Chile in June of '69. We got married about two weeks before that and we went off to Chile.

KINSLEY: [00:02:22] So basically you heard about it through Kennedy and you wanted to see what you can do to change the world.

DILIBERTI: [00:02:31] Yeah, I guess so, yeah. Idealistic candidate.

KINSLEY: [00:02:35] Did you have a specific country or project in mind when you applied?

DILIBERTI: [00:02:41] I really didn't, no. But I was happy when I got assigned to South America, to Chile. It was an exciting time. The 60s, you know, I was very active in some of the anti-war movements and cultural changes, some community organizing. And South America was, all over the world things are going on. In Europe, they had a lot of things going on in China and South America. Chile was one of the few democracies in South America at the time, and I was really looking forward to just going down there and just learning. I was also an international studies major in college, so I'd studied

Chile and a lot of South American countries. And I had taken some Spanish so was glad to be building that foundation.

KINSLEY: [00:03:28] Okay. What were your friends' and families' reactions when you were accepted? Was there any hesitation or reservations, either on your part or their part?

DILIBERTI: [00:03:41] Oh, I guess they all knew I wanted to go, and I think some people thought I was just kind of losing a couple of years of my life. My dad was wondering why I spent two years in the Peace Corps earning nothing and not getting a late start on my career. But other than that, I think people were pretty supportive.

KINSLEY: [00:03:59] Yeah, I think a lot of people had that same thing. You know, why are you just kissing away two years? But really, it contributed in the long run to a lot more.

DILIBERTI: [00:04:08] It really made me who I am and really defined who I am. And it's interesting because, you know, you don't really realize how it shapes you until later when you reflect on and you think.

KINSLEY: [00:04:21] Yeah, I think you're right there.

DILIBERTI: [00:04:22] And you know, it's still the sixties as a Peace Corps is fairly young in the 60s, it is pretty exciting and the whole idea of make a difference, join the Peace Corps. It was really kind of a feeling a lot of people had about the Peace Corps.

KINSLEY: [00:04:34] Okay, what project were you invited to join?

DILIBERTI: [00:04:39] So, you know, we were invited to join. When we were invited to join the Peace Corps, we got married and we went down there and we were, I think three days in Washington, D.C., and went right down to Chile. All our training was in-country. I had worked construction during my college years. That was my knowledge of construction. They sent us to a Chilean technical school for three months. We're learning their construction techniques and their language and learning how to swear in

Spanish, which is essential to a construction site. And I went down. I was assigned to a self-help housing project where people built their own houses right in the outskirts of Santiago. These were projects that were done throughout Chile. I got assigned to near the airport, Pudahuel, on the outskirts of Santiago.

KINSLEY: [00:05:28] Did you do anything to prepare yourself for leaving the U.S. for two years?

DILIBERTI: [00:05:35] I got my wisdom teeth pulled and got all my shots and off we went. No, I didn't really prepare.

KINSLEY: [00:05:39] Ok. Talk about the training a little. Tell me like where it was, something about the faculty, syllabus, technical studies, the reaction to other people training, language.

DILIBERTI: [00:05:53] What was interesting because we got down there and we went to an old seminary where we had, I think there were 22 couples and I think there were maybe ten single people. They sent couples to the housing sites to construct because they found out that they had a single instructor there. It kind of was kind of detrimental to the family structure because all the families were there and all the women were married on the site and they wanted the married volunteered to go to the site. Yes, so we were at this old seminary, and we were taught Spanish. A lot of us didn't know any Spanish at all. None of our instructors speak English, it was total immersion. There were 22 couples there. A lot of us were just recently married. They didn't really give us any instructions on how to eat or what to eat. They prepared the meals for us. And at the end of training, they gave us a list of what we shouldn't eat, and it was mostly what was on the menu, what we'd been eating in the last several months. It was about a two and a half, three-month training process. So most of us had diarrhea most of the time.

KINSLEY: [00:07:05] What were you saying about the single people? What was the problem?

DILIBERTI: [00:07:10] Oh, they found out when they send single American volunteers to be instructors on the housing sites that sometimes they got girlfriends. But the women were all married there, so it was kind of disruptive to the site. So they said to send married couples so. The woman's job wasn't always as clear as the men's job. I was an instructor teaching people how to build their own houses, and my wife's job was to work with the social worker and work in the school there. Much, much less structured than mine was.

KINSLEY: [00:07:35] Uh, okay. What was your reaction to the other trainees and, uh, maybe they're going to the selection process?

DILIBERTI: [00:07:46] The selection process was invisible. I have no idea what the selection process was. I applied and I was accepted and I was going. When we got to Washington, D.C., though, they took us on a cruise and we had a couple of social events. And I didn't realize at the time, but they were interviewing us and talking to us, and some people didn't make or were deselected in those three days and weren't sent down to the country. I think there may have been a couple of volunteers during the training process that actually got deselected, but most of us were pretty carefully selected before we went down there.

KINSLEY: [00:08:15] So they didn't really deselect many before you left?

DILIBERTI: [00:08:18] Right. Yeah, because there wasn't any time. I mean, it wasn't like you trained for a month in the States and then went down.

KINSLEY: [00:08:25] So your group stayed together pretty much.

DILIBERTI: [00:08:30] Pretty much so.

KINSLEY: [00:08:31] Because we lost half of our group. We started out with a hundred and ended up with 50. And we didn't know until two days before we were going and who was going to go and who wasn't.

DILIBERTI: [00:08:42] Oh my god, what a stressful thing.

KINSLEY: [00:08:45] Upsetting. We didn't get a chance to go home or anything.

DILIBERTI: [00:08:47] Where were you trained?

KINSLEY: [00:08:48] Uh, Portland, Oregon. Ok. Were there any surprises or disappointments or enjoyments during your training?

DILIBERTI: [00:09:00] Well, you know, there were a couple of accusations that we were American spies being trained for Chile and we were in the newspapers a couple of times in Chile. We had instructors there from the Chilean technical school in construction, and there was a lot of good humor there. They taught us how to build, how the building techniques were in Chile and what was being done. It was a good training process. We built a lot of camaraderie among us, got to know each other. Although we could only speak Spanish during the day, so it really inhibited us for the first month or month and a half or so from even getting to know each other because it's such a rudimentary Spanish that it's difficult to even talk to each other.

KINSLEY: [00:09:37] I found that I, you know, we practiced, but until I actually got out in the situation. Because I had a partner so I could always speak English. I had to be into, you know,

DILIBERTI: [00:09:48] I remember I was in Chile about six months. I was walking on the street and there was a guy on the radio was talking about the weather or something going on. And I thought about what he said, and I thought, oh my god, I understood the guy in the radio. Because you know they talk so fast on the radio and I realized I finally could understand, you know, regular conversation and had a grasp of everything people were saying.

KINSLEY: [00:10:07] Yeah, it took me about six months. I had a headache every night, you know?

DILIBERTI: [00:10:10] Yes, it was six months for me too.

KINSLEY: [00:10:13] Until it kicked in. Ok. What about your initial? Well, you are already in the country, your reaction to the country. What was that like?

DILIBERTI: [00:10:23] You know, on the way down that we flew, I think it was Pan American Airlines, and you simply stopped in every country on the ways down. So you'd get up and down and up and down. And by the time we got there, I was totally ill, sick. But you know, we stopped in Peru. We stopped in Ecuador. And we saw these short Indians. And I thought, well, that's what Chile's going to be like. Like the other volunteers say, that's what Chile is going to be like. But it wasn't. Chile's kind of a mix of people, a lot of mixed blood people. And I always, I felt comfortable from the time I landed there with folks. They were very cosmopolitan, very interested in what Americans were like and getting to know you. You know, it's very much of a social interaction with every encounter you had. So I liked, I liked it a lot.

DILIBERTI: [00:11:06] And during training, we went to a couple of people's houses. We stayed for dinner and my wife had taken French in high school. So when she was learning Spanish, she started mixing up with her Spanish. She'd speak this mixture of French and Spanish, which always made me laugh. But people always turned their head sideways, looked intently at her, and usually got what she meant. So she just wasn't afraid to talk at all. And it was good. I was always felt like I had to study it and understand it before I could say it. So she was much faster, much quicker in learning Spanish than me.

KINSLEY: [00:11:36] The guy that I was assigned with was better in language than I was. So, of course, the villagers would want to talk to him instead of me. So that kind of, you know, held back my development a little. Ok, what about the impression of the local people and the physical environment?

DILIBERTI: [00:11:57] So we were assigned to a housing project, well, actually the real story is that when we were in Peace Corps training because it was so controversial, it was a very political environment there and we're accused of being spies. We said that, the volunteers got together and had a meeting. We asked the trainer as we said, you know, are we sure that when we go to a place we're assigned to, that they asked them if they want a Peace Corps volunteer. And we respect their wishes. If they don't want a volunteer there, you know, don't send us there. Well, I got to my

village, my village, where I was assigned, and the social worker said, oh, you're going to be here? And I said, yeah. And the director said, oh, you're going to be here? And I said, you sound surprised. They said, well, they didn't actually tell us that you were coming. I said, well did they ask you if you wanted a volunteer? And they said, yes. And I said, and you said yes? They said no, we said no. So I went back to the Peace Corps office and I said, you know, we asked you to interview them and ask if they wanted us. We assumed that they said no, that meant you wouldn't assign us there! Although I really I enjoyed the placement itself and I enjoyed meeting the people there, and I think it probably would've worked out. I said, you know, we really have to respect the wishes here.

DILIBERTI: [00:13:00] They said, well, they don't have any other place to put me and my wife. I said, well, when we were touring projects, you know, during training, there was one project that wanted a volunteer but couldn't get one. And I mentioned to them, they said, well, why don't you go out there and talk to them? So I went out there and talked to the director of the project who was very interested in having a volunteer working with him. So I kind of placed myself at this project and it really turned out well. We were put in a village right, right in the village with folks. Made a lot of friends, people right across from us and our neighbors. And they were the lifelong friends who we've gone back to visit several times. And it just, you know, when you're there after a while, you know, people don't seem strange to you. There's a fat guy and the skinny guy and the smart guy and the funny guy and you know, they all just become people to you. We spent a lot of time there, we very seldom went into town, and a lot of volunteers asked us, how come you never come into town at all? But I just felt like that was really what was happening out there. And that's where you had to spend your spare time there to kind of see what, what comes up and what happens.

KINSLEY: [00:13:59] So that that first village you didn't go to, you found another one.

DILIBERTI: [00:14:04] Yeah, yeah.

KINSLEY: [00:14:08] Ok. Talk about some of the specifics of your job, the living conditions, typical day.

DILIBERTI: [00:14:18] So people built their own houses. They went to a job during the day and in the evening they worked on their houses. And I was one of five or six instructors that went out with teams of people. We put the foundations in or put the plumbing in or put the walls up, or the roofs. We had different teams of people doing different parts of the project, so people were. They may be 110 families and they were organized into like five or six teams. And so we first all build, put the foundations in. And then we set a team going on the walls and we get a team behind that on the roofs and plumbing. And so we had kind of marched through the project doing these specialized tasks with our team.

KINSLEY: [00:14:55] So they are all the same, were they?

DILIBERTI: [00:14:56] All houses were the same, yeah. And then people that worked the hardest to, you know, show up every day, they can get first choice of the site or the house that they want to live in. Most people were already living on the site and ended up living and staying at the house. They were next to the house, temporary house they were living in. It turns out that a number of people actually were working at night, either in addition to their job or instead of it. Or sometimes the husband died. There was a widow there and she had a son who went to school during the day, so they wanted someone to take a morning team of people and work with them. And so the chief of the project asked me if I would work with one other Chilean instructor and put together a team of, a daytime team. We had about 22 people on our team, and an evening crew had about 60 or 70. We had a great time. We really built a lot of camaraderie. A lot of young people were in there. We ended up actually producing more than the evening teams, in terms of our output. And I had a good time doing it. I made some friends there. Young people. Got to know a lot of them. My wife worked at the local school. She worked with a youth group, a young girls group, and the mothers club. And I did the construction and a project, and I learned a lot from them and it was really a great project.

KINSLEY: [00:16:19] So did they volunteer to do this or did everybody in the village get to?

DILIBERTI: [00:16:24] Well, it's actually, it was on the outskirts of Santiago and people signed up for this. And then they qualified. They put them, we called it a village, but it's actually a little community inside of the town. Then they put them together in the site. So it'd be one hundred families, sometimes from the near environment, sometimes from all over town. And they actually lived on that site and they built their houses on that site. So they got to know each other through working together and building their houses together. And it really was a good community building process because that town was like the community there. People all knew each other and they looked out for one another and that's how they got into the project.

KINSLEY: [00:17:06] And how long did it take to finish a house?

DILIBERTI: [00:17:10] Well, I'd say at the end of the two years, most of the houses were built. We built, our project's 110 houses and actually started as an open field. And it's very interesting because they use very rudimentary tools like they used clear hoses for levels. So you'd take one end, fill a hose with water, stand with one end at one end of the housing site, hold the hose up on the other end and the water goes to the same level. So you could put levels on the site and then you do one, two, three, four right angled triangles to get squares. And so you start with a stake in the ground on each end of this ten block long site and you went in forward inside with just a hose and a string and a tape measure, and you can build these houses straight and level and well-made. I learned a lot about what you can do, you know, by hand and with simple materials.

KINSLEY: [00:17:59] Now, where did the idea for these houses come from? Was that from Chile or from the U.S.?

DILIBERTI: [00:18:03] It was actually from Chile. It was, yeah, it was a government project and there were Peace Corps volunteers assigned to it all up and down the country. And then, you know, then there's the other things you do too. You know, like there were a lot of young kids there and nothing to do, and they'd hang around and they try to ask me to translate Santa Ana records for them or something. And I got to know them, and we actually put together a young people's club. They just had nothing to do. So we organized this club. We collected bottles and recycled materials, raised

money. We put together a clubhouse, which the mothers' center also used, and bought a ping pong table. And, you know, all kinds of projects in the community. Community clean up days. At Christmas, we handed out bags of candy to the kids, and it was something that I really didn't realize was that big of a deal when I was doing it, that people asked me what I was doing. I was building houses. But when I went back, I saw these kids and it was such an important part of their lives. I realized, when did I do that? When did that happen? You know, and you realize it was really an important part of when I was there, what I did.

KINSLEY: [00:19:06] Yeah, I didn't. You know, I didn't know that at the time that I had any effect. It wasn't till I went back and they didn't tell me anything at the time, so I thought I might have been a failure. But when I went back later on, you know, they really thanked me for. Not that I did all that much, but just the fact that I was there and communicated with them and lived with them and knew the language.

DILIBERTI: [00:19:28] Yes. Yeah.

KINSLEY: [00:19:32] Ok. What was the role of language? Was that after six months, you kind of?

DILIBERTI: [00:19:39] Yeah, it took a long time and you know, you're always an expatriate. So there's always certain cultural things and children's stories or doing jokes or history or common experiences they have that you don't have. So you're always learning. The jokes are the hardest. But I sat around a lot in the evening with the other instructors cooking clams over fire and just talking and listening. And it was, it was a good experience, but it was a real challenge for me because I'm not good at languages. I never was good at languages, in high school or in college. My SAT scores show I'm poor in foreign languages. So if I hadn't gone there and learned and spoken every day, I probably would've never learned another language and it served me well in my career.

KINSLEY: [00:20:17] So where did the clams come from?

DILIBERTI: [00:20:22] Chile is a long, narrow country that has a coastline, you know, from one end to the other. And so they had a lot of seafood, clams, fish, crabs and *gosto*, which is like a lobster. And they had a lot of lamb and some beef. They had, well, they had two meatless days a week. They call them meatless days, which really meant you couldn't have beef, you could chicken, you know, lamb, fish, everything. But they're trying to get you weaned from meat because they're next to Argentina and the people are so used to eating steaks for breakfast.

KINSLEY: [00:20:53] Oh yeah. Okay. What about the Peace Corps Peace Corps staff? Did you have much contact with them?

DILIBERTI: [00:21:02] You know, we didn't go into town much, but they came out a couple of times just to check on us, and they were very supportive. Anything I needed, they were always there. John Hill, I think, was a director of the country at the time, and the regional director was just a good guy. I always felt like anything I needed, they always were there for us. And the health staff, the nurse there. I just felt I had the support I needed. We also brought our laundry in. They had somebody in town that they set up to do laundry for Peace Corps volunteers, which is really a good thing for us and got the guys into town a little more often.

KINSLEY: [00:21:37] That was in Santiago, so the officer was there?

DILIBERTI: [00:21:40] Yeah.

KINSLEY: [00:21:41] What about your work time versus your leisure time?

DILIBERTI: [00:21:45] It's interesting is that the Peace Corps volunteer we went back to visit had a saying. Don't just do something, stand there. And he said, you know, so many of the changes in, you know, the other two parts of the Peace Corps volunteer experience, of learning about other countries and them learning about Americans, happens not only necessarily working your job, although my site did, but also when you're just sitting around talking and telling stories and people get to know you as an American, as a human being, not as just a person, an outsider. You know, when I went back to Chile 30 years later and we really didn't get many cards from

people, they hadn't had much communication at all. But when we went back there, people made us at the airport, drove us into the so-called población, which is a community, and they didn't let us leave for two weeks. I mean, it was like going from one person to the next for dinner every night. And it was almost like you said, you know, what did I do here? It's almost like you live and you died and you came back 30 years later and said, well, what did that life there mean? And you really get a sense that you did have more of an impression than you thought you did.

DILIBERTI: [00:22:50] When those, when I saw those young people there that I worked with in the youth center, they said, hey Dan, how are you doing? And I had to pull out a picture because they were teenagers when I knew them, and I said, which one are you? Because now they're a grandfather. You know, it's 30 years later, they look older than I do. They said, oh, that's me, I'm Jose, how are you doing? And then they'd say, let's get a reading together. Like, how about next week, Wednesday? I said, oh, OK, we'll do that, figuring that it'd never happened. You know that Wednesday night, every single kid showed up. They gathered from all over Santiago and out of town. They all, it was that important part of their life that they wanted to come back and just talk about it together. It was very touching. I thought, when they talked about all the things they did and I really thought we empowered them, you know, to be active participants in the community like they weren't before. And it was really impressive to me, it was really touching to me. And you really get a sense that, you know, you do things that you don't realize that you're doing. Like, when did I do this youth group? When did that happen? But it just happened. One of the things you're doing on the way to doing something else, and it happens.

KINSLEY: [00:23:54] I didn't even tell them I was coming, I just showed up and they just welcomed me like.

DILIBERTI: [00:23:59] Like you never left, right? It was like I never left, 30 years later, and I got to the población and I looked around. I didn't even recognize it because the houses that were built were starter houses. They put a second floor or a back floors, walls or fences. You could have put me in there and I would have never known I was there. It changed so much. But

I felt the sense of community there in the sense of friendship, just like we never left. Amazing.

KINSLEY: [00:24:20] How did life and work change over the months would you say?

DILIBERTI: [00:24:29] Well, I mean, at first we were, you know, unusual, you know, having a gringo there. They called us gringos. We lived in the model house at first inside the project and moved out to one of the neighborhoods.

KINSLEY: [00:24:44] So you lived in the same kind of house that you were building?

DILIBERTI: [00:24:47] No, the temporary houses that people were staying in. As we got to know, people, you know, people invite and stopped over more and really became part of the community, part of the community life. You know, Chileans are so generous. I always tried to give something back or give them something but they would end up giving something back to me.

KINSLEY: [00:25:07] Yeah, you got to get the last thank you in there.

DILIBERTI: [00:25:10] Yeah, right. So when I left, I was giving some things out and they'd come over to the house and bring me something. I don't want to carry those things back to the States, but I didn't know what to do with them all.

KINSLEY: [00:25:19] I lived in two villages and their primary crop was hazelnuts. So each village gave me a huge bag.

DILIBERTI: [00:25:30] I had a camera there and I had to develop, I had an enlarger and a darkroom I set up there, so I was taking a lot of pictures and giving people pictures. And when I came back, you would pull those pictures out, 30 years later.

KINSLEY: [00:25:45] I was the only one with a camera. So nobody else had one of them. So when I came back, I brought as many as I could, but still a lot I couldn't. Had them transferred from slides. Uh, let's see.

DILIBERTI: [00:26:04] Ok, what about.

KINSLEY: [00:26:05] Go ahead.

DILIBERTI: [00:26:06] Well, you know, in those days, you know, now Peace Corps volunteers, I've talked to some new ones. You know, they have internet and they have cell phones and they're in constant communication. We are there, I think we had one or two calls in our village. Wait, you know, one guy had a phone and we wait in line and got the scratchy connection. We called home for a short time and had this little conversation, and that was pretty much it. You know, you sent letters and you waited for letters, that you know, they'd take two or three weeks, you know, it takes to get delivery once they were mailed. So, you know, connection with home was very distant to us. You got a sense of distance also in those days. So you're kind of there, present there. Your mind was there and there was a presence there. I think you probably might not have today.

KINSLEY: [00:26:46] Yeah, that's true. I think my sister got married and I made one call to the U.S. and that was it, but I had to, you know, set it up ahead of time. It was a chore. Ok, what about like at the end of your first year? What was some of the notable events or reflections?

DILIBERTI: [00:27:07] My first year?

KINSLEY: [00:27:08] Yeah, the end of the year.

DILIBERTI: [00:27:10] In Chile, my first year? Well, we took a trip. In those days you got, what was it, a month vacation?

KINSLEY: [00:27:23] Forty five days in two years.

DILIBERTI: [00:27:25] Yeah. So I think it was like so we decided just to travel. We went up there. We were stationed in Chile, went to Peru and Bolivia. It was just, it was good to get away in a way, to kind of get a perspective on what you're doing because you're so immersed in it. You're thinking about it all the time. It was a nice break, and we came back, I think we had more of a sense of what we had done so far and where we were going. And

also, you're starting your second year. You kind of feel like it's going to go quick. Because the first year you're just you're all trying to become a volunteer. And then the last year, you realizing that, you know, the other new volunteers are coming in and looking at you as a veteran. And you know, it just changes your perspective on things.

KINSLEY: [00:28:09] You know, you alluded to some health problems. Now were those mostly in training or did they subside once you got to your site?

DILIBERTI: [00:28:17] They're mostly in training. I mean, I had diarrhea I think for the entire time I was in training. They had these paregoric pills that they'd give us and you'd just keep taking them until it stopped. When I left Chile, though, they did a test and I had all kinds of parasites and amoebas and things in my system. I had to take some pills on the way home for like a week and a half, and they turned my eyes yellow. It was a very strong chemical to kill all the amoebas and parasites. Then when I got back to the States, I had to get a test to make sure they were all gone. So I went to the doctor, had a prescription. I gave it to them, to the lab, and they did the test and it came back and I asked for the results. And they said, we can't tell you, you have to have a doctor. And I said, well, I just want to know if they're positive or negative. If it's positive, I'll go see a doctor. If it's negative, I won't need one. And they said, we can't tell you because you're not a doctor. Well, can't you just tell me yes or no? They said, we can't tell you. Now a doctor happened to be standing next to me by the counter. And he said, was it positive or negative? She said negative. He turned to me and said, negative. So I got the results. You're a bureaucrat. So bureaucratic compared to Chile. When I came back to the States where we're getting closer, you know, we're getting to the airport. You see vending machines and things. In Chile, there was never a vending machine. There was always a little store with someone there and buying something was an interaction. It was a social interaction and you couldn't just go there and pick up something and run. You know, they ask about you and the family and the kids and you talk about what's going on. And you know, it was it was hard to adjust at first, and I didn't really realize when I first came back how hard the adjustment really was.

KINSLEY: [00:29:48] It's tough. What about the end of your tour? What was your sense of achievement, failure, your pluses and minuses?

DILIBERTI: [00:29:59] Well, you know, when you're leaving, there's so many people that are saying goodbye to you and this is such an overwhelming feeling. Like you really didn't know exactly what had come to project wasn't completed finished yet, but I knew we did a lot. I knew I, you know, in terms of building houses, we did a lot. I made a lot of friends. But I realized, you do feel like you are a expatriate and you realize that so much of what is part of you is not there. At the same time, you leave part of yourself there, you know, because you lived there for two years, you had those experiences and part of your soul was always there or the experience of your soul is always part of the experience in the Peace Corps, I think. So people tell me that when I speak Spanish, my personality changes and I think it's, you know, it's just a different way of life. It's a different perspective of time and social interactions.

KINSLEY: [00:30:56] And those like in Turkey, you just sit down for a meal and you'd be there for an hour and half. Nothing was rush, rush, rush. It was just slow.

DILIBERTI: [00:31:07] I used to think it was kind of impolite when people arrived late, but I realized when I was in Chile it was impolite to leave where you were at to get there on time because you can't just say goodbye. There was a whole interaction about leaving. And so you're always running late and that's just part of life.

KINSLEY: [00:31:23] Yeah. Um, okay. Did you have any like regrets or did you make any plans for the future?

DILIBERTI: [00:31:37] When I was in Chile? You know, my wife was ready to go on to graduate school. She was a social worker, had become a social worker. I was coming back home not really knowing where I was going to do. When I came back, I joined VISTA, the volunteering service to America. I served in the Hispanic area of Milwaukee at the for a year. That's where I met Frank Demerock. We were in VISTA training together in Chicago. But, you know, I think I felt like I had to go back to United States. That's really

where I was really going to be, understand, make a contribution somewhere.

DILIBERTI: [00:32:25] It's interesting because when I was in Chile, like there was an area in my población, in my village, where they put in sewers, but it kept flooding. And so the kids played in the water. One kid actually drowned. It's really tragic. And so they wanted to write the head of the sewerage commission, a letter to tell him to come and fix it up. And they a lot of them couldn't write very well, so they asked me to write it. So we wrote a letter saying, Dear sir, we have a problem here in the village and when it rains the sewers back up and it forms ponds. It's very dangerous for the kids, and one person died. Would like you to come out and fix the problem up so that, you know, for the safety of our village. I showed them the letter and they went, oh, what? I said, what do you mean? And they said, we'll re-write this letter Don Daniel, we'll write this letter for you. So they went back and rewrote it and said, Dear Honorable Commissioner, we know you are a very important person and a very busy man. We don't want to take up too much your time. But there's one small thing here that really, we'd like to just bring to your attention. If you'd give us some time, we'd appreciate your understanding, It went on and on, this whole kind of deferential kind of attitude. It was really a cultural, cultural education for me to realize how Americans are different.

KINSLEY: [00:33:40] Yeah. So you had to really brown nose in order to get anything done?

DILIBERTI: [00:33:44] Yeah, yeah. And it was more like the guy was in charge. He was like, we call it a *patrón* in South America, and you would go up to him like, like, the landowner and you're a peasant. And you'd ask him for time or attention or some favor of some kind. And I think you have to live outside the United States, even understand what being an American means. I think I learned a lot about what being American means to me. We're much more informal, you know, in that status, class or status conscious. We're much more direct. And I think we're much more just kind of generous and open and always looking for the right thing. You know, what's the right thing to be done here? Like things can be right. You know, there's a one side and that's the right side. When things are much more

complicated and much more difficult to negotiate, I think you're looking at other countries.

KINSLEY: [00:34:32] Let's see. So what did you say you planned to do when you got back?

DILIBERTI: [00:34:39] So I always thought I'd go back to graduate school and I did. I went back, got a master's of urban studies and then I got a job working full time at the University of Wisconsin.

KINSLEY: [00:34:49] Ok. Is there anything else you can want to tell about your experience there?

DILIBERTI: [00:35:02] I really think it shaped me a lot. I think. I think I approach people differently. You know, I was a young kid then I really didn't know much about the world. Like in the project, there was a chief in the project who was in charge, very much in charge. And I learned how to work with people. I learned and like, I had the morning group of workers and even though we were doing much better than the afternoon workers, I never bragged about it. You know, I always said, I always asked him for suggestions if I had an idea, I would say, you know, we're trying to do something and we're trying to, you know, figure out how to do this with these young kids and the wheelbarrows are too heavy. And how can we, you know, I knew what I wanted, but I didn't say it. I waited until he said that, I said that's a great idea. And he always liked to work it with me because he came up with all these great ideas and I always gave him credit for it. And that was really, it was a really good experience for me to learn how to work with people in and not how to take credit for it, but to make it so people think that they did it on their own. And that's that was an important thing for me to learn. Some volunteers never learned that.

KINSLEY: [00:36:14] In politics, that's really important too.

DILIBERTI: [00:36:16] Yes. Yeah.

KINSLEY: [00:36:17] I mean, you know, if you want something done, you don't really care who gets the credit as long as it gets done.

DILIBERTI: [00:36:22] Exactly. Yeah.

KINSLEY: [00:36:24] Ok, now we're going to try to evaluate your service in the light of the three goals of the Peace Corps. The first one is to provide technical assistance where requested. How do you feel you did in that area?

DILIBERTI: [00:36:42] Well, you know, truth be told, there were five of the Chilean instructors and me, and if I wouldn't have been, there might have been six Chilean instructors and they would built the houses, but it would have been a whole different experience. I was the only one who lived on the site and they always said, you know, Dan, you're different than the instructors. You're not afraid to go down there and grab a shovel and work with us. The other instructors are the instructors and we're the workers. And there was this divide and they always wore, you know, wore a sport coat. And, you know, they came and told them how to do it. And I kind of got out my ruler and pen and, you know, helped them drive the sticks in the ground and worked with them, whatever needed to be done. And they, I think they got it. I think they really had an impact on the project. And the team I had in the morning was different that way. We had a good spirit. We're all in it together, and I think people appreciated that. In fact, when I came back, some people told me that. And 30 years later that, you know, you were one of us. You were one of the guys who just whatever it took to get done, you got it done. And it wasn't a divide between us.

KINSLEY: [00:37:36] How long was the morning shift as opposed to the, was it an evening or afternoon?

DILIBERTI: [00:37:43] Well, you know, we got started more or less around nine o'clock and probably closer to 10:00. It went to maybe two o'clock, you know, right around lunchtime we'd stop. I'd still be around the project. I'd be there in the evening talking to the chief of project or some of the instructors or letting what we'd done, because we're working in teams in the whole project. One of the instructors, you know, was just more of a fragile kind of ego, and he didn't like the fact that I was working at my own. He was kind of the senior instructor and wanted me to be working under him, and I just always let him know what I was doing. And, you know, I think he finally

accepted me in terms of not someone's who trying to make him look bad, I'm just trying to make the project look good. And if we look good, he looked good so.

KINSLEY: [00:38:34] And what about the, did they work at night or just?

DILIBERTI: [00:38:36] Oh yeah, they worked in the evening and you know, till dark.

KINSLEY: [00:38:43] Ok. The second goal is to promote better understanding of the United States. How do you think you did on that one?

DILIBERTI: [00:38:52] I think I did well, you know. When you're a Peace Corps volunteer, it's almost like, I think army veterans, I mean, they don't talk about the war experiences. But if you're not with any other Peace Corps volunteer and try to talk about your project, they'd say, what did you do for those poor natives? How did you save them? You know, and the truth of the matter is I learned more than I taught. And I got more than I gave. I think people were very generous and kind, and the people were very patient with me, with my language. People were very curious. I learned a lot about people. I learned a lot about South America. I learned a lot about life in general from people, and it was a real gift to me in my life. And what was the second one?

KINSLEY: [00:39:38] To promote better understanding of the U.S.

DILIBERTI: [00:39:41] Yeah. And so people asked what it was like, you know, they asked about racial discrimination and the Vietnam War was going on at the time. And sometimes I get movie projectors from the Peace Corps office, and we'd show movies at night. They always wanted me to play these, I guess we call them propaganda movies, from the United States. But I didn't usually do them because, I mean, if they asked for them, I brought them on. But it was mostly just a social thing. I think people just, you know, Chile was a very political country. Those Communist parties were active. The Socialist Party, the Christian Democrats, the right party. And people accepted me in all political persuasions. It was really apolitical in terms of people's curiosity about me. You know, the commies were just curious about me as the conservatives. I really didn't have any problem

with anybody at all. You know, they just took me as what I was. They'd check me out, find out what I was like. If that's all they want to do, they disappear. Or if they, you know, if they wanted to just, you know, hang around and hang around.

DILIBERTI: [00:40:46] My wife ended up with this youth club, and she did projects with people like they raised baby chicks and give them different diets to see how they looked and how healthy they got. And we decided to keep them and get eggs from them. So we raised them all and they all turned out to be roosters. We knew nothing about chickens! And the children just kind of laughed at us and they went out and bought some new chicks with us that they were able to sex and then we got chickens and it came by. It was just a, everything was a topic of conversation, everything we did. Kids used to come by and watch me with my electric razor, just me shaving. And I got to know a lot of kids in the neighborhood, watched them grow up for two years.

KINSLEY: [00:41:25] Now, you said, I think during training, there were some things in the newspaper about being spies. Where did those come from? Do you know where they originated?

DILIBERTI: [00:41:37] Well, actually it was a Communist Party newspaper. So many people out there with a camera in the taxi and they'd turn around and you turn on the drive and take some pictures of the building, and they're on the front page of the Communist Party newspaper.

KINSLEY: [00:41:46] Oh, okay.

DILIBERTI: [00:41:47] It's spies training and *rinconadas*. But I never had any problem with that when I was on site. I think that socialists and communists are more curious about me than anything else. And, you know, being a young person in the '60s, you know, we've said a lot in common in terms of trying to make the world a better place.

KINSLEY: [00:42:04] And in some ways, it sounds like their government is more of a democracy because there are like four or five different parties that have a

part, whereas here, if you're not a Republican or a Democrat, you're nothing.

DILIBERTI: [00:42:17] You can do that in a smaller country, though I think. You can have the more give and take. In your larger country, for five parties in Washington, it'd just be a standstill.

KINSLEY: [00:42:25] Yeah. Of course it is. But okay, what about the third goal is to promote better understanding of other peoples by Americans?

DILIBERTI: [00:42:36] Yeah. You know, I did that a lot I think when I first came back. People had me come and talk to classes and I told a lot of stories and people were very curious because I was there when Salvador Allende was elected president. And it's a very interesting time in Chilean history. People had a lot of questions for me when I came back. And I think throughout my life, you know, I really. I think I understand how people are afraid of differences. And like when I was a supervisor, organized block watches, just brought people together on blocks. Hispanics or African Americans and whites and Native Americans and I think, you know, just emphasizing what we have in common, what we're striving, what we want in their lives and the common things we strive for.

KINSLEY: [00:43:31] So you did that as a kind of supervisor?

DILIBERTI: [00:43:33] Yeah.

KINSLEY: [00:43:33] Well, I didn't realize that.

DILIBERTI: [00:43:37] I think you get a sense that America still has a message to give to the world, you know, like it's almost like manifest destiny. But you know, we in this country can live together, different languages, different religions, different races, different cultures, side by side. You know, with the Croatians, the Serbians living next to each other and Jews and Arabs. And it's we don't thrive in spite of it. We thrive because of it. It seems more when you change your ideas and more of a dynamic and the world needs that message. You know, they need to see an African American president. We need to see that we can live with our differences and prosper. And

that not be something that separates us. It's a message the world needs to have. It's the only way the world will survive. And I think America is a good example of that to the rest of the world.

KINSLEY: [00:44:21] Ok. Through the years, have you continued any kind of involvement with your country of service and contact with people from that country?

DILIBERTI: [00:44:30] We've gone back twice. It's a long way to go, to Chile, Santiago. We took our kids back one time and they got to meet the villagers. They all went to Spanish immersion schools, our kids, so they all learned Spanish, which is something I think we took with us in Peace Corps, wanting our children to learn another language. Cause the language and culture and understanding are so tied together. You know, we've been part of the Returned Peace Corps Volunteers on and off, more active sometimes some years than others. I've been active in Amnesty International, some organizations like that, you know, trying to make a difference in the world.

KINSLEY: [00:45:05] Have you been involved with the third goal activities, trying to promote better understanding? I guess you sort of have, like you gave a lot of talks. Did you have like slide shows?

DILIBERTI: [00:45:21] I never had slideshows, I had pictures. I haven't done that in several years now, on the anniversary of the Peace Corps, you know.

KINSLEY: [00:45:28] We're now in the 50th anniversary.

DILIBERTI: [00:45:31] Are you going to go?

KINSLEY: [00:45:32] I think I am, yeah.

DILIBERTI: [00:45:34] Do you know when that is?

KINSLEY: [00:45:34] I think it's like the 22nd to the 25th of September.

DILIBERTI: [00:45:40] Oh, September. I see Shriver just died too.

KINSLEY: [00:45:46] Yeah, yeah. I guess we're going to have a sendoff March 2, you know, for the new volunteers going over at that time. It's going to be at the Urban Ecology.

DILIBERTI: [00:46:02] Oh, really? Is there a group going down from Milwaukee to Washington, or just individuals?

KINSLEY: [00:46:09] I think people are trying to do it through their country of service more, you know? But yeah, there are quite a few people that are planning on going.

DILIBERTI: [00:46:19] I ran into Mike Farmer the other day at Marquette University. He's still around. But we did, we did a lot in our Peace Corps group. When the war in Central America was going on, we tried to not get the Peace Corps volunteers were used as pawns in that old Cold War battle ground.

KINSLEY: [00:46:38] Let's see. What do you think the Peace Corps had, what kind of an effect do you think it had on you? You know, as far as yourself, your career plans, long term.

DILIBERTI: [00:46:51] I think it really had an impact on me in the long term because you realize that if you just. Even lower middle class living better than 90 percent people in the world. So I think I've been, I've lived fairly simple in that way. You realize, you know, just appreciate what you have and don't try to. You realize that money isn't everything and material goods aren't everything. I think my values are different. What I do with my life is more important than what I get. I think I never had a goal to make a lot of money, but to try to make a difference in the world. And I've been in public service my whole life, you know, a VISTA volunteer and a Peace Corps volunteer. I was head of a nonprofit inner-city government project. I did campus community relations at UWM. I worked a lot for Milwaukee County in various roles, and lately even held elective office as a county supervisor for 12 years and county treasurer for six. So I think I just tried to serve the public good in everything I've done. I think that's really, I got that from, maybe that's why I would join the Peace Corps in the first place. Or maybe

from the Peace Corps, I took a lot from the Peace Corps and really shaped my life.

KINSLEY: [00:48:02] Yeah, I think it did for me too. Actually, when I got back, I joined the Teacher Corps.

DILIBERTI: [00:48:09] Same thing, yeah. I was involved in the Teacher Corps.

KINSLEY: [00:48:13] You were?

DILIBERTI: [00:48:14] With Frank Vissay?

KINSLEY: [00:48:15] Well, there was one. I did this in Detroit, but there was one here in Milwaukee.

DILIBERTI: [00:48:21] I helped organize it here.

KINSLEY: [00:48:22] Oh, is that right?

DILIBERTI: [00:48:23] I was on the committee that reviewed the first applicants.

KINSLEY: [00:48:28] Ok. Are there any things, words of wisdom or anything you'd like to add to this interview and that you'd like to leave with people who might be listening to it?

DILIBERTI: [00:48:46] I highly recommend it. I think it's a real soulful thing to do if you take it and you do it right. I think it can really make a difference in your life. I'm not sure how much difference it made. I think it did when I went back and saw it. You realized, you know, what you did and how you lived and went. What you did on the way to doing other things was really the most important things we did. And actually, people feel different about Americans when they actually know one. And they realize we're not just, we do a lot of things that Americans aren't aware of in this country and overseas, that people interpret the wrong way. Or sometimes the right way, if it's the wrong thing.

DILIBERTI: [00:49:28] But I think I think it really helps. I think it's helped a lot. It helps in the world that people live someplace else and you get to experience Americans and then we come back and we're able to share that experience. You know, when you see those world hunger things that are collecting money for orphans, you know, they're real people to you. They're not just pictures. You realize, you know, you knew kids like that and you knew families like that. You can't save the world, but you can just be who you are in the world and try to make a difference with your presence there.

KINSLEY: [00:50:01] Ok, I think that's well stated. I guess unless you have anything, anything else?

DILIBERTI: [00:50:06] I think that's pretty much it, so.

KINSLEY: [00:50:08] Thank you for doing this.

DILIBERTI: [00:50:10] Ok, thank you.

KINSLEY: [00:50:11] It's good just to talk.

[END OF INTERVIEW]