

Billie Jean Chambers Oral History Interview
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Billie Jean (Ellsworth) Chambers served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ecuador from 1962 to 1964 on an agricultural extension and home economics project.

Access

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Oral History Interview

with

Billie Jean Chambers

July 27, 2004
Stillwater, Oklahoma

By Robert Klein

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

KLEIN: [00:00:01] Twenty-five [sic], 2004. This is Bob Klein. I'm interviewing Billie Jean Chambers, whose last name was Ellsworth when she served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ecuador in 1962 to '64 in ag extension. So let's go back, you know, maybe a year before you joined and talk about what was going on in your life.

CHAMBERS: [00:00:27] Well I started college in fall of 1960 and shortly after I started college, I went to Rock Island, Illinois, to hear JFK campaign, sometime in the fall anyway. Went up with a group of friends to Rock Island.

KLEIN: [00:00:45] Were you politically active or just sort of out of curiosity or?

CHAMBERS: [00:00:48] Just probably more out of curiosity than anything. Some others in the group were fairly politically active. My family had been politically active. Actually, I had, as a nine year old, nailed up posters on

telephone poles out in our rural area for Dwight Eisenhower. But, you know, I wasn't that politically active at that particular point.

KLEIN: [00:01:12] Where did you grow up?

CHAMBERS: [00:01:13] I grew up on a farm in west central Illinois, near Mount Stewart in the Brown County, near Mount Sterling, Illinois, about 40 miles west of Quincy on the Mississippi, or east of Quincy on the Mississippi.

KLEIN: [00:01:26] And you went to high school there?

CHAMBERS: [00:01:27] I went to high school in Mount Sterling. It was a consolidated high school.

KLEIN: [00:01:31] During high school, did you do any extracurricular activities, volunteer work, travel?

CHAMBERS: [00:01:37] Well, back in the fifties on the farms, things were not real good, and so I didn't do a whole lot. Most of the things I did were oriented around our country church and my 4-H club. And oh, just a few things at school itself, not very many. I was in the Future Homemakers of America but couldn't really participate because I had to catch a school bus. And a few things like that. So there was always a school bus issue. So, no, I was grew up in a relatively, you know, fairly isolated actually. I grew up 40 miles from the Mississippi and I'd only been a few miles across the Mississippi River twice.

KLEIN: [00:02:16] Oh, OK. And then you finished high school and were able to go to college.

CHAMBERS: [00:02:21] Yeah, I finished high school there at Brown County High School and got a state teacher scholarship. And so was able to go to Western Illinois University, full tuition paid, and so that helped me go to college and get my bachelor's degree.

KLEIN: [00:02:39] And you were, with what goal, you're going to become?

CHAMBERS: [00:02:43] OK, I, um, my goal was to become a homemaker, become a home economist and I didn't have a very big perspective on what some of the options were because of the kind of area where I grew up. And so as far as being a woman at that particular point in time, I could see, well, I could get a job teaching or I could get a job as an extension home economist. And so that was sort of my perspective, and I also considered some other areas, but felt that those would limit me simply to teaching because there weren't other options that I knew about. And so my goal was to get a degree in home economics and I was actually interested in extension service from the beginning, because I had been active in 4-H, knew the 4-H agent and extension home economist and the ag agent very well.

KLEIN: [00:03:35] Now you're in your third year of the program and when you went up to listen to John Kennedy speak.

CHAMBERS: [00:03:42] I was a freshman. First semester of my freshman year, first quarter of my freshman year.

KLEIN: [00:03:48] Let's go back to the story if you going to hear Kennedy.

CHAMBERS: [00:03:54] So, um, not too many students had cars back in those days, but I had a friend who had a friend who had a car and so a carload of us went up to hear JFK in Rock Island, Illinois. Of course, the Peace Corps had been proposed before that, I can't remember how long before that particular campaign stop, not that awfully long. But anyway, heard him and he was very exciting and, you know, invigorating. And, you know, he talked about this organization where young people would give two years of their lives to help. And he particularly talked about young people with ag backgrounds. And of course, I'd grown up on a farm and we had, you know, it was a small subsistence farm back then. You know, we had cattle, we had hogs, we had chickens, you know, we had row crops of various kinds. And, you know, it's very different than the farming of today. And so I grew up on that kind of farm, being involved, you know, in the farm.

KLEIN: [00:04:55] So did you.

CHAMBERS: [00:04:57] And so that was exciting to me, so I was immediately interested.

KLEIN: [00:05:01] And he was inaugurated in January of '61.

CHAMBERS: [00:05:05] January of '61. And when Peace Corps started, my boyfriend and I, who were engaged at that time, we decided to apply.

KLEIN: [00:05:19] OK. Now how do you apply from being in such a small town and small college?

CHAMBERS: [00:05:24] Actually, it wasn't in January '61 We applied in January of '62, excuse me. We were engaged in January, in December of '61 and we applied in January of '62. And it really wasn't hard. We just wrote to Peace Corps and asked for applications and filled them out and mailed them. There wasn't really any recruiting to speak of back in that day that I'm aware of. Maybe they were recruiting on bigger campuses, but you know, there wasn't any recruiting at Western Illinois University.

KLEIN: [00:05:52] Do you remember the application process?

CHAMBERS: [00:05:54] I don't remember a whole lot about it. I know that it's a lot different than today. I remember it was fairly lengthy. It was all on paper.

KLEIN: [00:06:02] Do you recall, there's a point where they ask you, one, if you know any second language, and, two, if you had a preference for assignment?

CHAMBERS: [00:06:10] Yes, I remember that part. And no, I did not have a second language. Our high school had only offered Latin. And so I had a year of Latin and no usable second language. And so that was my response to the language portion of the question. And then as far as assignment, somehow we decided that we were interested in Latin America based on some people, you know, we had perhaps known things we know about it, and, you know, both of us, actually our perspectives were somewhat

limited, but we indicated that Latin America would be our first choice and then, you know, anywhere would be the second choice. We really wanted to do this.

KLEIN: [00:06:54] And you were applying as a couple?

CHAMBERS: [00:06:56] Yes, we were applying as a couple, planning to get married in June.

KLEIN: [00:06:59] Oh, OK. And what was your family's reaction?

CHAMBERS: [00:07:04] Oh, my family was absolutely horrified. I was the first one in my family, on either side of my family, to go to college. And, you know, they were afraid that I would not finish. That, you know, they just were very, very concerned about the whole thing. My family didn't even have a telephone in 1960. And um, so you know this, you know, I indicated before that I'd only been a few miles across the Mississippi River, even though I grew up 40 miles from it. So this was a very big step as far as they were concerned and very frightening and very.

KLEIN: [00:07:43] How about your friends at college, did they think you were crazy?

CHAMBERS: [00:07:46] Well, some of them did, but they were generally supportive. They were generally supportive. Back then, you know, they, um, you know, they still do background checks, but you know, they talked at length with your friends and then I think even did maybe some background checks on some of your friends.

KLEIN: [00:08:01] The FBI?

CHAMBERS: [00:08:02] Yeah, they did. And you know, my friends were supportive.

KLEIN: [00:08:07] And your fiancé was?

CHAMBERS: [00:08:09] Yeah, he was as interested, you know, was probably.

KLEIN: [00:08:11] As committed?

CHAMBERS: [00:08:11] Yeah, the synergy of both of us probably is what prompted us to do this.

KLEIN: [00:08:16] Was he from the same town as you?

CHAMBERS: [00:08:18] No, he wasn't from the same town, but he was from, you know, maybe 40 miles away or so.

KLEIN: [00:08:24] Similar background though?

CHAMBERS: [00:08:25] Similar background, except, well, he didn't actually grow up on a farm, but he had a lot of farm contacts and had worked on his grandfather's farm, was majoring in agriculture.

KLEIN: [00:08:35] Was he ahead of you in school?

CHAMBERS: [00:08:36] No, we were both. We were both on the same stage.

KLEIN: [00:08:39] When were you due to get your degree?

CHAMBERS: [00:08:42] Well, I was planning to go through in three years. I'd gone to summer school that first summer, we both had, to try to get through faster and, uh, get jobs faster. But then along the way, the Peace Corps thing really had interested us ever since we first heard JFK speak, and he was in that group when I went to Rock Island. Had interested us from that time. And then as the program started to materialize and a little publicity came out about it and the news and the applications became available, you know, we decided that this could be something that we could do. That we both had farm backgrounds and, you know, we could contribute, we wanted to contribute.

KLEIN: [00:09:24] Do you remember taking a test as well?

CHAMBERS: [00:09:28] Yes, I do remember taking a test.

KLEIN: [00:09:30] And were you intimidated by that?

CHAMBERS: [00:09:31] Yes, actually I was. Uh huh. But I don't remember much about the test, but I do remember taking the test.

KLEIN: [00:09:39] It was kind of like a GRE or something.

CHAMBERS: [00:09:44] Right.

KLEIN: [00:09:44] So, your applications are in. Have you finished up your degrees yet?

CHAMBERS: [00:09:52] Oh no. We finished our degrees after we came back from Peace Corps.

KLEIN: [00:09:55] So you're still in school?

CHAMBERS: [00:09:57] We're still in school.

KLEIN: [00:09:58] And you've set the marriage date.

CHAMBERS: [00:10:00] We set the wedding date. Uh huh.

KLEIN: [00:10:02] And then what happened?

CHAMBERS: [00:10:03] Well, we received our acceptance to Peace Corps, assignment to Ecuador.

KLEIN: [00:10:09] Do you recall the letter?

CHAMBERS: [00:10:10] No, I don't.

KLEIN: [00:10:10] Was it letter, phone call, telegram?

CHAMBERS: [00:10:13] Letter. It was letter, I believe. It was in writing. It may have been a telegram. I don't recall exactly, but it was in writing. It wasn't a phone call.

KLEIN: [00:10:21] And what did it say?

CHAMBERS: [00:10:22] Um, I believe it said, you know, congratulations. You've been accepted for training for this project and you will report to this location, which was for us, Bozeman, Montana, Montana State University, on this date. And I don't remember exactly, but basically it came in writing.

KLEIN: [00:10:42] What was your reaction?

CHAMBERS: [00:10:44] Oh, very excited. Absolutely excited. Uh huh. And of course, I think my parents up to that point had felt that maybe this wasn't really going to happen. So, um, things became rather tense at that point. They were not at all excited about this.

KLEIN: [00:10:59] But you were committed enough that you were not going to back down?

CHAMBERS: [00:11:01] Yeah, I was very committed.

KLEIN: [00:11:05] And Peace Corps understood they were accepting you without the degrees.

CHAMBERS: [00:11:10] Yes. Oh yes. Actually, at that point, you did not have to have a degree to go into Peace Corps.

KLEIN: [00:11:15] Yeah, yeah. In filling out the application, you must have indicated a lot about having grown up on a farm and being in, having studied agriculture.

CHAMBERS: [00:11:26] I believe so. I believe that a lot of that was on the application. There were things about, you know, volunteer involvement, which, you know, had mostly been through my church and my 4-H club. And, you know, I participated on some, you know, livestock judging teams, and then about working on the farm at home and that kind of involvement.

KLEIN: [00:11:48] And your, is he now your husband, your husband?

CHAMBERS: [00:11:52] Um, my fiancé at the time.

KLEIN: [00:11:56] Did he have a strong enough agricultural background?

CHAMBERS: [00:11:58] Well, he had grown up helping his grandfather on the farm and was actually majoring in agriculture. I was majoring in home economics.

KLEIN: [00:12:05] Got it. All right. Did he speak any other languages?

CHAMBERS: [00:12:09] I think he may have a semester or a year of Spanish. I can't remember. A small amount, not. I mean, really, neither one of us spoke Spanish.

KLEIN: [00:12:22] And it was your sense that you were both committed to doing this?

CHAMBERS: [00:12:26] Mm hmm.

KLEIN: [00:12:27] When were you asked to report to Montana?

CHAMBERS: [00:12:32] We reported in June. I don't recall the exact date because we finished the quarter, got married, and then went to Bozeman.

KLEIN: [00:12:41] So your honeymoon was.

CHAMBERS: [00:12:42] Our honeymoon was in Peace Corps training, more or less. You know, after the first couple of days, anyway. Actually neither one of us had ever flown before on an airplane. So the Peace Corps sent us airline tickets.

KLEIN: [00:12:53] Where did you fly out of?

CHAMBERS: [00:12:56] Well, we didn't. The federal government, you know, always uses first class tickets so they can be refunded. And so we cashed the

tickets in and got train tickets because neither one of us had ever seen any of the country west. And so we took the train to Montana.

KLEIN: [00:13:15] Lovely.

CHAMBERS: [00:13:15] We didn't plan the trip very well, though, because we were this naive that we got on the train in central Illinois in, you know, early in the day or like sometime in the morning. And went to Chicago and had to change trains and went to Minneapolis and changed trains again and then headed west. But by then it was dark. And so we went all across the states we really wanted to see, the Dakotas and eastern Montana, in the dark and woke up, you know, not too far out of Bozeman actually. We did see a little bit of it around Bozeman the next morning.

KLEIN: [00:13:52] And you got yourself. So it was at a university?

CHAMBERS: [00:13:59] Yeah, the training was at Montana State University had the contract for Ecuador, and the home economics, the ag staff were involved.

KLEIN: [00:14:11] Do you recall first reporting, checking in, you and, what's your husband's name?

CHAMBERS: [00:14:17] Dave. Dave Ellsworth.

KLEIN: [00:14:17] So you and Dave show up and tell me about.

CHAMBERS: [00:14:24] They met us at the train station and took us, um, to check in. I don't remember a whole lot about the check-in procedure. I do remember we were lodged in the dorms and, um.

KLEIN: [00:14:35] Together, I hope.

CHAMBERS: [00:14:36] Yes, together. Uh huh.

KLEIN: [00:14:38] How many were in the group?

CHAMBERS: [00:14:39] Initially, there were 77, I believe, somewhere in the seventies.

KLEIN: [00:14:44] Now you've made this decision, you and David have made this strong decision to join, and now you're in the midst of 70 some people who've done the same. What was your reaction to others, to the rest of the group?

CHAMBERS: [00:14:59] Well, you know, actually, I'm having a little trouble remembering, you know, it's 42 years later.

KLEIN: [00:15:05] Sure. Yeah, yeah.

CHAMBERS: [00:15:07] The group was somewhat diverse from my perspective at the time, anyway. There were quite a few people with ag backgrounds like ours. And then there were some people without ag backgrounds who were to be trained, you know, in agriculture.

KLEIN: [00:15:25] There must have been people from California, New York.

CHAMBERS: [00:15:28] Yeah, from everywhere, you know, there was an. Most of the group was fairly young, either right out of college. There were several who had not started college at all. And then we were in the middle, you know, of our degree programs at the time. There was one couple. He was a retired extension agent from Kentucky and his wife, who was probably, they were the oldest in our group. There was a couple probably in their forties or so. And then there was a single woman who'd been a goat farmer in Florida. And then most of the rest were right out of college. Yeah, mostly right out of college.

KLEIN: [00:16:04] But a fair number have were coming off, from farm backgrounds?

CHAMBERS: [00:16:08] Farm backgrounds.

KLEIN: [00:16:09] So you weren't the oddball in the group.

CHAMBERS: [00:16:11] No, we weren't the oddball in the group. They were quite a few farm kids, young people. Well, not just young because the retired extension agent. And the goat farmer.

KLEIN: [00:16:24] Tell me about the structure of training, how was that?

CHAMBERS: [00:16:26] The training was extremely intense and actually my first shock was when we got our training schedules because of my first name being Billie, even though at that point I went by my middle name, which was Jean, I got an assignment to this tropical agriculture training. The training was divided into tropical agriculture, I think. Well, I guess tropical agriculture included both the highlands and the tropics, the way we did that. And then home economics. And so I went to the person who was in charge of the home economics portion of the training and said, I think you've made a mistake. You know, I'm a home economics major. And she looked at me and she said, well, um, all of the other females in the program don't have the kind of background like you have. So there were men who had the ag backgrounds, but the females tended not to.

KLEIN: [00:17:25] Right.

CHAMBERS: [00:17:26] And so we have decided that we're going to put you in tropical agriculture training because you already have done or know all the things that we're going to be covering in in the home economics portion of the training. You know, they killed a chicken one day and everyone was talking about killing the chicken. Well, you know, I'd killed and dressed hundreds of them.

KLEIN: [00:17:44] Yes.

CHAMBERS: [00:17:44] And so, you know, that was the right decision. She had to convince me, though, that the whole training staff had talked about it, that the ag people and she had talked about it.

KLEIN: [00:17:54] Was Dave in the same group?

CHAMBERS: [00:17:55] Yes. Yeah. So he and I were in the same training as far as that part of it.

KLEIN: [00:18:01] Right. Now, well, let's talk about the ag training. What was involved, I mean, what were they preparing you for?

CHAMBERS: [00:18:11] Um, basically it was, um, you know, it was very different agriculture than most of us had been around. In the highlands of Ecuador, of course, they grew some wheat and grains and so on. There was that aspect of it. But the emphasis was on the kinds of things that we would not have been exposed to. You know, bananas, cacao, coffee, you know, tropical things. Some of which, you know, were grown in a lot of plantations, but there were some small producers.

KLEIN: [00:18:38] But Bozeman is not a tropical environment.

CHAMBERS: [00:18:41] No, it isn't. I guess the highlands, you know, they had staff on the training staff from Ecuador.

KLEIN: [00:18:51] Who were Ecuadorian?

CHAMBERS: [00:18:52] Who were Ecuadorians, someone from the Ecuadorian extension service who was not that, which was not that old at the time. Um, the director of Heifer Project in Ecuador. Our group, by the way, was contracted to Heifer Project in Ecuador to manage the agriculture part of it, and they had either started or been very involved with the Ecuadorian extension service for quite a number of years.

KLEIN: [00:19:18] Can you give me a brief description of what the Heifer Project was?

CHAMBERS: [00:19:22] OK. Heifer Project is based in Little Rock, Arkansas, and it was actually started after World War II by a person who had the vision of sending livestock from here to Europe to replenish the livestock, particularly dairy heifers, originally. That's the name Heifer. And so they would send bred heifers to Europe and then the person, the recipient, would then be responsible for returning the first female offspring so that

this was like a calf chain, you know, to multiply the livestock in the country. It later became incorporated, you know, they have a huge research operation now down near Little Rock. And Heifer Project had been doing agricultural development work, particularly in the livestock arena, in various countries of the world. And I believe the Peace Corps contract with Heifer to run that was the first contract with Heifer in the world, the one in Ecuador.

KLEIN: [00:20:25] Now did they get money from AID also?

CHAMBERS: [00:20:27] I don't know what their funding was. We didn't know that much about the funding, but the advantage was that we were working with Peace Corps, but we were working directly with Heifer and we were assigned to the Ecuadorian extension service. So there were people at our training site who had been involved in extension in Ecuador, like the assistant director was there throughout, and then the director of Heifer for Ecuador was there throughout.

KLEIN: [00:20:54] And they were all Ecuadorians?

CHAMBERS: [00:20:57] The director of Heifer Project was not. He was from the States.

KLEIN: [00:21:00] How about language training?

CHAMBERS: [00:21:03] Oh, language training was very intense because I started out with zero. And we had five hours of language a day.

KLEIN: [00:21:13] What was the approach, do you recall?

CHAMBERS: [00:21:15] Primarily conversational. We had a book or two, a couple of books, but it was primarily conversational.

KLEIN: [00:21:23] Did you get tapes and listen?

CHAMBERS: [00:21:25] Oh no, they didn't have tape players and all that in our training at that point. No, it was just strictly small group with a native speaking instructor.

KLEIN: [00:21:33] So they had Ecuadorians.

CHAMBERS: [00:21:35] Well, not necessarily Ecuadorians. Our instructor was from Mexico. And there were like 12 people. They broke us down, the approximately 77 of us, into groups of about 12 or so. And for a lot of things, you functioned in this group of 12, in language you stayed with this group of 12. And for your weekend camp out and hike ins in the mountains, you functioned with this group of 12 plus the staff who went along. And then for your area studies, you know, we had big things with all of us. And then the agriculture training included those who were in the agriculture training. And the home economics training included those who were in the home economics training.

KLEIN: [00:22:17] With the language training, were you told that you had to get up to a certain level in order to be selected?

CHAMBERS: [00:22:26] Mm hmm. Yes.

KLEIN: [00:22:27] Which must have been a source of a certain amount of tension.

CHAMBERS: [00:22:29] Oh, it was a lot of anxiety for everyone. That and then the other anxiety was the all the psychological tests that they gave you when you. And as I'm recalling part of that was when you first arrived, they gave you a lot of psychological tests.

KLEIN: [00:22:44] Paper and pencil?

CHAMBERS: [00:22:45] Paper and pencil tests. And um, and then based on I'm not sure what all criteria. I know that the psychological portion and the tests were part of it, the observation of the psychiatrists and psychologists who were with your group because each of these groups of 12 had a psychiatrist, a psychologist, assigned to be with them.

KLEIN: [00:23:05] Did you get, were you interviewed separately by a psychologist or psychiatrist?

CHAMBERS: [00:23:12] Yes. Uh huh.

KLEIN: [00:23:13] What was that like? Because I assume you had not had much contact with either.

CHAMBERS: [00:23:17] No, I had never had any contact with either. Actually, I was probably so naive. I was probably pretty relaxed about it. But they ask you, I really don't remember what they ask and so on but.

KLEIN: [00:23:31] Go ahead.

CHAMBERS: [00:23:34] Yeah, I just can't. You know, part of it was follow up to some of the pencil paper questionnaire, I believe. I really don't remember a whole lot about that, though.

KLEIN: [00:23:43] Were you and Dave interviewed together at any point?

CHAMBERS: [00:23:46] No, separately.

KLEIN: [00:23:47] And do you recall being questioned about how do you think, you're newly married, how will it go?

CHAMBERS: [00:23:54] Yes, definitely on things like that. Yes, there were things along that line and, um, you know, maybe some questioning of me about, you know, his motivations and probably him about mine. I can't recall exactly about that, it's been a long time ago,

KLEIN: [00:24:12] But did you and Dave talk about?

CHAMBERS: [00:24:15] Well, they didn't really give you that much time. Our day started at 5:30 in the morning with physical training. And we had to run. Well, actually, you could walk over, but you had to be over at the football field at a certain time for physical training. And so, you know, you usually

be running late and you'd go over there and you do your exercises and then you'd run and then you'd run all the way back to the dorm. I tried to get back first or second because so I was in a hurry because the water would run out in the showers and everyone was coming in at the same time and the water in Montana was cold even in June and July.

KLEIN: [00:24:54] That's great.

CHAMBERS: [00:24:55] And so, then we'd go to breakfast and yeah, we did talk about it. But you know, I just don't remember that. That's been a long time ago. But, you know, the days were pretty busy. You didn't have a lot of time for that kind of talking. You were, you know, pretty busy and tired most of the time. Then you'd go through, you'd go to breakfast and then you'd go to your first language class. And then you'd have, as I'm recalling, either area studies, which would be about the history and culture. We studied a lot on the history, the customs, the culture, you know, of Ecuador. Um, you know, then I can't remember exactly the language class schedule. I remember there was one early in the morning, and it totaled about five hours a day altogether.

KLEIN: [00:25:41] Do you remember if in the dining hall, they tried to set up speak Spanish only at meals kind of thing?

CHAMBERS: [00:25:49] No, I don't think so. I think that the language instructors did join us at the tables as we got more into the training and then we would talk with the instructor in Spanish. But I think in the beginning, no, they did not. We just went through the cafeteria, the university cafeteria, along with all the students, and selected from the line.

KLEIN: [00:26:10] And do you remember if there was a component of American studies and world communism?

CHAMBERS: [00:26:17] Oh yes, I think there was some. Yeah, I think there was American studies too. I'd forgotten that aspect of it.

KLEIN: [00:26:23] And any discussion of world communism as well?

CHAMBERS: [00:26:27] I believe so. That part I don't remember really as clearly as, um, as the Ecuadorian area studies, probably because that was totally new to me.

KLEIN: [00:26:38] Well, yeah, I mean, in practical, you're about to go to Ecuador

CHAMBERS: [00:26:42] Focused on it. But yes, there was a history professor from the university on our training staff. This many years later, my guess is that that was probably his role to coordinate that part of it. And the reason I remember him so clearly because he was in our camp out group.

KLEIN: [00:26:59] Oh, OK. Tell me about the camp outs.

CHAMBERS: [00:27:03] Oh, the camp outs. Well, we had.

KLEIN: [00:27:04] Was it every weekend?

CHAMBERS: [00:27:06] Every weekend. We had training all week, Monday through Friday, and then Saturday morning. And then Saturday, as soon as training was over, maybe lunch, they'd load us into the back of trucks along with our World War II surplus or Korean War surplus issued sleeping bags and haul us out somewhere to the foothills of the mountains, usually each group totally separately. Sometimes they would combine maybe two, but usually each group separately. And our psychologist went along and an outdoor person expert went along, on the area, you know, on that area where we were going. Or two of them usually because our outdoor experts, one of them was the history professor and then the other one was this woman who really was an outdoorsman, a rancher and so on in area.

CHAMBERS: [00:28:03] And we would hike in with our food on our back and it wasn't freeze dried like today. I remember the time that I had the five pound can of tuna put in the back of my backpack. It was along with all the other things that you had back then. You know, you tried to keep it to a minimum, but anyway, you'd hike in and you'd make camp and you'd make fire and you'd cook your supper. And, you know, usually we'd sing around the campfire and things.

KLEIN: [00:28:33] And how did the staff explain the purpose of it?

CHAMBERS: [00:28:37] Well, they sort of explained it that we didn't know where we were going in Ecuador. And you know, some of us might have to, you know, do a lot of hiking and walking in and it was a mountainous country. As I'm recalling, that was more or less the explanation.

KLEIN: [00:28:49] But you didn't believe it.

CHAMBERS: [00:28:51] Well, actually, I sort of did, except I ended up in the coast, and so. I ended up in the desert on the coast.

KLEIN: [00:28:57] But the whole time you were out on these weekends, did you have a sense you were being watched?

CHAMBERS: [00:29:02] Oh yeah. Everyone, everyone had a sense that they were being watched and all the time because this psychiatrist, psychologist, was there all the time. His name was Dr. Geenwa, ours was. And starting about two weeks into our training, on a certain day of the week when you came back from your morning physical training before you went to breakfast, there would be pink slips in the mailboxes and so everyone would run to their mailboxes to see if they'd gotten a pink slip that week. And that was a deselection slip.

KLEIN: [00:29:38] Huh.

CHAMBERS: [00:29:41] And actually, we started out with about 77. I think 47 or 49 of us went to Ecuador.

KLEIN: [00:29:47] Oh my god.

CHAMBERS: [00:29:47] You know, the deselection rate was really quite high, and it was based on, you know, a number of criteria. I think language helped, people got along with others, motivation. Um, I think someone was the deselected from our group because they were perceived as proselytizing

and that would not work in Ecuador. But anyway, yes, on the camp outs, very definitely.

CHAMBERS: [00:30:12] In fact, I have a really funny story about one of the camp outs. Toward the end of the summer, we were camped out fairly high. We'd hiked in a fair distance and oh, it stormed. And by then everyone had quit taking the extra shoes along and so on because we got tired of carrying all that stuff. So most of the time we just had our hiking boots and maybe a change of socks, because we had to pack in all this food that was heavy. And anyway, we'd gotten up there and we had a hike after we made camp and came back and made our supper. And it started raining, and all anybody had was the plastic dry cleaning bags to keep dry. We didn't have, we didn't sleep in tents, you know, we just did sleeping bag camping under the stars. And so it rained harder and harder. And you know, we put wood on the fire to try to, you know, stay halfway dry. Um, and it was really, really miserable. And so we decided that we're going to make the best of this because this psychologist or psychiatrist is watching us. And so we stood around the campfire singing songs because no one could sleep because it was too wet and cold. I mean, this was fairly high altitude.

KLEIN: [00:31:25] Yeah. [tape break]

CHAMBERS: [00:31:31] You know, went on our hikes and late in the afternoon, they loaded us in the truck and hauled us back to Bozeman. And we discovered that all the other groups had come back in the middle of the night the night before. Well, two years later, when I'm about to finish my service in Ecuador, Dr. Geenwa and team came down to evaluate and determine and talk with us about what we thought, you know, two years later. You know, what training should include. Basically they were doing an evaluation. And so at the end, he asked me if there were any questions I wanted to ask him. And I said yes, as a matter of fact, there is. You know, I've always wondered that night when it rained so much why you and Tess didn't take us back to Bozeman. Because when we got back on Sunday night, we discovered all the other groups had come back. And it absolutely floored him, he said. You mean you wanted to come back? And I go, we all wanted to come back! And he said, we

wanted to come back too, but you all seemed to be having so much fun. We didn't want to spoil your fun.

KLEIN: [00:32:32] That's great.

CHAMBERS: [00:32:34] So we put up too good a front for the psychologist, I guess.

KLEIN: [00:32:38] But with the appearance of pink slips, did the group begin to sort of coalesce and did anyone object to the process? Did anyone say, well, why are they going or were you told anything?

CHAMBERS: [00:32:55] We were never really told anything. In fact, they would whisk them out of there so fast. It was like a big secret. And I think people were afraid to ask because there was this little intimidation, you know, because we knew about this deselection process and I think everyone was afraid to be a boat rocker because, you know, that might be perceived as uncooperative. But the way they did the pink slips is they would put them out there when you were at physical training. They would actually go in and, you know, pack up the person's stuff and, you know, like, pretty well whisk them out of there before anyone had a chance to talk to them. I think I only had a chance, maybe to talk very briefly, you know, just sort of in passing, with one person who was deselected. Basically, they'd just sort of disappear and everybody would go, gee, they must have been selected, you know.

KLEIN: [00:33:42] Did it create stress between you and Dave? I mean, was there a concern that one would?

CHAMBERS: [00:33:50] Well, of course, in a couple, if one's deselected, the other is.

KLEIN: [00:33:53] Well, yeah.

CHAMBERS: [00:33:54] And so he may have had some concern about my Spanish because my Spanish wasn't quite as good as his. But, you know, he never verbalized it.

KLEIN: [00:34:05] Oh, OK.

CHAMBERS: [00:34:05] But I think we were both concerned about deselection. Everyone was. Everyone was, you know, really, you know, really uptight. And, you know, there may have been more competition in this group than what I have seen and heard about from recent RPCVs. You know, because of this thing that was set up on the deselection process.

KLEIN: [00:34:25] And this went on pretty much in the same pattern for eight weeks?

CHAMBERS: [00:34:30] Yeah, eight weeks.

KLEIN: [00:34:32] And you were tested midpoint and at the end in language?

CHAMBERS: [00:34:36] Right.

KLEIN: [00:34:37] What about your technical skills, that was? There was no test.

CHAMBERS: [00:34:40] I don't think there were any tests in the technical skills. No. It was more of an, as I look back on it, I would call it more of an awareness. Yeah, I did learn some things because, you know, about how bananas are propagated and so on. That I still remember and a few things.

KLEIN: [00:34:56] At any point in the training, was there any kind of specificity about the job you were going to be doing when you got to Ecuador?

CHAMBERS: [00:35:07] At one point, we did get to indicate what part of the country we might like to go to. You know, coast or Andes, and that may, they may have at that point then focused a little bit more. I don't really remember totally. But I do remember there was discussion. We had an opportunity to indicate whether we were more interested in the coast or the Andes.

KLEIN: [00:35:29] Of course, you weren't asked about who you wanted to be assigned with because the assumption was it would be you and Dave.

CHAMBERS: [00:35:35] Right. And I don't know that they asked the others who they wanted to be assigned with. They did assign. They did not assign single women to an area unless they assigned a male Peace Corps volunteer there.

KLEIN: [00:35:48] Oh, OK.

CHAMBERS: [00:35:50] I guess because of the culture and the time and so on, they felt that the females needed to be have someone to quote, look after them.

KLEIN: [00:35:57] Right. Right. So how did how was final selection? By then everybody who was going to be deselected had been or was there the last couple of days when you didn't know if it was going to happen or not?

CHAMBERS: [00:36:15] And, you know, I've forgotten that. I'm really not sure.

KLEIN: [00:36:18] OK, OK.

CHAMBERS: [00:36:19] So I don't remember if it went up, the final deselection was right at the end or if it had been a week or so earlier.

KLEIN: [00:36:26] Do you know what your final score was on language?

CHAMBERS: [00:36:29] No, I don't remember. I don't know that we were told that.

KLEIN: [00:36:32] All right. But you and Dave were selected.

CHAMBERS: [00:36:35] Yeah, we were selected.

KLEIN: [00:36:36] Along with 40 some other people.

CHAMBERS: [00:36:38] Along with 40 some other people.

KLEIN: [00:36:41] And at that point, what happened?

CHAMBERS: [00:36:44] Well, then we were given a plane ticket to fly home and pack. We were told, you know, what kinds of things to pack. And back then you got a foot locker to ship, as well as your 66 pounds or whatever you could take on an international flight. And so we went home and, you know, packed up our stuff.

KLEIN: [00:37:03] Did you fly back?

CHAMBERS: [00:37:04] Yes, we did fly back. We flew back.

KLEIN: [00:37:06] And that was your first flight.

CHAMBERS: [00:37:08] That was my first flight. Yes. That was my first flight. Flew back, packed up the things, and then flew to New York City and convened as a group in New York City.

KLEIN: [00:37:18] OK, let's get there in a minute. But when you're doing training, had you been calling your family or writing them or?

CHAMBERS: [00:37:27] Well, I'd been, we'd been writing.

KLEIN: [00:37:29] Were you hearing from them?

CHAMBERS: [00:37:35] Um, I was hearing from not my parents, but from other family members. I was hearing from my grandmother, my grandmothers. I think both of my grandmothers. My aunts.

KLEIN: [00:37:50] And what were they saying?

CHAMBERS: [00:37:51] Oh, they were just, you know, writing family stuff mostly.

KLEIN: [00:37:54] Nobody was saying, you know, are you going to give this up?

CHAMBERS: [00:37:57] No.

KLEIN: [00:37:58] OK. What happened to all the wedding presents?

CHAMBERS: [00:38:00] Well, you know, it was a very small wedding, so they were just sort of stored. They were just stored.

KLEIN: [00:38:07] Just a side kind of question. How long were you back home in between? Two days, three days?

CHAMBERS: [00:38:13] It was at least a week, I can't remember, because I did see some family.

KLEIN: [00:38:19] Did you and Dave split and he went to his family and you went to yours?

CHAMBERS: [00:38:25] I was just down at my family's for a day and mostly was at his family's and actually then with some of my other relatives. My parents didn't go to see me off at the plane.

KLEIN: [00:38:37] Did you have any second thoughts at that point, you know? That maybe it's pretty far I'm going and?

CHAMBERS: [00:38:44] No. But as far as the phone calls, you know, that was not that unusual because you have to remember that my parents didn't have a telephone. His parents did. But you know, people didn't make long distance calls like that back then. You know, it's different than now with cell phones and.

KLEIN: [00:39:01] Email even.

CHAMBERS: [00:39:02] Right. No, I don't, no. We really didn't have any second thoughts. I don't think either one of us did. You know, we were excited about it. We were pumped up. We were ready to go. And you know, the only, you know, sad thing was when we went to the airport in Peoria, Illinois, you know, to fly out. My dad's parents were there. My grandmother in a wheelchair. She had several strokes and, um, my dad's youngest sister and her husband and her children. And Dave's parents were there. And, you know, but my parents were not there.

KLEIN: [00:39:43] And was it disapproval?

CHAMBERS: [00:39:46] Oh yes. Oh yes. And, you know, it was going to Ecuador, getting married so young, marrying him at that point in time, you know, just the whole.

KLEIN: [00:39:56] Just too much.

CHAMBERS: [00:39:56] Just all of it combined. Yeah.

KLEIN: [00:40:00] So continue with the great adventure. You flew for the second time in your life.

CHAMBERS: [00:40:06] Right.

KLEIN: [00:40:07] And ended up in New York City.

CHAMBERS: [00:40:08] Ended up in New York City.

KLEIN: [00:40:09] Where you had not been before.

CHAMBERS: [00:40:10] Where I'd not been before. And actually, we went in, as a lot of people did, a day or two early to see some of New York. We walked because everyone was on a tight budget and didn't have, you know, extra money. You know, we weren't, you know, I didn't have support from my family on this venture. So, you know, I was on my own totally. We walked from Central Park to the harbor to see the Statue of Liberty at a distance. It's a long way.

KLEIN: [00:40:39] Oh yes. Oh yes.

CHAMBERS: [00:40:41] Uh huh. And then, you know, on the way down and back actually zigzagged a little bit seeing some other sights, you know, just generally took advantage of that day or whatever it was.

KLEIN: [00:40:50] You remember what you stayed?

CHAMBERS: [00:40:52] It was a hotel right off Central Park. I don't remember the name of it.

KLEIN: [00:40:55] And Peace Corps had arranged that?

CHAMBERS: [00:40:57] Peace Corps had arranged that.

KLEIN: [00:40:57] So you could report in early and that was OK.

CHAMBERS: [00:40:59] I think maybe we had to pay for one extra day or one extra night and we came up with that.

KLEIN: [00:41:04] And so New York was just the staging.

CHAMBERS: [00:41:08] Yeah, they really didn't do anything there except convene us and get us on the same flight. You know, there wasn't really staging per se there.

KLEIN: [00:41:14] By then, had those of you who were finally selected, been selected, had you come together at all as a group?

CHAMBERS: [00:41:23] Well, we did some, you know, before. There were some friendships, particularly in these camp out groups, because that was the group that you really ended up knowing the best. The group that you were in your language training with.

KLEIN: [00:41:33] Right.

CHAMBERS: [00:41:33] And you know, you were sad when one of them was deselected or whatever. And because you had your language with them, you had your, um, your camp out with them. And actually, those groups might not have been. That may have been too separate. They may have evolved separately as the time went on, as people progressed differently in language, I'm not exactly sure. But those were the groups of people that you probably knew the best.

KLEIN: [00:41:59] Were you close friends with any other married couples?

CHAMBERS: [00:42:02] Um, well, there was one other married couple and they left early. She found out she was pregnant and they weren't in the training group. They were fairly close to our age, just a couple of few years older. Oh, actually, there was one other one. Yeah, somewhat close to. Actually, there was one that was in their forties that we were sort of close to. And then there were some single people that we were close to also. But you know, things were a little bit different because of the situation. But yes, by the time we got there, you know, we had a lot of fun together and you know, we'd all made it through the first stage and we were getting ready to go to the second phase of training.

KLEIN: [00:42:38] Yeah. So going down there was going to be additional training and you knew that.

CHAMBERS: [00:42:45] Right.

KLEIN: [00:42:47] It wasn't a charter flight, was it?

CHAMBERS: [00:42:48] No, it was commercial.

KLEIN: [00:42:49] All right. How do you get to Ecuador?

CHAMBERS: [00:42:54] To Puerto Rico, that was the next stage.

KLEIN: [00:42:57] Oh my goodness.

CHAMBERS: [00:43:00] Yeah. Uh huh. That was the, um, Puerto Rico was the next stage of the training. That was during the time that they had the big training camp in Puerto Rico with the survival training and everything.

KLEIN: [00:43:11] Outward Bound.

CHAMBERS: [00:43:11] Oh yes, which reminds me that I forgot to mention one aspect of the training in Bozeman. We had like one hour a day free time every afternoon right before dinner. And because I didn't know how to swim, I went and took a swimming lesson every day. We didn't have any pools

in our area and so on, so I never learned to swim. And my uncle trying to teach me one time had thrown me into a strip mine pit and had to rescue me because, you know, of course, I was terrified. And so I was really afraid of water. I actually took a swimming lesson every day up until the very last day of training, and my camp out leaders were there. One of them was also the swimming instructor, and they were there, you know, cheering me on. Ecuador's only 20 feet away. Ecuador is only 15 feet away. Ecuador is only 12 feet away. Ecuador is only five feet away. You can do it!

KLEIN: [00:44:06] Was that because they knew in Puerto Rico you were going to have to swim or just?

CHAMBERS: [00:44:11] Well, they did have that survival training where they put them in the gunny sacks and threw them in the lake and everything. Actually, I was terrified.

KLEIN: [00:44:18] Not them. I mean, you.

CHAMBERS: [00:44:19] Yeah, the trainees, right. Where they put the trainees, except I didn't end up having to do it. That's another story. But, you know, we knew that that camp was the next stage of the training. And so, you know, passing the swimming test. Yeah, probably Dave and I were afraid that I wasn't going to make it through swimming if anything. And then that part was really terrifying to me.

KLEIN: [00:44:41] Puerto Rico?

CHAMBERS: [00:44:41] Mm hmm. As we left New York. You know, can I do this? Because we were heading to this camp for more language training and this survival training.

KLEIN: [00:44:53] And describe the situation at the camp.

CHAMBERS: [00:44:55] Well, actually, when we got there, they didn't take us to this camp. They took us to another nearby camp for the weekend and at the end of the weekend, they told us that the camp had too many people in

it. And that they had decided to divide our group in half based on language ability, and that half of us would go out and spend the next month with an assigned extension agent out in the island.

KLEIN: [00:45:23] Oh.

CHAMBERS: [00:45:24] And luckily, Dave and I were two of them that got to go out to an extension office, and we went out to the extension office in Aguas Buenas.

KLEIN: [00:45:34] Say that again.

CHAMBERS: [00:45:35] Aguas Buenas. Good water. Yeah, and I don't say it very well anymore. But anyway, we went out there and it was very undefined. They gave us some money and told us how to find the bus in that general direction and told us who to report to. And we got there luckily just before the extension office closed for the day. It was a long ways.

KLEIN: [00:45:59] Was it just you and Dave going?

CHAMBERS: [00:46:02] Mm hmm. Well, other people went other places. You know, like half of the group went out more or less and half of them went to the camp.

KLEIN: [00:46:09] But the village you were going to, it was just the two of you.

CHAMBERS: [00:46:12] Right. And so we got there and reported to the Puerto Rican ag agent and home economist in the town there.

KLEIN: [00:46:20] Were they expecting you?

CHAMBERS: [00:46:22] Yes, they were expecting us, amazingly. And they had. So the first problem was, where are we going to stay? And they knew of a public health nurse who occasionally rented rooms, and the home economist had actually contacted her to see whether it might be possible. And so we went over and talked with her and rented a room from her.

KLEIN: [00:46:42] Had you been given pocket money to cover this?

CHAMBERS: [00:46:44] Yeah, we had living money, a certain amount of money, to cover it and you know, it came out, you know, pretty, pretty well. And I think they didn't, you know, I think they hadn't had a lot of notice that this was happening. So they, I think, weren't really sure what to do with these people who didn't speak Spanish very well. Because now so many Puerto Ricans, you know, are very bilingual. But back then in this town, the home economists spoke English, some English. The ag agent did not, as I'm recalling. And the public health nurse with whom we stayed spoke some. And then there was a local bar owner in town who spoke some, and that was a pretty good sized town. That was the extent of it in that town. And so it was a good place to learn more Spanish because, you know, sort of sink or swim. You had to, you know, go and, you know, get your meals and.

KLEIN: [00:47:37] How did you do that?

CHAMBERS: [00:47:39] Well, you know, first, it was very stressful, but you know, we managed. And toward the, in the beginning, he took us out on his visits out to the, he is the ag agent, to farmers and mostly we went with the ag agent. And then as time went on, he would do things like give us. It was really good experience, you know, increasing independence on doing things that we could sort of handle. And not any real teaching or anything. But the first thing was to send us out in the *collectivos* by ourselves, to get off at a certain place with a little hand-drawn map to hike up into the campo into a certain area. And he would explain, you know, that you can stop and have lunch at this school lunch program. And then I'd like for you to find and tell these people about this meeting that I'm having and, you know, the date and the time and place. And you know, it was a lot of verbal meeting notifications was what we did.

KLEIN: [00:48:37] And on those excursions, you were pretty much operating in Spanish?

CHAMBERS: [00:48:41] Oh yeah. Oh yes, totally.

KLEIN: [00:48:42] Did you find?

CHAMBERS: [00:48:43] Carried our dictionary around and struggled.

KLEIN: [00:48:47] Did you find yourself relying more on Dave because he was better? If he was.

CHAMBERS: [00:48:54] Maybe. Yeah, he was a little bit better. Probably. Probably because of that, and also because he was a male in that culture. Uh huh.

KLEIN: [00:49:01] Oh, OK. How long was this period, in this village Agua?

CHAMBERS: [00:49:07] We were there a month.

KLEIN: [00:49:09] A month?

CHAMBERS: [00:49:10] A month. And so then toward the end, though.

KLEIN: [00:49:12] Did anyone come out to see you while you were there or?

CHAMBERS: [00:49:14] No.

KLEIN: [00:49:15] You're there for the month and?

CHAMBERS: [00:49:16] We were there for the month and it was sort of like, OK, you report to these people in this town.

KLEIN: [00:49:21] You could have been doing nothing.

CHAMBERS: [00:49:22] You do what they tell you and you come back here in 30 days. Or 28 days or whatever it was. And anyway, toward the end of that time, they actually had us do some presentations. I remember doing a food demonstration with a 4-H club with the home economist, maybe a couple of them. And then I also remember us going out with the ag agent and doing some kind of presentation. I can't remember what anymore, but I

remember we really worked on it. We struggled with every word, wrote it all out and everything. On the foods demonstration because you're demonstrating things, I wrote out and, you know, practiced it and everything. But you know, it isn't quite as verbal as when you're doing a lecture about some crop or whatever it was, I don't remember what we were.

KLEIN: [00:50:11] What was your confidence growing that you could actually do this thing?

CHAMBERS: [00:50:17] Yeah. Well, it was still, you know, I was still nervous. But yes, I felt that I was beginning to believe that, yes, I can do this. I mean, I could begin. I could get through all the daily things. I could get around in the *collectivo*. I could ask directions. I could find my way to places. You know, I could ask directions and understand them. I could.

KLEIN: [00:50:35] And your understanding of this was somewhat like what you would be doing in Ecuador.

CHAMBERS: [00:50:41] Well, I knew that I would be doing things, that my language would have to improve. You know, for the living and getting around, yes, that would be somewhat alike. But to really do the job that my language would have to improve a lot because it was at a very low level, but it was improving.

KLEIN: [00:50:57] When they sent you out, did the training staff say, we're going to test your language when you come back? Was there any sense that this was going to be further selection?

CHAMBERS: [00:51:08] Oh yeah, we knew there'd be further selection.

KLEIN: [00:51:11] This is now your, you've been in the Peace Corps already.

CHAMBERS: [00:51:14] 12 weeks, I think. Uh huh. And yes, there was a further selection. I can't remember if anyone was deselected at that stage or if everyone went on, it almost seems like maybe there was someone.

KLEIN: [00:51:26] Now the group, when you got to Puerto Rico, the group split into two. Some went to the village. Some went and had to do the Outward Bound training.

CHAMBERS: [00:51:35] Right.

KLEIN: [00:51:36] Was there resentment? A lot of those who did Outward Bound or was it, I mean.

CHAMBERS: [00:51:42] Um, well, actually.

KLEIN: [00:51:44] I don't know that it was a joyous experience.

CHAMBERS: [00:51:46] Yeah, I don't know. You know, I don't really know either. I really don't know that. I really don't know. I know that I was just thrilled that I didn't have to go do it. And the interesting thing was they spent the bottom half to the Outward Bound camp because they were had the formal Spanish training, you know, continuing there. And those of us who went to the village who had tested in the top half on the language exam. And it came back and there was an even bigger spread on the language ability when we came back.

KLEIN: [00:52:16] Which says something about how you learn a language.

CHAMBERS: [00:52:20] Because they were around other people who spoke English. I mean, we were in this town where, you know, we could go in and drink in the bar and talk to the bartender. And that was about it. In English.

KLEIN: [00:52:32] Now at the end of the four weeks, were you all gathered again at the camp or?

CHAMBERS: [00:52:39] I don't remember if it was at the Outward Bound camp or the one we were at originally, but anyway, we gathered in that same area, I believe.

KLEIN: [00:52:48] How many people are now left in the program?

CHAMBERS: [00:52:51] I think there were about 47 of us that went to Ecuador. I can't really remember if anyone was deselected there. I think there might have been, but I'm not positive anymore.

KLEIN: [00:52:59] But when you got back together, there must have been a lot of storytelling about sharing, comparing experiences?

CHAMBERS: [00:53:05] Right. You know, who. I remember, I was even more grateful that I didn't have to go to that camp and get tied in a gunny sack and have to get out after they threw me in the lake. I would have drowned.

KLEIN: [00:53:14] Oh yeah. But nobody had drowned.

CHAMBERS: [00:53:18] No, nobody had drowned. But, you know.

KLEIN: [00:53:20] Their Spanish did not improve that much.

CHAMBERS: [00:53:22] Well, it had improved, but not as much as the ones who were out on their own using it.

KLEIN: [00:53:28] So is there, are you finally sworn in as volunteers or? You're still in Puerto Rico. It's now at the end of the four weeks.

CHAMBERS: [00:53:36] I think we actually had our swearing-in in Ecuador. When we got to Ecuador.

KLEIN: [00:53:42] Let's get you out of Puerto Rico. At the end of the four weeks, there was nothing further.

CHAMBERS: [00:53:49] No, we went back to the, I believe it was to the camp. We went back and I believe it was to the camp. I believe we had another language exam because, you know, we were told somewhere along the line that, you know, the gap was even bigger.

KLEIN: [00:54:05] And they may have been studying the group as learning language.

CHAMBERS: [00:54:08] I'm sure they were. I'm sure they were. That was part of it, in the early days, you know, they didn't have a model for the training for Peace Corps. You know, they set up some of these things like these hike outs and so on, probably based on military training. And some of the physical training and the schedule and the discipline and so on. You know, I think that was probably the only model they had. And so they were looking at it as they went and modifying it as they went.

KLEIN: [00:54:35] So you finally fly down to Ecuador?

CHAMBERS: [00:54:39] Yeah, we fly to Ecuador. Actually, we landed, we had a stop in Caracas, Venezuela, and this was when it really hit me. I don't know about this. We landed in the airport, just supposed to be a brief stop, and there were military police with carbines all over the place. And we were there a long, long time, and at first, you know, couldn't find out what was going on. And apparently there had been sort of a terrorist incident at the airport.

KLEIN: [00:55:10] You were on a commercial flight?

CHAMBERS: [00:55:13] Yeah, we were on a commercial flight. You know someone flooding the runway with gasoline or some, I don't know exactly. You know, I never was real clear on exactly what it happened, but we were there longer than we were supposed to be.

KLEIN: [00:55:27] Sitting on the plane?

CHAMBERS: [00:55:28] No, we were in the terminal. But anyway, there were these MPs with, you know, weapons all over the place and I'm going, oh my gosh, what have I gotten myself into?

KLEIN: [00:55:38] You had Peace Corps staff accompanying you, didn't you?

CHAMBERS: [00:55:41] Yes, the head of Heifer Project was with us. I think just the head of Heifer Project and the person who worked for the Ecuadorian extension service. I think they may have been. At least the head of

Heifer Project. His name was Don Schultz, and he was with us, and he had spent many years working in Latin America. And he.

KLEIN: [00:56:01] In the whole period up to this time, had you met anyone from Peace Corps, Washington? Had anyone come out and talked to you or let you know or say anything?

CHAMBERS: [00:56:12] No, I don't think so. No, I believe it was all the training staff and the Heifer Project staff. Because, you know, we always, I think that's probably why we always identified more closely with Heifer Project staff than with Peace Corps staff. Although we did get well acquainted with the Peace Corps director for the coast, which they now call an APCD, I believe, or something like that. James Pines. But we identified with Heifer Project and the Ecuadorian extension service. Although we definitely, you know, identified ourselves as Peace Corps volunteers, you know.

KLEIN: [00:56:47] So the Venezuelan military finally let you go.

CHAMBERS: [00:56:51] Well, they weren't really holding us, I think they were keeping us in a secure area, but it was a little scary. Anyway, things are finally safe for the plane to depart. We flew on to Ecuador without further incident. And then when we got there, we were greeted by some Peace Corps officials from Ecuador and Galo Plaza, who was a former president of Ecuador, who was very involved in agriculture, you know, in Ecuador and who later was Secretary General of the U.N. Or maybe previously. Anyway, he was very involved in international, very, very esteemed.

KLEIN: [00:57:35] You weren't, it wasn't the first ag extension group, was it?

CHAMBERS: [00:57:44] Yes, we were the first ag extension group in Ecuador.

KLEIN: [00:57:46] OK. The previous group had been what?

CHAMBERS: [00:57:48] Well, there were two previous groups that went in, all of us within about three weeks of each other. And one was, I believe,

education and one may have been like public health or something such as that.

KLEIN: [00:58:02] All of you were, Peace Corps in Ecuador was a relatively new thing, so just in a few months.

CHAMBERS: [00:58:08] Well, actually probably not even a few months, you know?

KLEIN: [00:58:12] Oh, less. Where had the others trained, you remember?

CHAMBERS: [00:58:15] No, I don't know. We didn't have much contact with the other groups. Actually, I knew some of them in Guayaquil when I was located there but didn't have a lot of contact with them. You know, I was involved with the Ecuadorian extension staff and.

KLEIN: [00:58:31] Well, let's wait.

CHAMBERS: [00:58:32] And you know, I didn't have a lot of contact with the other.

KLEIN: [00:58:35] Big reception coming in.

CHAMBERS: [00:58:36] Yeah. Mm hmm.

KLEIN: [00:58:38] Which must have made you feel good. Someone really wanted to have you there.

CHAMBERS: [00:58:42] Right. Somebody wanted us there. You know, here's this former president who was very esteemed and, you know, these officials.

KLEIN: [00:58:48] And he wasn't going to throw you in a lake.

CHAMBERS: [00:58:51] Yeah, I didn't have to do that, and I didn't have to swim anymore. I didn't have to get in a gunny sack.

KLEIN: [00:58:56] What was your, do you recall what your feeling was? You know, you're in Ecuador and this is where you're going to be.

CHAMBERS: [00:59:07] Yeah, well, that was exciting. I knew that my ultimate assignment by then, I think I knew that mine was going to be the coast. And we were in Quito. We were in high altitude. Maybe we didn't know yet then that it would be the coast. We may have found that out after our little tour of agriculture projects through the Andes and so on. They put us up in a metal building that was sort of a camp training center. I'm not exactly sure what it was, but they had bunk beds out there and some showers and so on. That was where we stayed. It was pretty cold, I remember that, and the water was very cold while we were near Quito. But then they took us on a bus through the Andes to see some of the Heifer Project and extension service projects. And, you know, sort of an orientation to what they were doing, you know, we saw. You know, we met people, we met Quechua Indians, we went to dairy operation at Galo Plaza, the former president's, hacienda. You know, we went all the way almost to the Colombian border seeing projects, then came back down. And then we went down to the coast. I remember we stopped at Santo Domingo. And you know, the roads were just amazing and terrifying. The famed Andean highway.

KLEIN: [01:00:26] Hairpin.

CHAMBERS: [01:00:27] Yeah. You know, drop offs of thousands of feet and, you know, single lane wide and you met other vehicles and so on. Then when we started heading down to the coast, you know, this is the highway between the two main cities in the country. The capital and Guayaquil. Quito the capital, and Guayaquil. And they were working on the road between Quito and Santo Domingo. And it was just totally, you know, mud and dirt, you know. It wasn't the rainy season or it would have been really bad.

KLEIN: [01:00:55] What were you traveling in?

CHAMBERS: [01:00:57] A bus. We were, they still had us all together in a bus. It was a bus of just us.

KLEIN: [01:01:02] Had your Bozeman training been some acclimatizing to being at altitudes?

CHAMBERS: [01:01:09] Well, there may have been some of that with that hike, because Bozeman, you know, is at a high altitude. But then we were in Puerto Rico for a month or so, you know, if we'd acclimated, we de-acclimated during that time.

KLEIN: [01:01:20] But if you're up in the Andes, you're up at ten thousand feet plus.

CHAMBERS: [01:01:22] Oh yeah. Quito is at ten thousand feet, the capital city, and then you go up from there.

KLEIN: [01:01:27] You must have felt it when you arrived.

CHAMBERS: [01:01:30] Um, well, you know, I was pretty young, so I don't remember really. I'm sure I would now. But I don't remember it that much. But anyway, then we stopped and we saw some projects in the Santo Domingo area, which is you're getting down into the banana region. We stopped at an Ecuadorian experiment station that's tied to.

KLEIN: [01:01:50] The whole group?

CHAMBERS: [01:01:51] Yeah, the whole group still. That's tied to their Department of Agriculture, partway down where they did cacao research and maybe coffee. I think mostly cacao. And then we finally arrived in Guayaquil, and they put us up in a hotel. And the day we got there, the night we got there, was the Bay of Pigs invasion.

KLEIN: [01:02:13] Oh.

CHAMBERS: [01:02:14] And there was a big demonstration in front of our hotel, and we all thought it was because of us. But they didn't really know we were there. Probably didn't even know what Peace Corps was. But it was scary.

KLEIN: [01:02:27] Oh yeah. Who was reassuring you, who was sort of leading you to say, don't worry, or this is what's going on?

CHAMBERS: [01:02:36] Well, as I'm recalling, it was probably Don Shultz who was the head of the Heifer Project.

KLEIN: [01:02:40] How did you hear about Bay of Pigs? Did Don tell you or you hear it on the radio and you read about it in the paper?

CHAMBERS: [01:02:48] We probably read about it. And he may have told us. He may have told us and then, you know, we didn't. [tape break] OK, so we arrived in Guayaquil and we were in a hotel and there was a demonstration in front of the hotel, and it also happened that it was the day of the Bay of Pigs invasion. And we thought that the demonstration was a demonstration against Peace Corp. It was generally anti-American, but it was not against Peace Corps, as it turned out. I don't think they really knew we were there. And the director of Heifer Project for Ecuador was with us. I don't remember if there was anyone from Peace Corps per se, but I think he was with us during this whole time, and had had many, many years in Ecuador prior to this.

KLEIN: [01:03:36] This is just an introductory tour.

CHAMBERS: [01:03:38] Yeah, this was an introductory tour, sort of an orientation, you know, a second orientation to agriculture in the country and the people.

KLEIN: [01:03:44] And this is your second or third day in the country maybe?

CHAMBERS: [01:03:47] Oh no, we'd been in the Andes for probably a couple of weeks.

KLEIN: [01:03:50] Oh, OK.

CHAMBERS: [01:03:51] And then we'd been, it had taking us several days to come down by the time we went down through Santo Domingo and stopped at the experiment station. You know, it wasn't really that far, but you know, by the time you make the stops and you know, you do all the appropriate social protocol, you know, and all that kind of thing. And the roads aren't that good. It takes a while.

KLEIN: [01:04:11] And these were really just take a look at kind of visits. There were no training sessions or anything?

CHAMBERS: [01:04:16] No, no training sessions. No real training sessions.

KLEIN: [01:04:20] And then what happened after Guayaquil?

CHAMBERS: [01:04:22] Well, that was then where we were dispersed to our sites. And you know, people were, I guess, given their final assignment. Maybe that was where we were given our final assignment. And you caught a bus and you know, you went there. Except our final assignment was Guayaquil initially. My first, our first assignment was in the extension office in Guayas province, which was in Guayaquil.

KLEIN: [01:04:48] Did Heifer have an office in Guayaquil?

CHAMBERS: [01:04:51] No, no, we were assigned to the Ecuadorian extension agents in Guayaquil.

KLEIN: [01:04:58] Did Bob take you and introduce you to that person?

CHAMBERS: [01:05:01] Don.

KLEIN: [01:05:02] Don, sorry.

CHAMBERS: [01:05:04] I don't I don't remember. I'm not really sure. Um, we may have, but I don't really remember.

KLEIN: [01:05:14] Do you remember? Yeah, go ahead.

CHAMBERS: [01:05:15] Anyway, the extension offices were all located in the capitals of each province. So Guayas province, Guayaquil was the capital, and so it was the extension office for the whole area.

KLEIN: [01:05:33] Tell me about your first week on your own now.

CHAMBERS: [01:05:36] Well, you know, we stayed initially. We moved out of the nicer hotel into a boarding house while we tried to find another place to live. And so we stayed in this boarding house for a while. I don't know, maybe a week or more.

KLEIN: [01:05:49] What was the money arrangement?

CHAMBERS: [01:05:51] Well, they gave you, you had a living allowance. It was about a hundred dollars a month, which was, you know, really fairly good. I mean, it was somewhat comparable to the Ecuadorean extension agents, but maybe slightly better.

KLEIN: [01:06:03] Now did you guys get two hundred?

CHAMBERS: [01:06:04] Yeah, we got two hundred.

KLEIN: [01:06:06] And did they simply give you a bundle of money?

CHAMBERS: [01:06:11] Well, almost. We went to a certain bank in Guayaquil each month to pick it up in cash. People didn't operate with checkbooks and so on there. You couldn't really write checks in places, and so, you know, you had to get it in cash. And then, you know, you've got this big bunch of cash that you're hoping doesn't get stolen. And so that's how we operated.

KLEIN: [01:06:36] And how long are we at the boarding house?

CHAMBERS: [01:06:38] Oh, I'd say a week or two, a couple of weeks, probably.

KLEIN: [01:06:41] What were you doing during that time?

CHAMBERS: [01:06:43] Well, during the time we were there, we'd, you know, go to the extension office, you know, every day and we were beginning to get oriented to the extension program. Sometimes we'd go out with the Ecuadorian extension agents. I would go with the home economists sometimes. Sometimes I'd go with the ag agent, or we'd both go with the ag agent. Dave and I would both go with the ag agent. I mostly operated

with the Ecuadorian home economist though, to go and see what she was doing and who she was working with and how she was doing, and improve my Spanish, and so on. And then at night we'd go back to the boarding house. We'd have breakfast at the boarding house and we'd have supper at the boarding house.

CHAMBERS: [01:07:22] And then we were also, you know, sort of trying to find a place to live. And we ended up in actually a very nice house. This is going to sound horrible. It was better than the house I grew up in on the farm in Illinois. One of the Ecuadoran extension workers lived in the neighborhood and he came in. He knew we were looking for a place and he came in and he said there's a house for rent out in my neighborhood. And the bus ran right from the extension office out there. Or if we were on the same schedule, it turned out he lived a block away, you know, sometimes we'd ride with him. It was sort of inconvenient for grocery shopping because the big markets and grocery stores were all downtown Guayaquil. But anyway, so there were actually a couple of people from extension who lived out in that area, so we were sort of living out in this professional community.

KLEIN: [01:08:17] Was it a furnished house?

CHAMBERS: [01:08:19] No, it wasn't. So we had to sort of gather up furniture and everything. I mean, that was the one thing that Peace Corps didn't do that was, you know, really hard. That came as a big surprise because I mean, it didn't even have a stove. So one of the first things we had to get was a mattress and a kerosene stove. And so, you know, it took us a while to get things like a table and chairs and.

KLEIN: [01:08:41] Did they give you a settling in allowance?

CHAMBERS: [01:08:44] It was, no, it was just a monthly living allowance, you sort of had to get it out of.

KLEIN: [01:08:50] You didn't get a special?

CHAMBERS: [01:08:51] You didn't get a, no. Because a lot of them, a lot of the people in our group were teaching at. Some of them, well, a couple of them were teaching at agricultural schools and then some of them were assigned to extension offices. And the single people, a lot of them were living with families. So I think that, you know, they hadn't really thought about married couples that much. I think it was the married couples that had this kind of problem. Excuse me. [coughs]

CHAMBERS: [01:09:17] We were talking about settling in and we sort of gradually acquired, you know, things to function. And anyway, meanwhile, then the extension agents also covered little towns. The home economist did quite a few groups right there in the city of Guayaquil, but she also went out to other towns with both 4-F clubs, which is Ecuador's equivalent of 4-H, and then training for women, women's groups. And so we started going out with various people, not just the ag agent, but some of the specialists.

KLEIN: [01:09:52] What would bring a group of Ecuadorians together? Your early work you were doing.

CHAMBERS: [01:10:03] Well, some of the work was done one-on-one and then some of it was done in groups and the ag work was done more one-on-one, at least initially. And the more of home ec and the 4-H groups in some places, there were some semi organized groups. They would, um, we would go in and contact a lot of times the teacher in the school. Yeah. And it wasn't like the 4-H groups here in the States where you have this system of a county staff training the volunteers and the volunteers doing it. It was more that the local person who you convinced or decided that, you know, this was a good thing for kids to do, would be the one who would sort of round up people, convene them, remind them, you know, provide the place, either the school or the home or whatever. And then you would come in with the activities and the training or whatever it was that you were going to do that day for them. And so with the kids, you know, you work through these local contacts, that you would convince and then would convene.

KLEIN: [01:11:12] Right. All through this period, you're working with a counterpart. You're not on your own?

CHAMBERS: [01:11:19] Initially. Actually, not for very long. Fairly soon, we were out on our own taking, you know, busses for hours out here and there.

KLEIN: [01:11:26] And what did all this have to do with Heifer, the Heifer Project?

CHAMBERS: [01:11:31] Well, a lot of what, some of what we were doing, you know, Heifer does a lot of animal work, but Heifer also, you know, was very involved with the Ecuadorian extension service. And so the programs of the Ecuadorian extension service, the 4-H club, the 4-F club there, is one of their programs and you know, it may have animal aspects. It may have crop aspects, it may have nutrition aspects, you know, food and nutrition, sewing and the home ec, you know, hygiene.

KLEIN: [01:11:59] So the overall goal of the Heifer Project is to help with development?

CHAMBERS: [01:12:03] The overall goal of Heifer was to, you know, upgrade the nutrition and diet of the people, originally through animals, but also through sanitation with the extensions. But you know, their real goal is through, you know, upgrading the diet through animal production. But the home economics plays into that. But initially, yes, I always went out with someone. But it wasn't all that long that, you know, I would be taking a bus out by myself. Or Dave and I would be taking one out and maybe I would be meeting with the girls while he would be meeting with the boys. Or I would be meeting with women while he was making, you know, individual visits with farmers.

KLEIN: [01:12:41] Were you able to set up those meetings at a distance so that when you went?

CHAMBERS: [01:12:45] No, no. Only when we went out to, um, there was one small sugar cane plantation, not a big international one, but a small one, that we went out to that the school teacher out there would convene the 4-H

clubs for us. And actually, Dave didn't work in that one much. I was the main one out there. I would go out and I would work with the girls. And we had gardens. We had a 4-H garden and everyone would work in the garden and then sharing the produce. And oh, and we also did nutrition and sanitary, you know, just regular programs. Sometimes, you know, cooking, sometimes a lot of times the sanitation was taught through cooking demonstrations. You can teach a lot that way and people always would come for, you know, being able to taste it or whatever, have a bite of it. There was a lot of interest in sewing in one of the areas also. But anyway, I'd go out, when I went out there, we could notify her in advance because it was a sugar cane plantation. And, you know, it was organized enough that you could, you know, get a message out or make a phone call. Most of the places we went, you know, we'd tell them we'll be back in two weeks and you just sort of round people up when you got there.

KLEIN: [01:14:01] It may be maybe hard to answer. What do you think the Ecuadorians' perception was of you? I mean, what you were all about or what Peace Corps was all about?

CHAMBERS: [01:14:14] Well, Kennedy was very, very popular in Ecuador. Of course, in some of these small towns, they were pretty isolated and so on. But Alliance for Progress had worked with the Ecuadorian extension services, so they had been in there some. And so they had a little bit of perception that, you know, that we were tied in with Kennedy and that we had come to, you know, help them somehow. And they were really very receptive because I would say because Kennedy was so popular in Latin America at that time.

KLEIN: [01:14:47] Now, from your own perception, why weren't Ecuadorians doing this? What did they have to bring you in for? With all due respect.

CHAMBERS: [01:14:53] Well, actually, actually, yes, that was a thing that was really puzzling to me in the beginning. You know, first of all, they didn't seem at least at that point in time to have the volunteer ethic that, you know, permeated our culture. And you know, I grew up on a farm and my mother was a 4-H leader, but my mother was a high school graduate and a lot of the people that I was working with very honestly, you know, I

couldn't leave them. First of all, the Ecuadorean extension service didn't have all the manuals and publications. They had a few, but not very many, that the extension service here had, even at that time. And even if I had had them, I couldn't just leave them and expect someone to, you know, read it and carry on. For the women who were involved with the program, there were some, you know, who could read, but some of them really couldn't, particularly out in the Santa Elena Peninsula, where we ended up doing the bulk of our work. But there were a lot of people, some people we worked with there who. And then on the other hand, there were some who got really involved. And I think that's the real important thing.

CHAMBERS: [01:16:06] It was actually very frustrating, you know, going out to this area and, you know, a school teacher would convene, but we were always the ones. And then going up the Daule River, up to the towns up there and, you know, it seemed like nothing permanent was happening. We placed a bred gilt with a family up there and we thought that everything was going to work perfectly. It was a Heifer Project gilt. And, you know, we'd gone in and individually trained this family, you know, we'd helped them build the pen, you know, isolate, you know, trained them on feeding, sanitation, you know, the whole shebang. Placed the gilt. And ultimately, anyway, they weren't feeding it properly. This was a mango growing region. And, you know, money was scarce, but you know, it needed to eat more than mangoes and it was losing weight. And so we ended up out of our own pocket, paying him for the food the animal had consumed and removing it and placing it somewhere else. You know, for goodwill, I mean, you know, we could have just taken it, but we didn't think that was a good idea. We just bit the bullet and took it out of our pockets.

KLEIN: [01:17:23] Well, over the first four or five months, what percentage of the time were you and Dave going out together? And what percentage not? Were you always going out together?

CHAMBERS: [01:17:44] No. No. Sometimes I went out with him, sometimes I went out with Juana Mendoza, the home economist. And probably within the, you

know, within five or six months, I was at times going out by myself, if not sooner. Uh huh.

KLEIN: [01:18:00] And it was considered proper for a woman alone to go out and do the extension work both either an American or an Ecuadorian?

CHAMBERS: [01:18:10] Mm hmm.

KLEIN: [01:18:10] How is your Spanish after five months?

CHAMBERS: [01:18:12] Well, it was improving. I still, you know, I was still struggling at that time. I would get words mixed up and, you know, I would have to ask. I was certainly good enough, though, that I could, you know, explain things with lots of words. Explain a simple thing like if I didn't know. You know, you just explain it with more words like, well, we've got this glass here, you know, say I couldn't remember the word glass, which of course I could, because that's a very simple word.

KLEIN: [01:18:39] But the thing with the water?

CHAMBERS: [01:18:41] The thing, yeah, that you drink from, you know, that kind of thing. So I was, you know, I would still do some of that at that point in time.

KLEIN: [01:18:48] Did that amuse your audiences?

CHAMBERS: [01:18:50] Oh, yeah, at times they did. And particularly at times I would get two very similar words mixed up. Um, *cansada* and *casada*. *Casada* was married and *cansada* was tired. And I would, when I was tired, I would get those two words mixed up and they would laugh.

KLEIN: [01:19:12] Was there any point in the first couple of months where you thought to yourself, oh my God, we're here, you know, we're Peace Corps volunteers, it's happening, it's what I wanted. Was there any feeling of that sort?

CHAMBERS: [01:19:25] Well, you know, of course, in the beginning there still the excitement for the first few months. And then, you know, I still, even now, I talk with a lot of the students that I know who go into Peace Corps, I stay in touch with them when they go and I always write them a long letter about the six month point. Now an email, but um yeah, I hit that slump probably at about six months. Like, I think that was where I, you know, I went from being, you know, fascinated with the differences to disillusion with some things. Like, you know, how can I ever accomplish anything here? The sanitation problems, you know, are so bad. You know, people don't understand that to get ahead, you have to help yourself. And some of those kinds of things, like the volunteer ethic that we were talking about, that, you know, that wasn't a part of the culture, and I'm not sure I fully understood the whole thing then. But then I did find some people who were willing to do things to help their own communities later.

KLEIN: [01:20:25] Generally speaking, how was your and Dave's health during the first six months or so?

CHAMBERS: [01:20:32] Oh, well, we did very well. Actually, I got food poisoning in Puerto Rico in the training there when I was there out in the town and then probably at about the six month, maybe about, no. Actually, it was probably longer than that. Maybe about six or eight months, I had one bout with food poisoning in Guayaquil. I got too confident and I was eating lots of street food. And as a lot of Peace Corps volunteers do. And I was very, very sick and ended up. This was why I was still living, we were still living in Guayaquil, and I ended up in the Peace Corps doctor's sick room in his house in Guayaquil.

KLEIN: [01:21:13] Oh, there was a Peace Corps doctor in Guayaquil?

CHAMBERS: [01:21:14] There was a doctor in Guayaquil.

KLEIN: [01:21:16] Do you remember his name?

CHAMBERS: [01:21:18] No, I don't. But I remember that another Peace Corps volunteer and Dave and I were supposed to go up to Esmeraldas to take

some things up to a Peace Corps volunteer up there. Someone who'd worked for Heifer, a Peace Corps Heifer, had left the country. And actually, Dave and I had been given his vehicle so that we could get around to these towns that were so spread out a lot easier, because we were spending lots and lots of time on busses. And so we were supposed, the three of us were supposed to take some things. So I had been out in the sugarcane plantation area where, you know, I'd take the bus down to the harbor of the Guayas River, take a launch across the river, you know, catch the bus on the rest of the way. And I missed the connection. And so I had some questionable street food and I got really sick when I went out in the sugarcane plantation and I did usually spend the night with the school teacher out there.

CHAMBERS: [01:22:21] Anyway, I, you know, just sort of kept getting worse, and she finally decided that I'd better get back to Guayaquil, but the question was how I was going to get back. And so there was an engineer out there at the plantation with a jeep, and he brought me back actually all the way to my house. And then we were supposed to leave like the next day and I was just sicker and sicker. So I ended up spending the weekend in the Peace Corps doctor's sick room and the others went on to Esmeraldas, and I never did get to Esmeraldas.

KLEIN: [01:22:50] Now the vehicle that you and Dave sort of had access to was a Jeep.

CHAMBERS: [01:22:55] Well, it was a Willis wagon.

KLEIN: [01:22:57] And provided by Peace Corps?

CHAMBERS: [01:22:59] By Peace Corps.

KLEIN: [01:23:01] For volunteers who?

CHAMBERS: [01:23:02] Well, it was actually originally for this Heifer Project employee who was assigned to the coast. And Don was in the mountains, but this guy had had international experience in other places, not Latin America. And his family was not happy there and they left. So when he left, a

decision was made not to replace the position. And anyway, they decided that the best thing to do with the vehicle was to let us use it to get around because Guayas is a huge province and we were covering, trying to cover some pretty big area. And at that point, by that point, we were traveling on our own all the time by bus.

KLEIN: [01:23:46] On a personal matter, you can answer or not. Had Peace Corps said anything about the desirability of not getting pregnant? Was there any official or informal position?

CHAMBERS: [01:24:01] Uh. I don't think that that was really discussed very much. You know, I think that actually there were some Peace Corps babies in our group.

KLEIN: [01:24:12] So in fact, I mean, you weren't told.

CHAMBERS: [01:24:15] No.

KLEIN: [01:24:16] Or advised not to.

CHAMBERS: [01:24:17] No. No. But you know, we didn't. But the one couple that was married when they went into the Peace Corps had a baby. And then there were a couple of marriages, you know, fairly early on and there were a couple of them had babies.

KLEIN: [01:24:34] And they stayed on.

CHAMBERS: [01:24:35] Yeah, they stayed on. Yeah. Now this was before I think our Peace Corps was looking at a lot of things as they occurred and, you know, including the vehicle issue. I think that, you know, they didn't. The original plan was not to give Peace Corps volunteers vehicles. And then, you know, this happened and they gave us one. And then of course, later the policies all changed.

KLEIN: [01:24:55] Being in Guayaquil and having a jeep, did outlying volunteers tend to weekend at your place or head into the? Or wasn't it that difficult?

CHAMBERS: [01:25:09] Well, we didn't use the jeep to do things on weekends. I mean, to do so, you know, we used it for the job. Occasionally to come into Guayaquil and then into the downtown for something, to haul something or something. But there was a guy who was in an agricultural college. His name was Curt, and he would come in occasionally and spend a weekend at our place and we'd go to movies and things like that together. I remember the first Christmas. He had Christmas with us, and we didn't travel. None of us. I mean, he traveled into Guayaquil and it was sort of like a lot of Peace Corps volunteers do. It was just the three of us and we tried to sort of replicate, you know, being a good home economist, you know, I went and I got a chicken and I stuffed it and made a stuffed chicken in my little kerosene stove with my little tin box oven in this 100 degree heat because it was the hottest season in Guayaquil. And, you know, tried to replicate things as best I could with local ingredients. You know, nothing, you know, imported, but, you know, roast chicken and some vegetables and mashed potatoes and gravy and probably a pie of some kind for dessert.

KLEIN: [01:26:17] At that point, how long had you been in the country, the first Christmas?

CHAMBERS: [01:26:19] At that point, it hadn't been that long because we actually arrived in country in September. And then I think at our sites. Let's see, we spent June, July, I think early August we left. In early August, we left Bozeman and we spent a month in Puerto Rico and we toured around, I think we got to our sites about the 1st of October. So we'd only been there October, November, and part of December.

KLEIN: [01:26:49] During the first six months, eight months, did you have any contact with Peace Corps staff?

CHAMBERS: [01:26:55] Um, the regional office was in Guayaquil, James Pines, and yeah, we were in and out of there periodically. He never came to visit us, but, you know, then we were right there in Guayaquil. I don't know about the other volunteers who were out of Guayaquil.

KLEIN: [01:27:13] Was it a supportive relationship?

CHAMBERS: [01:27:15] Oh yes, it was very. He was very helpful and very.

KLEIN: [01:27:18] And how did his office stand in relation to the Heifer office?
Who is looking at whom?

CHAMBERS: [01:27:27] Um, we didn't, we didn't see anybody a whole lot, if you really want to know.

KLEIN: [01:27:35] Well, that's fine.

CHAMBERS: [01:27:36] It was sort of like, go do this, go do something useful. But they were there, you know, to support us. Like if our money didn't come in on time at the bank. You know, if there were problems. When they had the revolution and threw out the president, I can't remember exactly when that was. That was after we were out in Santa Elena in the western part of the province. But when they had the revolution, my grandmother, who did not have a lot of schooling, wrote a letter to Sargent Shriver that it wasn't safe there and that you should send me home. And I didn't know anything about this. And I went into the Peace Corps office one day, and you know, by then, it had filtered from Sargent Shriver down to the director for Latin America, down to the director for Ecuador, down to the director for the coast of Ecuador. And so he says, here is something I want to show you and talk with you about. You need to write to your grandmother if you haven't done it recently.

KLEIN: [01:28:39] Uh, how long were you in Guayaquil?

CHAMBERS: [01:28:42] About a year. Maybe not quite. I think we were there from like October until August. And meanwhile, we got a good program going with people who seemed just super receptive out in the western part of the province in the Santa Elena Peninsula.

KLEIN: [01:29:00] Was that part of your responsibility?

CHAMBERS: [01:29:02] Yes. Uh huh. And that was one of the areas that we had been taken very early on by an Ecuadorian poultry specialist in the extension service. And he had done some work out there and had. Um, anyway, he took us out there and introduced us to people out there, and people were very receptive and they took us and introduced us to people in other surrounding little towns actually.

KLEIN: [01:29:22] And this is kind of an area to itself?

CHAMBERS: [01:29:26] No, it's actually.

KLEIN: [01:29:31] How far is it from Guayaquil?

CHAMBERS: [01:29:32] It was about four hours by bus. And it was a nice straight road that you could travel at, you know, like a hundred kilometers an hour, you know, paved. Anyway, we had people who had been really receptive out there and they talked with us a little bit like, well, why can't you come out? Why can't you be out here more? And so one day we went into the Peace Corps office and James Pine said, I had a visit from some people from Santa Elena who came in. Really? And, you know, like, oh dear, what did I do? What did we do wrong? And he said, um, well, they wanted to know if you could come to, if you can move to Santa Elena. And it's sort of like, oh really, wow, yes! He goes, you really want to go there? And we said, yes, we did. And they did probably the unthinkable. We did not have a counterpart in Santa Elena. We were on our own.

KLEIN: [01:30:38] Which is a gesture of trust on someone's part.

CHAMBERS: [01:30:42] Right. I mean, we were still, we worked through the Ecuadorean extension service. We worked on a big poultry project and some other things. And you know, we worked with the poultry specialists and we worked with the diagnostic labs when we'd have a disease outbreak and so on. But yeah, it was, we did not have a local counterpart per se.

KLEIN: [01:30:58] And that was all back in Guayaquil?

CHAMBERS: [01:31:01] That was all in Guayaquil.

KLEIN: [01:31:02] But then you would come from Santa Elena and into Guayaquil and work directly with whatever agency?

CHAMBERS: [01:31:11] Yeah. And probably the closest to a counterpart was this sort of local community leader that people sort of looked up to who had this little room under his house that said Agricultural Center. But nothing was going on there, until we got there, but then stuff started going on, you know, he let us use that sort of as a base of operations.

KLEIN: [01:31:32] Where did you then stand in relation to Heifer?

CHAMBERS: [01:31:36] We were still working with Heifer. I mean, Heifer and Peace Corps jointly decided that, yeah, we could go to Santa Elena. So we went out to Santa Elena. And by then, Dave primarily had started to work on a big. We'd both been doing some poultry work. You know, we'd already placed a Heifer Project animal out there when we had to take it out of this other town. Anyway, we'd started working in Santa Elena, had a couple of things going. I had a girls 4-H club, 4-F club going. He had a boys 4-F club going. I had the beginnings of one going, we each did, in another little town south of there. And part of the sales pitch was there other little towns that we could, you know, do things in surrounding, particularly with the Willis wagon. And so we, you know, that helped because even there.

KLEIN: [01:32:29] So part of the deal in moving out there was you kept?

CHAMBERS: [01:32:30] Yeah, we kept that.

KLEIN: [01:32:32] Oh great.

CHAMBERS: [01:32:32] And we'd go up the coast to Manglar Alto where this was a desert area. So nothing grew there. I mean, there weren't even cacti there. Every drop of water was trucked in from 25 kilometers east from a spring where it was slightly saline. It was very expensive and you boiled it not only make it safe, but out of the water salt settle out. And but up

the coast a little ways, and this was right on the coast, I was two kilometers from the Pacific Ocean. And some people probably would think, but I hardly ever got to the beach, you know, like two or three times in a year.

KLEIN: [01:33:08] But the area you were in had no water?

CHAMBERS: [01:33:13] No water.

KLEIN: [01:33:14] How did people live?

CHAMBERS: [01:33:15] Well, it all came in from, you know, in this truck and it's like an old farm tank truck is really what it was. We used to haul water for our livestock on the farm and you'd buy it in these cans and they'd fill up your barrels depending on how much you could afford or how much supply they had and how many trips they were making that day.

KLEIN: [01:33:32] How about keeping chickens alive?

CHAMBERS: [01:33:34] Well, chickens were very profitable and it was a good area to grow them in. And both eggs and poultry meat were very, very expensive. So you could haul in all the feed and all the water and still make a good profit.

KLEIN: [01:33:50] And most of that, how was that sold?

CHAMBERS: [01:33:53] How was it, how was it sold?

KLEIN: [01:33:54] In Guayaquil and through a co-op?

CHAMBERS: [01:33:57] The eggs were sold, it was a co-op. The eggs were sold locally and the meat was sold, actually initially while we were there, mostly locally. There was a big British oil camp nearby.

KLEIN: [01:34:08] Oh.

CHAMBERS: [01:34:09] And there was also a small Ecuadorian oil camp. And some people got their water from relatives who worked out the British oil camp. They had a distillation system but. [tape break]

CHAMBERS: [01:34:22] Fairly well, but I couldn't carry on any deep conversation. Probably intellectual conversations, I couldn't probably, you know, do a technical lecture or some of the kinds of things that I used to be able to do.

KLEIN: [01:34:34] Oh, OK. So let me say thank you.

CHAMBERS: [01:34:39] Well, thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]