

**Lon J. Lembert Oral History Interview**  
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Lon J. Lembert

**Interviewer:** Gail B. Gall

**Date of Interview:** September 10, 2019

**Location of Interview:** Lesterville, Missouri

**Length:** 21 pages

**Biographical Note**

Lon J. Lembert served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Honduras from 1969 to 1971 on a cooperatives project (Honduras 15).

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Lon J. Lembert, recorded interview by Gail B. Gall, September 10, 2019, page #, Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

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Oral History Interview

with

Lon J. Lember

September 10, 2019  
Lesterville, Missouri

By Gail B. Gall

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

LEMBERT: [00:00:00] The thing is, are we going to get background?

GALL: [00:00:03] We may. Let's just. All right. So this.

LEMBERT: [00:00:05] Let's do a little bit and see.

GALL: [00:00:07] Yeah. So this is Gail Gall on September 10th, 2009, and I'm interviewing Lon Lember.

LEMBERT: [00:00:16] 2019.

GALL: [00:00:18] Oh, 2019. And interviewing Lon Lember, who was part of Honduras 15 group from 1969 to 1971.

GALL: [00:00:50] It's still recording.

LEMBERT: [00:00:51] Okay.

GALL: [00:00:52] Well. One, two, three, four, five, go.

LEMBERT: [00:01:08] Little mini cassette tape.

GALL: [00:01:09] Right. I know. They were so much easier.

LEMBERT: [00:01:12] Yeah, actually, that's very true.

GALL: [00:01:15] Yeah. Okay, so let's go ahead and start with, um. So today's interview is being conducted in Lesterville, Missouri. And with Lon Lemberg and he's from group 15. So the first common question, of course, is why did you join the Peace Corps?

LEMBERT: [00:01:50] Ah.

GALL: [00:01:52] And you have to, yeah.

LEMBERT: [00:01:56] Well, for probably two reasons. One, at the time of my senior year in college, I decided, based on some of the other things I've done, that I wanted to spend, that I want to do, to do something in my life that I could say I maybe made a difference or made a contribution. And the other one, of course, was I didn't want to go to the Vietnam War. And I figured this was positive versus the negative of being in the war. I had signed up and I'd been accepted into the Navy, but didn't, didn't want to go. That was actually a third fallback besides going to Canada. But mainly I had had some experience internationally and I wanted another one and I wanted it to be something that I felt like I was accomplishing something.

GALL: [00:03:05] What was your other experience international?

LEMBERT: [00:03:08] Well, I had gone to school in the Netherlands my junior year of college and been able to travel around all of Europe and some of Eastern Europe. And we had a lot of classes. It was business oriented

and trade oriented. And the idea of trade and building up underdeveloped countries and stuff was of a, was of interest.

GALL: [00:03:39] Okay, good, good, good. So before doing the Peace Corps, what, a little bit of your background. You talked a little bit about education and going abroad. Your childhood or any other experiences relevant to going into Peace Corps?

LEMBERT: [00:03:54] Well, I don't know that they actually contributed to, uh. I grew up in a very, you know, the 1950s middle class, small town of Vancouver, Washington, right across the river from Portland, Oregon. I was the second of five in my family. My dad was a pediatrician. My mom was a housewife. I went to private Catholic schools from first grade up through 12 years of age. But I had had a Jesuit priest, uh, mister, who in my junior year taught sociology and was talking about Brown versus Board of Education and, and we were studying poverty and stuff. And he ended up then the next year going to Africa. And that made a big impact on me. He kind of put his money where his mouth was.

GALL: [00:05:05] Okay. Yeah.

LEMBERT: [00:05:06] Yeah.

GALL: [00:05:07] So a kind of a role model, influencer.

LEMBERT: [00:05:10] Yeah. Then I went to a small college in cow country and in central Washington and didn't think too much, too much about. Well, we were talking a lot about the war and about the military industrial complex and all those kinds of things. But it wasn't until I came back from Holland my senior year that I had a roommate who, and we talked a lot about all the situation, the world situation, and what we could do. And went middle of winter. All of a sudden, here's this sign by the student union, Peace Corps recruitment center.

LEMBERT: [00:05:59] So stopped in to get more information. And came back, filled out the stuff, and took the language test and applied. And I wanted to, I know that's one of the other thing is I chose Central South America as a

primary simply because I figured, you know, Mr. Practical, that it would be something that I might be able to use the language when I came back. India was second and just for the total change of culture, and I thought that was very kind of interesting. And then Africa was third.

GALL: [00:06:51] Hmm. That's pretty interesting. So, um. So you did hear about the Peace Corps. It sounds like we've covered this through the recruitment. What made you want to apply?

LEMBERT: [00:07:04] Yeah, and I guess I had seen enough and maybe read little blurbs about this Peace Corps that was pretty new. And it sounded very, you know, very interesting. And being a Kennedy person spent, probably paid more attention to it.

GALL: [00:07:27] Yeah.

LEMBERT: [00:07:28] But when I saw the sign, it's like, oh, okay, let's, let's go check it out.

GALL: [00:07:36] So what was your reaction when you were accepted?

LEMBERT: [00:07:39] Well, so I had applied and hadn't heard anything, hadn't heard anything. Worried about the draft. So I extended, I took fewer hours my sophomore, my, uh, my senior spring quarter and I went to summer school to keep my 2-A classification. And about halfway through the summer, I was visiting a lady's house over in Seattle. And I got a call from one of my roommates and said, this guy from Washington, D.C., called. And so I asked if I could use the phone, called back, and they were saying, welcome, you've been accepted to Honduras. And honestly, I would have to say, okay, I got to get to the library and find out exactly where Honduras is.

LEMBERT: [00:08:36] But I knew it was Spanish speaking and I knew, you know, he told me a few things and that I was going to be working in co-ops and which was, I mean, at least it had a little bit to do with my major at the time of business, international business. But so I knew that and I was just, yeah, happy and kind of scared.

GALL: [00:09:01] Mm hmm. So this was in the summer of '69?

LEMBERT: [00:09:06] This was in the summer of '69, and it was probably mid-July. It would be my guess.

GALL: [00:09:13] Yeah. Okay.

LEMBERT: [00:09:15] Because it was still getting a little bit late in this summer session and I was running out of options.

GALL: [00:09:23] So you had, you stated already that you had some preference about where to go and you talked a little bit about wanting to, the practical aspect of being in Central America or South America. And so just tell us for the record, the project you were invited to join.

LEMBERT: [00:09:42] Okay. So I was, I was, uh, and I didn't know anything about it until actually weeks after we got into country, exactly what it would entail. But there was a national federation of credit and savings cooperatives that was, had about 125 units. And we were going to be trained to basically do auditing for the co-ops, but also do some instruction in cooperation and savings and training to the credit committees and some of the operations of the credit union. What I didn't know is, well, I'll talk about that later, but yeah.

GALL: [00:10:33] So, um. So you knew that you were going to go into the credit when you got the phone call?

LEMBERT: [00:10:38] Yes. Yes, I knew when I got, when I got that, and he explained a little bit about that. It sounded, it sounded great, you know.

GALL: [00:10:47] Good. And so, um. I just want to make sure we're still going. That's good. Okay. So. So training. We'll talk a little bit about when and where you were trained and prepped.

LEMBERT: [00:11:00] Okay. So we flew into to San Juan, Puerto Rico. And as I remember, I was totally shocked that they actually, everybody just spoke

Spanish in San Juan, even though I knew it was American, American protectorate or American, you know, satellite or whatever. And then I went to the hotel and they gave us a few language things and I knew *buenos días*, that was it, in Spanish, and met some of the other some of the other people. And then we started with the little field trips of three days to get to Arecibo and we went up to the camp. And then we found out which language classes we would be in. And I was in a small one of four people, and I guess that French was the common language that we had all studied.

LEMBERT: [00:12:03] But so we had, it was hours of no books, no, very little writing. Sometimes the professors or the instructors would come in with prompts, but we basically started out our day one standing up and repeating after the professor and *buenos días*, how are you and what's your name and all that kind of stuff. And so it was all, it was all verbal, which was very interesting for me. I expected books and all that kind of stuff.

LEMBERT: [00:12:41] And then part of the day was spent learning the accounting system for the co-ops, learning about Central America, doing other group related type of activities, interactions, and who's the last person on the island. And we also then had a small, our, our credit union folks. We still had a small introduction to agriculture. A couple of weeks of basic, basic agriculture to the crops that were grown, rice, beans, corn, tomatoes, and stuff like that.

GALL: [00:13:25] Was it because the co-ops were related around the agriculture?

LEMBERT: [00:13:28] No. No, it was not. It was I think just because we were going to be in towns and be working with other people and a lot of the folks that we were going to be working with were coffee growers and agricultural folks that were members of the co-op.

GALL: [00:13:43] Oh, okay.

LEMBERT: [00:13:44] So it would give us a little bit of an idea, something to talk with them about. And then actually later it also led me to try planting some of my own crops in my first site.

GALL: [00:13:59] So, um. So in what extent did the training adequately prepare you for?

LEMBERT: [00:14:06] Um. Well, even though I didn't have confidence that I could, by the time it came to go into country, I could make my way through different things and ask enough questions that I could function at a basic level. Couldn't understand, not a good language person. So it was a slow process, but it gave me enough of an understanding. And then with the, with the co-op training, you know, we had the, we had our sheets of paper and our information on the, to do the auditing and stuff. We were familiar enough with that to be able to go to a smaller co-op and.

GALL: [00:15:02] Oh, okay.

LEMBERT: [00:15:03] Doing some of that, doing some of that work. And of course, that was an ongoing, ongoing process.

GALL: [00:15:10] So how did you interact with other volunteers and host country people during training?

LEMBERT: [00:15:17] Well, of course, you met tons of people. There were 42 in our group and a lot of it centered around the people that you were in language class with. Number one, because those are the people that you spent most time with. And then the people were going to be in the, working for FACACH [Federacion de Cooperativas de Ahorro y Credito de Honduras], the credit union. Those were other people that you spent more time with. But throughout, I think, you know, at least got to know a lot of different people from everywhere across the United States and in a lot of different walks of life. And, uh, and it was, that was a real bonus. We liked, you know, the trainers were excellent.

GALL: [00:16:07] Did you have any trainers from FACACH come to camp or?

LEMBERT: [00:16:11] Not that I, not that I remember. Not that I remember. It was somebody that, uh, I think he actually maybe was from, on the staff in Honduras that came and did some of it. But I don't remember meeting because I, you know, I would have noticed if they got it when we got into country that, oh yeah, you were at our training, because there weren't that many. They didn't have that much staff.

GALL: [00:16:43] FACACH didn't?

LEMBERT: [00:16:43] FACACH didn't. So in a sense that we really completed a lot of the, of the staff.

GALL: [00:16:51] All right.

LEMBERT: [00:16:52] For the agency.

GALL: [00:16:54] So the trainers you had were Peace Corps trainers?

LEMBERT: [00:16:58] Yeah, they were. They were Peace Corps trainers.

GALL: [00:17:00] So, um.

LEMBERT: [00:17:02] At least as far as I remember.

GALL: [00:17:03] Yeah. So. So what was your initial introduction to the country like?

LEMBERT: [00:17:13] Oh, boy. Well, the initial was the airplane ride from hell coming down the mountain thinking for sure we were going to crash in an old DC-6 that had rickety seats and some of the seats didn't work and the others were okay. And we were so close to the ground the whole way down, I thought, oh my God, if there's an air, you know, air pocket or something, we're going to die. But getting there and getting out and my first impression was like, wow, this is a tropical paradise. There are palm trees, warm air, and it didn't smell that bad. And it was just very interesting. And of course, it was Tegucigalpa. So it was, it was pretty busy.

GALL: [00:18:09] Yeah.

LEMBERT: [00:18:11] And I was just like taking everything, I was taking everything in. And at that point, you know, I was really liked what I, what I saw. It was someplace different and people seem okay and it just said, all right, you know, this is going to, this is going to be okay.

GALL: [00:18:32] Good, good, good. Okay. And so how did Peace Corps staff play a role in facilitating your entry?

LEMBERT: [00:18:45] Well, they, they had us do a little stay in a local little bed and breakfast type place. So we got more, but we were still together and we could experience that together and get a little bit of introduction to the, to the life in Tegucigalpa. And then, then later when we went to the Azteca ranch outside of Comayagua and we had more classes and, as I remember, people that came and gave certain talks and they were all facilitated by the, by our Peace Corps staff. And then had a few private conversations too, you know, how are you doing and where are you from? And they all seemed like people. The doctor that was there, I don't remember his name, but it all seemed like, oh, there's, these are people that you can go to if you have an issue and they're here to, they're here to help you.

GALL: [00:19:53] Okay. So, um, and any particular reaction to the town that you were assigned to the first time you went?

LEMBERT: [00:20:02] Well, I had no idea. I knew it was a small little town. And, um, and I sometimes wonder, you know, why they picked that. But when I, I rode up with one of the supervisors of FACACH and he had already, I had a place to stay actually, so I didn't have to go looking for a place to rent or that. But as we crossed one river and then crossed another river and probably crossed the same river for the third and the fourth and the fifth time. And it took about an hour. It was not supposed to be that far away, but it was. It took an hour, a little over an hour and 15 minutes, hour and a half to get there and up, up, up the mountain.

LEMBERT: [00:21:00] And here was this little village that, at the most it had 150, 200 people. And it was just, there was a plaza. There was just a, the central field with a road going through it. A little church on the left-hand side. And the house that I was going to stay in was right there. So I went up there and I met Dona Maria and I rented a room from her. She was a widow and had, she was probably, she was a, a matron.

GALL: [00:21:43] A midwife, no?

LEMBERT: [00:21:45] No, matron of the village.

GALL: [00:21:47] Oh, okay.

LEMBERT: [00:21:47] She was like 78 or 80 or something like that. And, uh, and Paco, my direct, my FACACH director, you know, did the introductions and we talked and all that kind of stuff. And Paco didn't speak any, any Spanish, any English, but he made sure that I was understanding. And there was a, the grandson of this lady became my, my mentor and my good friend. He was a year younger than I was. But she showed me, eventually ended up showing me the ropes and stuff. And here was this one little room and, uh, and a bed and a little table and chair with a, with a window. And, you know, then Paco left and it's like, ahh!

GALL: [00:22:51] Okay.

LEMBERT: [00:22:53] But it was a beautiful setting, on the other hand. Pine trees.

GALL: [00:22:58] Oh, good.

LEMBERT: [00:22:59] Yeah, a lot of pine trees. And it was up high and it was at about 4,000 feet.

GALL: [00:23:07] So what were the specifics of the job to which you were assigned?

LEMBERT: [00:23:13] At this point, it was kind of open ended because as I found out, the co-op that I was attached to was only open twice a month, and

there was no physical space for the co-op and it was all very rural campesino, coffee farmer or cart workers in the coffee. There was no other, no other. I mean, they all raised corn and their own corn and rice and beans and that, but that was it. So I eventually, it wasn't until a little bit, a couple of weeks before I got a chance to look at the books. And it was, everything was really simple. And I thought, okay, I'm going to have to gear everything down. And that was basically my quote.

LEMBERT: [00:24:17] But my, my other unspoken expectation or, or opportunity was to do community development and get to know the community and do whatever might make sense to the people who live there.

GALL: [00:24:36] Like what?

LEMBERT: [00:24:37] Like there was a, um, there was a consumer, a small consumer co-op, about a five mile walk away from the village. And they could, they needed some help and kind of clarification and validation, I guess too. And they had, they sold rice and beans and gunny sacks and rope and just very basic agricultural, hoes and machetes and things like that. And help with monitoring the inventory, looking for other things that people might want to buy and where to buy, where to buy them. And then in the, in the mountains, because they all had little 5 to 10 acre coffee farms, the people in Las Arenas, the village, they were, there were enough that lived in the mountains that they had started a little school, a one room schoolhouse, but had ran out of money.

LEMBERT: [00:25:55] And there had been a volunteer previously who had worked in the valley and came up to Honduras, and he was from New Mexico and he was Spanish speaking, and married a Honduran woman. And so, you know, it was like, oh great, this is what I'm following. But helping to finish that school. And then in the village, they had a two-room schoolhouse that was in not the best of shape.

GALL: [00:26:25] Mm hmm.

LEMBERT: [00:26:25] And so by the time I, I also helped to organize and get some money to, uh, to start the. It was about a three-room schoolhouse but

had some other modern features like an office for the teacher and that kind of thing.

LEMBERT: [00:26:46] But we, we only had water 6 months out of the year, but I think the volunteer before me or even before that or somebody had come up and there was a, we had a gravity flow system with one spigot to each house. And that was, that was just during the rainy season. The rest of the time there was a creek fairly nearby that you had to pull your water and stuff, so that it was, there was no. In terms of the school, there's no bathrooms or anything that was going to go in there. But I ended up using the CARE, funds from CARE and from the American embassy to buy supplies to finish the roof in the one room classroom in the mountains, which the, which the dads carried up on their friggin' backs for miles, the metal to be used. And they completed that.

LEMBERT: [00:27:56] And we had a big ceremony before I left. I was there for, I was there for about 11 months. And then we had the basic, the foundation started on the school.

GALL: [00:28:09] Wow.

LEMBERT: [00:28:09] In our, in the village. So it was, you know, I had a lot of extra time in terms of not, not having to, a whole bunch of co-ops to.

GALL: [00:28:22] Oh, okay.

LEMBERT: [00:28:23] Yeah.

GALL: [00:28:24] And did you want to talk a little bit about your second assignment?

LEMBERT: [00:28:28] Yeah. Okay. So, so for the second year, we, we ended up getting some jeeps from the Panama program.

GALL: [00:28:39] And why don't you explain that a little bit more, like from Peace Corps Panama?

LEMBERT: [00:28:45] From Peace Corps Panama.

GALL: [00:28:47] Yeah.

LEMBERT: [00:28:47] Because Peace Corps Panama was leaving Peace Corps for political or.

GALL: [00:28:52] Uh huh.

LEMBERT: [00:28:54] Political issues. And I think I believe we got somewhere around like six jeeps. And so then my Spanish was better and then I moved from the central part of Honduras to kind of the southwest part of Honduras and had a district of six, six or seven co-ops. And these were larger co-ops that were opened every day.

GALL: [00:29:32] Oh, okay.

LEMBERT: [00:29:33] Yeah. So I, then I became more of a, of a, what you call an extensionist in agriculture. I mean, a co-op extensionist and truly going around and doing two or three days each place, auditing their books and getting any name for any information and being the spokes, you know, going into the central office. And if anybody, if there are any issues that the, that the people needed additional help with. And occasionally I got support from the, their full-time people were more than willing to come out and help participate in, oh, a pep talk or a sponsorship, you know, membership building kind of thing.

GALL: [00:30:27] So you got more participation from FACACH?

LEMBERT: [00:30:30] I got more, yeah, I got more participation from FACACH because there was a lot more to do and a lot more at stake.

GALL: [00:30:37] Was the workday there six days or five days or flexible?

LEMBERT: [00:30:43] It was flexible. It was flexible. Mainly five days. But then if you were finishing up at some place, you didn't want to have to. You didn't

want to come back. You wanted to make sure you got the work done. And but that, it seems like I just made it fit into a five-day workweek.

GALL: [00:31:15] And, um, oh, what did you do during vacation time? Fill it in as you like.

LEMBERT: [00:31:23] Okay. Well, vacation would also, could be defined as weekend stuff. And there were some of that. But I was always so far away that just coming into the nearest village, the first setting and even the second setting, kind of coming into the capital city of Tegucigalpa, was kind of like a little bit of a vacation where they actually had cold drinks and ice cream and stuff like that. But the first main vacation I took was actually to go home on a surprise visit for Christmas and spent like three weeks in Vancouver and visiting as many friends and family as I could and then going to the East Coast to connect up with all my Peace Corps friends that had also gone home for Christmas and attending one of the Peace Corps volunteer's wedding and just soaking up what was different and new in the United States.

LEMBERT: [00:32:34] At the, near the end of the second year, myself and two buddies went on a trip to, bussed through Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama. Saw the Panama Canal, flew to Peru, didn't have enough money to go to Machu Picchu. Took the bus back up through Ecuador and Colombia, and then flew to the sand islands and then and spent a day and we were flat broke, except for we had a plane ticket back to country. And then in terms of other vacation we just, when we terminated we decided to cash in our plane tickets and traveled by land through Guatemala, Mexico. Henry Africa is in San Francisco and then and took a few buddies up to stay with me in Vancouver. And we went skiing at Mt. Hood and then they flew back to the East Coast.

GALL: [00:33:58] Well, we're down to only a few more questions here. So this is a reflective one. Looking back at your tour of service, what did you think your main accomplishments, regrets, failures, lessons learned? How'd it influence, how did Peace Corps influence your plans of the future?

LEMBERT: [00:34:16] Okay, um.

GALL: [00:34:16] You don't have to answer every one of those.

LEMBERT: [00:34:18] Yes. Yeah. One of the, well, obviously, the main. The main issue, the main learning was that language kind of was everything in terms of communication and getting stuff done. I was kind of an introvert, so that was kind of a drawback. But my second year I was kind of forced to, I was around a lot of people, so my language skills improved, I thought, you know, quite a bit. Plus I had a little more of an urban vocabulary versus a rural. I thought that, um, that the. Basically the co-op had technically collapsed when I first went there. And I thought that by the time I left, we'd put into place enough people who had a little bit of education and a little understanding.

LEMBERT: [00:35:25] You know, you don't loan all the money to your, to your relatives so that somebody else coming to get a loan and then money's all dried up kind of thing. I thought I had resurrected that and a little more confidence in the co-op because people were starting to join that were very hesitant. And the Hondurans would rather keep their money in a mattress than put it in a, you know, in with somebody that they don't know that well. I felt really good about finishing the school and good about being able to start the school for the, for that village because it was education. It was so evident what even a sixth grade education would do for these kids. And my friend Chilo had an eighth grade education and he was by far the most educated.

LEMBERT: [00:36:25] The other, the second year, I felt like maybe I was more productive because I was doing what I was supposed to be doing and I was functioning kind of as an employee of the, of the agency. And so that, that felt good in terms of. I wish I had, I had found better ways to push myself language wise, where I could have learned, been more fluent faster. I felt I could have gotten a lot more stuff done. And I'd had an idea about starting a coffee co-op where everybody would pull their coffee crop together and together the co-op would sell and cut out the middleman. But I just didn't have the means and the language and the stuff and the time to pull that off. So that was one regret, actually. I just read about it in a diary.

GALL: [00:37:29] Oh, really? You kept a diary?

LEMBERT: [00:37:31] It was a pretty good, well, an occasional diary. Yeah, yeah. And what was the other?

GALL: [00:37:38] Well, just how, so I think this is a good one too. How did your Peace Corps experience influence your plans for the future?

LEMBERT: [00:37:46] Oh. Oh well, they totally screwed them up. I came back not knowing at all, kind of, I didn't. I was no longer interested in business. I was interested more in government or doing something in the public sector. And I guess that that was a really, yeah, that was a really good thing because that just felt like it fit more than being in the business world. Yeah.

GALL: [00:38:16] That's a big insight.

LEMBERT: [00:38:17] Yeah.

GALL: [00:00:00] Yeah.

LEMBERT: [00:00:00] Yeah.

GALL: [00:38:20] And how did, just a couple of sentences about how, what did you do then?

LEMBERT: [00:38:25] Did it work out? No, actually I came back home and I was, I had a hard time readjusting, uh, getting myself out the door from. I went back to living with my family but starting to look for work. And there wasn't this plethora of jobs available. But I was able to hook onto a job in rural Oregon, in a rural part of Oregon, outside of Portland, Oregon, with the Valley Migrant League. And I was a job developer. So I'd go around and our object was to serve the people in the migrant stream.

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

LEMBERT: [00:39:16] And if possible, get them into everyday kind of jobs that would be more consistent. We had a winter, what they call a winter day school, where they, when they were not working in the farm in the wintertime, things would slow down and if they were still around, get them in and have them work towards improved English and getting a GED. I didn't do that specific job, but that was what the agency was meant for. And it paid just, it was like Peace Corps wages in the United States, \$467 or something.

GALL: [00:39:57] Yeah. Wow.

LEMBERT: [00:39:59] And then I, I went to Seattle and tried to get on with the city, the state, and it was just a hard time. So I ended up going back into business with South End Corporation for about nine months. Had applied to graduate school social work because that also it, a light went on when I was struggling looking for work and saying oh my God, yeah, that's, you know. So I looked into that and I got accepted to Portland State University, had delayed my entrance. And then I finally, um.

GALL: [00:40:38] Either way.

UNKNOWN: [00:40:40] That's not a bathroom, is it?

GALL: [00:40:41] No.

UNKNOWN: [00:40:42] Okay.

LEMBERT: [00:40:43] Other corner. Um. And had it with business, business world and reactivated my application and then started and got my master's in social work.

GALL: [00:41:00] Great. Okay. So overall, how do you assess your service in light of three goals of the Peace Corps, uh, to, I'll just read all three, okay?

LEMBERT: [00:41:14] Okay.

GALL: [00:41:14] One is to provide technical assistance when requested. Two is to promote better understanding of Americans. Three is, C is to promote better understanding of other people by Americans. So technical assistance.

LEMBERT: [00:41:30] Yeah, technical assistance. While it took a while, took a while. By the second year I was, I was able to answer almost every question and help with accounting issues and that kind of stuff. So I felt like I was, I felt like I truly was starting to function as an employee of the federation of credit unions. Uh. What was the second?

GALL: [00:42:02] The better understanding of Americans by the host country.

LEMBERT: [00:42:06] So I resisted. Through USAID, there was all kinds that you could, you could get.

GALL: [00:42:13] Oh yeah.

LEMBERT: [00:42:14] A projector and the movies. And what I heard from them was that they were like, you know, middle America, you know, with kitchens that just, you know, it just, it just seemed ludicrous. So I never, I never did any of that. And it was mostly through talking. And people asking questions and you, you would answer them as best you could. And saying, well, it's a big country and here we do this. And another part of the country, they might do that, but we're all Americans. Um.

GALL: [00:42:56] And then the better understanding of other people for Americans.

LEMBERT: [00:43:01] Well, yeah. And that's.

GALL: [00:43:02] By Americans.

LEMBERT: [00:43:02] Ever since. By Americans. Uh, certainly after I came back. The, you know, talked a lot about issues that people had and the misconceptions. Tried to pop the bubble that, you know, no, that's not really correct. And it kind of feels still in today's, in 19, you know, 2019,

that it has to be done all over again, especially with the view of migrants coming into the country. But, um, yeah, there was nothing formal that I could put my finger on that I did.

GALL: [00:43:45] Okay. Yeah. Through the years, have you continued to have any kind of involvement with your country of service or contact with people from that country? Any continuing Peace Corps involvement and anything particular related to that third goal of understanding other people by Americans?

LEMBERT: [00:44:08] Um. Not so, not so much. At first, uh, yes. And I joined that RPCV organization and got the magazines and got the t-shirt. The best job you ever, you know, the hardest job you'll ever love kind of thing and would talk about Peace Corps whenever, you know, whenever I perceived that anybody would, you know, was that really interested in listening. Um. But then, then I got involved in my career and that was pretty consuming so that and kids and stuff. For a while with a social, through the social worker networks, I started to get involved with some information about, you know, homeless kids in South America and that kind of thing, but I just didn't, I just didn't have the time to be consistent at it.

LEMBERT: [00:45:14] I haven't, regretfully, kept up with like Chilo and found out how things have gone for him over the years. I did, we did have a visit at one of my schools from Honduran teachers. So I was able to take them around and talk a lot about the differences in the countries and the form of education and stuff like that. And that was, that was really a nice, that was great. But I contribute to a health, a private health organization that does stuff in Honduras. And, you know, I guess I would hope especially we're at a reunion right now that to, you know, get a little more involved in terms of both money and interest. And I've been updating, trying to update myself more on what's going on in the country.

GALL: [00:46:31] All right. Here is your \$64 million question. What has the effect of your Peace Corps service been on your life?

LEMBERT: [00:46:41] I would say that the Peace Corps has affected every, every bit of my life. And again, there's not like a specific kind of thing other than I always felt after the experience that I had the confidence that I could live anywhere and in any circumstance, and I could, I could do it.

GALL: [00:47:10] Okay.

LEMBERT: [00:47:12] And that has kind of carried, you know, of course, I'm not going to put myself in jeopardy to test that. But it gives you this, this different view of the world. It certainly, when you are abroad and you look back at your country, you see that here is the United States of America and Florida and Portland are a ways away, but they're not that far away. And the things going on in that, in your country, you see more about how they inter-react and stuff and you are all part of the same country.

GALL: [00:47:59] Hmm. That's interesting.

LEMBERT: [00:48:02] It kind of shrinks, kind of shrinks the United States.

GALL: [00:48:07] Okay. That's good. That's interesting. Yeah. I'm just going to assume, like, because had you never left the Northwest, you might not have seen that, that unification of the States. Or am I putting words into your mouth?

LEMBERT: [00:48:23] Yes. Well, okay, no. Well, because I had had that experience, I guess I had had that experience in Europe also, being able to look back. But from, this was now from the Southern viewpoint and all the country that led up to it and Mexico and, and it was like, oh, this is North America. And part of North America is the United States. But a lot of people can, you know, made the distinction between, oh, you're North American or South American, never, you know, never, not in anybody's vocabulary. And so that was, it was similar, but it was a little different perspective of the country seen from the south looking up.

GALL: [00:49:12] Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

LEMBERT: [00:49:14] You know? Yeah.

GALL: [00:49:18] Great. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about?

LEMBERT: [00:49:24] Um, like you always wish that you could have done more and that you were the kind of person that could just knock down barriers and things like that.

GALL: [00:49:35] Yeah, yeah.

LEMBERT: [00:49:36] And, uh. But, but you can't beat yourself up. You just do what you can do, you can do. And I have always felt like I learned much more than I gave, you know, and that just, just stuck with me. And we've had, you know, I've influenced my niece to go into and her husband to go into Peace Corps.

GALL: [00:50:07] Oh!

LEMBERT: [00:50:07] In Jamaica. And so, and some of my grandkids started to ask questions about, you know, what was this? What was that about? You know, what was that about? Well, and surprisingly, you know, the things. And they can't believe that I lived without water and electricity and that that's possible in today's world even.

GALL: [00:50:40] Yeah. Yeah. Well, great. You feel like we've covered enough?

LEMBERT: [00:50:46] Yeah. Yeah.

GALL: [00:50:47] Good. Okay. Well, so I'm just going to reiterate that this interview was conducted with Lon Lember, Honduras 15, 1969 to 1971, by myself, Gail Gall, and it was conducted in Lesterville, Missouri. And today's date is September 10th, 2-0-1-9. And I think that, just checking, that we've covered all the parts of the oral interview. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]