

**Jenifer McCurry Oral History Interview**  
Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Collection  
Administrative Information

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**Biographical Note**

Jenifer McCurry served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Honduras from 1967 to 1969 on community development and public health projects.

**Access**

Open.

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Oral History Interview

with

Jenifer McCurry

July 8, 2004  
Carpinteria, California

By Barbara Hodgdon

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

HODGDON: [00:00:04] Okay. Today is Thursday, July 10th [8th], 2004. I am Barbara Hodgdon and I am interviewing Jenifer McCurry, who was a Peace Corps volunteer in Honduras, serving between 1967 and 1969. So now that we've got the formalities out of the way, Jenifer, um, let's talk about your going into the Peace Corps. What were you doing when you got the idea of becoming a Peace Corps volunteer?

McCURRY: [00:00:37] I had, uh, my husband and I had gotten married in August, and I was working, volunteering at a Head Start center in Santa Barbara. And he was facing a, um, possible draft notice. And this was in 1966. And he was actually told to go down to Los Angeles and to report at a draft, it might have been an induction center, I'm not sure. And they took a look at a scar on his arm that he'd had surgery on when he was a baby, and then again later as a teenager. And it had left this kind of indented scar. It was nothing serious. I think it was maybe a benign tumor or something that he'd been born with. But the doctors at this

induction center looked at it and they said, you're not eligible for the service.

McCURRY: [00:01:43] In the meantime, while all of this was looming, I had noticed a, um, an ad, an announcement, maybe in the newspaper, for a test in the basement of the Santa Barbara Post Office for the Peace Corps. And so I had suggested that we go and take the test just in case. And so we had done, we had completed the test. And then this news came that he was not going to be eligible for the draft. And lo and behold, we got a call from, I guess, Washington, D.C., that a group was staging in Philadelphia, end of February, for Honduras. They were going to go and train in Puerto Rico. And did we want to go? We looked at each other and said yes.

HODGDON: [00:02:36] Well, from the time you took the test in the basement until the time you got that offer, what length of time had?

McCURRY: [00:02:43] Hardly any.

HODGDON: [00:02:44] That's most unusual.

McCURRY: [00:02:45] It was very strange. And now when I see these 18 page applications that volunteers have to fill in, I'm just astounded how, the ease with which we.

HODGDON: [00:02:56] Did you specify that you wanted a Latin American assignment?

McCURRY: [00:03:00] No, we didn't.

HODGDON: [00:03:01] So you were open to going anywhere?

McCURRY: [00:03:03] Anywhere.

HODGDON: [00:03:03] Did you speak Spanish?

McCURRY: [00:03:04] No, I didn't.

HODGDON: [00:03:06] Did your husband?

McCURRY: [00:03:07] He had had Spanish in school. I had had French and Latin. The first Spanish I had was in Puerto Rico in the training camp. And I loved it.

HODGDON: [00:03:17] So the. You took the test, what month?

McCURRY: [00:03:21] It could have been November, something like that.

HODGDON: [00:03:23] And the invitation came?

McCURRY: [00:03:25] In I think early February. Late January, early February.

HODGDON: [00:03:29] Like three months?

McCURRY: [00:03:30] Yeah, something like that. And we were gone.

HODGDON: [00:03:33] What about medical?

McCURRY: [00:03:34] We were gone by the end of February.

HODGDON: [00:03:35] Cause often that trips people up. What about medical, do you remember?

McCURRY: [00:03:39] They didn't do anything with us in that regard here.

HODGDON: [00:03:42] Okay.

McCURRY: [00:03:43] They just flew. The only thing that we did for medical is we went to our dentist and had the full mouth dental x-ray for identification purposes.

HODGDON: [00:03:58] Okay.

McCURRY: [00:03:59] If anything, you know, ever came to that. So the only medical thing that we did here, we did all of our medical happened in training.

HODGDON: [00:04:06] In training.

McCURRY: [00:04:08] All of our injections and.

HODGDON: [00:04:09] And your training took place?

McCURRY: [00:04:12] In Camp Crozier, Puerto Rico.

HODGDON: [00:04:16] Okay.

McCURRY: [00:04:18] Puerto Rico. And I had in a classroom not too long ago, a former volunteer from Costa Rica came and spoke to my students and she said she was in the same training camp. But a few years before we were.

HODGDON: [00:04:35] Right.

McCURRY: [00:04:36] And they were just focusing on Outward Bound and she was miserable. She just nearly went home. She said that training was the worst part of the entire experience.

HODGDON: [00:04:47] But that was not true for you?

McCURRY: [00:04:48] Not true for us at all. They'd shifted from Outward Bound to community development. Heavy focus on language. We had, um.

HODGDON: [00:04:58] How long was your training program?

McCURRY: [00:05:01] Three months.

HODGDON: [00:05:01] A three month training. And all of it was in Puerto Rico?

McCURRY: [00:05:04] All of it in Camp Crozier. And I think that the name Crozier, he was the first volunteer to be killed in action, C-R-O-Z-I-E-R. His first

name might have been David. I'm not entirely sure. It was in a rainforest in the southern part of Puerto Rico. And I loved it. We had a little bit of animal husbandry. We had community development techniques. We had a lot of language. We had three experiences out in the field where we were given the name of a barrio somewhere. We had to find it on the map. We had a general drop off location and from there we had to make our way out to the site that we were given and find some family that would take us in. And we had three visits out there and we were, um, the staff of the, the trainers came and made visits to all of us in our sites where we were sent so they could see if we would, if we looked like good, resourceful Peace Corps material.

HODGDON: [00:06:23] So you had to go out and find a family to live with? And how long did you live or stay with them?

McCURRY: [00:06:29] I think the first time was a couple of days and it may have been two visits that we made, but I'm thinking it was three.

HODGDON: [00:06:36] Okay.

McCURRY: [00:06:39] And so by the time we were done with that, we were all great friends.

HODGDON: [00:06:43] How was your language development at that point?

McCURRY: [00:06:45] It was the stage where you understand way more than you.

HODGDON: [00:06:50] Can say?

McCURRY: [00:06:51] Can say.

HODGDON: [00:06:51] Yeah. Okay.

McCURRY: [00:06:52] Exactly.

HODGDON: [00:06:53] Okay. So your training included not these home stays on a, on an ongoing basis, but short home stays with a family that you yourself found.

McCURRY: [00:07:04] Uh huh. That we went and asked if we could come and stay. Explained that we were training for the Peace Corps, that this was part of our training. And, you know, could we be of any help around the homestead type of thing?

HODGDON: [00:07:19] Okay. Okay.

McCURRY: [00:07:20] Yeah. We found a nice lady that took us in and was happy to see us come back.

HODGDON: [00:07:26] Okay. So what else do you remember from those months of training?

McCURRY: [00:07:31] We were divided into groups for our community development training, and what they did was they gave each group a pregnant sow. And so we were in charge of overseeing the delivery of these little piglets and castrating the males. And, um, I'm not sure if we had to organize for the sale of the piglets, but it turned out that the sow that we were given turned on her piglets. And so we had to take them away and put them with another sow that was willing to nurse them. And so that was kind of interesting.

HODGDON: [00:08:17] That's, that is. How many people?

McCURRY: [00:08:21] She was out of sorts.

HODGDON: [00:08:22] Yeah.

McCURRY: [00:08:23] Maybe 80 people.

HODGDON: [00:08:24] In your training program? And they were all being trained to go to Honduras in community development?

McCURRY: [00:08:30] Honduras VIII. We were the eighth group to go to Honduras. And we had some technical city planners, but most of the people were rural CD, rural community development.

HODGDON: [00:08:45] Okay.

McCURRY: [00:08:47] And it was fun. We bonded. We went, after the three months in Honduras [Puerto Rico], we went to Miami for a few days and regrouped. And from there we flew down.

HODGDON: [00:08:59] Right. What do you remember about the selection process or the deselection process?

McCURRY: [00:09:07] Yeah, deselection, that's what it.

HODGDON: [00:09:07] In those days, yeah, right.

McCURRY: [00:09:11] Absolutely. I think that most of the people went. I remember a few people were deselected and not sure why. And I remember one single girl and I don't know if they were concerned for her safety or what the issue was, but she really wanted to go and she wasn't able to. We had an engaged couple who got married while they were in the training camp right there in Puerto Rico. And, um. Yeah. Jan Russell and Vince Morabito. Jan and Vince Morabito, by the time they left.

HODGDON: [00:09:52] What were your, what was your housing like during training?

McCURRY: [00:09:55] We had little cabins that were thin walled and they were complete with little geckos on the wall. And I was not friendly with lizards or any of that, so I had to get used to that. Lots of rain. But it was fun. It was, it was just.

HODGDON: [00:10:14] As you reflect back on it, do you feel that the training was appropriate for the circumstances that you would later find yourself in?

McCURRY: [00:10:26] I think that it was. I think that we probably could have used, um. Oh, the language training was excellent. They were using the

Foreign Service Institute method of memorizing and repeating dialogs, and it stuck, like memorizing a script. And so I think that we were learning to establish cooperatives. And my husband was very active in that when we got to Honduras, so that was good. We learned a little bookkeeping for that, double entry bookkeeping.

HODGDON: [00:11:15] Okay.

McCURRY: [00:11:15] We had excellent trainers. The language staff was really good. They took great pains to make sure that we had a representation of people from all over the Spanish speaking world, which was very nice.

HODGDON: [00:11:32] At the time you went into the Peace Corps, what background did you bring at that point? Did you bring rural background or, um, what had you done prior to joining the Peace Corps?

McCURRY: [00:11:45] I had not done much. I had worked. I had jobs. The secretaries had worked at the medical clinic in Santa Barbara. I was a newly naturalized citizen.

HODGDON: [00:11:58] And a newly naturalized citizen from?

McCURRY: [00:12:00] From England. And I had not really wanted to do that, but I had done it sort of under duress. But I was advised in the courthouse that because my mother had been naturalized, that I should be. I was traveling to Australia and I needed a passport. And so I did a quickie naturalization thing down at the Federal building in Los Angeles. And I'd been a poli sci major. I had an AA degree from City College at that point and I was working in Head Start. I was a newlywed and thinking of going back to school. And then the whole Peace Corps concept arose in our lives and we were very excited to do it.

HODGDON: [00:12:51] Right. Right.

McCURRY: [00:12:54] We definitely subscribed to the ideals.

HODGDON: [00:12:57] Right. So after three months of training in Puerto Rico, you and roughly 80 others.

McCURRY: [00:13:06] Something like that.

HODGDON: [00:13:07] Headed to Honduras. And when did you actually arrive in Honduras?

McCURRY: [00:13:12] It was.

HODGDON: [00:13:13] What month?

McCURRY: [00:13:14] I think the middle of June.

HODGDON: [00:13:16] Okay.

McCURRY: [00:13:16] Because at the time that we were in Miami, it was the Seven Day War in Israel. And I remember people hopping around on the beach, retirees complaining about whether the hot sand was worse than the [inaudible]. So that marked our time there. We weren't there for very long, a few days. Just kind of regrouping.

HODGDON: [00:13:43] Yeah, right.

McCURRY: [00:13:44] Getting ready to.

HODGDON: [00:13:46] So what are your first impressions of arriving in Honduras?

McCURRY: [00:13:49] Well, we flew into the capital and it was, um, Tegucigalpa is much cooler than the north coast where we were assigned. We found out our assignments and we had asked to be on the coast. And sure enough, they sent us up to the north coast. We were sent to Puerto Cortes. I think when we arrived we probably stayed in Tegucigalpa for a few days as we got organized and transportation was arranged for us to all be sent out to our sites. Some went over land. We actually flew from Tegucigalpa up to San Pedro Sula, and, um, when we got off the plane

in San Pedro, it was, it was like opening the door to an oven and you just kind of stay there.

HODGDON: [00:14:48] Uh huh, uh huh.

McCURRY: [00:14:49] It was so hot.

HODGDON: [00:14:51] Right. Now, were you the only ones that were assigned to that location?

McCURRY: [00:14:56] We were the only ones that were assigned to Puerto Cortes. But there were a few other people that were in San Pedro and there were, um, people in places around. But we were the only ones there.

HODGDON: [00:15:12] Had any other Peace Corps volunteers preceded you in that area?

McCURRY: [00:15:16] Yes, they had. There was a couple from New York, Bill and Judy Grann, I think their name was, G-R-A-N-N, and they were leaving just as we were arriving.

HODGDON: [00:15:27] So were you taking their assignment, so to speak, or just? It was a different?

McCURRY: [00:15:32] Yeah.

HODGDON: [00:15:33] Okay.

McCURRY: [00:15:33] I don't even know what their assignment was. We just got there and checked into the hotel on the main square and set about finding a place to live. And we pretty much did everything on foot. Cortes was at that point the fourth largest city in the country. It was 28,000 population, and Honduras was maybe six or 7 million. It's about the size of Mississippi. So it was bigger, Los Angeles, greater Los Angeles area had more population than the country. And that's, uh, the infrastructure wasn't developed back in the sixties.

HODGDON: [00:16:23] Right.

McCURRY: [00:16:24] Which is why we were flown up to the north. But what a sweet country.

HODGDON: [00:16:32] What are your memories of arriving at your Cortes, your assignment city?

McCURRY: [00:16:38] Yeah. We were given our assignments in Tegucigalpa, and four women, I was one of four who were assigned to the Honduran welfare agency, was going to start up a *comedor infantil*. And so I was happy to have that assignment because I kind of liked the idea of framework more than just going out and creating something. So the impressions that I had of arriving in Cortez was, um, there was one paved street that went through. Everything else was dirt road. It was a port city. It is a port city. A lot of bananas exported from there. It's a little smaller than La Ceiba, the big port city in the north. But nonetheless, it was very active, um, very tropical.

McCURRY: [00:17:46] The bus ride directly north from San Pedro Sula up to Puerto Cortes was pure jungle, both sides of the bus. And I can just still smell that diesel from the bus and the stops along the way. And little kids with big trays held over their heads coming down the aisle of the bus, selling their food, snacks.

HODGDON: [00:18:15] Right.

McCURRY: [00:18:16] Those little open face kind of tostada sort of things. Just so cute. Um. I was a little bewildered. How are we going to survive this heat? How is this going to be possible? But we, we were a good team and we found a nice place to live way up on stilts because of the rainy season. Lots of people, lots and lots of the houses were up on stilts and ours was up really high. It was high enough that you could consider the underneath of it a ground floor if you wanted to and.

HODGDON: [00:19:01] How did you find your house and why did you choose that one?

McCURRY: [00:19:04] On foot, walking around, looking, word of mouth, asking for things. We had found one that was out way on the outskirts, but we didn't want to be out. We wanted to be in the, we wanted to be centrally located kind of thing. And so we took this one. It was 60 lempiras a month, \$30 a month. It had two bedrooms, way more space than two people with no children needed. And we just furnished it in rustic ways. We built our bed and got straw mats and put them down, a couple of straw mats in the living room. And noticed that when people would come to visit us, they would always walk around the mats. And then we realized those are used for beds. You wouldn't walk right across somebody's bed. We were using it as a rug.

HODGDON: [00:20:04] Right. Did you have running water and electricity?

McCURRY: [00:20:10] We had running water and we had electricity. We had cold water. We didn't have any hot water. And the house was built right next to another one. The roofs met in the middle and whenever there was heavy rain, it just poured down the valley of the two roofs. And we'd often go down there in bathing suits and have a really great shower down there because the force of the water was enormous. And then sure enough, the back yard would fill up and it would just be kind of a swamp. There was, uh, outside of the living room window, there was a palm tree and a roof, right, a tin roof. And there was an iguana that would come and bask in the sun on the top of that roof. And then I guess he'd go back via the palm tree. I'm not sure what he did, but I made peace with reptiles. I got some practice in training.

HODGDON: [00:21:12] Right.

McCURRY: [00:21:12] Little geckos on the wall.

HODGDON: [00:21:14] Right, right. What about cooking?

McCURRY: [00:21:18] Cooking. What we did was we bought a kerosene stove, and we were given a water filter, Peace Corps issued, along with bicycles and a book locker. And so we just used that. And every now and again, I

don't know if you had a kerosene burning stove when you were in Malawi, but sometimes they would just kind of go poof and whatever was on top was just covered with this black, greasy soot.

HODGDON: [00:21:56] So did you and your husband both do the cooking?

McCURRY: [00:21:59] Um, I think I probably did most of it. We didn't have a refrigerator, but we had, uh. He built a little cage with wood and netting for the food that we, you know, like whatever things, nonperishable things that we would keep, to keep the cucarachas out. I've never seen cockroaches that long. We'd measure them, you know, two and a half inches. No problem. And we discovered that they would eat, they'd get into the dirty clothes basket and eat. If you had food spilled on a T-shirt, there would be holes where the food had been.

HODGDON: [00:22:41] Oh my goodness.

McCURRY: [00:22:42] They would get in and just.

HODGDON: [00:22:45] Do their thing.

McCURRY: [00:22:46] Do their thing, just eat whatever was there. And there would be a time in the year when they would fly. They'd come out at night and there was no getting rid of them. You know, they were just part of the scene.

HODGDON: [00:23:00] Right. Right.

McCURRY: [00:23:02] But you get used to that kind of thing. What I did was go to the market every day, particularly, and get what we were going to have and prepare it. And that was that. We lived very simply.

HODGDON: [00:23:17] Yeah. In terms of the work you ended up doing. Can you describe, you know, how you launched your projects and what they were like?

McCURRY: [00:23:27] Yeah. Here's what happened with that. I, um, went as soon as we got to Puerto Cortes, I went and introduced myself to Maria Elena Argentina de Medina, and she was the head of the *comedor infantil*. And my job was to set up a Head Start type program for the younger siblings of all of the school age kids, keep them busy and learning and giving them some kind of educational structure. And then at noon, their older siblings would come and everyone was served a hot meal. And the *comedor* was supplied with some funds from the Bienestar Social, the welfare agency, from the national government and CARE. And so periodically we would get a shipment, a delivery from CARE, and it was kind of appalling.

McCURRY: [00:24:47] Sometimes they would slash these gunny sacks and lift them up and weevils and things would crawl out, and they'd do that to let all of those things get out of there. So I guess they must have been packaged here for the silos and those varmints were in there, I don't know. But we'd get trigo, sometimes we get boxes of corn flakes, *cornflakes*, and they'd cook that in hot milk. It was kind of interesting. What they'd do most every day was get a couple of big bones from the meat market, very little meat on them. Cook them, make a very thin soup, put vegetables in it, and put trigo in it. And that would pretty much be, a plate of that would be what these children would eat.

HODGDON: [00:25:45] And how many children did you typically feed?

McCURRY: [00:25:48] I think there were maybe 90 or something like that. It was a big group when everyone came. I had a much smaller group. But what happened was that I, um, in visiting in the evening, my husband and I went out and we're kind of trying to visit the city elders and introduce ourselves. And we went to see Dr. Pena and he was the head of the health center. And this was also a government run health center. And he was so thrilled to meet volunteers. He apparently hadn't met the ones that had been there, that were already there, and they left as soon as we had come. I don't know what their assignments were even, but he invited me to bring those children that I had over a period of months to give them physicals.

HODGDON: [00:26:42] Hmm.

McCURRY: [00:26:43] And then in the afternoon, and I would only be able to take maybe five at a time, in the afternoon I would go with the nurse from the health center, Estellita. And we would go and find their mothers. And we discussed nutrition and birth control, and he invited me to make available to them IUDs.

HODGDON: [00:27:11] Mm hmm.

McCURRY: [00:27:12] I have always been very sorry that I didn't keep a journal of all of this because it was so fascinating. There wasn't one child that wasn't severely anemic. Lots of them had parasites. When we'd go to see the mothers, some of them, they were so young and they looked so old, and some of them didn't know whether they'd had 11 children and two had died, or if they'd had 12 children and three had died, that kind of thing. They pretty much had a baby a year and they were very suspicious of me discussing birth control. Um, I was 21. I was a definite gringa. I was very blond. I was, I had no children of my own.

HODGDON: [00:28:08] Mm hmm. And you lacked credibility?

McCURRY: [00:28:13] I lacked credibility. And they were just suspicious. And with infant mortality being so high, they didn't want to not surround themselves with their own children.

HODGDON: [00:28:26] Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

McCURRY: [00:28:28] They didn't want to suddenly not have children if they were going to be losing them.

HODGDON: [00:28:35] Right.

McCURRY: [00:28:36] At a steady rate. And at that point they, Honduras was the country of 30 percent, it was 30 percent literacy, 30 percent infant mortality. I think the statistics, from what I've seen on the internet, those statistics have changed dramatically, which is really a good thing.

HODGDON: [00:29:00] Mm hmm.

McCURRY: [00:29:01] So I worked with those kids in those families, and we would bring nutritional tips to them. But people only did what they could do anyway. It wasn't that they weren't feeding their children properly because they didn't know how. It's because they couldn't. You know, the.

HODGDON: [00:29:27] Just the economics?

McCURRY: [00:29:29] The economics were so severe.

HODGDON: [00:29:31] Mm hmm.

McCURRY: [00:29:31] It was hand-to-mouth and it didn't go around.

HODGDON: [00:29:35] Right. Did you continue to do that same work throughout your two years?

McCURRY: [00:29:39] Well, here's what happened. We had our annual conference.

HODGDON: [00:29:42] Stop just a second.

McCURRY: [00:29:44] Okay.

HODGDON: [00:29:45] We had our first year conference in Tegucigalpa. All of the Group XIII volunteers were there, and the four of us who were assigned to the national welfare agency were invited to go and speak to the director in her office in the capital. It was a very auspicious meeting and she told us to speak freely and tell us what was going on. And she wanted our observations. And what I had observed and subsequently shared with her, I've kind of questioned that ever since, CARE products were being sold around the town. And often these little *tiendas*, little *chitas* they were called, um, you'd see cans of oil with the flag and the symbol of hands across the sea. And it seemed really wrong to me and I shared that. And when I shared that, the result was that CARE pulled its products out. It stopped supporting that *comedor infantil*.

HODGDON: [00:31:09] Do you think that was as a direct result of your comment?

McCURRY: [00:31:15] A direct result. And so.

HODGDON: [00:31:17] How would CARE?

McCURRY: [00:31:18] I've always be very cautious when people say you can speak freely, because we weren't speaking freely. And when I reflect on that, I think that. [tape break] The head of the *comedor* was not doing anything out of the norm for her life experience or culture. Graft and corruption were completely acceptable and for me to lower the boom and cause a situation that made CARE withdraw food from this *comedor* was, it was very sad. Very sad for me. I was really upset at the result. I thought that I was doing the right thing, but reflecting on it afterwards, I don't think I did the right thing. I think that maybe speaking to her about it, not sharing it with the head of the entire agency, would have maybe been better. You know, she had her reasons, and I'm sorry that that that source of food was stopped.

HODGDON: [00:32:37] Right.

McCURRY: [00:32:38] And she didn't want me to be there anymore. So in the meantime, we had made friends with a man who had, he was a very intelligent social activist. He was a Moreno. They were a group of people that were. They were black people that had their own language. Garifuna was their language. They lived on the north coast. They had absorbed an Indian language from maybe an Arawak kind of language from the Antilles when they'd been dropped off, you know, slave ships, um, hundreds of years before. And they populated the coast of Belize, Honduras, maybe down a little bit to Nicaragua, I'm not sure. But he had come here and studied at the University of San Francisco, and he was an economist and he was all for doing anything that would make the life of his people, the Moreno and then the larger community, better. That was where he was at.

McCURRY: [00:34:03] And so he, at that point, asked me if I would. They lived on a sand, Cortes was on a sandbar. And so the port side was where we were, where the city was. And you crossed in a little bus or something. It would take a long time to ride a bike across, but it was a big sandbar, but their village was on the other side. Travesia was the name of their village, and he asked me to go out there and just do what I had been doing over here. And so that's what I did. And so that became a regular thing. And we started up this little school over there and, um, it worked. It was nice. It was very low key. I don't remember if we got any CARE products or what we did for food over there. I just don't remember that. But we did create a school and children came and they looked forward to it.

HODGDON: [00:35:10] And you commuted by bus every day?

McCURRY: [00:35:14] It was a little Volkswagen bus, and if there were too many people, you know, they'd drive with the door open and somebody standing up and half hanging out and, you know, just hang on tight when you come to the bumpy parts. And it's just amazing how resourceful everybody was.

HODGDON: [00:35:32] You continue to live in your same little house that you found for the entire two years. So roughly halfway through then, not the nature of your work, you continue to do the same kind of work, but you did it in a different setting.

McCURRY: [00:35:46] I did.

HODGDON: [00:35:46] With a different group of people.

McCURRY: [00:35:48] Exactly.

HODGDON: [00:35:49] Yeah.

McCURRY: [00:35:49] Exactly. And these people were bilingual because they spoke their Garifuna, their Moreno language, and they all spoke Spanish and some of them spoke English. There was quite a bit of English there on

the coast with the shipping and everything. But what happened to us was that, um, I got pregnant. I got pregnant with the full knowledge of our Peace Corps doctor and everything. And we had just kind of calculated and thought it would be really great to have a baby and share it with the people. And they were always asking, are you brother and sister, what's wrong with you? That kind of thing. And, um, the Peace Corps director changed and the new director did not want to have a rash of babies, which is understandable. And so he terminated us early. We were terminated in February. We should have gone in May.

HODGDON: [00:36:54] Okay.

McCURRY: [00:36:54] And so what we did was we appealed it and we went to Washington. And after a lot of wrangling, they sent us back.

HODGDON: [00:37:04] How long did that process take?

McCURRY: [00:37:05] I think we were there for six weeks. So February, March, April, they were, we arrived back in April.

HODGDON: [00:37:13] And the baby was due in?

McCURRY: [00:37:15] It was due in May.

HODGDON: [00:37:17] Okay.

McCURRY: [00:37:17] But it was late. It came in June. Yeah, it was almost, I mean, it was kind of crazy. I don't think that would happen now.

HODGDON: [00:37:25] Reinstating you, you mean?

McCURRY: [00:37:27] Well, sending us back at that late stage of pregnancy and all. They tried everything to deselect us or terminate us early. And I think that RhoGAM came into it. I was, my RH factor. I was negative. I had negative, positive. And they developed this anti serum thing in the meantime and that was available, they flew it up from Panama. No problem. That was not an issue. So they said, okay.

HODGDON: [00:38:01] Mm hmm.

McCURRY: [00:38:02] But we went back on the condition that we would extend for a couple of months and that we would live and work in the capital because they felt that that would be safer conditions. Better to have the baby there. And so, um, that's what we did. And I worked in the Peace Corps office.

HODGDON: [00:38:27] Oh, okay.

McCURRY: [00:38:27] And I was overdue and I hardly missed any time at all. And the director was so angry every time he'd see me, I could see him just seething. And then right away, as soon as the baby was born, I was just back at work. We had a little crib she was in. I was typing up the termination reports on Group XIII.

HODGDON: [00:38:56] Huh.

McCURRY: [00:38:56] We came back in time for our termination conference, so we were able to.

HODGDON: [00:39:01] And you attended it?

McCURRY: [00:39:03] We attended it. And we were able to say goodbye to all of our friends, and they were just so astounded that there we were. And then they all left and we stayed. And our baby was born just at the time when Honduras and El Salvador went to war. They had that brief soccer war in 1969. It was over territory, but it was, the event that sparked it was a soccer game. And this was World Cup qualifying games and they ended up having to play the deciding match in Mexico City because it wasn't safe to play it in either of the two countries. And so we had a curfew at night and a blackout and we had to just use a little candle and that baby would wake up at night and we'd, you know, sequester ourselves and blacken everything and sit by candlelight.

HODGDON: [00:40:04] Huh.

McCURRY: [00:40:04] And feed her and change her diapers. And it was so unusual. It was just surreal.

HODGDON: [00:40:11] Right. Were, um.

McCURRY: [00:40:13] Because the capital was where a lot of the action was.

HODGDON: [00:40:16] Yeah, I'm trying to remember, as I recollect in the late sixties, Peace Corps had a family policy. They were recruiting families into the Peace Corps.

McCURRY: [00:40:28] Well, I had friends who were in.

HODGDON: [00:40:30] Were you the only family, though, in Honduras?

McCURRY: [00:40:33] Yeah, I think so. There was a some people in a previous group who had a baby down there. And in our group, some people went home pregnant. But those the babies were not born in country. And, um, I had friends who were in Liberia and they took two children with them and had a third child there. So and because we'd been up front about it, I'd spoken to the Peace Corps doctor at the annual physical and discussed, you know, am I in good shape to have a baby and that type of thing. That was why we.

McCURRY: [00:41:19] I looked, two things. This is a piece of corazon tree. This is, this was given to me by the head of the health clinic.

HODGDON: [00:41:27] Very light.

McCURRY: [00:41:29] Yes. Isn't that unusual?

HODGDON: [00:41:31] Yeah.

McCURRY: [00:41:31] I could polish it and it would be very shiny. This is the in-country newspaper that our, one of our volunteers did. And this is just a montage here. There I am very pregnant.

HODGDON: [00:41:46] Oh.

McCURRY: [00:41:47] This is when Nelson, maybe Jack Vaughn came to visit, but Nelson Rockefeller also came to visit. And there's an article in here about him. I would be really happy to copy that whole thing if you want to send it with the tapes.

HODGDON: [00:42:01] Actually, um, actually, that is, I think that the archives might be interested in this, but that is something that I would direct. Have you discussed directly with the archivist?

McCURRY: [00:42:13] Oh, okay.

HODGDON: [00:42:13] Yeah, they've asked us to do it that way, so, but yes, I would think this would be something that, um, that the archives would be very interested in.

McCURRY: [00:42:21] Yeah, there's some interesting politics in here.

HODGDON: [00:42:26] Uh huh.

McCURRY: [00:42:27] There's a story that we wrote about our experience, "La Catracha That Almost Wasn't."

HODGDON: [00:42:33] Oh, okay, uh huh.

McCURRY: [00:42:34] And *catracha* is the nickname for Hondurans.

HODGDON: [00:42:38] Okay.

McCURRY: [00:42:38] And then this, this is the really interesting thing is Nelson Rockefeller came down and one of the, um. There was a group of nurses who came down after we were there. And this one, Bonnie Hagan, actually came and stayed with us for a while when she first got to Cortes.

HODGDON: [00:42:59] Uh huh.

McCURRY: [00:42:59] I can't remember if she was just there for a little while and then went to a different site, or if she found a place and stayed living in Cortes.

HODGDON: [00:43:11] Uh huh.

McCURRY: [00:43:11] But she kind of spearheaded a meeting with Rockefeller. And I just read this the other night when, you know, preparing for today. And he was very savvy. He didn't choose to meet one-on-one and just have a lot of questions from volunteers. He invited a specific number to come and be one at a table at a luncheon so that that way he could hear from his people. He could get more information that way so that each volunteer would be sharing with table mates that information would be relayed back to him.

HODGDON: [00:43:54] Huh. Uh huh.

McCURRY: [00:43:55] Kind of interesting.

HODGDON: [00:43:56] Right, right. As you reflect back on your two years, um, is there anything in terms of a negative situation that stands out in your mind?

McCURRY: [00:44:09] The biggest negative for me was busting the lady that I worked for at the *comedor*.

HODGDON: [00:44:19] Right.

McCURRY: [00:44:20] And, um, it was just kind of, I think I was just ill advised in doing that.

HODGDON: [00:44:27] Yeah.

McCURRY: [00:44:29] Because I just, I, I can't blame her for what she was doing and I blame myself for that food source being removed. And it was so critical.

HODGDON: [00:44:41] Probably growing out of the cultural differences.

McCURRY: [00:44:45] I think so. I mean, I thought that I was doing the right thing.

HODGDON: [00:44:48] Right, right.

McCURRY: [00:44:51] And you know, in retrospect, I don't think I would. I would do that differently.

HODGDON: [00:44:55] And the flip of that, and the flip of that question, what stands out as a real highlight of your experience?

McCURRY: [00:45:04] Children. Making friends with the children who used to come and play all the time. They were just so cute. I look back on some slides and just these darling little kids.

HODGDON: [00:45:16] Did you make, um, friends with like counterpart types of people, people that you've retained a relationship with?

McCURRY: [00:45:26] Um, I have retained a relationship with a couple of volunteers. Interestingly enough, the first solicitor general in the Clinton administration was in our group.

HODGDON: [00:45:39] Uh huh.

McCURRY: [00:45:40] Drew Days.

HODGDON: [00:45:40] Uh huh.

McCURRY: [00:45:41] He's an attorney. He resigned and didn't stay in with the administration for the second term. But that was interesting. And he actually came out and we've seen him, we saw him while he was serving as solicitor general. So that was really interesting.

McCURRY: [00:46:03] After Hurricane Fifi, which was early seventies, I wrote to our friend Jose Avila, the one who set me up in Travesia, and didn't hear

back from him. And I always was concerned about his welfare. What happened to him? I don't know if he was even still alive. You know, I mean, it's highly possible that the letter never got to him.

HODGDON: [00:46:37] Right.

McCURRY: [00:46:37] There's no way of knowing. And the mail, you just, you know, name the barrio that people live in, and that's the address. So it's kind of sketchy. We had a couple of *estado de sitio*, state of siege situations. Elections go awry and military clampdowns and that, and the actual war with Salvador were kind of hair-raising situations because there were vigilante groups. And it was, it was certainly wise to be really cautious. I'm not a daredevil.

HODGDON: [00:47:28] Right.

McCURRY: [00:47:30] My husband was a very productive volunteer. He worked in co-ops. He'd been an econ major and he just took to that, helping people develop businesses. He worked with the local bus route in Cortes, just the city bus that, it was kind of a long stretched out city. And then it would travel to the little barrios around. And they all got together and they formed an actual route so that they, they made some advances. It was no longer as haphazard as it had been.

HODGDON: [00:48:12] Mm hmm.

McCURRY: [00:48:13] And then he worked with another group of bus drivers who had a route that went out to the Guatemala border. You went right along, it just was a west, directly west to the Guatemala border. And they actually bought a bus. They banded together and they bought a bus, a used school bus from, it came out of New Orleans and was shipped down. And so that was wonderful. It was very, very exciting for everyone. And then he also worked with the fishermen and they formed a co-op and they bought a freezer.

HODGDON: [00:48:56] Ah, uh huh.

McCURRY: [00:48:56] So that was just tremendous strides. And the pride and excitement that went with these groups that they were able to work together was, it was just thrilling to see. You know, they'd paint signs for the fishermen and *cooperativa pesquera de Puerto Cortes*. And it was a lot of excitement with that, a lot of pride.

HODGDON: [00:49:26] And was he able to do that same kind of work once you were transferred into the city?

McCURRY: [00:49:31] When he went to Tegucigalpa, they assigned him to the agrarian reform agency, INA [Instituto Nacional Agrario]. And he went, he had a great time there. He didn't work with co-ops at all. He worked with maybe public information, I'm not sure. But he went out a couple of times on trips, taking transformers and projectors and visiting remote sites. And it was all to do with agrarian reform. He was there for such a short time, you know, just a couple of months that, I don't know. He probably was learning more than he was imparting.

HODGDON: [00:50:13] Right, right.

McCURRY: [00:50:15] Speaking of transformers, one of the best things that I ever did was to bring films from the USIS. Took a projector and a transformer and had a few film evenings for the parents of the children in the *comedor*. And the very favorite one was one about Jackie Kennedy.

HODGDON: [00:50:41] Huh.

McCURRY: [00:50:41] And it was her trip to India with her sister. And the people just loved it. Just loved it. It was just.

HODGDON: [00:50:47] What did they relate to, do you think?

McCURRY: [00:50:49] Well, they really related to Kennedy.

HODGDON: [00:50:51] Oh, okay.

McCURRY: [00:50:52] And so then to see his wife and it was just a thrill, and to see a motion picture.

HODGDON: [00:50:59] Yeah, yeah.

McCURRY: [00:51:01] For free.

HODGDON: [00:51:01] Yeah.

McCURRY: [00:51:01] In the children's school.

HODGDON: [00:51:02] Right.

McCURRY: [00:51:02] Was just such an unusual thing. It was, it was a great success.

HODGDON: [00:51:09] Yes. Yes. Have you ever been back to Honduras since you left?

McCURRY: [00:51:13] No, I haven't.

HODGDON: [00:51:14] You think you will?

McCURRY: [00:51:15] I think I will, I want to very much. My daughter Hillary, who was born there, and her younger sister did go. But they got stuck in the Bay of Islands getting licensed for scuba instead of making their way into the campo. I have discussed going back with the lady who was in my group. We've talked about it a few times. Maybe one of these years soon we will.

HODGDON: [00:51:44] Right, right.

McCURRY: [00:51:46] When Hurricane Mitch struck Honduras in '97 or whenever that was, maybe '98, it crisscrossed two or three times and just devastated the whole country. I, um, I contacted. What's the name of that, Power Bar people? They're right up here in the industrial park. I asked them if they would donate. I'm so embarrassed I can't remember

the name right now. I wrote to The News-Press editorial letter to the editor. They donated a pallet of these pre-wrapped nutrition bars.

HODGDON: [00:52:34] Uh huh. That's great.

McCURRY: [00:52:37] I can't remember the name right now.

HODGDON: [00:52:39] I'm not sure I can pull it up either.

McCURRY: [00:52:40] Yeah, but it's one of those nutrition bars.

HODGDON: [00:52:45] Mm hmm.

McCURRY: [00:52:45] So that was wonderful. And I got shipped down Jack's Bagels here. There was a drop off spot for donations. And so.

HODGDON: [00:52:53] And you put that all together?

McCURRY: [00:52:55] I didn't do anything with Jack's Bagels.

HODGDON: [00:52:58] Oh, okay.

McCURRY: [00:53:00] They were already doing that. I had a cook from Honduras, and so they were receiving. I think actually, it turned out that they, they put a, um, oh, a big storage container there. I think that it got filled with food and things, clothing, and then it shipped, the someone from somewhere, some steamer went out of Houston. The things left from here, and they got sent to Houston and then they went on the steamer right down. So that was wonderful.

HODGDON: [00:53:40] Yeah.

McCURRY: [00:53:41] I was very appreciative.

HODGDON: [00:53:43] Right.

McCURRY: [00:53:44] Like Power Bar or something like that.

HODGDON: [00:53:46] Cliff is the only other one that comes to my mind at the moment.

McCURRY: [00:53:49] Yeah, Cliff.

HODGDON: [00:53:50] Cliff. Right.

McCURRY: [00:53:52] Cliff Bars. I wish I could remember.

HODGDON: [00:53:54] Yeah, well.

McCURRY: [00:53:55] But anyway, it was very generous.

HODGDON: [00:53:57] Yes.

McCURRY: [00:53:58] And they shrink wrapped the whole pallet and off it went.

HODGDON: [00:54:03] Right.

McCURRY: [00:54:03] So that made me happy.

HODGDON: [00:54:05] Probably no weevils.

McCURRY: [00:54:06] Yeah, right.

HODGDON: [00:54:09] As you reflect back now on those two years that you spent in Honduras, how do you think they've impacted the balance of your life?

McCURRY: [00:54:17] Well, my livelihood has been teaching Spanish, and I would not have been, I wouldn't have done that if it hadn't have been from Honduras. And I just feel that it's never left me. The experience has never left me. The reality of the poverty, the disparity in the world, all of those, those harsh facts have not been resolved and may never be resolved.

HODGDON: [00:54:59] Right.

McCURRY: [00:55:00] They just, it doesn't leave you.

HODGDON: [00:55:04] Right.

McCURRY: [00:55:04] So I just feel that we're all called to do whatever we can in whatever capacity we are able to. I would love to go back to Honduras.

HODGDON: [00:55:15] Yeah.

McCURRY: [00:55:16] I'd love to work in a Peace Corps training camp. I raised my kids up and now they're having kids. So I'm not on the verge of going anywhere yet, but I'd love to go back.

HODGDON: [00:55:32] Yeah.

McCURRY: [00:55:34] I just, I've always felt that we got more out of it than we were able to give.

HODGDON: [00:55:43] I think many of us feel that way.

McCURRY: [00:55:44] Yeah. Yeah, right. It's overwhelming. The problem is really overwhelming. It's just, I get emotional thinking about it. Of all of the women that I spoke to about birth control, two to my knowledge went to the clinic and had IUDs put in. One of them was so glad. Every time I'd see her, she'd say thank you.

HODGDON: [00:56:11] Oh, yeah.

McCURRY: [00:56:12] She didn't know it was possible to not have a baby.

HODGDON: [00:56:14] Every year.

McCURRY: [00:56:16] A year, and she didn't want to keep doing that. Yeah.

HODGDON: [00:56:20] Jenifer, you're a wonderful storyteller. You remember such detail. I'm impressed. I thank you for sharing.

McCURRY: [00:56:31] Oh, thank you for doing this.

HODGDON: [00:56:31] Your Peace Corps story. I think we've covered most of the important points. And you have, you leave a legacy.

McCURRY: [00:56:38] Well.

HODGDON: [00:56:39] In the archives of the United States.

McCURRY: [00:56:43] And my little Honduran baby.

HODGDON: [00:56:44] Yes, yes. She's another legacy.

McCURRY: [00:56:47] A living legacy.

HODGDON: [00:56:47] Right, right. Well, again, I thank you.

McCURRY: [00:56:51] Yeah, thank you, Barbara.

[END OF INTERVIEW]