

**Judith Brown Oral History Interview**  
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Judith Brown  
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**Biographical Note**

Judith (Judy) Brown (nee Detrich) served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Iran from September 1966 to June 1968 as an English teacher.

**Access**

Open.

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Oral History Interview

with

Judith Brown

February 2, 2008  
Albany, California

By Susan Luccini

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

LUCCINI: [00:00:08] Today is February 2nd, 2008. This is Susan Luccini, and I am interviewing Judy Brown, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Iran from September 1966 to June 1968 as a TOEFL teacher. So, Judy, where do you live now? What are you doing? What is your present life like here in California?

BROWN: [00:00:36] I live in Albany, California, with two cats, and I'm retired. I've been retired for about nine years. My last work was as a social worker for Alameda County in a program called Family Preservation, where I did family therapy and, um, the people that I worked with were families who had had their children or were at risk of having their children removed by the courts.

LUCCINI: [00:01:09] I see.

BROWN: [00:01:09] And the unit that I was in provided intensive services with the goal of getting or keeping the children home. And I did that work for ten years.

LUCCINI: [00:01:18] I see.

BROWN: [00:01:19] Here in Alameda County.

LUCCINI: [00:01:21] I see.

BROWN: [00:01:23] I'm divorced. And I should tell you that my name when I was in the Peace Corps was Judy Detrich the first year.

LUCCINI: [00:01:32] Okay, that's good to know.

BROWN: [00:01:32] And then Judy Detrich Brown.

LUCCINI: [00:01:34] Okay, good. Good to know that. And how old were you when you joined the Peace Corps?

BROWN: [00:01:42] I was really old. I was 26 and 27 while I was in Iran.

LUCCINI: [00:01:49] Uh huh. And tell me a little bit about the year before you joined. What were you doing at that point? Had you finished university? Had you gone to university?

BROWN: [00:01:58] I had, um, I had finished college and taught in high school for two years to pay back my student loans and an extravagant amount of money I borrowed to go to Europe the summer after I graduated. At the time I thought of joining the Peace Corps, I was finishing a master's program at the State University of New York in Buffalo, and it occurred to me that I needed to do something when I was finished. And I thought I would like to teach English in a university in a foreign country. Somehow I got in. I don't know how I figured this out, but I knew that the armed forces had universities for the military personnel, and I had fallen in love with old English, which was similar to modern Icelandic. So I, uh, and there was a university for the Air Force in Iceland.

LUCCINI: [00:02:58] I see.

BROWN: [00:02:59] So I applied to be a teacher at that university. And I got a letter back from them saying that they had no facilities for women at their outfit in Iceland. And being a dutiful person, I accepted that. So then I was still looking for a place where I could teach English as a foreign language, or teach English period. And there was a fellow in my graduate program who had been a Peace Corps volunteer in India, and he made it sound so attractive that I just turned my attention from the rejection from the Air Force to the Peace Corps. And I applied and was accepted. I put down Nepal and India and I think a third place. But the first invitation was to Iran. I went to the National Geographic and looked at these lovely pictures.

LUCCINI: [00:03:58] I see.

BROWN: [00:03:59] Of women in chadors drinking tea and so on and thought, well, that's just as well. So I accepted that invitation.

LUCCINI: [00:04:06] And this would have been probably the summer of '66?

BROWN: [00:04:10] That's right. I finished at Buffalo in, I guess, May and in June went to Reed College in Portland for the training.

LUCCINI: [00:04:21] I see. And were all the people in your group teachers?

BROWN: [00:04:27] Ours was an experimental group, so we were all, quote, older. We mostly had master's degrees. And, um, the. So the experiment was in self-selection instead of deselection, it was.

LUCCINI: [00:04:46] Good.

BROWN: [00:04:46] The idea was that we would be mature enough and the, the way the training would be provided, we could choose to go or not with the knowledge that we gained about the Peace Corps life.

LUCCINI: [00:04:57] Oh I like that. So it's very, it's a very mature way of doing it.

BROWN: [00:05:00] Yes. Yes. So there were 34 people in the group and most had master's degrees. There were seven, I think, married couples and two single women. I was one. And I remember thinking, I'll probably marry one of these fellows. And I did. And a motivation that the the fellows had almost to the man was to avoid the draft.

LUCCINI: [00:05:32] Oh yes, of course.

BROWN: [00:05:33] So yeah. So that made them hardened idealists. They, they all would say, oh no, I'm just here for, to avoid the draft. But I think really they were, they had chosen the Peace Corps for other reasons as well.

LUCCINI: [00:05:49] Yes, that's interesting. And of all those 34 people, did anyone self-select out?

BROWN: [00:05:56] Um, two. And one. Right after we were there, still in the early testing stages, one fellow sort of wiggled out and was sent home. And perhaps because of this draft, you know, the motivation was really strong to go. So I think that only two selected out. One decided he didn't want to go anywhere in the Peace Corps. And I think the other one decided it wasn't right for him. And then we all had the belief that despite the self-selection, there were two fellows that perhaps were really encouraged to not go, whether they were deselected or self-selected out I'm not sure.

LUCCINI: [00:06:42] Was there something particularly physically rigorous about your training program that would make somebody not want to continue with it? I mean, it wasn't, you didn't have to swing on ropes or anything like that.

BROWN: [00:06:55] No, no. Reed. This was the first and only Peace Corps contract that Reed had. And it was controversial because Reed was, and is I think, a very liberal school. And to have any government contracts brought some raised eyebrows. But I think that the Reed staff who were our trainers were, were very interested in seeing how all of this would

work. And so the training was, perhaps this is true of every training, but it was a lot of psychological scrutiny.

LUCCINI: [00:07:32] Mm hmm.

BROWN: [00:07:33] And then the rest was just a focus on learning the language and learning about Iran.

LUCCINI: [00:07:39] Is the language Farsi?

BROWN: [00:07:41] Mm hmm. The language is Farsi.

LUCCINI: [00:07:42] And how did you do with Farsi?

BROWN: [00:07:46] Actually, about halfway through, a friend of mine and I were called aside by the psychologist who was doing all the testing and he said they would send us to Iran, but that our aptitude for learning a language was below zero. So, so when we got to Iran, I'm getting a little ahead this story. But I, I taught at the university in Tehran the first year. And so I didn't have to use my Farsi a lot. My students were very motivated to speak English with me and I could get around Tehran easily without.

BROWN: [00:08:24] But the second year I was in a small, two small towns in the south. And in the first of the two small towns, my husband and the male English teacher spoke English and that was it. So I was, if I wanted to speak a lot, I had to learn or really renew my Farsi. And at the end, and again I don't know if this is true of every group, but they gave us the foreign language test and I scored higher than many people.

BROWN: [00:09:00] Good for you.

BROWN: [00:09:01] So I think it was the, no matter if I had a handicap, if I, if I wanted to speak with people, I learned the language.

LUCCINI: [00:09:08] It isn't, it wasn't true of every group. It wasn't true in my case. I don't even know if they had one for Twi, which is the, it's not the principal language in Ghana, but it's the one more people speak than any other.

BROWN: [00:09:21] Uh huh.

LUCCINI: [00:09:22] And I just spoke recently with a fellow who learned Nepalese, but in Nepal.

BROWN: [00:09:27] Aha.

LUCCINI: [00:09:28] So they did it differently at different times I think. It was an interesting, interesting thing to hear. And is there anything else about your training that stands out in your mind that you thought was particularly good or particularly weak?

BROWN: [00:09:43] It was a time when there were a lot of Cuban refugees in, uh, in coming to the United States, and there was a community in Portland. And so to teach us how to teach English as a foreign language using the TOEFL methods, they created classes of, uh, and they were sort of equally elderly Chinese and Cuban refugees. And we learned this mim-mem [mimicry and memorization] method of teaching. And so I remember very much those classes.

LUCCINI: [00:10:21] I can imagine.

BROWN: [00:10:22] And another thing they did was they had us each working in community service projects in Portland and with some of the migrant workers around Portland. So I was working with a group of mainly African-American children in the inner city in Portland. And those were two very good experiences and I think really helpful, the community service project as well as the learning the methods and dealing with the people who were learning English as a foreign language.

LUCCINI: [00:10:57] Sounds that way to me too.

BROWN: [00:10:59] And then we learned the, the third emphasis was on the culture of Iran, and they did a very good job of preparing us, especially to be so respectful of the ancient history and the highly developed culture there. And, uh, and then we, our teachers were Iranian students, mainly from Texas I think, at the universities there. And they did a good job of teaching us Farsi too, whether or not I learned it there.

LUCCINI: [00:11:32] Very nice. That's nice to hear. And so you didn't have as much culture shock when you finally arrived in Iran as some people might have when they first came to the country where they were going to be working. Because you had been.

BROWN: [00:11:45] I don't know.

LUCCINI: [00:11:47] Well, tell me about that.

BROWN: [00:11:47] Yeah.

LUCCINI: [00:11:47] When you first got there, what was it like?

BROWN: [00:11:51] I think, I think my culture shock, shock came on gradually. And I don't think there was any amount of preparation for going to a culture that was so different from ours and where women were, the expectations around women were so different. And I think some of the pressure and some of the shock had to do with our own, and maybe my own, expectations of how to behave there. And because I was in Tehran the first year, my experience the first year and then the second were very different. I was single. I taught at the university.

LUCCINI: [00:12:35] Where did you live, Judy, when you were in Tehran?

BROWN: [00:12:38] I lived in an apartment with another Peace Corps volunteer who had been there. She was in her second year, which was again a very good thing that they did to give us an orientation.

LUCCINI: [00:12:51] And were you near the university, relatively close?

BROWN: [00:12:54] It was a good taxi or bus ride away.

LUCCINI: [00:12:58] So you got around by bus mostly or?

BROWN: [00:13:00] A bus and walking.

LUCCINI: [00:13:02] And walking. Yeah.

BROWN: [00:13:04] And the other thing is, there were so many Peace Corps volunteers coming in and out of Tehran that, uh, I met. You know, I was with other volunteers I would say almost equally as my time with the Iranians the first year. And then the second year, well, and I married my husband at the end of the first year. He had been a volunteer in my same training unit.

LUCCINI: [00:13:37] And he was in a different city or?

BROWN: [00:13:39] He was in a very small town in the south. We believed, the Peace Corps volunteers believed, that if you were interested in another volunteer and you didn't make a commitment such as marriage before you went, then they put you at opposite ends of the country.

LUCCINI: [00:13:57] That's very probable.

BROWN: [00:13:59] Whether that's true, it's true, I don't know. But as fate would have it, all my classes were on three consecutive days at the university, and so I had four days a week that where I was fairly free to travel and I managed to go to the south or meet Dennis in another place, oh, probably at least four or five times. And he became ill and was sent up to Tehran at one time too. So we continued our romance and married in Tehran in May.

BROWN: [00:14:39] He was in a very small town, way up in the oil fields in the south of Iran between Ahvaz and Shiraz. There's a highway now with a route number, but at that time it took a long, long time by a bus ride to climb up through the oil fields and over mountains, and then on to this high plateau. And that town really wasn't ready for Peace Corps

volunteers. There were very few Iranians who were from Tehran and other large cities, and they, we all sort of lived together in a compound, but it was difficult there.

LUCCINI: [00:15:22] So you moved to that place the second year?

BROWN: [00:15:23] I moved there the second year.

LUCCINI: [00:15:26] I see, okay. So I thought maybe you might have gone together to a different location.

BROWN: [00:15:28] No, I moved there where he had been the first year, and I think we thought it might be easier as a married couple, but it wasn't. And so along about November, the Peace Corps took us out of that town and we spent the rest of our time in a town called Shushtar, which is also in the south. And Shushtar is on one of the ancient southern parts of the Silk Road.

LUCCINI: [00:15:58] Oh, I see.

BROWN: [00:15:59] And it was a town in a long time ago that had consulates and so on. People came through. And the superintendent of schools there and the principal of both the boys school and the girls school really wanted more volunteers. And probably very importantly, there was another volunteer there who was, had made a very successful inroad. So the three of us finished out the school year there.

LUCCINI: [00:16:29] And you were still teaching English at that point?

BROWN: [00:16:31] Yes. So, so.

LUCCINI: [00:16:32] Was your husband also an English teacher?

BROWN: [00:16:34] Yes. He taught in Behbahan at the boys school and I at the girls school. I probably went there all of eight times. The principal of the school would come to the room where they were, the rooms were around the courtyard, and she would lean into the window of the room

and tell the girls to misbehave. If I was saying, for example, this is a book, she'd say it's book! And so it was really difficult.

LUCCINI: [00:17:02] Yes.

BROWN: [00:17:04] But the third experience in Shushtar was just the opposite. I taught in the girls school and started English classes for the women who were interested too. And it was, it was fine.

LUCCINI: [00:17:19] And in this experience, you must have gotten to know some of these girls fairly well. Do you, do you know, do you remember anything about their expectations of their lives? Did they have to wear the chador in the classroom?

BROWN: [00:17:34] Yes. Well, no. They wore uniforms, little gray dresses, in class. And then the chador going to and from school. The classes were in a room the size of my living room and dining room. There might have been 80 students.

LUCCINI: [00:17:53] Oh my goodness.

BROWN: [00:17:54] So I, I didn't really know my students very well, but I made good friends with the principal of the, uh, principal of the boys school. She was the principal of the girls school. And who I remember the most were some of the students in my adult class and then my neighbors. Our house was the mirror opposite of the house for the town postmaster.

LUCCINI: [00:18:26] I see.

BROWN: [00:18:26] So the post office was in the front and then the family lived in the back and we each had steps that came up and went over the roofs.

LUCCINI: [00:18:36] Uh huh.

BROWN: [00:18:36] So they would come up their steps and onto the roof at the back of the building and call down to me. And then I would go up the steps and over. And we spent hours and hours talking and having tea.

And when the weather became good, we would take a samovar of tea and a carpet and go out into the orchards and sit. That's where I really learned my Farsi.

LUCCINI: [00:19:01] Oh, I'm sure. That sounds lovely. It sounds lovely. And, uh, you said that the training didn't entirely prepare you for the culture shock. Could you explain more about that and the, and what things in particular, what memories you have about anything that might have shocked you or surprised you?

BROWN: [00:19:27] Well, by the time I left, I truly thought that everything that I as a Westerner believed was the opposite of what people believed in Iran. That the truth, the way we perceive the world, was so very different. I don't feel that way with a perspective of all these years now, but I remember strongly feeling that way. And the, um, at that time, I might not. I might do this differently now. I don't know. But at the time, I felt like as a representative of a woman from the West, I needed to walk down the street in street clothes, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.

BROWN: [00:20:18] The longer I was there and the more we were in very conservative areas, I realize how truly offensive this was to, to just the broad population in the, especially the two towns where we lived in the, in the south. And it was psychologically so difficult that by the end of the two years I was wearing a long, dark raincoat and a scarf over my head all the time because the, the constant, um, staring and attention and comments. And then sometimes the actual grabbing and such was so intrusive psychologically that it was very difficult.

LUCCINI: [00:21:11] I can imagine that if you live in a culture like that for a while, you start to see yourself the way they see you. Can that, did that, can that happen?

BROWN: [00:21:22] I think that's true. And also, as I knew more the language, I could understand what, what they were saying. And when I say "they" now, that's truly the sense. It was the anonymous people on the street who didn't know us. Um. And it was in some ways worse in a large city

because no one knew the people who would grab us or say, say really bad things. Um. But it, it was. It was increasingly difficult, yes.

LUCCINI: [00:21:58] I can, I can imagine. It's so hard to resist the force of many people having the same opinion. You know, it's. And I think that many Peace Corps volunteers have experienced that.

BROWN: [00:22:16] They, they. There was a concept, they used the word najis and it meant dirty, but it meant spiritually dirty. You were not Moslem. And, um, and it was hard. It was very difficult to live with that.

LUCCINI: [00:22:32] Like, I can, I can perceive why that would be. That would be quite enough to occupy a lot of psychological energy, wouldn't it? Um, I wanted to ask you. Iran has a rich culture in carpets and many, many other areas. Did you, how did you, did you, were you interested in that aspect of your stay there?

BROWN: [00:22:59] Yes. I think plastic was just coming to Iran. And so all the things made of copper, all the things that were lovely to us were still available, still being used.

LUCCINI: [00:23:15] I see.

BROWN: [00:23:15] But people were enamored of plastic and we weren't. I think it's safe to say that all of the Peace Corps volunteers became very interested in the carpets and acquired a much deeper appreciation than, than just theoretical or even from having them in homes in the United States. We learned about the making of them and the quality of a good one and how to bargain and so on. And that's just, the copper and the carpets are just two of many, many wonderful artistic traditions that there were in Iran. And I think probably like Peace Corps volunteers everywhere, we all got around the country a lot.

LUCCINI: [00:24:04] That's great.

BROWN: [00:24:04] And saw a lot of the historical places like Persepolis. I had a mullah from Qom, which is the like the Rome of Iran, it's the holy city and where a lot of the mullahs and ayatollahs both taught and studied.

LUCCINI: [00:24:25] Excuse me, Judy, could you tell me the difference between a mullah and an ayatollah?

BROWN: [00:24:30] An Ayatollah would be a very high up. I'm, I'm not, this is not exactly accurate, but probably like cardinals and popes and so on, whereas a mullah was a lesser level.

LUCCINI: [00:24:45] Like a priest.

BROWN: [00:24:46] Yes.

LUCCINI: [00:24:46] Okay, thank you. I didn't know the difference.

BROWN: [00:24:49] And I had a mullah in my class at the university and he invited me to go and I went. I hadn't been in Iran very long and my students advised me to wear a chador. I did. And one of the, one of my fellow Peace Corps volunteers went with me. And it was a very interesting experience. He, and he had tea for us, and so it was a day's trip there and back. I thought, okay, so here I wore my chador and no one knew who I was and so on. When I got back to the university that Monday, several of the girls came running over and said, oh, we saw you in your chador in Qom and you were beautiful! So those veils were not all that, uh, hiding of your traits.

LUCCINI: [00:25:39] Oh, that's a wonderful story. That's great. Um, this is an ignorant question, but what did people do for entertainment? What do they do? What did they do? There are no dramas or live performances or any of that sort of thing, like or musical concerts or anything. Is that correct?

BROWN: [00:26:00] Well, in Tehran, there were all of those things.

LUCCINI: [00:26:03] I see.

BROWN: [00:26:03] Both Western and for Iranian music. The, there were huge movie theaters and that's what people did for entertainment in Tehran. And they had movies from the West, but they were highly censored. I remember seeing Doctor Zhivago there, and there was a scene, I didn't know until I got back here and saw it again, what the scene was. But there's a scene where someone is reading a newspaper and it says that the czar had been assassinated. Well, the Shah didn't want things like that talked about even, so that had been cut out of the movie and so on.

BROWN: [00:26:45] And probably the national pastime for entertainment is taking tea and having walks. They were called *gardesh* and they were, everyone would do this. Men with men and women with women. And people would go out into the countryside and have tea and picnics. People traveled at certain times of the year. The new year was the big time. I was thinking of that with the Chinese New Year now and the people stranded because they can't get home. But Nowruz, the new year in Iran, was a time when everything came to a standstill and people went back to their homes and there were all kinds of traditions of what you ate and other things like that.

LUCCINI: [00:27:35] Did they have a lot of restaurants in Tehran at that time?

BROWN: [00:27:38] Mm hmm. Yes. And because there were other Peace Corps volunteers always coming in, I often, in fact I would say most of the meals as single young people, we ate out in Tehran.

LUCCINI: [00:27:53] And no alcohol?

BROWN: [00:27:55] Well, no, there was. There. I don't know about now. At that time, alcohol was frowned upon, but freely available. There were beers made in I think Denmark and places like that. Maybe Iraq. I think Iraq. And they preserved them with glycerin. So they were pretty dreadful to drink. But they were all over the place. In the smaller towns, everyone in town would know that there would be somebody who would sell alcohol. And they, usually it would be you'd go to a window in a little, little tiny house and knock on the window. I'm exaggerating a bit. And a hand

would come out, you know, and hand you the bottle and you'd give the money. And those people were not, they were sort of like bootleggers here during prohibition. They were not favored. But there was I think in every town someone like that.

BROWN: [00:28:57] And in all the towns, the small towns, there were Lions clubs.

LUCCINI: [00:29:02] Oh, I see.

BROWN: [00:29:03] And the men who were out stationed there, teachers, gendarmes, oil officials, all kinds of people who are doing a required service in the town other than Tehran or one of the big cities would be a member of that. And at the Lions Club, they could have alcohol or or they had alcohol. So it was freely available but frowned upon and not used by the conservative people.

LUCCINI: [00:29:35] Did you ever have a chance to have conversations with women about how they felt about their situation? Did they ever speak about that?

BROWN: [00:29:48] Not. Not like we would.

LUCCINI: [00:29:52] Right. Right.

BROWN: [00:29:54] Not like we would. There were, there would be more sort of very polite, curious questions about me. Around things like was I going to have children and such. And that was especially after I was married. The first year in Tehran, the students were, they were the outstanding young people from all over the country. And they were very sophisticated, probably more sophisticated than I in some ways. And many had been, had traveled to France and Germany and so on. And so their questions, you know, they really focused on their desire was to learn English. But the ones who were not wearing even a scarf in class, clearly I remember looked to me as like an ally, but I don't remember a lot of discussions about it.

BROWN: [00:30:57] I remember there was some students from more conservative areas who would wear a scarf even in class, and it was because of their upbringing and beliefs. It wasn't required of them at that time. When Dennis and I were married, the university. Well, I should back up and say in, um, at Nowruz, which was in the spring, there was some political disturbance at the university. So they just closed the whole unit. [tape break]

LUCCINI: [00:31:31] Okay. Okay.

BROWN: [00:31:32] And they, in Iran, you, you were required to be married in a church, as well as the civil ceremony, but they didn't care what religion it was. So we found a chaplain who was associated with the army facilities that were above Tehran, who was willing to marry us. And there was an Iranian Presbyterian church. It was lovely. It had been there probably a hundred years, and it was very beautiful. And it had a beautiful Persian garden next door. So we were married in the church and then had a reception in the garden. And my students came, but they wouldn't come into the church. And these were the, they were very sophisticated people, but they didn't come in, but they attended the part that was in the garden.

LUCCINI: [00:32:23] Interesting.

BROWN: [00:32:24] Very, very nice.

LUCCINI: [00:32:26] And it seems as though they all, um, their behavior was coordinated, so to speak. It's not like one of them came into the church and restrooms.

BROWN: [00:32:36] That's right, yeah.

LUCCINI: [00:32:38] Because I was, when you were speaking, I was thinking about these books. I think it's Persepolis One and Persepolis Two. You probably have read them.

BROWN: [00:32:45] No, I haven't. I got them from the library but they were in French and I don't speak French so I, I haven't, you know, there's a movie out now.

LUCCINI: [00:32:52] I heard that.

BROWN: [00:32:53] So I hope to see it.

LUCCINI: [00:32:54] Do read the books. They are really, uh, I think you're going to find them very interesting having been there.

BROWN: [00:33:01] Yes.

LUCCINI: [00:33:02] She's a, she's quite a little rebel.

BROWN: [00:33:07] She was, uh, she was there. She was a young woman during the revolution. And so that, you know, there's a whole huge modern chapter of Iran that I, I don't know. I haven't known about much except the little I've read for years. But last year, I volunteered through a program of the Berkeley libraries to teach people who wanted help with literacy and reading. And they matched me unknowingly with an Iranian young woman. She's about 38, and she is here with the goal of getting a doctorate in architecture. She was an architect in Iran. And she was born the year I left Iran. And so I have, I have caught up a lot through her.

BROWN: [00:34:03] And she's one of the reasons why I would not anymore say that our views of reality, Iran's and mine, the East and the West, are black and white and differences. Because her values, she's so much like me it's amazing. It's like we're sisters. And from her too, I've, I've caught up a bit on, you know, what her experience is, her family's experiences have been like in all those years.

LUCCINI: [00:34:36] Very nice. That's a lovely coincidence.

BROWN: [00:34:38] It's wonderful. I thought I knew no Farsi and my brain just clicks back on, and every once in a while she'll say something and she'll

struggle for a word and I'll supply the Farsi. And still we look at each other like, how did I do that? You know, how did you know that?

LUCCINI: [00:34:57] I think it's lovely.

BROWN: [00:34:58] It's, it's wonderful. And it's, it's sort of given me a whole new aspect of my Peace Corps service.

LUCCINI: [00:35:06] It's kind of like rounding it out, isn't it?

BROWN: [00:35:08] Yes.

LUCCINI: [00:35:09] Kind of tying the knot after all that time. That's very nice. I think for many Peace Corps volunteers, this time was really a life changing experience because we went in believing that everything that we had known up to then was what was real and true. And we learned that that wasn't the only way of looking at it.

BROWN: [00:35:35] That was the greatest. I would say the Peace Corps experience was probably. It might even be the most important experience in my life and evolution as a human being. And it was that, to understand in every cell of my being that there are many ways of being human in the world, and my culture is only one.

LUCCINI: [00:36:01] That's pretty shocking realization.

BROWN: [00:36:03] Yeah.

LUCCINI: [00:36:04] It tells us something about the way we were, despite our education, somehow closed off from other ideas.

BROWN: [00:36:16] Yes.

LUCCINI: [00:36:16] And we were, we both, for example, had master's degrees. And it's just interesting that somehow that never was conveyed to us.

BROWN: [00:36:25] Yes. Yes.

LUCCINI: [00:36:27] Did you experience any, any other situations that frightened you or that? We talked a little bit about the aggressiveness of some of the men. But you didn't have any earthquakes or anything like that there or?

BROWN: [00:36:43] No, no, nothing.

LUCCINI: [00:36:44] Illnesses or?

BROWN: [00:36:45] Nothing, uh, no, I didn't in my personal experience. There were Peace Corps volunteers that I knew of that did have personal things. Not, no one had an earthquake or such an experience while I was there. I remember when the revolution came thinking back that I don't once remember really being afraid in Iran, and I don't know whether that was youthful ignorance or what. But, but I don't. I, I remember being, for example, on busses where we were going on very dangerous roads and you'd always know it was really dangerous when people would start praying aloud, you know, Allah. But I don't remember being afraid.

LUCCINI: [00:37:37] That's nice. That's lovely. You said your husband had become ill. What was that about?

BROWN: [00:37:42] He, I think, uh, I think it was partly culture shock for him. And he lost a great deal of weight and they were afraid that he might have TB. So he went to the gendarme station in the small town and they were able to communicate with the Peace Corps doctor in Tehran who called him up, and then they gave him tests for TB and he did some resting there too. He lost a lot of weight.

LUCCINI: [00:38:14] So you had also a doctor in the capital?

BROWN: [00:38:18] In country, yes.

LUCCINI: [00:38:19] And then other, other Peace Corps staff were? You had a Peace Corps director?

BROWN: [00:38:24] Yes.

LUCCINI: [00:38:25] How did that go?

BROWN: [00:38:26] There was, there was actually I think a fairly large Peace Corps staff. There was a woman who was British and married to an Iranian man who was in charge of the teaching English part. And she would travel around and evaluate and help.

LUCCINI: [00:38:45] Interesting, the British.

BROWN: [00:38:45] Yes. Then there was, uh, the Peace Corps doctor who was serving his, avoiding the draft himself. He was a public servant, public health doctor, I guess. And then there were like the man who came and made the decision to move us from Behbahan to Shushtar was like an area representative.

LUCCINI: [00:39:11] I see.

BROWN: [00:39:11] So, so there was a significant staff in Tehran and then, you know, they would come out to do visits and such.

LUCCINI: [00:39:22] Before we bring you back to the U.S., is there anything else that you?

BROWN: [00:39:28] Okay. When we're through, I'll show you my carpet. The Peace Corps volunteers joined together and bought a carpet. And because there were so many married couples and so many single people, I learned later they had this big argument because the married couples thought they should pay one portion and the single people thought the married people should pay two portions. So it's a very big deal. But anyhow.

LUCCINI: [00:39:57] American fairness.

BROWN: [00:39:59] And women's lib, I guess. They thought the women were equal in the, in the pay. But I do have a lovely carpet and lovely memories.

LUCCINI: [00:40:08] I look forward to seeing it. That's lovely.

BROWN: [00:40:12] I should say about the, the hazards and so on. There was a liver fluke that was in the waters in parts of Iran. You may have had it in Africa as well. It was called schistosomiasis.

LUCCINI: [00:40:27] Yes, we did.

BROWN: [00:40:27] And I remember that the, Shushtar had a river and it had ancient flour mills, where in the old times they would grind the grains on stones and they poured water down back into this river and the children would swim. And we had a lovely Iranian sort of director of education when we were in that province. He was a lovely man and he was about 40 and he died of the schistosomiasis. Apparently, it's dormant when you're a child after you catch it. And, um, so that was both a very sad thing that happened and a danger. The Peace Corps people were always, you know, giving us instruction about how to avoid the water and the liver fluke.

LUCCINI: [00:41:20] You didn't have to take anti-malarial?

BROWN: [00:41:24] Oh, yes.

LUCCINI: [00:41:24] Yes, you did?

BROWN: [00:41:26] Not in Tehran, but in the south. Yes. Yeah. Quinine or, I don't remember what it was, but yeah, we had to take it. I don't remember the name, but I remember the thing. I was, before we leave Iran, I would just like to create a memory.

BROWN: [00:41:46] In this town of Shushtar where we lived, there was a lovely, very old mosque. And when you go up to the top of them, there are these lumps where there's a pillow beneath, pillar beneath, and the tops

are not tiled. They're all brick. And it's the adobe brick that they used for building there. And on the minarets, from the rooftop, you could see that the storks had built nests. And every evening in the spring, I remember that the storks would fly out searching for food and so on over the city, and then back to these huge nests, nests that were up on the minarets. And it was a lovely picture. And I have many good memories of Iran to go with the difficult times that we had.

LUCCINI: [00:42:40] Interesting that you mentioned the storks. I hadn't thought about wildlife, if you want to call it that. I guess they must have a number of birds because of the nature of the land.

BROWN: [00:42:51] Yes, yeah. Yeah.

LUCCINI: [00:42:53] And any other large beasts, lions, tigers? No?

BROWN: [00:42:58] Well, in times gone by, you know, the, not the last Shah, but the kings of Iran would always have hunts and they would hunt gazelle. And it must have been a kind of leopard and things like that. And that's, that's a picture that's often recurrent in their miniature, Persian miniatures.

LUCCINI: [00:43:21] It seems to me I've seen that, yes.

BROWN: [00:43:26] Yeah. There were wild goats. And there were a lot of tribal people in Iran. So that another lovely image, and again, a lot of it was sort of like what I thought the Bible lands would be like. There would be shepherds and, you know, a flock of sheep herding or going across a ford with the water just stalled there, in the spring when there was water. And other lovely images like that, you know, actually a lot about wildlife.

LUCCINI: [00:43:58] It's lovely. It just occurred to me when you spoke about the miniatures, Persian poetry is also very famous. Did you have, what language, what is that in?

BROWN: [00:44:11] It's in.

LUCCINI: [00:44:12] Is it in Farsi?

BROWN: [00:44:15] Some of it may have been in Farsi and some of it may have been in Arabic. Arabic was the language like Latin was the formal classical language here and in Europe for so long. I'll ask Sima because now I want to know. We visited the, um, the tombs of Hafez and Ferdowsi, and Hafez tomb is in Shiraz in a very lovely garden. And, uh.

LUCCINI: [00:44:46] He's a wonderful poet.

BROWN: [00:44:47] Yes. And of course now, you know, Rumi is hot.

LUCCINI: [00:44:51] But Rumi never lived in Iran, did he?

BROWN: [00:44:54] I think he lived around Tabriz, which is in the north.

LUCCINI: [00:44:57] I see.

BROWN: [00:44:57] Next to Turkey.

LUCCINI: [00:45:00] I somehow associated him with Turkey so that might have been it.

BROWN: [00:45:02] So yes, he was, uh, he became a follower of the Sufi, you know, with the dervishes and so on. But they were in that part of Turkey that's right by Azerbaijan, Iran. And so I think he is actually Persian and may have lived up there.

LUCCINI: [00:45:24] Interesting. Many of us read Persian poetry in translation, but I have no idea what it would be like. I did once hear someone reading it in I guess it was Farsi. It must have been.

BROWN: [00:45:38] I would think.

LUCCINI: [00:45:39] But I, you know, of course, it just sounded lovely, but I had no idea what they were saying. Also, I wanted to ask you, were you paid adequately?

BROWN: [00:45:55] In Tehran, I never could make my money last. And then when we went to the small towns, and Dennis the first year, he couldn't spend his money. So he would help me out for travels and so on. And I think the second year we were all right. The towns that we lived in provided our housing and we were paid about \$40 a month, which was the same, the equivalent pay of an Iranian teacher in the high schools. But the first year in Tehran, even though we didn't pay our rent, I think that I was just always short of money.

LUCCINI: [00:46:37] It's hard to budget on \$40 a month. [phone ringing]

BROWN: [00:46:41] Sorry all those bells and whistles were on.

LUCCINI: [00:46:44] You must have had school vacations, or did you get assigned to other projects when school was out?

BROWN: [00:46:52] In the summer, between the two years that we were in Iran, Peace Corps volunteers didn't stay in the south because it was so hot. So Dennis and I worked at the, we worked in a missionary school connected with the church where we were married. We, I had met the woman when we were arranging for our wedding. So we put on like a summer program for young people. And then I mentioned that the school, the university, went on strike in March. So from March until my wedding in May, I was what Iranians called *bekar*, without work. And I didn't, I didn't look for other work because I was planning my wedding and traveling. But many Peace Corps volunteers did take off work during those off periods. Not everybody was an English teacher, but that's what most of the people in our group did.

BROWN: [00:47:51] And then in the second town, in addition to teaching, I taught, I started classes for the some of the women and did that after school. Another thing is that we volunteers would take pictures, slides, everywhere we went. And by the time we got to the last town, I had quite a collection of slides of Iran and the children had never seen their own country.

LUCCINI: [00:48:22] Oh.

BROWN: [00:48:23] So I don't remember how it got started, but I would take the projector and the slides and I went to all the grade schools and I had enough Farsi by then that I did a travelogue of Iran showing them the slides of their own country.

LUCCINI: [00:48:40] How lovely.

BROWN: [00:48:41] And because of that, I got to see all of these little back streets and these schools that, in addition to the boys and the girls high schools are there, that I would never have even known about. And so that was a very.

LUCCINI: [00:48:55] That's lovely.

BROWN: [00:48:56] Very wonderful experience.

LUCCINI: [00:48:57] Yes, that's a wonderful memory. Do you, do you feel that you, how were your students? Were they good? I mean, would they, did they learn quickly or was it a struggle?

BROWN: [00:49:10] The students at the university the first day had a uniform, sheer panic look because I was speaking in English, and although they had studied from a book for probably six years they'd not had much experience. But they were hungry to learn, very motivated, and people were always. Everywhere we went, at a bus stop, at a tea house, people would always come up and ask to speak English. And, uh, my students were very keen, very curious in at the university.

BROWN: [00:49:50] In the, in the girls schools, I really didn't have a chance to get to know any in Behbahan. But in the second town, they were, they were polite, but they were as provincial as I was when I got there in terms of, uh, I was so foreign to their world and learning English. English was like PE here, one unit in their course of studies, and these were just little. If two out of a class of 200 went on to school anywhere else, that would be

quite something. But they, they were curious and bright and, uh, I enjoyed the experience very much.

LUCCINI: [00:50:40] It sounds to me, this is just a quick impression, but it sounds to me as though you were a very nice representative of your country.

BROWN: [00:50:47] Well, I hope so.

LUCCINI: [00:50:50] It's, sometimes I ask people whether they felt that they gained more or gave more, and most people said they gained a great deal more than they gave.

BROWN: [00:51:00] I would say that too.

LUCCINI: [00:51:06] Did people ask you about life in the U.S.?

BROWN: [00:51:09] They would ask things like, how many days would it take to drive there? A wide range. In Tehran, people would say, well, no, not just in Tehran. A lot of people in the small towns, not the students, but like an English teacher, would have heard of the Fulbright. And there were people who very much wanted any contact and were learning English with the hope that they could get a Fulbright or otherwise come and study in the United States. On the other hand, we went to a wedding once that lasted several days and we didn't stay at night, but we went in the daytime and I remember we were seated. You sit on the ground there and we were at this long cloth that was put out. And I overheard a very old woman down at the end say, she eats food.

LUCCINI: [00:52:13] Oh.

BROWN: [00:52:14] And that, that always has stuck with me because, you know, I think I could have been from another planet.

LUCCINI: [00:52:22] Yes.

BROWN: [00:52:23] As far as, you know, she was just surprised that I was a human, that I needed, you know, food.

LUCCINI: [00:52:31] Sustenance. Wow.

BROWN: [00:52:32] So, so it was such a variety. There were people with far more culture and education than I will ever have. And then there were people who were, you know, just crude or so conservative and narrow, and then many people who were just kind. And Iran has always had a tradition of being welcoming to guests and taking care of them. And we were treated to that again.

LUCCINI: [00:53:04] Tell me something about a wedding lasting several days. What did they do? Eating and drinking.

BROWN: [00:53:10] Yes, and danced. But there were, there were men with men and women with women. There were, there were a lot of. This was in the south in a I think what we'd call like a traditional, not a Westernized way.

LUCCINI: [00:53:24] But this would be a wealthy family or? Or no?

BROWN: [00:53:27] It would be, um. There wasn't much of a middle class. This would not be a poor family, though.

LUCCINI: [00:53:36] Okay.

BROWN: [00:53:37] And so the wedding was at the home of the bride. And one of the things I remember is they, we all at one point when there was a procession of the bride, or home of the groom I guess in this, the procession was the bride and the groom coming. And they pushed us up to the front, right by the gate, the wall gate of the house. And that was so we could be present when they sacrificed the goat. And so they slit the goats throat right, right there and looked at us like, oh, you know, this is such a great part. But I think they were also wondering what our reaction would be.

LUCCINI: [00:54:13] Right, yeah.

BROWN: [00:54:14] And then they served the food later on. And but there was a tradition of the sort of like the sacrifice to the bride and groom. And then there were a lot of customs when the bride could see the groom for the first time. And that was I think through a mirror.

LUCCINI: [00:54:35] Was this arranged marriage?

BROWN: [00:54:37] Probably. This was a very traditional marriage. And there's a lot of preparation. The groom and the bride each go to a hammam, which is a bath, which is another wonderful experience.

LUCCINI: [00:54:54] Okay.

BROWN: [00:54:55] And the bride, I don't know about the groom. I think this is true of the groom too. But they remove all their hair and then they pluck their eye, the bride's eyebrows for maybe the first time. But they remove the hair by this elaborate twisting of strings. It must hurt some, but it takes like a day. So they're getting the bride all prepared. And then there were religious ceremonies. And then I remember the celebration was with the food and the dancing.

LUCCINI: [00:55:33] And they might have had to have a religious ceremony as well as a civil ceremony?

BROWN: [00:55:37] Yes. Yes, that's right.

LUCCINI: [00:55:38] As you did.

BROWN: [00:55:39] But theirs would be an Islamic ceremony.

LUCCINI: [00:55:42] Right. Interesting. What a wonderful story. Wonderful memory. Well, I guess, I guess I would like to ask you, unless you have something else you wanted to say, about how it was to come back to the U.S.

BROWN: [00:56:04] Well, I went a single woman and came back married and, um. It was.

LUCCINI: [00:56:16] Where did you come to when you came to?

BROWN: [00:56:18] To the Port Authority in New York, in the middle of the wee hours of the morning, I think. And I remember that was so strange. Just all the people, you know, kooky people and so on. We knew that there was a hippie revolution going on and San Francisco was a big part of it. And we were all thirsty, you know, for the music and so on and of that time. So those are some of the things I remember. I had never been to California, so the gift of California was something else that my marriage gave me. I remember driving across the highway above Sausalito and looking out, thinking this is where I would have chosen to be born. And I've pretty much lived here ever since.

BROWN: [00:57:14] When we were, in April of the year that we were in Shushtar, we heard on the BBC that Martin Luther King had been assassinated. And I remember sort of making a vow that my life's work was going to be somehow helping with civil rights and people who were becoming disadvantaged at that time. And, um, and so when we came back, my first jobs were teaching in what they called programs for the hardcore unemployed. And I taught in an affirmative action program for the building trade unions in San Francisco. And I taught staff for the Employment Development Department for the State of California for about 12 years. And so another of the things that just a circumstance of my being in Iran and hearing that news about Martin Luther King was sort of making a vow for my life's work here. I.

LUCCINI: [00:58:28] We talked.

BROWN: [00:58:29] I'm sorry.

LUCCINI: [00:58:30] In a way like a continuation of your service.

BROWN: [00:58:33] Yes, it really was. The idea of teaching in universities just went out of my head and the idea of teaching adults, disadvantaged adults, came into my head. And I think I think the Peace Corps

experience served me well in all the capacities that I've worked since then, including my volunteer work now.

BROWN: [00:58:59] There was a lot of talk about culture shock and so on. I, I guess the main thing I remember and is still an aversion is there were so many crowds in Iran and we were always a spectacle wherever we were. Big city or in the small towns, people would follow us. Just masses of people. And the demonstrations at the university during that strike and so on. And I've always had an aversion of crowds since then. And that was true when we came back. You know, I would avoid be-ins and even concerts because of that.

LUCCINI: [00:59:43] I understand. I have an aversion to it too. Do you, is there anything you would like to add?

BROWN: [00:59:57] I know I will think of a billion things. And I really enjoyed this experience. And I think that my experience with Sima, the young woman I'm working with now, and actually I'm meeting many Persians through her. There are many, many Persian people who came before the revolution, during the time of the revolution, and then people like Sima who are still managing to get here. And it's, it stirred up wonderful memories of Iran. And this is just like the icing on the cake for my experiences with her over these past months.

LUCCINI: [01:00:39] That's lovely, Judy. I'm so happy to hear that.

[END OF INTERVIEW]